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## Multicultural Conviviality in the Midst of Racism's Ruins

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### ABSTRACT

This article argues that the idea of multicultural tools is the best way to approach the understanding of conviviality. This argument is made through two discrete steps. The first offers a critical review of how issues of urban life and diversity have been theorised focusing on recent debates about 'culture loss' and 'super-diversity'. The discussion, we suggest, elides historical and present racism, in the making of urban diversity in cities like London. The second step develops the notion of conviviality by identifying the ways in which young adult migrants living in London make convivial worlds emphasising the idea of tools, returning to Ivan Illich's early formulation, and the capability to make multiculture. The article's conclusion is that understanding urban multiculture requires equal weight being given to the paradoxical co-existence of both racism and conviviality in city life.

### KEYWORDS

Multiculture; racism; conviviality; urban diversity; everyday multiculturalism; migrant youth; migration; London

London is a world city of convivial multiculture. From its very beginnings London was shaped by the international flows of people and things that have converged on this great metropolis. It is where the cultures of the world have accumulated, sedimented and combined in one place. Once an imperial centre, London is now a key junction or crossroads within the circuits of global neoliberal capitalism, an exemplar of what Doreen Massey calls the 'throwntogetherness' of urban life (2005: 149). In the shadow of its financial citadels young migrants are contributing to new patterns of cultural combination and social connection that are very often off the radar of public concern, where 'immigration' has become a symbol of a world falling apart and a society that does not hold together. As a result London's dynamic cityscape is prone to being appropriated by very different interests to show either concern that London is 'losing its culture' or is countered by an enthusiasm for metropolitan diversity.

This article takes London as a place to consider the politics of urban diversity both theoretically and empirically. Divided into broad two sections, the first reviews the ways in which London's diversity is either poses a problem to its social cohesiveness or moving into a new phase of super-diversity (Vertovec 2007). Here we argue that it is important to situate the contemporary debate within a longer tradition of research that

has focused on the paradoxical co-existence of racism and urban multiculture. We look specifically at Gilroy's (2004, 2006) writing that is largely responsible for introducing the idea of conviviality into the contemporary discussions of multicultural cities in the last decade. Here we also discuss the link between Gilroy's writing and the thought of Illich (2009 [1973]) and his emphasis on thinking about the tools that make convivial life. The second step of this argument focuses on how young migrants make home in a city like London. Using ethnographic material drawn from a longitudinal qualitative study of young adult migrants begun in 2009 we argue that a situated ethics of conviviality can be identified within the way they make London their home.

Our meetings with the 31 young adult migrant participants in this study and the artefacts they have contributed to the project illustrate their attempts to build associations that work with and through difference, unpacking an insight beyond the parameters of super-diversity. As a result through using methods such as but not limited to photography, scrapbooks, creative writing, painting and drawing the participants have become observers of their own lives. On an everyday level this confounds forms of legislation and surveillance, which actively breed suspicion on cultural, religious and racial grounds. The participants in this study are drawn from a wider diversity of migrant experiences. We argue that within these young lives we can identify *convivial capabilities* as ways of dealing with life in a post-imperial city. The convivial culture exemplified in these worlds is best understood, we suggest, as a series of tools and capacities. This study began in 2009 and throughout the course of the last six years we have conducted an on-going form of dialogic multi-media ethnography that we refer to as a 'sociable form of sociology' (see, Sinha and Back 2014). Before showing what might be learned from a close attention to these lives, we first discuss current understandings and anxieties regarding the social and cultural impact of London's burgeoning diversity.

### Culture loss or finding super-diversity?

David Goodhart's book *The British dream* first published in 2013 is a good example of the impending sense anxiety that many commentators share with the idea that London, and Britain more generally, is 'losing its culture'. Goodhart writes: 'London is not the happily colour-blind multi-racial city that many people imagine or that one might think from wandering around the centre of the city' (2013: 51). Rather 'urban England' has become in his words 'mysterious and unfamiliar worlds just around the corner or ... a few tube stops away' (Goodhart 2013: 47). The city of multiculture is a source of anxiety and worry particularly for the elderly and poor. For him 'race relations' experts and 'academics' have censored the understandable and legitimate concerns of 'ordinary citizens' about the social costs of immigration. The building of a 'mega mosque' in Merton, south London is for Goodhart symptomatic of the damage done by excessive diversity.

Merton is an outer London suburb that has been little remarked upon by researchers or political commentators. Like much of suburban London is it a patchwork of affluent neighbourhood alongside post-war social housing for working-class residents many of whom bought their homes from the 1980s onwards. The mosque is a place of worship for the non-conformist Ahmadis, who have been largely marginal to mainstream Sunni and Shia Muslims. Opened in 2013 it is located in a repurposed local Express Dairy that lay unused for several years. Goodhart comments:

It dominates the neighbourhood, though as part of the planning deal no call to prayer rings out from the minaret. It replaced an Express Diary, which until the late 1980s provided a few hundred skilled and semi-skilled manual jobs, for the local people and, of course, lots of milk bottles – an icon of an earlier, more homogenised age. (2013: 47–8).

Goodhart's political pun relating to the longing for a lost, more homogenous time captures the heart of the matter for him. While the Ahmadis are in many respects 'model immigrants' they are also the symptom of the unacceptable excesses of multiculture. He offers the example of them paying for posters on London to congratulate the Queen on her 2012 diamond jubilee as an example of their commitment and gratitude for providing a home for their ecumenical form of Islam. At the same time, Goodhart argues, for many white people the 'giant Ahmadiyyan mosque with a capacity for 10,000 worshippers' is a symbol of the disappearance of their 'familiar mental and physical landmarks'. Taking a side swipe at political correctness along the way, he concludes: 'As one man – described as White Heritage Elder Male in the jargon of race relations – told a Merton council focus group: "We've lost this place to other cultures ... it's not English anymore" (Goodhart 2013: 53).

Like many critics of immigration before him, Goodhart styles himself as a brave solitary voice speaking uncomfortable and less said truths in the service of the ordinary people who he sees as the true victims of the failures of post-war immigration. Ware (2008) notes how such 'uncomfortable truths' are spoken loudly by politicians and circulated widely in the mainstream media. It is important not to dismiss this work without taking its contents seriously because some of its key themes have become a rallying point for the political mainstream. Goodhart's supporters range from Trevor Phillips, former chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, to David Willetts, British Conservative Party politician and Minister for University and Science until 2014 cabinet minister, to the Labour politician Frank Field. An interesting and motley crew of metropolitan elitists and working-class advocates has assembled behind the message that diversity has gone too far.

Stories like the case of the Merton mosque matter because they so often reveal the moral and political commitments of not just the teller but also the audiences that find them compelling. Kenan Malik points this out perceptively: 'the story of Merton mosque, and the retelling of that story as a narrative of "cultural loss", gets to the heart of the contemporary debate about immigration' (2013: 42). This, however, is less about the facts than the 'existential impact' because 'Immigration has become symbolic of the disruption of communities, the undermining of identities, the fraying of belongingness, the promotion of unacceptable change' (Malik 2013: 42). As Malik points out you could re-tell the story of the Merton Mosque a different way revealing the moral commitments evident in the initial version (see also Barker and Beezer 1983). For example, during the seven years when the Dairy was effectively an industrial ruin drug users made it into a 'crack den'. 'So, one story we could tell', suggests Malik,

is the that of economic forces closing down an unprofitable dairy, with the loss of several hundred jobs, and of local Muslims subsequently rescuing the abandoned, crime-infested site, creating new jobs and in the process transforming Merton for the better. (2013: 42)

Yet, doing this would change the point of the story. It would shift the story from culture loss and white melancholia to urban renewal and cultural reconstruction. The problem

herein though for people like Goodhart and his ‘White Heritage Elder Male’ is that this still would not make the Merton Mosque English or amenable to inclusion within ‘fellow citizen favouritism’ (see Goodhart 2013: xxxvii).

Seemingly from the opposite end of the political spectrum academic researchers have rallied attempts to tell a different kind of story around the idea that London is now an exemplar of ‘super-diversity’. Coined by Stephen Vertovec in a much-cited essay, super-diversity has quickly spawned a style of academic research that we would like to evaluate carefully (Vertovec 2007, Wessendorf 2014). Vertovec starts out his discussion with the assertion that today: ‘Diversity in Britain is not what it used to be’ and in the new context super-diversity results from the ‘dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade’ (2007: 1024). Vertovec argues that super-diversity is a ‘summary term’ to name this new unstable situation in which patterns of migration are more variable and it is important to move beyond the study of particular ethnic groups as the sole objects of study. He argues: ‘London is the predominant locus of immigration and it is where super-diversity is at its most marked’ (Vertovec 2007: 1042).

While this position seems at odds with those who lament ‘culture loss’, many of the key elements in Vertovec’s argument are strikingly similar to Goodhart’s. Both stress that within the last decade or so a quantum of diversity that has been breached. Equally, both authors minimise the significance of racism in understanding contemporary multiculturalism. Goodhart is open about this, when he writes ‘the threshold for the use of the word racism has fallen too low in the past two decades’ (2013: 122). For him racism continues through residual minimal effects and accuses anti-racists and Left academics of refusing to get beyond their ‘race pessimism’. Vertovec’s insouciant treatment of racism works largely through omission. He includes just one short paragraph in his super-diversity essay on ‘new patterns inequality and prejudice’ (Vertovec 2007: 1045) and mentions the word ‘racism’ just once. So enchanted are both Goodhart and Vertovec with their own apparent novelty, they pay no serious attention to the extensive tradition of work on the cultural politics of race and new ethnicities inspired in large part by the work of Hall (1987, 1988). They effectively erase close to 30 years of scholarship on the relationship between racism and urban multiculturalism (Hewitt 1986, Gilroy 1987, Jones 1988, Alexander 1996).

While Goodhart and Vertovec play down the continued social vitality of racism they insist that explanations can be found for the patterns of life changes within migrant communities need to be explained in ‘cultural terms’. Goodhart particularly is right to point out that anti-racist writers have been skeptical of the use of culture in this way, the reason being that culture becomes an absolute variable invested with independent explanatory power. Various authors historically have called these cultural archetypes ‘ethnic absolutism’ (Gilroy 1987) or ‘cultural essentialism’ (Hall 1992). This view casts the victims of a divided society in circumstances – culturally speaking – of their own making. On the 27th September 2015, the Ahmadiyyan mosque in Merton was the subject of an arson attack, while the motivations of the arsonists are not known the police are not ruling out a racist motivation.

Vertovec’s conception of super-diversity is concerned with a more complex understanding of culture. He argues against the tradition of scholarship that has tended to emphasize the uniformity of ethnic groups limited to the patterns of migration and

settlement associated with the postcolonial relationships (Vertovec 2007: 1029). Usefully, he observes that the varying kinds of immigration status within migrant groups have profound impacts on their life chances and conditions of belonging in Britain, noting, ‘there may be widely differing statuses within groups of the same ethnic or national origin’ (Vertovec 2007: 1039). No connection is made, however, between the legacy of empire and racism, and the newer racist hierarchies that have emerged. These order the time and space of migrants differentially through bordering practices, culminating in immigration surveillance, detention, removal and ongoing attempts to stop ‘others’ reaching these shores.

Vertovec’s analysis emphasises an attention to the social arithmetic of urban diversity in a well-intentioned attempt to value it positively and develop a more complex understanding of contemporary migration flows in cities like London. The risk here is that emphasising superlative difference feeds the fire of public anxieties of an already panicked debate about immigration. While there is an urgent need to find new ways of notating and representing the cultural kaleidoscope of the migrant city (see e.g. Rhys-Taylor 2013, Hall 2015), to do so without paying equal attention to the ways divisions are drawn within urban multiculture is ill-judged. As a consequence, super-diversity as a concept is politically one-dimensional. This is despite Vertovec’s recent work with co-authors modifying this position by acknowledging that ‘conditions of superdiversity are inherently tied to power, politics and policy’ (Meissener and Vertovec 2015: 552). Further, Nowicka and Vertovec (2014: 351) note that: ‘conviviality and conflict invariably intertwine’ within urban life. Nonetheless, how these paradoxical impulses work together is not developed analytically.

We argue for ‘a way of seeing’ that is attentive to forms of division and racism alongside and sometimes within multicultural convivialities. Here we understand racism as a mutable and changing pattern of power that operates at both a popular and institutional level that sifts and rank London’s diverse population into hierarchies of belonging. Here residual ideologies of colonial racism and melancholic nationalism remain socially alive while new forms of cultural racism taking in new targets are innovated and elaborated (Sinha 2008, Back and Sinha 2012).

Understanding urban diversity entails a careful attention to what Wise and Velayutham call the ‘micro-politics of everyday life’ (2009: 15) in which state power and policy filters down into the smallest scale and become entangled with new emergent modes of coexistence. A growing literature is emerging that seeks to explore this intersection and the sensuous texture of multicultural life. As Rhys Taylor points out: ‘The everyday multiculture that emerges through the senses has outpaced both cultural theory and many city dwellers’ own accounts of their lives (2013: 405). But as Neal *et al.* explain, paradoxically: ‘notions of ethnic segregation, cultural withdrawal, and multicultural crisis have dominated public and policy debate despite the new complexities and newly emergent spaces of difference and diversity’ (2013: 319).

The young lives we have followed offer examples of a new kind of lived multicultural politics that is not just about opposing racism but establishing tools through which people from disparate biographies can live together in a city riven by social divisions and damage. As Hall points out London ‘emerges as an intense place through which migrant citizens are simultaneously integral to and regulated from the past, present and future of the city’ (2013: 12). Extolling ‘cultural loss’ or finding ‘super-diversity’ offer equally inadequate

understandings of the combinations of division and accommodation. Patterns of people flow are more chaotic and the elsewhere of postcolonial London is changing. Paying close attention to the lives of young migrants reveal not only the omissions and glosses within the public debate about immigration but also we can glimpse the ways in which new modes of living take hold in the city.

### Postcolonial melancholia or convivial culture?

An alternative way to give a name to these modes coexistence is the idea of convivial culture (Gilroy 2004). As Nowicka and Vertovec point out the idea of conviviality is based on the Latin root for ‘with’ and ‘living’ (2014: 341). In Gilroy’s formulation – inspired by Ivan Illich and Theodor Adorno – conviviality is always proximate to its negation. For Gilroy, the shadow of racism, imperial melancholia, ‘anti-terrorist’ securitisation and war casts its shadow over the impulse to live differently. Understanding how these tensions are lived out involves writing what he calls a ‘counter histories of cultural relations’. ‘This negative work’, Gilroy argues in his book *After empire*, ‘can discover and explore some of the emancipatory possibilities that are implicitly at stake in convivial culture but do not announce themselves, preferring to remain hidden and unpredictable’ (2004: 161). We might add that convivial cultures are often excluded, penalised or disproportionately policed. Gilroy himself leaves the notion of conviviality under explicated in part because it acts like a fugitive hinterland in the context of racism and melancholic nationalism.

For him, a ‘habitable multiculture depends upon working through the legacies of departed empire’ (Gilroy 2006: 27). This means a reckoning with the ruins of Empire that continue to animate the ways we understand the legacy of racism particularly in relation to immigration. ‘Even if today’s unwanted newcomers – from Brazil or Eastern Europe – are not actually postcolonials, they may still carry all the ambivalence of the vanished empire within them’ (Gilroy 2006: 31). Gilroy offers a way of understanding conviviality as an unruly, spontaneous social pattern produced by metropolitan social groups living in close proximity with each other. Here racial differences become ordinary, banal, unremarkable and sometimes mundane to the point of boredom. In Gilroy’s view of conviviality the forms of comprehension and communications that result produce ‘everyday virtues’ that enrich city life. Our experience of working with young migrants is in keeping with Gilroy’s characterisation. Looser social bonds result in which ‘a degree of differentiation can be combined with a large measure of overlapping’ (Gilroy 2006: 40). We will argue that this prosaic form of multicultural ‘good-sense’ is best understood by focusing on the sensibilities – as practical tools – that make convivial culture.

The important lesson Gilroy’s thought offers is his insistence that: ‘recognising conviviality should not signify the absence of racism’ (2006: 40). What the notion of conviviality does offer is an alternative understanding of culture that focuses on what people do everyday rather than always reducing them to their cultural origins. As Gilroy concludes: ‘Culture is misunderstood and oversimplified through being conceived as ethnic property to be owned and held under copyright. The vital alternative comprehends unruly, convivial multiculture as a sort of “Open-Source” co-production’ (Gilroy 2006: 40). Gilroy offers

a series of analytical instruments that enable us to understand the coexistence of both racism and convivial culture.

We argue that conviviality should not be a by-word for saccharine diversity fantasies. Valentine points out rightly that it is foolhardy to replicate the mistaken logic of Allport's (1954) famous 'contact hypothesis' and assume that conviviality is the simple consequence of proximity to difference (2008: 334). Although, many of Valentine's findings merely re-state observations that have been long-established in the field (see Hewitt 1986). Gilroy – recalling Adorno – stresses the 'negative dialectics of convivial culture' because he insists on avoiding a simplistic account of affirmative multiculture (2004). While there are certainly shifts and forms of cultural bridging there is no positive resolution of the dialectical tension between racism and multiculture. This involves having to live with countervailing conditions, or 'metropolitan paradoxes' both in places and in people that do not hold out the possibility of synthesis (Back 1996).

Central to Ivan Illich initial formulation of conviviality is the emphasis on *tools*. This offers a way out of either reducing conviviality to a sense of 'identity', or claiming a kind of underlying 'cultural ecology' that structures and therefore explains convivial life. By playing close attention to the experience of young migrants we can find glimpses of the capabilities and resources that enable them to live, make space to live within a city that remains divided by racism. Although Illich's concerns were very different – he was seeking to find alternatives to the damaging nature of industrial society – he notes 'individuals need tools to move and dwell' (2009 [1973]: 11). Interestingly for our concerns Illich focuses on the 'structure of the tools, not on the character structure of the users' (2009 [1973]: 15). In the same vein, we do not want examine the 'character structure' or identities of young migrants but rather identify the toolbox of convivial capabilities they use to navigate their way through life in postcolonial London.

### **Convivial tools and micro-publics**

The young migrants we have spoken to experience London as a divided city in a variety of ways from popular anti-immigrant sentiment and racism to the structural relations of aggressive immigration policing, institutionalised marginalisation which prohibit them from working legally while waiting for their claims to be processed (Back and Sinha 2012). We argue that in midst of the ruins of racism – or what might be called the social damage of anti-immigrant times – an uneven but nonetheless vital convivial multiculture is also being made. We have identified five main tools or convivial capabilities evident in the lives of the young migrants in our study. We are not suggesting that these prosaic assets are evident in all of our participants but they do resonate and combine in different individual ways as we will demonstrate.

The first tool we want to foreground is the fostering of an *attentiveness to the life of multiculture*. What we see in the young lives of all of the people we have worked with is a capacity to listen to, read and be surprised by London's complex cultural landscape. They are curious about their social worlds and, as we have already noted, sometimes come to see it with the enchanted eye of a tourist. This kind of attentiveness to everyday multicultural life stands in stark contrast to what Noble calls perceptively 'panicked multiculturalism' (2009). In the local context the terms of belonging can be redrawn as a result producing a kind of 'neighbourhood nationalism' that shifts partially the terms of

inclusion (see Back 1996). It is within the spaces of everyday life that prosaic negotiations with difference through intimate proximity take place and are often compulsory and necessary. These are best characterised as 'micro-publics' including workplace, schools, hospitals, colleges, youth centres, sports clubs and other contact zones of association including public transport (for an elaboration of this idea see Amin 2002: 969).

As Noble points out they can also be places where convivial life become habitual and the base line in which difference is 'transacted and reconciled in the daily conduct of people' (2013: 1). Wise and Velayutham argue that this can extend into an intercultural habitus, which captures 'habits, dispositions and speech practices of intercultural accommodation and connection' (2014: 423). The point we would stress is that convivial culture is not the organic product of the cultural ecology of a particular place or micro-public. We argue cultural contact provides both an opportunity and the social material for making convivial alternatives. Yet, conviviality is not guaranteed by contact alone. Rather, the tools of conviviality shape the micro-publics rather than the other ways around. The social ecology of multiculture we argue provides the staging of a micro-public – where profound proximity and encounter take place – convivial life is fashioned through these capabilities that are used to make a convivial life.

The second tool is a capacity to *care for the life of the city*. Again this came out time and again in the verbal accounts, photographs and artworks made by the young people in our study. It recalls Hage's important distinction between an ethics of care in contrast to the concerns of paranoid nationalists who worry about culture loss or being swamped by difference (2003). This is not a simple racialised distinction because we are seeing increasingly the emergence of complex hierarchies of belonging that sift and rank according to differences within 'diversity' and where black and brown people are enlisted into the idea of the 'us' of 'host culture' that is being jeopardised by the presence of 'them' – the new immigrants to the migrant city (Sinha 2008, Back and Sinha 2012). Caring for London's heteroglot landscape and being curious offers an alternative tool for living in it. Many of our participants' lives illustrate this sensibility of attentiveness and care. ZeeZee's biography particularly brings these sensibilities to life.

ZeeZee's experiences, outlook and aspirations are influenced by her encounters with different parts of the world both internationally and in Newham, East London. Our first conversation for the purposes of this research was in May 2009, when she was 23. East London absorbs and reworks global influences to create and recreate its identity. This does not mean that everything in ZeeZee's life is simply fluid. Rather she has learnt from her journeys and situations that she feels are important. Her imagination is as profoundly global as it is humane.

ZeeZee has five brothers and three sisters. She describes herself as Arab, itself a category not bound by nation-state or continental boundaries. ZeeZee was born in Mogadishu in 1985. Fleeing war and famine there at the age of four she went to Yemen, then Egypt, Libya, then back to Egypt and then to Dubai. They experienced unrest in Yemen and left Libya because it seemed on the verge of war. ZeeZee's mother lamented the fact that war was following them around. Then in 1999 she came to London. In London, she sought and won asylum and eventually applied for and gained British citizenship. ZeeZee loves London's mixture and likes how the schools in her area seem to know more about Islam than she does. ZeeZee explains how grateful she is to London for providing a refuge for her as she fled one conflict after another. She also pointedly comments

that she appreciates all too well how the violence she experienced was directed at her from 'her own people'. Reflecting on the violence in Somalia and Yemen she said:

I thought [to myself] 'Arab people, Muslim people didn't help you did they?' They didn't provide you a house, they didn't provide you education, they didn't provide you hospitality. As far as I am concerned, I am in a country where they are making me feel safe. I had a choice do I want to utilize this opportunity or end up cursing and cussing English is this and English is that? 'UK Is this, Britain done this to us before ...' So, I wanted to learn and utilize what I was offered and give back .... And before I give back to my family and my country that I promised I would ... I wanted to give back to the community that gave me a life. Whatever UK gave me - I am paying it back.

ZeeZee understands the history of colonisation and the damage that the colonisers left in their way. It makes her sad to read that history. At the same time she says: 'I cannot put hate in my heart ... In my own personal experience I went through a war where it was my own people who was killing my own people'.

It is not that ZeeZee has not encountered hate in London but she refuses resolutely to be defined by it. She commented, 'I don't like news. My dad watch news 24 hours. I hate news. I am tired of death, death, death ...' Even as a child she would switch off when the news came on the TV. She remembered a painful incident after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001. The following morning she collected her books ready to leave for another school day. As she left the house a white neighbour confronted her shouting abuse:

I was coming out walking trying to go to the stairs and she had a coffee in her hand. She was like 'it's all you lot, you bloody Muslims' I was wearing a [head] scarf like I am wearing now. 'You bloody Muslims you are killing all the people' and she threw the coffee in my face. My Mum was like 'Oh my god'. My skin was red.

It was not until she arrived at college that she became aware of what had happened to trigger the racist outburst from her neighbour: 'It was because I am Muslim but I don't do this to people'. What ZeeZee communicates is a powerful intolerance of intolerance. The same neighbour would often abuse her mother:

... come and knock the door and say to my Mum F ... ing this and F ... ing that. My Mum doesn't speak English and my Mum would say 'sorry ... sorry' and I'd say to her 'Don't say sorry to people. Stop putting you head down to people ... They are not God!' More than ten years passed and then ZeeZee encountered her neighbour again, this time not as a child but an adult woman. ZeeZee remembers: I said 'hello do you remember me?' She got old now 'I used to live in number 69 ... ZeeZee?' She was saying 'are you saying hello to me?' I was saying like yeah - why not? She was shocked, that I actually said hello to her. She thought I was going to hate her .... I think she was surprised. I told her I do youth work and work with young people and she did apologise to me. I said to her not all Muslim people are like that. I told her my Mum passed away.

ZeeZee's refusal to put 'hate in her heart' is born out of an experience being reviled and expunged. This is a lesson that her mother taught her. 'For me one thing my Mum taught me, even if people come to you with violence, be humble. Your humbleness is what will educate people. It doesn't mean because I am a Muslim I am a terrorist'. There is a third tool here that we would describe as a *capacity for worldliness beyond local confines*. ZeeZee's is at home in Newham, London where she also finds the traces

of all the global elsewhere's in which she can also trace of herself. So, what is close at hand is never simply parochial.

A fourth convivial tool is *resisting the pleasures of hating or laying blame at the door of the new stranger and the next in line*. ZeeZee's emphatic intolerance of intolerance provides a powerful illustration. The fifth and final tool we want to stress is *an aptitude for connection and building home in a landscape of division and social damage*. This last tool of connection and making home is alive in the experience of a young man called Mardoche.

## Making home

Born in Kinshasa, Congo, Mardoche migrated to London as a refugee at the age of eight. He is now in his 20s. Mardoche does not remember much about the immigration process as he was young then, but he does have UK citizenship now. We first met him first in a 'greasy spoon' about 10 minutes from Angel tube station. A 'greasy spoon' is a café/restaurant known for serving fried and grilled food at relatively cheap prices. We order chips and the Turkish speaking staff look ready to close up for the night. Upon arriving in the UK Mardoche lived with his aunt and uncle in a hostel in Finsbury Park. The reason why his uncle had brought him to London we later found out was that in Congo Mardoche had been labelled a 'witch child' and he was held responsible for death of his mother.

At our first meeting we learn that he has had a troubled family life and spent a lot of time on the streets. It was difficult to talk about so we gave him a camera and asked him to take pictures of the places in the area making observations about his own life. About three weeks later, we meet and he has taken 36 photos ([Figure 1](#)).

Mardoche talks us through his photos. Mardoche did not feel welcome at his auntie and uncle's house and used to spend much of his time hanging out and having fun on the



**Figure 1.** Observing his own life.

streets. He shows a park where he and a friend used to play a game when they were 12. Mardoche says:

When I was outside, when I was not at home, I was outside, like this is the place basically, me and my friend came and basically we hide like when its night time, we hide here, and basically, we jus pick up um, there's a apple tree up there, we pick um, its bad but it was fun, we pick out apples and we start throwing at the cars when it goes past. So that yeah, basically that's how I enjoyed myself, in a way, having fun.

Mardoche was 11 or 12 years old when he started staying over at friends' houses because he did not feel comfortable at home. Despite this disruption he points out that he never missed school. He says: 'Mostly like Friday I used to like come from school, I could never sleep, like from Friday jus', get out of my house'. Nonetheless, he would only return home Sunday or Monday. He says: 'so if my aunt says like, "where was you?", I jus' say "I didn't feel like being here"'.

One day when he was 11 or 12, Mardoche's auntie had a dream about being murdered. In the dream she thought it was Mardoche who had killed her. His auntie took this as a sign. She went down to where he was playing with his friends and ordered Mardoche home. Remembering that night is difficult. 'A lot of stuff, bad stuff.' He continues: 'when I went home she actually threatened me with knife, if I have any dream from you, if I have any bad dream from you, I will kill you'. Mardoche left his house and went for a walk by the canal. Here is the bench where he sat down to take it all in ([Figure 2](#)).

He says: 'I went out the house, I was so angry, I didn't know where to go where to start, what's next for me'. Things got so bad that one weekend he planned to see his friends, enjoy his time and then commit suicide by poisoning himself. His auntie contacted the



**Figure 2.** Mardoche's bench.

police because she did not know where he was and they caught him in time. He was subsequently taken into care.

Despite these troubles, Mardoche has managed to rebuild his life with the help of friends as well as youth and social services professionals all from a diverse set of ethnic groups. While Mardoche may not always have felt supported by his family, he found a group of people who operate the kind of convivial tools we have tried to describe here. They are not biologically related to him but they are his family. Steve, Mardoche's football coach, was his 'rock'. He grew up on a north London council estate called Southgate where he was one of very few local black families. He played football for West Ham as a young man but was actually better at boxing. He was a professional boxer for seven years before he became a youth worker. Mardoche also has close friends he made while in the foster home in Upton Park. This friend took him to football games at West Ham and they used to watch *Match of the Day* together (a football highlights programme). Mardoche reports that this friend is now doing well and has moved into his own place. His thinks his friend is Ethiopian and came to the UK at a young age. He also made friends with a girl from Ethiopia there and a boy from Burundi.

Mardoche had a mentor assigned to him by social services. He appreciates his perspective and remains in regular contact with him even though he is now over 18 and is catered for by the 'leaving care' team rather than as a looked after child. This mentor is a British-born white man. He has a close friend who is also a participant in this research and who was born in Ghana. Like Mardoche he has had professional football trials. Mardoche also has a friend from Jamaica who went to the same school. When he called round before school his family would offer him breakfast. Mardoche also maintains contact with the youth workers that helped him. Steve explained:

He's someone who could ask anything and I'd say 'You know what Mardoche, we'll try and get you it, trying sort you out'. He's been an easy guy to work with because he's not demanding. He's not demanding he don't take it all out of you. He don't push you, he's just there trying to get on with his life. He'll take every opportunity and he'll do the best with it.

Mardoche works in the building trade. How this happened reveals the dimensions of the convivial capabilities that we are trying to describe. Steve explained that a female colleague at Copenhagen Youth Project who was born in Scotland mentioned that her husband who is a builder was looking for someone to help out. The builder was also Scottish by birth but grew up in north London. Steve explained: 'They live in Hackney – he's a good friend of mine. They were just blown away by him [Mardoche] and he said – "this guy is a decorator". That's when it all fell into place'. A white British builder and his wife opened a door to a different future for this young man from Congo. When we put this to Steve as evidence of people making a work together he replied, 'yeah that's right, all that racial stuff gets pushed aside'.

Mardoche has completed an apprenticeship in painting and decorating. He is employed and now living in his own flat. Steve concluded 'He's a capable, capable young man. Whatever he suffered wherever he has now he values it'. In addition to Steve there another British-born Ghanaian youth worker has been particularly important to Mardoche whom he has known since he first came to Copenhagen Youth Project.

Mardoche's foster mum is from Sierra Leone and he went on holiday there where he went clubbing and played football. Mardoche wants to rebuild a relationship with his auntie and uncle. Mardoche is grateful that his uncle brought him over from Congo

especially because this meant leaving one of his sons there and this seems to be a reason that he is keen to maintain a relationship with him. He likes his foster mum but she is against this and sometimes he feels that she does not understand. Mardoche complains about having to stand there and listen to her lecturing him and puts this down to African culture where the mum is always right.

When meeting Mardoche to show him this account he wants us to highlight the inspiration he got from role models who helped strengthen his belief that one can meet challenges and survive adversity. Mardoche's favourite player is Thierry Henry but he also mentions Patrick Vieria who came from Senegal to France as a migrant and made a life for himself. Denzel Washington is an actor whom Mardoche admires not only for his acting but he sees him as a strong and happily married family man. Tupac Shakur is another person he admires, a rapper who was also carving out a career as an actor at the time of his murder. In 2014 Mardoche got involved in another initiative close to the Copenhagen Youth Project. This time it was to make a monument in the local area with young people. Mardoche told us proudly that the inscription on the monument was his idea. It is a quote from rapper 50 Cent: 'I'm the diamond in the dirt that ain't been found'. He plans to train as a motivational speaker and he is coaching football at the Copenhagen Youth Project.

Mardoche has experienced deep troubles but is putting his life together and building a home in London. He feels deeply attached to people who may not be biologically related to him but form a family to him. They might come from different parts of the world but they help him feel like he belongs here – even if he does fancy the idea of building a residence in Sierra Leone one day. These are convivial tools at work. What is so compelling is that the Copenhagen Youth Project offers a refuge and a place of belonging in a hostile world, where connections can be made and as Steve says where young people can 'widen their map of the world'.

## Conclusions

To end we want to return to how London is used to exemplify very different accounts of urban multiculture. In her argument for a 'global sense of place', geographer Doreen Massey shows how the 'longing for coherence' in global cities gives rise to 'defensive and reactionary responses' (Massey 1994: 147). The idea of 'culture loss' that we have described is one such example of this kind of impulse. Massey is equally critical of easy superficial celebrations of urban diversity in the age of globalisation and neoliberal economics. Following her lead it is vital to understand how migrant lives are circumscribed by 'power geometries' that include racism, immigration surveillance and everyday policing that hold people in place. Yet, as Massey herself acknowledges, there is always room for 'judgment, learning, improvisation' (2005: 162). In this article we have attempted to show that even within the confinements of London's 'power geometries' and 'chaotic mix', convivial relationships are established and new kinds of urban life take form (Massey 1994: 153).

What we see in the lives of the young people in this article is a quite different picture to that offered by those who mournfully talk about the passing of a 'more homogenised age' or commentators who confront the multiply positioned migrants in the midst of London's super-diversity as a social problem. The young migrants in this article use their convivial capabilities to re-make the city and build a life in the midst of racism's ruins.

We also want to stress that what is made is not singular but open and emergent. Multiculture can take on very different forms with varying political and ethical qualities. Convivial culture can also be forged from damaging formations of masculinity, misogyny and violence or alliances forged between different groups united by a shared hatred of the latest newcomers. Stressing Illich's idea of convivial tools enables us to keep open the question of what kind of multiculture is being made as a result.

What we have tried to identify here are the tools that emerge from the young lives we have listened to closely. These can be summarised as follows:

- Fostering attentiveness and curiosity.
- Care for the city and a capacity to put yourself in another's place.
- Worldliness and making connections beyond local confines.
- Develop an aversion to the pleasures of hating.
- Make connections and build home.

What these tools produce is also a sense of openness to the future. This is much more than merely extolling diversity but a set of navigation devices that enable young people to find a way through the barriers and limits that racism places upon them. This convivial knowledge or everyday wisdom goes unnoticed by the high priests of macro-policy or those concerned only with the social arithmetic of diversity.

Visiting Steve in the February, 2014 we suggested to him that through his work he was creating a kind of convivial space for young people. He thought for a few seconds:

That's big. That's really big ... A boy said to me once – and this is a great quote. Basically, I was sitting here one day and the bus pulled up ... he was training with a football team on the other side of London. He jumped off the bus, pressed the buzzer, came straight in the door, in he came jumped straight on the computer. I said 'George aren't you gonna go home?' He went 'Steve, I am home'. That was it in a nutshell – walked straight in went straight on the computer and he said yeah I am at home.

Our point here is that convivial tools make the conditions for a liveable home in the micro-public space of the club, even if it is temporary and made in the midst of social damage, inequalities and exclusions.

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