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Managing strangerhood: young Sikh men's strategies

Abstract

This paper offers a critique of accounts of 'the stranger' that lack empirical grounding and are fetishising, suspicious and anxious. Instead, I propose that we should engage with strangers and move towards more relational, emotional and embodied accounts of the place of the stranger in contemporary society. In order to illustrate this argument, I draw upon qualitative research with young Sikh men growing up in urban Scotland to explore the complex strategies enacted by these young men in responding to being placed in the position of the stranger. The strategies employed by the young men include educating others, managing multicultural intimacies, affiliating with the Scottish nation and travelling far to socialise with friends. Overall, this paper offers a relational, embodied and emotional set of insights into young Sikh men's strategies for managing being cast as strangers and demonstrates the agency and creativity of the young men in doing so.

Keywords stranger, racism, ethnicity, young people, Scotland

Managing strangerhood: young Sikh men's strategies

Introduction

The figure of the 'stranger' has a long history in urban studies and social theory (Ahmed, 2000a, b, Amin, 2012, Bauman, 1991, Schuetz, 1944, Simmel, 1950) with some of the earliest insights (Schuetz 1944, Simmel 1950) providing an important basis for more recent work. In particular, earlier accounts show attentiveness to the spatialities and temporalities of the 'stranger' with issues of acceptance, surveillance, distance, proximity, closeness and remoteness being important themes:

For our present purposes the term "stranger" shall mean an adult individual of our times and civilization who tried to be permanently accepted or at least tolerated by the group he approaches. The outstanding example for the social situation under scrutiny is that of the immigrant (Schuetz, 1944: 499)

The unity of nearness and remoteness involved in every human relation is organized, in the phenomenon of the stranger, in a way which may be most briefly formulated by saying that in the relationship to him, distance means that he, who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who also is far, is actually near. For, to be a stranger is naturally a very positive relation... (Simmel, 1950: 1-2)

In this paper, I review scholarship about 'the stranger' in order to explore how young Sikh men growing up in urban Scotland respond to being positioned as the stranger. I critique literature about the place of the stranger for its suspicious, anxious and fetishising tendencies and argue that there is a need for relational, embodied and

emotional accounts of being a stranger to be further developed. In particular, this article emphasises the importance of theoretically-informed empirical research that allows the stranger to speak back.

Focusing upon the experiences of Sikh youth is important not only because they are under-researched but also because of practical and conceptual reasons including: their relative absence from political and policy debates about immigration, citizenship and multiculturalism; the lack of attention to, and public engagement with, the principles and values of their religion; and their complex racialisation vis-a-vis Muslims and experiences of Islamophobia. These factors all contribute to placing the young men in the position of the stranger and this paper maps out the tactics they employ to respond to this positioning. These strategies – which are explored in more depth in this paper - include educating others about their religion, managing multicultural intimacies, affiliating with the Scottish nation and travelling far to socialise with friends.

In exploring how young Sikh men in Scotland manage being placed in the position of the stranger, this paper contributes to a number of overlapping literatures, including work about encounters in the city, geographies of youth, religion and multiculturalism. Valentine (2008: 333) has critiqued work about the encounters whilst also noting that we should not allow the 'knotty issue of inequalities to slip out of the debate.' In focusing upon issues of inequalities and injustice, I take forward three of Willis' (2010) suggestions about research on what she calls 'social collisions' focusing on emotions, the ethics of engagement and the influence of geopolitical events. More broadly, this paper contributes to debates about the politics of multiculturalism (Chan 2010, Lentin 2012, Nagel and Hopkins 2010, Swanton 2011) and the contested geographies of ethnic minority and religious young people

(Barber, forthcoming, Nayak 2010). Geographies of religion has arguably now developed into a strong sub-field of the discipline (e.g. see Hopkins et al 2013) with a focus on issues as diverse as: youthful geographies of religion (Dwyer, 1999, Hopkins et al, 2011, Mills, 2012, Olson et al, 2013), religious institutions (Sharma, 2012) schools (Kong, 2005) and university campuses (Hopkins, 2011, Sharma and Guest, 2013); religion, migration and development (Olson and Silvey, 2006); and religion and sexuality (Andersson et al 2011) to name a few. However, the focus of most work has been on Islam and Christianity, with fewer contributions focusing on other religions or forms of spirituality. Indeed, geographic studies of Sikhs are rather limited with important contributions including: Walton-Roberts (1998) readings of the turban and Frost's (2010) insights into being 'brown', both of which focus upon Vancouver; Dufty and Lui's (2011) study of Sikh women in agricultural labour in Australia; and Peach and Gale's (2003) analysis of religious buildings in the UK (see also Peach, 2006). In neighbouring disciplines – and in the sociology of religion in particular (Nesbitt, 2005, 2009) – Jasjit Singh (2010a, b, 2011) has recently made a number of important contributions to understanding the lives of British Sikhs through his exploration of British Sikh youth camps and the personal religious identities and practices of Sikh youth. Similarly, in social psychology, Jaspal (2013) has offered insights into how Sikhs born in Britain understand and define their religious identities.

The Sikh community has had a presence in Scotland for many years and especially since the period from 1920-1940s when Sikhs settled in port cities across the UK, including Glasgow and Edinburgh (Ballard, 1994). As Singh and Singh Tatla (2006) clearly evidence, Glasgow was an important centre for trade – and related arrivals of immigrants – including Sikhs - in the 1920s. Furthermore, 'in 1939-40 there were 37 Sikhs registered as peddlers with the Glasgow Council' (Singh and

Singh Tatla, 2006: 48) and the presence of gurdwaras increased from 2 in 1972 to 9 in 1985, to 11 in 2001 (Singh, 2006). The 2001 census found 6,821 Sikhs in Scotland (0.13% of the total population) with 37.6% of the Indian population in Scotland identifying as Sikh. The Sikh population is also young with nearly 60% being under 35 (Bluck et al, 2012). The population is geographically dispersed across Scotland with the highest concentration amounting to 3% of the population with most areas being less than 1%.

Alongside the academic need for research about Sikhs, there is also a policy imperative for such work with the Scottish Executive (now Scottish Government) observing that Sikhs were the mistaken targets of Islamophobic attacks following 11th September 2001:

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001, there were reports that Muslim people in Scotland were being subjected to new harassment and intimidation. Sikhs and Hindus were apparently also targeted. Some Muslims have expressed the view that they now do not know whether they are being viewed as the victims or the perpetrators of religious hatred. Among the religious groupings we spoke to, some of those with a strong racial sub-identity felt that new legislation to try to tackle religious hatred might be desirable (Scottish Executive, 2002: 9)

Having now contextualised this paper within relevant academic literatures and policy debates, I now review literature about the stranger in order to propose that research should move towards relational, embodied and emotional engagements with the stranger rather than continuing to fetishise the stranger through suspicious and anxious engagements with the place of stranger in contemporary society. I then

move on to explore the complex management strategies enacted by young Sikh men in response to their experiences of being cast as the stranger.

Fetishised, suspicious and anxious accounts of ‘the stranger’

The stranger comes into the life-world and settles here, and so – unlike the case of mere ‘unfamiliar’ – it becomes *relevant* whether he is a friend or a foe. He made his way into the life-world *uninvited*, thereby casting me on the receiving side of his initiative, making me the object of action of which he is the subject: all this, as we remember, is a notorious mark of the *enemy* (Bauman, 1991: 59)

Here, Bauman’s insights into the figure of the stranger position it as the enemy, a settler and unfamiliar character that has entered into the world in an unsolicited and unwelcome manner. He sees strangers as ‘undecideables’:

Undecideables are all *neither/nor*, which is to say that they militate against the *either/or*. Their undetermination is their potency; because they are nothing, they may be all. They put paid to the ordering power of the opposition, and so to the ordering power of the narrators of the opposition. Oppositions enable knowledge and action; undecideables paralyse them. Undecideables brutally expose the artifice, the fragility, the sham of the most vital of separations’ (Bauman, 1991: 56).

Like the earlier accounts of strangerhood outlined by Simmel and Scheutz, issues of distance, proximity, closeness and remoteness also come through in Bauman’s (1991) work where he suggests that the stranger occupies an ambivalent position in being is physically close whilst also being spiritually distant. Bauman’s (1991: 67) accounts of the stranger carry with them a deep insecurity that something

problematic, damaging and divisive may occur if people are not wary of the stranger: 'a moment of inattention, and the intercourse may well spill over the permitted limits. Thus the strangers remain the permanent 'slimy', always threatening to wash out the boundaries vital to native identity'. He continues:

The harder they try, however, the faster the finishing-line seems to be receding. When, at last, it seems to be within their grasp, a dagger of racism is flung from beneath the liberal cloak. The rules of the games are changed with little warning. Or, rather, only now the earnestly 'self-refining' strangers discover that what they mistook for a game of emancipation was in fact a game of domination' (Bauman, 1991: 71)

Bauman (1991) goes as far as to suggest that it is not possible for a stranger to transform their identification as a stranger to become a friend as 'the best he can be is a former stranger, 'a friend on approval' and permanently on trial, a person vigilantly watched and constantly under pressure to be someone else than he is...' (Bauman, 1991: 72).

Amin's (2012) recent insights into *Land of Strangers* provides a contemporary set of insight into debates about race, politics and the place of the stranger. I agree with Amin (2012; 61) when he notes that 'the rounding of vulnerable minorities and assimilated strangers has inflamed racism, intolerance and xenophobia and forced the injured into a feral and fearful existence'. Significantly, he reminds us of the '...persistence of legacies of racial judgement that return some strangers as outsiders and threats' (Amin, 2012: 2). However, much of the remainder of his insights are cast with a similar hue of suspicion and anxiety evident in Bauman's work. A key problem with such accounts are that the personal perspectives,

accounts or voices of those categorised as 'strangers' are curiously absent from this work (Noble, 2013).

Relational, embodied and emotional engagements *with* the 'stranger'

Generalization or universalization of strangeness – we are all strangers – that conceals the difference in experience and the ways in which the stranger come into being through historical and geographical practices of estrangement. Secondly, the celebration of the figure of the stranger as the paradigmatic figure of postmodernism invests it with a life of its own; it becomes something that exists on its own terms (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011: 345).

A key issue with engagements with the figure of the stranger relates what Ahmed (2000a) refers to as stranger fetishism: 'is a fetishism of figures: *it invests the figure of the stranger with a life of its own insofar as it cuts 'the stranger' off from the histories of its determination*' (Ahmed, 2000a: 5). Engaging in stranger fetishism as Koefoed and Simonsen (2011) notes, give the stranger a life of its own and therefore the figure of the stranger becomes constructed by the social theorist and then takes on a life of its own without much regard for the role of others in shaping how, where and why particular figures become categorised as 'strangers'. There is a need then for accounts of the 'figure of the stranger that does not ontologize the figure' (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011: 344).

It follows from this that the stranger is a 'relational figure constituted in spatial ambivalence between proximity and distance' (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011: 343). This relationality therefore relies on various encounters with difference which result in particular figures being categorised as strangers. I agree with Sara Ahmed

(2000a: 6) who notes that 'we need to understand how identity is established through stranger encounters without producing a universe of strangers':

...we need to consider how the stranger is an effect of processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities, including communities of living (dwelling and travel), as well as epistemic communities' (Ahmed, 2000a: 6)

By doing so, we are more likely to see multiple inequalities, prejudices and injustices and be able to explore how these discriminatory practices operate in and across scales, places and temporalities. Bauman (1997: 46) notes that 'all societies produce strangers, but each kind produces its own kind of strangers, and produces them in its own inimitable way'. Appreciating the relational positioning of the stranger will enable deeper insight into the ways in which societies produce particular bodies as 'strange'.

Many accounts of the stranger are curiously disembodied (Amin, 2012, Bauman, 1997) and provide little indication of what the stranger actually looks like and how their embodiment (and that of their 'other') is interrelated with their positioning as the 'stranger'. Yet, 'it is not possible ... to simply 'be' a stranger; one becomes a stranger through specific, embodied encounters (Koefoed and Simonsen 2011: 344):

...differences can be understood through thinking about the role of everyday encounters in the forming of social space ... as well as bodily space ... Such differences are not then to be found *on the bodies of others* ..., but are determined through encounters between others: they are impossible to grasp in the present' (Ahmed, 2000a: 9)

Encounters with the 'stranger' are therefore 'played out *on* the body', and '*with* the emotions' (Ahmed, 2000a: 39). Often, 'the constitution of strangers involve[s] emotionally charged *spatial negotiations* over mobility and home, (imagined) communities, boundaries and bridges (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2012: 625). Any analysis of the strange should therefore consider processes of embodiment as well as the role of emotions in encounters with others.

Processes of embodiment, encounters with emotions, and relational engagements with 'strangers' requires carefully conducted and detailed empirical research in order for such issues to be fully appreciated. Arguably one of the most important critiques of accounts of the 'stranger' relates to the lack of empirical engagement with those cast as being 'strangers' (although for notable exceptions see Askins, 2008, Koefoed and Simonsen, 2012, Pietsch and Marotti, 2009). As Askins (2008: 235-6) notes:

...we need honest engagements with the complex ways in which otherness and fear play out in the everyday alongside an understanding that encounters between different groups draw upon, reiterate but also have the *potential to shift* how we see and how we feel about our others.'

These encounters therefore have the potential to change how different groups and individuals relate to and perceive each other. Such 'transformative geopolitics' may 'potentially occur in the moment of encounter ... or/and in the *moments that follow*' (Askins, 2008: 243). These potentially transformative engagements are crucial because the stranger 'is not somebody we do *not* recognise, but somebody that we recognise as a stranger, somebody we know as not knowing, rather than somebody we simply do not know' (Ahmed, 2000b: 49). By engaging with those grouped as 'strangers', we enable 'the stranger to be familiar in its very *strangerness*' (Ahmed

2000b: 49). Such emotional, embodied and relational engagements with the 'stranger' are likely to vary 'depending on the geographic scale of analysis' (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011: 335). Overall then:

...nobody simply *is* a stranger. Rather, everybody is continuously constituted in everyday encounters in a continuum of positions between familiarity and strange(r)ness. Strange(r)ness, then, is basically a spatial relation, and the stranger is a *relational* figure or an interaction constituted in bodily encounters – face-to-face and/or mediated through images formed in encounters performed in other times and other spaces' (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2012: 625).

The study

This paper draws upon a study that was informed by a feminist and anti-racist methodology (Anthias and Lloyd, 2002; Moss, 2002); this involved in-depth analysis of five group discussions and ten individual interviews in Glasgow and Edinburgh with more than 40 young Sikh men participating in the research. Four of the five focus groups took place in high schools with the fifth group being with a group of university students. All of the young men live in either Glasgow or Edinburgh, are between 14 and 26 years of age and from relatively middle-class families. Those who participated in the research were contacted through a process of snowballing where initial contacts at schools, universities, gurdwaras and community and voluntary organisations were asked to identify Sikh youth who may be interested in taking part in the study.

Group discussions were deliberately informal and tended to include participatory diagramming sessions (Hopkins, 2006, Kesby, 1999) followed by group

discussions on the key issues arising from the diagramming exercises (Hopkins, 2007a). The individual interviews were unstructured although key issues that tended to arise included; being Sikh in Scotland; negotiations of difference; and the key principles of Sikhism as a religion. All interviews were fully transcribed before being analysed and coded in detail by the author. All of the participant's names are pseudonyms, many of which were selected by the young men themselves.

Through a careful analysis and re-reading of the interview transcripts and group discussions, it became apparent that the young Sikh men who participated in this research were placed in the position of 'the stranger' as a result of a combination of factors that led to their everyday movements and interactions being subject to scrutiny. Three inter-related factors can be identified. First, the small size of the Sikh population in both Glasgow and Edinburgh placed the young men in a position of distinctiveness which led many of them to feel unique and different. This apparent distinctiveness in relation to other racialised young people in their neighbourhoods led others to be either inquisitive and intrigued or racist and exclusionary. Second, the young men referred to the often subtle, regularly racist and occasionally aggressive ways in which their senses of belonging and rights to occupy everyday places were monitored and surveyed by others; this is similar to what Noble and Poynting (2008: 129) refer to as the 'affective regulation of migrant belonging'. Third, they were regularly mistaken for being Muslim and therefore problematically associated with terrorism. Similar to Noble's (2005: 117) research, I found that 'many interviewees spoke of the experience of being strangers'. With reference to fears of the 'Arab-other' in Australia, Noble and Poynting (2008: 129) point out that 'much attention has been given to thinking about this culture of fear in abstract terms, with little research into the experiences of those concerned, and with a focus on the

manipulation of (largely 'white') fears (Aly and Balnaves 2005) which forgets about the objects of those fears'. In my own research, I have spoken with young men who are the objects of the fears that Noble and Poynting (2005) refer to and thereby make an important contribution to research in this area by giving voice to young Sikh men, a frequently ignored, regularly silenced, and persistently overlooked group of the Scottish population. I now consider the ways that the young men responded to being placed in the position of the stranger.

Managing strangerhood: young Sikh men's responses

It would perhaps not be surprising if the young men engaged in a policy of defensive withdrawal or what Hopkins and Smith (2008: 106) have referred to as a 'strategy of 'invisibilisation' in order to avoid harm and minimise material threat. However, although the young men did respond to being placed in the position of the stranger, their responses were often about making a statement about who they are, engaging with inter-ethnic relations and carefully managing multicultural intimacies rather than simply withdrawing from public life. I now explore the sophisticated set of relational, embodied and emotional tactics employed by young Sikh men in Scotland in response to being placed in the position of the 'stranger'.

Educating others; jostling for position

Some of the older research participants – who were in their early twenties – articulated a strong desire to educate people about Sikhism. Here the participants concur with Koefoed and Simonsen (2011: 349) who note that they 'found a significant feeling of being misrepresented and excluded from the imagined community in the public discourses, in particular as they are articulated in the media'.

Hari, a university student, notes how he feels that many people do not fully understand the Sikh religion:

Hari: Because like not a lot of people know about Sikhism because, I mean, it is very religious ... to be honest when I read it, I was just like, this is actually true and then it was actually on the BBC website about how like Sikhs have got a link to Al Qaeda in the UK and I was just like ... I think that's Muslims but it's just weird.

This statement also evidences Hari's frustration at what he feels is the misrepresentation of Sikhs and Sikhism in the media. Some of the older participants often used the interview as an opportunity to explain what they see as the key principles of their religion and this clearly emerged from a strong sense that their religion and personal religious identities were marginalised and misunderstood. Consider Ramandeep's views here:

Ramandeep: I started getting called the terrorist. That's when it began, that's when the world changed, that's when people became careful about people who are brown, people who have beards, people who have turbans, you know ... Osama bin Laden doesn't actually wear a turban. He wears a piece of cloth round his hair, his head to keep his head cool because it's hot there, you know.
Only Sikhs wear turbans. Okay?

Ramandeep continued by telling me that he regularly – sometimes on a daily basis – explains this difference to people in order to confirm what he sees as key differences between embodied religious practices in Sikhism compared with in other religious or cultural practices. Indeed, Ramandeep went to great lengths to explain to me that his heightened awareness about the lack of understanding of his religion has led him to

start doing presentations at schools in order to educate people about Sikhism. This demonstrates a relational, embodied and emotional response to being cast as the stranger as it involves engaging with, and relating to, others about his personal faith. Shortly after returning home from the interview, he sent me a very detailed set of PowerPoint slides that he uses for this purpose. In discussing their willingness to educate people about the Sikhism, some participants were presented with resistances from others:

Hari: ... and then again there are some people that I know like who are unwilling to change their opinions. Do you know what I mean? Like they think, you know, you are what I think you are then sort of that's it but I'm not really sure but I think it's still important to sort of educate people, it can go a long way can't it?

The inclination to educate people about Sikhism was generally most prevalent amongst the young men in their late teens and early twenties, and in particular for those who were at university or had recently graduated. For the younger men involved in the research, all of whom were at school when they took part in the research, they often engaged in form of youthful masculinity that can be characterised by a 'jockeying for position' on a racialised hierarchy (Edley and Wetherall 1997). Such engagements with their ethnic, religious and racialised social positioning often emerged from the participatory diagramming sessions where discussions regularly focuses on the 'problem' of asylum seekers and refugees, issues with Muslims or other ethnic groups, and worries about ethnic conflict and racism. The young men often engaged in this set of positioning strategies in order to differentiate themselves from these other ethnic groups and to distance themselves from some of the problematic stereotypes associated with such groups, stereotypes

that the young men themselves felt resulted in them being inaccurately cast with suspicion and distrust. The tactic of educating others therefore included processes of self-justification (about religiosity) and differentiation (from other minoritised racial and religious groups).

Managing everyday multicultural intimacies

Another set of strategies that some of the participants engaged with in an attempt to reduce difference was to manage social relations relevant to what Wise (2010) calls 'everyday multiculturalism' and to what Fortier (2008) refers to as 'multicultural intimacies'. In an attempt to minimise feelings of insecurity and promote the comfort of others, young Sikh men talked about engaging in acts of politeness and positive engagement as a strategy for promoting their well-being and sense of inclusion. These encounters took place in a variety of settings, including on public transport. Travelling by bus 'is often an intrinsic and necessary aspect of everyday routine and public life ... It is a site of tacit negotiations and intense encounter, where studied avoidances are likely and tolerance of others is essential' (Wilson, 2011: 634). One of the most detailed examples of this arose in an interview with Hari, a baptised Sikh from Glasgow:

Hari: Like whenever I'm on the bus, I'll say "after you" and do you know this, they sort of smile and they're like, "oh gosh, thank you, you're so kind" you know. Whereas if I went first, like nothing would happen. Whereas if I say to her like, you know, why don't you go first, you know, she does say thank you, you know, you're so kind and throughout the bus journey she'll be constantly looking over and smiling at me simply because I let

her go on first and then I suppose that's building a sort of like relationship, you know. I let her go on first, then she might sort of start thinking, well, maybe I had the wrong idea, do you know what I mean? Maybe they're not so bad? So I think like the tiniest little things like that make huge amounts of difference. So I'm always careful of little things like that...

As this illustrates, small everyday encounters and engagements – or the 'tiniest little things' as Hari suggests – help to minimise the sense in which young Sikh men are placed in the position of the 'stranger' whilst promoting a sense of comfort amongst others. As Fortier (2008: 7-8) notes, 'multiculturalism is decidedly about proximity, intimacy, and feeling *for* and *within* the nation'. I therefore agree with Wilson (2011: 635) who observes:

In a space of such extraordinary intimacy with others and intense materiality, where bodies are pressed up against each other, seats are shared, and personal boundaries are constantly negotiated, we find an important and often overlooked site of ordinary multiculturalism, where differences are negotiated on the smallest of scales' (Wilson, 2011: 635).

Fortier (2008: 71) observes that since 2001 'a new politics of inter-ethnic propinquity became imperative – one which emphasized inter-ethnic interactions and mixing as a pathway to integration.' This research suggests that the experiences of smaller groups of the population – such as the Sikh community – could provide useful insights into, and reflections on – the challenges of promoting and managing everyday multiculturalism.

An additional set of responses from some of the young men focused on how they managed multicultural intimacies through thinking critically about their embodied

presentation. For example, Jangjeet discussed following the advice of his father in order to minimise the likelihood of him being associated with Osama bin Laden:

Jangjeet: I didn't feel scared. I used to wear a white turban a lot when I was about ... at that time, I was about 13 or 14, I used to wear a white turban a lot and my dad said to me, don't wear obviously a white turban, it's sort of what Osama Bin Laden wore at the time and my dad said to me, don't wear a white one. I used to wear blue much more often anyway but I did occasionally wear a white one and my father did actually prefer me not to do that...

These embodied management strategies highlight the agency of the young men and their families whilst also demonstrating the worrying outcomes that racism, Islamophobia and the discourse of the war on terror can have on the everyday lives of ethnic minority and religious young people who are misunderstood and misread as a result of the complex racialisation of religion (Dunn et al 2007).

Alongside managing their interactions with (white) others, many of the young men explained how their peer groups were often multi-ethnic and multi-faith, partly as a result of the small size of the Sikh population but also because of the young men's willingness to engage with others. Both Gulzar and Ramandeep explained that most of their peer group are white and do not follow Sikhism:

Gulzar: I play football on a Thursday evening and at the weekend too ... on a Friday it's straight back from work and out with my mates ... we hit all of the pubs and clubs everywhere

Ramandeep: ... but one of my best friends is a Jew, so there are different kinds of religion there but all of them are white in that sense

Although the young men may have little option other than to socialise with diverse groups of young people, the multi-faith and multi-racial composition of their peer group – and their ability to competently navigate between these different groups demonstrates their agency and evidences the ways in which they are responding creatively to being positioned as the stranger through positive inter-ethnic and inter-faith peer group friendships.

Affiliations to the Scottish nation

As much of the literature about ‘the stranger’ testifies, the national scale is often employed as a significant framework to identify strangers (Ahmed, 2000a, Bauman, 1991):

Strangers are the one who are encountered at the border and whose proximity threatens the coherence of the nation. The stranger becomes an object of discussion, one that concerns the question of letting the stranger in or keeping him/her out of the national territory’ (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011: 339).

All of the young men displayed very strong connections to Scotland and Scottish national identity and were unwavering in their affiliation as Scottish Sikhs. From the interviews, it was clear that their sense of connection with Scottishness was both a deeply felt as well as performed. All confidently declared “I am a Scottish Sikh” much like Hari explains here:

Hari: I do see myself as a Scottish Sikh very strongly ... we see ourselves as Scottish, then see ourselves as Sikh ... I would see myself as Scottish first and then with a sort of Indian sort of twist

The young men claimed their affiliations to Scottishness through a number of claims to national identity including: their accent, place of upbringing, their educational experiences and their commitment to Scotland's landscape. Previous research about ethnic minority young people in Scotland has produced similar findings (Hopkins, 2004, 2007b, Saeed, Blain and Forbes, 1999), however, what was particularly surprising about the young Sikh men who participated in this research was the number of them who also actively engaged with material and fixed markers of nationalism (such as the kilt and the Scottish flag) rather than only claims to the nation. For example, following the interview, Hari, Jangjeet and Gurchathan all sent me photographs of themselves wearing a kilt. Consider what Jangjeet says here:

Jangjeet: I like the bagpipes, yeah, I like the sort of identity of, you know, a mean in a kilt, you know, the land, sort of ...maybe it's just watching Braveheart too many times ...My sister's getting married, so I might wear a kilt for her wedding

In a different example, Hari explains his excitement about finding out that there was a Sikh tartan:

Hari: I was on a project with work and we had an awards ceremony at the end of it, and I was wearing a kilt, do you know what I mean? I actually want to wear a kilt and I was wearing the full thing ... on that day I went to the store, the kilt store. They were saying to me, like obviously the guy knew I was a Sikh, right? And I was quite happy that he did and he was like telling me how there's a Sikh tartan ... like in Glasgow, in Scotland, I was quite proud of that, that Sikhs have their own tartan. I thought that was a pretty big sort of thing ...I was actually so thrilled that

I was actually wearing it. I've got hundred of pictures of me actually wearing the kilt. It was fantastic ... I loved wearing the kilt that day, it was brilliant and to actually know that we've actually got a Sikh tartan, em ... I was actually thrilled. Actually it was just amazing that we've got like our own Sikh tartan in Scotland!

So, although 'the national state is designed primarily to deal with the problem of strangers, not enemies' (Bauman, 1991: 63), here we see young men castigated as the stranger in their own country, responding through positive affiliation to the nation and to both fixed markers of nationhood (such as the kilt) as well as to claims to belonging (such as those associated with education, accent and birth).

Travelling far; distant relations

A final set of strategies that a number of the young men engaged with in managing being placed in the position of the stranger relates to the ways in which they would often travel long distances to meet, worship and socialise with fellow Sikhs. Here there are clear parallels with Hirvi's (2010, 227) research in Finland about ways in which the gurdwara in Helsinki plays a key role in how Sikh youth 'learn to be a part of their parent's religion' and how it 'provides them with a foundation on which they have the possibility to shape and negotiate their religious identities as Sikhs'. From the interviews, it was apparent that the Sikh communities in Glasgow and Edinburgh had strong personal and familial connections with Sikh communities elsewhere in the UK, and in particular in South Shields and Birmingham. The Sikh community in Edinburgh would regularly visit South Shields

(almost 130 miles) away as well as hosting the South Shields community when they travelled north to their fellow Sikhs in Scotland:

Ramandeep: So there's a lot of connection from South Shields and Edinburgh. With Glasgow, you know, when we have kind of big kind of events, we will be invited by South Shields and we go there and kind of ... you know, for singing and stuff like that and we will invite South Shields up as well

Here, we see that the young men actively engage in these distant relations through regular visits and have established important friendship networks and social support through these relations. These opportunities offer them an extended network of Sikh friends with whom they can share their religious and cultural heritage with and with whom they would stay in contact with via e-mail and Facebook between visiting each other. As such, these engagements expanded the young men's Sikh networks and offered them new (and sometimes different) insights into the politics and practices of being Sikh and being part of the Sikh community.

Significantly, these connections minimised the young men's senses of difference and disjuncture from society by offering them renewed insights into religious and cultural traditions that were familiar and comfortable to them. This provided them with additional resources upon which to feel self-confident about their Sikh identities and to share this with others. Rather than simply withdraw, these young men are actively engaging with the opportunities available to them to manage being placed in the position of the stranger and travelling far to practice their religion and socialise with other young Sikhs in England is another strategy that enables them to do so. These distant relations therefore offer the young men spaces of

familiarity where they are acknowledged for who they are rather than being seen to be strangers.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper has proposed an agenda for research about strangerhood that engages with the relational, embodied and emotional experiences of strangers and moves away from accounts of strangerhood that are fetishising, suspicious and anxious in nature. I have suggested that this can be done by engaging with strangers in order to explore their experiences and responses to such a positioning, rather than simply theorising the location and account of the stranger without empirical evidence. In order to action this proposal, I have explored the management strategies of young Sikh men living in urban Scotland in order to demonstrate and explore their relational, embodied and emotional responses to being placed in the position of the stranger. I have argued that the young men's management strategies – which include a complex and intersecting set of techniques including education, multicultural engagements, national affiliation and travelling far – demonstrate that they are not simply engaging in a tactic of defensive withdrawal and instead are agentic and creative in responding to their positioning as strangers. I now make three broader set of observations from the findings of this research.

First, with regards to strangerhood, Noble (2005: 117) has noted that it is discussed 'without adequately exploring the production and regulation of strangeness' and I contend that the response of strangers to such production and regulation also requires further exploration. This paper offers a specific set of insights into the ways in which a group of religious and ethnic minority young men respond to being strangers. In highlighting the relational, embodied and emotional

aspects of strangerhood, this paper has also shown the significance of issues of proximity and closeness as well as remoteness and distance (Bauman, 1991) in understanding how strangers respond to their strangeness and engage with others in the process in order to make themselves more understood. However, this paper has shown the agency of 'the stranger' in their employment of proximity rather than silencing them, being anxious about them, or castigating them as permanently 'strange'. Further research could usefully explore the accounts of other social groups whose racialised, ethnicised, religious and/or cultural background results in them castigated as strangers in order to explore their employment of proximity and remoteness in responding to, and managing, their positioning as strangers. Noble (2005: 199) also refers to the 'prevailing Western mood of existential insecurity: a world in which we are no longer sure who we can trust, whether our identities and communities are meaningful any more, whether we have any' and observes with reference to Australia, that 'our comfortable and relaxed nation ... rests increasingly on the discomfort of strangers'. This project has arguably reached similar conclusions although it would be useful for us to reflect on whether or not this is the kind of society that we feel comfortable living in or if further work is needed in order to promote understanding and acceptance. This article suggests that much work still needs to be done.

Second, in exploring how young Sikh men manage strangerhood through their relational, embodied and emotional engagements with others, this paper also contributes to debates about social civility and encounters in public space. As noted earlier, I have advanced the three requests made by Willis (2010) about 'social collisions', focusing on emotions, the ethics of engagement and the influence of geopolitical events. With reference to these social collisions or to the politics of

encounters, Valentine (2008: 332) has requested that 'we need to think carefully ... about which types of encounters are sought, and by whom, and which are avoided, and by whom'. This article has shown that when it comes to exploring encounters, it is important to consider the emotional labour being undertaken by people as well as their particular desires and preferences for specific forms of encounter. This paper therefore makes an important contribution to studies about Sikh youth in exploring their encounters with others (Singh, 2010a). Further research on the embodied, emotional and relational aspects of different forms of 'encounters' would enable us to advance understanding of the efforts made by different constituents of the population in their social interactions in public space as well as the meanings and interpretations of such encounters.

Finally, and following on from debates about encounters, this paper also informs debates about the politics of multiculturalism, and in particular, debates about the significance of inter-ethnic propinquity as a means of promoting integration. As noted earlier, Fortier (2008) points out that following urban unrest in various cities in northern England in 2001, inter-ethnic interaction and propinquity was proposed as the solution to tensions and as a way of preventing communities from living parallel lives. This discourse has already been challenged and critiqued by geographers (Chan 2009, Phillips 2006), however, this paper also highlights potential issues with regards to simply reading interaction and proximity as leading to understanding and acceptance. Although the sophisticated strategies employed by the young men in the study were successful in terms of minimising the extent to which they were placed as strangers, all of the emotional labour was undertaken by the young men themselves thereby exacerbating a set of inequalities that were already very uneven in the first place. This would suggest that to move towards what

Askins (2008) refers to as a 'transformative geopolitics' of encounter then further work is needed for people to live in more harmonious and accepting neighbourhoods and communities (see also Askins, 2012).

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