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Resisting the givenness of place and "community": young people and "anti-social behaviour" in the public spaces of Lewisham (South East London)

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ABSTRACT

"Anti-social behaviour" and the implied role of the "community" has long dominated political discourse and policy regarding youthful disorder in public space. While much academic research has focused on a post-Foucauldian governmentality approach to the relationship between communities, ASB and public space, such an approach does not provide a thorough examination nor understanding of the complex lived experiences of young people who live within a dominant imaginative geography that inscribes their bodies with criminality upon visibilisation. In particular, the ways in which being targeted by ASB discourse has impacted upon young people's sense of belonging in public space, especially from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds, has received little attention, despite their over-representation in the criminal justice system, racial discrimination in policing practices and the prominence of essentialising discourses constructing certain groups as "problematic". This paper's concern is with how the performances of young people engage and disrupt the dominant imaginative geographies of public space that have become the object of governmental and community intervention under New Labour ASB policy drives. In order to answer the question of why youths in public space are immanently "anti-social," and how this impacts upon their notions of community and belonging, it is argued that the interrogation of unofficial discourses of young people's narratives is necessary. These intertwined questions are approached through focusing on the formation of youths in public space as "anti-social," examining the constructionist legacy of moral panics, folk devils and the role of imaginative geographies in the conflation of place, bodies and criminalisation in south London. The imaginative geography of the immanence between youths in public space and ASB in Lewisham is analysed as an instance of Agamben's 'bare life,' whereby the powers enshrined in Dispersal Orders and Stop and Search have the ability to exclude them and thus express their lack of substantive rights or disjunctive citizenship. It is argued that through their narrative accounts of performances in public space, young people 'resist the givenness of place' through disrupting tropes established by ASB discourse and thus in Rancièrian terms, re-politicise them. Furthermore, the emphasis of ASB discourse on youthful disorder in public space is critiqued as being draped in discourses of cultural norms that veil the material and social inequalities inherent in the moral project. In summation, this paper demonstrates the importance of examining unofficial narratives of young people, and as such is an intervention into contemporary dominant imaginative geographies, and current debates surrounding "ASB and difference" and "community and belonging" in multicultural London.

INTRODUCTION

> The stages of the city – Hall's 'truly heterogeneous spaces' – are a narrative device through which the foundational lexicon of citizenship, justice and democracy are made comprehensible … [the] fabricated nature of the spatial and the temporal creates mutable subjects and changing institutions at the heart of dynamic cities of multiculturalism. Such a positioning demands ethnographic understandings of the city alongside alternative framings of the subjects and cartographies of the cities itself. (Keith, 2005a: 60).

The performances of young people in public space engage and disrupt dominant imaginative geographies in multicultural cities, these spaces being the subject and object of governmental and community interventions under anti-social behaviour discourse and policy. In order to understand why young people in public space are constructed as immanently "anti-social" and how this impacts upon their notions of community and belonging, it is necessary to interrogate the unofficial discourses in the narratives of young people. This paper attempts to explore whether young people, through their narrative accounts of continued performances in public space, 'resist the givenness of place' constituted by anti-social behaviour discourse and thus in Rancièrian terms, re-politicise them (1998). The role of "the community" as emphasised within policy and political rhetoric, is probed, to question whether it really addresses local complexities of belonging in Lewisham, a highly multicultural south east London borough.

Through a small-scale case study of the narratives of young people in Lewisham, the imaginative geography of the immanence between young people in public space and anti-social behaviour[1] as an instance of Agamben's 'bare life,' (1998) whereby the powers enshrined in the outlined laws have the ability to exclude them and thus express their lack of substantive rights or disjunctive citizenship (Holston, 2008). Local complexities of belonging are teased out of the narratives, which are not necessarily ethnically and territorially-based, but transnational in a highly nuanced way. Furthermore, the fixed notions of community as depicted in anti-social behaviour discourse, highly dependent on culture and ethnicity, is found to be draped in cultural norms that veil the material and social inequalities inherent in the moral project of anti-social behaviour policies. The paper focuses on the formation of young people in public space as "anti-social," examining the constructionist legacy of moral panics, folk devils and the role of imaginative geographies in the conflation of place, bodies and criminalisation in south London. The role of the community with regards to ASB, is also interrogated, and government policy discourse's focus on "shared values" is analysed alongside more situated accounts of multicultural communities.

Anti-social behaviour and the "local"

Using the lens of post-Foucauldian governmentality, while useful and popular within literature on anti-social behaviour, limits analysis to social constructions of reality and does not lend itself to deeper examination of complex lived experience of young people's encounters with anti-social behaviour discourse (Parr, 2009). Studies responding to such critique focus on the unofficial voices of those 'who could not carry their contractual obligations [and] who are now to appear "anti-social"' (Rose and Miller, 2010). However, while Prior states that 'those who are discursively constructed as lacking in political power ... in fact have the capacity to prevent or disrupt modes of governing from achieving their intended outcomes – if only by refusing to accept their allotted role in the governmental process,' (2007: 28) such an approach still centres on static notions of community and fixing people in place. Political discourse around community appeals for intervention in "local" affairs, yet 'lack any real sense

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[1] Referred to as "ASB" hereon

2   Devices which comment upon the narrator, the narrating and the narrative both as message and code (Babcock in Bauman and

of context and how complex struggles over belonging, conflict and entitlement are embedded in particular localities' (Back *et al*., 2002a:198). Such a static notion of a "contractual community" sits uneasily in the context of contemporary urban settings, home a multiplicity of communities, contextualised by the so-called 'death of multiculturalism' (Kundnani, 2002) and the subsequent language of 'community cohesion' (Kalra, 2002). What does community *mean* for young people, within a political context where the community itself is defined as the agent of exclusion? The capacities of communities to live *with* difference, and the danger of securing identity through closed versions of communities is a key question of the twenty-first century (Hall, 1991; 1993: 361). The articulation of ASB discourses that operate within a dichotomous notion of community of "shared values," disregard the texture of multiculturalisms and contemporary tensions surrounding notions of cultural difference and the politics of difference (Alexander, 2002), and are thus inherently problematic; rather than 'the arbiter of moral worth it [the community] becomes a battleground of competing ethics' (Back *et al*., 2002b). Prior's (2009) work on 'governing difference' – ASB implementation in inner city multicultural communities – finds ASB coordinators generalising that young people turning away from the 'traditional community' leads to a greater likelihood of their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour, and legitimises legal intervention. Such ethnically and territorially centred and *fixed* notions of community betray an unwillingness to engage with transnational and more nuanced global connections within communities. Within multicultural areas there is thus a friction between languages of rights and responsibilities and concepts of identity and belonging; a tension between 'notions of community obligation and a sense of justice that does not differentiate between individuals' (Keith, 2008: 4.2).

Interweaving grounded notions of community, place and belonging into such debates is necessary, in order to disrupt essentialising discourses. Indeed, 'community is not simply an organic fact,' (Back, 2009: 204) and more ethnographic approaches can explore the complex experiences of young people. The intersection of these issues relies on constantly shifting combinations of rational, realist, mythologised and symbolic narratives and public space thus produced draws on performances of multiple vocabularies; of policy elites, scholarly, rumour and reputation. The importance of 'distinctly local processes of narrative amplification,' (Back *et al*., 2002a) is that they reconfigure the world and actively engage in the 'disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities, and 'get a life' by telling and writing their stories' (Langellier, 2001: 700 in Riessman, 2005: 1).

CONTEXT

Lewisham is London's second biggest inner-city borough, located south east of the Thames. It is demographically diverse; 40% of residents are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, which rises to 70% in schools where over 170 different languages are spoken by pupils (Lewisham Council, 2009) and 25% of the borough is under 19 (Lewisham Strategic Partnership, 2010). It is an area where 'intercultural identification [is] linked to a strong, officially sanctioned, problematic of neighbourhood harmony,' (Back, 1996) but 16 (62%) of Lewisham wards are amongst the most deprived in England (Drugscope: Stephens *et al*., 2004). In the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation, Lewisham ranked 39th out of 354 local areas worsening since 2004 and its local economy is ranked 30th out of the 33 London Boroughs (Lewisham Council, 2008).

The area has a rich history regarding youth and apparent disorder, with an historically antagonistic relationship between young people and the police (Gilroy, 1978) and the historical legacy of the "sus" laws and subsequent campaign (Hall *et al.,* 1978; Keith 2005a) can be traced to the contemporary Dispersal Orders addressed in this paper, which Squires and Stephen argue 'virtually reinvent sus laws … but with added emphasis and tougher sanctions in the event of non-compliance,' (2005: 113).

There is a contemporary imaginative geography of the Blue borough that constellates around the long history of baptismal gangs, postcode territoriality and NEETs – 16 to 24 year olds, not in education, employment or training – of which in actuality there are only 4.9% in Lewisham (DCSF, 2010). ASB discourse weaves in and out of this spectrum, and is dealt with in numerous ways. Lewisham is known for innovations in local governance and attempts to engage with young people through the establishment of the young mayor and young citizens panel (Asquith, 2008); addresses community issues through local assemblies (Quirk, 2006) and street wardens. Each ward has a Safer Neighbourhood team, with locally defined "priorities" – all of which explicitly include ASB and youth engagement, with some wards localising problems even further and naming estates for targeting (2010).

Counter to this is the imaginative geography of a harmonious multicultural Lewisham that is intolerant of popular racism and is animated by certain key dates; the anti-fascist demo of Lewisham '77, the New Cross fire of '81 and also informed by a rich history of youth culture; mythologised reggae soundsystems of the 1970s to contemporary grime raves. Back's 1996 ethnography of Deptford examined an 'our area' local semantic system, an inclusive social semantics that opens up the possibility of genuine cultural syncretism, resulting in 'a new ethnicity that contains a high degree of egalitarianism and anti-racism' (123). Such re-oriented meanings of race and belonging, which have a grounded precedent in Lewisham, is what makes it a fascinating site for discussion of young people in public space as "anti-social" and the role of "the community."

This paper focuses on the narratives of young people, exploring the intersections between the formation of youths in public space as "anti-social" and the role of the community using a combination of semi-structured and open-ended interviews. The strength of such a qualitative approach is that allows for situated, contextualised narratives to emerge, performances that have the potential to interact with imaginative geographies in a highly localised way. The narratives are examined as a combination of different kinds of discourses – anecdote, rumour, reported speech and meta-narration.[2] One focus is the manner in which narratives are continuously decentred and recentred – taken from social and cultural contexts of production and reception and cited and recited (Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 78) – and the multi-scalar meanings such of such processes in the everyday lives of young people (White, 1980). As Cohen states, 'the relations between real and imaginary landscapes are always mediated by the symbolic … by the narratives through which these landscapes are inhabited with personal and social meaning' (2002: 233). The potential weakness of such an approach lies in the variable depth of conversation, for speech is indeed a socially interactive act, and the context of communication negotiated between performer and audience. It is thus necessary to 'insist that our accounts are always incomplete. To insist on a kind of modest attentiveness, that is positioned and contains particular vantage points to listen, look and make sense' (Back, 2009).

Resisting the givenness of place

Discussion about young people in public space as "anti-social" *with* young people is inherently complex, and I cannot claim to do justice to the wealth and richness of the threads of meaning. What follows is a brief examination of the stories young people have shared with me of how they engage with the dominant imaginative geographies involving their use of space. The analysis posits whether the immanence of young people in public space and ASB can be understood as a biopolitical struggle, and young people's performativity as resisting the givenness of place.

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2 Devices which comment upon the narrator, the narrating and the narrative both as message and code (Babcock in Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 69).

The laws and policies surrounding ASB are sufficiently vague that they are appropriated according to the dominant imaginative geography and in a highly localised fashion; the contours of the ASB regime are a 'postcode lottery' (Committee of Public Accounts, 2007 in Prior, 2009: 16). Thus, as Lewisham has a 'gang problem,' (Jameson, 2009) Dispersal Orders and Stop and Search are used to interrogate ' "suspicious" or "dangerous"-looking young people and/or disperse groups of young people thought to be involved in gang activities' (PCSO officer in Deptford). Underlying such concerns regarding gang and knife crime, is a contemporary form of deviancy that can be conceptualised as the act of not consuming, not taking part in neo-liberal society. ASB discourse engenders a dichotomous relationship between "us" and "them" where "them" is anyone who is a threat to the 'consuming majority' (Bannister *et al*., 2006) and such Manichean constructs intertwine with the "moral panic" surrounding gangs to create folk devils of dangerous youthful bodies in public space which must be controlled. Young people become the embodiment of the surplus, the residual of an entrepreneurial, neo-liberal economy and the welfare state, literally spilling onto the streets; all youths in public space become at the very least, the unproductive NEETs. This process of 'internal Othering' (Gregory, 2003) sees post-7/7 ASB connected to fears of terrorism and conflated with immigration. As such, ASB is 'cast as part of a spectrum of risks and fears, a symptom of a nation in transitional crisis, in which achieving safety and security and protecting the traditional through undefined norms and values of "the majority" becomes key' (Flint, 2006: 4).

The contemporary folk devil of "the hoody" and the connection of locations across south east London through a unifying imaginative geography was multiply invoked in conversation; a strong identification of the Orientalist trope of the gangster and its repercussions for *all* young people alike. The racialised image – with a certain swagger and clothing – is part of their negotiation everyday of life in public space, due to the lumping of all young people who might fit that profile because of 'the measly 1% of young people – it's only 1%! – who get involved in ASB' (Benny, 16). This echoes concerns of the 1970s, whereby the conflation of crime, race and the ghetto 'located and situated black crime, geographically and ethnically, as peculiar to black youth in the inner city ghettos' (Hall *et al*., 1978: 29).

> Rhona: Fair enough there might have been an increase in youth crime, but I only think that's only in certain areas. Not in all of them do you see people in hoodies being disruptive. After it's happened in certain areas, they decide that all areas with that same profile ... for instance, if something happened in Peckham, which is a high profile area, they would go to places like that, even if there's nothing going wrong, to up the surveillance in those areas, because of what's happened in one area. I think it's south east London especially – the police has gone up completely, because of ruckuses [*fights*] in one area. I think it does have a bad reputation, even though not all of it is bad at all.

This imaginative geography relies upon making a contingent spatial articulation of relationality – young people in public space as "anti-social" – foundational (Rose, 1999). "The media" is addressed as the gatekeeper guiding perceptions of young people in public space as "anti-social" states Rhona (18), who has been stopped and searched when in public space with a group of friends (as have all of my interviewees). The disjuncture between mediated imaginaries and multiplicity of realities, and its role in the naturalisation of the criminalisation of youth is reiterated throughout the narratives of young people.

> Jonathan (17): A lot of people listen to the media as their only source of information. So if they see young people on a street corner, they *have* to be in a gang, just stabbed someone, dealing drugs … it's one of the reasons why where there are young people in public space, they *have* to be criminals.

> Tommy (16): Your body language makes up quite a bit of your communication as a person. So when you're walking down the street, wearing certain clothes, you're just making yourself a target to people like the media or the police, who make it even more negative. Some young people don't seem to understand that.

This recognition of the 'social facts' (Butler, 1993) that their bodies being in public space engender reinforces the intimate connection made between the spatiality of the imaginative geography and the production of a criminalised identity. However, this is not to invoke a 'literal interpretation of spatiality … attributing space with autonomous ontological status and concomitant sets of mysterious causal powers' (Keith, 2005: 69-70) for the inscription of young people's bodies with criminality is an inherently biopolitical issue. This can be evidenced from their narratives regarding *why* young people in public space are targeted as being "anti-social." Dan, 20, states 'it's too easy to just blame the media, they're just printing what people want to hear.' He's a student of politics and as such has imbibed notions of the blame culture, accountability and the importance of voting blocs, and argues that young people are constituted as having no rights:

> Dan: Whenever something happens it's always easy to have someone to blame. When it comes to politicians … if something happens in public space you can't blame your average middle-class person, salary man, older person, because they vote. The only group who are indefensible against criticism and even react negatively to that criticism are young people. While we live here, we don't have any power as to how our lives are run. You can blame us and there are no repercussions.

This indefensibility echoes the state of 'bare life,' and Benny expands upon the disjunctive citizenship of youths below, (Holston, 2008) interrogating the imposed essentialised subjectivity of young black men as folk devils, with Dan's attempt to collapse it exposing the potency of the claim of 'bare life':

> Benny: I think that fundamentally, it's just picking on the people who are *weak*. Let us face it! Well, I need to face it. I am weak. [Counts on fingers] I am a young person who doesn't work, who has only an education he can rely on. I don't work, I don't earn anything at all …
>
> Dan: [Heated] How on earth does that make you weak? You have the one thing that doesn't makes you weak; you've got your *voice*, so you've got the power and the ability to make a change. Nobody on this planet is weak, unless you live in a third world country. No one in this country is weak.
>
> Benny: I'm saying they're picking on the weakest bunch. I know my voice will be my power, my sword, and I'll stand by that. What I mean by weak is that society will think: "what can *he* do? That black boy on the street, wearing a hoody, lives in Catford … single mum – check. Bottom of the food chain."

Acknowledging the power of the dominant imaginative geography and simultaneously the ability they possess to disrupt it, doesn't detract from certain realities; Benny sees young people as being the holder of rights they cannot uphold for themselves (Rancière, 2004). Reinforcing this perspective, Dan says, 'very few know their rights in regards to detention and arrest, in regards to stop and search'. The meaning of such a state of 'bare life,' for Benny, is that 'it seems as if there is a small élite that just doesn't want young people to succeed. Especially young black boys,' and this sense of hierarchical powerlessness is shared by Rhona, who thinks that 'once an image is out there, that image will forever be there, until someone of higher power changes it.'

Public space, despite producing such "anti-social" subjects, also opens up the possibility of a multiplicity of performances that have to be understood dialogically. 'If you label certain young people, they're obviously gonna think "ok you're labelling me like that, I'm going to act like that. Because that's what you think I am"'. This potentially self-conscious re-citation of expectations, as outlined here by Michelle, can also be read as a provocative disruption in a discursive sense (Butler, 1993). The ways in which the young people all spoke of being in public space conjured an ambiguous interplay between different imaginaries, bringing together notions of corporeality, desire and discourse (Rose, 1999) and potentiality:

> Michelle: Certain young people from certain parts think that they have to act tough because of where they're from. It's from the government as well. They don't really care. That makes people feel like they have to

> perform to what they're expected. It's a choice thing as well – sometimes people don't have choices, because they could be the only child and they have to act tough as they don't have any other siblings around them. Yes, I have been *labelled*, but I have to think about *why* and the way I act. I try to talk to young people, but some of them are still going on that journey and I hope they can change, because they have the right to change.

Michelle's last statement both emphasises the flux that embodies the process of adolescence, and the language of rights that is evident in the narratives of all the youths; that it is the fixing-in-space of the ASB discourse that infringes on their civil liberties. Thus it is not only performances of identity, but also their performances *of* space that young people enact in public space, which can be analysed as a transgression of their immanent ASB and inscription of 'bare life.' Their re-inscription in public space, in spite of continuous targeting, defies the desires of the dominant discourse upon their bodies to be invisibilised. As Benny states, 'I want my personal freedom,' and Tisha (18) says 'I don't care what they say – I'm not going to change where I spend my time.' If we take political activity as 'whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's function ... makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise,' (Rancière, 1998: 30) then through continuing to practise everyday activities in public space, young people are enacting a *political* performance. These performances, however mundane, are a provocation (Back, 2009) and have the potential to disrupt the established order and practices of identification (Dikeç, 2007) making visible those intended to be invisibilised through the normalising ASB project. Indeed, what makes such public spaces of "potential" so powerful is that they are 'always conditional, always precarious, but every performance of the colonial present carries within it the possibilities of reaffirming and even radicalising the hold of the past on the present *or* of undoing its enclosures and approaching closer to the horizon of the *post*colonial' (cf. Bhabha, 1994: 219 in Gregory, 2003: 308). Through continuing to affirm their presence in public space, they also attempt to 'block the territorialisation of what is fundamentally biopolitical, of what goes beyond the social mappings of inclusion/exclusions' (Pinku and Giorgi, 2007: 107) – as Rhona states 'it's still our area … we are part of the public, so we should be able to spend time in the public spaces.'

What of "the community"?

Following on from this discussion, is the intertwined theme of how being labelled as "anti-social" in public space impacts upon young people's notions of community and belonging – what these evocative, ambiguous terms might mean to them. The conversations with young people were framed by issues arising from the 'Respect and Responsibility' paper, analysis of their narratives focuses on four themes. Firstly, the community is not an essentialised, territorial or ethnically-centred notion as implied in the dichotomous ASB discourse, but inherently transnational, and as such notions of belonging are complex and reference both global and local imaginative geographies. Furthermore, some of the youths' critique of the official community discourse expresses their perceived voicelessness as young people. Finally, there are undeniably multiple unofficial discourses of community within multicultural Lewisham, and the language of "shared values" and subsequent imposition of norms via ASB policies veils the social and material inequalities evident in the area and shifts focus policy attention away from these issues.

Transient, shifting and intrinsically transnational connections and ways of living come to the fore when talking about conceptions of "the community" in relation to ASB in public space. Details of the joys of multiculturalism in Lewisham, "good vibes" stories (Back *et al.*, 2002a) about food and diversity of friendship groups, are juxtaposed with claims of youths in the area 'not knowing where they're from' and a subsequent correlation with 'behaviour problems.' Departing from ASB discourse's essentialist notions of difference, in that the young people highlighted the importance of 'knowing and loving your culture [mentioning Muslims]' as an integral part of identity formation (Joseph). This also illustrates

contemporary tensions between the politics of difference, whereby hybridity is complexly negotiated, and cultural difference, the 'irreducible and antipathetic 'Others' (Alexander, 2002, 557-558). However here, it is the *affirmative* coherence of 'Muslims who love their culture' that is reified.

The idea of "shared values" is clearly problematic, and transnational links that 'sit in tension with spatially bordered configurations of 'the local community,' (Keith, 2008) are narrativised most succinctly through the recitation of a de-contextualised proverb that was thrice brought up on separate occasions and framed in almost identical fashion by different boys. 'There is an African saying – it takes a village to raise a child.' This imaginative geography of the importance of "the community" acts as an positive Otherness to Lewisham, which Grossberg (1996) describes as differences being defined by their contextual power to affect and be affected, and this allows the boys to articulate rituals from Nigeria and Cameroon, referencing rites of passage for manhood. Here, it is possible to think of community as a *narrative achievement*, 'a way of talking and telling life's story' which can 'make ways of acting possible … enable an opening up of the social landscape but … also lead to a closing down of that landscape' (Back, 2009: 204). These selective narratives are intertwined and contrasted with the "micro-public spheres" that form the dominant local imaginative geography, informing ASB policy implementation in public space.

> Dan: Lewisham is just a bunch of imaginary lines drawn in the ground. Literally, people don't understand that a postcode is a bunch of imaginary lines surrounding a postal distribution centre. If you say, "I'm from SE13" then you are fighting over your local Royal Mail distribution centre. But nobody knows why it started! I found out that postcode wars have been around for 30 years. It's above our generation! There has to be a cause. If you take the culture war between Muslim and Christians, that goes 700-800 years into the past, and it's so stupid! They were fighting over a bloody city!
>
> Benny: You say "bloody city" but that was their *sacred* city.
>
> Joseph: It's so deeply ingrained into our culture, our brains – it's a subliminal thing – so when intelligent people look at gang wars, postcode wars … they think it's ludicrous. But when you look back into the history then you can understand why.

Joseph and Benny's elucidation of the entrenched historical and emotional aspects of territory in Lewisham, and Dan's distancing, highlight the communicative uncertainty that is central in the dramaturgical process of narrativising imaginative geographies (Keith, 2005) where metaphor and metonym slip and combine to form multiple senses of the "sacred" guided by everyday life, local history and official discourse and critically internalised, informing a multiplicity of possible local identities and performances. Indeed, Lewisham is "doubly transcribed" as a site of exclusive appropriation and a shared belonging, mirroring a double articulation of the national; (Back *et al.*, 2002a: 211) and of all the interviewees, only Dan defined himself as English.

Set within this context of multiculturalisms, the rhetorical device of the government helping communities 'taking a stand' against young "anti-social" subjects in public space triggered discussion of material and power imbalances within Lewisham. Rhona spoke of the role of "the community" being unstable because 'the majority of people they talk to might be elderly people, or middle-class people, that might not have the full perspective of people who live around there.' This lack of fullness of engagement with difference was reflected in Dan's summary that current practice of putting young people 'all in the same basket,' doesn't work, 'because everyone's different. People need to understand that one statement!' The stabilisation of that which is constantly shifting, and the motif of the necessity of inter-generational engagement ran through many of the narratives, also with regards to how the government engages with youths. Benny and Joseph had been to the launch of RSA's commissioned report on ASB (Rogers, 2010) and were grappling with its constitution of relationship between "community," young people as "anti-social." While Joseph thought that the model of

citizenship empowerment via first aid-esque educational tools would further reinforce negative stereotypes of youths and thus rejected it outright, Benny sought to initiate a dialogue with the politics presented: "Big Society" and the residual traces of New Labour discourse.

> I don't like the fact that they're saying, "communities play a role". What pissed me off was that Nick Herbert was talking about "the community delivering." He was saying that during New Labour, Blair said "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime," but now it's about "community, community, community." I said, [adopts posh accent] "Mr Minister sir," and he took one look at me and then walked over to someone else. I was upset. I wanted to say, "I'm a young advisor in Lewisham (and he probably would have said "Lewisham, near Peckham? GASP") how can young people play a role?" Communities play a part, but the State are the people that should deliver. If the State doesn't deliver to people that pay their taxes, why should we pay our taxes? I would have said, "Have you thought about getting your boss Theresa May to engage with young people in places where that 1% of children who get involved in ASB are?" If they can go, actually go, not in a bulletproof vest … just walk down the streets of Lewisham, Peckham, Deptford, doing community work. If they could set an example I'd have more respect.

This passage intertwines symbolic and mythologised political moments that fluctuate between national and local issues. Harriet Harman walking around Peckham in a bullet-proof vest (Guardian, 2008) is intrinsically connected to the imaginative geography of south east London that Benny playfully assumes strikes fear into politicians'' hearts. Furthermore, the "Respect" agenda and its "contractual community" are inverted – how can it be demanded of young people when it is not received? The importance and lack of mutual respect is reiterated by all youths and in other research (Mackenzie *et al.*, 2010). Benny also decentres the narrating event and his own voice, through his use of reported speech, thus opening up 'possibilities for renegotiating meanings and social relations beyond the parameters of the performance itself' (Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 70). He expresses a desire for an engagement which can be theorised as Bhabha's space of 'enunciation' (Bhabha, 1996) opening up a 'space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal … neither assimilation nor collaboration ... deploy[ing] the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole' (Bhabha, 1996: 58). The potency of such a hybrid discourse is that it reimagines the world in new ways (Bakhtin, 1981) and simultaneously employs and refashions political language of the 1965 Race Act, with its calls for "assimilation." Contemporary echoes are found in unstable New Labour rhetoric of community *cohesion* (as opposed to *integration*) (Kalra, 2002) oscillating between encouraging "diversity" and assimilatory language (Shukra *et al.*, 2004) of "shared values," an unsettling scale of reference that is imbied in ASB discourse surrounding youths in public space, which Benny acknowledges as 'Enoch Powell-esque,' and it is notable that none of the young people employ *cohesion* to discuss their lives, preferring *multiculturalism*; perhaps an effect of it being ingrained into the Lewisham schooling system (Hesse, 2000).

Through enforcing dominant cultural norms about who and what is desirable in public space, ASB discourse and policy reinforces socially constructed divisions and shifts political focus away from the everyday inequalities that shape young peoples' lives in Lewisham. Addressing the *causes* of postcode territoriality and ensuing generalisation of youths as "anti-social" in public space was deemed more important by young people; 'social inequality is why people think that their postcode is one of the most important things about them … where someone's born can actually define who they're going to be for the rest of their lives' (Benny). Joseph states that 'Lewisham is a densely populated with migrants and in terms of cultural difference it's a big melting pot … for young people, the government really needs to take into consideration those who are part of the community, and the problems of each culture, and the way how they do everyday living things.' This is not to invoke Cohen's "multicultural illusion" – that 'the dominant and subordinate can somehow swap places and learn how the other half lives, whilst leaving the structures of power intact,' (1988: 12) but expresses the disjuncture between Hall's

'belonging-in-difference' (1991) and the sense of unbalanced citizenship and rights, and its effects on everyday life. Joseph hints at the lack of Ibrahim's 'interculturalism' in ASB discourse – the ability to reflect on different experiences in order to increase understanding of 'diverse needs and rights across cultural boundaries,' (2004, in Shukra *et al.*, 2004: 193).

> Joseph: Living in Lewisham, one thing you realise, is that it's the British mentality to divide and conquer. I feel that in a certain sense, we're put to hate each other. When you take a large amount of people and put them in a small community, you can imagine the problems … it's like you're breeding trouble. Fair enough, if they had everything it'd be easier to live in harmony. A lot of them don't have a job; don't have the basic essentials to live, so they start to treat their neighbours as their enemy.
>
> So when a stranger comes into the community and says "hang on, you're all from the same background, same people, why the hell are you fighting each other?" I think, "well, how about if I put you and your brother in a room with one piece of bread? You guys are gonna fight" – simple as that. No one in their right mind can say, "Why are these people fighting?" If anything, you're supposed to say "I know why: the government are injusticing [sic] the people that live in the country. The rich are staying rich and the poor are getting poorer." Why is that? Because somebody understands how the system works, and they're living their life to keep the system in place.

ASB discourse thus interpreted construes difference as fixed "cultural barriers" and does not attend to entrenched, structural inequalities. Through enacting an imaginary encounter with a fictional "outsider," Joseph simultaneously codes post-colonial melancholia of Britain (Gilroy, 2005) and explicitly addresses issues of exclusion and material inequalities which penetrate the everyday lives of youths in Lewisham, which despite being cited as a national concern intrinsic to the 'drivers of perceptions of ASB' (Mackenzie *et al.*, Home Office 2010) remains unequivocally ignored in ASB discourse but as an aside (Millie, 2006).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

> Dan: Young people are part of your community as well! This is one thing that everybody seems to forget. We live here as well. Not all of us have the best lives, but we do live here, and we are part of your community.

Scholars have called for the study of the perspectives of young people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds to be taken into account regarding anti-social behaviour discourse and policy implementation (Prior, 2010; Millie, 2010; Mackenzie *et al.*, 2010). This paper has responded by focusing on the experiences of young people in Lewisham, examining their narratives regarding ASB discourse and related policies and laws, and its impact on their notions of community and belonging. The experience of being homogenously labelled "anti-social" when in public space was narrativised as a projected performance onto their bodies that they have to negotiate with in their everyday lives; a fixed identity, constitutive of the dominant imaginative geography of south east London. Their constant targeting was portrayed as part of a continuing "moral panic" conflating multi-sensorial imaginative processes, drawing upon collective memory of criminalised black youths, and contemporary issues of gangs and NEETs. The youths' discussion of the power of this imaginative geography that excludes them from public space and renders them lacking substantive rights, has been analysed as a form disjunctive citizenship and an instance of 'bare life.'

This paper has examined how young people transgress this inscription of 'bare life' and their formation as "anti-social" through their continued performances in public space. Disrupting the dominant imaginative geography, asserting the fact that 'we live here too,' and continuing to congregate in public space, it is argued that they repoliticise space through their everyday practice of making themselves visible. The implications of understanding the performances of young people in public space as political rather than immanently disorderly are numerous. Acknowledging the demonstration of the multiplicity and flux of youthful identities goes towards a living-with-difference that might allow for their narratives to be re-inscribed into official discussions of the Local. Indeed, while previous research has highlighted how the cleansing of public spaces in the "revanchist city" can be understood through 'modes of governance, sets of programmes, prophetic and dystopian images and reference economic objectives,' (Atkinson, 2003: 1833) this paper has highlighted the importance of re-inserting young people's narratives into such governmentality discourses. As Dan puts it, if the performances of young people were to respond according to the logic of official discourse, then 'why try to help keep public space nice if you don't even feel you belong there?'

Young people's notions of "the community" and belonging contrast starkly with those emanating from official discourses. Emphasising syncretism and transnationality, young people reject fixed notions of community as irrelevant. Their narratives intertwine multicultural harmony with neighbourhood inequalities, addressing identity conflict and cultural differences, and implicitly code perpetuating institutional racism:

> Joseph: my father is from another generation, they had a different experience from us. We think: we're all young, we all need to live, we all need money, we all want to be happy – that's what we have in common. The older generation don't understand that, the laws are old. And when we do certain things, why things haven't changed, why are they still the same? Why do I have to recognise that just because of who I am and where I'm from, why are things totally different for me? When my friend might have it a bit easier.

The narratives of young people have important implications for current political debates around ASB. It was agreed amongst the young people I interviewed, that the political discourse of "empowerment" and "respect" perpetuates generational and power inequalities within Lewisham. The constant targeting of young people has also led to feelings of a great lack of inter-generational respect, an inversion of the "Respect" agenda, and perceptions of severe dis-engagement of older members of "the community" and policymakers with the everyday lives of young people. Furthermore, while such ASB discourses implies the importance of cultural norms of civility being adhered to, this is interpreted as merely shifting focus away from the social and material inequalities endured by many of Lewisham's youths and as such contributing towards the social reproduction of these inequalities.

Exploring these issues in greater detail requires a more rigorously ethnographic approach to the narratives of young people, with a larger group of young people from different backgrounds than this paper has presented. As Dan said, 'the way you're doing it is good ... but you should talk to more normal people,' and indeed the sample method initially included interviews with young people through the Youth Offending Team, who unfortunately were not able to participate. The current political moment invites further investigation into the ASB-community nexus. "Big Society" was a big talking point amongst the young advisors and young mayor interviewed, and its vision of the community has been touched upon (RSA report). While the ASBO is now gone (Home Office, 2010), ASB remains a concerning issue for the government, but 'fundamentally a local problem, and the answers to it can only come from local people who are close enough to understand the root causes ... the solutions need to come from within our communities themselves' (Home Office, 2010: 7). The

Coalition government thus hints at further responsibilisation and retreat from concern with structural issues.

Perhaps 'the city's public spaces are not natural servants of multicultural engagement,' (Amin, 2002: 12) but this paper has shown that young people's performances *of* and *within* public space have the potential to produce meaningful, politicised narratives that contest the imaginative geographies of contemporary discourses of deviancy in the public spaces of Lewisham.

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