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## **Towards inclusive geographies? Young people, religion, race and migration**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper, we discuss the challenge associated with moving towards more inclusive geographies. We argue that one mechanism for doing so is to give greater attention to the contested everyday geographies of young people. We reflect upon a research project with 382 young people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds that employed a framework of everyday geopolitics, intersectionality and place. Specific attention is given to issues of national identity, migration and mobility, and misrecognition. We use this paper to call upon geography teachers and educators to consider the importance of young people's geographies; here, we include both a focus on the everyday geographies of the students in our classrooms and also the inclusion and integration of such issues into the geography curriculum.

### **Introduction**

The theme of the Geographical Association Annual Conference in 2017 was 'Inclusive Geographies?' Mary Biddulph, the GA President for 2016-2017 posed the following questions in relation to this theme: is school geography inclusive, for teachers and students, and how can it be made more so? How can we extend the reach of the subject and support the development of the interface between school and academic geography? And, how can school geography support young people's engagement with and participation in matters of local-global significance? These are important questions. Being critical about how inclusive - or not - our discipline is, is crucial for its ongoing vitality as an exciting subject for pupils at school and as an appealing option for students to continue to study at university.

The questions posed above raise many issues not least of which is how we make geography a more youth-centred and less adultist subject. In this sense, our discussion here gels with the aims of the Geographical Association's Young People's Geographies project (<http://www.young-peoples-geographies.co.uk/>) (see also Biddulph, 2012). In this paper, we reflect upon a research project with young people from different ethnic and religious minority groups (Hopkins et al, 2015) and in doing so consider the challenges of moving towards inclusive geographies. Our contention is that by focusing on the lived experiences of young people – our pupils and students – and on matters of ethnic and religious diversity, we are making clear steps towards making spaces of education in general, and geography in particular, more youth-centred and inclusive. In putting forward this claim, we are aware that many geography teachers may feel constrained by the requirements of the specific curriculum they are working with; that being said, following Lambert and Biddulph (2015), we contend that it is useful to consider the relationships between the discipline of geography and the everyday lives of our students. Put differently, there are issues here that fit nicely into specific

curricula and assist teachers in thinking about what to teach; at the same time, some of the issues discussed here may have pedagogical relevance in terms of how to teach geography given the experiences of the students in your classroom. Part of our intention then in this paper is to encourage geography teachers and those involved in curriculum development to include issues similar to those covered here in geography curricula and when teaching geography.

### **Everyday geopolitics, intersectionality and place**

Our underpinning framework for this research focused on the interrelationships between everyday geopolitics, intersectionality and place. We say a little more about each of these here in order to contextualise our thinking taking each of these in turn. First, everyday geopolitics is about how international, national and local political events shape the everyday experiences of young people. Geopolitics traditionally focused on the state or transnational scale and on the practices of political leaders or political elites. Research within critical and feminist geopolitics has been important in emphasising the ways in which geopolitics is embodied, can be emotional and intimate (Pain, 2009) and experienced in everyday life by people who are often seen as distant from the political centre. More recently, recognition has been given to the place of children and young people as important actors in debates about geopolitics (Benwell and Hopkins, 2016). Research in this field explores children's and young people's place in: everyday militarism, recruitment and play (e.g. Horschelmann, 2016, 2017, Rech, 2014); territories, borders and migration (e.g. Christou and Spyrou, 2012); in diplomacy and geopolitical relations (e.g. Benwell, 2016); and in activism, protest and everyday politics (Hopkins and Todd, 2015).

Alongside everyday geopolitics, we use intersectionality as a mechanism for exploring the intersecting forms of identification and oppression experienced by young people. Emerging from black feminist activists in the USA and entering academia through socio-legal studies and anti-racist feminism (e.g. Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1982, Collins, 2000, Crenshaw, 1989) intersectionality has become an increasingly popular way of conceptualising the oppressions and exclusions experienced by individuals who are multiply marginalised. It was used in relation to the experiences of black women in the USA (Crenshaw, 1989) where it was argued the intersectional experience of being a black woman went beyond racism and sexism and is now used in a range of different fields, including in geography (e.g. Hopkins, 2017). Put differently, to simply apply understandings of exclusions based on racism and sexism to black women is insufficient as it overlooks their unique intersectional experiences as black women. Collins and Bilge (2016) discuss six characteristics that underpin intersectionality: social inequality; power; relationality; social context; complexity and social justice. We used intersectionality in this project in order to be sensitive to the complexities of young people's different experiences of marginalisation and exclusion and to enable us to be attentive to their structural vulnerabilities and political positionings.

Finally, you may be asking yourself, "how is all of this about 'geography'?" Although we use debates about everyday geopolitics and intersectionality to inform our work, we were constantly sensitive to the interrelationships between society and space (Smith, 2005), as well as geographic scales such as the body, home, institution, city, nation and the transnational (Marston, 2000). Combining these academic resources we developed a detailed framework for exploring the everyday geographies of the young people involved in this research. Our attentiveness to issues of place emerged during focus group and interview discussions as well as during our analysis of the data. We were particularly sensitive to the ways that young

people engage with and respond to political issues in specific places in their everyday lives, such as when at school, in public spaces, at home, or on social media.

### **Introducing the study – why use qualitative methods?**

The project we discuss in this paper was a large qualitative study of the experiences of ethnic and religious minority young people (aged 12-25) growing up in urban, suburban and rural Scotland. A specific focus of this project was upon young people who were targeted because they look Muslim and to explain how different religious, ethnic and minoritised youth experience and understand Islamophobia, and the impact of this on community relations, social cohesion and integration. 45 focus groups and 223 interviews were conducted with young people from different ethnic and religious minority groups including Muslims, non-Muslim South Asians (e.g. Sikhs, Hindus, non-religious South Asians), asylum seekers and refugees, Central and Eastern European migrants, international students and white Scottish young people. Participants were accessed through schools, colleges, universities, religious community groups and voluntary organisations. Most of the focus groups were relatively informal and with some of the younger people we used flip-chart paper and post it notes (an approach sometimes called 'participatory diagramming' (Kesby, 2000)) in order to find out their ideas rather than imposing our own schedule of questions onto them. Qualitative methods can therefore be participatory, creative and inclusive compared to other methods of doing research although this all depends on how they are used and applied in different contexts.

So, why did we only use qualitative methods in this project? Qualitative methods do not start from the assumption that there is a pre-existing world that can be known – instead the assumption is that the social world is changing and constantly being made and remade. We were interested in exploring the social worlds of young people and methods such as focus groups and interviews provided an ideal format for doing so as they establish a forum where young people could talk openly about their everyday lives, their families, friends, interests and their hopes and fears. However, more than this, qualitative methods are also useful for identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and generating new grounded theories about the latter (Limb and Dwyer, 2001). For example, some of the issues that young people raised in focus groups and interviews were unexpected and surprising such as a number of the Central and Eastern European migrants being mistaken for being Muslim; it would have been very difficult to find out about these through using only quantitative methods. Qualitative methods are also useful in helping researchers understand the processes by which events and actions take place and so can be a useful way of developing causal explanations about socio-spatial phenomenon. Although we did not adopt such an approach, it is also important to consider the ways in which a mixed methods approach – using qualitative and quantitative approaches – can be beneficial (Walker et al, 2009). For example, mapping levels of ethnic or religious residential segregation can be a useful process to engage in with students; this can be further enriched through qualitative work that explores people's lived experiences of living in such communities. Finally, the use of qualitative methods has been endorsed by government and used regularly to inform or clarify approaches to policy formation or changes to policy.

### **National identity**

The focus of this study upon Scotland and the timing of the study to partly coincide with the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 meant that debates about national

identity, Scotland and Scottishness featured regularly in focus group discussions and interviews (Botterill et al, 2016). However, there has been surprisingly little research about children and young people's perceptions of national identity (see Scourfield et al, 2006 for a notable exception). We found that the Independence debate acted as a catalyst for young people to reflect on what it meant to them to be Scottish with many feeling that Scotland was a 'fair society' that was 'diverse' and 'friendly'. Young people affiliated with Scotland and Scottishness irrespective of their ethnic and religious heritage. This demonstrates the ways that politics and political events can provide fertile ground for engaging with young people about their everyday geographies, personal identities and senses of place.

However, in some public and institutional spaces, young people's experiences of racism and Islamophobia influenced their sense of belonging and claims to Scottishness:

Shelina: They have said 'go back to your own country' and I'm like 'this is my country I've been, I've been living here all my life' (female, 22-25, British Bangladeshi, Muslim, Dundee)

Here, we see the damaging effects that racism have on young people's sense of identity as their entitlement to occupy space and construct a sense of belonging comes into question. Although Shelina sounds confident about her sense of belonging in Scotland, persistent questioning of this may erode her sense of affiliation with Scotland leading her to question whether or not she has a future in Scotland.

In terms of the everyday geographies of national identity, young people talked about important locations that nurtured a sense of Scottishness including urban areas and educational sites. Many refugees and asylum seekers, for example, felt a strong sense of belonging in the cities that they had been dispersed to since they felt safe in comparison to their home countries. For example, Celia (female, 22-25, Kurdish refugee, Glasgow) said 'I feel Glaswegian more than I feel Scottish'. Schools were viewed as fostering a sense of Scottishness through mixed peer group interactions and teacher interventions, although this varied from school to school with private schools perceived to be more internationally focused. Given the important role of educational environments here, geography teachers could play an important role in providing spaces for students to discuss and reflect upon different understandings and appreciations of national identity.

At the same time, our participants also pointed out that national identity was only one aspect of their identity with faith, ethnicity and cultural heritage also being important. Many young people also reflected on their transnational identities such as their connections with the countries of birth or their parents and grandparents countries of birth. Some young people, particularly children and young people who have fled persecution and are seeking asylum in the UK, were eager to return to their countries of origin once it was safe to do so. The private spaces and intergenerational relationships of the home often complicated national identities and often reminded young people of their affiliations with different places and cultural practices as Maalik notes:

Maalik: *I feel Scottish with my friends and you know the way we talk. Soon as I come back home, speaking in Urdu and you know it's like I'm back in Pakistan* (male, 16-18, Pakistani refugee, Muslim, Fife).

Here then we see the complex everyday spaces many ethnic and religious minority young people negotiate daily between different cultural practices, languages and social expectations.

## **Migration and mobility**

Participants who were born and brought up in Scotland tended to have relatively limited experiences of migration and mobility although a small number of young people had family relatives living elsewhere in the UK or had experiences of living in England before moving to Scotland. Migration heritages were often very important to young people's sense of identity, particularly if they had engaged in international migration and mobility. Natalie, who was born in Cameroon, grew up in Canada and recently moved to Scotland, says:

Natalie: *"I think you should be proud to be where you're from. Cause that's what makes you unique.....an' makes you who you are. So you just, you know, it's somethin' a' wouldn't throw really cause it's quite cool... an' it's just quite interesting"* (female, 12-15, Black African, Christian, East Renfrewshire)

Young people's mobility led to various expressions of belonging and multiple and shifting ideas about 'home'. For those participants not born in Scotland, life in Scotland was frequently compared with life 'back home'. For refugees and asylum seekers, Scotland was often viewed as both safer and fairer than their home countries. Here Aziz talks about growing up in Inverness compared to South Africa:

Aziz: *'We know we're safe and secure, you know whereas in South Africa we would think, 'you know what I'm definitely not going out after 7 o' clock' you know'* (male, 16-18, Indian South African, Muslim, Inverness)

Migration experiences depended on a range of factors, including duration of stay in Scotland, English language skills, access to spaces of integration with young people from diverse backgrounds and intercultural encounters with people of different age groups and ethnic and religious heritages. Language was a key barrier to inclusion for migrant young people including for their parent's generation. Second generation migrants discussed the challenges their parents continue to experience in 'meaningful communication' with service providers, such as health practitioners. For example, Preet (female, 16-18, British Indian, Sikh, Edinburgh) suggests when talking about her mother's experiences at the doctor:

*'Even now I still think there is a slight gap 'cause I still have to keep going to the doctor with her. I feel as if there should be translators like...Like she can communicate but it's just she can't say the precise problem'.*

On the one hand, taking on a role of responsibility such as this could help Preet to develop important interpersonal skills, however, on the other hand, this may provide an additional burden for him as he grows up.

Young people's attitudes to immigration was an interesting topic that arose in some focus groups and interviews; this demonstrates that young people often enjoy discussing issues that are covered in the news or other media and often labelled as 'controversial'. Indeed, our sense was that the participants often relished the opportunity to openly debate and discuss such matters and felt that the experiences of school did not provide a similar forum for doing so. Although many young people talked positively about immigration and supported pro-migration policies in Scotland, they also recognised the negative impact of the media on immigration discourse, including personal experiences of 'securitization' (Botterill et al., 2017). Most young people felt that migration to Scotland has positive effects in terms of population growth and economic prosperity. There was widespread discomfort about the term 'immigrant' among both Scottish and non-Scottish born young people. For example, consider Mohammed's views:

Mohammed: *"I'm sort of fed up of living here just 'cause ... like a lot of people are just like look at you and go 'immigrant' even though you're not, I was born here, I've lived here*

longer than a lot more people. But despite that some people are like, 'oh immigrant, yeah, look at him' (male, 16-18, Bangladeshi British, Muslim, Dundee)

### **Negotiating misrecognition**

One of the key aims of our study was to explore the experiences of young people who are discriminated against because they were mistaken for being Muslim and experienced Islamophobia as a result of this (Hopkins et al, 2017); in this sense, we were interested in exploring young people's experiences of Islamophobia, including those of young Muslims and other ethnic and religious minority young people – such as Sikhs, Hindus and non-religious South Asian or African migrants - who were mistaken for being Muslim. We found that a diverse range of young people experienced being misread as Muslim. This included Sikhs, Hindus and other South Asian young people as well as participants from Africa and the Caribbean. Some Central and Eastern European migrants also experienced by misrecognised as being Muslim. This points to the ways in which groups that would normally be seen as 'white' are re-categorised through alternative understandings of whiteness, identity and belonging (Nayak, 2012).

Our interest in place meant we were eager not only to explore experiences of misrecognition but to understand more about the spatiality of these experiences. Young people often encountered misrecognition when at school. During a focus group with Sikh boys at a school in Glasgow (aged 13-17), one of the participants said "some teachers, say "Aw you are all Muslim"". Being misrecognised by teachers decreased the faith that young people had in educational professionals as it created a sense of distance between them and their teachers by making young people feel that their teachers did not know very much about them. Continuing the discussion, another Sikh boy said "Yes, yesterday I was in the dinner hall and I was like getting chicken nuggets and then the lady was like, "they are not halal", I was like "I am not Muslim"" and another responded "Yeah, I know that happened. Same with me". There were many examples like this recalled by young people where they felt they were being misrecognised by teachers, fellow pupils or other school staff.

Young people also discussed experiences of being mistaken for being Muslim when in taxis, at the airport and in public spaces. The young people involved in our research offered interesting explanations for why their experiences of misrecognition. . There was a sense that the entire 'Asian' community in all of its diversity was seen as homogenous and lacking any internal diversity. This was frustrating for our participants. There was also a sense that the racial slur 'Paki' was used against anyone who was perceived to belong to any black and minority ethnic group. In a focus group in Glasgow, four Black African boys were confused by the fact that "Some people call us Pakis for some reason". Many of the participants were also conscious of the relationship between geopolitics and geopolitical events and their experiences of misrecognition. For example, Kudoo said "If they see the turban they just link the turban and terrorist" (19-21, Sikh, Glasgow, born in Afghanistan). Finally, some of the Sikh young people involved in the research claimed that their own community could do more to project their unique religious identities as Sikhs and counteract misrecognition. Schools could usefully play a role here by providing a context in which the unique identities of the Sikh community can be shared with young people from diverse backgrounds.

Young people also responded to being misrecognised with a diverse set of tactics such as using humour, clarifying their religious faith through educating others and actively engaging positively with others in order to minimise being discriminated against. This emphasises the agency that young people demonstrate in interpreting and responding to their own experiences; these young people are not simply passive victims of racist misrecognition and instead demonstrate tenacity and skill in managing misrecognition, responding to it in creative ways and interpreting its complexity in a sophisticated manner.

### **Conclusion – moving towards more inclusive geographies?**

In this article, we have explored the everyday experiences of ethnic and religious minority young people growing up in Scotland, focusing upon issues of national identities, migration and mobilities, and negotiations of misrecognition. This research sheds light on the everyday geographies of young people and reflects on different issues of importance to them. It is clear that young people's everyday geographies are diverse and not only confined to the local or national scale. Many young people have connections to other places alongside a Scottish or British national identity. These connections shape their experiences and encounters with others. Also, we have shown that educational spaces are important sites for young people to reflect and challenge pre-given assumptions about others. We have used ideas about everyday geopolitics, intersectionality and place to help us explore this. We have also advocated using qualitative methods as a valid and important way of investigating young people's geographies and partly see this paper as a call for such approaches to be incorporated more widely into geography teaching and learning.

So, how does this help us move 'towards inclusive geographies'? First, we contend that this research highlights the range of issues of interest to ethnic and religious minority young people that have the potential to be incorporated into school curricula and lessons, including in geography: from geopolitics and referenda through to national identity, migration and multicultural encounters. Second, many of our participants talked openly about challenging racism and were eager to do so. Rather than avoiding such issues, educators could play a key role in facilitating open and ethical discussions about such issues in order to promote cross-cultural understanding and to advance geography as a discipline that is committed to equality and diversity. Third, exploring young people's everyday geographies with young people themselves has the potential to make geography feel more personal, more alive and more realistic for students; this could be crucial for the long-term sustainability of geography as a discipline.

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