



PROJECT MUSE®

Imagining Bradford: Islam, Space, and Anxiety in *Multitudes*
and *Combustion*

Asif Majid

Theatre Journal, Volume 72, Number 3, September 2020, pp. 309-323 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/765423>

Imagining Bradford: Islam, Space, and Anxiety in *Multitudes* and *Combustion*

Asif Majid

In the penultimate scene of *Multitudes*, the protagonist, Kash, undertakes his final monologue. He lets loose on his ex-girlfriend's mother, a prominent figure in Bradford's Conservative Party named Lyn, with whom he has been at odds the entire play. Kash describes how numerous young British Pakistani Muslim men and women come to him "about going over there" to fight for Da'esh¹ or another militant group.² He consistently encourages them to stay in Bradford: "You can speak Urdu, Punjabi, Mirpuri, Kashmiri in a hundred shops across the city and be understood. You can eat cheaply, live cheaply, buy houses cheaply. You were born here, I tell them, why would you go anywhere else?"³ But he comes to believe that his desire for them to be seen as the "good Muslim"⁴ or "the good immigrant"⁵ is mistaken: "for what? To be tolerated? To tone yourself down so much you don't know who you are? There's a difference between blending in and disappearing. Some of these kids—the *lives* they've had—all they've been told is what they're *not*. They're *not* British. They're *not* Pakistani . . . for them to stand up and say who they are, what they *believe* in, that's powerful stuff."⁶ Kash explains that he sees the situation dualistically: "I'm tired of trying to hold both sides together. Tell you lot we're not a threat. Tell them that they've got a place here. I don't believe it any more." He ends his monologue by telling Lyn to "fuck off."⁷

Asif Majid is a scholar-artist-educator working at the intersection of Islam, media, marginality, and politics. He is a Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow with the San Francisco Arts Commission, where he serves as a community impact analyst. He completed his PhD in anthropology, media, and performance at the University of Manchester, earned an MA with distinction in conflict resolution from Georgetown University, and graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a self-designed BA in interdisciplinary studies from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He has been published in Theatre Topics, RiDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, and Contemporary Theatre Review. His performance credits include work with the Kennedy Center (US), Convergence Theatre (US), Royal Exchange Theatre (UK), and Unity Theatre (UK).

¹ *Da'esh* is the Arabic acronym for ISIS/ISIL, a group that is neither Islamic nor a state. I use it here instead of the English terms to reflect that the Arabic word *da'esh* also has the capacity to translate into phrases such as "to trample down and crush" or "a bigot who imposes his view on others." See Zeba Khan, "Words Matter in 'ISIS' War, so Use 'Daesh,'" *Boston Globe*, October 9, 2014, available at <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2014/10/09/words-matter-isis-war-use-daesh/V85GYEuasEEJgrUun0dMUP/story.html>.

² John Hollingworth, *Multitudes* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2015), 107.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Harmony, 2005).

⁵ Nikesh Shukla, *The Good Immigrant* (London: Unbound, 2016).

⁶ Hollingworth, *Multitudes*, 107 (emphasis in original).

⁷ *Ibid.*

In *Multitudes*, this scene constitutes the narrative climax. Throughout the play, Kash has been betwixt and between multiple sociopolitical positions: achieving his political ambitions via a proximity to whiteness,⁸ honoring his religious and ethnic heritage as a British Pakistani Muslim man, and discouraging young people in his community from joining Da'esh. All of these pressures culminate in the final monologue, in which Kash comes to favor these youth honestly claiming their lived critique of Britishness, rather than preferring that British Muslim youth with hybrid identities who water themselves down in order to be tolerated by racist Britain. To him, the accident of their birth in Bradford has become less important than the fact that they are asserting their own perspectives. Kash's narrative turn is that he ends the play supporting this form of self-belief.

In this essay, I examine two contemporary British plays—*Multitudes* (2015) and *Combustion* (2017)—and consider how they focus on a specific tension that they site in the north English city of Bradford. These plays reify Bradford as a site of racial conflict, which in turn: 1) maps a generalized vilification of Islam onto a specific city that already has a reputation for conflict, 2) rehashes an outdated “clash of civilizations” narrative that pits Islam against the West, and 3) embeds anti-Islam discourse into contemporary Britain's anxious spatial politics. Using theories on space and place, I examine *Combustion* and *Multitudes* to demonstrate the extent of these misrepresentations and their consequences. Having only attended a production of *Combustion* and not *Multitudes*, my analysis examines these performances as textual scripts rather than considering the semiotics of stage space. The exception to primarily analyzing the plays as texts is my attention to the audience's racialized theatrical imagination as addressed in the essay's final section, which can be gleaned from the script in conversation with wider sociopolitical discourses about Muslims in Britain. Ultimately, both plays depict a particular type of British Muslim—Pakistani, male, and with working-class roots—in a way that fails to recognize the internal and intersectional variability of British Muslimness. What sociologists Steve Garner and Saher Selod refer to as “the racialization of Muslims”⁹ thus appears in two forms: British Muslims as ethnically Pakistani and British Muslims as purportedly beholden to a religion of conflict that demands a “conservative cultural politics.”¹⁰

In what follows, I first attend to Bradford's historical realities as a working-class city shaped by migration, pointing to the relevance of this history for my analysis of the plays. Second, I turn to my main argument about how the plays misrepresent Bradford as a city. Third and finally, I examine the particular spatial politics to which *Multitudes* and *Combustion* contribute: one of anxiety. Throughout, I draw on theories that intersect space, place, and race, engaging primarily with the work of human geographer Doreen Massey. Her conception of space exposes the ways in which both

⁸ See Divya Kumar, “Dear Brown Girl: Proximity-to-Whiteness Does Not Make You White,” *EmbraceRace*, 2020, available at <https://www.embracerace.org/resources/dear-brown-girl-proximity-to-whiteness-does-not-make-you-white>; Jonathan Sun, “Proximity to Whiteness Is a Lie,” *Inheritance*, March 5, 2019, available at <https://www.inheritancemag.com/stories/proximity-to-whiteness-is-a-lie>; and Zukiswa Pikoli, “The Double-Edged Sword That Is Proximity to Whiteness,” *Daily Vox*, September 1, 2016, available at <https://www.thedailyvox.co.za/vukiswa-pikoli-racism-double-edged-sword-proximity-whiteness/>.

⁹ Steve Garner and Saher Selod, “The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia,” *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015): 9–19.

¹⁰ Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera, “Introduction,” in *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North*, ed. Linda Herrera and Asef Bayat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.

plays recall narratives of the city as conflictual. Massey frames space as a concept that privileges interrelationships, requires distinct social trajectories, and remains in process. The plays attempt, in the words of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, “to produce the sense of continuity in the face of the temporariness of things,”¹¹ rendering Bradford as a city that is static in its fixity of conflict. Given dominating discourses around Islam and the West, *Multitudes* and *Combustion* entrench rather than counter notions of an ongoing and inevitable culture clash, dangerously embedding anti-Islam discourse in Britain’s wider spatial politics of anxiety.

Bradford: The Twentieth Century to the Present

Set in a city of complex racial, social, and class dynamics, *Multitudes* and *Combustion* reflect Bradford’s recent past in terms of multiple interrelated factors: working-class backgrounds, South Asian migration to the UK, the politicization of Islamic identity, and nostalgia for Bradford’s position during the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, actor John Hollingworth wrote *Multitudes* to voice his experience of growing up in Bradford, a city that he describes as “an interesting soundclash of east and west; a place full of contradictions.”¹² As a city, Bradford rose to prominence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for wool processing, given its abundant access to water and proximity to coal and iron stores. Workers migrated from around Britain and nearby countries to fill jobs in textile mills and mines. During the nineteenth century, many of these migrants came from Ireland and Germany. In the mid-twentieth century, workers from South Asia, and Poland to a lesser extent, came to the city. The 1948 Nationality Act was particularly relevant to this shift, because it extended British citizenship to all Commonwealth citizens in an effort to fill labor shortages in transportation, health services, and other sectors.¹³ Migrants from across Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia took advantage of this law, often as a reaction to political strife in their home countries. This international working-class heritage is an essential part of *Multitudes* and *Combustion*, both of which prioritize the telling of these stories.

At the same time, textile production and manufacturing associated with the mining industry began to collapse, as the wider challenges of deindustrialization, inadequate housing, and economic deprivation that plagued post-industrial Britain appeared across England’s north. Labor migration through the 1950s was a direct response to the need for a larger workforce in the wool-processing sector that fueled Bradford’s prowess, before the industry’s rapid decline. Lyn and Andy, the older white characters in both plays, nostalgically yearn for a return to such economic prowess—a yearning that is tied to the English project of racial purity. In *Multitudes*, Lyn typifies the conservative bigotry of the stereotypical “older generations with deep roots in the English countryside.”¹⁴ As the local Conservative Party chairperson in Bradford, she struggles

¹¹ Arjun Appadurai, “Illusion of Permanence: Interview with Arjun Appadurai by *Perspecta* 34,” *Perspecta* 34 (2003): 47.

¹² Hannah Ellis-Petersen, “New Play at Tricycle Theatre Looks at Muslim Conversion,” *Guardian*, February 16, 2015, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/feb/16/play-tricycle-muslim-conversion-islam-multitudes>.

¹³ See Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji, Sundeep Lidher, Malachi McIntosh, and Debbie Weekes-Bernard, “20th & 21st Century Migrations: 1900s–2000s,” in *Our Migration Story: The Making of Britain*, 2017, available at <https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/by-era/1900%E2%80%932000>.

¹⁴ Allison Loose, “Multitudes,” *Plays to See*, February 25, 2015, available at <http://playstosee.com/multitudes/>.

to accept her daughter Natalie's conversion to Islam, a conversion that is influenced by Natalie's romantic relationship with Kash. Lyn's bigotry leads to the rift between her and Kash as demonstrated in the scene that opens this essay. Similarly, *Combustion's* Andy is a frustrated member of the far-right English Defence League (EDL) and bemoans Muslims who "pollute our landscape with [their] fucking mosques."¹⁵ His hatred for Islam, which he claims is "a fucking disease," is also personal: his estranged daughter converted to Islam after marrying an Asian Muslim whom Andy describes as looking like "Osama bin Laden."¹⁶ Both plays stage Bradford's increasingly intercultural dynamic through the relationship that an older white Bradfordian parent has to a daughter being romantically involved with a local Asian Muslim male. In each case, the result is different: Andy starts to reconcile with his daughter while Lyn never does with hers.

All the Pakistani-heritage characters in *Combustion* and *Multitudes* are direct descendants of the original South Asian migrants that made England's north their home in the middle of the twentieth century. Many of these migrants were single men from India and Pakistan, both newly created states, and sent remittances to South Asia rather than bringing their families with them. However, once the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act came into effect, limiting migration from Commonwealth countries to those with government-sanctioned employment sponsorships, migrants from South Asia already living in the UK began family reunification processes. Alongside other north English cities, Bradford started to see an increase in Indian- and Pakistani-heritage communities that competed for resources with white working-class communities, a change that *Combustion's* Andy decries.

These demographic changes were made more acute with the building of the Mangla Dam in the Pakistan-administered region of Kashmir, a 1967 event that shaped contemporary Bradford and the broader British Pakistani population. The dam was built in the Mirpur District and the project displaced over 110,000 rural residents.¹⁷ The Pakistani government offered compensation to displaced villagers. Many used these funds to move to Britain after securing work permits from the British government, which was an international guarantor of the project. Much of this resettlement happened in Bradford, because migrants from Mirpur who worked in textiles could translate their skills to England's north while relocating to an area with familiar social, religious, cultural, and linguistic structures.¹⁸ The scene from *Multitudes* that opens this essay shows Kash highlighting the consequent local Islamic multiculturalism and multilingualism in terms of Mirpuri, Kashmiri, and other languages. Similarly, the writer of *Combustion*, Bradfordian actor Asif Khan, argues that Bradford showcases ongoing linguistic code-switching between English and Pakistani languages in "the Muslim mouth."¹⁹ Recent figures put the city's number of British Pakistanis at approximately 20 percent

¹⁵ Asif Khan, *Combustion* (Twickenham, UK: Aurora Metro Publications Ltd, 2017), 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 50, 59.

¹⁷ Bogumil Terminski, *Development-Induced Displacement and Resettlement: Theoretical Frameworks and Current Challenges* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2013), 50.

¹⁸ Irna Imran, *Home from Home: British Pakistanis in Mirpur* (Bradford, UK: City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council Arts, Museums, and Libraries, 1997).

¹⁹ Suman Bhuchar, "Asif Khan's Debut Comedy Drama Explores What It Means to Be a British Muslim," *Theatre Voice*, July 3, 2017, available at <http://www.theatrevoice.com/audio/asif-khans-debut-comedy-drama-explores-means-british-muslim/>.

of Bradford's total population.²⁰ Nationally, estimates indicate that 60 percent or more of British Pakistanis are of Mirpuri origin.²¹

Beyond this migration-inspired demographic shift, three events in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries gave the city a reputation for being in conflict: the Honeyford affair in 1984, the Rushdie affair in 1989, and the 2001 riots. Both *Combustion* and *Multitudes* draw on this reputation in their staging and imagining of Bradford, such that the city's history problematically becomes an inevitably conflictual backdrop for contemporary sociopolitical struggles. First, in 1984, Ray Honeyford, the head teacher at a Bradford school, disparaged the Bradford Council's attempts at multiculturalism in the city's schools, which sought to respect the practices and languages of various ethnic groups. He warned that academic standards would suffer "unless English and Western culture were reinforced" for minority children, resulting in a major public outcry that forced him into an early retirement.²² *Combustion's* Andy espouses views similar to Honeyford's.

Second, in response to the 1989 publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini called for Rushdie's assassination because of his portrayal of Muhammad in the book. International protests seeking its banning, including book-burnings in Bradford, led to Rushdie's protection by armed guards. In Britain, these protests marked the first time that British Muslims collectively politicized their Islamic identity. Such politicization is restaged in both plays. In *Multitudes*, a group of Muslim women camps out in front of Bradford's City Hall to protest war. Established on the eve of the Conservative Party conference, the protest camp is a spatiotemporal manifestation of the Islam-versus-the-West narrative. Qadira, Kash's 18-year-old *hijab*-wearing daughter from his previous marriage, spends time in the protest camps, anxious to take action against Britain's political vilification of Islam. This results in her hospitalization after she receives injuries from her botched attempt to burn a British flag in front of the Conservative Party conference, just as her father delivers its opening remarks. Thus, *Multitudes* problematically uses Qadira's visible Muslimness and flag burning to re-entrench links between Islam and terrorism. In *Combustion*, 20-year-old *hijab*-wearing Samina—her brother, Shaz, is the play's protagonist—is involved in local activism as a peace studies student at the University of Bradford.²³ Samina delivers a rousing speech at a counterdemonstration opposing the EDL's intentionally provocative anti-Islam rally. She also cofounds a group called "Bradford for Peace" that, among other initiatives, works to challenge the white-supremacist characterizations of Bradford's

²⁰ Office of National Statistics, "2011 Census: Key Statistics for Local Authorities in England and Wales," 2012, available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/2011censuskeystatisticsforlocalauthoritiesinenglandandwales>.

²¹ The Change Institute, "The Pakistani Muslim Community in England: Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities" (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009), 7, available at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120920001118/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1170952.pdf>.

²² "Death of Former Head Teacher Ray Honeyford Sparks Schooling Debate," *Telegraph and Argus*, February 11, 2012, available at http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/local/localbrad/9525569.Death_of_former_head_teacher_Ray_Honeyford_sparks_schooling_debate/.

²³ The University of Bradford is renowned in the field of peace studies for having one of the world's oldest university departments of teaching peace. It was founded in 1969 and retains partnerships with both the Quakers and Rotary International. See "Peace Studies and International Development," University of Bradford, 2018, available at <https://www.bradford.ac.uk/social-sciences/peace-studies/>.

Muslims as embodying Islam's purportedly "conservative cultural politics."²⁴ In both plays, the politicization of Islamic identity is placed in the hands of young, activist, and visibly Muslim women.

Third, in the summer of 2001, an extreme right-wing British political party called the National Front attempted to hold a rally in Bradford, despite the party having been banned by Britain's Home Office. A counter-protest was held, leading to a confrontation between the National Front and counter-protestors. The tension led to riots by white, and then Indian- and Pakistani-heritage youth over multiple days.²⁵ The government-sanctioned Ouseley Report, released in the same month as the riots but based on earlier research about diversity in Bradford, claimed that the area was divided "along race, ethnic, religious and social class lines—and now finds itself in the grip of fear."²⁶ In *Combustion*, the inflammatory rally that the EDL holds and the counterdemonstration at which Samina speaks are almost carbon copies of the 2001 events.

Beyond these three Bradford-specific events, there is an additional, more regional event that is worth noting: child sexual exploitation rings in the north of England from the late 1990s to early 2010s. These rings operated out of Rotherham and Rochdale—two towns that neighbor Bradford—from 1997 to 2013 and 2008 to 2010 respectively. The Rotherham ring victimized nearly 1,400 children,²⁷ while the Rochdale one victimized almost fifty.²⁸ In both cases, children were taken by taxi to a number of cities, including Bradford, and raped. The rings fueled tensions between Asian and white communities in Bradford because many of the perpetrators were Asian taxi drivers, and many of the victims were young white girls.²⁹ *Combustion* stages this history in a particular way. The inflammatory rally that the EDL holds conflates Asianness with Muslimness and attempts to blame Islam, rather than criminality, for the rape of "Girl T"—an anonymized victim of the ring in *Combustion*. In conversation with Andy after the rally, Samina recalls the banners that he and other EDL members held in protest: "Lock up your daughters, the Qur'an is evil."³⁰ Furthermore, Ali, Shaz's best friend and an employee at the auto-repair garage that Shaz owns, is ultimately arrested because he participated once in abusing "Girl T." Throughout the play, despite Ali's remorse and disinterest in further involvement, he continues to receive unwanted texts and phone

²⁴ Bayat and Herrera, "Introduction," 5.

²⁵ See Janet Bujra and Jenny Pearce, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning: The Story of the Bradford Riots* (Skipton, UK: Vertical Editions, 2011); and M. Yunis Alam, *Made in Bradford* (Pontefract, UK: Route Publishing, 2006).

²⁶ Herman Ouseley, "Community Pride Not Prejudice: Making Diversity Work in Bradford," *Bradford Vision*, 2001, 1, available at <http://tedcantle.co.uk/publications/004%20Bradford%20pride%20not%20prejudice%20Ouseley%202001.pdf>.

²⁷ Alexis Jay, "Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham: 1997–2013," Rotherham Metropolitan Bureau Council, 2014, available at http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1407/independent_inquiry_cse_in_rotherham.

²⁸ Helen Carter, "Rochdale Child Sex Ring Case: Respected Men Who Preyed on the Vulnerable," *Guardian*, May 8, 2012, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/may/08/rochdale-child-sex-ring-case>.

²⁹ Public failure to stop these sexual exploitation rings has been widely documented. The Jay report on the Rotherham case, for instance, cites multiple reasons for this failure: police inaction and inability to take the situation seriously, social care managers who downplayed the gravity and scale of the situation, desires by politicians to not be seen as offensive if they engaged with British Pakistanis to prosecute Pakistani-heritage perpetrators, stigma against children from working-class backgrounds who were victimized, and social misperceptions about sexual abuse being an "ethnic" problem.

³⁰ Khan, *Combustion*, 61.

calls from leaders of the ring who are British Asian members of a rival auto-repair garage elsewhere in Bradford, confirming the play's spatial politics regarding the city's Asian Muslim men. At the conclusion of the play, Shaz also feels remorse, perhaps unjustifiably so, because he unknowingly funded Ali's rape of "Girl T" by employing and paying him. Throughout *Combustion*, the fluidity of Asianness and Muslimness renders visible and particular to Bradford the "conservative cultural politics" of the city's Muslims. The city is thus painted in a negative light, a narrative that echoes actual British media reports such as the *Economist's* characterization of Bradford as "a new kind of ghetto" in Britain.³¹

Of course, the city is more multifaceted than its reputation implies. Architectural relics of Bradford's wool-inspired past are particular points of pride, many of which the government has listed as buildings of historical merit. *Multitudes'* Lyn in particular points to these when speaking of Bradford's "gleaming" past.³² However, the city has only somewhat recovered from the deindustrialization of England's north during the 1960s and '70s. Development from the 1980s to the early 2000s has taken place in sectors like financial services, information technology, and digital industries, such that the city was named UNESCO's first City of Film in 2009. Bradford's Literature Festival, which launched in 2014, has also been a notable innovation because of its uniquely scaffolded payment model, diverse programming, and demographically representative audiences.³³ Yet at the same time, a tour of Bradford's city center reveals struggling local businesses and a racially segregated topography, patterns that are also found in other parts of the city. Moreover, youth unemployment remains high,³⁴ and news headlines highlight Bradford's continued struggles with segregation,³⁵ economic redevelopment,³⁶ and discrimination.³⁷ Many of these problematic trends are reflected in both *Combustion* and *Multitudes*. Indeed, the city of Bradford is a complex space.

³¹ "A New Kind of Ghetto," *Economist*, November 9, 2013, available at <https://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21589230-britain-no-longer-has-serious-race-problem-trouble-isolation-new-kind>.

³² Hollingworth, *Multitudes*, 39 (emphasis in original).

³³ Claire Armitstead, "Brontës, Bradford and Buddhist Poetry—Meet the Women Transforming the Literary Festival," *Guardian*, June 26, 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/jun/26/bradford-literary-festival-diversity-women-brontes-buddhist-poetry>.

³⁴ Ammar Kalia, "'We're All Competing for the Same Jobs': Life in Britain's Youngest City," *Guardian*, February 5, 2018, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/feb/05/life-britain-youngest-city-bradford-uk-unemployment>.

³⁵ See Mark Townsend, "Why Do So Many Muslim Women Find It Hard to Integrate in Britain?" *Observer*, November 27, 2016, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/27/bradford-muslim-women-integration-casey-report>; Helen Pidd and Josh Halliday, "One City, Two Cultures: Bradford's Communities Lead Parallel Lives," *Guardian*, June 19, 2015, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/19/bradford-one-city-two-cultures-communities-lead-parallel-lives>; and Samia Rahman, "Segregation in Bradford," *Guardian*, December 21, 2009, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/dec/21/bradford-islam-white-flight-segregation>.

³⁶ See Simon Jenkins, "Could Bradford Be the Shoreditch of Yorkshire—or Is It the next Detroit?" *Guardian*, May 3, 2018, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/may/03/could-bradford-be-the-shoreditch-of-yorkshire-or-is-it-the-next-detroit->; and Harris Beider, "Don't Buy the Stereotype: White Working-Class in England Are Not All against Multiculturalism," *The Conversation*, December 3, 2015, available at <http://theconversation.com/dont-buy-the-stereotype-white-working-class-in-england-are-not-all-against-multiculturalism-51371>.

³⁷ Aina Khan, "Sorry, Louise Casey, but Muslim Women Are Held Back by Discrimination," *Guardian*, December 6, 2016, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/06/louise-casey-discrimination-muslim-women-bradford>.

Imagining Bradford in Conflict

Bradford is imagined in *Multitudes* and *Combustion* as a city at the forefront of conflict between Islam and the West. To be sure, there are different shades to this imagining. *Multitudes'* imagining of Bradford paints it as part of a clash of violence, while *Combustion* invokes a clash of values. However, in both plays, the staging of these conflicts occurs through placing the conflicts outside of the audiences' view—in Bradford's city center. Crucially, this requires the audience to *imagine* the conflict and draw on preexisting narratives that vilify Islam, narratives that are convenient and endemic in the public sphere.

In *Multitudes*, civilizational conflict figures most strongly in the protest camp, which occupies both a spatial and dramaturgical position. Spatially, it sits in front of City Hall, in a direct affront to power. It is established at a crucial moment in time: on the eve of the Conservative Party conference. The moment of the conference means that the camp's physical position in front of City Hall is magnified, for it is established just as power—in the body politic of national politicians—is descending on Bradford. At work here is geographer Doreen Massey's insistence on the coproduction of space and time. Because space is "the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality . . . the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist . . . the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity," it is "always under construction" and imaginable "as a simultaneity of stories-so-far."³⁸ The protest camp is powerful because it is an affront to both the physical structure that is City Hall and the soon-to-arrive national politicians. The protest camp's "coevalness"³⁹ of space and time puts the racial problematics of the play into sharp relief, where Islam is linked to static, fixed, and shabby tents from the traditional past while the West is linked to dynamic, fluid, and moving politicians of contemporary modernity.

Dramaturgically, the protest camp links Islam and extremism, echoing what political writer Arun Kundnani has described as the British government's "failure to distinguish between radical beliefs and violent methods,"⁴⁰ such that terrorism becomes a label "reserved for acts of political violence carried out by Muslims."⁴¹ The camp is established by Muslim women protesting war. Such expression is the theoretical and ontological foundation of purportedly democratic societies like Britain. But the camp is also the place where Qadira's interest in a more radical form of protest begins to take root. Such protest is not without risks. With particular reference to Muslim youth, sociologist Miri Song writes that the British press "tends to conflate legitimate protest or claims making [like anti-war protests] with 'radical extremism.'"⁴² In this sense, *Multitudes'* fixing of the camp in place as the site of Muslim protest is a crucial mistake that reflects philosopher Michel de Certeau's approach to place, rather than Massey's. In critiquing de Certeau, Massey argues that the de Certeausian view connects place to "immobility, power, coherence, [and] representation."⁴³ *Multitudes* adopts the prob-

³⁸ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2005), 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁰ Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (London: Verso Books, 2014), 129.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴² Miri Song, "Part of the British Mainstream? British Muslim Students and Islamic Student Associations," *Journal of Youth Studies* 15, no. 2 (2012): 147.

⁴³ Massey, *For Space*, 47.

lematic de Certeausian approach, in which place becomes a surface onto which groups and communities, primarily non-Western, minoritarian, or subaltern Others, can be assigned, stabilized, and deprived of their histories. The camp is the only place in the entirety of *Multitudes* that is specific to Muslims. It is also the location that inspires Qadira's flag burning. In this fixity, the camp is given terroristic value. Assigning the burgeoning of a violent protest act to the exclusively Muslim camp renders Islam exclusively responsible for and inextricable from terrorism. Terrorism and violence thus become Muslim problems.

Such an image is enforced by the way that the audience is required to imagine Bradford's city center in relation to the protest camp. The protest camp is set there and hosts a clash between security forces and protestors, resulting in one protestor becoming comatose. Kash is in City Hall at the time and sees the events unfold from above, such that audiences hear his interpretation of the clash rather than see the violence for themselves. Later, Natalie recounts a similarly violent experience, as she was in the protest camp when the clashes began. Audiences are thus urged to imagine these events as spatiotemporally out there and away from here, the world of the play, but still informing and shaping its context. This dramatic construction stabilizes Bradford's city center as a place of conflict between Islam and the West, falling into the trap of "the [spatialized] imagination of representation" that Massey decries.⁴⁴ All the violence between Islam and the West that is literally played out in *Multitudes*—between Muslim women protesting war and British security forces ridding public space of unwanted ruffians before a major political convention—occurs offstage. The play pushes the audience to imagine a "clash of civilizations" in which "Islam has bloody borders."⁴⁵

Combustion similarly imagines Bradford as inherently conflictual, although this occurs more in terms of vocalized values. Take, for instance, the speech that Samina gives at the anti-EDL counterdemonstration. The EDL's desire to protest the rape of "Girl T" underpins its rally, but it is intentionally provocative because it is scheduled for the Islamic festive holiday Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan. After the rally, Andy bursts into Shaz's garage, gets into a scuffle with Ali about the counterdemonstration, and decries Samina's speech against the EDL in the city center. Here is evidence of sociologist Brooke Neely and education theorist Michelle Samura's theorization of racial space as constituting, among other elements, "conflicts over resources and access to space."⁴⁶ The confrontation between Andy and Ali/Samina also highlights what American studies scholar George Lipsitz has described as "the racialization of space and the spatialization of race," in which "the lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension."⁴⁷ Andy

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 35. Huntington's woebegone theory argues that major civilizations are cultural hegemonies that are destined to conflict with one another. This aligns with his realist political-science orientation that imagines states as billiard balls devoid of internal variation (see also his "The Clash of Civilizations?" [*Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22–49]). Critics of Huntington's position include, among others, economist Amartya Sen (1999), writer Paul Berman (2004), and postcolonial theorist Edward Said (see Said's *Orientalism* [London: Penguin Books, 2003] and "The Clash of Ignorance" [*The Nation*, October 4, 2001]).

⁴⁶ Brooke Neely and Michelle Samura, "Social Geographies of Race: Connecting Race and Space," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 11 (2011): 1941.

⁴⁷ George Lipsitz, "The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape," *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1 (2007): 12.

attempts to claim ownership of the city center as a place to which Samina and other Asian Muslim counterdemonstrators have no right. The city center, for Andy, is a white and non-Muslim space. The conflict he sees there is based on conflicting social values that are simultaneously expressed in racial and spatial terms: a far-right anti-Islam politics embodied by white EDL members and a progressive Muslim politics embodied by Asian counter-protestors, in which both parties attempt to claim the city center as their own.

Moreover, there are notable imperially and racially gendered dynamics to Andy's intrusion in the garage, in which Samina and her body are policed by Andy in terms of her public position and Ali's support for her to speak out. This is a variation on post-colonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "white men are saving brown women from brown men," which recalls the "saving" of Hindu widows by British occupiers of colonial India.⁴⁸ As Andy attempts to "save" Samina from Ali's exhortations, he carries the civilizational conflict sited in Bradford's city center with him. Thus, the racialization of Bradford's city center is not limited to that particular space. It travels, and in doing so, takes on a life of its own. Andy's belligerence becomes a specific, interpersonal extension of this racialization, as he decries Muslims who "pollute our landscape with [their] fucking mosques."⁴⁹ He sees the change of Bradford's skyline as a physical manifestation of the West losing the battle against the "fucking disease" that is Islam.⁵⁰ During the rest of the play, Samina helps Andy unlearn some of his anti-Muslimness by involving him in her peace activism. Her speech is thus used to great effect in *Combustion*, at once serving as the launching point for the racialization and misrepresentation of Bradford while also demonstrating how Muslims in Bradford are at the forefront of resisting white supremacy and the far right.

Yet despite its significance, the moment of the speech is not staged in *Combustion*. Rather, it is alluded to and referenced in the play. It occurs offstage, somewhere else. Indeed, the possibility of multiple interpretations of Samina's speech only becomes clear when Andy bursts into the garage. Audiences are required to imagine the speech and how (anti-)inflammatory it was, depending on who they side with. That the political clash occurred in the city center is also telling, for the whole of *Combustion* reads as a response to conflictual events taking place elsewhere in Bradford: the abuse of "Girl T" and demonstrations by the EDL and Muslim peace activists. The characters are propelled by the energy of circumstances—the "combustion" of the play's title—and can only react to rather than take ownership of the situation before them. Spatially, the conflicts of the city reflect Neely and Samura's racial space overlap of "difference and inequality."⁵¹ Indeed, Andy's fury about the increasing number of mosques in Bradford renders that "difference" visible, even if the city center remains unseen by *Combustion's* audience.

What is most notable about the imagining of Bradford in *Multitudes* and *Combustion* is how limited it is. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai speaks of imagination as "the collective ideas of what is possible," before linking such imagining to space: if "spatiality [is] to take its form, there has to be an effort, a 'production of locality' . . .

⁴⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 296.

⁴⁹ Khan, *Combustion*, 50.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Neely and Samura, "Social Geographies of Race," 1942.

Once that effort to produce the local is fully observed, we will also, among other things, get a deeper sense of what it means to produce, inhabit, and sustain spatial relations.⁵² In *Multitudes* and *Combustion*, that which is “possible” in Bradford’s city center is limited to conflict between Islam and the West. In *Multitudes*, this manifests as violence between the protest camp and the Conservative Party’s security forces. In *Combustion*, this manifests as competitive speechifying between the white-supremacist EDL and progressive Muslim counterdemonstrators. Thus, the city is narrowed. It is restricted to binaries. It is no longer Massey’s type of place, in which there is a “thrown-togetherness” that reflects “the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now” and constitutes “the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a [single] thing.”⁵³ Instead, it becomes—dangerously, I find—a place “of stability” that is “ultimately reducible to the *being-there* of something dead.”⁵⁴ Both plays render Bradford fixed, trapped in a particular and repetitive narrative of the “something dead” of conflict.

In *Combustion* and *Multitudes*, Bradford becomes imaginarily stabilized as a *place* of conflict. It is not “in process” at all, nor is it “the product of interrelations” or “the sphere of possibility,” nor even “always under construction” as “a simultaneity of stories-so-far.”⁵⁵ Rather, it is depicted as a static locale that is closed off from alternatives. There are none of Massey’s “loose ends” or “ongoing stories,”⁵⁶ but instead a single story about Bradford as a place that reinforces the belief of ongoing conflict between Islam and the West.⁵⁷ This single story is codified further by a separation between the imagined Bradford offstage and the discussions of it onstage. The separation between these on- and offstage worlds means that Bradford is imagined as a conflictual particularity, a conflictual certainty. In *Combustion* and *Multitudes*, Bradford’s only role is to host a clash between the West’s purported progress and Islam’s assumed regression. The city is constructed as frozen in time and held “still for our own purposes, while we [in the West] do the moving.”⁵⁸

An Anxious Spatial Politics

What are the implications of characterizing Bradford as a fixed place in the Islam-versus-the-West conflict? I contend that such imagining embeds an anti-Islam discourse in contemporary Britain’s anxious spatial politics. As a feeling of being socially, politically, and personally unable to control one’s immediate environs, anxiety spatially manifests in these plays through fights, violence, and the staging of Bradford’s city center as always elsewhere. As such, this anxious spatial politics emerges through two distinct dimensions of the plays: a classed slippage between the racialization and ethnicization of Muslims, and the creation of a racialized theatrical imagination.

⁵² Appadurai, “Illusion of Permanence,” 46.

⁵³ Massey, *For Space*, 140–41.

⁵⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117–18 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁵ Massey, *For Space*, 12, 99.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁷ Similarly, novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie speaks of “the danger of a single story.” See Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” *TED*, July 2009, available at https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.

⁵⁸ Massey, *For Space*, 122.

First, the intersection of class and ethnicity underpins both *Combustion* and *Multitudes*. Both plays articulate Bradford's Muslim communities as working class and Pakistani. This is no surprise, given the migration history outlined above. However, when this history is combined with the de Certeausian approach to place that both plays take, the purported conflict between Islam and the West fuses with the particular working-class and Pakistani-heritage background of Bradford's citizens. This reifies a particular set of stereotypes about the British working class: "embodying anything angry and Brexit,"⁵⁹ "angry, macho and unemployed,"⁶⁰ and "against immigration, multiculturalism and change," while "whin[ing] about the loss of a country and identity that never was, and will not be the reality of modern Britain."⁶¹ The working class is thus portrayed in general and flattened terms as brutish and unsophisticated.

Moreover, placing this conflict in Pakistani-heritage communities runs a particular risk: that of slipping between the racialization and ethnicization of Muslims. By racialization, I mean the process of Muslims, as a religious group, becoming Othered based on nonreligious criteria. This accords with the way that scholars of Islamophobia have understood this otherwise problematic term: as requiring a "giving up [of] the conjoined twin false binaries underpinning the fixation that religious affiliations are never to do with the body, and that 'race' is *only* to do with the body."⁶² More succinctly, historian AbdoolKarim Vakil has written that "religion is 'raced,' and Muslims are racialized."⁶³ In other words, the religious category of being Muslim is becoming, or has become, a racial category in and of itself, one that is not exclusively tied to bodily markers. And yet, in the north of England in particular, this racialization began as ethnicization. Anthropologist Pnina Werbner has described how, after the Rushdie affair in 1989, Muslim identity in nearby Manchester became a racial category with ethnic origins.⁶⁴ Muslimness across the UK became politicized, as sociologist Tariq Modood writes, for "the racist taunt 'Rushdie' rouses more self-defence than 'black bastard,'" because "people do not turn and run when something they care about is under attack."⁶⁵

In *Combustion* and *Multitudes*, any distinction between the categories of Muslim, Asian, and Pakistani disappears. In these plays, to be Muslim is to be Asian is to be Pakistani. The city as a site in the battle between Islam and the West is enacted in ethnonational terms. Examples abound from both plays: Hollingworth's desire to set his work in Bradford because it is "an interesting soundclash of east and west; a place full of contradictions";⁶⁶ Lyn's memories of Bradford's storied past before the arrival of Pakistani migrants;⁶⁷ Khan's argument that Bradford showcases ongoing linguistic code-

⁵⁹ Zoe Williams, "Forget Angry, Brexit Stereotypes—the 'White Working Class' Does Not Exist," *Guardian*, August 1, 2018, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/01/white-working-class-stereotypes>.

⁶⁰ Phil McDuff, "Enough of the Patronising Myths about the 'White Working-Class,'" *Guardian*, September 7, 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/07/myths-white-working-class>.

⁶¹ Beider, "Don't Buy the Stereotype."

⁶² Steve Garner and Saher Selod, "The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015): 11 (emphasis in original).

⁶³ AbdoolKarim Vakil, "Who's Afraid of Islamophobia?" in *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives*, ed. Salman Sayyid and AbdoolKarim Vakil (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 276.

⁶⁴ Pnina Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims: The Public Performance of Pakistani Transnational Identity Politics* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002).

⁶⁵ Tariq Modood, *Not Easy Being British* (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Trentham Books Ltd, 1992), 28.

⁶⁶ Ellis-Petersen, "New Play at Tricycle Theatre Looks at Muslim Conversion."

⁶⁷ Hollingworth, *Multitudes*, 39.

switching in “the Muslim mouth”;⁶⁸ and Andy’s statement that Muslims are building mosques and “recruiting more of [their] fuckers to blow this country to smithereens.”⁶⁹ In these plays, the conflict between Islam and the West is both ethnic and civilizational: brown Muslims fight against white Westerners. Moreover, this conflict manifests in classed terms, exemplified by the interethnic, interreligious, political, and ultimately physical brawl between Andy and Ali in *Combustion*. As working-class individuals who duke it out based on multiple forces, these two men are brought together and thrown apart by their shared classed positioning. Their assumed backwardness maps onto their involvement in the purported conflict between Islam and the West.

Second, in their dramaturgical choice of locating Bradford’s city center offstage, both plays frame the city center as a place of “spatio-temporal events,”⁷⁰ “the lived experience” of which “has a racial dimension.”⁷¹ This choice does not require audiences to imagine *what* is going on in that place, as the characters explain the events of the protest camp and demonstrations. Rather, it requires audiences to imagine *how* these events are unfolding. What do they sound like? What do they look like? Are they violent? Who started it? By using the protest camp and the demonstrations in a way that frames Bradford as a place of conflict between Islam and the West, these plays leave the audience to assume just *how* violent and dramatic this place is. The processual imagination of the audience is related to the priming that these descriptions have done.

In his writings on offstage space, narrative, and imagination, theatre scholar William Gruber argues that a playwright’s use of offstage space to narrate particular events and characters has the effect of endowing them “with the illusion of both solidity and temporal duration,” which “invite[s] us to project an image of them existing and acting beyond our immediate perception.”⁷² But in light of de Certeau’s conception of place as a reification of identities, this “solidity” can also be problematic. In the case of *Combustion* and *Multitudes*, the “solidity” that is found in the articulation of Bradford as a city at the threshold of Islamic/Western conflict results in that conflict narrative “being embodied in these kinds of imaginary or ‘conceived’ spaces” offstage, imbuing such a narrative with “both solidity and temporal duration.”⁷³ This “solidity” is confirmed by how characters in both plays describe Bradford. In *Combustion*, the city is “the lion’s den,” a place where people get “arrested” and “banged up,” hosted “what happened in 2001,” sees “racist thugs” getting “into scuffles with police,” and is a place where “massive brick[s]” are “smashed through the window” of “our mosque.”⁷⁴ In *Multitudes*, the city is “ungovernable,” contains “an army of people,” is “tribal,” consists of “thugs” and “rival gangs of youths,” is occupied by “police horses” and “riot squads,” requires “water cannon[s],” is in a state of “carnage” befitting “the ninth circle of hell,” is “a war zone,” and is a place for “sending troops in.”⁷⁵ Thus in both plays, the onstage dialogue and offstage space conspire together to render the city of Bradford as a fixed and consistent place, characterized by an Islam-versus-the-West conflict.

⁶⁸ Bhuchar, “Asif Khan’s Debut Comedy Drama.”

⁶⁹ Khan, *Combustion*, 50.

⁷⁰ Massey, *For Space*, 130.

⁷¹ Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race,” 12.

⁷² William Gruber, *Offstage Space, Narrative, and the Theatre of the Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁴ Khan, *Combustion*, 25, 35, 45, 54, 72–74.

⁷⁵ Hollingworth, *Multitudes*, 17, 39, 70, 75, 85, 87, 90–91, 98.

As a consequence, *Combustion's* and *Multitudes'* audiences are pushed to think of the relationship between Islam and Britain in static racialized terms rather than fluid ones. The plays export a generalized anti-Islam sentiment to their audiences, drawing on preexisting narratives such as Huntington's aforementioned clash of civilizations logic, sociologist Asef Bayat and anthropologist Linda Herrera's argument that Muslim youth tend to be publicly depicted in terms of "religiosity, conservative cultural politics, and extremism,"⁷⁶ political scientist Mahmood Mamdani's outlining of the "good Muslim" and "bad Muslim," and the need for Britain's racial minorities to be seen as writer Nikesh Shukla's "good immigrant[s]." As a result, these narratives are reified and racialized much in the way that de Certeau's conception of place reifies identities. Rather than being based on Appadurai's "collective ideas of what is possible," the audience's imagination is limited to the particular spatial and sociopolitical framings that each play offers when figuring Bradford as a city in conflict. Racializing the offstage narrative space ends up racializing the audiences' imagination, risking reentrenchment of the exact type of discourse that these plays originally sought to counter: assumed civilizational conflict between Islam and the West.

These two dimensions of *Combustion* and *Multitudes*—the classed slippage between the racialization and ethnicization of Muslims, and the racialized theatrical imagination—contribute to their anxious spatial politics. Appadurai has theorized such anxiety in reference to the "geography of anger," which is "the spatial outcome of complex interactions between faraway events and proximate fears, between old histories and new provocations, between rewritten borders and unwritten orders."⁷⁷ Such geographies are fueled by "the uncertainty about the enemy within and the anxiety about the always incomplete project of national purity."⁷⁸ Spatial politics provide a way for these anxieties to be mapped. The ambiguity of the unfinished yields to an "anxiety of incompleteness" that inflects particular places and spaces with disquiet.⁷⁹ Manifesting in a range of ways, including violence between marginalized identity groups and the contestation of public space, *Combustion* and *Multitudes* reflect contemporary Britain's anxious spatial politics.

In reference to this anxious spatial politics and the classed slippage between the racialization and ethnicization of Muslims, the longstanding stereotype of the working class as angry and change-averse reappears in both works. In *Combustion*, anxiety appears as Andy's disquiet about the wider intermixing of Bradford, refracted through the lens of his daughter's interracial marriage. Similarly, in *Multitudes*, Lyn reminisces about how "it was *gleaming* back then, Bradford," and how it is now full of people "shunning our lifestyle and changing the fabric of this country."⁸⁰ The return to the past that both Andy and Lyn seek recalls the "fluidity and historicity" of Neely and Samura's racial space framework, in which historical narratives about race in a particular place structure the degree to which that place is racially pliable in the present.⁸¹ Such longing for the past is also embedded in Appadurai's identification of the national

⁷⁶ Bayat and Herrera, "Introduction," 5.

⁷⁷ Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 100.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁰ Hollingworth, *Multitudes*, 39 (emphasis in original).

⁸¹ Neely and Samura, "Social Geographies of Race," 1945.

project of purity. The inability of such a project to be completed yields an anxiety that underpins many of the plays' interpersonal conflicts.

In terms of the racialized theatrical imagination, the codification of Bradford as hosting a conflict between Islam and the West is the political manifestation of Appadurai's "anxiety of incompleteness." The offstage city is incomplete. To complete it, audiences must imaginatively fill in the gaps between what they see and hear onstage and what has happened offstage. Spatially, the world of the stage is a contained place. But the world that is offstage is an open space. The shift between these open and closed spaces triggers a particular anxiousness about *how* to imagine that open space. The plays' characterization of Bradford in terms of the Islamic/Western conflict narrative gives audiences the framework to conceptualize that offstage space in a particularly racialized way. The characters' interpersonal conflicts—Andy and Ali's fight, Lyn and Kash's disagreements, and so on—push audiences toward seeing Bradford in terms of conflict between Islam and the West. Staging political moments of such strife offstage confirms these racialized imaginings.

With both plays contributing to a spatial politics underpinned by anxiety, Bradford is theatrically produced as a conflictual space built on the anxiousness of how different groups relate to each other: the challenge of "interactions and relationality," despite "difference and inequality,"⁸² constituting "the question of our living together" in a single place.⁸³ In *Combustion* and *Multitudes*, that "living together" occurs in a city purportedly in constant civilizational conflict. Bradford is rendered a fixed place of anxiety, where its spatial politics are one of negative emotion. The conflicts are not dealt with constructively or creatively, but rather through a dramatic and affective register. The local becomes the emotional.

Multitudes and *Combustion* both imagine Bradford as a stabilized place of conflict that hosts Islam-versus-the-West anxieties. These plays reify misrepresentations about the city, and Islam more widely, in a way that exports anti-Islam sentiments to confirm contemporary Britain's anxious spatial politics. The codified representation of Bradford as a stagnant place rather than a dynamic space entrenches these sentiments, undermining the discursive and dialogic efforts that the plays attempt to make. The concluding call, therefore, is this: privilege space as opposed to place and prioritize lived experience onstage as opposed to racialized imaginings offstage, lest performance entrench the status quo rather than challenge static framings with hope.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1945–46.

⁸³ Massey, *For Space*, 151.