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Keywords:	conviviality, Paul Gilroy, integration, indifference to difference, multiculture, London, race
Abstract:	<p>Revisiting Gilroy's <i>After Empire</i>, this article explores how conviviality constitutes a more radical ideal of urban interaction than ordinarily appreciated. Based on interviews and observation in two London locations, it is argued that as opposed to being a concept which simply names everyday practices of multi-ethnic interaction, conviviality speaks uniquely to a sophisticated ability to invoke difference whilst avoiding communitarian, groupist precepts. Other themes folded into this exploration of what I synonymously describe, turning to the recent work of Amin, as an anti-racist ethos of 'indifference to difference' include: the negotiation of identity mixture and ambiguity, the proximity of conflict to conviviality, and the role played by space in mediating convivial possibilities, or lack thereof. It is consequently this article's contention that sociological accounts need and can assume a bolder line in disaggregating contemporary formations of multiculture from the orthodoxies of integration and the normativity of communitarian belonging and identity.</p>

Conviviality and Multiculture: A post-integration sociology of multi-ethnic interaction

Revisiting Gilroy's *After Empire* alongside Amin's recently mooted ethos of 'indifference to difference', this article explores how conviviality constitutes a more radical ideal of urban interaction than ordinarily appreciated. Based on interviews and observation in two London locations, it is argued that as opposed to being a concept which simply names everyday practices of multi-ethnic interaction, conviviality speaks uniquely to a sophisticated ability to invoke difference whilst avoiding communitarian, groupist precepts. It is consequently this article's contention that sociological accounts need and can assume a bolder line in disaggregating contemporary formations of multiculture from the orthodoxies of integration and the normativity of communitarian belonging and identity.

Keywords: conviviality, Paul Gilroy, indifference to difference, integration, London, multiculture

Introduction

In spite of the broader political retreat in Europe from ideals of multiculturalism (Back et al. 2002; Lentin and Tittley, 2011; McGhee, 2008), there has been a welcome growth in a sociological literature documenting everyday diversity, often denoted as multiculture. This documentation, with frequent reference to the practices of emergent youth generations, addresses ordinary forms of 'multicultural drift' (Hall, 2000), where ethnic and cultural diversity become increasingly indelible features of city life (Jones and Jackson, 2014; Neal et al. 2013; Watson and Saha, 2012; Wise and Velayutham, 2014). Often utilising Gilroy's concept of conviviality, or what Amin calls the 'convivium', this body of work affirms how everyday interethnic interaction and cultural formation is an unspectacular, extra-governmental aspect of today's urban experience (Smith, 2015). But whilst this work is important for countering the dystopian political rhetoric surrounding Europe's ability to live with diversity, there is a risk that the sociology of multiculture tends towards a certain descriptive naiveté. Put simply, it is often seen as adequate to establish that multi-ethnic life persists without conceptually distinguishing its specific validity from orthodox conceptions of integration and the normativity of communitarian belonging and identity. There is certainly no need to arrive at a sociological consensus about what multiculture is, particularly as the term remains notoriously 'polysemic' (Hall, 2000). But this paper maintains that, in the course of researching young people's urban practices, it is still important to make clear what is distinctive about multiculture vis-à-vis ideals of integration and derivative conceptions of multiculturalism.

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3 The aim to offer conceptual distinctiveness could be rendered in any number of ways: opting for
4 an emphasis on youth cultural formation and flows (James, 2014; Kim, 2015), issues of
5 governance and rights (Jones, 2013; Uberoi and Modood, 2013), to bottom-up practices of
6 political mobilisation (Dobbernack et al. 2014; James, 2015). These are all important sites of
7 analysis. But, based on interview and observation material generated in London and empirically
8 operationalising a particular reading of Gilroy's concept of conviviality, this paper explores the
9 distinctiveness of multiculturalism as it applies to the reception and performance of difference within
10 everyday fields of interaction. Implicitly building upon the seminal 1990s accounts of an
11 emergent and complex urban multiculturalism in Britain (Alexander, 1996; Back, 1996; Baumann,
12 1996; Brah, 1996), the core aim of this article is to empirically operationalise conviviality in a
13 manner which captures some of its more avowedly radical currents vis-à-vis the everyday
14 reception of difference as practised by young people. Conviviality is a concept that is often
15 referenced in contemporary research on multiculturalism and young adults. But this article maintains
16 that inadequate attention has been given to what I interpret as Gilroy's specific emphasis on how
17 everyday multicultural practices rest on a radical and complex ability to be at ease in the presence
18 of diversity but *without* restaging communitarian conceptions of the self-same ethnic and racial
19 difference.

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31 Importantly, the analysis of convivial multiculturalism advanced here is not to be understood as
32 suggesting that encounters in London are always, or even most of the time, convivial. Indeed,
33 the very sociological inclination to weigh the prevalence of conviviality contra conflict remains
34 unhelpful. As Karner and Parker (2012) illustrated in an important engagement of the concept,
35 conviviality's everyday instantiation always sits adjacently to processes of ethnically construed
36 'conflict' – the two are proximately situated. The more interesting question therefore for this
37 article's purposes is not whether conviviality characterises most contemporary interaction (which
38 I think unlikely); but rather, what features are constitutive of convivial multiculturalism when it is
39 indeed manifest and in turn, how is it substantively distinctive from the ideals of co-existence
40 formalised by integration.

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49 This argument will be empirically routed through three London research participants' reflections
50 about their habitual interaction with both acquaintances and strangers. The interaction featured
51 here was either witnessed during observation sessions or was invoked by the participants during
52 the interviews. More specifically, this argument will be channelled through the presentation of
53 three vignettes from two London sites, one a north-west London suburban high-street and the
54 other a south London inner-city social housing square. Attention will be given throughout to the
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3 conditions which the different participants identify as important to the facilitation of multi-
4 ethnic interaction – including, the cultivation of an ‘indifference-to-difference’ ethos, the
5 negotiation of identity mixture and ambiguity, the proximity of conviviality to conflict, and also
6 the role of space in both enabling and limiting convivial interaction. And whilst these convivial
7 formations will be read through certain interactional practices characteristic of *young adults*, the
8 broader socio-cultural features profiled here do carry a wider analytic resonance vis-à-vis the
9 sociologies of integration and multicultural writ large.
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16 **1. Methodological note**

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18 The material featured here comes out of a broader project conducted from 2010 to 2012. The
19 research consisted of interviews and participation during everyday activity with twenty-three
20 ethnic minority participants, aged 22-30 and of working-class background, in London and
21 Stockholm – though in the interests of analytic focus, only the former will feature here. Of those
22 participants discussed in this article, I spent a minimum of three sessions with each individual
23 during the course of 2011. These often lengthy sessions consisted of accompanying a participant
24 during a series of mundane leisure or work (if access was feasible) activities considered ordinary
25 to the participant’s routines. And though these sessions were carried out separately, certain
26 spaces did recur frequently, due to some participants enjoying propinquity to a shared location –
27 not least, the south London estate complex featured in this article which was a hub of local
28 activity and where two participants were residents and two others lived nearby.
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37 This article does of course only raise a select few instances from this research process. Whilst the
38 chosen extracts are indicative of the experiences and reflections of various research participants,
39 these examples are also instructive in profiling the variation in contexts which underpin
40 conviviality – ranging from a humdrum suburban high-street to the inner heart of an increasingly
41 isolated inner-city estate. The vignettes discussed are also chosen by their ability to demonstrate
42 that conviviality is not merely applicable to everyday mundanity, but also to particular
43 negotiations of conflict and discomfort.
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49 **2. Conviviality and the sociology of ties**

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52 The term conviviality was proposed by Gilroy (2004) in *After Empire* to capture the quotidian
53 routines of multiculturalism apparent across postcolonial European cities. The appeal of Gilroy’s
54 argument lies not only in his rejection of integration and its emphasis on securing shared
55 identities of national self but also in his departure from principles of ‘respect’, ‘recognition’ and
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3 ‘culturalism’ (‘ethnic absolutism’[Gilroy, 1993]) when theorising multi-ethnic cohabitation. The
4 uncompromising premise of Gilroy’s argument both here and in his other works is that the
5 production and reproduction of racialised minority identities are always, in large part, ideological
6 attributions marking out inferiority vis-à-vis European, white normativity. It is accordingly noted
7 that any politics of minority recognition, at the level of governance but also everyday urban
8 negotiation, is inadequate if it does not substantially remake the ideological terms by which those
9 identities of difference come about in the first place. In other words, the politics of minority
10 recognition, even if conceived in terms of ‘multiple belongings’ and ‘multiple identities’ (Gilroy,
11 quoted in Farrar, 2007), is ultimately pyrrhic – as underpinning the logic of minority inclusion is
12 always a longer modernist project of whiteness and its implied majoritarianism.
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21 It is consequently asserted that ethnic differences do not require accommodation, remaking or
22 respectful recognition vis-à-vis the white majority, but should simply cease to require scrutiny
23 and evaluation in the first place – i.e. conviviality. Failure to rework multiculturalism within a
24 framework of conviviality – analogously defined by Amin (2013: 3) as an ethos of ‘indifference
25 to difference’ – is likely to result in epistemologies which continue to presume identities of
26 difference to be both ontologically authentic and culturally separate. At worst, such perspectives
27 invite amongst nationalist agitators the wholesale effacement and/or ‘expulsion’ (Bauman 1993:
28 163) of minority difference – i.e. orthodox integration. At best, it tends towards orthodox
29 multiculturalism (‘multicultural integration’ [Modood, 2013]) and the ‘exotic’ (Gilroy, 2004: 137)
30 identitarian politics of ‘recognition and reconciliation’ (Amin, 2012: 7) that undergird it. Moving
31 away from these imbricated traditions involves for Gilroy a deconstructive practice of interaction
32 whereby identity difference is rendered politically ‘unremarkable’ and ‘insignificant’ (2004: 105).
33 In other words, it is only by dispensing with communal identity as being relevant to the
34 regimentation of space, culture and social worth – absolutist notions historically embedded
35 within the privileges of whiteness – that a multiculturalism that is practically sustainable and
36 politically inclusive can emerge. And crucially, it is not that the cityscape is stripped of cultural
37 difference; it is only that cultural difference becomes ‘unruly’ (Gilroy, 2004: xiv), less easily
38 reduced to hierarchically indexed ethno-racial positions.
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52 Relatedly, this orientation also maintains that it is not regularised *contact* and *ties* (Putnam, 2007:
53 143-144) that presages a fluent basis for multi-ethnic interaction. An emphasis on ‘contact’,
54 posited as a valuable social good in its own right (Cantle, 2001; Hewstone, 2014), has increasingly
55 skewed the imagination of a sociology still wedded to ideals of integration. What Amin (2012:
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3 18) deploras as a troublingly resilient ‘sociology of ties’ continues to frame a range of prominent
4 ideological positions regarding difference: non-existent (liberal universalism), subsumed
5 (integration) or formally recognised (multiculturalism). Conviviality helps undercut this heritage,
6 moving the emphasis beyond ‘co-existence and contact in itself’ (Williams, 2013: 50) to the anti-
7 racist, anti-communitarian moral economy which allows for fluent interaction across putative
8 lines of difference. Put differently, ‘neighbourly contact’ cannot be seen as of its own accord
9 engendering the goods for productive relations across difference to manifest (Thiranagama and
10 Kelly, 2010: 12). Rather, I read conviviality as arguing that the neutralisation of conflict is realised
11 only when multicultural norms which annul the very interrogation of difference already pre-empt
12 the encounter. Put differently, the unspectacular breaching of already ascribed racial and ethnic
13 boundaries emerge from alternative ‘habits’ and ‘habituations’ (Noble, 2013: 162) rather than
14 alternative ties of belonging and/or circuits of contact.
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24 **2.1. Conviviality and difference**

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26 Of course, what actually happens to racial and ethnic difference within interactional routines,
27 convivial in type, requires closer conceptual clarification. Simply put, the observation that
28 multiple ‘groups’ undertake regular interaction does not preclude them from upholding the
29 putatively discrete, culturally indexed boundaries demarcating each ‘community’. Commonplace
30 cross-ethnic interaction can still leave substantially intact the broader symbolism of national
31 identity, integration and communitarianism – symbolic formations which Brubaker influentially
32 dubbed ‘groupism’ (2004: 7-10). The social cost of groupist conceptions of self and other being
33 retained is the likely recourse to hardened suspicion of minority difference whenever broader
34 socio-economic circumstances realign (the aftermath of 9/11 and the 2008 global recession each
35 tells its own sobering story) and/or when charismatic demagogues garner public platforms. This
36 question of how ethnic and racial difference is navigated within convivial formations is therefore
37 important. It is not enough to demonstrate that interaction across difference is commonplace –
38 which I consider to be the flattening tendency of much contemporary output on multicultural.
39 And it is at precisely this juncture that it becomes important to put forth a more precise
40 interpretation of Gilroy’s theorisation of conviviality vis-à-vis the remaking of difference’s
41 everyday resonance. A more precise purposing is further necessary given Gilroy’s complicated,
42 but I believe often misunderstood, critique of racial and ethnic particularity when considering
43 multicultural’s ‘democratic possibilities’ (2004: 140).
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3 Gilroy's sustained criticism of race when formulating his vision of conviviality resides of course
4 in the origins of race in racism. That is to say, given that race is birthed out of structural, colonial
5 racism, it is necessarily entangled in the operations of those discursive and institutional logics
6 which mark out the racialised as a pathological outsider – as a non-normative, culturally deficient
7 denizen (Goldberg, 2009, Winant, 2004). Contiguously, Gilroy and likeminded critics reject the
8 intimations of cultural fixity, homogeneity and discrete authenticity intrinsic to racial and ethnic
9 absolutisms. They conclude that if it is 'inescapably reified as a divisive and exclusionary concept'
10 (St Louis, 2002: 662), "race" can have no ethically defensible place' (Gilroy, 2000: 6).

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18 But it is necessary to make clear that a need to think beyond racialised absolutism does not imply
19 a visualisation of conviviality absent of 'racial, linguistic and religious particularities' (Gilroy,
20 2006: 40). I argue that Gilroy's framing of conviviality is not anchored in an 'undifferentiated'
21 (Robotham, 2005: 565) polity premised only on a Universalist sameness, as some critics suggest
22 (Gikandi, 2002; Roediger, 2006). His argument does not actually posit any such future without
23 difference and is certainly not a retreat from a critique of the material inequality and state
24 violence wrought by global capitalism – this being the charge levelled by Collins (2002) and
25 Carter and Virdee (2008: 669-670). On the contrary, it is the internal *sameness* which marks
26 appeals to 'race and nation' (Gilroy, 2000: 15) that engenders its futility regarding an open-ended
27 and effective critique of inequality and thereby warranting of its ethical obsolescence. It is its
28 imagination of self as part of a homogenous 'pre-political' communal entity which limits its
29 potential concerning political solidarities intuitively comfortable with difference. As Gilroy (8)
30 concludes, 'in a multicultural democracy, solidarity should be constructed on a radically non-
31 racial humanism that avoids the allure of automatic, pre-political uniformity.' In this context, all
32 claims to communitarian identity (as they emerge within the intertwined formations of nation,
33 ethnicity and race) are troubled in the interests of *actively* negotiating *new* forms of solidarity.
34 Conviviality is in turn interesting because it facilitates interactional practices by which racial and
35 ethnic difference is made commonplace; but *without* rehearsing the exclusive and culturally
36 disaggregated picturing of difference unique to a tradition of European modernity and its
37 constitutive politics of national integration and/or group recognition (Valluvan, 2013; 2014).

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52 It is hereby interesting that some critics seem puzzled by Gilroy's ability to maintain a forceful
53 anti-race claim whilst concomitantly detailing the racism which underpins the resurgence of anti-
54 difference integrationism:
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3 Gilroy concludes [*After Empire*] by reiterating the anti-race claim *even though* the majority
4 of the text is about the battle to preserve the postcolonial planet amidst imperialistic
5 [anti-difference] forces (Roberts, 2006: 165, emphases added).
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8 The ‘even though’ is I think misplaced. As I read him, there is no contradiction in Gilroy’s
9 argument against ‘race-thinking’; the argument he carves is intricate but it is clear that his
10 theorisation of anti-communitarian conviviality does not require a habit of identification without
11 race and ethnicity. As he writes elsewhere,
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15 Conviviality is a social pattern in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close
16 proximity but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not – as the
17 logic of ethnic absolutism suggests they must – add up to discontinuities of experience or
18 insuperable problems of communication (Gilroy, 2006: 40).
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22 Put differently, I read Gilroy’s anti-race position as being straightforwardly pro-difference. It is
23 specifically the neo-colonial renditions of difference which are channelled through essentialised
24 assignments of culture and biology and formalised by the logics of integration and
25 communitarianism that Gilroy deems untenable. It is in turn these practices of conviviality where
26 difference circulates with a casual ease but in a manner which circumvents communitarian
27 idioms which will be profiled in the following analysis of multicultural’s conceptual and political
28 distinctiveness.
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33 34 **3. Conviviality and the normalisation of difference** 35

36 I open with an intentionally ‘banal’ and ‘mundane’ (Gilroy, 2004: xvi) vignette involving Farima
37 (24), a participant of Iranian background from a northwest London borough known for its
38 ethnic and religious diversity.
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42 On multiple occasions we wandered our way through the borough’s high streets with a
43 few of Farima’s female friends (they were all either Iranian or South Asian of varied
44 provenance). We moved at a leisurely pace between cafes (her preference being
45 Starbucks) and shopping. As we strolled through the unglamorous commercial streets
46 and meandered through the two humdrum shopping complexes, we would regularly
47 chance upon various acquaintances to one or more of those women whom I was with.
48 These acquaintances spanned a wide range of ethnic backgrounds constitutive of the
49 area’s post-war history of settlement. On the Wednesday evening, when making our way
50 to Nando’s for an after-work meal, we happened upon a white acquaintance (Claire) who
51 was promptly asked to come along. Which she did – leading to a long, lively dinner rich
52 with gossip about common acquaintances and different work situations. The most
53 abiding impression from these sessions, apart from being generally awed by the sheer
54 number of people they seemed to know, was the wide array of backgrounds represented
55 in these myriad acquaintances and the very frequent, easy referencing of those
56 backgrounds during the course of conversation.
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4 This prosaic sketch echoes numerous observations from my research. Simply put, these routines
5 of ambling through the suburb's high-streets and navigating its multiple interfaces were
6 generically multicultural – the spaces are *multi-ethnic* and the interactions *cross-ethnic*. Such casual
7 routines are of course 'unremarkable' (Gilroy, 2004: 105). But Farima's reflections regarding the
8 conditions which facilitate such mundane routines draw important attention to the ideals of
9 'indifference' and 'simply letting be' (Wise, 2013: 40) which make such routines fluent.
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16 There is a difference in how people make choices about me. If I am Iranian, that's not
17 the problem. But you can choose to see me like I am a problem or you can choose [not
18 to]. To be treated fairly, until I mess up I guess. [...] Innocent till proven guilty. [...] The
19 [white] people here, like Claire, they know how to behave and know they shouldn't joke
20 about some things, [...] like not ask stupid questions about this and that.
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22 Farima expands, contrasting her ease with her borough to other places whiter in constitution,
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25 At Uni (Westminster) there were so many people who didn't seem used to being with
26 other people. I found it hard kind of to be with them, but it was strange because I know
27 loads of white people from [here]. But at Uni or over on the other side, like in [two
28 neighbouring areas], there you have a different kind of white person...you can tell that
29 they are unsure about what my history might be. Like [wondering about] what I do and
30 think. I don't want to be with people like that.
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33 Crucially, a normative multiculturalism where racialised identity, ceasing to be studied, becomes
34 'banal and ordinary' (Gilroy, 2006: 40) is not synonymous with it becoming trivial and/or
35 expendable. As Solomos (2013: 20) notes, 'lived experiences of multiculturalism does not take us
36 "beyond race"'. On the contrary, Farima is assertively clear that this normalisation relies on
37 *presupposing* the presence of subjective difference – racially and ethnically construed.
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43 The normative criteria Farima specifies centre on a crucial a priori supposition concerning the
44 presence of racially signalled difference, difference which Farima assumes as self-evident when
45 going about her 'convivial' movements. Having presumed the legitimacy of racialised difference,
46 and, providing that such legitimacy is forthcoming from those others present, it is indeed likely
47 that such difference makes less of a conspicuous impression. But this merely entails that the
48 presence of racially and ethnically signified difference has been 'habituated' (Noble, 2013) as a
49 *taken-for-granted*, 'common sense' (Robbins, 2012: 131) quality. It is an appeal to an ease with
50 diversity which is only possible upon freeing racialised bodies of suspicion ('innocent till proven
51 guilty', 'know how to behave, not ask stupid questions', not being concerned with 'what my
52 history might be'), upholding the right to fashion presentations of self unbound by the
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3 demagogic racial inscriptions of inferior status. The coda – ‘I don’t want to be with people like
4 that’ – all the more forcefully rejects any ideal of everyday life where difference to is to be vetted.
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6 Ultimately, Farima expounds a picture of multiculturalism which is predicated on a stance towards
7 difference as non-intrusive (‘I am not a problem’) and thereby unremarkable, as opposed to a
8 stance towards difference as simply non-existent (liberal universalism), subsumed (integration) or
9 formally recognised (multiculturalism).
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14 It is within this specific terrain as outlined by Farima that I situate Gilroy’s pivotal claim that
15 amidst circuits of conviviality – when compared to the other ordinary pleasures and hazards alike
16 which the cityscape has to offer – race is made ‘essentially insignificant’(2004: 105). It is an
17 ‘insignificance’ which emerges from a well-accustomed *indifference*, not *non-difference*, which is at the
18 centre of the post-integrationist ideal advanced by Farima. Integrationism (Kundnani, 2007;
19 McGhee, 2008) reads the possibility of shared life as emerging primarily from the absorption of
20 the minority, and especially its young, into a unitary collective bond – even if some proponents
21 do acknowledge the need for that collective identity to be reconstructed (Alba and Nee, 2003;
22 Favell, 2010). Conviviality renders the orthodoxy of integrationism anachronistic. Interactive
23 fluency does not rest on articulating a unitary identity field within which minority identifications
24 are either effaced or folded in; but rather, identities of ethno-national self are made politically
25 obsolescent in the first place – in that they cease to operate as categories for ‘supervising’ (Hage,
26 2000: 228) hierarchies of belonging. As Amin (2013: 11) helpfully sums up when distilling the
27 practices of ‘indifference to difference’ underpinning the ‘urban convivium’ (Amin, 2012: 72-74),
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32 I see the challenge of integration less as one of changing identities and building inter-
33 subjective empathies than as one [where] the status and visibility of particular bodies
34 recedes as a measure of their social worth and entitlement.
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39 The framework offered by Amin neatly captions Farima’s political philosophy. The objective is
40 not to supplant existing identities of ethnic and racial difference with superseding identities of
41 common national affiliation or to engender more congenial manifestations of minority
42 difference. The aim is to instead blind the very gaze which looks to study difference as worthy of
43 normative evaluation.
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46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 **4. The complex negotiation of complex mixture** 54

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56 This emphasis on what might be understood as the unassuming retreat from communitarian
57 ideals obtains an instructive analytic breadth in Gilroy’s (2004) extended discussion of those
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3 subjects who disrupt prevailing schemas of ethnic and racial order. Gilroy's emphasis on those
4 agents and cultural artefacts (e.g. Ali G, The Streets and Richard Reid) characteristic of an
5 emergent youth generation that trouble existing ethnic orderings is a helpful cue when thinking
6 about conviviality's ability to actualise an anti-communitarian reception of identity and/or
7 cultural difference. By being attentive to how ambivalent 'hybrid culture' (163) – those who
8 register as in-betweens, 'half-different' and 'partially familiar' (137) – might feature
9 unproblematically in the multicultural actualised at those spaces prominent to my participants'
10 everyday interactions, it is possible to more precisely capture how convivial, indifference-to-
11 difference sensibilities manifest.
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19 I note however that any such emphasis on a Britain where 'intermixture is banal' (166) and where
20 'cross-racial sex is no more or less meaningful than multi-racial football' (144) does not
21 constitute a rebuke to those ethnic formations which are not *obviously* syncretic. This brief
22 clarification is necessary in order to avoid placing a transcendent political value on the ostensible
23 mixture, ambiguity and syncretism often attributed to certain segments of today's younger
24 generations. Many (Friedman, 1997; Kalra et al. 2005; Sharma, A. 1996; Sharma, S. 2007;
25 Williams, 2013) have noted how anti-racist Cultural Studies orientations became too restricted by
26 the progressive possibilities of alleged hybridity, diaspora and syncretism, inadvertently
27 sponsoring a disregard, even hostility, towards those who appear, at the realm of signification, as
28 'traditional' and transparently 'ethnic' – e.g. the first-generation 'housewife' or even a second-
29 generation black grime artist.¹ In avoiding a further iteration of any such hierarchy regarding
30 mixture and ethnicity, I read conviviality as only arguing that to refrain from treating identity
31 ambiguity and indeterminacy as illegitimate, *as matter out of place*, serves as testimony to the anti-
32 communitarian gaze active at a given cluster of convivial locales.
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44 An extended reference to a field-site central to many of my observation sessions helps
45 substantiate the possibilities of such an indifference-to-difference ethos that is 'confident'
46 (Williams, 2013: 51) with the simulation of identity mixture but is not restricted by it either: a
47 quadrangle servicing a sprawling south London estate – the ward being the poorest in the
48 borough. The majority of the residents (two of whom were participants) were black, both
49 Caribbean and African. In this square, invariably awash with activity, a staple feature was the
50 well-attended, makeshift domino tables, where older Caribbean men would sip beers and engage
51 in lively gambling. There would also often be numerous women from East Africa seated on the
52 benches at the heart of the square – generally dressed in a direh (long, black dress) and hijab or,
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3 less frequently, a full jalabeeb (burka). In contrast, the square also boasted numerous formations
4 which would be readily understood by Gilroy (2004: 135) as constitutive of ‘proteophobic’ⁱⁱ
5 identity ambivalence: e.g. young multi-ethnic congregations, including an ample young white
6 contingent, collectively engaging in a black diasporic cultural vernacular and, also, the not
7 insignificant presence in the estate of Muslim converts/‘reverts’.
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12 I include here one snapshot of a street-party held on the day of the 2011 Royal Wedding which
13 captures the prominence in the square’s life of those figures who elude monochrome racial
14 designation.
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19 There is a rather dilapidated mosque at the mouth of the lane which leads on to the
20 various estate blocks from which the young men are returning – today being a Friday
21 ensures that many have been at mosque. Their customary ‘hip-hop’ inflected attire is only
22 partially perceptible as a long kameez shirt reaching down to their ankles is worn by many
23 of the young men on top of their usual clothing. The contrast is intriguing. They swagger
24 in a pronounced, confident manner, with all the bodily trappings of a cultivated urban
25 machismo, yet one cannot get past the putative piety of the kameez when worn by such
26 young, black British men. The impression is equally prominent when displayed by the
27 young white bodies amongst the returning crowd.
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30 One black man in his kameez seems particularly popular as he strolls past the crowd of
31 young black and white men from whom I purchased my chicken and rice, and from where
32 grime music is blaring. They greet him and touch fists. He seems pressed for time though,
33 so apologizes with a fluent knocking of his fist on his heart and continues on his way into
34 Hawthorne Block. Behind me, where I am still seated, is a young black woman. Her gaze
35 hovers assuredly over a multi-ethnic gaggle of kids who are scurrying about. The woman,
36 who has a distinct South London accent, wore a black hijab as well as a slim jilbab. I was
37 told later by Michael (a participant from the estate) that the woman, of Jamaican
38 background, converted to Islam a few years ago.
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41 Given this indicative instance of the square’s overlapping ambiguities which disrupt culturally
42 absolutist mappings of difference, it is instructive to simultaneously recall those enunciations that
43 register as *less* ambivalent in terms of racial signification. Those older men who gather around the
44 domino tables, speak with a distinctive Caribbean intonation, and listen to a dated brand of
45 reggae and dub,ⁱⁱⁱ do not garner for themselves any conspicuous markers of ‘semiotic
46 undecidability’ (Bauman, 1993). Similarly, the Somali mothers and aunts in hijab – and indeed,
47 their daughters and nieces as well – would register coherently along prevailing ‘racial scripts’
48 (Molina, 2014). Yet, their presence is equally constitutive in realising the square’s convivial
49 grammar and signifying field. As clarified previously, a critical reading of conviviality does not
50 consent to such a narrow position which privileges conspicuous intermixture. It is not a case of
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3 only profiling those often young people who confound ostensible boundaries. Instead,
4 conviviality is merely a matter of normalising any such ambiguity, whenever it does manifest.
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8 In probing further the anti-communitarian textures which multicultural engenders, another
9 implication of the aforementioned Royal Wedding celebrations becomes apposite. It being the
10 Royal Wedding does of course enjoy some totemic significance concerning racialised
11 ambivalence. The manner in which the occasion was commemorated (those responsible did have
12 to obtain clearance from the council to arrange a 'street-party' and leaflets were distributed
13 designating the occasion as wedding-pertinent) can appear amusing, given the understated
14 acknowledgement of the wedding during the party itself. It is however also evocative of the
15 'unruly', 'unkempt' practice of race which Gilroy (2004: xiv) places at the centre of convivial
16 culture. The scene is replete with cultural symbols and expressions best characterised as black.
17 For instance, given the Ghanaian and Jamaican flags (and lack of Union Jacks) and
18 'inappropriate' selection of music (grime, more grime followed by deep, rumbling reggae), the
19 party seems to flirt sardonically with a narrative of imperial Britain. And in the process, the scene
20 effortlessly reroutes the celebration towards an aesthetic of a contemporary, multi-ethnic
21 London. It revels in only being a *partially* familiar evocation of Britain. From the external,
22 'melancholic' (Gilroy, 2004) gaze which fixes the occasion's pomp and pageantry as redolent of a
23 lost Britain, this celebration is rendered incoherent, insomuch as it trades on the same patriotic
24 moment and yet distorts it in favour of pleasures symbolically irreconcilable with that hegemonic
25 narration of Britain. In short, the scene does not chime with a reading of racialised ethnicity as
26 hermetically sealed, absolutist difference. Instead, the celebration can be read as a spectacle of
27 Black Britain, a multicultural Britain, which courts a certain element of intentional bastardisation
28 vis-à-vis dominant discourses of race and nation.
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43 The play of such anti-absolutist cultural formations found particularly instructive reference in
44 Michael's precise account of the estate's identity nomenclature. Michael (25), a young resident of
45 the estate and a prominent presence in its day life due to him working part-time at a Caribbean
46 eatery situated along one flank of the square, commented:
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50 'You will say I am black, yeah. [...] It would be real dumb if you didn't, you know what I
51 mean. I have no problem with that. Really, I don't think anybody does. [...] We are black
52 and there is no doubt about it. [...] But my people are Caribbean yeah, but *now* we have
53 here Nigerians, Ghanaians, all sorts really. Fuck man, there are more of them than us
54 right [laughter]. [...] And also Somali youths yeah, [...] they be black too. So like, okay
55 I'm black, but [...] it don't mean nothing much.'
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3 Michael's deployment of black as a basis for self-identification is in itself unremarkable, but such
4 citations do not stand outside of global migration and shifting patterns of local settlement.
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6 Whilst he sees his own black identification as straightforward, he also empties it of significance
7 as to what this might 'mean' in terms of his cultural present and future. Indeed, Michael helpfully
8 noted to me during a passing conversation that many of the major black rap/grime stars of
9 today, such as Tinie Tempah and Skepta, have Nigerian backgrounds, signalling a significant if
10 underappreciated shift or blurring in what Black Britain might be in terms of its recent heritages.
11 (The sudden popularity of Afrobeats, a fascinating amalgam of genres which I encountered
12 during the later stages of my research at the estate, further speaks to this protean remaking of
13 urban Britain and its soundscapes). The 'now' in 'now we have' makes particularly clear Michael's
14 awareness of contingency, of how characterisations of subjective identity change in accordance
15 with a broader set of globalising local realities.
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23 I have argued that we might understand this awareness as being central to the square's convivial
24 moments: where identificatory terms of communal difference circulate, but are not bound to the
25 metaphysics of modernity and its move to code the world's people discretely along certain
26 communitarian sets. It is the habituation of conviviality which allows for this elasticity with
27 regards to iterations of migrant settlement within local spaces, migrant movement which is of
28 course constitutive of the urban ground which conviviality negotiates (Keith, 2013: 25-26). More
29 broadly, the above impressions regarding the activity conducted within the square suggest that
30 confidence with everyday renditions of difference rests in a decidedly more radical notion than
31 mere recognition (multiculturalism), overarching identity (integration) or post-racial
32 transcendence (liberal universalism). It suggests in short, a more substantive practical
33 disengagement with ethno-national *community* as a legitimate principle of social organisation. Of
34 course, any such instantiation of disengagement does not of its own accord entail a more
35 comprehensive disenchantment with the broader political appeal of community. But it does
36 constitute the prefigurative and 'ludic cosmopolitan energy' (Gilroy, 2004: 140) which can
37 presage the more substantial multicultural 'democratic possibilities' which Gilroy's argument
38 looks to harness.
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50 **5. Racialising and de-racialising conflict**

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52 It is however necessary to observe that conviviality cannot be seen only through those instances
53 where multi-ethnic interaction is fluent, but must also be considered by how it becomes
54 pertinent to invocations of ethnically construed suspicion (Karner and Parker, 2012). In this final
55 section, I contrast the habitual cross-ethnic encounters detailed before against the appeal of the
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3 pervasive conflict paradigms which continue to frame discussions around the ‘increasingly
4 complex forms of racialised and ethnicised diversities that have emerged over the past few
5 decades’ (Solomos, 2013: 18): paradigms which trade in a toxic ‘vernacular’ which is ‘fretful and
6 fearful for the stranger’ (Wise, 2013: 42). Indeed, what might be understood as a conflict
7 determinism is apparent in the very conceptual tools of influential integration and social
8 cohesion theses – indicated in the use of behaviourist terms like ‘ingroup bias’, ‘outgroup
9 hostility’, and ‘stereotype threat’. But whilst these discourses of conflict exercise a considerable
10 reach, even amidst circuits of conviviality, I profile here certain counter-practices of conflict
11 negotiation which the ‘habituation of conviviality’ (Noble, 2013) allows individuals to call upon.
12 To do so, I centre my discussion on one telling incident which I was witness to during the course
13 of my research.
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22 The incident transpired at a mid-sized convenience store located at the mouth of the
23 aforementioned estate. The shop also sits adjacent to the increasingly gentrified areas bordering
24 the nearest train station and riverside fronts. The store therefore operates at the nexus of the
25 sharpened class contrasts which mark out many contemporary urban areas.
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29 One evening I was with Mehmet, a participant of Turkish background who is the owner’s
30 nephew and is tending to the store alongside his cousin. I am reading the paper by the
31 entrance. It is late at night with only a gentle, attenuated stream of customers visiting the
32 store. There are, as of now, only a handful of customers inside: a white woman in business
33 attire with a similarly suited partner and an older, rather unkempt, white man who intends to
34 buy some cans of beer. A black couple enters the store. Both of them are around 40 or a little
35 younger. They purchase their goods. I glance over. It appears to be a customarily innocuous
36 affair.
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39 But then, the woman demands to have a receipt. I hear Mehmet say that he was only joking.
40 Matters stiffen. The other customers look anxiously towards me. I try to ascertain what’s
41 happening. ‘I was only kidding. I wouldn’t cheat you man.’ The man, peering over his partner,
42 shoots back, ‘You don’t kid with me. You don’t know who you talking to.’ ‘It was only a joke.
43 I didn’t mean any disrespect.’ The woman interjects, ‘You don’t fucking joke with me. We’ll
44 fuck you up. You dunno who you be fucking with.’ This seems absurd. Mehmet is such a
45 gentle character.
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48 It is later revealed to me that he had merely quipped that the Lucozade would cost her five
49 pounds (or something to that effect). He couldn’t fathom why they deemed this a slight. The
50 pair utter a few expletives whilst leaving. Mehmet, behind the counter, sighs in what I deem
51 an ill-advised, mocking fashion. As they reach the door, the man glares back ominously, blurts
52 something else and departs. The scene is hushed.
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55 Mehmet and his cousin speak in Turkish. The remaining customers remain silent. After they
56 too have left, Mehmet’s cousin claims that if they were black themselves, the pair wouldn’t
57 have conducted themselves in such a manner. It’s only because they think they are docile,
58 ‘freshie’ Turks that they act so belligerently. I suggest that the two were under the influence of
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3 drugs in order to account for their behavior. Mehmet doesn't think that it has much to do
4 with them being black or drugs. The cousin disagrees. He claims that they think Turks are
5 easy targets to act tough towards. Things have calmed. Normal service resumes.
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8 In this incident, what was poised to be just another innocuous demonstration of convivial life –
9 the ability to happily interact across racial lines without invoking a socio-political desire to 'test'
10 each other's difference – transformed in an instant into racially charged conflict. Race becomes a
11 marker of suspicion and weariness. It is of course possible, even likely perhaps, that race was not
12 the actual source responsible for either the ludic invitation or the resulting altercation. But it
13 remains a narrative repertoire which can be made applicable for post-hoc rationalisation of
14 conflict – as manifested when the cousin retrospectively apportioned blame in accordance to
15 racialised meanings.
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22 In this example, Mehmet extends a joke which might establish a rapport between customer and
23 worker, but also, across ethnic lines. Yet, in wanting to realise the latter, the gesture involves the
24 risk of misfiring, of being unreciprocated. Such an incident reveals the messiness which trails
25 conviviality but it also brings into stark relief the variation in power relations active at different
26 spaces. As has been commented upon by various researchers of multiculturalism, spaces are not
27 neutral canvasses but exert their own conditions concerning the interactions available (Hall,
28 2012; Wise and Velayutham, 2014). Simply, the workers in a convenience store are not afforded
29 the kind of protection that might be expected at establishments which carry a certain branded,
30 consumerist lustre whilst still remaining reasonably receptive to affordable/non-discerning
31 consumption – e.g. the Starbucks and Nando's frequented by Farima. Mehmet and his cousin, by
32 virtue of being workers at an 'immigrant' convenience store (which perhaps offsets their relative
33 cultural mobility as *second-generation* minorities), might be lacking the symbolic capital which
34 could better disarm the threats latent in certain multi-ethnic encounters. Conversely, it might be
35 said that the store, irrespective of the workers' own class profile and trajectory, might stand
36 symbolically for a certain kind of Poujadist, petty bourgeois stability denied to many of the black
37 residents who people the nearby estate. The store might therefore momentarily operate along a
38 fault line, written across intersections of local readings of class and ethnicity, which engenders
39 convivial gestures and habituations more fragile.
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53 In clarifying this spatial asymmetry I turn to the work of Keith. In *After the Cosmopolitan* (2005),
54 Keith distils the spatial register as a key mediator of different 'urbanisms' and, in turn, different
55 'multiculturalisms'. He isolates a variety of ways in which city spaces are made, pictured,
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3 inhabited as well as lived and exceeded. Notable here is his reading of how ethnic diversity and
4 processes of racialisation are constituted differently in the ‘cultural quarter’, ‘the banlieue’, ‘the
5 street’ and ‘the ghetto’ respectively – all four of which are ways in which diverse spaces are
6 pictured and regimented. Whilst this article is not in a position to engage the finer vagaries of
7 space – concerning the relationship between planning, infrastructure, patterns of governance,
8 settlement and local use – I take from Keith the salutary observation that urban space (both
9 diffuse areas and sites within it [e.g. the corner-shop]) is not constituted abstractly, is not lived
10 outside of different configurations of power and status. For instance, the corner-shop might
11 carry a different symbolic charge regarding possibilities for multicultural exchange when
12 contrasted to how other spaces becomes locally drawn – be it the estate square, or, as alluded to
13 earlier, the decidedly unglamorous but densely peopled, bustling consumer high-street.
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23 In this context of certain spaces carrying more threat, when Mehmet was asked during the
24 interview about his own reluctance to frame the incident racially, what becomes readily apparent
25 is that Mehmet is continuously contending with pressures to assume as self-evident the negative
26 traits which dominant discourses attribute to differently racialised groups. But, as seen in the
27 following interview excerpt, it becomes equally apparent that Mehmet can call upon alternative
28 scripts too, scripts which are ‘internalised’ and made ‘common-sensical’ through the ‘ritual and
29 practice’ particular to certain spaces (Wise, 2013: 40-42). Wise, reflecting on her research on
30 multiculturalism in Sydney suburbs, writes persuasively about how agents of multiculturalism are always
31 contending with *competing scripts* which jostle for pre-eminence.
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39 Research has shown the importance of ‘scripts’ and ways of talking in shaping [people’s]
40 perceptions of those different from themselves. [And] as much as darker discourses, [...] many such scripts are about accommodation, unfixing and loosening essentialised
41 concepts of the other or simply ‘letting be’ (40).
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45 The navigation of multiple and often opposing scripts draws attention to the energies which are
46 expended when the negativity and distrust ascribed to certain minorities are questioned. After all,
47 meanings or scripts are not rendered relevant of themselves; but rather, need to be made
48 contingent to the vagaries of local living and experience (in this instance an interaction at a
49 corner-shop). And in making this transition from the discursive to local life, numerous tensions
50 have to be tackled by the individual.
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56 Mehmet: ‘We hear many things like that. I hear it when at home, especially when with
57 Turkish people. It’s really bad with some older ones, like black people are just bare
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3 trouble, can't do anything good. But you realise bruv that this is just stupid talk. People
4 are people. I know from my own life, just like being at this shop you know, that none of
5 this makes any sense. Most people, if you give them a chance, are totally fine. But I guess
6 some people hold on to beliefs even when they know so many people who are not like
7 the prejudices. [...] You know, I love this shop we work at, 'cus when I go off for lunch
8 or something, I call some guys who I know in the area, or like, I've got to know them
9 since I started coming here, and they are usually black yeah, and we chill and just chat.
10 It's not any issue. [...] The cafe next door, owned by the Ethiopians, I love chilling in
11 there. I know the kids, the mothers who come in. It's all good. [...] And what proper bugs
12 me bruv, is that if you are Muslim, I think you should be more careful about saying shit
13 like that. 'Cus, you know, there are loads of idiots who just believe all the shit on TV that
14 say all kinds about us. About our mothers. Like they our daddy's slave or something...
15 About us, you know, young Muslim men and all that shit...Like we wanna blow up the
16 place, you get me.'

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19 This comment eloquently captures the disjointedness involved when anchoring the discursive
20 (prejudices on TV which are reinforced by some fellow Turks) in the materiality of local life
21 ('they know people who are not like the prejudices'). The warm familiarity with those who are
22 different which is cultivated in the course of transient multi-ethnic encounters (go off for lunch,
23 go to the cafe) serves to complicate the discursively established prejudices and degrading
24 characterisations of locally relevant other figures (e.g. working-class black). In short, it is this
25 duality which is central in any negotiation with racial difference. Being embedded in quotidian
26 multicultural routines, whilst, simultaneously, being exposed to the conflict paradigms which
27 often situate discussions around race and pluralism – both privately through family and other
28 intimate contacts amongst whom ideas circulate and at the level of general discursive
29 engagement (e.g. news media and other racialised popular-culture images).

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32 It is important to recenter here the role of space in mediating this negotiation. Different spaces
33 privilege different interactive trends, leading to variation in the degrees of allowance concerning
34 the ability to destabilise ethnically-framed conflict narratives. Various seminal urban
35 ethnographies have demonstrated how spaces, in the process of becoming places (in the process
36 of becoming locally demarcated and conditioned towards certain forms of engagement and social
37 purposes), are structured by specific arrangements of power and, in turn, interaction (Back, 1996;
38 Baumann, 1996; Hall, 2012; Puwar, 2004). But crucially, an analysis of convivial practices also
39 allows us to move beyond an overstated spatial determinism. Namely, it is also to be noted that
40 particular habits and dispositions cultivated at particular sites do not remain static. Rather, they
41 can also be carried and redeployed, in turn contesting the racialised tensions which might be
42 encountered elsewhere. Borrowing from Anderson's (2011: 74, 93) notion of 'trial spaces' where
43 denizens engage in 'folk ethnographies' which deconstruct normative narrations of racial
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3 pathology and danger, it might be ventured that certain spaces which Mehmet is privy to help
4 him formulate 'narratives which make sense of the present' but also concomitantly 'challenge the
5 intolerant naming of the stranger' (Keith, 2013: 26). It is not necessarily the relationships, or lack
6 of, which materialise at the corner-shop that allows Mehmet to exit ethnic explanatory-frames of
7 conflict. It is rather the interactions which he is party to elsewhere (the nearby cafe, the estate
8 square) that primes in him a greater cautiousness whenever invited to racialise antagonism.
9 Herein, when assessing the relationship of conviviality to conflict, it is important to situate space
10 and its historically accrued conditions as a key mediator. But it is also important that conviviality
11 creates possibilities beyond space. Put differently, practices of conviviality within certain urban
12 hubs cultivate the situated substance for the writing of broader discursive scripts inclusive in
13 character.
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22 **6. Conclusion**

23
24 This article explored how Gilroy's original formulation of conviviality constitutes a more radical
25 ideal regarding everyday multi-ethnic interaction than ordinarily appreciated. As opposed to
26 being a concept which simply names everyday practices of multi-ethnic interaction, conviviality
27 speaks specifically to an ability to invoke difference whilst avoiding communitarian, groupist
28 precepts. The first line of analysis, via the reflections of Farima, accordingly established that
29 convivial multiculturalism is not simply an epiphenomenal manifestation of multi-ethnic co-existence
30 and contact, but instead, the outcome of particular normative habituations where difference
31 becomes 'unremarkable. This understanding of conviviality acquired further conceptual clarity
32 through probing the play of identity and cultural mixture within a south London estate square.
33 Prominent here was an indifference-to-difference ethos which easily absorbs – but does not
34 necessitate – identity ambiguity.
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43 It is not however my claim that the interactions performed are always or even generally convivial.
44 And it is certainly not the case that interactional routines of convivial multiculturalism are not prone
45 to misfiring or free of communitarian contestation. The concluding line of analysis hereby
46 assessed the proximity of conflict to everyday sites of convivial practice. Figurations of space
47 were profiled as key mediators in both realising and limiting convivial formations. However, it
48 also became apparent that habituations of conviviality should not be subject to an overstated
49 spatial reductionism. As expounded by Mehmet, habituations of conviviality do offer young
50 urban denizens the resources to script a non-communitarian, anti-racist narrative for the city writ
51 large.
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3 In sum, this article mapped a framework of multiculturalism which is strongly decoupled from any
4 residual attachment to the normative ideals of integration and communitarian belonging. It was
5 shown that certain public formations, be they the impoverished estate square or certain
6 consumer suburban fields, are located in wider interactional circuits distinctly post-
7 communitarian in character. Of decisive analytic importance here was the identification of a
8 unique multicultural principle where markers of racialised ethnic difference, as opposed to
9 requiring recognition and/or dissipation, cease to be objects of normative supervision *in the first*
10 *place*.
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For Peer Review

ⁱ Mixture, far from remaining a self-explanatory anti-racist phenomenon, is often appropriated by various merchants of liberal 'post-racialism'. See for instance Johann Hari's (2005) emphatic claim, during the course of a broader anti-multiculturalism homily, that: 'Britain has the highest rate of mixed-race partnerships anywhere in the world, largely due to sexual relationships between white and black people in London. This – not multiculturalism – is the British tradition to promote.'

ⁱⁱ The anxiety provoked by the ambiguity associated with certain outsiders is what Bauman (1993: 168), also cited by Gilroy, captured as *proteophobia*: anxiety about the unclassifiable and its unknown future form.

ⁱⁱⁱ Entertainingly, there is playful bickering between the generations about what music to play on the sound system.

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