

Beyond Binaries

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**For my mother,
who shaped my past
For Gareth,
who continues to shape my future**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the creative cultural production, consumption and representation of individuals within Britain, classified as of ethnic minority backgrounds. It draws together the fields of 'race', ethnicity and nationality and argues that these wide ranging themes have been conflated to produce simplistic, inaccurate, understandings of contemporary identity categorisations. The thesis challenges these prescribed understandings and argues that they produce identity as situated within a binary perspective, British and Other. The need for an intersectional, relational perspective is outlined, not just for individuals but also when engaging communities.

The thesis draws together two case studies to explore these issues. The first considered the research subjects' engagement with participatory arts practice within a youth centre setting in Coventry, UK. This case study highlighted the complexities of the cultural identities of those often marked as alterior. The second case study involved working with Asian women and young people in Birmingham to develop a visual arts exhibition, a publication and performance event. The case study particularly highlighted the ways in which people negotiated existing cultural institutions whose arts practice often moves towards an assimilationist agenda. Together the case studies provide a means by which the complexity of everyday life can be considered in relation to art, cultural production and representation.

The thesis contributes to debates on culture, identity and art particularly in terms of public policy and how publicly funded cultural institutions fail to serve the needs and interests of ethnic minority communities within the UK. The thesis argues instead for the need to use arts and cultural practice to deconstruct binary perspectives, replacing them with intersecting cultural crossroads.

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

This thesis investigates how cultural identities are constructed and considers the inter-weave between creativity, cultural life and 'race' situated within contemporary socio-political frameworks. At a time when identity has become increasingly complex and contested there appears to be a superficial acceptance of that perceived as culturally alterior. Within the thesis, I question whether this is the case, and suggest that the nation states borders whilst seemingly porous are highly guarded. I explore the extent to which there is any real structural engagement with that determined as culturally other. Through an exploration of some of the ways in which we negotiate our cultural identity/ies I explore the routes – and roots – that we navigate. I consider questions of both artistic and popular culture in relation to identity and meaning making. My intention is to investigate the way in which identity and culture are recognised as fragile and highly sensitive yet at the same time obdurate and impervious. I consider how the terms black and white have been positioned as juxtaposed and utilised to segment cultural identity within a socially and politically constructed framework.

Culture and society are themselves complex concepts and producing an authoritative version is not something that I anticipate achieving within the research. However, the thesis does view culture from multiple perspectives. It considers culture as part of everyday life (Williams, 2000) but equally as that distinguishing feature (Eagleton, 2000) of artistic practice, recognising the whole whilst acknowledging its components (Kannan, 1978, p. 2) and the complexities of the terrain (Eliot, 1962; Hall & du Gay, 1996; Williams, 1997). Consequently, the thesis picks up on the interplay that exists where socio-political modalities are constructed through both artistic engagements and popular culture as daily lived practice. Considering the material and social determinants of culture is central to exploring contemporary understandings of identity.

The thesis examines why, at a time of increasing mobility and greater attention upon global movements, identity labels continue to exist as simplified metonyms. The complexities within identity are channelled through a limited number of narratives, notions such as citizenship, nationality and ethnicity, which are undeniably connected to political perspectives of power and the adjudicating role of the nation state. The

research therefore examines how the identity choices made by the research subjects are constructed within potentially contested discourse. This occurs even whilst categorisations are highly scrutinised for what they allegedly reveal about individuals within contemporary social and cultural frameworks. In a progressively global age, I argue that such conflated identity categories offer ever decreasing cultural insight and risk essentialist readings.

Consequently I seek to gain greater understanding of the use of such categories whilst contextualising this within the potential complexities of cultural transformation and identity in Britain today. I investigate the wide-ranging contexts and discourse within which identity categories pertaining to culture are negotiated and utilised. The ontological frameworks within which we operate are rejected or absorbed within so called cultural norms under the guise of greater understanding, comprehension and all too often the supposed needs of 'the community'.

In developing the research approach I adopted a mixture of artistic reflection, exploration and analysis alongside an examination of discursive social modalities within which creative production takes place. I sought to ground the methodology within spaces that facilitated the research subjects' dialogue and learning and to have this process recognised as reflexive within the thesis findings. I sought a methodology which "brings together theory and praxis in a way that goes beyond empirical lip service and theoretical abstraction, and that truly allows for ambiguity and dangerous, unfashionable resistance, or capitulation" (Alexander, 2002: 567). An interactive research process allows researchers considerable insight into identity as process. It can move findings away from seeing identity or culture as fixed and provides a framework within which an analysis of culture and identity might be contextualised.

The utilisation of an interactive, praxis led, research approach allowed me to bring together differing themes of research. This was particularly important in providing a means by which the role played by cultural norms could be viewed in situ rather than, as so often happens, in isolation, particularly because culture and society are inseparable (Parekh, 2000). It was important to demonstrate differing modes of meaning making within culture and society, in particular to identity those integral to political perspectives of power that work within the adjudicating role of the state. For Hall, (1989; 1992a; 1996) in a move towards social constructivism, ideology, politics and culture work together as 'language' where structures and a prior order must be

recognised prior to their deconstruction. In keeping with this, we must acknowledge the role played by dominant identities, if only to deconstruct them (Kalra, 2006).

I therefore consider how the research subjects opened up a cultural space for themselves, both within the physical space of the *Venue* but equally within cultural interactions facilitated through *Changing Views*. In developing the case studies, I sought out spaces where the research subjects could comfortably explore cultural identities within a discursive space. The thesis and the discourses of the participants must therefore be understood as partially circumscribed by the socio-political context of the case studies. I compare the manner in which publicly subsidised cultural institutions engage with and categorise alterity. I consider how this compares to popular culture which may hold the potential of greater freedom, even whilst this also remains relative.

An exploration of prevailing cultural politics within the arts and cultural sectors highlight the manner in which individuals are framed within a bifurcated cultural framework. This offers little in relation to more complex conceptualisations. I therefore investigate the extent to which hybridising third space offers a robust structure for cultural negotiation by the research subjects, particularly given the effectiveness of existing cultural frameworks. By working in this manner I aim to identify processes which are normalised in constructing subjects in ideology.

I utilise a dialogic process in order to consider notions of a given essentialism whilst questioning binary constructions (Derrida, 1981) which appear to facilitate hybridising theory and results. Consequently, my explorations focus upon the interplay that has been categorised as taking place 'between' cultures. I am aware that this field has a broad vocabulary, having been defined as fusion, cultural contact, disjunction (Young, 1990), but also hybridity and third space (Bhabha, 1990; 1994) both of which I position centrally within the research.

My intention is to demonstrate how cultural objects do not possess a *singular* fixed meaning or identity, each can be determined anew (Bhabha, 1994, p.37). Yet, both cultural products and subjects are continually fixed within the cultural hierarchy. There is little acknowledgement of the contradictions or conflict contained within identity formation and cultural practices; instead cultures are portrayed as ossified.

Within the thesis, I question how, if the cultural content or signifying meaning of objects is not fixed, attention is focused on individuals as producers of supposedly *syncretic* objects? What does this tell us about the cultural producers and their position within culture and society? Does a constructed process occur where objects are disconnected and reconnected to other individuals or cultures? I therefore draw attention to the manner in which certain cultural subjects and objects are considered essential whilst others are categorised as the products of cultural transformation, whether through hybridising strategy or innovative cultural shifts and changes.

I investigate whether third space activity and engagement interacted beyond the confines of dominant cultural institutions through a consideration of the participant's wider engagement in cultural activity. Cultural adjustments are continually being shaped and are dependent on context and situationality. It is from this perspective that I outline the limitations of third space theory. I consider the manner in which the research subjects responded to notions of authenticity and cultural, or historical, roots. I suggest that hybridising third spaces are often predicated on foundations of racist discourse as was the experience of many of the research subjects. So, whilst we may desire a new politics of difference (West, 1993), the reality is that difference remains compartmentalised and constructed within the majority grid (Bhabha, 1990).

Aims and original contribution

The overarching aim of the research is to explore how, whilst cultural identities are complex, they are positioned and constructed within a limited number of prescribed narratives. I intend to more fully understand on-going processes involved in the construction of contemporary cultural identities. The research investigates some of the intricate relationships which construct culture and identity and engages with them as mobile, fluid, processes. The thesis examines how culture also positions us as subjects-in-discourse within the prevailing socio-political frameworks.

I approach culture from a multiple perspective. I investigate engagements with cultural institutions as spaces of representation, but also work to connect with the research subjects as producers of creativity and arts practice within their daily lives. I felt that such multiplicity would draw together greater understanding of cultural approaches which are often segmented.

The thesis seeks to ascertain the extent to which conflated cultural identity positions were evident within cultural institutions. It assesses the extent to which cultural institutions genuinely provide autonomous spaces for diverse representations. My interest lies in gauging the extent to which representation within institutions meets an assimilationist agenda.

The thesis considers how the research subjects interacted with cultural institutions but also asks how proactive a role the formal arts sector plays in challenging social and political constructs. I consequently aim to broaden views in relation to how formally presented and produced arts practice operates in containing and influencing understandings of cultural identities.

Much cultural research offers only an externally positioned perspective on how cultural institutions produce culture and contribute towards the identity of the nation. In contrast, this thesis provides an 'insiders' understanding of the processes of cultural production and programming within publicly funded cultural institutions. This unique position is one of the components that provide the thesis with its originality. In critiquing the very institution of which I was a part, I glean a rare perspective of the manner in which a bifurcated culture operated within cultural institutions.

The praxis led approach enabled an examination of an active relationship between cultural institutions and the research subjects. The case studies demonstrated how, even whilst publicly funded, institutions may not engage with the public but limit themselves to individuals with whom they shared particular values and ways of aesthetic and cultural seeing. The thesis therefore contributes to understanding how such positions are constructed within cultural policy and practice.

My research focus seeks to identify processes of engagement within mainstream cultural institutions as well as the research subjects' response to this. This approach ensured that I was able to balance the apparent progression of cultural institutions with the research subjects' own sense of representation or exclusion from cultural institutions.

Since the research focus is upon culture as a reflexive process it enabled me to assess whether a cultural and social gap existed between the research subjects' lived experience of creativity and the representations of art contained within mainstream cultural institutions. This is significant since the research approach did

not only seek to understand the processes behind the structures that maintain inequality it was also concerned with starting on the journey of challenging them.

I therefore consider this from the perspective of the research subjects own cultural engagements. To what extent did they draw upon binaries within the discursive spaces created by the case studies? How did they navigate culture and to what extent were sites of supposed freedom engendered through creative engagement beyond the 'white cube of the gallery'? Central to this therefore was how the research subjects created and engaged with culture beyond formal cultural institutions. From this, potentially more open, perspective I aimed to assess the extent to which cultural engagement and creativity were free floating, or to what degree was it marshalled to meet government ideology in the creation of subjects?

I also sought to analyse the extent to which hybridising third space theory operates within arts and cultural production, art within cultural institutions, as well as popular culture within the daily lived experiences of the research subjects. So, the thesis also seeks to understand notions of hybridity and third space. Consequently, the depth of engagement within the research also establishes its originality since I draw upon a participatory research approach to explore hybridising third space theory *alongside* cultural identities within and beyond cultural institutions. Through the praxis led approach, I consider measures by which cultural identities are negotiated within contemporary society and whether hybridising and third space theory identifies a genuine route through which newness might be seen to enter the world.

Chapter Outlines

The thesis consists of five chapters as well as the Introduction and Conclusion. The first chapter reviews the existing body of literature. I include within this the wide ranging intersecting literature on 'race', ethnicity and nationality, however I also move on to consider notions of community and intersectionality. Finally, I review hybridising third space strategy. In the following chapter I outline the methodology and crucially, my decision to engage with an interactive research approach. In Chapter Three I consider how the research subjects were positioned within the socio-political framework of the nation state. I review how they negotiated shared values and social agents, but also how racist discourse impacted upon their cultural engagements. In Chapter Four I explore the manner in which cultural institutions operated from a culturally bifurcated perspective and consider how this fits within

hybridising, third space strategy. Finally, in Chapter Five, I consider how culture was produced by the research subjects in spaces of *relative* freedom, beyond formal cultural institutions.

In Chapter One, I argue that many theories surrounding identity formation fix identity so that it is increasingly contained and stratified. Individuals consistently position their identity within a limited set of narratives. Establishing such categorisations enables the compartmentalisation of what are actually wide-ranging, diverse identities. I suggest that in order to challenge this framework, contemporary definitions must be destabilised. This search formed part of the epistemological framework. I argue that analysis of identity categorisations in relation to so called cultural norms must include the manner in which such norms – and categorisations – are perpetuated and maintained. The motivation behind identity categories was an important constant, specifically considering the manner in which identity is assigned and “imbricated by the exercise of power” (Sharma, 2006).

Intersectionality is important in considering multi-dimensionality within identity as this has provided constructive insight when negotiating contemporary identities. It also lays a strong foundation for the analysis of processes such as the interplay and suture that takes place as individuals draw upon constantly shifting identities. In Chapter One, I argue that intersectionality must be applied across all identity formations, recognising multiple connections and identity categorisations. I argue that this is particularly the case once we acknowledge the complexities of difference. However, we must conceptualise the terms difference and sameness as manufactured and manipulated in order to support dominant discourse within the state. A social constructivist approach is useful here since for Friedman this also entailed “shifting the discussion of culture to the problem of the attribution of meaning [so] we can begin to ask a number of concrete questions about the way in which a culture is so to speak, diffused in the process of imperial expansion” (1992, p. 27).

The role played by the processes of attribution are evident in debates surrounding terms such as black which has, almost chameleon-like, undergone considerable re/negotiation in questioning its signification. In gaining broader understanding of the interplay between blackness and whiteness I question how we work with such terminology whilst refuting the polarity that they appear to represent. I outline the risks in terminology which fixes understandings of British – or Western – cultural identities in the same manner that the West has been fixing its other. Marginalised

cultures must be wary of the manner in which they name the centralised cultures, since this very act only further pushes them to the margins (Morelli, 1996). The stance taken by Nayan, a research subject and one of the artists with whom I worked, is therefore interesting, since he comments that there is now a box that he can tick, “an Anglo-Indian type box”. In keeping with Morelli’s concerns however, he is wary of this category, preferring the “theoretical ‘in joke’ and the freedom allowed by the category ‘other’”.

So, in Chapter One, I argue that this danger doesn’t only apply to definitions of identity but also to the processes that are considered to shape them; the notion of hybridity risks supporting the concept of an essential or original, complete culture. I highlight that theories of hybridity very rarely distinguish between diasporic variations or the cultural transformations that could be said to naturally occur such as through social, economic, environmental or technological shifts. I suggest that one could rationalise that all culture is hybrid, or nothing is hybrid.

In the final section I consider the possibilities of third space theory and whether this might shift or alter the dynamic. I acknowledge the possibilities of the third space whilst also recognising its weaknesses, (Parry, 1994). Since we are always constructed within discourse, identity, subjects and objects are always dependent on the social framework, in an inter-woven relationship; neither identity nor culture is able to transfer to a free-floating, signifier-free sphere.

In Chapter Two, I align the research topic to the methodology. In determining the research method, I chose to work with a medium that could acknowledge the tensions between essentialism and heterogeneity within culture and identity formation. I therefore sought a methodology that, like the identity constructs I challenged, was not fixed or singular, but fluid, engendering multiple positions that produced “identity ethnography in cultural studies ... carrying out interactive research” (McRobbie, 1992, p. 730). Nayak rightly argues that “ethnographic research should be seen as a process that produces meanings and identities, which both perform and dislocate ‘race’” (2006, p. 403).

I was interested in reviewing the manner in which an active research approach allowed me to engage with the research subjects from an ongoing perspective, one that provided spaces for contemplation, analysis and change. If I demanded that the social framework be considered in the construction of identity and the production of

culture, it was vital that I also considered the impact of the social framework in the relationship between researcher and research subjects (Back, 1993) even whilst seeking to challenge these terms (Mies, 1983).

Consequently, I carried out two fairly large-scale case studies as well as a series of smaller pieces of research that added to the research findings, recognising that it is no longer enough to write about lives in a spatially disconnected way (Nayak, 2003). The *Venue*, the first case study, focused on the social and every day cultural positioning of the research subjects. The findings at the *Venue* highlighted the depth and range of the research subjects' relationship to and synthesis of culture. Therefore, in the second case study I developed research that was bound far more to the consumption and production of culture as art. I examined the role that cultural production and representation play in establishing one's sense of cultural identity. These two case studies were not set up for comparison but rather to provide a more comprehensive overview of the research theme.

Without seeking an inclusive research method I felt that the research would have failed to acknowledge the constantly shifting and adapting parameters of access and representation, as well as disregarding individual agency to navigate prescribed frameworks. The methodology utilised was suitably positioned to ground the findings within a climate that has positioned identity as increasingly polarised. Consequently, the approach utilised enabled greater understanding and comprehension relating to pre-determined notions of the nation's insiders and those perceived to operate outside the nation.

Chapter Three is contextualised from the perspective of the first case study, the *Venue*. I highlight my role as youth arts worker and position the findings within this framework. However, I also situate the *Venue* within dominant political and cultural systems in England. As West outlines 'culture is quite as structural as the economy or politics; it is rooted in institutions like families, schools, churches, synagogues, mosques and communication industries (tv, radio, video, music)' (1993, p. 38, see also Nagel, 2001). I explore the complexity of action where concepts, objects and borders are maintained. I contextualise the research findings that connect culture and identity to notions of belonging within prevailing government systems. These are considered from a dialogic perspective, with particular focus given to culture as coextensive with politics and society (Parekh, 2000; Bhatt, 2006) in the production of the nation.

I analyse how the research subjects navigated the promotion of the nation-state as containing the 'peculiarly British nation' alongside particular values which they were not portrayed as sharing. Consequently, the chapter moves on to consider the culture of the nation, to which the research subjects appealed and how they negotiated their engagement within and/or external to this. I acknowledge that to identify with multiple commonalities is to constantly challenge arguments put forward for the nation-state as having a singular set of shared values upon which alterity is based. Dominant discursive frameworks within contemporary society are increasingly polarised. In Chapter Three, whilst I consider perspectives of belonging in relation to the state, I also focus upon the changing positions adopted by the research subjects. I highlight the extent to which these shifted and adapted and I suggest that they were performed in relation to context and situation.

In chapters four and five I consider culture from a multiple, dialogic process since each perspective is influenced by and connects with the other (Knowles, 2006). I deliberately blur the boundary lines between academic production and cultural expression (Sharma, Hutnyk & Sharma, 1996) through the provision of both physical and metaphorical spaces for contemplation. In considering culture produced as part of everyday life, I review the manner in which one's environment impacts upon the means and processes of production, whilst always being relational.

Consequently, Chapter Four opens with a consideration of the differing roles played by cultural institutions. The findings in this chapter developed out of the second case study but also draw upon a number of smaller pieces of research that arose through my consultancy practice.¹ The chapter blends the detailed thinking of academics, cultural theorists and arts critics (Araeen, 1987, 1987a, 1989; Bennett, 1995, 2005; Chambers, 1996; Hylton, 2007; Mercer, 2005, 2008) and pulls together differing perspectives of thought on art, culture, identity and notions of alterity.

I analyse the role played by established, mainstream funded,² cultural organisations, in both maintaining the nation's identity whilst also framing cultural representation and production. I argue that binary positions were constructed within these spaces. They shaped the social sphere and worked to maintain what were promoted as the

¹ For more information on this area, please visit www.hybridconsulting.org.uk

² My focus is primarily upon what are termed 'regularly funded organisations' within the arts sector. These organisations receive regular resource support, which goes beyond finance, from various government departments and specifically from the regional and national offices of Arts Council England.

prevailing norms of the nation. The chapter highlights how cultural representation is controlled by means of tools such as cultural objects being either too visible or invisible with only minimal representation in between these perspectives. I therefore suggest that many of the research subjects felt only a minimal connection with the majority of cultural objects represented within formal cultural institutions. Whilst selected engagement was proffered to some individuals this was likely to be on the basis of heightened visibility, such as in the Veil exhibition curated by inIVA and the play Behzti shown at Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Behzti illustrated how cultural institutions construct cultural objects and work with the binary perspective of British and other in mind, utilising this reference in the production of new work. Conversely, however, Behzti also provides us with an example of how the *plural* other confronted a mainstream cultural institution.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I suggest that the research subjects' more complex relationship between art and life consistently challenged conflated identities. So, Chapter Five mixes ethnography, culture and hybridising third space theory in a bid to investigate beyond cultural institutions. In this chapter I consider how the research subjects engaged with creativity and to what extent their cultural expression was limited by contemporary boundaries, social encounters and the challenges of essentialism. I move on to analyse how the existing cultural and social frameworks positioned and regulated such representations of artistic practice. The findings highlight how there was also evidence of regulation and judgements relating to how difference is valued and assigned. Difference was very clearly made to matter even whilst it was also temporal, itself dependent upon context and situation. The chapter also considers the research subjects' own reification of culture, specifically in the manner in which they produced popular culture.

However, I also suggest that the research subjects, who included artists, were not rendered powerless in responding to specific representations; rather we see evidence of a range of spaces and routes by which responses were made to so-called dominant cultural norms. I highlight how many of the research subjects questioned the singular manner in which they were perceived, challenging the binary position of 'other' to that of British.

I assess how the binary relationships and conflated identities that existed externally impacted on the manner in which the research subjects responded to Changing Views. I therefore consider hybridising strategy within this, and review how the

reification of both objects and subjects has constructed culture so that hybridity appears to provide a route towards cultural fusion, syncreticism and transformation. Whilst there may appear to be evidence pointing us towards hybridising third space strategy, I question the extent to which the research subjects challenged notions of authenticity and cultural, or historical roots. Although we may call for a new politics of difference (West, 1993), artistic difference remains segmented within a majority grid.

CHAPTER ONE

Identity Theory: Re-negotiating identity in a shared future

Introduction

My starting point with this chapter, and indeed the research itself is current identity terminology as it relates to culture in the fullest sense. I argue that identity definitions are overly conflated, with individuals able to access only a limited set of narratives. I suggest that this overly holds individuals in place; identity is prescribed rather than subscribed to. In turn, I argue that current identity categories tell us little about the cultural identity of individuals – or even so called communities. This leads to ignorance, or knowledge based upon reified cultures and stereotypes. It sets the foundation for cultural interpretations based upon notions of ‘race’ and enables, rather than challenges, prejudice.

So, whilst there appears to be a desire to re-vision the nation as possessing an increasingly diverse cultural heritage, including for example Chicken Tikka Masala as the national dish, I question whether such cultural or artistic engagement and inclusion is genuine. We are living in a time when the nation state’s borders appear to be at their most porous even whilst at the same time most heavily guarded and maintained (Lewis & Neil, 2005), a time when we see a challenging mix of fragility and obduracy existing within identity.

Within the thesis I examine identity as intersectional and argue for the need for deeper understanding of cultural identities. Consequently, the first intersection that I consider alongside identity is that of ‘Black/ minority ethnic’ arts. I review how identity has been impacted by, as well as impacted upon, the contemporary arts and creative infrastructure and specifically how understandings of black and white have been constructed as racial dichotomies.

I suggest that we need, instead, to use arts and cultural practice to deconstruct polarities within and between communities and to demonstrate intersecting cultural crossroads. This approach challenges a continuing engagement with ‘race’ as an overly simplistic construction. Recognising the complexity of identity, positions us to question notions of community and therefore the segmentation and stratification of culture. Rather than allowing community to be conflated with notions of nationality,

citizenship, state and 'race', we must problematise the use of such simplistic overarching terms. I argue for the need to reconceptualise such boundaries and acknowledge identity as far more segmented, connected not through simplistic narratives but complex inter-lacings that are both evident and constantly changing within culture.

Ultimately, I suggest the need to acknowledge simultaneous sameness and difference through the utilisation of brisure and hybridising third space theory. However, since hybridity has been seen as a bridge 'between' my concern is that we move once more towards binary positions of British and other, included and excluded, valuable and valueless. I therefore investigate existing binary positions within which identity is frequently perceived and argue for culture as a dialogic process, situated and relational. It is this ambiguous perspective which re-connects us to third space theory but also takes us beyond, where we must recognise the centrality of context and situation.

Reviewing identity definitions

My starting point in the research is to review existing definitions relating to identity. This is an area of considerable complexity, having been at the forefront of much theoretical analysis. As Gilroy has commented

We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept, theoretically, and as a contested fact of contemporary political life. The word itself has acquired a huge contemporary resonance, inside and outside the academic world. It offers much more than an obvious, common-sense way of talking about individuality and community. Principally, identity provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity is formed (1997, p. 301)

The interest that Gilroy highlights here has not diminished in recent years. However, my focus within the research rests on the *interplay* outlined by Gilroy. Whilst we undoubtedly have pedigreed theorists that have written on Black identities there is considerably less work that explores the challenges – or the rarely extolled benefits – of identity as supposedly operating within a multiple borderland. Notable exceptions within this field include Parker and Song (2001), Jayne Ifekwunigwe (1999) and Phoenix and Tizard (1993).

The challenge in working with the concept of identity is the complexity of the strategies that deal with this subject. So it is not the difficulties encountered in defining what is meant by identity itself but rather methods of engaging with identity as a categorisation that is, as Hall and Du Gay (1996) comment, never completed, always in process. To demonstrate this, I want to draw on an illustration used by one of the keynote speakers at an arts conference.³ The illustration concerned a young schoolgirl who was born in Bradford to parents who had migrated from the district of Kashmir in Pakistan. When asked to define her identity she comments

When I'm standing in the school playground with my white English friends, I'm black. When an African Caribbean girl joins our group, I become Asian. When another Asian girl comes in, I think of myself as Pakistani and a Muslim. When a Pakistani friend joins us, I become Kashmiri, and when another Kashmiri girl turns up, I become a Bradford schoolgirl again

This illustration highlights the manner in which no-one identifies with the same group, or in opposition to the same set of others all of the time. Everybody has more than one answer to the question of identity definition. The illustration aptly highlights Hall's thinking regarding the temporary attachments that we make, since he comments that he uses

'Identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. (1996, p. 5-6)

It is therefore vital that, in order to better understand how notions of identity operate, we focus upon the point of suture, and the interplay that *continuously* takes place as a range of points are drawn upon in selecting one's identity. Grossberg similarly picks up on these "temporary points of belonging" (1993, p. 100) when spatially re-aligning identity as unfixed and constructed through an "organisation of places and spaces" (1993, p. 99) as opposed to producing identities within prescribed, normative, subject-positions (Sharma, 2006a), similarly both Nayak (2003) and Back (1996) specifically argue for identity to be clearly and explicitly positioned. Nayak stresses the need to recognise cultural geography as people *and* place and to situate participants "through a multi-site analysis of young lives" (2003, p.29). To achieve this, ethnography is an important tool since it is capable of elucidating links between the particulars of the everyday and the enduring and structured aspects of social life.

³ Ranjit Sondhi, at a conference organised by Sampad, on South Asian Dance, called 'Navadisha 2000'. For more information on Sampad, go to www.sampad.org.uk.

In reading and re-reading Back (2007), I often returned to his use of Berger to better understand how we engage identities without patronising, how we recount identity with both subjectivity and objectivity, he quotes

what separates us from the characters about whom we write is not knowledge, either objective or subjective, but their experience of time in the story we are telling. This separation allows us, the storytellers, the power of knowing the whole. Yet, equally, this separation renders us powerless ... we are obliged to follow them ... The time, and therefore the story, belongs to them. Yet the meaning of the story, what makes it worthy of being told, is what we can see and what inspires us (2007, p. 171)

My understanding of this was that we must place identity within the broader social, economic and cultural processes and recognise, as Nayak outlines, the role of “performance, action, experience” (2003, p. 29), situating this “firmly within the context of young people’s immediate local circumstances” (ibid). In shaping the research parameters I therefore sought to acknowledge and develop cultural spaces that whilst based upon private understandings recognised public rulings (Back, 1996) and how cultural sharing takes place on a range of levels, intersecting at multiple points.

Identity and intersectionality

Phoenix and Pattynama’s (2006) thinking on intersectionality highlights subject positions as socially relational, making “visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it” (2006, p. 187). Since intersectionality acknowledges the importance of multiple connections and multiple identifications it proved a valuable perspective within the research, preventing a myopic perspective on issues of ‘race’ alone. In a dual approach many of those writing on intersectionality critique identity politics for the manner in which it has fragmented and essentialised understandings of identity. Intersectionality acknowledges the complexity of our identifications and encourages us to recognise the irreducibility of social positions. Identity must be considered *within* discourse and beyond definitions such as ethnicity, nationality and ‘race’ which have constantly produced over-simplistic metonyms.

The concept of intersectionality connects us to notions of commonality, sameness, difference and alterity; themes that have received less attention in relation to specific

material understandings of identity. We are, as Said outlines “mixed in with one another in ways that most national systems of education have not dreamed of. To match knowledge in the arts and sciences with these integrative realities, is I believe, the intellectual and cultural challenge of the moment” (Said, 1993, 1994 edition, p. 330).

Intersectionality has both its supporters and detractors, Judith Butler has mocked “the ‘etc.’ that often appears at the end of lists of social divisions” seeing it as “an embarrassed admission of a ‘sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself” (1990, p. 143). Butler also refers to the potential dangers that the lack of a universalist perspective might bring, fearing that instead of unity we risk illustrating only fragmentation.⁴ Maintaining an awareness of the dangers of reductionism may prevent us from breaking identity down too far, so that we lose sight of the fact that all identities are performatively produced in and through narratives that connect with concepts of belonging and integrative realities (Said, 1993, 1994 edition). Performativity demonstrates the manner in which normalised rules operate in identity categorisation and how our social reality is continually created (Butler, 1990a) through these rules.

However, a challenge in the use of intersectionality is to maintain that balance. A balanced engagement with intersectionality provides us with a better understanding of how the young schoolgirl above is black *and* Asian *and* Pakistani *and* Muslim *and* Kashmiri *and* a Bradford Schoolgirl. The question to ask should rather be what meaning and balance each of these categorisations holds once broken down as well as whilst collected within the identity of one individual? In this illustration the schoolgirl is continually relating her own sense of identity against that of those around her; as this group changes so too does her identity and we see evidence of “a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity” (Brah, 1996, p. 20). Tied in with this, Brah suggests that

There is something we ‘recognise’ in ourselves and in others which we call ‘me’ and ‘you’ and ‘them’. In other words, we are all constantly changing but this changing illusion is precisely what we see as real and concrete about ourselves and others. And this seeing is both a social and a psychological process. Identity then is an enigma which, by its very nature, defies a precise definition (1996, p. 20)

⁴ The need to consider a shared organising logic is expressed by Skeggs in Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006

One could therefore argue that identity itself is an elusive term, I would rather suggest that its elusiveness hangs upon our sense of identity constantly shifting and changing; from day to day, even minute to minute, always dependent on the context within which we are framed (Grossberg, 1993). Once we recognise this component, identity becomes considerably more accessible. Our sense of self-identity can never be truly resolved or completed since it is an ongoing process always dependent on time and circumstance (Chambers, 1994, p. 25). In a similar fashion, Hall has commented how identities have always

Come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves, into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (1990, p. 225)

It is therefore important that we talk not of defining a journey by roots, since roots has connotations of fixity or of an inevitable return to a secure, sure, even essential sense of ourselves, but that we talk about the routes that individuals take in their identity journey and how this relates to exploring a pluralistic concept of identity formation (Parker, 1995). The problem this raises is that identity has the potential to become meaningless due to the limitless number of categorisations upon which one can draw, as highlighted by Butler above. The move away from identity as a permanent or fixed entity towards fluidity must consider extremely carefully the different connections that are made as well as the value attributed to each of these. Recognising the methods by which such category choices are limited and prioritised is a consistent theme within the research, particularly since the narratives which are attributed with weight and meaning are rarely self-determined but negotiated through complex systems in defining a normalised identity *of* the nation as well as those *within* the nation.

So, whilst Hall stresses the role of the individual in identifying these temporary attachments or connections, he also affirms the existence of pressure from discourses and practices that place us into predetermined positions and categories; we shall see further how our identity will not always be that of our own choosing. There are, as Brah states, those who must "*name an identity*, no matter that this naming rendered invisible all the other identities – of gender, caste, religion, linguistic group, generation" (1996, p. 3). Equally, there are those for whom their identities are

named for them. They are subject to hyper-visibility (Thompson, 2005) with little consideration of Hall's caution not to homogenise wide ranging themes and content within identity; although he specifically considered this in relation to Blackness.

Unfortunately (fortunately?), it isn't possible within the research parameters to consider all of the possible fields of categorisation outlined by Brah and Hall. It is, however, vital to acknowledge that they provide us with entry points into gaining greater understanding of the identity choices that we may make. What is important is that it is the *processes* of identity formation that are considered. These must be contextualised with an understanding that one cannot move identity out of the social discursive sphere within which we are always placed, even whilst it is vital to acknowledge that this is in turn always changing. In the following sections I consider the different approaches and thinking that have accompanied identity theory. Within this I specifically pick up on those which continue to play a key role in cultural identity categorisations.

IDENTITY AND BLACK/ MINORITY ETHNIC ARTS: THE FIRST INTERSECTION

Considerable insight can be gained regarding the methods by which artistic and cultural production is shaped, specifically the discursive field from within which arts and creative based production takes place. Whilst culture may mean a "body of artistic and intellectual work of agreed value, along with the institutions which produce, disseminate and regulate it" (Eagleton, 2000, p. 21) we must also consider "under what social conditions does creativity become confined to music and poetry, while science, technology, politics, work and domesticity become drearily prosaic?" (Eagleton, *ibid*) Culture, in the *fullest* sense, provides a continual source of material in adjusting self definitions and analysing identities included or excluded within the nation. The presence of both of these fields of negotiation is therefore vital, exploring how culture was produced within the research subjects' daily lives, as well as how the participants engaged with cultural institutions and artistic production to produce culture in another way.

Moreover, cultural practice and production must be examined in relation to social and historical structures (Grossberg, 1992), and how they impact upon forming cultural identities. This position challenges much work by postcolonial critics who may be

removed from more direct engagement with social discourse.⁵ Much contemporary academic writing replaces “considerations concerning the mechanics of political organisation with an array of politicised statements, either identitarian or generated as corollaries of idealist theoretical axioms, as a compensatory form of engagement” (Shapiro, 2006, p. 1). If we are to respond to this then we, as researchers, must clearly position research within social, political and cultural discourses that are blatantly dialogic.

The relationship between the social and cultural is therefore an important one, since there is neither society without culture nor vice versa (Parekh, 2000). We are, as Hall outlines, “always in context – positioned” (1990, p. 222). We all write and speak from a particular space or place and time, from a history and a culture that is specific to ourselves. If the fact that culture cannot exist in a social vacuum is our starting point we begin to see how, at least in the abstract, culture can provide intelligibility and unity for the most diverse group of political debates, policy initiatives and social interventions about minority-hood and multicultural policy (Bhatt, 2006). Equally, however, on a macro level it is important not to decontextualise the migrant “out of her socio-economic and historical situation” (Sharma, A., 1996, p. 18), for by doing so we loosen the framework holding individuals in positions that may not be of their own choosing. Accordingly, this must be balanced lest we fail to acknowledge the manner in which “culture reflects the constant production and reproduction of social meanings through relationships of power, located not only in the nation-state but also in households, neighbourhoods, workplaces” (Nagel, 2001, p. 255).

To comprehensively negotiate relationships between the social and cultural it is important to consider some of the framing conditions which have impacted upon art and culture perceived as alterior. Today, Arts Council England sees what it terms as ‘cultural diversity’⁶ at the heart of its strategies and programmes of activity. Decibel, an Arts Council England large-scale initiative closed in 2008 after having run, in various guises, for over 5 years, commencing in 2002. Yet, it was as late as 1975 that the researcher and cultural commentator Naseem Khan was first commissioned⁷ to investigate the state of the publically funded arts within the so-called immigrant communities of Britain and to put forward recommendations for their development.

⁵ This approach formed the basis for my research methodology, outlined in Chapter Two.

⁶ Although this term is currently under-going considerable negotiation, see <http://sustainedtheatre.org.uk/en/debate/view/115> (accessed August 2008) for one of the most recent explorations and discussions taking place within the subsidised arts sector.

⁷ By the Arts Council of Great Britain (as it then was), the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Community Relations Commission (as it then was)

The report and Khan's subsequent work were extremely influential on the arts sector, introducing concepts such as 'minority ethnic arts' and 'multicultural arts'. It engendered an industry of debate, discussion and policy documents intended to persuade minority ethnic communities that their claims to recognition were being taken seriously and in some measure to find financial resources to support them. In the early eighties the 'Minorities Arts Advisory Service' was established with the aim of becoming a conduit, an arm's length framework for liaison between ethnic minority artists, arts organisations and funding bodies. It received funding from the Arts Council nationally to establish a database of what was termed ethnic arts activity.

The main framework for implementation of the policies and strategies devised by the arts sector were the Regional Committee of the Arts Council, and the Community Arts Panels of the Regional Arts Associations.⁸ As a result, the work of 'ethnic minority' artists and organisations was not measured against aesthetic criteria, but against criteria of community empowerment and development. Khan herself, in the Arts Council England funded publication Navigating Difference (2006) comments

But where in the Arts Council's rigidly compartmentalised structure would these new arrivals fit? The immediate answer was to place them within the remit of the new Community Arts panel rather than the artform departments. The belief was that 'ethnic minority arts' were the province of the communities from which they had sprung and not of any wider significance. The concept that a British-based artist of ethnic minority origin might feature on the international scene was alien. (2006, p.20)

This was echoed by Mercer who highlighted how "notions of 'purity' in formalist accounts [of artistic practice] effectively detached art from its surrounding social and cultural context" (2005, p. 9). Right from the start, engagement with ethnic minority arts was seen as community rooted, and community routed, with little sense of how engagement might take place from an aesthetic or arts form perspective.

Alongside the Community Panel, the Carnival Committee was the only working group established by the Arts Council that supported an arts specific approach. Its role was to provide small amounts of financial support to mas camps preparing for the Notting Hill Carnival. Carnival was recognised by the Arts Council as a demonstrable aesthetic of Black culture. It fostered theatre, involved crafts, design and

⁸ The Arts Council of Great Britain underwent considerable change in the nineties and early 00s. Firstly, it split to become the Arts Councils of England, Scotland and Wales. Then, the independent Regional Arts Councils were merged with Arts Council England to form a single organisation.

construction. It also attracted large numbers of visitors and participants from a diversity of cultures, a feature which remains part of carnival today. It was seen as contributing towards the agenda of community politics and policing. There were interesting projects which exposed the complex matrix of theory and practice involved in the traditions of carnival.

Khan's report (1976), and the developments that ensued, received a mixed response from the communities it sought to empower. On the one hand, many groups pragmatically used the report as a reference in support of funding applications to the Arts Council or to the Regional Arts Boards. On the other, the report was greeted with disappointment and scepticism, and in some cases, outright hostility. Kwesi Owusu took particular issue with the language that appeared to be generated by the report

The ... report engendered its own concepts and vocabulary, which multiplied as time went by: 'ethnic arts', 'ethnic minority arts', 'non-British arts', 'new British arts', 'multi-ethnic arts', 'multi-cultural arts' and so on and on. By funding bodies and others who latched on to this new vocabulary, these terms were used arbitrarily and with considerable confusion.... their use defined and described Black and other immigrant arts not in their own terms, but in terms of their subordination to the dominant British culture. (1986, p.50)

It was not Khan's intention to create a self-fulfilling ghetto for the arts communities she sought to champion (see Khan, 2006). However, there is no doubt that the labelling of the arts as minority and ethnic was more than just a matter of language, particularly in the use made of these labels – wittingly or unwittingly – by the arts establishment and funding bodies ever since. Attempts have been made to change the labels – with multiculturalism and cultural diversity just two of the most recent variations.⁹

Progress was slow. In 1984-5, for instance, only 0.03% of the Arts Council's music budget and 0.8% of its drama budget went on 'Black Arts'. A quota approach seeking funding allocations of 4% to match the demography of the time was instigated by Council member, Usha Prashar. Unfortunately this failed to address the key issues and was seen to encourage tokenism and short term thinking. It also failed to consider questions that are still relevant today such as is art always ethnically tied or does it transcend 'race'; and is 'Black arts' anything created by a

⁹ Other variants that I have encountered within the arts sector include BAME - Black, Asian Minority Ethnic and the ridiculous BAMER - Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee.

Black person, some of these questions also contribute towards the thesis framework. It is appropriate then, to consider the term black in more detail here.

Black

Theorists have constantly challenged definitions that appear fixed in time, rarely re-negotiated or re-constructed. One such definition that has continued to evolve – being both fixed and unfixed - has been what Hall has termed the ‘essential black subject’. The term black has been utilised as a collective term working in opposition to white racism, Hall considered it to have served the purpose of “referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions, and ethnic identities” (Hall, 1996, p. 441).

In terms of anti-racist struggles, allegiance to an inclusive notion of black politics was useful in highlighting (du Bois, 1999; Mercer, 1990; Sivanandan, 1990) and counteracting some forms of racism prevalent in British culture and society, a feature with which the Arts Council of Great Britain sought to connect. However, they also failed to see that a strategically essentialised identity could prove invaluable in creating a form of collective, political, group identity¹⁰ particularly when the underpinning issues, namely racism, remain prevalent in contemporary society.

The contents of the term have received considerable criticism as contestation took place over who might be included within the category black. Brah, in writing on this subject spoke of the term being claimed following its use by the Black Power movement in the USA. She drew on Mercer (1994) who argued that the sign black was drawn upon as a displacement for the categories ‘immigrant’ and ‘ethnic minority’ which were used in the sixties and seventies. Its use in the UK has been very different to that in the USA. This, however, did not prevent criticism, notably from Modood (1988) who argued that the black used in Black Power ideology was concerned with the experiences of people of sub-Saharan African descent and therefore empty of meaning for South Asians in the UK.

¹⁰ This point is one to which I will return in Chapter Three when considering how other essentialised identities are shaped and utilised in the construction of the nation.

Modood (1988) employed the term Asian alongside black, which he felt provided a greater connection with a sense of heritage than that proffered by the term black. By doing so, I argue that the questions that he subsequently left unanswered were what or who's heritage, what or whose history, what sense of Asia and to whom did this apply? These were questions that the Arts Council was also struggling with. Positioning such questions, and complicating simplistic responses, is of increasing rather than decreasing significance today. The dual use of 'Black and Asian' has received criticism and is not an expression that I will utilise within the research, as Owusu has written "Black refers to a political colour, while 'Asian' is a descriptive geographical category" (1986, p. 76), even whilst such terminology fails, for example, to acknowledge the history of Asian communities produced in the context of Eastern Africa.

Brah suggests that the term black does not have to be construed only in essentialist terms; that its use can change and as with all cultural processes "it can have different political and cultural meanings in different contexts" (1996, p. 98). Key to Brah's argument, and particularly relevant here, is that the term did not seek to deny cultural differences between African, Asian and Caribbean people but as Hall comments, to provide an "organizing category of a new politics of resistance" (Hall, 1996, p. 441). It worked on the basis of recognising experiences that were shared, sameness over difference. It is also important to acknowledge that the utilisation of collective organisation is frequently insufficient to gain understanding behind the social groupings that emerge as allies. This is particularly so when a wide range of social, economic and cultural affiliations are consolidated under one broad political category.

Historically, writers and cultural critics such as Sivanandan (1990) have written extensively on the role and importance of black as a collective category; stressing that "black was a political colour" (1990, p. 66) which "was finally broken down when government moneys were used to fund community projects" (1990, p. 67).¹¹ Brah similarly acknowledges such challenges, writing that "the replacement of black by some other politically neutral descriptor will not secure more equitable distribution of resources" (1996, p. 100). Rather, as Sivanandan has stressed

¹¹ Sivanandan is here referring to the growing segmentation of black communities as they sought funding for a range of government supported projects. Defining ever smaller groupings was seen as a way to prioritise one's funding application; an assumption perpetuated by the government's reaction and support of applications which involved increasing fragmentation.

On an ideological level a new battle was being mounted by the state against black struggles whereby they could be broken down into their ethnic and, through that, their class components. Ethnicity was a tool to blunt the edge of black struggle, to return black to its constituent parts of Afro-Caribbean, Asian, African, Irish ... ethnicity delinked black struggle (1990, p. 67)

Yet, for Sivanandan there was a very clear political, class, dimension to the breakdown of the political construction of the term black, not for the positive reasons that Hall (1989) had hoped or intended when he wrote about the end of the 'essential black subject', to see beyond homogenous perceptions. The breakdown of the term black was seen as a negative result of the greater fragmentation of communities as many groupings slowly but increasingly began to question the definition as inclusive. This has not changed, as Sivanandan more recently commented

my experience in the Black, anti-racist struggles of the '60s and '70s - when we made Black the colour of our politics and not the colour of our skins - when we fought on the factory floor and in the community, as a people and a class, and as a people for a class - tells me that only in being involved and supporting each other's struggles that we can forge an organic relationship between us, not just ad hoc coalitions. (2006)

It isn't possible within the confines of the research to pick up on the multi-layered systems of exclusion here. So for example, it would be interesting to consider differing relationships between culture, 'race' and other intersectional identity positions such as gender, (Tate, 2006) a feature somewhat neglected by Sivanandan, who focused rather specifically upon class. However, it is important to acknowledge their role in shaping the social terrain and its subsequent impact upon identity formation.

Butler, whose writings on gender identity have much in common with Hall's work on 'race' and ethnicity, outlines a number of areas for concern in the field of culture. She expresses how

the cultural focus of left politics has abandoned the materialist project of Marxism, that it fails to address questions of economic equity and redistribution, that it fails as well to situate culture in terms of a systematic understanding of social and economic modes of production; that the cultural focus of left politics has splintered the Left into identitarian sects, that we have lost a set of common ideals and goals, a sense of a common history, a common set of values, a common language and even an objective and universal mode of rationality; that the cultural focus of left politics substitutes a self-centred and trivial form of politics that focuses on transient events, practices and objects rather than offering a more robust, serious and comprehensive vision of the systematic interrelatedness of social and economic conditions (1998, p. 34)

What is particularly interesting, in relation to such writings, is the sense that a preoccupation with identity has led us to a politically debilitating fragmentation and social de-unification. Increasingly, identity politics are examined outside or external to the discursive cultural framework, a failing that I seek to address through a post-structuralist approach, with the consistent contextualisation of identity processes as positioned within and affected by the discursive realm.

Criticism of terms such as black or 'black and Asian' will unquestionably continue since, ultimately, the rationale for a collective organisational force is only as feasible as the people that buy into it. We continue to see both adoption and rejection of the terms and the research undertaken picks up on this to a limited degree. Theoretical research has frequently focused on complexities of the terminology; less criticism has been focused on the social discourse behind the terminology and the experiences of individuals as they select a range of, often porous, inter-laced identities.

Where black was drawn upon in direct opposition, as an organising, political term to whiteness, there was a clear and demonstrable role to which individuals could buy into – although this was never as simplistic as has been suggested. However as the content of black has shifted it has become a more complex signifier, neither operating as a collective category against forces of racism and marginalisation nor, in reality, providing a space for identity definition or cultural/ artistic expression. It is important, therefore, to contextualise understandings of the term black with that of white. Particularly since the focus of the research rests on the interplay and suturing by means of which identity positions are shaped.

White

As with all classifications, notions and understandings of whiteness have also shifted. In the landscape of contemporary Britain simplistic understandings of whiteness are themselves being challenged and complicated through European migration.¹² The focus has been on the concept of cultural integration, nationalism and belonging, with these themes increasingly prioritised within government policy. Finally, we are beginning to hear, following a considerable period of tacit silence, more of how whiteness has existed and continues to exist. This increasing sound (Back, 2007) highlights a growing challenge to the reification and hegemonic modality of

¹² This has particularly focused on the new European countries with much media attention and hype connected to economic migrants from these and also ascension countries.

whiteness. Consequently, through the deepening complexity of blackness alongside greater understandings of the intricacies that are found within whiteness, we see the terrain change as hegemonic monolithic versions of whiteness are undermined. Winant (2004) picks up on the challenges raised by more complex understandings

Whites continue to inherit the legacy of white supremacy ... But on the other hand, they are subject to the moral and political challenges posed to that inheritance by the partial but real successes of the black movement (and affiliated movements). These movements advanced a countertradition to white supremacy ... they did not destroy the deep structures of white privilege, but they did make counterclaims on behalf of the racially excluded and subordinated. As a result, white identities have been displaced and refigured: They are now contradictory (2004, p. 4)

Whilst the 'taken-for-granted rule of the system of white supremacy remained in place' (Winant, 2004, p. 4) "the fabric of the [du Bois'] veil was not ruptured" (ibid). However, it did mean that the increasing complexities of both blackness and whiteness produced ever greater challenges in promoting the notion of a gentle nationalism, one into which diasporic communities must assimilate (Billig, 1995). As a sense of whiteness as a monolithic entity is increasingly challenged,¹³ in part by growing complexity within blackness, understanding assimilation as a viable concept becomes ever more questionable. Into what are individuals and groupings to be assimilated when the nation is itself multi-dimensional? Indeed, we will see how, in Chapter Three we are drawn towards the notion of shared values as a modern day means by which inclusion, or exclusion, from the nation takes place. Whilst hegemonic processes are not easily visible, there is constancy in the dominant narrative to which we are referred, and to which we 'perform', as the desire to maintain a certain social order underpins hegemonic processes.

Although we see increasing evidence of complexity, and intricacies are further drawn out, the opposite positions of blackness and whiteness continue to operate as framing paradigms. The term black is incessantly positioned so as to operate as a politically challenging 'other' to whiteness, its existence seen to produce a binary position (Derrida, 1981). The problem therefore is that whilst understandings of blackness and whiteness are seen to be diverse and complex they remained rooted in their opposition to each other.

¹³ This perspective was expressed by Saeed, Blain & Forbes (1999) who, when writing on Scottishness, commented that in the late nineties, Scottishness along with Welshness became a more visible identity and category, "contesting the space denied by Britishness, through the deployment of all these terms within the public sphere" (1999, p. 823). They reviewed the contradictions that such complexity has involved including "in English usage, a conflation of 'English' and 'British' senses which has led to discursive inconsistencies in characterizing the cultures implicated" (ibid).

Hall was quick to stress that the language of binary oppositions and substitutions could no longer suffice. His idea of the 'black experience' acknowledged a new politics of resistance and a critique of the way in which black people were positioned as the homogenous 'other'; irrespective of their diverse histories, traditions, and identities (Hall, 1992a). West similarly picked up on some of the representational challenges facing the black diaspora commenting how

the modern Black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness can be understood as the condition of relative lack of Black power to present themselves to themselves and others as complex human beings, and thereby to contest the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by White supremacist ideologies (1993, p. 261)

The challenge, set out by Hall earlier, was to see beyond – to see an end – to the essential black subject. West similarly highlights the need for complex representations in order to specifically challenge 'white supremacist ideologies'. The danger is that in breaking down essentialism in a way that forces the refutation of singular, collective identifications, we risk dismantling only those facets of identity which have previously provided powerless individuals with a sense of group and social belonging. It is the identity positions that provide individuals and groupings with strength or force, as demonstrated by Sivanandan with the use of the political category black, that are broken down rather than social identities that constrain and contain. It is therefore vital that identity is destabilised or deconstructed more widely than only understandings of what black is to have stood for.

De/constructing 'race'

Gaining greater understanding of how the fields of ethnicity and 'race' engage in the construction of identity is a subject that has occupied much thinking. Since an overview of these fields could more than consume the research, my focus is upon the inter-play between notions of ethnic and 'racial' identity, as well as how this impacts upon processes of cultural production. It is important to clearly position and recognise the parameters of the terms ethnicity and 'race,' acknowledging them as socially constructed (Bhatt, 2006; Gilroy, 2004), performative (Butler, 1990b) and inter-dependent.

Ethnic and racial identities are spoken of as real¹⁴ even whilst they are written about as myths or social constructs (Abizadeh, 2001; Ali, 2003; Alexander, 2000; Banton, 1997; Billig, 1995; Brah, 1996 as merely a starting point) regarding which the only consistent factor is their continual adaptation and change (Billington et al., 1991). Recognising both the role played by ethnic and racial identities as well as their level of constructedness is central to the research approach. Whilst the fields of ethnicity and nationality have been closely inter-linked it is important to acknowledge, as Hall outlines, the need to split the “notion of ethnicity between on the one hand the dominant notion which connects it to nation and ‘race’ and on the other hand what I think is the beginning of a positive conception of the ethnicity of the margins of the periphery” (1988, p. 29). Regarding this relationship, Hall outlines that ethnicity was relabelled – and reconstructed - in order to support a racist argument that had been shifted away from failing biological arguments of innate difference to cultural racisms.¹⁵ However, Hall stressed that this should not allow us to “permit the term to be permanently colonised” (1992, p. 257) but that we must constantly contest it “from its position in the discourse of ‘multi-culturalism’” (ibid).

Recent debates surrounding ‘race’ have been particularly focused upon those who argue that the time is now right to move beyond ‘race’ (Gilroy, 2004) and those who argue the need to re-negotiate what ‘race’ stands for in contemporary society (Saldanha, 2007; Winant, 2004).¹⁶ However, for St Louis (2002), positioning ‘race’ as a social construction provides neither a descriptive framework nor positions it beyond political challenge, partly due to the fact that the “non-biological, social constructionist and culturalist foundations of ‘race’ ... failed to prevent – and perhaps inadvertently even enabled and legitimated – the emergence of novel discourses of cultural difference and their progeny of ‘cultural racism’” (2002, p. 653).

Ethnic and racial constructions are central to debates surrounding political differences, including the suggestion that human values are shaped through cultural

¹⁴ Ethnicity definitions were defined within the UK Race Relations Act of 1976 as when a ‘racial group’ was considered to be part of a group of persons defined by reference to colour, ‘race’, nationality or ethnic or national origin.

¹⁵ Although, theorists such as Saldanha (2007) argue that we must also consider the notion of ‘new materialism’ which, whilst acknowledging the materiality of phenotypical variation, does not see this as limiting or curtailing in any way, thereby enabling a challenge to discrimination on the basis of phenotypical traits.

¹⁶ Winant re-visits du Bois’ writing on the veil, commenting that in a time when “both race and racism are simultaneously acknowledged and denied, the figure of the veil can prove useful once more. The deep dialectic of race and racism must be affirmed against those who consider these themes anachronistic or wish to “get over” them” (2004, p. 14). Winant considered du Bois to be searching for a means to transform the veil, namely a way to preserve some of the differences it demarcated but not the status distinctions it built.

difference (Hill-Collins, 2002). Particularly since “ideas, cultures and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power also being studied” (Said, 1995, p. 89). Brah (1996) stressed the importance of power relations in how one is viewed and rightly positioned power as operational within both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic groupings. The agenda to which it works are not singular. For Brah, cultural clash was as much a sign of power operational within culture as the shape of cultural interaction.

Whilst the influence of power relations is certainly multi-faceted, a key signifier is the manner in which value is attributed and how judgements and positions within a hierarchy are constructed. Maynard examines the complexities of difference and the manner in which it can be both positive and detrimental in offering an explanation towards the hierarchialisation of culture. Highlighting that it is in “the assigning of value to difference which is then used to justify denigration and aggression and not in difference per se” (Maynard, 1994, p. 19). We consequently witness the existence of an undoubtedly strategic manufactured hierarchy that operates within a clearly constructed social, environmental and cultural framework, here there are many ‘ethnic groups’ but only a few are made to matter and for very different reasons.

Part of the consequence of terminology that acknowledges the porosity of identity is that it challenges a considerable amount of identity theory. In considering this, Parker and Song, for example, question how we can “conceive of ‘mixed race’ without reifying ‘race’?” (2001, p. 2) Such explorations of the linguistic terrain within which we operate expose indisputable hazards. As Nayak outlines “I want to underline, then, as many other race and ethnic scholars have done before me, a remark that is as tiresome as it is pivotal: there is no such thing as race” (2006, p. 411). I also acknowledge, as Nayak does before me, that

If race is an arbitrary sign used to divide up the human population, why do social constructionists continue to deploy the term at the same time as they refute its existence? If race is an empty category that holds no value what does it mean to be writing, researching and conducting ethnography in the name of race? (2006, p. 411)

The problem remains that whilst Gilroy (2004) may write about us all being ‘post-race’, there is no doubt that in this country, as is the case globally, ‘race’ is one way by which difference and sameness are decided and racism continues to exist. In 1903, Du Bois famously foretold, “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line” (1999). Echoing Du Bois, Hall has claimed that ‘the capacity to live

with difference is, in my view, the coming question of the twenty first century' (1993, p. 361).

What ontological framework am I therefore to work within? If I am to consider terms that are seen to apply to those of us who are 'othered' how am I to operate without fixing the other? Nayak (2006) stresses the usefulness of social constructivism in challenging understandings of identity categorisations. Consequently, the research approach focuses upon the tensions that exist within and between identities as we work through individual and group narratives, the terminology that surrounds them and how they influence and are themselves influenced by the social and cultural framework.

In this respect, I need to constantly re-negotiate existing ontology surrounding identity theory which forces us into the position of having to fix definitions in order to challenge them, rather than destabilising this framework. Recognising the dialogic relationship between identity and the social and cultural framework is central to understanding existing constructions. This is particularly so since fixing definitions and terminology in order to challenge them takes us into the dangerous territory of essentialism, of binary positions. It is therefore unsurprising that theorists such as Spivak (1990) and Said (1978; 1993) stress the importance of refuting 'fixed' positions or origins. As Spivak comments

I think it is important for people not to feel rooted in one place. Wherever I am I feel I'm on the run in some way ... one needs to be suspicious and against simple notions of identity which overlap neatly with language or location ... deeply suspicious of any determinist or positivist definition of identity. (1990, p. 8)

The research must therefore work with such a suspicion of terminology. Vitally, one needs to ensure that being deeply suspicious includes being widely suspicious. Whiteness, as Sharma (2006) writes might be everywhere but it must still be included. Refusing to fix does not only apply to those categorised as marginalised or powerless, it must be an inclusive suspicion that equally encompasses those perceived as central or powerful.

The challenge lies in opening out the debates surrounding identity so that all are seen to constantly reproduce themselves anew; having a porous identity. Rarely, however, does this happen. Those who are considered to belong to marginalised groupings are perceived as being unable to control the manner in which they are

represented; a factor rarely applied to all groupings. Powerless or marginalised groupings are frequently shown as overly simplistic in the form of stereotypes (Bhabha, 1994), as not being integrated within the national identity, or seen as the exotic other (Said, 1978). As Virdee, Kyriakides and Modood have commented “the interest is not just in the character of racialisation, but also on the negotiation of identities as a defensive strategy against a perceived sense of exclusion” (2006, p. 21).

Furthermore, in responding to the lack of progress that it was making in accessing black communities, Arts Council England set up a dedicated Access Unit that covered a number of thematic areas.¹⁷ A significant shift did occur as artists began to engage in debates and practices that challenged existing notions of artistic representation. Central to this was the work of the BLK Art Group established by Eddie Chambers, Keith Piper, Donald Rodney and Marlene Smith in 1982.¹⁸ Chambers work also led to the creation of the African and Asian Visual Artists' Archive (AAVAA) in 1989, which he co-ordinated until 1992. At the time this was the only dedicated archive in the country, it remains the only dedicated Black *visual* arts archive documenting the history and work of British-based Black artists.

Hall highlights how it has tended to be only the diaspora experience which is defined “not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (1990, p. 235). Individuals perceived as being holders of a diasporic identity are not seen to conform to what is represented as the powerful majority; even whilst closer examination inevitably reveals that nation-states rarely house simple national identities of ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1989) with none of this impervious to change and adaptation.

We have, in some ways, moved past the time when the arts sector sought to entirely impose its own definitions on the practice of artists from all cultures. In 2002 Leon

¹⁷ This resulted in some significant changes, the proportion of the visual arts budget for example increased from 0.03% to 15.6% over ten years, in drama it was raised from 0.8% to 2.5% in 1994-5; and in music from 0.03 % to 1.4%.

¹⁸ Chambers went on to establish the African and Asian Visual Artists' Archive, a Black artists' research and reference facility

Wainwright¹⁹ compiled a bibliography recording these debates for a website, and offered the following overview

The decade of the 1980s was a special and defining period of art practice for many artists of the African, Asian and Caribbean diasporas in Britain. An understanding of more recent visual culture and diaspora in this country might be framed by the art, events and issues of that decade. Key debates characterising the 1980s include those of patronage and public 'visibility'; the politics of historiography and art criticism; diverse visual practices; cultural difference and identity politics; and exhibition and display. Even a small cross-section of the literature offers a sense of the period's extraordinary diversity in visual technologies and processes, gendered and sexualised positions, and the role of ethnicity and 'race' in contemporary art making.²⁰

Wainwright highlighted how contemporary debates on art and identity had been galvanised around modes of representation as a formative element in the social construction of 'difference'. This theme was picked up by Mercer (2005) who questioned whether the "heightened 'visibility' of black and minority artists in private galleries and public museums really mean that the historical problem of 'invisibility' is now a problem solved and dealt with?" (2005, p.8) The problem, Mercer outlined, was that whilst one could argue that a lack of visibility was being addressed through what he termed blockbuster exhibitions these rarely portrayed the *fine art* traditions of countries that experienced colonialism and imperialism.

Even so, considerable change did occur. For Hall the eighties demonstrated a period where a shift from the 'representation of politics' to the 'politics of representation' took place. Of this, Mercer commented

If the former [the 'representation of politics'] was influenced by politically-driven discourses and galvanised by the injustices of institutional racism, the latter [the 'politics of representation'] took up a more semiotically inflected interrogation of the media construction of the black body ... What emerged were innovative artistic practices in which the political was inextricably embedded in the aesthetic and which firmly grasped a new language of artistic agency. (2008, p.197)

Chambers, like Mercer, also noted the growing visibility of Black artists in the eighties and early nineties but cautioned against any hopes that this could mean growing credibility or reputation. Rather, he felt that the 'real motives' lay "somewhere between political expediency and liberal posturing." (1999, p.55)

¹⁹ A researcher at the University of Middlesex

²⁰ Leon Wainwright (2002), "Introduction to Contemporary British Art of Black and Asian Diasporas: focus on the 1980s", University of Middlesex (www.glaadh.ac.uk/documents/wainwright_bibliog.htm) accessed June 2006

Part of the challenge lay in presenting multiple histories across the art forms. For Mercer (2005) this was constrained by drastically uneven patterns in the production of knowledge, with a focus upon immediate histories and minimal awareness of longer term complex histories. Problematically, this was also accompanied by a focus on particular contemporary art forms, such as photography and video/ film. Mercer quotes Mackey (1993) commenting

Conversely, the interest in colonial history explored by contemporary artists and theorists alike has generated considerable interdisciplinary insight and yet the prevalent tendency to roam across the cultural sphere at large – taking in literature, film, photography and popular culture – has left the specific realm of the fine arts relatively untouched, especially as regards the lives and works of non-western and minority artists” (2006, p.8)

An engagement with culture provided a wider paradigm for critical research, yet was itself limited to specific art forms more immediately accessible and engaged. In part this was seen to be due to the issues outlined by Chambers, who in a number of articles (Chambers, 1999) set out the argument that so long as mainstream arts institutions²¹ remained in ‘white hands’ they could not serve the interests of Black artists (1999).

Papastergiadis (1997) also picked up on the very different approach that had been taken by the arts sector in comparison to the advances made by artists themselves, such as the steps taken by the BLK Art Group. Papastergiadis commented that whilst “the critical discourse in the visual arts has been slow to address the questions of identity and belonging, the practice of many artists has taken many radical trajectories and created complex hybrid forms” (1996, p.10). This multi-faceted or alternative approach had not been paralleled within the mainstream, subsidised, arts institutions. “In a system that demands that somebody be clearly *either* black *or* white *or* Asian, for example, stories that feature the nature of multiple subjectivity seldom get told” (Mercer, 2006, p.139).

This contrasted with Chambers perspective who wrote that the “cornerstone of Black creativity should always be the Black community” (1999, p. 175). Problematically, such a perspective narrowed possibilities of engagement and suggested that aesthetics are guided and constrained by ethnicity. This focus competes with any intervention that recognising multiple identities might play, as Gilane Tawadros sets

²¹ Chambers included within this, exhibitions held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery and ICA, in addition to work carried out by National Touring Exhibitions (1999).

out, “the recognition of multiple identities has helped skewer the double binds of minority/ majority discourse, thereby unpacking the black artist’s burden of having to be a representative – a process which has brought to light the sheer diversity of black identities previously expressed in cultural nationalisms” (2004, p. 165).

This is vital if we are to challenge the foundations upon which the criteria for artistic othering occurs. As Mackey outlines, artistic “othering has to do with innovation, invention, and change, upon which cultural health and diversity depend and thrive. Social othering has to do with power, exclusion and privilege, the centralizing of a norm against which otherness is measured, meted out, marginalized” (1993, p.265). Consequently, a process of widening engagement that re-visits what we define as artistic and how we engage creatively enables more fluid interventions. This thinking has been outlined by the perspective of cultural commentators such as Ranjit Sondhi who comments

This particular debate, in the words of Duncan Cameron, an academic who wrote in the 1970s about the changing role of museums, is between two distinct stances – the traditional one of the arts as a temple, and a newer one of the arts as a *forum*. As temple, art plays a 'timeless and universal function involving the use of a structured sample of reality, not just a reference but as an objective model against which to compare individual perceptions'. In contrast, as forum, art is a place for 'confrontation, experimentation, and debate' (2006: 38).

IDENTITY, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE: THE SECOND INTERSECTION

In the following section I will consider how identity positioning and categorisation is impacted by the intersection between culture and community. If the nation-state houses complex, multi-faceted, identities what challenges might be posited by means of alterity and differently performed identity choices which challenge existing modalities? Caglar has written how centralised, supposedly normative assumptions regarding culture, are challenged by individuals who draw in the complexities and tensions contained within identity categorisations. For Caglar, they “highlight the inadequacy of commonsense assumptions about culture as a self-contained, bounded and unified construct” (1997b, p. 169). The many layers found within this relationship are central to the research. In an assessment of what she terms ‘multilocal cultural formations’, Caglar calls for a fresh look at what, exactly, is

meant by culture.²² She expresses concern regarding the manner in which an anthropological use of culture has, despite its anti-essentialist intentions, suggestions of culture as attached to 'race' and culture as frozen, rather than as Trinh suggests drawing upon the identity as "not so much a core as a process" (1989a, p. 72).

Caglar clarifies her call for a new theorising of culture as fluid, by stressing that we must also 'evolve effective methodologies' (1997, p. 170) that will enable worthwhile research within diverse contexts. For those seeking identification and congruence within contemporary understandings of collective identity and shared culture there is a genuine need to acknowledge points of identity (Grossberg, 1993) as not being founded upon fully formed and closed narratives. As Hall (1988) stresses, there is a need for a politics of articulation, a space where identity can be negotiated as an on-going never to be completed process, which is never absolute or closed. So, any definition of cultural identity is dependent upon the cultural context and inter-relationships. Such "anti-essentialising moves equally call for a reconceptualization of community: a shift from the idea of inherited or imposed authority and towards the principles of difference and dialogue" (Gilroy, 1987, p. 5).

Whilst the politics of representation surrounding subjects shift what rarely changes are the facets of identity which are made to matter. Consequently, there is always pressure within the existing social relations, being internal or external to the nation. Even so, challenging existing definitions of identity and ethnicity pushes at what are ultimately manufactured parameters, although this rarely questions larger notions of community and the lack of identification with notions of Englishness or Britishness for many individuals.²³

Reconceptualising community

The reconceptualisation of community is raised by Alleyne (2002) when challenging the community as doxa. Alleyne considers the concept of community problematic when working with cultural identity and narratives of community groupings. He comments that community as "doxa has the effect of normalizing, even naturalizing

²² Within the research I draw on UNESCO's definition of culture as the "set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group", which includes "art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs." Website at http://www3.unesco.org/iycp/uk/uk_tb_national_articles.asp?CodeContact=24857 accessed November 2003

²³ See also Virdee, Kyriakides, and Modood, 2006 for an interesting perspective on engaging with Scottishness

something which should be objectified and accounted for sociologically, that is, the social fact that people tend to cluster around specific identities” (2002, p. 607). These clusters are conveniently termed communities, although Alleyne clarifies this stating that community may be “a term which is impossible to define with any precision” (2002, p. 608). Hall similarly asserts the need to analyse what is meant by community, and how the different communities which compose the nation actually interact (2000, p. 231-232). Discourse surrounding the concept of community has the potential to

totalize people into ‘communities’, and serve to reinforce historically and theoretically untenable notions of immutable difference between things unreflexively and ahistorically imagined as ‘cultures’, ‘communities’, ‘ethnic groups’ and ‘races’. Far from being a self-evident term, community has a history, and by implication a range of connotation. (Alleyne, 2002, p. 609)

Alleyne’s thinking is significant in recognising the need to challenge many of the current discourses in relation to cultural difference as homologous to community. Vitally, if notions of community are understood as normalised, even naturalised, the challenges in combating prescribed cultural difference, as played out in community difference are heightened. With community perceived as providing normative systems of segregation, culture is simplistically categorised, as value is placed on the supposed norms of difference across culture and community.

Similarly, in re-imagining communities, Ahmed and Fortier (2003) question to what we appeal when we refer to community. Highlighting that to ask “such questions at this present moment is to make clear that the word ‘community’ does not itself secure a common ground, for such questions suggest, by their very nature as questions, that community itself is ‘in question’” (2003, p. 251). They highlight that whilst community may appear to embody a universality that resists liberal individualism or defensive nationalism through use of a ‘we’, it might also be premised upon the notion of commonality, through ‘shared allegiance to systems of belief’ (ibid).

Crucial to the research therefore, is how we work with notions of – collective - belonging without its reification (Alleyne, 2002). Those who challenge the imperviousness of identity can play a key role in questioning specific concepts associated with community. These are concepts such as boundaries and boundedness; displacing prescribed identity as well as the identity positions perceived as centralised. Understandings of the imagined community have specifically been applied to that contained within the nation state consequently, in the

following section I will consider paradigms of nation in relation to questions of identity and community.

Socio-cultural boundary formations

Is it possible today, to talk of identity representation and meaning as being porous, particularly when a highly specific collective identification with the nation's cultural identity has been used as a barometer of the nation's 'health'? Specific lifestyles and shared values have been perceived as symbolic of one's belonging; an indicator that one is part of the so called 'norm' or status quo. One's cultural identity, or the cultural identity attributed to one's lifestyle, is a constant reminder of those who are seen to 'belong' and those who must work to identify themselves as part of the nation, as 'British'.

Whilst being British is repeatedly associated with being a 'tolerant nation' we are continually subject to lines being drawn that demarcate who can and can't belong²⁴ to the collective identity. It is important to contextualise notions of tolerance as most frequently referenced by those operating within institutions of power. Levels of tolerance are assessed as dependent upon the existing social relations and systems in place at any given period of time. There is always a "politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'" (Hall, 1990, p. 226), one's status and place within such cultural positioning is rarely of our own undertaking.

Lewis (2005) also recognises that the ontological acknowledgement of notions of tolerance position us into a hierarchical framework, or axes of power, whereby the positions of 'majority/normative/ tolerator and minority/ deviant/ tolerated' (2005, p. 540) are instituted. The very concept of tolerance thereby creates a series of binary divisions where a process of identifying not only that which is to be tolerated but equally those who are tolerant is established.

This notion is not stable. A historical example of how the other may shift and change is that of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor who lived during the late nineteenth century, and died in 1912. During his lifetime, Taylor was admired by peers such as Parry and Elgar who also commissioned him to produce work. He wrote the well-known

²⁴ For a fascinating but also disturbing journey into far right thinking on this subject visit <http://www.amnation.com/vfr/archives/005468.html>, accessed June 2007

cantata, Hiawatha's Wedding Feast yet, today, little is known about him and his music is rarely heard. A published article²⁵ questioned how a black composer was so feted by the white British musical establishment, commenting "one suggestion is that SCT was hardly regarded as a threat to a white Anglo-Saxon establishment that was more likely at the time to be anti-Semitic or anti-Catholic than anti-black. Indeed some have suggested that SCT may have been regarded as a novelty and that this may have helped his career".²⁶

This example particularly highlights the importance of prevailing social relations at any given time. Existing prejudices such as anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism were far more prevalent than the contemporary racisms evident today. However, it also highlights how many communities have, at any one time, been seen as 'a threat to a white Anglo-Saxon establishment' (ibid) whilst also confirming that changing attitudes towards Muslims, since 9/11 and 7/7, should come as no surprise as perceptions and the supposed substance of ethnic groupings continually shift and change. As Gilroy affirms, racism never moves "tidily and unchanged through time and history. It assumes new forms and articulates new antagonisms in different situations" (1987, p. 11). Today religion is perceived as standing at the vanguard of the interface of cultural difference and belonging and one can be tolerated or condemned depending on the position one takes in relation to questions of faith. However, this is not an area that I will explore in any depth due to the research limitations.

We begin to see how a framework is created through which we can begin to shape the interface of cultural difference. We see evidence of how particular tools have been utilised to define and contain belonging; ethnicity - and 'race' - have been key to this process particularly since "ethnicity is best understood as a mode of narrativising the everyday life world in and through processes of boundary formation" (Brah, 1996, p. 241). We therefore see how "the cultural traits so selected provide for the creation and maintenance of a socio-cultural boundary vis-à-vis other ethnic groups with whom they interact" (Oommen, 1997, p. 36). Our experience is therefore that of social and cultural boundaries constructed as existing between ethnic groups, framed within an undoubtedly strategic manufactured hierarchy. We live our lives entrenched in camps - racial, national, cultural and religious (Gilroy, 2000).

²⁵ In The Guardian, 3rd January 2003, page 5

²⁶ op cit, page 5

Culture, government and power

One particular regulatory tool which is helpful in identifying the manner in which culture and society have a symbiotic relationship in their production is that of governmentality. This concept frames the governmental exercise of power and authority as anything but self-evident and stresses the need for considerable analytical resources in working through notions of government and state. In analysing this discourse and considering its impact upon the research subjects, the position that I will utilise is Foucault's concept of biopolitics; politics that concerns the administration of life (Lemke, 2001), specifically in relation to cultural life.

In a review of Foucault's lecture on neo-liberal governmentality, Lemke outlines the semantic linking of governing to modes of thought, stressing that it isn't possible to study the apparatus of power and governance without an understanding of the rationality that underpins them; I argue that a corresponding situation plays out from a cultural perspective. Lemke points us towards two perspectives. Firstly, that of representation, the production of a space or discursive field within which the exercise of power and the rules of governance are rationalised. For Lemke this occurs through the "delineation of concepts, the specification of objects and borders, the provision of arguments and justifications" (2001, p. 191). Regarding this he comments that the government may put forward certain strategies for handling or solving a problem. Lemke's second perspective concerns forms of government intervention. He highlights how political and I would argue cultural, rationality does not operate upon a nonaligned basis but represents knowledge from the paradigm of those in power. These fields are utilised within my research since they are methods that enable the production of subjects and the governance of objects within a political rationality. They are therefore constructive in understanding how the research subjects were framed and the impact that this had upon their cultural identity.

Significantly, then, the notion of governmentality is also present within the cultural infra-structure. Within the arts and creative sectors there is evidence of decision making processes although these are themselves highly subjective. By means of the two case studies I sought to illustrate the extent to which culture is shaped and contained within a supposedly 'common fold', even whilst so called cross-cultural encounters are historically so prevalent as to make the self-contained, enclosed culture an anomaly, as Bhabha wrote translation "denies the essentialism of a prior given or ordinary culture" (1990, p. 211).

The inter-relationship between cultural hegemony and political rationality, including notions of governmentality, (Lemke, 2001; Larner & Walters, 2004) have been picked up as operational features defining subjects of the state. For theorists such as Friedman (1994) the creation of specific forms of culture which are carefully contextualised and positioned is central in contributing towards the creation of particular subjects. He emphasises how “in global systemic terms, invention and cultural mix are quite irrelevant problems. All cultural creation is motivated. And the motives lie within the contemporary existences of creating subjects. Invention is thus grounded in historical conditions and necessarily in a social and existential continuity” (1994, p. 12 - 13).

The important relationship between the social and cultural was similarly recognised by Parekh (2000) who rightly framed them as inseparable. Marx in writing on material production recognised that culture did not exist in a social vacuum but performed an ideological role of legitimising political modalities. The perpetuation of such a system leaves us in a compromised position, since

Despite the efforts by theorists of transnationalism to challenge ‘traditional’ analytical categories, conceptions of ethnicity and cultures as bounded, unitary entities contained within nation-states, remain largely intact. Until we grasp that culture reflects the constant production and reproduction of social meanings through relationships of power, located not only in the nation-state but also in households, neighborhoods, workplaces, a truly non-state-centric approach to the social sciences will remain an elusive goal. (Nagel, 2001, p. 255)

Nagel is right to acknowledge the diverse spaces within which power relations are played out, since the relationship between cultural *difference* and cultural *value* is significant when seeking to explain why some cultural differences are discounted whilst others play a key role in defining one’s position within society, inevitably determined by the powerful few ‘white men and their values’ (Bowles & Klein, 1983, p. 5).²⁷ It is only when Western rationality is itself questioned and no longer seen as absolute, objective or disinterested truth but as truth that is implicated in the maintenance of quite specific power relations that we shall begin to see the genuine destabilisation of contemporary identities.

Raymond Williams’ work was at the forefront of explorations tying notions of culture and power together. For Williams (1958), it was vital that culture be interpreted in

²⁷ Categorized here by Bowles and Klein but equally defined by many other theorists.

relation to its underlying system of production, he stressed that culture was a way of life, operating alongside what he termed 'high culture'. He also viewed the arts as part of a social organisation which were affected by economic change; a statement which reflected Williams' resistance to the idea of culture as superstructure. Williams expressed culture as existing in two senses

to mean a whole way of life - the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning - the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture are questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind. (2000, p. 5)

For Williams, culture was always political, that social processes addressed by political analysis were embedded within culture and could not be separated. Williams reversed the usual analysis so that rather than seeing culture as a specialist process, we see culture as a way of life, the very fabric of society within which we see evidence of the adjudicating role of the state and political hegemony.

Much of the writing on culture treats it as distinct from politics or indeed power. Culture is seen as something which operates as an external pressure, whilst pushing inwards it impinges on people's lives from the outside, rather than playing an integral role within its own production, consumption and representation. For Williams', who drew upon a Gramscian understanding of the nation, it was impossible to discuss culture without an accompanying discussion of power, which was in turn interlinked to established institutions.

Gilroy (1992; 1993) however, has criticised Williams' approach and perspective, specifically the naturalisation of Britishness with whiteness, a theme also picked up by Hall. He accuses Williams of an "apparent endorsement of the presuppositions of the new racism" (1992, p. 50) and even read Williams' perspective as sharing much with Enoch Powell, replicating the distinction between so called authentic and inauthentic types of national belonging. It isn't possible within the confines of the research to respond to Gilroy and others criticisms, see for example Nonini (1999), even though there have been numerous defences made of Williams. Although, it is notable to acknowledge a comment previously made by Williams (1983) who asked how many of those working within the field of cultural studies themselves are nationally and internationally mobile and therefore gradually loose sense of the rooted settlements from which many people derive their communal identities.

IDENTITY AS SEGMENTED

We have seen the manner in which identity categorisations are constructed and associated with simplistic understandings of highly complex themes such as community. Conversely, however, identity has been shown to be a continuing, complex process that throws up challenges in its very formation. Of the many collective definitions that have been categorised, collected and termed, Caglar has written

A number of concepts have come to be celebrated: 'hybrid', 'creolised', 'hyphenated' and 'diasporic' identities are the most prominent among them. These concepts aim to capture the complexity of the practices, cultural configurations, and identity formations of translocal and culturally nomadic groups and individuals. (1997, p. 171)

Simplistically, hyphens are applied to identities which don't appear to 'fit', Chambers suggests that hyphenated identities are those which prove "impermeable to the explanations we habitually employ" (1994, p. 3). Almost inevitably it is marginalised groupings to which such segmented identities are applied. Superficially, this approach would appear to enable individuals to decide for themselves the cultural signifiers and tracers that they choose to prioritise in defining their identity.

Yet, Modood has commented that there is a genuine need for Britain to embrace the notion of hyphenated identities in a similar manner to America, through 'hyphenated nationality.' He comments that this can be seen as "the claiming of an ethnic identity within the framework of a common nationality that is open to all forms of ethnic difference that do not challenge the over-arching bonds of nation and citizenship" (1992, p. 5). Within the research I shall highlight how notions such as nationality are *already* subject to self-defined identifications with categories and labels that move beyond single signifiers such as those of national identity. Trinh also picks up on this and comments that since "Britain is a plural society, it is, at least theoretically, possible for people to have hyphenated identities (as in the United States) such as Asian British or black British" (1991, p.13).²⁸

Contrastingly, however, Gilroy suggests that black people in Britain should refuse the use of a hyphen in drawing on an identification with black *and* British since Britishness should implicitly include the sense of 'and' now. For Gilroy

²⁸ Although, interestingly, Trinh leaves out the physical hyphen within these terms

It is possible to think about the nature of new political identities, which isn't founded on the notion of some absolute, integral self and which clearly can't arise from some fully closed narrative of the self. A politics which accepts the 'no necessary or essential correspondence' of anything with anything, and there has to be a politics of articulation – politics as a hegemonic project. (1987, p. 45)

However, I would argue that such - ethnic - self-identification is most often associated with an option *between* identities and is decreasingly concerned with opening out identity as porous; one is either British or – not. Prior to 9/11 and 7/7 the spaces for arguments that such a dichotomous model was simplistic and inaccurate were opening (Hutnyk, 1991), today however, they are closing. Whilst one could once have argued for the opening out of identity; that individuals might relate across so called majority and minority groups in contemporary society, the metaphorical and physical borders of the nation are ruthlessly policed.²⁹

Racialised identities have, in a similar manner to community, become increasingly intersected with national identities, perhaps picking up on the manner in which “race is one way by which the boundary is to be constructed between those who can and those who cannot belong to a particular construction of a collectivity or population” (Anthias, Yuval-Davis & Cain, 1992, p. 2). Lutz stresses that “the vast majority of the young people eschew racism and racialised exclusions, maintaining an egalitarian ideology to do with ‘race’, social class and gender which is particularly marked for those of mixed parentage” (1995, p. 30).

For Gilroy, “the characteristic outcome is a situation in which blackness appears as a kind of disqualification from membership of the national community” (1993, p. 64), although he argues that the national community is further compartmentalised and prescribed, since “the idea of an authentic cultural content of our national life is therefore constructed through an appeal to Englishness rather than Britishness” (1993, p. 75).

La Forest picks up on Gilroy's notion that British should now include black when she suggests that “against all odds, white Britons have at once caught on to the pluralist proposal. Even if tentatively accepting the Britishness of Blacks, they now define themselves as Anglo-Scot or Anglo-Welsh and thus manage once again to be at centre-stage, giving precedence to white hybridity and ignoring the colonial hybrids

²⁹ See for example the special edition of *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, May 2005

deriving from colonisation. The barriers of racism shift and mature to suit the needs of hegemony” (1996, p. 50).

As barriers of racism shift we unquestionably see the challenges associated in the tentative, limited acceptance of plurality within notions and understanding of the British nation and identity. Individual perceptions of identity are continuously complicated and challenged. However, on a fundamental level I would question the extent to which La Forest’s theory is played out in reality; it is the diasporic experience rather than that of the so-called centre which is continuously challenged. However, there still exists an ongoing dynamic between the signifying themes of margin and centre since these are not fixed paradigms.

Furthermore, I would question where any evidence exists of the growing use of multiple signifiers with identities such as Anglo-Scott or Anglo-Welsh, or a so called emerging ‘white hybridity’. Instead evidence highlighted that the majority identity remains relatively unchanged and continues without the need for any further clarification within its identity make up; some identities are seen to require no further elaboration. Rather, the very act of moving into the arena of multiple signifiers such as Anglo-Scott or Anglo-Welsh,³⁰ risks the suggestion that holders of what are perceived as majority identities, are part of a grouping that is neither pure nor essential. It sends out a message that majority identities might also involve porous, multiple categorisations; something that would question the existence of the imagined community which is both intrinsically connected and essential.

Lastly, I disagree that Black people are included within quintessential notions of Britishness. To a limited extent they are included within a particular contemporary understanding of what Britishness means today, something that is marked as being very clearly different to what Gilroy terms Britannia’s finest hours, a time “from which blacks are excluded” (1990, p. 76).

³⁰ Whilst the impact of complex migration is acknowledged the terms of reference undoubtedly differ. Although increased migration, such as that of European migration, does complicate ‘Anglo’ identity, this has not had a significant impact upon how ‘race’ is theorised. This may change, particularly given the attention upon migration from Eastern and ascension European countries, where it is harder to categorise individuals on the basis of phenotype alone.

Challenging binary positions

The following example illustrates how identity can be problematised; the utilisation of simplistic categories is not uniformly utilised. The DJ and producer Adrian 'Tricky' Thaws is an example of someone picking up on the complexities of identity and 'racial' or ethnic categorisations. Known for his dark underground hip hop music Tricky grew up in Bristol but describes himself as "American, Indian, white, Welsh, black, British, Jamaican, and African," thereby challenging the collectivity of existing representations within 'race' and ethnicity. As he comments

I grew up in a family where you never see one race of people. ... You see white people, you see people who ain't quite black, you see people who are very white, you see people who are very yellow. You know what I mean. We're mongrels, right? But you know when you take a litter of puppies, the mongrel is the most intelligent. A mutant. A mutant race, you know what I mean? (Anon, 1997, p. 2-3)

Saldanha's (2006) thinking on defending a materialist ontology of 'race' interestingly calls for more detailed reflection on the specific transcendence of 'race', such as that proffered by Gilroy. For Saldanha, the political fight against racism and racial subordination requires a serious engagement with its biological dimensions. So, rather than simply eliminate 'race' it should be engaged on terms that recognise heterogeneity, such as that evident in Tricky's perspective. The complexity of individual identity categorisation, particularly when explored alongside cultural creativity is evident in the expressions of a number of 'postcolonial migrants' who are cultural producers. Whilst producers such as Tricky might fundamentally question the dynamics and discourse within concepts of ethnicity, there were also producers who operated from within a binary perspective. In contemplating his identity, the artist Jazzie B saw black and Britain as co-existing, but side by side, "black Britain has all types of things to be proud of. I think I'm a bit of both really. I'm black and I'm definitely British, and that's what I am" (1998, p. 46).

The simplistic manner in which identity *can* be perceived raises its own challenges. The framework leads us into binarism and the subsequent regulation and categorisation of 'new identities' (Rutherford, 1990; Morelli, 1996). If we continue to add to definitions of Britishness are we not constantly re-affirming that these additions are not included within existing understandings of Britishness; that individuals require, for example, the existence of a hyphen to engage with any sense of being part of the nation?

The language of binary oppositions will therefore not suffice. Hall is not the only theorist to comment on the need for a new 'phase' in terms of an alteration in the 'burden of representation'. In considering how to move away from the dangers associated in fixing identity, Hall suggests that "the shift is best thought of in terms of a change from a struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself" (Hall, 1996, p. 442). This is not a new request. Theorists such as Du Bois (1999) and Fanon (1993) argued, for many years, against the logic of 'either – or', both expressed concern with binary understandings and constraints.

Throughout the research, there was a sense of cultures as more complex, of being far more plural an exchange than mere binary positions. In a similar response to Fanon and Du Bois' challenge, Trinh is equally definite that identity does not only involve "duality between two cultural heritages", more exactly she clarifies that identity allows and requires a more "radical ability to shuttle between frontiers and cut across ethnic allegiances while assuming a specific and contingent legacy" (1991, p. 159). She rightly stresses how all culture is plural and ventures into a multiplicity of cultural exchanges. Defining one's identity is, as with all identifications, a constantly shifting identity, a process rather than a core. Trinh acknowledges a level of fatigue in constantly being required to fight for one's multi-dimensionality, commenting how

After a while, one becomes tired of hearing concepts such as in-betweenness, border, hybridity, and so on. It's like the word 'difference,' it is so old a word and yet we keep on using it again and again in widely varied contexts of struggle. Diversity, identity, ethnicity. The more these terms are popularised, the more difficult the challenge we counter when we use them (1996, p. 10)

This raises a particular challenge; how to write about and consider subjects, representations, identifications and identity positions when the very language we utilise has developed its own boundaries and parameters. This concern is expressed by Trinh who writes "the immediate concern I had while addressing the question of marginality was how to avoid reproducing, in the writing itself, the same model of the centre-margin power relationship that has prevailed in the existing system of cultural and political representation." (1996, p. 9) In a similar manner Morelli stresses that cultures must also be "vigilant in the act of naming their Other in an unitary way, because the risk is that of freezing their own movement, name and identity, which leads to the danger of re-creating the conditions in which, once again, they are easily

compartmentalised by the dominant cultures” (Trinh, 1996, p. 15), a fear also expressed by Spivak (1988a).

Trinh’s response to Morelli was that this question could be seen “as a critique of the simplistic way marginalised groups, marginalised cultures, name the centralised cultures. Such a naming fixes the West in the same manner that the West has been fixing its others.” (Trinh, 1996, p. 15) Trinh’s comments highlight the importance, of continually problematising all simplistic notions of identity.

We therefore begin to see how identity can be involved in questioning existing representations and in particular challenging constraints and containment, as Trinh sets out

Working right at the limits of several categories and approaches means that one is neither entirely inside [n]or outside. One has to push one’s work as far as one can go: to the borderlines, where one never stops walking on the edges, incurring constantly the risk of falling off one side or the other side of the limit while undoing, redoing, modifying this limit. (1991a, p. 218)

‘Undoing, redoing, modifying this limit’ is an experience that is consistently expressed by those who are coerced into an understanding that they must translate *between* groups (Hall, 1967). For Trinh, the challenge of the hyphenated reality lies in the hyphen itself since it is within this space that dialogue occurs. She continues, “the self, like the way you produce, is not so much a core as a process, one finds oneself in the context of cultural hybridity, always pushing one’s questioning of oneself to the limit of what one is and what one is not” (1989a, p. 72).

The hyphen was therefore drawn upon as a space within which dialogue could occur in order to show the self not as a core but as a process. Yet, for Weeks,

Behind the quest for identity are different, and often conflicting values. By saying who we are, we are also striving to express what we are, what we believe and what we desire. The problem is that these beliefs, needs and desires are often patently in conflict not only between different communities but within individuals themselves (1990, p. 89)

There are numerous complexities within this, since identity is a process we may each, at any time, experience choices in relation to our identity, shifting the terrain from individual choice towards internal conflict moves us into a very different realm where we must consider ‘self’. Frequently, rather than focusing upon the choices

made or the complexities within them we appear continually subject to homogenous categorisations. These play the role of constantly re-positioning minority groupings within marginalised spaces, constantly having to negotiate 'in-betweenness' and conflict rather than deepening understanding of identity choices made.

The need to move away from repressive nationality and ethnicity specific categorisations of identity is highlighted by Caglar who writes that "hyphenation privileges nationality or territorialised religion over other identifications. Ethnic (national or religious) identities are treated as the most basic identities that people possess." (1997, p. 175) This moves us towards the notion that "a 'hyphenated' identity, instead of resolving cultural essentialism, tends thus to highlight the *problematic* nature of collective attachments" (ibid). Problematically, therefore, the use of the hyphen may be as guilty of insisting upon the notion of a priori communities and relying upon social identity constructions as have other definitions.

Culture is once more connected to ethnic identity and cultural difference perceived as an already existing difference between ethnic communities and groupings. Differences of culture are once again imagined to be homologous with differences between ethnic groupings. We experience again the homogenisation of identities. If identity is rooted within ethnicity the dangers of an essential category are easily drawn in, particularly if we fail to question the continuing use of binary terminology, as highlighted by Morelli and Trinh above. Benita Parry developed the complexity of this position when she commented how "an equivocation of the necessity of inscribing cultural identity before it can be transcended, of working through attachments in order to emerge beyond them ... between validating specific subjectivities and being implacably hostile to what is perceived as the essentialist claims to perpetuate holistic cultural traditions and a transcendent native self" (1987, p. 30).

Brissure and hybridity

The theme of seemingly contradicting pulls within cultures, attempts to disrupt or unfix boundaries and the processes of cultural translation necessitates further exploration. The fight by many artists, producers and cultural critics against existing boundaries and power relations competes with institutional attempts to maintain a sense of the nation and thus a national culture and identity. What we experience is a dual process in operation; what Derrida has termed, 'brissure' within and between

cultures, to connote “a breaking and a joining at the same time, in the same place: difference and sameness in an apparently impossible simultaneity” (Young, 1995, p. 26).

How then might what are perceived as conflicting modes co-habit and to what extent does such co-habitation impact upon existing cultures and boundaries? Hybridity has become a popular term in working through such so called border cultural processes within contemporary society, as Sharma sets out, “[b]order differences have been most readily conceived as expressive of cultural *hybridity* – the site of a dialogic mode of inter-subjectivity” (2006, p. 24). The emergence of hybridity has been closely tied in with what has been seen as greater cultural diversity within the nation state.

In contemporary society it has become increasingly possible to engage with what are considered multiple cultures, peoples and places. One of the means by which we experience this is through the mass media and the internet. Yet, none of us solely derives our knowledge about the world through the internet or mass media; our identities are always positioned within the local context and social landscape which we inhabit. It is within these parameters that we negotiate meaning, structure impressions and decide our identifications. Instead of explaining these contacts as the imposition of a major culture onto a minor culture or vice versa, hybridity has been seen to emphasise their mutual intermingling.

However, hybridity has also been seen as the bringing³¹ “together of any unlike living things” (Young, 1995, p. 23) to the point that it “begins to become the form of cultural difference itself, the jarrings of a differentiated culture whose ‘hybrid counter-energies’, in Said’s phrase, challenge the centred, dominant cultural norms with their unsettling perplexities generated out of their ‘disjunctive, liminal space’” (ibid). As a result, the processes that operate around hybridity are seemingly dual edged, both remaining ‘within itself’ and yet synthesising and mixing with ‘other’ different cultural forms; a route through which brisure or ‘difference and sameness’ have been claimed to co-exist.

³¹ Young uses the term forcing but I disagree that these connections are obliged to come together under protest, although a sense of being compelled to adjust and change is likely to be present.

For Bhabha a key indicator of hybridity, as a form of cultural translation, is that it can always be traced although he does not suggest that the route leads us back to an originary culture, or essential form, rather he highlights how

The importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of being anterior. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (1990, p. 211)

Therefore, whilst cultural hybridisation offers new forms to what are seen as previously non-existing fusions, there is always evidence of roots and routes, in so much as being able to locate the so called cultural hybrid back to what are frequently a cross section of cultural processes. Theorists have often drawn upon musical genre in examining hybrid formations. Rap, for example, was utilised by Gilroy (1994a) a music form he considered to be hybrid, “rooted in the syncretic social relations of the South Bronx where Jamaican sound system culture, transplanted during the 70’s put down new roots in conjunction with specific technological innovations and set in train a process that was to transform black America’s sense of itself and a large portion of the popular music industry as well” (1993a, p. 6).

For Chambers, recognising the intermesh of culturescapes within musical forms is an important part of acknowledging different cultural journeys whilst acknowledging commonality. He considers Soul II Soul’s music as highlighting “a history that is continually being decomposed and recomposed in the interlacing between what we have inherited and where we are” (1994, p. 15). He comments how “listening and moving to Soul II Soul, grooving to multiple histories configured in a combinatory sound mix, we recognise that we are all, with our often very different accounts, travelling between our particular inheritance and potentially common culturescapes.” (1994, p. 14).

However, as with much debate surrounding hybridity, we are conscious of the multiple histories residing within cultural formations such as music. This is reflected in the artist Jazzie B’s consciousness on his music style since he clearly sets this out, stressing that their music was an eclectic music of ‘Euro and Colonial’, “It really has the whole traces of European pop elements, laced with the very essence of roots

music, reggae background. ... I think it'd be very one dimensional to suggest that Soul II Soul is just a London thing. We're really more of a British thing." (1998, p. 46)

Hybridity as crossing difference

Hutnyk (2005) draws together a number of theorists writing on hybridity to position the complexity of the term.³² Gilroy, for example, draws on hybridity within the field of cultural production (1993, p. 33). For Hall, hybridity plays a larger role, transforming British cultural life (1995, p. 18), whilst Chambers refers to tradition being replaced by the language of hybridity (1994, p. 82). Hutnyk particularly picks up on the stance of Clifford who "uses the word to describe 'a discourse that is travelling or hybridising in new global conditions'" (2005, p. 80). He rightly identifies that "assertions of identity and difference are celebrated too quickly as resistance, in either the nostalgic form of 'traditional survivals' or mixed in a 'new world of hybrid forms'" (2005, p. 81). In part, this is because we are positioned to see cultural transformations not as ongoing cultural engagement but as indicating specific moments of cultural change, or breakdown, brought about through diasporic encounters. Such cultural transformations have been seen as representative of cultural hybridity, the site of a 'dialogic mode of inter-subjectivity' (Sharma, 2006, p. 24).

There is no doubt that the history of hybridity has been subject to an array of ideas relating to the formation of identity, innovations of language (Bakhtin, 1981), coded for creativity and translation and even as a feature of the cyborg (Haraway, 1997). Ultimately, Hutnyk, drawing on Chambers, acknowledges that the conventional and perhaps most helpful accounts assert hybridity as possessing multiple influences and the "process of cultural mixing where the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the host culture and rework, reform and reconfigure this in [the] production of a new hybrid culture or 'hybrid identities'" (2005, p. 81), a vital element of this being that "hybridity is better conceived as a process" (ibid). For Hutnyk this continuing reconfiguration, reminiscent of cultural hybridisation is going on everywhere including "through television and other media" (2005, p. 92). Since it is beyond the scope of the research to consider all cultural institutions operational within the nation, particular

³² Although for a more detailed overview of hybridity see also Young (1995), Papastergiadis (1995); Bhabha (1990); Parry (1994).

attention will be paid to those institutions with whom a dialogic process was possible.³³

Hybridity has not only been concerned with new or transformative cultural products, it has also been perceived as providing a means of resistance against a dominant cultural power. Werbner and Modood draw on Barthes (1973), Bourdieu (1984) and Bakhtin (1981) when they comment how “modernist hybridity theory looked to sites of resistance and exclusion” (1997, p. 2). They suggest that hybrid moments, sites and spaces were actually subversive forces which were “hedged in with elaborate rituals and carefully guarded and separated from mundane reality” (1997, p. 1). A key element of hybridisation was therefore its ability to challenge “an official, puritanical public order” (1997, p. 2) by countering existing hegemonic forces, a route partly adopted by Bronfen & Marius when they draw on hybridity to harmonise power relations (in Terkessidis, 2000³⁴). Werbner and Modood comment how Hall’s “consistently original contributions to the debate on hybridity are grounded, above all, in the Gramscian idea that hegemony or counter-hegemony must necessarily be constituted through alliances across differences” (1997, p. 13).

Hybridity can therefore be viewed as an opportunity through which to counter existing hegemonic cultural forces, creating alliances across what are perceived as minority and majority differences. It is this role which is picked up by Bromley who comments that “hybridity is always a threat to the dominant culture which seeks to ‘ethnicise’ difference and render it static and exotic, rather than seeing it as a condition of the culture as a whole, always in transformation, always subject to modification.” (2000, p. 124) Gilroy, also picks up on the relationship between ethnicity and hybridity, suggesting that “hybridisation is a politically correct solution to an anti-ethnic or nationalist agenda” (1997, p. 13). Acknowledging the weakening of the nation-state and the increasing influence of globalisation and international links are vital if we are to gain greater understanding of the processes and role of hybridity within contemporary culture and society.

³³ See for example Morely, D and Curran, J., (1992) *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London

³⁴ In this article, Terkessidis develops examples of hybridity which he feels might be seen as the opposite of cultural mixture and suggests that hybrid phenomena could include “well-educated young immigrant women intentionally taking up the veil”, (2000, p. 219) through analysis he argues that Bhabha's concept has a fundamentally different meaning in the German context, and does not in itself ignore the unequal distribution of power.

Central to such interplay is the manner in which we differentiate between sameness and difference and how this articulates otherness. Significantly, Bhabha does not see this as 'in between' or other, but rather as the 'stubborn chunks' and comments how

Fantastical renamings of the subjects of cultural difference do not derive their discursive authority from anterior causes – be it human nature or historical necessity – which, in a secondary move, articulate essential and expressive identities between cultural differences in the contemporary world. The problem is not of an ontological cast, where differences are effects of some more totalising, transcendent identity to be found in the past or the future. Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements – the stubborn chunks – as the basis of cultural identifications. (1994, p. 219)

Similarly, Caglar, drawing on Clifford (1994), writes that it is the identity concepts understood as "products of culture and histories in collision and dialogue" (1997a, p. 171) that are of particular interest within contemporary society. Consequently, hybridity may appear to allow a route for association between what are classified as different cultures without overtly questioning or challenging the existence of a central or dominant culture of the nation or even the very boundaries that it seeks to cross. In an ironic twist, hybridity, the very tool perceived to offer a route for exchange, transformation, resistance or interruption in fact supports the segmentation and fragmentation of culture, cultural products and the existing cultural hierarchy. Hybridity can be seen not to break down or disrupt existing boundaries but to provide a metaphorical, symbolic, 'bridge' over which seemingly juxtaposed entities can meet without jeopardising the existing metaphorical centre or real cultural hierarchy.

The existence of 'elaborate rituals' to enable such crossings, as highlighted by Werbner and Modood (1997), are vital if the nation is to maintain the appearance of a homogenous carefully controlled culture, only crossed when hybrid forces create supposedly extra-ordinary cultural fusions and collaborations. As opposed, one can only presume, to those collaborations or transformations considered part of mundane reality, which do not acknowledge or draw in othered forms or cultures and are therefore not hybrid.

In contrast to Bromley (2000) who feels that hybridity threatens the dominant culture, I would argue that those supportive of a fixed, essential national identity bought into the notion of hybridity precisely because they found it supportive of the fragmentation and segmentation of culture. It was perceived to work across difference, as Young

comments, 'forcing unlike things together' (ibid); subsequently enabling engagement without challenging the prevailing understanding of cultural segmentation, and crucially hierarchialisation. This is a dangerous approach since, by implication, it suggests the existence of a 'full' independent or originary culture from which hybrid cultures emerge. The existing notion of hybridity, as a subversive site, therefore has a limited life since it is celebrated as both powerfully interruptive and yet theorised as commonplace (Modood & Werbner, 1997a, p. 1) as fusions, collaborations and conflict take place on a daily basis. Ultimately, hybridity is seen to become cultural difference itself, supposedly challenging what are perceived as centred and dominant norms.

Kawash also questions the role of hybridity and asks whether the desire to embrace hybridity is led by the necessity "to reconsider what we mean when we speak of cultural difference" or whether it is based on the desire to flee essentialism (1997, p. 4). For Kawash, hybridity is founded on a key division "the very notion of hybridity is based on conditions named by the essentialising division it seeks to counter, i.e.: the color line" (1997, p. 5-6). The central constituents that she identifies focus upon the search for an essential, even originary culture and the role of ethnicity within notions of hybridity.

However, it is equally important to be wary of those who identify cultures and products as hybrid, Ahmad (1995) echoing Williams earlier, has been rightly suspicious of academics living in the metropolis writing on the subject. Ahmad stresses the importance of acknowledging the role played by class, position, lifestyle and background in debating notions of cultural hybridity. He highlights differing starting points and considers the opportunities available to access culture significant in how one subsequently reads culture, readings which are also dependent on the range or rarity of the representations.

Therefore, whilst it is increasingly possible to recognise discourses around hybridity as a means to combat ethnicity specificity and nationalistic agendas, its weakness is that it actually does little to counter the hegemonic structure of the nation-state, nor the prevailing cultural hierarchies and cultural institutions. Where theory shows society as bounded, having controlled parameters, boundaries, structures and *lines of difference*, it seems logical to identify the cultures, cultural products or forms which appear to cross these boundaries as hybrid. Subsequently, the problem in viewing cultures in such a way, as either 'part' or 'whole', is that it forces us into seeing them

as made up of distinct separable, even quantifiable parts, that must cross divisions of difference, when in reality culture is itself far too fluid and interdependent to be so contained or categorised. If we follow this theory, we risk seeing hybridity as the 'connecting tissue,' 'between' cultures and therefore denigrate cultural translation to an impure 'part or partial' culture, even whilst only some people are considered to draw upon hybrid identities.

Culture as a dialogic process

Brah (1996) comments how, at any given time throughout its history, any culture will undergo cultural transformation, containing traces of that which it is to become alongside certain cultural institutions and traditions (1996, p. 18). She further highlights how "cultures are never static: they evolve through history, that is why the process of cultural reproduction is, in part, a process of cultural transformation" (ibid). Consequently, "there is no 'in itself' and 'for itself' within cultures because they are always subject to intrinsic forms of translation" (1990, p. 210). As Ahmad (1995) argues, hybridity, understood as the cross-fertilization of cultures is characteristic of all movements of peoples within and across national borders. All "such movements in history have involved the travel, contact, transmutation, hybridisation of ideas, values, and behavioural norms" (Bromley, 2000, p. 96). This movement has led to a definition of identities as rightly dependent on their relationship to each other.

For theorists such as Bhabha, there are sites of resistance against the existing hegemonic cultural hierarchy that venture beyond notions of hybridity. He moves the concept further with his reference to the temporal dimension, to think through and beyond culture in such a way as to move away from cultural binarisms and dichotomies and to think of culture not as a "cross-referential, generalizable unity that signifies a progression or evolution of idea in times" (1994, p. 37) but to have and maintain "an ambivalence in the act of interpretation", retaining a "spatial relation within the schemata and strategies of discourse" (ibid). He prioritises the need to acknowledge that interchange occurs between *all* cultural products or producers, as opposed to some cultures or products being complete, homogenous, pure or independent.

Indeed, Bhabha develops a critical element within the hybridity debate in order to deny the existence of any 'single, original' culture. He emphasises a significant shift when one refutes even the existence of an 'originary' or original culture. In

discussing the idea of cultural translation Bhabha also suggests “that all forms of cultures are in some way related to each other, because culture is a signifying or symbolic activity” (1990, p. 209 – 210) and therefore, as Bakhtin and Lévi-Strauss also demonstrate, cannot be museumised as a ‘thing’ (Modood & Werbner, 1997).

We therefore begin to see how all culture(s) never ceases to evolve and interact wherever there is convergence. Cultural mixing and cross-over becomes routine as *everything* becomes hybrid (Modood & Werbner, 1997a). Whether by force, necessity or design it is therefore impossible to debate the ‘wholeness,’ or ‘completeness’ of cultures, or to view cultures as ‘originary,’ since there will always be moments of fusion, evidence of cultural fluidity and complex processes of change and adaptation at any given point in history.

We must therefore assume that our focus needs to shift specifically in relation to how we prescribe the construction and identification of hybridity. For Bakhtin and Lévi-Strauss this involves an acknowledgement that “to speak of cultural ‘mixing’ makes sense only from inside a social world” (Modood & Werbner 1997a, p. 15). Indeed, Bhabha crucially stresses how “cultures are only constituted in relation to that otherness internal to their own symbol-forming activity which makes them decentred structures” (1990, p. 210). As he outlines, “there has to be an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’ for there to be a socially determinative relation” (1994, p. 220). If one is outside of a particular cultural grouping, hybrid forms may not be quite so transparent. Vitality and an area that will be considered in Chapter Three, one needs to possess a degree of reproductive and representational knowledge (Bhabha, 1990) and awareness in order to identify the emergence of forms considered hybrid.

From hybrid spaces to third space

If one argues that all cultures are hybrid, does it mean that hybridity is meaningless as a description of culture, cultural exchange or transformation? This is not the case for Bhabha, who considers hybridity to enable a moment of cultural and political change which engineers the third space. It’s important to examine this term that seems able to draw on and amalgamate forms of cultural hybridisation, synthesis, fusion, multiple centres, identities and cultural products.

It was Jameson who originally utilised the term third space when drawing upon what he considered to be the ‘in-between’ spaces of difference and juxtaposition. Within

this hybrid arena Bhabha develops Jameson's thinking on 'the space of 'thirdness in postmodern politics' (1994, p. 217) to open up

an area of 'interfection' (to use Jameson's term) where the newness of cultural practices and historical narratives are registered in 'generic discordance', 'unexpected juxtaposition', 'the semiautomization of reality', 'postmodern schizo-fragmentation as opposed to modern or modernist anxieties or hysterias' (pp. 371 –2). Figured in the disjointed signifier of the present, this supplementary third space introduces a structure of ambivalence into the very construction of Jameson's internationalism. There is, on the one hand, a recognition of the interstitial, disjunctive spaces and signs crucial for the emergence of the new historical subjects of the transnational phase of late capitalism. However, having located the image of the historical present in the signifier of a 'disintegrative' narrative, Jameson disavows the temporality of displacement which is, quite literally, its medium of communication. For Jameson, the possibility of becoming historical demands a containment of this disjunctive social time. (1994, p. 217)

The third space is therefore of greater contemporary significance than the original moments or components which enable its emergence. Here, the transformational value of change lies in the re-articulation, or cultural transformation, of elements that are "*neither the One ... nor the Other ... but something else besides* which contests the term and territories of both" (1994, p. 28). Such transformation can be evidenced within and between all cultures, a feature Bakhtin (1981) termed organic and intentional hybridisation. For Hall such processes are, in fact, "two phases of the same movement, which constantly overlap and inter-weave" (1988, 29 – 30). The third space is therefore concerned with newness namely that emanating from hybrid spaces

The importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace the two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211)

Bhabha therefore shifts the hybrid terrain since he considers it to produce parameters through which one cannot trace the *two* originary moments. What evolves is, as Barthes identifies, a 'third language' that is neither the one nor the other but a combination of both. Hybridity is based on contact between cultures at a specific moment or period in time. The third space is therefore re-emphasised by the presence of hybridity, since hybridity transforms the elements that progressively form part of the third space, the 'stubborn chunks' (1994, p. 219) become malleable forms.

The 'third space' is therefore not simply a case of creating or widening openings produced as a result of existing expressive identities, instead it is concerned with "reworking the very sense of history, culture, society, and language that had previously excluded or silenced such voices" (Chambers, 1994, p. 126).

Bhabha's commentary is crucial to debates surrounding hybridity, since without third space theory hybridity fails to offer meaningful insight relating to cultural engagement, as all cultures are ultimately hybrid. Crucially the third space further develops cultural interaction. Whilst with hybridity one is always able to trace the root or routes of a cultural product, the hybrid third space calls for the complete newness of cultural practices, culture which previously seemed juxtaposed now appears to be the natural order. Historical narratives are virtually re-written so as to include contemporary cultural reality and re-mix.

Wang and Yueh-yu Yeh (2005) equally stress the need to understand and generate new possibilities within cultures, the "birth of a 'third space' therefore requires a process of dialectic discourse and reflective interaction through which ideas, values, and meaning clash and are negotiated and regenerated. Without this element, hybridity is not much more than a simple mixing and hybridizing to include forms that blend different elements." (2005, p. 188)

On a cautionary note however, there was little evidence to suggest that this was taking place with many contemporary cultural institutions, although I would also argue that much rests on the cultural experiences and lifestyles of individual producers. It is, however, interesting to consider this when writing about the essential black subject, where Hall stressed that in order to change the way in which the term black was understood required having to *fight off* everything else that black had stood for or meant (1989). Hall adds that there is

A second, related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean's 'uniqueness'. Cultural Identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. (1990, p. 225)

Cultural practices have been used to extend new patterns of collective identity (Gilroy, 1987) and in a sense detach them from their existing meaning. The 'third' therefore offers us a *new* sense of history, a new way of perceiving, not only through the processes of 'hybrid' fusion but also those elements, histories, cultures et al which produced, or enabled their creation. The synthesis between the components opens up the space for a new cultural arena, one which will not only, potentially, influence the future path of the third, but retrospectively, the dual histories of its components.

In considering this, Said (1994) is one of many theorists to talk of cultures absorbing far more than they consciously exclude and questions to what extent one could really draw a line around British-London and exclude the impact of India upon such an imperial city, or be able to trace all of such impact back, in its entirety to any 'roots'. His position supports the notion that whilst there are cultural forms that appear to dominate, cultures in the minority still possess power beyond the perceptions and interests of the dominant group (Billington et al, 1991), something to which Bhabha's third space seems to allude.

Newness may not enter the world

However, critics of the third space argue that this way of thinking is not new. Parry shows how such comparisons have been made countless times before, with the terms creolisation, metissage or mestizaje, being used by Caribbean and Latin writers alongside Gilroy's use of the "inescapable intermixture of ideas and forms in neologistic transitional cultures" (1994, p. 13) as well as Hall's work on the "disjunctive, displaced and unstable postcolonial identities constituted in representation but which relate to real sets of histories" (1994, p. 13). "The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated" (Butler, 1990, p. 148). Critics of the third space argue that Bhabha's theory rests on there being a nonaligned space – when clearly this does not exist. One such example is the degree of complexity surrounding understandings of the term black and the continuing challenges in its definition and utilisation.

Parry quotes Dirlik, whom she considers Bhabha's 'most disobliging critic', Dirlik accuses Bhabha of "a reduction of social political problems to psychological ones, and of the substitution of post structuralist linguistic manipulation for historical and

social explanation” (1994, p. 9). I think Dirlik rightly identifies how Bhabha subsumes the social to the textual, leaving behind the complexities and conflict of any (re)negotiation in contemporary society (see Zahir, 2003a on a case study relating to this). To refer to Hall’s (1989) earlier comment, regarding having to fight off everything else that black has ever stood for or meant, is to question the extent to which one might move easily, if at all, within Bhabha’s third space of social agency.

Parry similarly expresses concern over the lack of any “notion of conflict” (1994, p. 6) within Bhabha’s third space. She goes on to highlight how Bhabha’s claim

Is that his theorising is providing different explanations, derived from the premise that social agency is performed, and is therefore recuperable, at the level of enunciation, and that the testimony of history is invested in the mode of its writing. The “social specificity” of the “productions of meaning” being understood as the circulation of “signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value” (1994, p. 9)

Central to Parry’s criticisms is her reading of Bhabha’s expectations relating to individuals’ capacity to move outside the contextual and social setting. One can examine products and consider them purely in terms of the manner in which they may appear to re-negotiate previous cultural productions. However when considering the producer it becomes far harder to ignore the complex culture and fusion that influenced the production of objects, subjects’ positions and multiple readings or representations that may take place once the product is completed. In my view, Parry correctly highlights how

Because Bhabha has written powerfully about ‘hybrid’ cultural articulations when glossing over the novels, poetry and films of postcolonial writers and artists, critics have readily interpreted his use of this notion as denoting culture’s multiple and incongruous accents, cross-cultural inventions and transnationality – that is, as descriptive of subject positions and social conditions traversed by heterogeneous cultural infections (1994, p. 13)

There is a tendency, therefore, as Parry highlights with regard to Bhabha, to examine the ‘cultural products’ without any examination into the cultural producers or the social environment that contributes towards their production. Yet, it would be short-sighted not to acknowledge that both conflict and creativity do exist (Brah, 1996).

This, for Parry, is a weakness within Bhabha’s third space. She suggests that Bhabha’s hybridity is a “twin term for the “catachrestic reinscription” of “cultural difference in the disjunctive postcolonial discursive space – that is, it is descriptive of

the textual processes and effects held to constitute social forms and conditions, and not of those forms and conditions as articulated in social practices.” (1994, p. 14). Bhabha subsequently avoids any articulation of conflict when one examines the creativity that exists within and between cultures without examining or acknowledging the social processes that are such an intimate and essential part of this process.

Whilst there isn't currently nor has there ever been, the capacity or neutrality for a third space within which entire cultures are collectively re-visioned, there are however spaces within which elements and individuals instigate cultural change. Back (1995) suggests that it is possible for an individual to draw so coherently upon a number of alternative roots/ routes so as to cover up their origins, citing the example of Apache Indian, whose music he considers a “cultural crossroads, a meeting place where the languages and rhythms of four continents intermingle producing a culture that cannot be reduced to its component parts” (1997, p. 128). What becomes rather more complex is to then concretely understand the moment of transformation from hybrid to third space.

For Manthia Diawara some films “construct diasporic space as a third space. By third space I mean the familiar notion of hybrid spaces that combine the colours and flavours of different localities, and yet declare their specificity from each of these localities” (Friedman, 1993, p. 157). Equally, Chambers highlights the manner in which music crosses so many boundaries that it throws into doubt its cultural formation commenting that

Sounds also offer a space for musical and cultural differences to emerge in such a manner that any obvious identification with the hegemonic order ... is weakened and disrupted by the shifting, contingent contacts of musical and cultural encounters. This represents the instance of a musical and cultural conversion in which the margins are able to reassess the centre while simultaneously exceeding its logic (1994, p. 79)

The example of Panjabi MC demonstrates such crossing. Audiences educated in Asian music are familiar with the unique blend of cut 'n' mix taking place when Panjabi MC fuses James Brown and Bob Marley as well as drawing upon older bhangra artists, such as Manak, Shinda, Janjua. Those familiar with bhangra music were therefore aware of hybrid formations whilst those for whom bhangra was unfamiliar found this an entirely new and therefore unrecognizable cultural transformation, one for which they were unable to trace the routes/ roots. In the case of Panjabi MC it is clear that the third space is a flexible, fluid process that shifts

position and location depending on context, culture, community and social relations not only for the producer but also and equally for the reader. It is therefore crucial to recognise where and how social relations and meanings hold cultural meanings, artefacts and people in place.

Relationality

Is it therefore possible for Bhabha's third space to offer a fresh way of viewing cultural practitioners or cultural products, or play a part in the formation of such cultural fusion? The individuals whose lives are predominantly implicated through so called minority and majority cultural and historical interaction and the associated social processes are easily implicated within the third space but is it actually correct to include them in such a manner? It is vital that we acknowledge the role played by social relations within and between identities as they are shaped, since difference alone does not offer us an explanation for the reasons behind the positions or value allocated within the cultural hierarchy. We therefore begin to see that "the use of the notion of a dominant discourse is incomplete if not accompanied by a critique which explains why some positions are easily co-opted and integrated into apparently dominant discourses, and why others are less likely to be appreciated" (Lowe, 1996, p. 19).

Identity can therefore only be understood in context; specifically, for Rutherford, in terms of economic and political subordination and domination. He highlights the necessity for such an encompassing multi-dimensional approach, commenting that "identity marks the conjuncture of our past with the social, cultural and economic relations we live within." (1990, p. 19-20) Drawing upon Gramsci, he quotes that "each individual is the synthesis not only of existing relations but of the history of these relations. He is a précis of the past" (1990, p. 19-20). This inter-relationship has been a constant theme, one that West also outlined when he commented how "whiteness is [a] politically constructed category parasitic on 'Blackness'" (1990, p. 123). Similarly, Said, in discussing the relationship between the West and what he terms, the Orient comments how "[t]he two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other" (in Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 89).

The importance of such reflections is to acknowledge the manner in which the dominant is considered complex and different but remains parasitic on Blackness. It is only by holding up this claim for analysis that we are able to fully examine the

processes of cultural fusion and production and considers Bhabha's third space from within this context. Therefore, whilst the research subjects are those perceived as being culturally excluded from the mainstream it is also vital that we examine the organic changes which the so-called 'powerless' are causing within the cultural norms of the powerful,³⁵ particularly given global changes of internationalism. Bhabha's third space is continually re-positioned within the cultural hegemony, as the adjudicating role of the state works within the prevailing frameworks of power to determine that which is included and that outside the identity of the nation-state.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed the terminology attributed to identity. I have highlighted how the notion of identity has undergone considerable analysis and change in the last decades (Back, 1996; Brah, 1996; Breakwell, 1986; Gilroy, 2000, 2004; Hall, 1993; Said, 1993 Spivak, 1988b; Woodward, 1997). Within the academy theorists have highlighted the need for identity as no longer complete but as a process, fluid, shifting, forming fragmentary, almost multiple selves (Hall, 1988; Said, 1993 Spivak, 1988a), capable of negotiating internal conflict. Hall's universal definition highlights how we are "confronted by a range of different identities, each appealing to us, or rather to different parts of ourselves, from which it seems possible to choose" (Hall, 1992, p. 303).

Yet, one's cultural identity continues to be seen as fixed, contained and stratified; we draw on a limited set of prescribed narratives to tell the story of who we are. Within the thesis I have recognised the need to acknowledge intersectionality within culture and identity positioning whilst also accepting that this cannot exist as a limitless set of categories, considering Butler's critique of the 'etc' when defining identity (1990, p. 143). Moreover, within this I recognise the need for balance pertaining to those factors which are attributed considerable signification and content in defining identity, culture and values.

I have sought to deconstruct the relationship between notions of 'race,' and community. In turn, I have suggested that this implicates how we negotiate and engage with definitions of culture, in particular that associated with the culture of the nation. Equally however, I have acknowledged that a simplistic understanding of

³⁵ Particularly since as Stanfield and Rutledge comment "as in so many other social service fields, the powerless, rather than the powerful have their heads examined" (1993, p. 24)

Britishness remains the central interface by which identities are determined and positioned. Particular understandings of themes such as the shared values of the nation are held together as unified. Through governmental processes and feelings of belonging/ non belonging, I argue that they influence how we understand and engage with ethnicity, 'race' and culture particularly within the nation state.

I have sought to investigate how binary positions of British and Other have been utilised within political narratives, a theme I consider in the Chapter Three. I have argued that exclusion operates on multiple levels and is inter-laced within both powerful and powerless identity positions. In view of this, I highlight that while hybridising strategy has been seen as providing a bridge 'in-between', and thereby challenging existing constructs, in actuality by focusing on the 'in-between' space, it confirms the binary positions of British and Other, arguing the need for the role of hybridity to cross cultural difference. I examine this in more depth in Chapters Four and Five.

My particular concern here is that we begin to move towards essentialism, where culture is, like identity, stratified and segmented into distinct and contained content. I argue against this, stressing culture as an eternally dialogic process, although not operating freely from the political constructs or social framework but manipulated, contained and constrained. In view of this, I query the applicability of hybridising third space theory within culture and argue that rather than newness entering the world, individuals engage in culture in complex but always situational relationships.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology: Interdisciplinary interventions and research methods

“If you’ve come to help me, you’re wasting your time. But if you’ve come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” Lilla Watson, ‘Aboriginal’ Social Worker, (in Stringer, 1996, p. 148)

“In order to follow a baseball game one must understand what bat, hit, an inning, a left fielder, a squeeze play, a hanging curve, and a tightened infield are.”

Clifford Geertz (1983, p. 69)

Introduction

We have seen in Chapter One how the notion of identity has undergone considerable change. There is an extensive literature on culture and identity, and perhaps because of its reach it is an enormously contested literature. This factor alone can make working within this field highly fraught. There are a range of connection possibilities that may cut across cultures and even seemingly contradictory positions. This complex positioning was therefore central in defining my methodological approach. I sought a methodology which enabled representations that were fluid, but also one which acknowledged that identity was not about singularity but multiple experiences, many journeys, located in lives and practices performed in relation to context and environment. It was also important that the thesis was of practical benefit, particularly since, as McRobbie stresses, it is possible to lose sense of the motivation behind the object of study when the ‘theoretical detours become literary and textual excursions’ (1992, p. 721). She stresses the need for “identity ethnography in cultural studies ... for carrying out interactive research on groups and individuals who are more than just audiences for texts” (1992, p. 730).

So, within this chapter I also position myself within the research, outlining my interest in the field and why I feel I was able to gain particular insight into the research topic. I develop the two case studies, the *Venue* and *Changing Views*, as well as the vignettes that emerged out of my longer term engagement with the arts sector. I review my choice of research which involved action through critical analysis whilst maintaining its value as an active bridge, or as Routledge (1996) highlights, a third space, between the worlds of academia and activism or development. However, I also recognise my involvement as impacting on the social realm and consider the ethics of a close relationship between myself and the research subjects. Finally, I

review the impact made by such an interactive research process from a practice led perspective in addition to its impact upon the thesis.

The research findings as developed in this chapter must be understood from a particular perspective. The case studies which form the basis for the thesis was carried out at the start of the research process, taking place in the late nineties and into early 2000. One could argue that some of the theoretical debates have moved on since then. However further research was undertaken, some of which took place in 2005 and 2006. This picked up on many of the research themes and contained considerable commonality, whilst revealing a greater sense of awareness of what was at stake. The research findings should not therefore be treated as anachronistic, even whilst acknowledging that some of the debates as well as the national and geopolitical contexts of identity, cultural production and 'race' have moved on – although I would argue that this movement is itself patchy, as Nayak writes “what happens when global transformations impact unevenly upon nations, regions and localities, when people and places get 'left behind'” (2003, p. 75)?

Introducing myself as researcher and my relationship to the research subjects

I want to start this chapter by introducing myself and how, as well as why, I came to this particular research topic. I have a lived experience of more than 'one' culture which is as familiar to me as that of the research subjects. As a child, my lifestyle covered regular holidays to Germany, a long holiday spent in Pakistan, I heard different languages, experienced music from different continents and countries; I ate an extremely wide range of food. I endured clothes such as salwar kameez at weddings that I hated and knew none of my friends would be seen dead in, and then as I grew older I wore salwar kameez that my friends loved. I wore a dirndl, a traditional German dress with full skirt and detailed embroidery, and went through periods when I loved it and when I hated it. I engaged with cultural products without feeling limited.

As an adult, I became increasingly aware of the boundaries and parameters that are established which it now appears one cannot so easily cross; as a child and young person I was never aware of nor taught about boundaries, the capacity to connect with cultural products seemed open to be actively enjoyed. I was therefore interested in the manner in which we connect with cultural products but also how and where we position ourselves in relation to our everyday sense of culture, particularly

considering how varied notions of art and culture have both engaged with and shifted mainstream culture but are also themselves the result of new connections.

Consequently, throughout the PhD process I found myself agreeing with Reinharz (1992) who comments how, frequently, research is as much an act of self-discovery – which may include self-conflict – as of learning about others. I also connected to the research in a way that other researchers might not, since as Bryman comments, the “investigator virtually becomes part of the arena” (1989, p. 187) because I already shared an understanding of identity as ongoing and complex, I considered myself a part of the arena prior to the start of the investigation. However, as Raghuram outlines “relationships with an interviewee may be complicated by ideology and conflicted values, or ... individual histories may include the intersection of differences which complicate ideas of hierarchy and power” (forthcoming). Les Back (1993) also highlights how the social framework impacts upon the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee.

This can cross all elements of engagement including group discussions, groups of friends and potential onlookers, as well as the situational circumstances and events that prompt the account. In any research situation, the interviewer may be considered part of the social context; something that many of those interviewed applied to me, since we frequently shared experiences. I found myself to be as much the ‘research subject’ as the ‘researcher’ both in the sense that I was included in conversations relating to identity and equally, in that whilst asking questions in interviews I was questioned too. Such situations need to be acknowledged throughout the research findings, since the researcher subsequently becomes part of the arena being researched and would therefore, potentially, feed into findings in more ways than merely collating data.

This can raise concerns regarding the researcher’s relationship to the research group. Central to this is the potential exploitation of the participants, particularly where the sole purpose of the research is the production of a thesis. Consequently, early on in this chapter I highlight the young people’s awareness and response to youth workers who lacked any genuine interest in them. Ensuring that the research subjects involved in the research were aware of and comfortable with the dual aims of the research which involved action and development was crucial. I considered it vital that this was done with the knowledge and consent of the research subjects involved. Their willingness to engage and their understanding of the approach was

evidenced in their wanting to deliver high quality responses to the interview questions – although this in itself is a challenge in that it shifts the focus from their own thinking to their sense of what might be required by the researcher. Fortunately, there were a number of opportunities for more open discussions, these provided us with spaces for informal, uncensored conversations which contributed towards wider development and was not specific or guided by the research questions and themes.

Rooting oneself within the research to such an extent may suggest, to some researchers, a lack of detachment, and hence cause concern regarding the research ethics however this needs to be balanced with the challenges of, or belief in, any neutral space or search for objectivity. I would argue that objectivity is not found by mere lack of connection or positioning oneself as standing outside the research arena but is a far more complicated process. Said suggests that any author will write their ideology into their material, whether this is in a commentary on a literary text or the supposed factual and scientific contents of economics (1994, p. 136); ultimately one is always subject to a form or forms of representation.

Therefore the extent to which any author represents is inevitably about personal choice and personal politics. The search for objectivity is, I feel, largely personal. This impacts on the research methods and the methods of analysis that we choose as well as the level of honesty in the challenges, difficulties and decisions made. We need to prove our detachment or profile our position from the outset. As Said has commented, “no-one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of society” (1994, p. 136). I wanted to be open about this subjectivity and acknowledge my role and position within the research at each stage both within the thesis itself as well as with the research subjects engaged in the case studies.

As researchers we come into the social context from a certain background, with the experience of particular positions and roles, each of which can influence the research subject's relationship towards us as researchers and subsequently the research findings. Without acknowledging our own position we have no sense of where we are coming from within the social context, nor the extent to which we influence the research. Maria Mies comments how

The postulate of *value free research*, of neutrality and indifference towards the research objects, has to be replaced by *conscious partiality*, which is achieved through partial identification with the research objects. For women who deliberately and actively integrate their double-consciousness into the research process, this partial identification will not be difficult. It is the opposite of the so-called 'Spectator-Knowledge' (Maslow, 1966:50) which is achieved by showing an indifferent, disinterested, alienated attitude towards the 'research subjects' (in Bowles & Klein, 1983, p. 122)

'Conscious subjectivity' should therefore replace 'value-free objectivity'; that one needs to be transparent about the complications and decisions that one makes in seeking objective research as well as how this might impact on one's research methods (Haraway, 1989, 1994; Harding, 2004). Acknowledging one's subjectivity and engagement in this research topic does not, by association, imply an entirely uncritical approach. This is a theme that I pick up on when considering the interviews and discussions held with the research subjects, in particular exploring the manner in which conversations may be shaped by the researcher.

Similarly, Bourdieu also rejects the possibility of objective or neutral research arguing for work that, quite specifically, actively enables progress rather than operating in isolated spaces

It seems to me the most urgent task is to find and mobilize the material, economic and above all organizational means to encourage all competent researchers to unite their efforts with those of the responsible activists in order to collectively discuss and elaborate a set of analyses and proposals for progress that today exist only in the virtual state of private and isolated thoughts or circulate in fringe publications . . . (2003, p. 15 – 16)

In developing the case studies I was aware that I needed to work in such a way that enabled results from the case studies to feed back into the theoretical findings; however I also wanted these to go beyond the production of a written report, in this case the PhD. I sought, in each of the case studies undertaken, to work within an environment that offered scope for development yet, more specifically, enabled the individual development of the research subjects.

I found that this worked in two ways; there was a considerable amount of work that did contribute towards the research, however there were numerous elements within the case studies that did not feed *directly* into the research. These included how public sector policies are developed and who influences them, building up self-confidence in the research subjects with whom I worked, encouraging and

developing artists in their thinking as well as in their ability to manage themselves. Ultimately the action research³⁶ led approach was contained within the two case studies themselves, whilst the production of the thesis itself was a distinct piece of work. However, the content of the thesis was strongly led by findings from the action research case studies even whilst this research process was not continued through to the production of the thesis.

Ironically, given Bhabha's theoretical terminology, Paul Routledge has termed this way of working the third space. He clarifies this space as "a site from which we may negotiate the locations of academia and activism. ... The third space implies inappropriate(d) encounters between academia and activism where neither site, role or representation holds sway, where one continually subverts the meaning of the other" (1996, p. 400). Routledge also clarifies how academic writing is able to merge into action, actively promote engagement and then express that action through academic texts; it was this model that I sought to duplicate in my own research

This notion of the third space reworks earlier positions of engagement articulated by people such as Fanon (1963) and Freire (1970), in that it is explicitly concerned with engagement as a process of continual becoming, flux and transformation, that entangles academic and political space. This third space involves a simultaneous coming and going in a borderland zone between different modes of action. A pre-requisite of this is that we must believe that we can inhabit these different sites, making each a space of relative comfort. To do so will require inventing creative ways to cross perceived and real 'borders' (1996, p. 406)

Operating within this synthesising role frequently caused the boundaries between my role as a researcher and that of a community development/ arts development worker to blur. Although unstable, this changing role was not uncomfortable although it did raise challenges. However, it also allowed greater scope and insight into both arenas, allowing me to repeatedly bring the benefits of one arena into the realm of the other.

By working in such a manner, sharing benefits between realms, I was able to largely avoid the difficulties raised by Judith Bell who discusses how negotiating access can be a difficulty, whereby "teachers, administrators, parents and keepers of documents will have to be convinced of your integrity and of the value of the research before they decide whether or not to co-operate" (1993, p. 52). In both of the case studies

³⁶ A fuller elaboration of how action research influenced my approach will be developed later in this chapter.

that I developed I was not faced with the problem of accessing relevant material, minutes from meetings, networks etc. because I had produced the documents and was therefore an active part of the institution and the community involved.

However, this is not to say that I did not experience any problems in terms of access. In both case studies I was considered a representative of the institution for which I worked; The *Venue* or Birmingham City Council. Consequently, whilst being an 'insider' can be an enormous advantage, it can also lead to one being perceived by others in a highly specific way and categorised as having a very definite role or point of view, a topic that I cover in each of the case studies. It is important to stress moreover, that where one actively works with communities, this perception can be broken down. Therefore, in fully accepting my role 'inside the social' as Back (1996) terms it, I sought to use the positions that I held - at The *Venue* as an Arts/ Youth worker and at Birmingham City Council's Arts & Community Unit as Cultural Partnerships Officer - to most benefit the participants and therefore the research.

The two case studies

The Venue/ Foleshill Multi-Cultural Open Forum

My aim within the first case study was to examine the social and every day cultural positioning of the research subjects. In carrying out an interactive research project within the *Venue* I hoped to engage a group of young people in identifying what are seen as some of the challenges and tensions in negotiating identity within a specific framework. Crucially, however, I hoped that we could consider some of the positive elements of being a young person who might not so easily connect with mainstream definitions of identity, living in Britain today. A key dimension of the project was enabling young people to vocalise and represent how they saw their position within British society and potentially shift this towards a more positive, inclusive, positioning with which they felt more comfortable. Providing them with a relatively neutral safe space within which they could represent themselves was therefore a key factor towards fulfilling the aims of the community youth project and the action led research approach.

Prior to my university education, I worked for Coventry Council for Voluntary Youth Services (CCVYS); as its name suggests this was the umbrella organisation for voluntary youth service provision across the city. For that reason I was fairly well

aware of youth service provision in Coventry and felt that I would be well positioned to develop the first case study in the area. I had knowledge of the geographical area, youth workers practising as well as funders. I felt that this would ensure that I was well placed to research from a position of relative knowledge. The first case study was therefore based at the *Venue*, a youth centre which was part of the Foleshill Multi-Cultural Open Forum which also included an 'Elders Project'.

Vitally, I was fortunate to have an extremely good relationship with the youth worker who was developing the *Venue* as a youth-led project for young people aged between eleven and twenty-five. I knew that we shared many of the same approaches and values, that we were both keen for young people to take control and ownership of the space. I was also aware that she was positive about developing arts and creativity-led techniques in working with young people. I considered these themes to be extremely positive in ensuring good practice both from the perspective of implementing action as well as with the potential research findings. Even prior to my joining, the young people's project already had a remit to offer advice and information in a range of ways. Methods used included project work, mentoring and peer based³⁷ youth work; the aim being to increase the number and range of young people who were accessed.

The *Venue* was based in the heart of Foleshill, Coventry which had been identified as a priority area in Coventry's anti-poverty strategy for many years. The unemployment figures³⁸ were higher than the average across Coventry, and Foleshill was one of the most economically deprived areas in the city.³⁹ The *Venue* was funded under Coventry's single regeneration budget (SRB) and had funding in place from April 1996 until the end of March 2000.

Foleshill⁴⁰ has been an area with a high migrant population for some time and has a diverse cultural and geographical environment. Mosques, gurdwara and temples are set next to churches and synagogues, alongside balti houses, fish and chip shops,

³⁷ Peer based work is categorised as young people working with other young people.

³⁸ Foleshill has the highest unemployment rate in Coventry at over 6%; the average is 3% whilst the lowest in Coventry is Wainbody at 0.6%. For more information, see Coventry City Council's website <http://www.coventry.gov.uk/ccm/search/?restrictToContentSections=content%2Cforms&terms=idbr> accessed July 2007

³⁹ The wards in Coventry with the lowest average household income are Foleshill (£19, 502) and St Michaels (£20, 283); the overall average for the city is £27, 692 against a national average of £31, 008.

⁴⁰ Hillfields, similarly to Foleshill, is also high on the City's anti-poverty agenda. However, whilst symbolically perceived as an area with a high minority ethnic population, it has only just higher than the Coventry average. The community consists primarily of people of African Caribbean origin which is also reflected in the food, the take-aways and the community organisations based within this area.

jewellery shops and a variety of food stores, all of which contribute towards the cultural mix of the area. Although the original occupants of Foleshill were factory workers and lower management at the nearby Courtaulds factory, the increasing industrial development of the area saw the departure of the majority of white-collar workers and the subsequent cheaper rents brought in a high percentage of ethnic minority residents. Consequently, as one of the few areas where migrants could buy or rent property, the migrant community expanded fairly rapidly in the Foleshill area. Even so there were areas of Foleshill, particularly those dominated by 'white English'⁴¹ people, which were known for racist attacks. This was something expressed by young people who used the *Venue*, when they discussed the gangs who lived, for example, across Stoney Stanton Road, a main road which is seen as a 'boundary line' by groups on both sides.⁴²

My work with the *Venue* started out in an advisory capacity. At the time I wasn't expecting to have to become quite so involved in the initiative in order to achieve the project aims. However, due to a lack of sufficient organisational support, I and the other youth worker worked far more than our paid employment required in order to achieve some outputs.⁴³ I started work at the project in January 1997, after having been to two executive meetings in November and December and attended the youth sub group meetings. I worked at the *Venue* for just over one year, during which time I spent a minimum of three days a week at the project. Whilst the project had been running for just over six months, prior to my joining, little work had been done towards establishing an infrastructure, nor had there been any work towards equal opportunities policies, a mission statement or the project's aims and objectives. The *Venue* was in the process of moving into its own centre, a recent acquisition, and prior to my arrival no work had been carried out in this space. The lack of a physical base had been a problem in terms of finding an identity and image for the work that was being done. Furthermore, problems with staff on the Foleshill Multi-cultural Open Forum meant that work wasn't being done; the project was floundering. So it was vital that work take place in earnest.

⁴¹ It isn't possible within the research parameters to more fully categorise the white communities in the Foleshill area, however the concept of intersectionality that will be picked up in Chapter Three is relevant here, since it highlights how groupings that clash may share more than they outwardly acknowledge. Consequently, white English communities in Foleshill lived in the area for many reasons, these included factors such as economics, class, education, family and culture.

⁴² Like Coventry, many of the larger cities in the UK are home to gangs who similarly demarcate territory depending on road positions, these are used as boundary lines to determine who 'owns' particular areas and streets.

⁴³ A factor that is considered to be fairly typical of voluntary/ community sector employment.

Research methods

During this time, and throughout my time working with the *Venue*, I maintained an on-going diary and field notes. These included day to day processes as well as problems and ideas. Within the notes I documented the challenges and issues that arose, not only in contact with young people but also concerning the social environment within which the project needed to operate. These diaries and field notes helped me to contextualise the research findings as well as the comments and thoughts of young people and older users. The field notes were also useful when documenting general discussions concerning the development of the *Venue*. One such example is included below with the large, informal discussion that we held in connection with naming the centre.

It was also vital that I understood the aims and developmental wishes of the young people using the centre; if this was to be an action research-guided case study, our outcomes and interests needed to connect. I was therefore very clear about my own research and we frequently engaged in informal conversations about some of the issues relating to notions of identity and positioning within contemporary society. Moreover, I was clear when engaging in discussions that my aim wasn't to teach the young people about interactive or action research led methods; I wasn't expecting them to take up action research as a practice. I felt that to put such explicit pressure on the research subjects would not be ethically right since they engaged with the centre for the youth services it provided or had the potential to provide rather than to undertake research. However, as our relationship developed they were open to engaging in the research process and reflecting upon the situation with the shared aim of transforming it.

Many of the discussions were carried out informally so, frequently, I was not in a position to tape or transcribe recordings. Consequently, the results were written up as soon as possible after conversations had taken place in the form of field notes. It could be argued that some of the accuracy of the interviews may have been lost, and whilst this is a fair comment, I feel that the insights gained by 'chatting' in an informal manner far outweighed the value of the accuracy lost due to the lack of taped recordings, particularly since I later formally interviewed the majority of these young people in a taped interview. Even so, the conversations held were still relatively informal and unstructured. One example of how informal discussion contributed towards the thesis was in the exchange that Akeel and I shared when discussing his

different use of terminology, as discussed in Chapter Three. An on-going relationship and access to informal conversations provided an insight into the research subjects changing thinking and positionality.

Another example of how more open discussion was a useful element of the action research method chosen was in deciding what name the centre should be given. We opened out a session and invited young people for an informal discussion on what name they would like to use. The name the '*Venue*' was decided by young people who attended the project. This discussion was, in itself, an interesting reflection of the manner in which the young people wished to have their centre represented. At the time, the group Kula Shaker were prominent in the British music charts. The influences that the group drew upon, specifically the way in which they utilised elements of South Asian music and culture, was considered positive. Subsequently, ideas around the name of the group were suggested, such as 'Kulas' or 'Shakes'. As the discussion continued popular groups such as Nirvana, Cornershop or the Manic Street Preachers were suggested as potentially influencing the name, one suggestion being 'The Manix'. However, whilst members of the group shared much in terms of their musical knowledge and understanding, there were still wide-ranging musical tastes within the group. They therefore agreed that it would be far too subjective to adopt a name based on a musical group. The project was therefore called The *Venue* since it combined a space for meeting, socialising, mentoring, talking and an information access point.

These discussions were a key element in the development of the interactive research. It was through such dialogue that the group considered the youth led space and how they wished to take it forward. The discussions were not led by myself or the other youth workers, rather the young people shaped the content and negotiated with each other and with the practical requirements, such as budgets, law, services and details of the grant that we had been awarded to run the project.

Structured interviews with the first case study

In addition to the open discussions that took place, I also carried out a number of more formal, structured, interviews (see Appendix One). In total, interviews were carried out with fifteen people, including youth workers and artists. The interviews varied in length from half an hour to almost two hours. All of the interviews were taped and transcribed to ensure continuity and understanding.

An important element of the interviews was encouraging the young people to expand on issues about which they had never previously been questioned. I wanted to obtain, from their perspective, as full and accurate a picture of their lifestyles and lived experiences as possible. Since I, as the researcher, would undoubtedly interpret information differently depending on my background, world views and cultural heritage, I needed to ensure that the members of the group felt able to express themselves fully (Bourdieu, 2003), even whilst acknowledging the challenges of performativity (Butler, 1990a). Since the interviews were structured the direction and possible responses had already been shaped by my questions. Questions themselves have the potential to circumscribe answers and deliver specific narratives that may not be as open as those desired by the participants, or those which provide the greatest insight into identity formations. I hoped that this had been in some way circumnavigated through extensive open discussion, as outlined above. In addition, within the interviews the topics that we discussed were allowed to vary, although discussion around some topics, such as lived experiences around locality, racism, nationality, identity, prejudice, leisure, entertainment and culture, were specifically encouraged through further questioning during the interviews.

In providing some context to the responses and acknowledging how they may have been performed, the interviewees were asked general questions about how they would define themselves, their relationship with their family and their knowledge of their parents or older family's upbringing and culture. They were also asked questions about culture, such as what cultures they were aware of and the extent to which they engaged with different types of art or culture, such as music, films, dance, and visual art. They were asked about their lifestyle and how, or whether, they felt it differed to that of their parents. More general questions were also accompanied by specific questions once conversations were in progress. Sample questions included:

- How would you define yourself? This question was sometimes contextualised, although only if the interviewee found it problematic.
- Do you think of yourself as British, English, both or neither?
- What cultural influences, from parents, family or friends do you think have had the greatest effect on you?
- Do you think that your family has a different culture to that of British culture – why?

- Do you think that people younger than you will find it harder/ easier living in Britain?
 - The following question was *sometimes* added
 - Perhaps due to your family having different life experiences?
- What do you do in your leisure time/ for recreation?
- Is this different depending on whether you are with family, with friends or on your own?
- Would you say that you're 'mixing' cultures? Could you say in what way?

It was not the aim of the interviews to shape the action led research, rather the questions were to provide greater insight into the individuals and personalities and to give detail to the context driven research approach. The findings of the interviews provided depth and texture to the research. They did not seek to drive the direction of the research but to demonstrate the relationship between the *Venue's* remit and the interests and identities of the young people involved. However, the questions would undoubtedly have impacted on the thinking and the responses provided by the participants. They would also have contextualised their answers within the space, since the interviews were held at the *Venue*, and in the fact that someone with whom they had a relationship, as an arts/ youth worker, was asking the questions.

Instrumental within this was also my awareness that individual lived experiences relating to culture and identity are offered subjectively, often depending on the interviewee's relationship with the interviewer. It was therefore important that I developed an open relationship with the young people, a relationship that encouraged them to express their thoughts, and lived experiences, in a safe space, without fear of condemnation. Equally vital, however, was that I did not abuse this relationship and I was wary of delving too far into the young people's personal and lived experiences, in particular when we discussed difficulties that they had faced or personal experiences which they had found particularly challenging. This was difficult to maintain but having an awareness of this and seeking to keep this balance guided the interviews.

The young people also knew me as a youth worker and were therefore aware of certain parameters, such as illegal activity. During the interviews I was offered 'hot' designer clothes, drugs and told about crimes that had taken place. From the start, it was made clear to the young people that, although the interviews were confidential, I did not approve of illegal activity; in keeping with my role as a youth worker on the

project. Whilst the area of confidentiality and the law is not an area that I shall develop here, it does need to be acknowledged by the researcher when carrying out interviews, and the interviewee openly informed of any action that may or may not be taken.⁴⁴

The participants

The involvement of young people from Foleshill was an extremely important aspect of the project. To enable young people to have a voice in how they felt a centre for them should be run, what it should look like and how it ought to be set up was a key principle within the organisation, as well as within my research. The group of young people with whom I specifically worked were part of the self-named 'Youth Action Group'. They were encouraged to make decisions and attend the 'Youth Action and Education' meetings on youth work in the region. This group was established in order to involve young people in advocating for a new multipurpose youth centre for Foleshill, one of the few areas in Coventry without a dedicated centre.⁴⁵ During these meetings, relevant problems were raised by young people who live in the area. They were generally problems affecting many young people: training, and (un)employment, lack of access to leisure opportunities, health, drug misuse, policing and racism. These problems are not unique to the client group, yet few of the young people in Foleshill had ever been given the opportunity to express themselves within such a setting.

The majority of the young people interviewed had been involved in the project since the start; they were predominantly from the youth action group, mentioned previously, but also included some of the young people who had attended *Venue* projects. I had been able to develop a relationship with them over a period of more than a year since I hoped to achieve the familiarity that Simon Jones expressed (1988): being already a 'familiar' face on Birmingham's urban music scene he felt able to 'initiate discussions with relative ease' (1988, p. 123). The interviews were contextualised with background information and understanding of the young people gained from the ongoing action research throughout.

⁴⁴ In this instance, I didn't probe further or ask about any suggested criminal activity since on the whole it wasn't relevant to the research. However, one role of the *Venue* was to actively discourage all illegal activities.

⁴⁵ Funding has since been found and this group of young people have played an important role in decisions concerning the new youth centre.

Crucially, moreover, the young people knew who I was and something about my background; whereabouts I lived and a little about how I spent my recreation time for example. Furthermore, they knew that I was at university and that the research would go towards my course. One young person asked at the start of the interview, “can I be casual about this or not”, stressing that she was aware that “this is for your PhD and stuff” and so knew that the findings would feed into a piece of research. I felt that it was ethically important that the young people knew that I was carrying out research right from the time that I began engaging with the centre; to have only said this prior to the interviews would, I felt, have been ethically wrong. One of the resulting benefits of this was that, rather than being suspicious, by the time I interviewed them, many of the young people felt complimented that their histories, thoughts and opinions were considered important or interesting enough not to be neglected (Stanfield & Rutledge, 1993) but were to be included within the research.

The relationships that had been developed were sufficiently comfortable for the young people to be honest about being dishonest, as the following interaction shows!

SZ *What about Bhaji on the Beach – did you like it?*
Robert Yeah it’s a bit funny, I can’t remember much about it though
SZ *did you think it was true what some people thought it was saying about Asians or what did you think?*
Robert A bit bullshit as well
SZ *Why?*
Robert [laughs] I ain’t even seen it fully, I’m just trying to go with the interview – I’ve seen Bandit Queen

This highlights the extent to which the young people felt able to divert or shift the interview questions whilst also acknowledging the degree of explicit performativity taking place. Although this was still contained within the overall subject of culture and artistic engagement; subjects which are also, to some extent, bounded. Even so, Robert was not the only person to answer with such an honest response as demonstrated by Raj in the following exchange

SZ *How much choice would you say you’ve had about mixing cultures?*
Raj Samina, pass I can’t answer that

A risk with such an engaged research approach is that as a result of our relationship the research subjects sought to deliver particular perspectives or perform pre-determined narratives. However, the diversity of the responses in addition to answers such as that of Raj above suggests that this was not the case.

The group was of mixed gender, there were nine male and six female interviewees. The majority of the group were of either Asian or African Caribbean descent, with ages ranging from fourteen to thirty. Those interviewed included young people from a cross section of religious backgrounds, including Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. The majority lived either in Foleshill or the surrounding area and were of a similar social background. Whilst the research highlighted that there were differences in parental attitudes towards education and employment; some of the young people's parents owned shops and take-aways, others were unemployed; some were in unskilled employment and others in white collar jobs. It is important to note, at this stage, that the limitations of the research meant that I wasn't able to fully explore the variations that might exist in cultural adoption or syncreticism depending on class, even whilst evidence from the research and secondary work suggests that this can be a factor (Dean, 1994; Sivanandon, 1990; Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Carey & Sutton, 2004).

Detail and design of the project

An important aspect of the centre was that it offered project based activities in order to open out access to as many young people as possible. Consequently a variety of projects would run consecutively in order to appeal to a wide range of interests. Projects needed to appeal to young people living in the area who came from a diverse range of (cultural) backgrounds and experiences. In all of our work we worked closely with young people to develop project ideas that they then participated in. The successes or challenges were then evaluated with the young people, this impacted on how we programmed projects in the future, in addition to the feedback provided to partners.

One of the first projects that I undertook was a series of graffiti art workshops. This art form was suggested by one of the young people who used the *Venue* quite regularly and was a project in which considerable interest was expressed by a number of the young people at the *Venue*. Workshops took place at a local school and were attended by approximately twelve young people of various cultural, racial and economic backgrounds. Whilst there was an educational basis to this project, in that the young people were encouraged to think about the use or misuse of drugs, they were allowed to design any image so long as it did not break agreed codes of *Venue* good practice (i.e. non-racist, non-sexist, non-prejudiced etc.).

Other project ideas suggested by young people at the *Venue* were also taken on board. During a youth action meeting, for example, the young people requested access to the internet and this was arranged through an agreement with Coventry City Council. We ran a series of training workshops with young people whilst also stating that internet use would need to conform to *Venue* codes of practice (highlighted above). Whilst there was a gender split in the way in which the internet facilities were used, the girls were as likely as the boys to use the internet. Policing was done by all of the users who would generally inform us if they considered inappropriate use was taking place. Other projects included holding a music event in the large hall next to the *Venue*. The young people designed fliers, participated in Djing workshops, marketed the event and agreed prices for the evening. They chose the music and arranged the hire of the hall along with the equipment and all visuals for the event.

Each of these projects was connected to the overall vision and aim of the centre. This was that young people's ideas, needs and development were at the heart of the work that we did and that we worked to provide a thriving youth and arts centre that was youth-led but consistently fed into future policy and strategy for the area and the city. This ensured that the research was not fixed or but was shaped by the young people's engagement in the research. As Nayak observes "what does it mean to design a new youth studies agenda around a geographical focus of the night-club, shopping mall or rave event? What does this us, if anything, about the perceptions held by adult researchers of young people's life worlds?" (2003, p, 33)

The challenges, decisions, ethics

I feel that my approach towards youth work at the *Venue* ensured a far higher level of confidence from the young people than if I had simply carried out interviews. It is apparent to young people if individuals are interested in them, in collating data or doing their barest minimum for their job. Their attitude towards a number of the youth workers reflected an all too clear awareness of the degree of their commitment, or lack thereof. I therefore feel that had I not played such an active part in setting up and running the centre I would have experienced considerable difficulty obtaining the detailed information that I did.

However, this also needs to be balanced alongside the fact that I was under-taking research. It is important to acknowledge that an engaged practice does have the potential to exploit the research subjects. In order to address this I consistently challenged my on-going practice working with the research subjects, and questioned how and why we were choosing particular journeys and paths. It was vital that the research subjects felt ownership of and an engagement with the case studies, so their needs were prioritised in shaping the projects. Working in this fashion did not mean that the research was taking a secondary position since the research was absolutely concerned with how the participants engaged and the choices that they made. At its heart the research sought to bring about positive social change that facilitated greater cultural engagement by the research subjects, drawing lived experience into a discursive, and active, space.

As highlighted previously, we specifically engaged young people in making decisions about the appearance, identity and role of the centre. In contrast, the young people's advice and information shop in the city centre was set up and developed entirely without young people's involvement. Interestingly, it received considerable criticism both from policy makers for young people, in Coventry City Council, as well as from young people, who commented that it looked like a library or careers centre rather than a place for young people. In contrast, I gained considerable insight into the lived experiences of young people in the area by developing and encouraging them to express their feelings around the aesthetics and role of the *Venue* space, in addition to the content, specifically in terms of the advice and information that should be held. This insight wouldn't have been possible without the grassroots interaction and engagement of the young people involved in the research. Nor would it have been achieved without the young people enjoying this level of engagement; ensuring that they had fun within this process was a core value for the *Venue*.

Whilst projects developed with young people at the *Venue* were generally positive experiences, this did not prove to be the case with all of the initiatives with which we were involved. One such project was the production of a comic book based around young people's lived experiences. I worked, for a short time, with a group of co-ordinators who had been funded to co-produce a comic with young people in the area. However, I was not involved in setting up the actual workshops. I attended a number of workshops as an 'observer' since I was particularly interested in hearing the experiences that were, supposedly, to be told. Unfortunately, this did not happen. The workshops were run by people with virtually no youth work or

community experience, the outcome of which was that members of the group were not encouraged to talk about or express experiences that they had had. This was extremely disappointing, although it did justify the approach that had been taken at the *Venue*.

A number of challenges arose from having to work with the partner Elders project. Members of the Elders Steering Group who sat on the Joint Executive Committee for the combined project were often out of touch with the needs of young people. They felt that too much money was being spent on the *Venue*, though in actuality it was less than half the overall funding. They commented that the young people using the *Venue* were 'undeserving,' had done nothing to 'earn their centre', and that they 'don't know how to look after anything they've been given' or 'what do they [the young people] care about their community – or their family' as well as 'that place [The *Venue*] is just like a nightclub, it's a dating agency'. Such sentiments stemmed from those supposed to be supportive of the project, since they were on the Executive Committee.

These comments certainly gave no credit to the work being put in by the young people in setting up the *Venue*. Fortunately, however, this was not a view expressed by other members of the immediate community. When publicising the opening of the *Venue*, a group of young people and I went round to all of the local shops with posters, requesting that these be put in the windows. Many young people spoken to had already heard about the project and were keen for it to open, since they felt that there was a real need for a centre for young people in the area. Shop owners asked us questions concerning the facilities that would be there as well as the information or advice which would be available and commented that they would encourage members of their own family to visit the centre.

The Venue: conclusion

The findings at the *Venue* highlighted the depth and range of diversity in relation to young people's synthesis of culture. I was therefore aware that further work would benefit the research with deeper, more culturally specific, findings. Hamel, Dufour and Fortin maintain that case study research based on one case study alone risks being microscopic, "considering only a single facet that is intrinsic to the case study investigation" (1993, p. 34). They suggest that by carrying out further case studies it is possible to lessen this risk. I therefore felt that an additional area of research was

required which developed, more specifically, the formation and influences of culture as art upon cultural identities and their subsequent impact upon the production of culture. Therefore, with the second case study, *Changing Views*, I developed an initiative that was bound, far more, to cultural identities as that deemed to pertain to high art. I consequently hoped to create an environment that allowed participants to consider the processes that led to cultural production and how this related to identity formation. I hoped that through the continued use of a more interactive research approach I would be able to encourage discussion relating to the processes and themes involved.

Changing Views

My aim within the second case study was to examine the role that cultural production and representation play in establishing one's sense of cultural identity. The structure and topic of the second case study was designed, in many ways, to complement the first case study in enabling the identification of issues and experiences relating to cultural identity formation. Individuals and groups were encouraged to draw upon their own cultural background whilst also examining the identities they utilised in terms of their cultural self-categorisation.

The concept for the project centred on the on-going identity debates around Asian women within British culture. A fundamental element of the project was to ask how it feels to be classified as of Asian origin but to live in Britain, and to represent the participants' thoughts and experiences through forms of cultural production specifically relating to their cultural 'roots'. In utilising such an approach the aim was to reflect cultural heritages which possess both cultural roots of a symbolic 'home' and of 'being here'. The research carried out at the *Venue* had unquestionably offered elements of this, yet the projects undertaken, whilst largely community arts driven, were never quite so specific in concentrating upon the *processes* of cultural production and the manner in which the influences that form one's cultural identity impact upon cultural production and subsequent consumption. The case study therefore initiated was vital in exploring such themes in practice, since it also sought to ensure a degree of visibility for those taking part in the project.

Birmingham,⁴⁶ England's second largest city is home to almost one million people and is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the UK.⁴⁷ 29.6% (just fewer than 300, 000) of the city's population is considered to be from an ethnic group other than white, as compared to the national average of 9.1% for England. In terms of demographic breakdown it is currently joint lead with Leicester to be the first 'majority minority' city. Contradictory though this statement might appear it would mean that the city's ethnic minority groupings would amount to more than 50% of the population, thereby becoming the majority.

Birmingham has the largest concentration of many groupings outside London, particularly Asian and Caribbean; there is a large Pakistani population, primarily from the Mirpur district of Azad Kashmir. One in five people in the city are Asian; in the region of 200, 000 people. African Caribbean people make up approximately 60, 000 of Birmingham's population. In recent years, the demography has changed even further with migrants from Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. This has included Somalis and Kurdish communities; primarily due to Birmingham signing up to the Government's refugee and asylum seeker dispersal system implemented in 2000.

Minority ethnic communities have tended to be concentrated within the inner city. There have been disturbances between communities and groupings due to on-going tensions. There has been tension between Asian and Caribbean, Caribbean and African and Asian and African communities; groupings and issues arise within and between all communities for very different reasons. Due to the parameters of the research it wasn't possible to develop or analyse this field in depth.

Birmingham's communities are economically very mixed; however just to provide a brief over-view I want to pick up on a few figures relating to economic data connected to the national census. There is a direct correlation between wards which have high minority ethnic communities and the national census figures showing individuals who have never worked. To illustrate this, the three highest minority ethnic wards are Sparkbrook with 4638, Washwood Heath 3927, and Lozells and East Handsworth 3524. The average for Birmingham is 1224. In contrast, there is a similar mirror picture when one considers the figures relating to those working in higher managerial or professional posts. In this category, wards with a high minority ethnic grouping

⁴⁶ For more information on Birmingham, see Parker and Long, 2003

⁴⁷ Figures accessed via <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/00cn.asp#ethnic> in July 2007

have a low score. If we revisit the three wards identified earlier, Sparkbrook has a score of 481, Washwood Heath 214 and Lozells and East Handsworth 354. The city average is 718.

My position in Birmingham was to a certain extent determined by my personal circumstances. At the time of identifying the need for an appropriate second case study, I was fortunate in gaining temporary employment as 'Cultural Partnerships Officer' for Birmingham City Council's Arts and Community Unit. The post was for nine months, although the arts team manager hoped that, after the first project, it would become permanent; an element that brought its own pressures and responsibilities. Working for Birmingham City Council I was in a very different position to that experienced at the *Venue*. Having council backing brought with it both challenges and advantages. I was perceived as having far more power, since I was a Birmingham City Council employee, and significantly, I was based at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. I was in that relatively rare position suggested by Bowles & Klein (1983), a critic of the very institution of which I was also a part. Yet, as a council employee I was far more answerable to councillors, line managers, and supervisors, as well as to preconceived ideas of the form this project should take.

Ultimately I was responsible for initiating, producing and managing the second case study, so my role within *Changing Views* was crucial. I also managed the budget. There is no doubt that without the council funding, I would have experienced considerable difficulty running such a creativity-led community project. I was therefore extremely fortunate to be in a position where a budget had been allocated to the post and I was able to negotiate the project's development and concept. Clearly this needed to be within the council-led agenda, and there were undoubtedly issues which I needed to navigate, some of which I will pick up on later when considering the challenges that were faced in developing the case study.

Research methods

Again, I utilised an interactive research approach. I sought, with this project, to enable the expression of syncretic cultural identities through cultural production. There were therefore numerous, layered, components that made up the whole case study. This provided a considerable amount of research material, although it also proved quite challenging to maintain up to date field notes and a working diary.

However, I felt that these were vital in documenting the case study's progression and so continued to use a field work diary throughout – an element that proved extremely useful when drawing together the local authority required evaluation.

Maintaining a diary helped me to chart not only the growing relationships with participants but also the challenges of working within the arts sector, specifically considering the many informal barriers that face those unfamiliar with the arts and creative terrain. The majority of my time with the participants was not spent in structured interviews but in creative workshops; a range of subjects could be covered during any single workshop. It was therefore vital to keep a record of the breadth and content of informal discussions and conversations. Analysis of the diary highlighted how my relationship with the participants developed far slower than that with the young people at the *Venue*. It is likely that this was because our engagement was primarily through the creative workshops which took place on a weekly basis, rather than the almost daily contact that I had with young people at the *Venue*. However, it is also likely that this was because of the position that I was seen to hold: representing the local authority. Individuals were consequently slightly less comfortable about my role within the workshops. However, as the project developed so too did my relationship with all of those involved.

Often, in an informal atmosphere, the participants and I went on to discuss ideas and issues relating to the research problematic. They spoke extensively concerning their ideas and thoughts on a range of topics. Without such interaction I feel that my research would have lacked key grassroots evidence (Whyte, 1943) or the real existing identities mentioned in the introduction by McRobbie. In the utilisation of such an informal environment I feel that I gained vital insight which would not have been achieved without building up a relationship with the participants. However, it was important not to abuse this relationship and I was clear from the outset that I was a student, researching a thesis. This positioned me as both an employee of Birmingham City Council as well as a university student, although perceptions of me by the research subjects tended to focus upon the former. Interestingly, however, the artists who worked on the project talked to me far more about my research and were interested in the areas that I covered. This resulted in some lengthy conversations some of which fed into the thesis, with quotes obtained through the structured interviews.

Structured interviews with the second case study

As in the first case study, I carried out a series of structured interviews. Thoughts and opinions around the issues that were faced were discussed during interviews which were carried out with participants from all of the groups. Throughout the project I developed relationships with the participants and was the holder of many confidences. Interviews were carried out at the location where the arts workshops took place, a prior acknowledged safe space. These venues were anything from schools to community centres and even participant's and other individual's homes. Individuals from all of the groups were interviewed although some were initially keener than others to take part. However, by the end of the project, all of the participants, artists and co-ordinators, that is over fifty people, had been interviewed in some way. It was consistently made clear that the structured interviews were optional and that I was happy for us to simply talk whilst workshops were taking place without any further discussion.

An added complexity within this was that the interviews contributed towards a publication that supported the exhibition. A copy of the publication was to be given to each participant. In order to be honest about my engagement and to ensure that the participants were comfortable with their comments going into a publication and into a thesis this was discussed towards the beginning of the initiative. We talked about how the theme evolved and how this then fed to and from my research. Many of the participants found this area interesting and were keen to talk about the research, as well as the practicalities of under-taking a thesis. Where there was little or no interest in my research, or discussion on this subject, I kept feedback and quotes – where they were available or relevant - within the confines of the publication.

Rather than adhere to set questions, questions were structured within themes. Since this was the second case study the questions were specifically targeted around culture, identity, production and representation. Our discussions were focused upon the development of the exhibition, particularly following our rebuttal by Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, an issue I investigate in Chapter Four. The interview themes picked up on some of the challenges, as well as the successes of *Changing Views* and engaged the participants in reflecting on solutions and the rationale behind circumstances and situation. Nayak (2003) profiles the benefits of reflexive theory-led discussions. In addition, since everyone was involved in creating new

work, a discussion of the pieces being produced was often a starting point. So, the following are just some examples of the questions posed

- We've talked about British and Asian or British and Caribbean as if they are two separate cultures, do you feel they are? Do you feel you're mixing them?
- Do you see British or Asian/ Caribbean culture as very different – do you think that they're ever going to be seen as the same?
- What about your cultural background, would you say it's different from your family, or different to your friends – or both or neither!
- Do you think you have as much choice as you need to have – as you want to have?
- How would you explain what culture is?
 - Would you say it causes problems – is it difficult mixing cultures?
- What about the project that we're doing – are you enjoying the project or have you enjoyed the project?
- Do you think that art is a good way to express ideas?
- Have you found it hard to engage in the project at all?
- Do you feel it combines traditional/contemporary styles?

The majority of the participants were interviewed on a one to one basis. However, because some of the groups were large - one group consisted of over 20 people - a number of focus groups were also run. Generally, however, young people were able to choose whether they wished to participate in an individual interview or take part in a focus group. Frequently, where a group of friends was participating, they chose the focus group option. Focus group sessions were therefore extremely relaxed; young people were encouraged to talk to each other and share their thoughts and experiences about the topics and themes raised. Developing the focus groups was key to ensuring that reflection and discussion was part of the process.

Since I was interviewing participants from across generations, language was a factor. Due to English being the language in common all of the interviews were in English, however for some of the older women, the co-ordinator or more proficient English speaker would translate, whilst this was not an ideal situation it was a necessary circumstance. I wanted to ensure however that the language used in the interviews was not intimidating, particularly since language can easily alienate those using a

different vocabulary or accent and in a worst case scenario cause interviewees to question the worth of what they are saying. Language, suggests Stringer “orients us to our world and to each other; appropriate language thus becomes a fundamental cornerstone of community based action research” (1996, p. 135). I therefore adjusted the terminology that I used to suit the context and the research subjects often led in the use of a variety of terms.

As mentioned earlier, those interviewed were aware that quotes would be transcribed and published in a book that would be available wherever the exhibition was on display. However, it was also made absolutely clear that no ‘confidences’ would be broken, that the publication would have no names next to quotes and interviewees would have full approval of all that was published. This was done by showing the text for the publication to all participants. The interviews were consequently lively and there was a considerable amount of censoring done during and after the interviews, particularly as the book was given to all participants and was therefore likely to be seen by parents or relatives. One example of such censorship was that the author of the poem on the front cover wished to remain anonymous because she considered that the social taboo of smoking would reflect negatively upon her as a Sikh and the poem mentioned her smoking (a point I examine in Chapter Five).

In developing the research content, I also encouraged the participants to write about and reflect on the art pieces that they had made although I also felt that a text based response alone was insufficient and I wanted to move beyond a solely “linear assemblage of words” (James, Hockley & Dawson, 1997, p. 11). I felt that whilst words may offer considerable insight into lived experiences, alone they could not fully pinpoint living, on-going, shifting cultural influences and identity connections. The pieces produced included textiles, paintings, 3D sculpture as well as digital images. This is not to say that I intended the visual images and work to constitute a ‘faithful representation’ as suggested by Clifford & Marcus (1986), rather that they provided an additional piece in actively representing the research subjects’ cultural engagement. All of the participants were aware that the pieces that they made would be included in an exhibition that I would support them in curating. We hoped that the exhibition would encourage the participants to feel that their cultural heritage and identities were valued within Birmingham’s arts provision.

The participants

In developing the case study, I again sought to ensure representation from the participants, who I anticipated would gradually shape the project. Consequently, it was vital to the project's aims and objectives that the initiative stemmed from the grassroots and be generated and developed by the participants.

In total, there were five groups participating in the project, so I had access to a considerable number of people from a diverse range of backgrounds. The first group was the Bangladeshi Group.⁴⁸ The Bangladeshi Group consisted of older Bengali women, approximately 15 – 20 attended the sessions but there was a core group of 15 women who attended almost every workshop. The group was established to decrease the feelings of isolation and alienation experienced by many Asian women when they first arrived in the UK. The group co-ordinator hoped to provide general advice whilst encouraging people to access provision and take up a variety of opportunities.

This group worked alongside the Bangladeshi Girls Group, occasionally connecting to bring work together. The girls group was smaller and consisted of between 5 – 7 girls, 2 of whom attended all of the sessions, whilst the others attended intermittently. The two groups worked with textile artist Ranbir Kaur who worked with both groups to produce traditional and contemporary tohran (door hangings).

The third group participated at Howard's End Girls School. This was a large, mixed, group, 22 girls aged between 13 and 14, the workshops were held during their art classes and at lunchtimes. They hoped to enjoy a broader insight into potentially alternative art forms through working with contemporary artists. This was a mixed group who worked with visual arts, a painter, Uzma Quraishi, who specialised in miniature paintings.

The final two groups were the Sikh Women's Forum and Ladybridge Girls' Group. The women's forum was a longstanding group who aimed to support the development of women in Birmingham. The girls group met regularly to encourage and support young women from a cross section of backgrounds in the area, offering advice and information on a range of issues. These groups had previously worked

⁴⁸ All group names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

on projects together and so agreed to meet and work together. The Sikh Women's Forum consisted of approximately five women, as did the girls group. They worked with a ceramics artist, Rita Patel, to both decorate and produce new work in ceramics. See Appendix One for more detail on the research subjects.

Detail and design of the project

The *Changing Views* initiative took place over a year. The project was made up of a number of components; these included a period of intensive community development work; participatory arts led creative workshops taking place over twenty weeks in a variety of venues and spaces chosen by community development workers; the production of a range of arts products which were owned by the producing individual or group; interviews and focus groups towards the *Changing Views* publication; a final exhibition of the work at a community museum in Birmingham and a performance event featuring local artists, attended by dignitaries.

The project brief produced for *Changing Views* discussed how: "without an acknowledgement of 'traditional' forms, or any sense of 'coming from', communities considered themselves, and their cultural routes/ roots under-valued". In addressing such issues, I sought to look in some detail at the changes that occurred over time and 'between' cultures, potentially through cultural cross-fertilisation, whilst also drawing on Bhabha's theory of a third space; observing his theory in what could be considered practice. Oommen comments how "one third of the tasks of social science is to establish the link between concepts and theories vis-à-vis a variety of empirical situations in order to establish their plausibility and test their validity" (1997, p. 23). Therefore, at the core of the initiative was the need to

Highlight the complex fusions which occur both inter and intra-culturally. That cultural transition is part of the conceptual framework is represented through the production of what could be termed culturally 'hybrid' art forms, designs and techniques. Furthermore, each participant brings personal lived experiences of a hyphenated identity to the workshops; it is this sense of multiple cultural heritages that influences cultural production. Such feelings similarly influence 'contemporary' artists who may consider themselves working 'in-between' cultures. The project therefore sought to examine both 'traditional' and contemporary arts skills and the influence of the former upon the latter.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Report paper produced for 'Changing Views', Birmingham City Council, 1998

It is an important factor in under-taking community led research that the project concept was only developed after considerable discussion with key community workers. I therefore met up with Asian women's development workers, youth and community workers, arts development officers, teachers and community artists. Working alongside community workers I accessed groups and individuals who were interested in the project.

A key element of the project was for all participants to feel ownership of the project; that they had been central to its delivery and vision, consequently ensuring their visibility and engagement. Therefore I worked hard to ensure as wide a range of opportunity for their voices as possible. I compiled a publication that drew on interviews, life stories, and oral narratives without leaving behind social research as a valid medium. The desired result was that the publication, if not the academic narrative behind it, was widely accessible to an audience which registered beyond academia and offered something towards addressing agnotology, curing 'the ultimate evil [of] stupidity' (du Bois, 1999, p. 58).

My aim in producing the publication was to ensure that many versions of truth could be represented. As Clifford comments, truth is negotiated on many levels and "even the most ethnographic texts – serious, true fictions – are systems, or economies of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control." (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 7) In both of the case studies, initiatives were set up which developed the ideas and work of so-called 'powerless' people (Said, 1995; Smith, 1986). This approach was central to the research, since I did not feel that my voice should be the only one speaking or being heard. An important element was that the research didn't only include my representations or realities but others' too. Therefore, whilst building relationships with the participants and research subjects I was looking to encourage a sharing of expression and lived experiences in order to, as Probyn (1992) suggests, place "the experiences of ourselves, and of our differences, to work where our voices may be able to reach, touch, change others, to the centrality of theorizing through one's feeling in and through another" (Routledge, 1996, p. 407).

In seeking a multiplicity of voices I aimed to access individuals from a cross-section of backgrounds and in a range of social contexts. This was particularly important since I considered the aim of enquiry within the research as "*not* to establish the 'truth' or to describe what 'really' is happening, but to reveal the different truths and

realities – constructions – held by different individuals and groups” (Stringer, 1991, p. 41). I sought to encourage practitioners, key workers and young people to ‘tell it like it is’,⁵⁰ to broaden out the realities that are vocalised and further develop as Routledge suggests, “in our writing, we stage a representation of particular “reality” in order to display it” (1996, p. 401).

The challenges, decisions, ethics

The development of *Changing Views* required considerable investment in terms of time and energy and became my full time role for well over a year. This had both a positive and negative impact on the PhD. It ensured that research was taking place from a genuinely deep perspective covering a comprehensive range of themes relevant to the research topic. However, it also meant that the writing and academic elements became secondary in the desire to ensure good practice at all levels within the case study development. I don’t regret that this happened although I do regret that it delayed the academic progression and contextualisation of the work.

I want to look at some of the issues that arose in developing the case study and explore the basis on which some of the decisions were made in relation to the search for good practice.

In developing the project, initial contacts were made with over seventeen⁵¹ groups, out of which we hoped to have four or five groups participating for the full twenty weeks. I specifically kept the overall concept fluid in order for individuals to influence the project. This was vital, since I sought to move away from the view of “human nature as passive, always acted *upon* by outside forces beyond the individual’s control” (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 8).

Firstly, I want to examine some of the reasons why contact with this many groups was necessary before the selection of the final five, since it raises some interesting issues. One of the first groups that I contacted was based at a Hindu temple in Small Heath, Birmingham. Small Heath is an inner city area, with a large, predominantly Pakistani, Muslim community. It is one of Birmingham’s targeted anti-poverty areas

⁵⁰ Quote taken from the *Changing Views* publication (1998, p. 14)

⁵¹ Contact was made with a wide range of groups, including youth fora, youth projects, youth and community centres, artists groups, sheltered women’s hostels, neighbourhood fora, cultural centres, primary schools, women’s groups, secondary schools, women’s fora, youth clubs and girls groups, mental health fora, and family centres.

and received a considerable amount of funding from the Government's 'Single Regeneration Budget' (SRB). The women's group there was fairly well established and primarily served the generation who had migrated to Britain, having previously grown up in the Indian sub-continent. Whilst the group had only a minimal knowledge of English they worked closely with Age Concern and accessed a number of services.

The Asian Women's Development Officer for the area had told them about the project and I first met the group with her. Whilst initially unsure about what the project entailed, they asked to meet me again, and the community artist with whom they would work, to discuss the project in more detail. It was at this meeting that the co-ordinator of the group asked how much they would be paid for participating and 'producing' pieces of art. After both I and also the community artist had explained that this was a voluntary project – participation was for enjoyment and to learn new skills from the community artist – the co-ordinator stated that without payment they weren't interested.

After discussion with workers who knew the group it appeared that they were aware of other Asian women's groups who were being paid for the work that they did, such as embroidery. Interestingly, the majority of community arts projects with Asian women have utilised embroidery or sewing - skills which tend to be seen as a 'necessity' rather than enjoyment.

The co-ordinator of the group felt that being asked to participate in an arts project for free was taking advantage of them and not acknowledging their skills. They did not consider this a leisure time activity since, for many older women, it was essential to purchase the fabric, design and make their own clothes when they first arrived in Britain (Bhachu, 2004; Puwar, 2004). However, it was also clear from the discomfort expressed to me by part of the group that some of the women did wish to participate. Unfortunately, they felt unable to do so since the co-ordinator of the group had made it clear that the group would not be participating.

The mothers' group at a Birmingham Primary School also raised some interesting issues. The Home Link worker runs a range of courses since, often, schools are one of the few routes through which to develop projects working with Asian women. Due to a number of factors, issues of access can be problematic. Language skills frequently play a limiting role in publicising information on initiatives and projects that

may be of interest to Asian women. Concerns regarding travelling to other areas also limit the extent to which some Asian women feel able to take part in projects. Hence, the Home Link worker established courses in which mothers at the school had expressed an interest. Particularly popular were the computer, English, DIY and Keep Fit classes.

Initially, the community arts project was to run over the summer period, however for the mother's group at the Primary School, running the project during the summer months would have meant time away from their children whilst on holiday, which was not considered desirable. All stressed that their roles as mothers were the priority. However, some interest was expressed should the project start date be pushed back to September, which, due to the extension of my contract, we were able to do.

The artist, who was to work with the group, and I went along to meet them early in September. However, whilst talking to them the artist noted that the teacher taking the English class was extremely negative about the project and was actively gate-keeping 'her' group. Subsequent visits developing and encouraging the group, alongside more general publicity, failed to find a core of women who wished to commit to the project. The negative role of the gate-keeper was a key factor within this and very clearly highlights just some of the challenges faced within community engagement and development. Occurrences such as these highlight the importance of acknowledging and researching the social context within which any research takes place.

For a number of the other groups, whilst interest was expressed, they felt that their skills were not equal to working so intensively on an arts project. One example of this was a sheltered women's hostel. The women were keen to become involved but did not feel sufficiently able to work within visual arts. Hence, rather than asking them to commit to the initiative we developed a project more suited to their needs. This project involved artistic 'home-making' and successfully drew on the women's skills without them feeling inadequate. Similarly, the women's group at a family centre and another at a community hall wished to do arts workshops yet without the intensity of a twenty week course. I subsequently arranged for them to participate in some of the workshops without feeling that they should commit more time. For other projects within the seventeen visited, such as a youth project, internal staffing problems curtailed their involvement.

There were also issues associated with the response from cultural institutions. Whilst I won't develop the theme or role of cultural institutions here since this is an area that I will cover in more detail in later chapters, I do want to explore some of the challenges that I encountered through the *Changing Views* case study. An important aim for the local authority arts team concerned opening out access and engagement for South Asian women. It was therefore made clear by the management that we needed to proactively move into some of the more formal cultural spaces for exhibitions, spaces that I felt were owned by what I term the mainstream arts sector. Along with community development workers I looked at some of the potential spaces for the final exhibition.

One of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery's spaces had initially been identified. However, we were not surprised when specific power dynamics came into play. The museum's exhibitions committee decided that because 'quality' could not be guaranteed the exhibition should not go into the main museum, a subject to which I will return in Chapter Four. Fortunately, Soho House Museum, one of the smaller community museums with a bespoke exhibition space, agreed to host the exhibition there.

Even there, however certain prejudices were evident. Soho House initially agreed for the exhibition to be up for just two weeks, a ridiculously short time period given that the majority of exhibitions run for three months. Once the exhibition was on display the curators almost immediately agreed that it could be extended. The exhibition eventually remained in the space for just under four months. Ultimately, the exhibition drew in far higher audience numbers to view the exhibition than had been recorded for almost all other exhibitions previously held in the refurbished space.

Changing Views: Conclusion and continuing engagement

My engagement with *Changing Views* positioned me to carry on working in this field. I continued in post as Cultural Partnerships Officer for a short time after *Changing Views* but subsequently went to work for Arts Council England West Midlands. Following this I continued to work within the Arts Sector but on a freelance, consultancy basis. I therefore continued to manage, produce and research a wide range of projects, a number of which were picked up within the PhD research.

The circumstances and methods engaged within each piece of work varied as did the challenges of undertaking thoughtful research. The consultancy work undertaken was not delivered as part of a PhD thesis but developed from the needs and outcomes required by very different clients. However, the findings were certainly applicable to the theme and questions within the PhD. This continuation was both a positive feature and threw up challenges.

On-going engagement with a range of projects continued to refresh the findings of the two case studies. It opened out the research to wider implications, organisations, institutions, artists and research subjects. It frequently enabled an internal position within a number of different institutions and therefore continued to generate relevant findings. However, this was also problematic; it perhaps threw the research too wide. It proved challenging when drawing together the thesis, there was too much to consider. The findings spanned both a considerable chronological period and covered a wide range of projects.

One of the projects drawn upon was that of the Veil exhibition which was held at the New Art Gallery Walsall. My involvement came about through my relationship with Walsall's Creative Development Team (WCDT). The WCDT have in many ways been pioneers of the participatory arts approach; addressing non arts sector agenda through creativity and the arts.⁵² I had previously been involved with the team researching the needs of Asian artists and communities in Walsall. This led on to my engagement with Veil. However, because for WCDT, engaging audiences and encouraging participation was central to their work, we worked with the gallery to host locally relevant programmes. One event was an open discussion; another was to curate local artists' work, responding to the Veil.

Another of the smaller case studies was a piece of audience development research on behalf of a national heritage charity. The charity was looking to develop Black and minority ethnic audiences for its cross section of heritage properties. I was appointed to carry out a period of research and produce recommendations. The research drew in the views of both 'non-attenders' as well as heritage charity staff. However, it is also important to note that the research did not consider the complex arenas of gender, class, age, varied ability or economic group in any detail. Where

⁵² More information on Walsall's Creative Development Team can be found at http://www.walsall.gov.uk/index/leisure_and_culture/creative_development_team.htm accessed August 2007

religion was a factor in our targeting individuals, the depth that might be required to draw together a fuller audience development action plan was not possible.

In all, we held three focus groups. These were broken down into the following categories; a group of arts professionals from across the region, not directly involved with the heritage charity; a group of young people, from Birmingham, considered the charity's marketing along with a tour of one of the properties and provided responses to this tour; an elder African Caribbean community group from Wolverhampton, who had not previously attended a heritage site, discussed interpretations and representations of history through, for example, stories and artefacts. It was considered important that the focus groups took place at the properties where possible, since this would enable a fuller understanding and appreciation of the organisation and its role.

Within the focus groups we drew upon the skills of artists in working with the groups. Their engagement provided a tool to enable consultation but also helped to avoid the all too familiar consultation fatigue. Many minority ethnic communities express their fatigue at constantly being the subjects researched. Primarily because they see little emphasis placed upon larger institutions or organisations that also require change and adaptation to the needs of a changing demography.

The focus groups were accompanied by more intensive one to one interviews with a cross section of individuals from a range of cultural backgrounds. This included researchers and curators within the area, a cross section of the charity's staff, and also artists with an interest in heritage. It also included individuals who had engaged in previous 'mystery visitor' research for the charity.

The final piece of work specifically relevant to the PhD research was when I was contacted as part of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre's production of Bezhti. Due to my freelance consultancy work I was asked to facilitate a post-show discussion for Bezhti, ultimately, the discussion didn't go ahead, however I was privy to a number of the discussions that were held in connection with the play but also aware of the consultation that took place prior to the performance being staged.

A mutual framework

The case studies, as laid out above, are not studies for comparison, together they offer a more comprehensive picture than either would alone. As highlighted, both case studies sought to benefit not only myself as the researcher but also the research 'subjects' in a positive, enriching way. As Rapoport suggests, it is important that research takes place "within a mutually acceptable ethical framework" (Hart and Bond, 1995, p. 70). Researchers who fail to address such ethics risk behaving in an exploitative manner; without such collaboration, empowerment will almost certainly fail.

Of necessity, both of the case studies on which I worked were time limited. However, in both there was an awareness of this, and an 'exit' strategy set in place. Although with *The Venue* this was slightly problematic, since the project was due to continue for some time after my departure, we organised a day's activities and evening meal. An opportunity was also arranged for the group of young people to visit Birmingham and participate in an arts project for young people with whom I was involved at the time.⁵³ Funding for the *Venue* ceased in March 2000, and funding from another grant giving body was not applied for. The reason for this, however, was positive. The project had highlighted, through practical grassroots evidence and the work of the young people, the genuine need for a purpose built youth centre in Foleshill. Finally, Coventry City Council had approved plans for a local building to be adapted for young people in the area.

In the case of *Changing Views*, part of the exit strategy was both the launch of the exhibition and the return of the pieces which each participant had worked on. The participants of *Changing Views*, whilst interested in accessing future projects, will need to apply for further funding. However, one of the participating groups hoped to qualify for an 'enterprise allowance scheme' which would allow them to continue their embroidery on a small commercial scale. I re-visited the group, since they wished to show me a tohran (door hanging) that they had produced without the assistance of an arts worker. Unsurprisingly, it was of extremely high standard and will be displayed at their centre, alongside those previously exhibited.

⁵³ See www.gallery37.co.uk for more information on this arts led young people's training scheme.

There was also a number of what could be considered softer outcomes for the projects. A number of young people who had used the *Venue* went on to university and commented that engaging with the project had helped with their self confidence as well as broadening their sense of aspiration. This was also the case in *Changing Views*, where a number of the younger women who hadn't previously accessed further education were able to do so, in part following older generations increased confidence in mainstream provision. One particular example that stood out was that of Sima, for whom engaging in the project opened up new avenues. Meeting in town shortly after the exhibition launch, she excitedly told me that she was being allowed to return to college "thanks to you and the art project". The reality was of course considerably more complex. Her parents had also engaged in the project and visited the museum. They had commented on their enjoyment and the relative ease that they felt accessing mainstream provision. This had allayed a number of their fears in connection with their daughter going on to the local college and they had decided to allow her to continue her studies.

In turn, the case studies were themselves grounded within knowledge gained through my continuing paid employment. My employment connected with the themes developed in both of the case studies. Those examples listed above included the research done for a large heritage focused charity, audience development for a small arts organisation and a mapping exercise for the regional branch of a strategic arts development agency. I use this work to contextualise further the findings of the above case studies.

Practice led, interdisciplinary approach and method of analysis

In deciding upon a research method, I wanted to be able to work with a medium that could acknowledge the tensions between essentialism and heterogeneity within identity formation. An important requirement for the research methods was for them to utilise an eclectic multi-disciplinary research approach since I wanted to ensure that identity could be viewed on an on-going basis, allowing fluidity and a sense of identity as not concluded but influenced and responsive to a plethora of changing factors, regarding which I saw culture, both as every day activity but also as arts practice, as a key element.

This, I felt, required a 'living' approach; a process whereby experiences included within the research could be symbiotic. I hoped that the research would include, to at

least some degree, a developmental experience or journey for the so called research subjects; I therefore aimed to encourage input by the participants and open out engagement as widely as possible. I felt that the research methods chosen were critical because the decisions one makes are not simply a technical enquiry but impact in a far more socio-historical manner upon the research.

Beverley Skeggs stresses this when she comments how “to ignore questions of methodology is to assume that knowledge comes from nowhere allowing knowledge makers to abdicate responsibility for their productions and representations” (1997, p. 17); knowledge is as much about politics as it is about understanding an area. Research is directly implicated by this since it concerns the manner in which knowledge is produced and the potential benefits or challenges to those in power, inevitably those who tend to control the processes and production of knowledge.

My initial starting point in researching a methodology adequate to such multiplicity and engagement was the work of W.E.B. Du Bois. In researching the case studies, I sought to enable the representation of some of the tensions that existed in reconciling identities which are positioned as contradictory. I was particularly interested in picking up on what it means to always be seen ‘through the eyes of others’; being, as Du Bois writes, ‘born with a veil’ (1999, p. 11); to always be the ‘mysterious other’, is something which frequently arose in the interviews and subsequently in the research findings.

Crucially, Du Bois also stressed the importance of a clear relationship between knowledge and action; something that I considered to be at the core of the action research method utilised throughout both case studies. Du Bois arrival at the vital importance of this approach stemmed from the following incident. Sam Hose was an illiterate black farm labourer who was alleged to have killed his white landlord’s wife. Du Bois set about gathering evidence concerning the mitigating circumstances of Hose’s alleged crime. However, on the way to the courts he learned that Hose had been lynched, his knuckles on show at the grocery store. He returned to Atlanta University and never gave his evidence.

In reading this, the factor which went on to influence my methodology was that the research, whilst still accurate knowledge, ceased to be of any *practical* beneficial use until it was also connected to action. This element was no longer possible with the Sam Hose case and the knowledge therefore ceased to be of value to Du Bois. He

went on to comment how the research which he was conducting constituted 'so small a part of the sum of occurrences' that it was simply too far from the 'hot reality of life' (1999, p. 222); again I felt that this factor was key within my own research. The research and subsequent analysis needed to be strongly rooted in and connected to the 'hot reality of life'.

After the Sam Hose incident, Du Bois made the decision to change his style of writing. He left the 'sociological monograph' and instead developed a far more interdisciplinary approach that was rooted in action and practical application. James et al comment how "The monograph, journal article or conference presentation are media which clearly do not offer a copy of the original, being a linear assemblage of words rather than a three-dimensional event or experience. Film, photograph or artefact involves visual images as well as language and might therefore appear to constitute a more 'faithful' representation." (1999, p. 11) I wanted, so far as was possible since one cannot move beyond representation, to seek as three dimensional an experience within the research as possible.

My decision to draw heavily on such an interactive research approach was influenced by Du Bois' own interdisciplinary approach and action-led aims. As Du Bois felt at the time, I also hoped that my research would, in some way, be of benefit on a level 'nearer' to the grassroots, bringing grassroots research practice into a closer affiliation with theoretical findings. Whilst there is no single best way to bring the practice of research into closer alliance with theory, an action research influenced approach was designed specifically to bridge the gap between theory and research.

I therefore prioritised grassroots action and participatory observation over secondary textual analyses. Analysis alone would not, I felt, have offered sufficient context within which to observe theory in practice, nor allowed me to view identity as a process, as consisting of multiple identifications and yet a whole identity, an on-going formation.

Simply recognising and writing about the factors that contribute towards the formation of 'new ethnicities' (Hall, 1988) would not, I felt, have been sufficient. Rather, I identified a research methodology that sought to enable individuals to represent as well as constitute themselves. I needed to implement a process, to examine how cultural production represented cultural identities in order to develop any theoretical stance regarding identity. Without carrying out such 'active' research I would have

failed to acknowledge the complexity of identities or the diversity of the contributing factors which are part of the on-going cultural processes of identity formation.

I also wanted to move away from the idea of knowledge as of singular benefit to the so-called producers of knowledge and develop, instead, a method which offered benefits both to myself as the researcher and equally importantly, to the so called research subjects who were engaged in challenging existing power relations. Therefore in both case studies the participants were consistently engaged and consulted. In the first case study this was in advocating for a youth centre for the area; in the second case study this was participating in creative arts practice and engaging with the mainstream arts sector in both the short and long term.

Stanfield and Rutledge endorse such a viewpoint when they comment that there is a great need for research methods such as action or participatory research stemming from epistemological traditions that have the potential to “assist research subjects in improving their quality of life, as opposed to the impersonal, exploitative conventions of logical positivism” (1993, p. 35). This approach is not unique, as Kalra has commented, “some sort of commitment to use research for achieving certain social ends seems to mark much of the writings on race and ethnicity in Britain” (2006, p. 453).

Stanfield and Rutledge further comment how “relativistic and pluralistic meanings of cultural difference, rather than evolutionary meanings, would encourage more complex research into how populations in their various stratified positions come to create, maintain and change a society through reciprocal processes of interaction and separation” (1993, p. 35). The relationship between the participants of both of the case studies and the institutions and social context within which they were placed, was a fundamental element of the research. Without a sense of the participants coming from diverse backgrounds and an acknowledgement of their relative positionality the case studies would offer little developmental understanding of the *process* underlying identity formation.

A more engaged research allows evidence of such reciprocal processes to be drawn out during the case studies; a key reason for approaching research in such a manner. It has the capacity to offer groups and organisations a developmental approach; specifically working within the realms of planning and development. The case studies above highlight how such an interactive research approach draws

heavily on a range of research tools even whilst the processes involved can be quite simple; reflection and practice work closely together. Utilising this multi-faceted process allowed me to examine complex identities and cultural production within the social context of the two case studies.

Rather than viewing individuals as isolated operatives, entirely separate from their social context, I carried out research that was rooted in issues familiar to the research subjects. Key to this is that the research subjects or individuals develop practice themselves by starting the process of learning from their own experience, shifting the emphasis away from specialist researchers towards a self-monitoring and/ or self-evaluating approach.

The research approach sought to ground the work in a way that the stakeholders affected by any planned changes had the primary role for deciding on courses of action which seem likely to lead to improvement. This included participants such as the young people in Foleshill, Coventry as well as the artists and community development staff wanting to engage with the mainstream arts sector in Birmingham. In both case studies there was continuous, constant, consultation and dialogue regarding the project's development. I felt that allowing the case studies to develop, shift and be themselves influenced as a process was key to understanding cultural formations.

Clifford suggests that any representation of social life(s) should be viewed merely as 'part truths', particularly since "culture is contested, temporal and emergent." He further stresses how "representation and explanation both by insiders and outsiders is implicated in this emergence" (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 19). Kalra similarly exposes the limitations of knowledge when he highlights the "inevitable limits that the ethnographic method places on the researcher. Ultimately, the production of knowledge in question rests on the analyst's perspectives and perceptions and the way in which dominant identities have to be produced if only to be deconstructed." (2006, p. 405)

Participant investment embedded throughout the research

Throughout the research process the research subjects were responsible for evaluating the results of any strategy that might be tried out in practice. As researchers they were essential to both the activity and the identification of issues.

Therefore all those involved learned and developed in some way, if only from having greater understanding of the framework with which we engaged. This approach shares much with that of Suki Ali who similarly sought to “engage her research subjects in the process, to ‘give voice’ and authority to groups usually considered ‘unreliable’ respondents ... and to position herself reflexively in this encounter” (2006, p. 405). Moreover, for Chambers, acknowledging others and “in that recognition the impossibility of speaking for them, is to inscribe that impossibility, that limit, into my discourse and to recognise my being not for itself but for being with and for the other.” (1994, p. 128) Chambers further stresses that to recognise this “‘doubling of modernity’ (Bhabha) is not to say that everything is now the same. We may share the languages of representation, but your history, your experience, cannot be simply exchanged for mine.” (1994, p. 85).

The emphasis of the research therefore changes from the production of a purely paper based report to the development of the research subjects as well as their social environment. This element was critical in the decision to develop a more action led research approach, particularly since this approach is directly opposed to research which panders to the belief in human nature as passive, always acted upon by outside forces beyond individual control, observed and yet without any participatory role, the participants’ engagement in both case studies highlights this.

This was important because I sought a method that allowed diverse voices to be heard, not only in the PhD but also in arts administration and policy making, such as through the aforementioned publication. Clifford (1986) stresses that the ‘anthropological voice’ needs to be exploded which would allow, suggests Back (1996), members of the cultural group under study to become, as it were, authors in their own right and represented within the pages of ethnographic writing. Enabling representation was crucial; allowing voices to speak and to ensure the self-production and potential self-re-presentation of diverse cultural identities.

In some ways, I felt, as Maria Mies comments, that “one has to change something before it can be understood” (1983, p. 125). It was, in part, due to this that I decided against a research method that only focused on an ethnographic approach. In 2006 the special issue of Ethnic and Racial Studies focused upon ‘Writing Race: Ethnography and difference’. This was an exceptionally thorough exploration of methodology issues in relation to ethnic and racial studies. In her introduction Alexander clearly elucidates the rationale for ethnographic research, vitally

highlighting how “a new generation of ethnographers have sought to reimagine the ethnography of ‘race’ through the contested and fragmented lense (sic) of the ‘new ethnicities’ framework.” (2006, p. 402)

Writers such as Back (1996) draw upon action research in their ethnographic work. Back’s New Ethnicities and Urban Cultures is based on two long term, intensive, case studies whilst, as the title suggests, also being significantly influenced by the work of Stuart Hall. Back’s aim was to move beyond the purely textual, and potentially one-dimensional, and focus on the ‘real’ social world and the involvement of young people and cultures within urban Britain in producing a plethora of hyphenations. Hence, Back’s case studies examine, at a ‘grassroots’ level, the lived experiences of young people in inner cities. It was this perspective that I sought to reflect in my own research approach.

In researching this, Back spent considerable time living within the social context and developing close relationships with young people. Studies such as that by Back are powerful supporters of both Hall and Gilroy’s anti-essentialist stance, drawing not only on issues of ‘race’ but also working against simplifications which provide props for racism, sexism and monoculturalism. Back stresses the key role played by factors such as class, geographic location, economic circumstances and gender alongside ‘race’ in influencing changing cultural identities. He also refers to socio-economic circumstances, such as demographic composition of the neighbourhood, local labour and housing markets, history of population turnover and minority settlement patterns (1996, p. 49 – 50).

Critically, I also examined the crucial role played by ‘race’ relations in determining a range of factors, such as arts access, economic background and geographic locations. Like Back, I considered social conditions and individual circumstances to be highly relevant to interpretations made about cultural identities. The “relationship between self and society [needs to be] viewed as a dynamic and integrated process whereby individuals work within and contribute to defined social realms of association” (1996, p. 49 – 50). However it wasn’t possible within the research parameters to explore this in any great detail.

Back also stressed the role that what he terms the ‘referent informational influences’ (Turner, 1987) can play, factors such as ‘the immediate set of class, race, gender, community, and other cultures, ideologies and discourses into which individual

subjects place themselves'.⁵⁴ Back outlines the importance of developing a relationship with one's research subjects, not only as the interviewer, but as being of the social context.

Nayak's writings bring the research methods sharply into focus when he rightly questions how we can undertake research with a research "subject/ object that is generally agreed by researchers not to exist" (Alexander 2006, p. 403). He argues that in a world where 'race' "continues to be lived through material inequalities, to engage in researching 'race' is to run the risk of reifying the very thing we are seeking to deny" (ibid). Nayak voices the need to position "'race' as a series of performances and repeated effects which deny any ontological stability or security" (ibid) and rightly argues that "ethnographic research should be seen as a process that produces meanings and identities, which both perform and dislocate 'race'" (ibid).

Taking such wider social change within context and its implications for explanation and prediction into account is one of the main tasks in theorising and investigating identity formation. It is, therefore, important to 'go wider' than the immediate social context hence, in the case studies I have examined, I have also sought to look further; to the arts system as a whole, as well as the cultural scene which influences individuals and the synthesis taking place elsewhere. In addition, I viewed examples of cultural artefacts that failed to acknowledge the importance of the changing social scene, such as the Veil exhibition which will be examined in Chapter Four.

My intention with each case study was to explore quite specific elements of the social context. I hoped, for example, to provide further insight into the complexities and range of factors that contribute towards the formation of cultural identities. I aimed to apply a multi-disciplinary research approach that both acknowledged and developed the diversity and complexity of thought and action in the world, of being both 'here' and 'there' as Trinh suggests; of being 'here' in the sense of residing in and being influenced by dominant cultural norms and also 'there' of being perceived of and influenced by an 'other' cultural heritage.

Obviously, there were considerable differences between the locations, aims, objectives, and path of each case study, and whilst comparisons were not part of the

⁵⁴ Taken from a transcript, by Back, for a talk given at Goldsmiths College, London in 1999

main objectives, interesting contrasts did arise between the two case studies. I was also aware that my role within each case study was different and that this, to a lesser or greater extent, could influence the research findings. The manner in which individuals related to me differed considerably within each case study; I found that this often depended on the position that I held, which, in turn, shaped each project.

However, I felt that there were also key aspects that had undoubtedly contributed towards the success of each case study. Without having a strong development work approach at the heart of each project and building up a relationship with the groups, little could have been achieved in terms of accessing confidences or understanding the depth of particular arts product, in particular when encouraging confidences pertaining to lived experiences and engagement with creativity.

Within the research I sought to prioritise the continual engagement and participation of the research subjects. Consequently, my approach was very different to the example of the development of the comic book. In this example, the young people were told how the workshop programme would run, rather than being consulted about how they thought it should or could be run, or, to step backwards even further, considering what project they might most enjoy and benefit from (not necessarily the same thing).

Creativity and arts practice remained a constant feature within the research, specifically the transformative nature of participating in arts activity (Reiss & Pringle, 2003). Socially engaged and participatory arts practice has been recognised as a legitimate and beneficial practice for some time, frequently connected to governmental issues around social inclusion (Carey & Sutton, 2004). Engaging in the production of art was a key element in the production of findings that were connected to cultural identities as an on-going process rather than being perceived as a product. Participatory arts have consistently been used as a proven technique to engage individuals in a non-threatening environment, highlighting how community and participatory arts can engage in an informal, non-threatening manner (Webster et al, 2005).

The utilisation of an interactive research approach allowed for the exploration of cultural identities alongside cultural production as part of a process. Working with research as an on-going process opened out spaces for greater understanding and insight of cultural identities. Within the research I was interested in identifying

professional artists and cultural practitioners' relationship to their material through active participation, engaging them in the project was clearly the best route towards achieving their input.

The issues/ problems of the process

There are numerous theorists who are critical of an action research led approach. However, the possibilities of ethnography have been critiqued by researchers such as Wacquant (2002) who has been particularly dismissive of much urban ethnography. Many of these criticisms are concerned with objectivity and generalisations (Heller, 1986). Some of these criticisms include the researcher's inability to control the environment; it is therefore seen as difficult to assess the influence of particular variables.

Most so called conventional research methods are considered to gain their rigor through the parameters and controls that are set in place. Within action research this can't be done since the central aim for collaboration requires a considerable degree of flexibility. Indeed, the virtue of grassroots led research is precisely its responsiveness to the social context.

Action research can be challenging. As the research commences, the research topic is not fully outlined; something that happens as the research progresses. This can be quite a strain, in particular when one is working towards a PhD. Since, as I've outlined there's also the need for a considerable amount of development work, which can be time-consuming. For some theorists there is also the issue of personal involvement affecting the findings (Francis, 1991), an area that I covered earlier.

However, drawing upon action in one's research approach challenges two of the main tenets associated with positivism, that there are permanent or universal laws and principles that impact on relationships and that there is just one way of unveiling them. Positivism existed for some time before it was questioned from the perspective that individuals do not exist in isolation – unlike perhaps a mathematical or scientific theorem – and one must therefore understand the cultural and social environment of which they are a part. However, writings on critical theory and constructivism contributed towards an argument that there needs to be a plurality of methods, with each having validity depending on the situation and knowledge sought.

Judith Butler has consistently argued 'against proper objects' (1994, p. 1), identifying the tensions that exist between social constructionism and its reliance upon ontological security, knowing an object. If then objectivity is, in fact, unobtainable, and ethnography whilst useful, offers little scope for active development or infrastructure for future practice, a more interactive research approach allows far more research and developmental scope in a considerably enhanced proactive manner.

Additionally, the 'distant' researcher hoards their research, holding it tight to the academy and active dissemination that includes the research subjects is rare. Hardly, I would suggest, positive research ethics. In contrast, research which acknowledges its position and is open in its involvement offers far more to the research subjects, as Bryman commented when writing on action research as a research method, "action research is explicitly concerned to develop findings that can be applied in organisations, a position that contrasts with the peripheral relevance to organizations that much organizational research exhibits" (1989, p. 187).

In exploring such an area, I feel that both my own cultural position, explored earlier and the research approach adopted has allowed me to utilise a method of research considered to be ethnoconsumerism by Alladi Venkatesh. He comments that this is "the study of consumption from the point of view of the social group or cultural group that is the subject of study." (1995, p. 27)

Significantly, such an approach allows for a heightened examination of behaviour on the basis of the cultural realities of that group and consequently begins with the "basic cultural categories of a given culture. It studies actions, practices, words, thoughts, language, institutions and the interconnections between these categories" (1995, p. 27 – 28). Participatory or a more engaged research approach, whilst drawing on a range of research methodologies, enables a wider range and a deeper level of engagement.

Conclusion

The research methods upon which the thesis is based were key to ensuring that the 'powerless' were given an opportunity to 'speak', as well as highlight the way in which the research subjects were challenging what it means to be 'culturally powerful'. Throughout the research process I considered it vital that I utilised an inclusive

methodology. Without this, the research would have failed to acknowledge the very parameters of lack of access and representation, as well as failing to create bridges between 'de margin and de centre' an area that the research sought to address. Since, ultimately, one cannot deny the importance of one's chosen methodology, as Skeggs comments:

To side-step methodology means that the mechanisms we utilize in producing knowledge are hidden, relations of privilege are masked and knowers are not seen to be located: therefore the likely abundance of cultural, social, educational and economic capitals is not recognized as central to the production of knowledge (1997, p. 17)

In keeping with the original aims, that grassroots practice tie in with theoretical concepts and to examine theory through practice, it was important that not only myself, as the researcher, benefited, but that the method of knowledge collection be acceptable, accessible and beneficial to the research subjects. Elden and Levin (1991) comment that in non-action, non-participatory research, only the researcher, or those able to extract meaning from research reports, generally other researchers or academics, learn. The 'subjects' do not. An engaged interactive research approach means that all those involved have learned and been empowered in some way by the exercise, without doubt challenging existing agnotology. However, this does not mean that at the end of the study there are 'neat' solutions to identified problems. Rather, the research is likely to have raised new issues that may extend the processes of inquiry. Individuals may move on into areas not connected to the research, even whilst drawing on skills and abilities learned, as I feel was evidenced both at the *Venue* and in *Changing Views*.

CHAPTER THREE

Negotiating identity formation within the framework of the nation

Introduction

This chapter considers how the research subjects were positioned as subjects-in-discourse within the cultural framework of the nation. It explores how cultural identities are produced within a supposedly normalised national grid, even whilst a continuous black/ white dichotomy exists in relation to a supposed national culture. The chapter highlights how, although hegemonic processes are not easily visible, there is constancy in the dominant narrative to which we are referred, and to which we 'perform', since the desire to maintain a certain social order underpins hegemonic processes.

The findings of this chapter emerge out of extensive dialogue on issues and definitions perceived as normalised by many of the *Venue* users. Key themes stem from the research subjects ongoing negotiations within dominant narratives. Sections such as the notion of shared values, and social agents have developed out of the research subjects thinking within the discursive space of the *Venue*. In developing this case study, I hoped in some way to encourage reflection upon normalised patterns of identity and culture.

In keeping with this, I sought to provide a youth led discursive space which provided a range of opportunities for young people to connect with culture as lived experience. Even whilst, within this, I acknowledge that the discourses of the participants were partially circumscribed by both the broader socio-political context as well as the micro context of the *Venue*. The research findings demonstrate how, within the space, the participants utilised terms such as shared values as being culturally dependent and connected with culture on the basis of both authentic production and consumption.

I highlight how they drew on what they perceived as the traditional culture of their communities but also worked through their own sense of Englishness and Britishness. I therefore investigated the degree to which the research subjects recognised that a relationship existed between the worth attributed to culture and the degree of racism they experienced within their daily lives.

I begin by contextualising the findings within the discursive space of the *Venue*. I consider the dominant political narratives to which the research subjects responded and contextualise the *Venue* within this framework. I go on to consider how the *Venue* users interacted with the supposed shared values of the nation, in some ways challenging these and in others adopting shared values of their own. I investigate how both political narratives and shared values were constructed and partially maintained through the role and remit of social agents. I specifically consider their impact upon notions of a national culture but equally how the creation of such paradigms influenced the research subjects' relationship to understandings of the nation. I highlight how users of the *Venue* pinpointed the existence of racist discourse, particularly when exploring their identity construction. I suggest that this led them to similarly reference supposedly authentic cultural consumption, which they perceived as external to the nation's culture.

Context: the Venue

Within the *Venue* I sought to work with young people, and their families, developing both an understanding of the constraining role of social and cultural frameworks but also facilitating the research subjects to produce their own discursive engagements. This was a key aim since Bhabha has been accused of a lack of contextualisation when reflecting upon the third space. A central narrative within the research approach was what kind of third space were the research subjects accessing and creating within the *Venue* and to what extent – if at all - could one argue that this was a neutral third space? As outlined in Chapter Two, the *Venue* was a voluntary youth project. The aims of the project were to offer young people access to information, this covered a range of areas including employment, relationships, budgets/ finance and addressing issues within the locality including bullying, gangs, crime and prejudice such as racism. We also aimed to provide them with experience managing and producing their own projects and included an educational perspective which was not explicit but built into the projects that we ran. We also drew upon participatory arts as a consistent medium of engagement and way of developing issue led work with young people in a non-threatening way (Webster et al, 2005). In addition, part of our youth work practice was to engage young people in debate and reflection. Vitally, this also provided a space wherein the process of culture, both the production and consumption, could be observed.

Within youth centred social and cultural discourse the *Venue* was not a powerful institution. It was not local authority run; in fact one of the aims of the action research was to draw attention to the lack of youth focused provision in Foleshill. As a project funded organisation, rather than revenue funded, we were reliant on drawing in further funding and were therefore not in a position to implement long term strategy or action plans. Whilst we had access to senior youth work staff at the local authority we were still developing the project without a strong steering group. As highlighted in Chapter Two, many of the decisions were made by the Foleshill Multi-cultural Open Forum Executive Committee which was entirely made up of members of the Elders Group. Problematically, they met during the daytime when most of the young people who used the *Venue* were in education and so were unable to join.

However, we did hold power in other ways. We had proven capacity for accessing young people whose needs were not being met by existing youth provision. We had successfully built up a core group of users who contributed towards the local authority's Youth Action Group. We identified systems of retention through strong partnerships with young people and by prioritising their ideas and input, many of which focused upon modes of creative and artistic engagement. In these ways we therefore had much to offer both senior youth work staff and young people who were interested in engaging with youth work provision within the Foleshill area.

Being the 'right sort' of young people

Anderson's 'imagined community'⁵⁵ (1983) remains a consistent aim across local authorities, government policy and practice in order to produce a sense of 'the nation'. Within this both citizenship⁵⁶ and the search for a clear cultural framework (see also Stevenson, 2003) play a significant role. Whilst complex community and cultural patterns undoubtedly exist, there remains an ideology of the nation that has its foundations in a multiply-faceted yet manufactured version of culture, even whilst this production itself shifts over time. Central to this is the desire to produce groups whose cultural identities are rarely questioned, (Smith, 1986) who have an implicit, unarticulated sense of belonging, and "who feel that they 'belong' to an ostensibly

⁵⁵ It is also interesting to see how terminology has itself moved on. The Department of Communities and Local Government now utilises the term 'Sustainable Communities', although once again precise definitions of what this means are not easily accessible. For more information on this see the website at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/sustainablecommunities/> accessed October 2008.

⁵⁶ My use of the term citizenship is based upon that of T.H Marshall (1950; 1965). Mark Olssen (2004) in discussing the Crick and Parekh Reports, draws on Marshall when he defines citizenship as "the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security, to the right to share a full social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in society" (2004, p. 180).

common fold” (Goulbourne, 1991, p. 17) part of which involves establishing “clear boundaries for those who do not ‘belong’” (Goulbourne, *ibid*). Buying into the “idea of roots and cultural authenticity” (Chambers, 1994, p. 73) where “there lies a fundamental, even fundamentalist form of identity that invariably entwines with the nationalist myths in the creation of an ‘imagined community’” (*ibid*) occurs across plural perspectives.

Given that it is into this wider, bifurcated framework that the cultural identity choices made by users of the *Venue* are positioned, I want to examine this field in further detail. Firstly, I want to consider how they interacted with the notion and modalities of a national culture, where government and state continually work to maintain concepts, objects and borders (Lemke, 2001). Government actions and rhetoric strive through both subtle and crude lines of communication to establish boundary lines. However, to what extent did the research subjects acknowledge – or adhere – to these, and equally in what manner did users of the *Venue* challenge such boundary lines?

Within the current climate there is an increasing – rather than decreasing - pressure upon individuals, such as the research subjects, to select the ‘right’ identity and to prioritise an identity that externally defines them as individuals of the ‘right sort’; as subjects actively engaged in integration. In the late nineties, Blair commented in the Third Way that “we seek a diverse but inclusive society, promoting tolerance *within agreed norms ... strong communities depend on shared values* and a recognition of the rights and duties of citizenship” (emphasis mine, 1998, p. 12). Crucially, Blair did not detail what those agreed norms were, or how one identified the values to be shared, yet he has repeatedly returned to them as if we all, subliminally, understand and share them. I would be very surprised if the values we are all supposed to share were ever agreed upon by more than a small fraction of the ‘imagined community’.

Blair was not alone; in 2001 William Hague spoke of a decreasing shared understanding within the nation and talked of taking us “on a journey to a foreign land – to Britain after a second term of Tony Blair”.⁵⁷ Similarly, Gordon Brown, in a number of speeches, has dwelt on values which are to provide us with “the sense of shared purpose, an idea of what your destiny as a nation is”, Brown draws on the notion of common values that are shared, that have made Britain a tolerant country,

⁵⁷ In The Guardian, 5th March, 2001

committed to 'fairness, fair play and civic duty'.⁵⁸ These have picked up on Britain as a democratic society and purveyor of human rights, a tolerant society.

At the same time, the desire for assimilation is clearly evident in the comments of David Blunkett in a BBC radio interview, where he considered the existence of national norms, commenting "we have norms of acceptability and those who come into our home for that is what it is should accept those norms just as we would have to if we went elsewhere" (Anon, 2001). Such assimilationist theory acknowledges but also marks difference, and whilst it expects an element of administrative inclusion to be offered to those 'moving in'; we are constantly forced to draw upon binary positions of otherness. The expectation is that difference will be tempered and incomers will gradually merge into the – unknown - values as determined by the host community.

The emphasis upon shared values and their active role is not only the dominion of politicians. In a CRE talk Trevor Phillips (2005) spoke of the need for a society to have a sense of shared values, 'inherited and passed on through the generations. They change from time to time, they are added to as new people arrive and they adapt with progress of one kind or another. But in this country many of our contemporary values would be familiar to a Briton over a thousand years ago – fair play, courage, commitment to the land and family'.⁵⁹

Venue users and shared values

Shared values were not only drawn upon to substantiate the aims of border keepers or social agents, such as those mentioned previously, even whilst they were utilised widely in maintaining the symbolic borders or culture of the nation. They were also drawn upon by the research subjects in discussing their own cultural negotiations whilst at the *Venue*. Values were seen to play a complex role in both shaping and situating identity. In an assessment of their cultural engagement a number of the research subjects explored this from the perspective of family influence upon shared values and how this, in turn impacted upon cultural decisions and modes of engagement - and disengagement. So Maninder in reflecting upon her cultural

⁵⁸ Gordon Brown's speech to the Fabian Society, for the full text visit <http://fabians.org.uk/events/new-year-conference-06/brown-britishness/> accessed September 2007

⁵⁹ Accessed via CRE internet page at <http://www.cre.gov.uk/Default.aspx?LocID-0hgnew03t.RefLocID-0hg00900c002.Lang-EN.htm> August 2007

identity saw it as inter-twined with that of her family, in conversation she related that she was

Indian ... with a pretty traditional culture, although we're also sticking to the British, not totally as though they [her parents] are in India still; we're still Westernised and yet also at home with tradition.

In reflecting upon her identity she clearly positioned herself within Britain, commenting "I know I'm in this country", even whilst at the same time indicating the challenges she experienced "but I'm not. I don't want to forget where I came from, my traditional values." So she also drew upon notions of tradition and values as demonstrating more fully her sense of coming from a way of life that existed prior to her/ her families' arrival in Britain. For Maninder, this was a way of contextualising her background which was appropriate to the setting; she was familiar with the approach taken by staff at the *Venue*, as well as our awareness of Asian customs and practices. Therefore, to use terminology such as 'still Westernised and yet also at home with tradition' was rooted in an understanding of the *Venue's* clientele and staff.

Rather than an acknowledgement of the agreed norms or shared values sought by many, the young people focused upon the desires and wishes of their parents and how these demonstrated both challenges but also a sense of solidity and 'coming from'. So for example Ramu picked upon issues that he saw as symptomatic of generational change and movement, from one country to another, which was determined by the experiences of his parents

They've brought us up with their values, so they expect you to act according to them, with extended values like marrying a girl from the same cast. There's no question of marrying a girl who doesn't speak the same language or isn't the same religion ... they [one's parents] don't know the problems that we have to go through, they've been born and brought up differently in India with their values, and they've just come over here with their set ways.

Similarly, Robert commented "I think they've always done what's meant to be done, what's expected from them, they've always done that." The expectation, therefore, is that their children will also do what is expected of them, as Michael suggests, "they do want to carry on with tradition." Zakia, one of the younger research subjects related this specifically to what she perceived as her parents curtailing her social interaction

My parents have got an old-fashioned way of thinking, they think, even though they live here, they don't think of it as safe. If I want to go out with my friends for example, they say 'be careful' or 'come back before this time and tell us where you're going', they think that girls can't look after themselves, that they should stay at home and cook ... if I went to a club, well that would be completely out, I'd be locked in the room, never allowed to go out again, they wouldn't approve of me going to see bands and stuff like that either.

These very normal sources of teenage and parental conflict, which actually form part of the wider processes of socialisation, (Allen & Cars, 2001) were frequently picked upon by younger interviewees who were highly critical of the choices that their parents or older generations made. They consistently questioned their lifestyle choices and repeatedly categorised them as 'old-fashioned'. They were seen as not fitting into the discursive framework within which younger generations sought to position themselves. However, whilst the research subjects were clearly reflecting upon themes that they perceived as setting them apart from their parents they did not entirely position themselves within the values and norms of the nation state, they did not see themselves as either integrated or assimilated.

The majority of traditional cultural studies approaches have targeted an analysis of integration and assimilation into so called national societies (Nagel, 2002a). For Alexander, Edwards & Temple, (2007) despite arguments promoting inclusion within the nation, there is "an on going tension ... between the imagination of a national 'community' championed in the Home Office's (Denham 2001) pursuit of 'cohesive communities' bound by 'shared norms and values' and the positioning of minority ethnic 'communities' as culturally bounded entities within, but distinct from (and implicitly opposed to), this broader national identity" (2007, p. 788). Alexander, Edwards & Temple rightly identify the manner in which "the dominant assumption, enshrined in policy, has been that minority individuals and groups 'choose' to self-segregate and live 'parallel lives' outside (and opposed to) mainstream culture and society" (2007, p. 785). However, alongside Alexander, Edwards & Temple, I also question whether this was actually the case and suggest that there was a far more complex process taking place. Within this, both individuals and structures align groups as internal or external to the cultural life of the nation.

Nayak (2003) writing on whiteness highlighted how fixed notions of ethnicity could quickly become "transformed into a 'new racism'" (2003, p. 156). He contrasted the supposed 'natural' British way of life espoused by Thatcher (1978), Tebbit (1991) et al with the antagonism attributed to the issue of ethnic bonding between minority

groups. Nayak outlines how “it was the ethnicity of minority groups that was laid open for inspection, and their alleged inability to come to terms with a perceived British ‘way of life’. It was never suggested that ethnic pride and British racist hostility had inadvertently encouraged minorities to adopt the heritage of their ancestors” (2003, p. 156). In the following section I will therefore consider the role and some of the arguments utilised by individuals who contribute towards political narratives of exclusion and inclusion.

Social maintenance, agents and their impact upon cultural life in the UK

The shared values of the nation were not fashioned within the spaces occupied by the *Venue* or its clientele. Those considered capable of specifying the appropriate cultural objects (Lemke, 2001) for inclusion within the imagined community of the nation are individuals recognisable through their roles, actions (Yuval-Davis, 2006) and access to power. Yuval-Davis comments that without “specific social agents who construct and point to certain analytical and political features, the other members of society would not be able to identify them” (2006a, p. 201). If it is the case that many members of a society could not identify particular analytical, political and I would add cultural, features without specific social agents to direct and inform them, who are the individuals who see their role as constructing the identity of the nation, what role do they play and how did this impact upon the research subjects?

Perhaps one of the better known, contemporary, high profile political figures in Britain was Enoch Powell, who sought to fortify the nation’s boundaries and very clearly identified what he perceived as its distinguishing features. Powell argued that neither migrants to Britain nor their children would ever truly belong to the British nation. Some years later, this perspective was echoed by Norman Tebbit, who commented

Our gentle nationalism, more a sense of nationality, was never built on any sense of racial purity. After all, the early history of these islands was of successive waves of immigrants mixing Celts, Britons, Angles, Saxons, Romans, Norse and Norman French. Later Flemish, Huguenot and Jewish immigrants were integrated to such an extent that only the Jewish community remained identifiable and that only by a religion on which the culture of the whole nation is largely based. But in recent years our sense of insularity and nationality has been bruised by large waves of immigrants resistant to absorption, some defiantly claiming a right to superimpose their culture, even their law, upon the host community. (1990, p. 78)

Tebbit openly acknowledged that the nation, or more specifically ‘sense of nationality’, was never built upon the basis of ‘racial purity’; rather, he allowed that this was as a result of different groupings coming into the country. Yet, even whilst allowing for this he sets out diversity within the controlled parameters of a pre-defined national identity; carefully bounded difference that ensures continuing insularity.⁶⁰ Problematically he sets out that such insularity and borders are now being ‘bruised’ through the inappropriate superimposition of alterior cultures. We can see how the crude lines of border keepers are gradually drawn out and established as culturally significant, implicitly interconnected to the lines of nation, community and ethnicity.

This perspective is pushed further by John Townend, MP for Yorkshire East. In 2001 Townend refuted any sense of even historic diversity. His comments were made in the context of the dialogue surrounding refugees and asylum seekers⁶¹ and claim that our “homogenous Anglo-Saxon society has been seriously undermined by the massive immigration”⁶² that took place after the war. Incredibly, Townend spoke of the existence of a so called homogenous culture as recently as the war. From Townend’s perspective the pursuit of and struggle for a definitive national culture is an absolute necessity if one is to maintain a dominant version of reality. Indeed the “myth of common origin and a fixed immutable ahistorical and homogenous construction of the collectivity’s culture and/ or religion as an encapsulating totality is central to such constructions” (Yuval-Davis, 2004, p.220). As Stanfield and Rutledge (1993) stress, any cultural, social or national complexity beyond a homogenous national identity threatens the status quo, since only certain identities are considered part of the status quo or ‘made to matter’, thus disrupting the control of the dominant group over the existing economic, social, political, and I would explicitly add to this list, cultural system.

Such perspectives highlight the struggle for an essential, monolithic, supposedly national, culture that allows limited association or influence by so-called ‘other’ cultures. Tebbit’s comment below, demonstrates the manner in which individuals are

⁶⁰ The challenges imbedded within this are evident within the citizenship ceremony, an initiative developed to engender so called citizenship education within new migrants, who must both pledge allegiance to the United Kingdom and respect its – still unknown – values (Alexander, Edwards & Temple, 2007).

⁶¹ The response to individuals seeking asylum in the UK has become a contentious theme that is monopolising much debate on the citizenship, identity and nation-state terrain. For reasons of limitations, it isn’t possible to engage with this area within this research. However, research has been carried out on ‘Arts & Refugees: History, Impact, Recommendation’ by the author/ Hybrid as a piece of consultation for Arts Council England, Baring Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

⁶² The Guardian, 28th March 2001

expected to endorse a singular culture of the nation, a focus which fails to acknowledge potentially wide-ranging attachments

multi-culturalism is a divisive force. One cannot uphold two sets of ethics or be loyal to two nations, any more than a man can have two masters.⁶³ It perpetuates ethnic divisions because nationality is in the long term more about culture than ethnics [sic]. Youngsters of all races born here should be taught that British history is their history, or they will forever be foreigners holding British passports and this kingdom will become a Yugoslavia.⁶⁴

Goodhart (2004) similarly questions whether Britain is becoming too diverse to sustain the mutual obligations behind what he classifies as a 'good society', a position rightly critiqued by Alexander, Edwards & Temple (2007). Goodhart focuses upon the need for individuals to feel a connection with, or possess shared norms and values with those with whom they share their 'home' (Blunkett, in Anon, 2001) if the national identity is to be maintained. Goodhart sees citizenship, as rights and duties, to particularly impact upon minority ethnic individuals and groups who, being excluded from the latter have little right to the content of the former. For Goodhart, 'race' is the marker of this difference, although he draws this in to connect 'race' with visible difference and to be visibly different is to be excluded from citizenship (Alexander, Edwards & Temple,⁶⁵ 2007).

So, whilst all identities must be contextualised within the social and cultural framework, the markers of difference vary in their role and function. The research findings frequently evidenced individuals who experienced no apparent tension in the category choices that they made or expressed feelings of not fully belonging (Fiske, 1994; Lemke, 2001). The comments made by Sophie correlate to Goodhart's aims since, rather than detail her ethnic or cultural identification to any degree of complexity, she comments

Sophie: I'm just British
SZ: *But I heard you just before saying what religion you are. (Whilst the other girls were talking, mentioning religion, Sophie and Sarah were talking between themselves about how they would define themselves, Sophie went on to mention being Christian)*
Sophie: Church of England – just normal really

⁶³ Perhaps an interesting nod towards the biblical text found in Matthew 6: 24

⁶⁴ The Guardian, 8th October 1997

⁶⁵ Alexander, Edwards and Temple argue that the Home Office (as it then was) adopted a 'reinvigorated policy' of citizenship education and integration towards new immigrants, one of the cornerstones of this was the English language. However their paper concluded that localised personal networks which challenged reified and abstract ideas of 'imagined communities' provided greatest insight into the performance of citizenship.

SZ: *So is that how you would identify yourself – did you say that because the other girls were saying what religion they were?*
Sophie: Yes

Sophie clearly saw herself as part of the status quo; as belonging. She drew on a religious identity only in the context of the other research subjects who were also considering their own religious influences; moreover she included this in relation to being ‘just normal’. Sophie was not the only participant to feel this way. Sarah similarly categorised a singular cultural identification

Sarah British
SZ *Just British?*
Sarah Yes

Both Sarah and Sophie’s comments highlight the manner in which they felt no need or demand to further clarify or consider their cultural identity. They were comfortable having this conversation and working through their identity positions within the space. In another context they may have felt greater pressure to reflect on the specifics of citizenship and how they were also implicated by the comments of individuals such as Tebbit et al. However, engaging in projects at the *Venue*, with a high proportion of ‘black’ users, they felt able to define themselves through the utilisation of a single category, since they saw this as including them in a manner in which they may not have done had the context been different.

As Jeremy Paxman stated in an interview, “never before have the English had to think about what it really means to be English” (Anon, 1998, p. 13). Yet, even in the act of his expressing such thinking, he begins to produce identity in another way, not only because he utilises the term ‘never before’ but because the act of recognition is itself an element of production. We begin to see how Goodhart et al’s aims engage in the *struggle* to maintain the culture and identity of the nation. So Sophie, in drawing upon a religious identity begins to produce identity in another way, the presence of difference around her resulted in her reflecting on the differences within.

Whilst Sarah and Sophie appeared to experience no tension in defining themselves as British, it is still likely that they remain outside certain borders (See for example Byrne, 2007 who considers how particular narratives are endlessly told to support the building of a national identity, even whilst he considers such narratives to have only a nominal hold on reality). Like others within the research group, they too, are positioned within the existing social and cultural framework. However, what is

significant is not whether or not those seeking to control borders and subjects would include the individuals highlighted here, but rather whether *they* feel themselves included within prevailing understandings of Britishness. As Billig comments “[w]hat does it mean *to claim to have a national identity?*” (emphasis mine, 1995, p. 61) So we must consider not only who belongs to the country but equally to whom does the country belong? Identifying with the nation has increasingly connoted an allegiance that possesses a contained, carefully maintained, culture. Where and how does one identify one’s national or cultural identity, particularly if the national culture is not the culture with which one would be most likely to identify?

Contributory features to the social and cultural framework of the nation are therefore drawn into place. In order to attain a ‘good society’, supposedly shared norms and values are sought. These, for border keepers such as Goodhart, are tied together with notions of citizenship and specific understandings of cultural life.

Yuval-Davis’ attention to ethical and political value systems is useful, since she acknowledges that the manner in which people understand themselves and their social relations is part of a complex social system. As Hall has commented, any set of social relations requires a set of meanings to hold it in place (Hall, 1984). Therefore, for the research subjects, there was an implicit understanding that they weren’t only positioning themselves culturally they were also positioning themselves within the social and political framework as set out by such border keepers. Whilst portrayed as such, this is not a simplistic system but intricately woven within a clearly defined central grid.

Venue users discuss their relationship to the nation

It is important to acknowledge that understandings of the culture of the nation and its subjects in discourse operate in a nebulous manner that can be challenging to negotiate. Notions of culture and identity have been less frequently tied in with gaining greater understanding of the political questions of governance (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Cohen, 1986; Dean, 1999; Gilroy, 1993; Horne, 1984; Lemke, 2001; Larner & Walters, 2004; Spivak, 1988a). Billig (1995) rightly illustrated how individuals do not wake up each day and reflect on how they are to imagine the culture of the nation, they simply live, but they do so within pre-described confines and ways of being, within narratives that are limited in their categorisations. Culture has been a site of potential and realised contestation since “identities are produced,

consumed, and regulated through culture – creating meanings through symbolic systems of representation about the identity positions which we might adopt” (Woodward, emphasis mine, 1997, p. 2).⁶⁶ The first case study provided a framework through which cultural experience could be explored as a process. The emphasis was upon popular culture, culture as a way of life and how users of the *Venue* both shaped their own lived experiences but they were also constructed in its telling.

Evidence of how this relationship operated was found in some of the responses of the research subjects, but so too was the struggle for an essential, monolithic nation. Whilst the research subjects utilised a range of labels in discussing and categorising their identity in conversations and interviews, they considered many categories or labels to be restricting (Eriksen, 1993). They subsequently drew upon a range of categories in shaping their cultural identity. It is important to contextualise this within my work and role at the *Venue* as well as other youth workers at the centre. The *Venue* encouraged users to think about identity, perception, labels and cultural engagement in part through the development of projects but also in conversation and on-going engagement. In frequent conversations the manner in which simplistic, singular labels were drawn upon was challenged and the research subjects brought this knowledge and perspective with them to the interviews and subsequent conversations.

The example of Akeel is interesting here in part because I was in a position to track the shifts in the manner in which he shaped his identity. This occurred on three occasions. Firstly, in completing ‘ethnic monitoring’ forms as a requirement for youth service provision. Akeel, in the ethnic monitoring within the form, used the category ‘Asian’. Secondly, during a visit to another youth project, as outlined in Chapter Two, he was asked to complete a table and state his ‘ethnicity’. In completing this table he asked me what would be acceptable, the answer that I gave was that this was for him to decide but that he should feel comfortable with what he was filing in. He later told me that he wrote in ‘Asian-Arab’.

⁶⁶ Morley and Robbins have written at some length about the changing role of the media in portraying contemporary identities and how a community or nation ceases to be limited by physical or geographical boundaries, commenting how “we are seeing the restructuring of information and image spaces and the production of a new communications geography” (1995, p. 1). How perceptions have shifted in view of this is an interesting arena to monitor, although not one that falls within the scope of this piece of research. (Parry, 2003; Stevenson, 2003) Srinivasan (2006) has also explored the role of new media in articulating indigenous, ethnic and cultural identities.

The next time that this was discussed was during the more structured interviews. Within the interview Akeel began by defining his identity solely as “Arab (sic) because that’s where I come from, the Middle East” but went on to follow this up with “I guess I was born here, so I’d also say British”. It is interesting that this contextualisation had not been drawn on in either of the previous instances. My hope was that by engaging with the *Venue* and participating in institutional provision for young people - Akeel was also in the Youth Action Group - he felt better able to reflect upon labels and terminology with which he might previously have felt less comfortable. However, it is also likely that the discursive nature of the interviews themselves facilitated a thought process that enabled Akeel to ‘try out’ multiple categorisations and positions.

Akeel’s response to these questions was also interesting in relation to the manner in which one’s identity shifts and adjusts to the context. Akeel was clearly modifying his decision in relation to a perceived hierarchy of acceptance and a degree of contextualisation that varied according to the information requested, the person requesting it and his own sense of the purpose or rationale behind the request.

This was not always the case. In some interviews the research subjects clearly set out a framework of dis/engagement. Robert chose not to identify with any sense of Britishness due, mainly, to his perception of the impact of shared history and the accompanying forgetting that he perceived as having taken place. His comments highlight the extent to which young people continue to draw upon the combined histories of Britain and a symbolic homeland

I’m not going to call myself British, but Western Asian ... because its history, HIStory, get it. Because there was one country until the British bastards came over and split it up. Thieves, the queen, she stole the diamond⁶⁷ and stole our country.

⁶⁷ Robert is referring here to the famous Koh-i-noor diamond that sits in the British crown. The diamond was presented by Lord Dalhousie in 1850 following the British annexation of Punjab, India. The history of the Koh-i-noor is complex, with some commenting that it was found between 3000 and 5000 years ago. Records mention it as early as the treasure won by Ala-ud-deen (Aladdin) at the conquest of Malwah in 1304 AD. The Koh-i-noor remained with the Mogul emperors until 1739. British colonial officials found the Koh-i-noor in 1849, in the treasury of the Punjabi capital, Lahore, now in Pakistan. They confiscated everything they found in the treasury as compensation for having fought against the Sikh army, whom they defeated. In 1911 a new crown was made for the coronation of Queen Mary, with the Koh-i-noor at its centre. Then in 1937 the stone was transferred to another new crown, this time for the coronation of Elizabeth. In October 1997, Queen Elizabeth II made a state visit to India and Pakistan to mark the 50th anniversary of Independence. Many Sikhs in India and Britain used the occasion to demand the return of the Koh-i-noor diamond. Currently, however, British officials take the view that the multiplicity of competing claims makes it impossible to establish the diamond’s true former ownership. Thus, for now, at least, it looks likely to remain one of the jewels in the British Crown.

In such a context, it is clear that Robert makes decisions of allegiance upon symbolic, if not wholly accurate, data. He draws upon the historical background of the Indian Sub-Continent and its relationship to Britain whilst quite specifically distancing his own identification with that of Britain. In a factual discussion it is unlikely that Robert's historical argument would stand questioning, yet he has made a very clear decision about how he wishes to represent himself with his current knowledge. In terms of re-visiting the notion of ethnicity, Robert adheres quite strongly to a shared history with the Indian Sub-Continent rather than any sense of a dual history inter-twined with both Britain and the Indian Sub-Continent. For him to categorise himself as being British – albeit only one facet of his identity – would be to deny the way he views the perceived effects of colonisation upon people from the Indian Sub-Continent. Hence, Robert would rather consider himself Western than British, even whilst a British citizen.

However, it is important to note that Robert was also positioning himself in relation to the context of the interview and the services provided by the *Venue*. So whilst he was categorising his identity as 'Western Asian' to me, it is unlikely that he would have utilised this term in conversation with another youth worker. Such positioning also evidences "a process where the meaning and desirability of social classifications are adopted and rejected by young people, providing a glimpse into the status of these concepts within peer groups ... In the process some identities are inhabited, but equally others are vacated" (Back, 1996: 126 – 127). So Robert was selecting an identity which was performed within the context of the *Venue*, a project strongly led by young people's ideas and interventions.

The opportunity to develop definitions of one's identity and to engage in an active exploration during the interviews, as well as during informal conversations within the *Venue*, encouraged the *Venue* users to deeply reflect upon categories and labels. Sundeep's initial response to the question of definition was that she would categorise herself as "Black-Asian, people know what you mean." However, when asked to explain this position she responds

I'd describe myself as Asian, although I do live in Britain, but I've moved around a lot. So that I wouldn't just stick with British Asian as I've come from Africa, so I wouldn't say African Asian, I'd just stick to Asian. Although I've moved from country to country, I haven't really moved that far culturally, so as for culture, I'd say Sikh.

Within the discursive space offered by the *Venue* and the interviews, Sundeep was able to highlight some of the features she saw as having shaped her identity. Whilst the category that she held onto was that of Asian, she also recognised that she had experience of three continents. Yet, it is also interesting that the one she selected did not represent somewhere that she had lived. The two categories with which she felt most at ease were an attachment to a religion, Sikhism, and an identity that drew upon a symbolic homeland and culture, Asia. These were selected in preference to Uganda, Africa where she spent the majority of her childhood or Britain where she was a resident. The opportunities for such elaboration in relation to one's identity positioning are rarely evident within government institutions.

Within the discourse, Sundeep also chose to extricate what she perceived as culture from understandings of nationality. Bhatt has highlighted how culture has become a

self-reifying thing-in-itself, such that it has become the modality for thinking about almost anything, including geo-political conflict. It becomes coextensive with politics and sociality itself, such that there is effectively no social exteriority to culture, and certainly little in the way of a political economy of culture. (2006, p. 99-100)

Bhatt here identifies the risk that we conflate culture too completely with the social and fail to see the possibilities of culture as one means by which a non-state-centric approach to the social sciences might be achieved (Nagel, 2001, p. 255). In considering her identity, Sundeep's decision making process is more complex than simply negotiating Britishness, since in drawing upon a cultural identity she removes this from any geographic connection, perhaps recognising its complexity.

As with Akeel, there was evidence of a plurality of positions being adopted by the research subjects. Sundeep drew upon a number of categories both during the interview and in more general discussion. She adopted terms such as Asian-British and Asian-African on a temporary basis, although as highlighted above these were not on the basis of highlighting a cultural attachment. Such interaction with categories on a temporary basis highlights how we are all "ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our *subjective* sense of who we are" (emphasis mine, Hall, 1988: 29).

Aims of the Venue

The *Venue* did not seek to encourage or discourage young people to a claim of Britishness or Englishness or to specifically see themselves within these terms but rather to gain greater understanding of the possibilities and vagaries of identity categories. Although in many cases the research subjects did feel that “Blackness and Englishness are constructed as incompatible mutually exclusive identities. To speak of the British or English people is to speak of the white people.” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 27 – 28) Relating to Englishness and Britishness were referred to as the struggle to “demarcate the parameters of inclusion in or exclusion from the nation as an equal and legitimate representative of it, two strands within liberal democratic values and ideology can be noted for both their tenacity and the tensions between them” (Lewis, 2005, p. 540). For Lewis, this concerns the need, on the one hand,⁶⁸ for tolerance of a certain degree of diversity, and on the other the perceived necessity for a ‘hegemonic normalising regime’ that enables the production of subjects and identifies minorities who are classified as not belonging, as being excluded from the identity of the nation. Consequently, for Lewis it is within “the immigrant that we have distilled the question as to how much difference can be respected and tolerated and to what extent must this figure be subject to practices of assimilation” (2005, p. 540).

An important function for the *Venue* was to ensure that the users felt able to represent themselves as multi-faceted, singular or some combination of these. The aim was never that the users of the *Venue* should feel that their identity was only validated if they experienced a particular sense of cultural belonging to Englishness or Britishness; rather it was to encourage them to engage in questioning their own – and therefore others - perspectives and recognising the complexities of such terms. So the perspective of young people such as Jags and Nav was also interesting since they both utilised terms such as English and British as well as reflecting upon this through more detailed responses which covered different perspectives and contexts.

Jags both challenged and drew upon a singular perspective, in turn questioning what Englishness and Britishness stands for. Jags’ background demonstrated a level of awareness and understanding of cultural identities such as English or British as neither simplistic nor singular (see also Virdee, Kyriakides & Modood, 2006). His

⁶⁸ Although I would argue it questionable that individuals such as Townend see this as a need.

comment regarding the relationship between being British and Scottish suggests his understanding of the on-going complexities

It's just that white people, they say that we're British, that they're pure British, but no-one's pure British at all, they've got a bit of Scottish (sic) in them or whatever.

The *struggle* for the monolithic culture of the nation is evidenced by the research subjects' response to singular categorisations. Jags' understanding of the diversity within notions of Britishness enabled him to question how no one is 'pure' British, thus opening up a place for him within Englishness. Whilst the dominant culture might ethnicise difference, thereby rendering it static rather than a constantly moving process (Bhabha, 1994), users of the *Venue* spoke of the complexities found within Englishness and Britishness. However, Jags was one of the few research subjects who felt comfortable utilising the term English in relation to his own identity categorisations, even whilst he questioned where this might sit within understandings of British (See also Lewis, 2005). He commented how

Not all of our family is Asian; we've got a few British and Scottish – white – people! We've got white people in our family, like my auntie.

His understanding of concepts such as English or British had been engaged by means of immediate interaction with family members. He therefore challenges traditional understandings of assimilation and comments that his family includes members who are

Christian or Catholic (sic), I don't know what they are, so we celebrate Christmas and Easter, we get Easter eggs but we don't really celebrate it, Christmas we don't celebrate for the religious stuff, and we get Diwali. I don't really celebrate that either.

Jags' comment demonstrates the plurality and diversity found within his family. With greater knowledge of the groupings that supposedly represent the imagined community of the nation, Jags is aware of the difference within, even whilst he is framed ontologically as outside the imagined community of the nation, Asian as opposed to British; non-white as opposed to white. That Jags includes his own identity within Englishness or Britishness offers a direct challenge to the particular perspectives of individuals such as Tebbit, Townend and Blunkett. Many of those supportive of such perspectives would disagree both with Jags' sense of classification as well as his right to categorise himself as English.

Furthermore, the open space of the interview facilitated the research subjects questioning of existing terminology and constructions of the imagined community, so Jags' challenge to border keepers is not so surprising. He questioned the make up of categories such as British, through his comment that 'no-one's pure British at all'. The importance of the role played by such spaces, in this instance the *Venue*, in addition to how the interviewer and interview is seen and experienced by the research subjects, is highlighted by Jags' later response in negotiating his cultural belonging. When reflecting upon his upbringing he invokes an additional identification, one which, in some ways seemed to require less explanation and perhaps also said more about how he perceived the makeup of his family, "Asian ... that was the way I was brought up – I'm Asian." Considering Jags' sensitivity to the construction of Britishness it is interesting that the complexity of the category Asian is however elided in this last response.

What is also interesting here is that the *Venue* not only provided space for exploring these different dimensions of identity but also for producing themselves as subjects in some interesting ways. The subject positions identified occurred not only as part of dialogue but were also subjectivities in formation, performed within that space for that audience.

Nevertheless these subjectivities were also performatively produced within the existing discursive spaces, including that produced by the *Venue*. It is therefore important that whilst acknowledging the macro context, we situate identity within culture, above all, in relation to an understanding of the social and economic modes of production (Butler, 1998), since identities "are constructed within, rather than outside discourse" (Nayak and Kehily, 2006, p. 67). They are therefore "subject to the complex discursive interplay, strategic repositioning and repetitive regulation" (ibid) that takes place within the cultural sphere. For the research subjects, identifying self and place within the social sphere was directly impacted by their engagement with cultural discourse.

Both acknowledging and challenging such situationality is vital to ensure that the focus does not rest narrowly upon the discursive, therefore obscuring wider consideration of the social and material determinants of culture (Parry, 1994). In light of this, I argue for the need to recognise the existence of complex, intersecting relations between culture, arts and creativity, governance, power and social

practices. "Today we are all cultural subjects, though some of us are more culturally imbued than others." (Bhatt, 2006, pp. 99-100)

One example that highlights how this may materialize is in an exchange between myself, Raj and Robert. The conversation began with a discussion of what cultural activities they wished to engage with as part of the activities offered by the *Venue*. We talked about what was culturally available within England and Coventry, none of which was picked up on by the research subjects. I subsequently asked them the following question

SZ *Do you think that being English doesn't include Asian or Black people's culture?*
Raj It does
SZ *In what way?*
Robert Because they haven't got culture without us
SZ *What about some of the things that we've been talking about, opera, ballet, high tea, tennis, cricket?*
Robert Fuck that, cricket was made by us anyway ...
Raj You ask me funny questions, sometimes I can't figure out what you're asking me.
Robert ... and we've got chicken masala
SZ *And do you ever see groups of Asian people there – in some of the cultural settings that opera or ballet takes place in, which is generally expensive and high profile*
Robert Because they never give us a chance
Raj They always stick to their own culture
Robert It's hard for people like us
Raj That's why we stick to our own stuff like bhangra and that
Robert Coloured people don't fit in to that kind of stuff

The comments made here connect with a sense of a particular time and social location but equally acknowledge a number of groupings and themes within this operating framework. Firstly, experimenting with cultural ownership and where this sits within concepts of Englishness or Britishness. Following this, the conversation moves on to quite specific understandings of culture drawing upon notions of product and class from particular perspectives. We are then engaged in dialogue around how this connects with an understanding of 'colour' and 'race'. What is particularly interesting about this piece of dialogue is that within the space of an interchange lasting, quite literally, seconds, three themes all relevant to and significant within the research were picked up and discussed by the research subjects. Consequently, when analysing such scenarios, which are neither unique nor rare, it is interesting to consider how

Social location is constructed along multiple axes of difference, such as gender, class, race and ethnicity, stage in the life cycle, sexuality, ability and so on. Second, the intersecting social divisions cannot be analysed as items that are added up but, rather, as constituting each other. Although discourses of race, gender, class etc. have their own ontological bases that cannot be reduced to each other, there is no separate concrete meaning of any social division. (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 200)

The example above therefore demonstrates the importance of acknowledging relationality, how at any one point we need to consider that multiple axes are operating within conversations. These may pick up on a range of cross-related factors, all of which will impact on the content and range of topics within interviews and dialogue.

In Chapter One I highlighted just a few examples of individuals contributing towards cultural transformation by means of cultural products that were not easily categorised or demarcated within supposedly singular cultural paradigms. Whilst an examination of those who are 'more culturally imbued than others' is vital in recognizing those more powerfully positioned to produce and reproduce social meanings through relationships of control (Nagel, 2001, p. 255), we must also recognise the ability of those 'less culturally imbued' to challenge the creators and existence of such a framework (Bhatt, 2006).

That this remains a struggle is evident in Nav's response, since for her an English nationality was both uneasy and limiting and she identifies more with Britishness

English always refers to being white and English. I mean British is culture clash or whatever, British. So I see myself more as British than English, even though they're the same thing.

Nav feels able to include herself within the notion of Britishness since she does not experience this as a pure or homogenous identification, as opposed to Englishness. Rather, the term British contains 'culture clash' or a mix, sufficient heterogeneity to include 'other', potentially complex, identities. Crucial to this is that the heterogeneity she perceives within Britishness which is inclusive of an ethnic or 'racial' dimension.

Such decision making processes are further complicated by the seeming incompatibility between categories, particularly as constructed by those in the role of border keepers. One cannot, for example, simply select the label British and know that this could include someone who also referenced an Indian identity (Gilroy, 1993;

Trinh, 1991b; LaForest, 1996). Rather, identifying in such a fluid manner *assumes* experiencing only a partial belonging to the nation, particularly since the research subject's identification with Britishness was frequently not based on a feeling, or symbolic, but was administratively positioned through the concept of citizenship.

The research acknowledged the potential of multiple choices in categorising oneself as included or excluded within the culture of the nation, as well as the challenges faced in negotiating individual and group positions which were positioned as conflicting. We begin to see the extent to which the research subjects felt able to, or wished to determine for themselves other cultural identities as opposed to selecting Britishness as an identity. Understanding of a dominant narrative, particularly when framing one's identity against a sense of the nation (Derrida, 1981), is a complex, highly variable field. The simplistic definitions sought by Goodhart et al undoubtedly struggle to maintain their hold as individuals challenge the value and content of singular categories and labels.

However, the successful pairing of singular understandings of culture with definitions of the nation, as outlined by Tebbit, resulted in few of the research subjects seeing themselves from the perspective of 'British'. On-going conversations with the research subjects highlighted an understanding of citizenship as significant from an administrative perspective. Being holders of a British birth certificate or passport provided them with the administratively legal position as a British citizen. Their connection was with a British citizenship through birth place, "I guess I was born here" rather than a sense of being part of a broader cultural identity (Oommen, 1991, Yuval-Davis, 2006a). The research subjects were consciously aware that there was a cultural identity in relation to British citizenship and nationality which, from their perspective, did not include them. Consequently, for many of the research subjects, cultural negotiation was experienced as on-going, rarely producing 'neat homogenous, national units' (Gilroy, 1987).

It is therefore not surprising that the research subjects chose to inter-weave identities in order to produce an identity that resonated. As Maninder commented "I think I'd say British-Asian or originally - no, Asian background but born in Britain – Yes that's a better one." For Bhabha, a new hybrid identity or subject position emerges from this, yet, we must also question to what extent does such complexity equal porosity? The hybrid perspective provides the basis for variables and the ingredients that shape identity are no longer fixed properties but provide the conditions for a third

space within which the research subjects were neither the one nor the other but something in-between.

The unproblematic selectivity which may appear to be available to users of the *Venue* might suggest that a more fluid, uncontested matrix was widely perceived as available to the young people with whom we engaged. Whilst the evidence here suggests that an intricate network of links and temporary attachments existed for the young people, I would argue that this was largely not the case. Rather, this approach had been deliberately constructed as a feature of the *Venue* in providing its users with a space for open reflection; a discursive project space which encouraged them to challenge homogenous racialised identities with more process driven identities of their own choosing. Since, in constructing the *Venue* we hoped to provide a discursive space within which diversity was recognised but that equally, in parallel, there was also greater understanding of the commonality of experience which acknowledged cultural customs and practices and the challenges of both internal and external differentiation.

Guibernau asks, if one is excluded from the “community of culture and unity of meaning [which] are the main sources that allow the construction and experience of national identity” (1996, p. 73) where and how does one subsequently identify one’s national or cultural identity, particularly if the national culture is not the culture with which one would be most likely to identify. We therefore begin to see the broader impact of processes of culture and how mono-cultural interaction is ingrained in multiple ways upon one’s lived, cultural, experiences.

For Hall, intrinsic belonging that includes a sense of political and cultural engagement is vital since without this “the society cannot call on the population to feel loyalty and a sense of belonging” (1987, p. 50). Gilroy (1987) has similarly suggested that, as long as racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships, so that identities seem to be mutually exclusive, individuals will always feel excluded from the notion of Britishness; occupying instead another space and adjusting their cultural terms of reference accordingly. As Rukhsana, one of the research subjects, commented

The British themselves don’t allow us to be British, if there is a clash or friction, immediately the white people turn and go ‘go back to Bangladesh’

For Rukhsana, incidents such as these demonstrated the existence of latent racism and prejudice and confirmed the lack of genuine belonging offered to 'othered' communities.⁶⁹ The research subjects specifically picked upon the riots, such as those at Oldham and Burnley in 2001, and their subsequent impact for individuals seeking to identify themselves within Britishness. The fall out from the 11th September 2001 and the 7th July 2005 will unquestionably have had a greater impact in discouraging Black and minority ethnic communities in Britain, although perhaps specifically Muslim communities, to 'feel loyalty and a sense of belonging' (Hall, *ibid*) or to view themselves as British or culturally included.

Rukhsana's comment illustrates how users of the *Venue* experienced racism as present within their everyday lives. Whilst the shape of racism has seen radical change within communities as well as in youth service provision, the fabric of racism has undoubtedly stayed constant. In the context of the *Venue*, the research subjects discussed how the dynamics of racism impacted upon them and how it operated within their everyday cultural experiences.

Venue, identity and racism

Consequently, the second area that I will consider in gaining greater understanding of the culture and identity choices shaped by users of the *Venue* is how issues of 'race' and racism impacted upon their engagement.

A challenge lies in the fact that, as Bhabha has outlined, "in societies where multiculturalism is encouraged racism is still rampant in various forms. This is because the universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests." (1990: 210). The research subjects drew upon a range of cultural products to find a 'through road' that was absolutely impacted by contemporary racism within urban spaces. Butler (1998) similarly highlights the need to situate culture, particularly in relation to an understanding of the social and economic modes of production. How this operates on a deeper level is evident in comments made by Michael who saw racism as a significant factor limiting cross cultural interaction

⁶⁹ Whilst not a discussion that I can engage with here, the backlash demonstrated in response to the bullying of Shilpa Shetty by Jade Goody on *Big Brother* 2006, is an interesting example of the complex, frequently contradictory dynamics shaping 'race' relations today.

I know a lot of [white] people who listen to bhangra music, but they're the people that hang around with me and they ain't experienced racism even though they hang around with Asian people.⁷⁰ Racists though, won't listen to bhangra, most of them don't like it 'cause they don't like the people.

In Chapter One I highlighted the challenge and desire to distinguish between cultural change as the result of particular diasporic encounters and specifically innovative cultural engagement. Yet, the difficulty still remains that the manner in which a considerable proportion of change and cultural shift occurs is rarely transformative in posing any challenge to the larger social or political frameworks – or impacting upon contemporary racism. As Bromley outlines “the alternative is always forced to occupy a subordinate – and secondary – space and is tolerated, patronised or suppressed, depending upon the level of its challenge to the hegemonic” (2000: 1).

This lies at the heart of the identity positions adopted by the research subjects and the current need for radical change in what are ultimately limiting categorisations. Bromley's point has echoes of Cornel West when he commented how “the modern Black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness can be understood as the condition of relative lack of Black power to present themselves to themselves and others as complex human beings, and thereby to contest the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by White supremacist ideologies” (1993: 210).

In discussing their engagement with popular culture the *Venue* users highlighted a struggle with the lack of wide ranging cultural representations. They saw this as impacting upon community engagement and representation. Quoted here, Maninder picks up on some of the social, cultural and religious tensions she sees represented in cultural products but feels that given the scarcity of such products the license to present such tensions was somewhat limited. In the following dialogue we can see how cultural production and consumption were inter-twined with one's individual status within the social political sphere but also how they become charged with importance because of their rarity.

Maninder I was really angry about 'Bhaji on the Beach', the way that Meera Syal wrote it. At the end of the day, the message that she gave was oh Indian wives get battered by their husbands – which is not true. I think when one Asian person sees another on TV, they find it funny and they get really happy and it was as if she wrote the programme to do

⁷⁰ This is *not* to say that white people cannot also be subjected to racism.

- that, to make Asian's happy and laugh about it, that's why it was successful but then at the end of the day I think it gave totally the wrong message
- SZ *Aren't you saying then that Asians can only give out a good message about the Asian community?*
- Maninder I'm not saying that, just vary it a bit and not just, she only did it from one eye. She never really gave the good bit as well. Or maybe that's just the way she wrote it. I guess there just needs to be a lot more out there. ... That's what we need, just Asian people being, doing, good at whatever. We need a lot more of that

For Maninder it was vital that greater complexity was accorded cultural representation in order to complicate readings that positioned the multi-faceted Asian community as simplistic, backwards, other, a point to which I will return later in this chapter. She clearly enunciated the need for greater representation through increased participation and greater presence. For Maninder, Bhaji on the Beach failed to construct an alternative reading or provide greater understanding of Asian communities. Whilst Diawara might see films as offering a potential third space, combining 'the colours and flavours of different localities' (In Friedman, 1993, p. 157), for Maninder the film was seen as stereotyping and one-dimensional. This was largely because of the rarity of representations which meant that cultural representation became far more symbolically weighted.

Maninder was also aware of the values that were represented, values which she felt provided an incomplete and inaccurate view of Asian communities, which were undoubtedly not included within the desired shared values of the nation-state. We see in her comments how, whilst the research subjects recognised cultural change they were wary of its implications which were not seen as producing new or changed social perspectives. Rather her concerns focused on questions of cultural and social integrity and the lack of impact cultural interchange seemed to make on the perceptions and lived experiences of minority communities.

'Authentic' Consumption

The research subjects were frequently challenged if the cultural products that they chose to reference were not those perceived as authentic. So, whilst they often sought to consume culture in a way that was not limited they were frequently questioned by their peer group, by parents and by others within their social circle. So, whilst Maninder challenged binary categorisations and the concept of authentic

cultural production, in response she saw her own cultural engagement questioned by those she perceived as being part of her peer group

- Maninder I was being called a white person, just for liking grunge or rock music. I was like hold on you've got this wrong, how much do you read about Indian history? Who are you to call me a white person? The bhangra music you listen to is all being Westernised anyway. It's not bhangra, don't give me the crap that it's from India. Everything that you listen to is made by and being manufactured into white companies anyway
- SZ *Do you mean like Sony having bought out Bally Sagoo and Apache Indian?*
- Maninder Yeah, it's like look at Apache Indian, what's he doing? He makes out that he's really Indian in his songs but I mean once he was doing this programme, 'Apache Indian in Bombay' and he just took the piss out of these religious people in India, I just thought, what message are you giving to everyone who's watching?

One's cultural identity was perceived as being directly related to the cultural products that one consumed, and was consistently compared to supposedly appropriate dominant or so called authentic versions of consumption. This frequently involved binary relationships which referenced authentic cultures. Clearly there are additional complexities in Maninder's comments, specifically around globalisation and increasingly corporate approaches to musical production, consumption and markets, which cannot be picked up in the research. It is interesting, however, to consider her rebuttal of the lack of authenticity with which she sees herself as being charged.

Maninder draws upon two key elements; firstly she authenticates her own position by highlighting her knowledge and engagement with Indian history and in her opinion stabilising her position as someone non-white. By doing so she establishes paradigms that define whiteness as lacking historical knowledge or understandings of the cultural heritages of India. In addition she challenges notions of bhangra being representative of a seemingly authentic Asian identity; she stresses its Western influences and calls into question contemporary bhangra as being 'from India'. The questioning engendered by the research approach was one adopted by many of the research subjects as a space within which they both challenged contemporary culture and their own thinking. Maninder's thought process here is typical of the multi-dimensional perspectives that many of the research subjects drew on in challenging not only their own cultural perspectives but also the social cultural discourse within which they were positioned.

In a similar manner, the following interchange between Amajeet and Kamajeet demonstrates how cultural norms were called into play to shape cultural consumption. Their comments highlight how such norms play a central role in firstly positioning supposedly authentic notions of culture and secondly assessing the degree of fit in terms of one's engagement

SZ *You don't like any?*
Kamajeet I don't like English music
SZ *So what would you say was English music?*
Kamajeet Crap! Although some of the songs she [Amajeet] listens to are nice, like some of Mariah Carey's music
SZ *So where would you position something like jazz?*
Kamajeet I don't know, I'd say that's -
Amajeet She'd say that that was English
Kamajeet Yeah, I'd say it's English
SZ *So what about what we might class as fusion music, for example some of the music that Bally Sagoo produces?*
Kamajeet Oh, I don't mind things like that because you've still got your – the Punjabi feel to it

Whilst jazz, which undoubtedly draws on multiple musical styles (see for example Gilroy, (1992) who has written extensively on the multiple fusions evident within jazz music), is seen as 'English', the musical styles of artists such as Bally Sagoo are considered to maintain 'the Punjabi feel'. In areas where they held considerable knowledge there was greater understanding of how music was constructed through multiple cultural cross-over. So whilst jazz might be termed English, Bally Sagoo remained essentially Punjabi even whilst it was also a fusion of multiple influences.

For Huq, there are two supposed levels of knowledge at play here, that "within the artist's own 'community' itself and outside." (1996, p. 68). Arguably Amajeet and Kamajeet consequently operate as personal social agents, able to "construct and point to certain analytical and political features" that perhaps "other members of society would not be able to identify" (Yuval-Davis, 2006a, p. 201- 202). Specifically, however, this is within the parameters of their existing knowledge, the music of Bally Sagoo and not that of jazz. For Yuval-Davis this can be expressed by means of colours within a rainbow. One may include "the whole spectrum of different colours, but how many colours we distinguish depends on our specific social and linguistic milieu" (2006, p. 201- 202). In a similar manner, Kamajeet and Amajeet's understanding of the musical components of Bally Sagoo allowed them to position him within an inclusive framework. At the same time they acknowledge that the

music draws upon other influences and styles that Kamajeet in particular may not see as part of her palette of that deemed acceptable, culturally authentic, music.

The decisions made in relation to musical origin and categorisation were, as highlighted above, peer determined so, in this instance, Amajeet saw Kamajeet's engagement as specifically Punjabi and vice versa. This could mean that for some of the research subjects looking for members of their peer group to share musical styles and consumption involved an element of searching others out. So, for Nav, her engagement with rock music represented a connection between cultural consumption and mixing culture, "I think I'm mixing culture quite a bit, music, I mean, I don't know exactly how many Asians are into rock really, I can't find any". Nav's response to this was to seek out individuals who could be categorised as Asian, represented within music

Nav There's always the singer from Echobelly, Sonia, she's Asian isn't she, and there's Cornershop. Cornershop are well cool.
SZ *Like Skin in Skunk Anansie, I guess there's not many like her*

This was also the case for Akeel, but rather than seeking *individual* representation he referred to the musical content of mainstream groups, such as Kula Shaker, as drawing upon Asian instruments in order to identify acceptability and relevance

they make a lot with all the Asian stuff, using the Asian instruments. It's like it's more acceptable to use Asian stuff, now it seems like it's not weird as it's going on anyway

Akeel utilised his knowledge of musical styles and influences to complicate perceptions of cultural borders. The sense of challenging a monolithic perspective was therefore sought from multiple angles; in the content of the arts product as well as in the producers. The relationship between art and culture as product and how it was contextualised or positioned within society as well as their consumption of culture was a frequent topic for discussion with the research subjects. Maninder's comment touches on some of the challenges that were perceived as operating where one sought greater cultural inclusivity

It [Asian art] is growing, having Cornershop, an Indie band, I think Asian arts goes really well because at the end of the day it's art as well, but so long as it's not a fashion thing, it's bloody serious and to take it seriously, it's like with this mehndi thing, they're all wearing it, but I mean centuries ago this was a serious thing. Don't destroy it afterwards, that's what worries me

For Maninder, whilst she saw Asian art as being well received, she also expressed concern regarding the seeming appropriation of cultural products. She drew upon mehndi as having an authenticity and symbolic weight that carried with it centuries of meaning. Her concerns focused upon the very symbolic and signifying forgetting that Bhabha seeks within the third space. Rather than seeing this as a positive factor, Maninder cautioned against wider engagement and new signification. Having such an emphasis upon signifiers raises particular challenges to Bhabha's third space, since if individuals are to hold onto specific significations it risks problematising the ease with which cultural products might be renegotiated.

Conclusion

Within this chapter I have considered how the environment provided by the *Venue* opened out a discursive space for the young people and their families. I highlight the challenges of the social and cultural hierarchy and how this impacted not only on perceptions of the *Venue* but also on how the young people saw themselves within existing social and cultural frameworks.

There was evidence that they struggled with the lack of wide ranging cultural representations with which they identified. I have argued that this was, in part, due to the manner in which identity definitions were conflated. This left them excluded from a sense of belonging in relation to the dominant culture of the nation. In turn, the research subjects drew upon shared values and norms in their own reflections and considered these as influencing cultural positioning within social and cultural frameworks, often based upon foundations of racist discourse. So they picked up on the manner in which social and cultural tensions were represented within cultural products but also expressed feelings of concern due to the scarcity of more in depth insight which they felt would have challenged one-dimensional stereotypes.

Within the *Venue* case study the research subjects discussed how they experienced racism on multiple levels, both on the 'outside' but equally the pressure to consume culture from positions of authenticity. I suggest that these perceptions were complicated and challenged by the presence of hybridising strategy and the discursive space provided by projects such as the *Venue*.

Chapter Four

Artistic engagement, third space, cultural institutions

Introduction

In this chapter, I consider the research subjects' experience of culture within cultural institutions, alongside a specific engagement with arts and creative led production through *Changing Views*. I investigate how this case study provided spaces where the dichotomous categories of British and other could be challenged by means of artistic engagement.

However, I acknowledge how particular individuals and social groupings exist which have carried considerable weight and influence in pervading and infusing what are perceived as cultural norms of the imagined community (Dyer, 1993; Jan Mohammed and Lloyd, 1987; Nagel, 2001; Sharma, 2006a). In view of this, I argue for the need to recognise complex intersecting relations between culture, arts and creativity, governance, power and social practices. I suggest that the continued deployment of a bifurcated cultural structure offered the research subjects little in the way of complex identity conceptualisation within cultural institutions. This, in turn, supported dominant political narratives in the construction of the nation.

Many of the research subjects questioned the singular manner in which they were perceived within formal cultural spaces. They struggled with the lack of artistic and cultural connectivity. Consequently, I sought to engage with cultural institutions as part of the research process. My aim was to analyse how the cultural infrastructure referenced a binary notion of Britishness. Yet, the research subjects were also caught up within notions of homogeneity and unified communities and framed within this structure. A binary perspective was therefore interwoven throughout *Changing Views* and evident in both dialogue and in the content of products.

The role played by established cultural institutions, in both maintaining the nation's identity whilst also framing cultural representation is central to this. I specifically explored how representations of artistic practice were positioned and regulated within existing cultural modalities. I demonstrate such cultural compartmentalisation and construction through a consideration of cultural products such as Bezhti and Veil.

Frequently, the lines and boundaries employed by the research subjects framed them as excluded from the culture of the nation and the concept of hybridity was utilised to draw in cultures designated as alterior (Bhabha, 1990). By investigating hybridising strategy in relation to cultural institutions, the chapter seeks to identify processes which are normalised in constructing subjects-in-discourse and reveals how cultural authority is laid out as the natural order. However, whilst I recognise how much of the evidence points us towards hybridising third space strategy, I question the extent to which the research subjects entirely challenged notions of authenticity and cultural, or historical, roots.

Consequently, whilst we search for a politics of difference (West, 1993) which requests new ways of seeing and thinking difference, as well as new ways of engaging with alterity, the realities are that difference remains compartmentalised and constructed within the majority cultural grid (Bhabha, 1990). The representation of cultural objects or subjects perceived as external to a national grid were carefully controlled by means of tools such as the 'not visible enough' or the 'too visible', although they could equally be categorised as exotic or other. Thus, cultural objects seen as other would neither question nor challenge dominant norms within cultural institutions. A pattern that I argue is repeatedly reflected in cultural institutions' failure to challenge or resist prevailing social or political norms.

In the first section, I consider a relationship between the invisibility of particular cultural objects and subjects within formal cultural institutions and the value allocated to them (a theme I return to at the close of the chapter). I go on to explore the complex framework that exists within cultural institutions and argue that it is within these spaces that value and presence is negotiated. I draw on the examples of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and the Drum to evidence this. I highlight the impact that a lack of presence within formal cultural institutions had upon the research subjects and suggest that this was echoed in the manner in which they struggled for cultural representation within their daily lives. Being positioned within a binary cultural framework drew the research subjects to utilise a similar perspective in their own cultural production as part of *Changing Views*. However, alongside this they also engaged with multiplicity and challenged the manner in which much culture operates from a bifurcated perspective. This opened out possibilities for engagement with cultural hybridity and the potential of third space theory as operating within cultural institutions. Yet, in conclusion I demonstrate that such engagement was rarely complex or multiple but frequently predicated upon binary perspectives, such

as those evidenced in the play Bezhti. I suggest that rather than a neutral engagement, unfamiliar cultural products were positioned as ‘too visible’ or ‘not visible enough’. I conclude the chapter with a consideration of the Veil exhibition and highlight how whilst cultural institutions may engage on a superficial level they remain largely resistant to change.

Limited representations, limited value?

In this first section I want to suggest that the relative invisibility of particular cultural activities within spaces aligned as British had specific implications for how they were valued. In particular because the research subjects were aware that they rarely connected with cultural institutions and saw this as having an impact upon how cultural groupings were both represented and un/attached to the culture portrayed as that of the nation.

This problem of invisibility became most apparent in the project *Changing Views*, which provided the participants with space to produce and discuss the consumption of culture. In doing so it raised a number of perspectives and highlighted particular challenges facing the research subjects. The artistic production that accompanied this project was seen as a positive engagement by the participants, providing access to artistic and cultural activities which would not otherwise have been available to them. As Sima commented “it’s the best thing learning how to do it because I don’t know how to stitch or anything. There are no places that you can go and learn new things, if it’s English – Westernised - or Asian things that they show you how to do”.

Part of the research process involved facilitating the research subjects’ engagement with cultural institutions, such as museums and galleries, including Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Soho House Museum and New Art Gallery Walsall. Particularly since, through my employment, they were partners in delivering the project. There was a mixed reaction to the participants existing engagement with cultural institutions. Some of the participants commented that they did visit cultural institutions, either with school, or when in town, while for others this was not the case, as the following exchange highlights:

SZ	<i>Do you go to museums?</i>
Saima	Yes
Rezna	Not that much I don’t.
Saima	I go every Saturday ‘cause I go to town.

SZ *So what do you go to see – do you go to this museum?*
Saima Yes, I usually go to see pictures of Cezanne or Van Gogh, things that artists do.

Whilst Saima bought into the notion of visiting museums, it was actually unlikely that she visited Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery on any regular basis. This is primarily because the artists that she mentioned do not have works on permanent display at the museum – in fact their work rarely tours to BMAG. It is more likely that she was enjoying her creative engagement within *Changing Views*, that she was connecting with me as an arts development worker but also that I was someone that she enjoyed talking to, and she wished to share an engagement with the arts. So, we can begin to see how Saima was more likely to be performing a *desired* feature of her identity.

Similarly for the community development worker working with the older women who participated there was a sense of performing a particular engagement. Lily spoke of them 'gaining freedom' and leaving the 'prison' or 'closed environment' in which they lived. The women enjoyed the project although also experienced 'high art' in a way that they hadn't been able, as the following exchange with the group co-ordinator highlights:

SZ *Do they think that the arts institutions are accessible to them?*
Lily Now, Yes, having the opportunity to go out to museums, art groups or exhibitions; it gives them an opportunity to get out of the house away from the 'prison', or closed environment that they live in and for them to get out it's like opening an door. To them that's gaining freedom.

Changing Views specifically worked to facilitate the research subjects' connection with existing arts provision, something which this group hadn't previously felt able to do. I organised a visit to the main museum outside of the main visiting times, they were therefore able to enjoy the exhibits without worrying about how other people might perceive them, something which they had previously been particularly concerned about. However, these engagements were also delimited by the terms of presentation within the museum. One example of how they interacted with the pieces was their engagement with the famous Burne Jones tapestries which were on display at the time. They wanted to view them in close detail, examine and feel them, none of which was permitted in the museum. There were clear differences between my research participants and the museum galleries as to how art was to be best enjoyed.

Moreover, *Changing Views* could only open up a small percentage of the artistic and creative outputs to the research participants, since they were only connected to a limited number of cultural institutions through the initiative. This was highlighted by one of the participants who said “when we go to the museum we’ll be able to see different things but it’s all mainly visual art – what about other art forms such as performance?”

Thus, the research subjects’ relationship to formal cultural institutions was complex. At one level they saw such sites as being markers of quality, providing spaces for cultural representation to select groupings, within which they were largely not included. However, on another level the research subjects were cautious regarding who would view their work, as Sophia comments “who are these hob nobs that are going to see it – that’s what you said, you said ‘hob nobs’”. Similarly Sarah on learning that their work would be seen by councillors commented “I don’t like councillors. What if we don’t want to show our work?” So, the participants were also concerned about their work being seen in a gallery. The participants were performing a particular element of their engagement with the project, these focused upon their worries about the public viewing their work and fears – still experienced by professional artists – that it would not be good enough, or that audiences wouldn’t like it.

As such when they got an opportunity to showcase their work in Birmingham they were pleased that their work was to be on display, as one individual commented “I think it’s a good idea and it’ll be good to see the exhibition”. This was echoed by another participant who saw the value in increased representation as drawing communities out of narrow representations

I think things that bring more of the Asian community out. Do a lot more Asian stuff and people will start to recognise it ... it’s not really recognised a lot, but when people do things like we’re doing now, I think it’s quite nice, I think there should be more.

Zakia provides one example of how those interviewed saw a role for art and creativity in encouraging interaction and engagement. She commented on the role that engagement in arts practice could play, as well as how this might feed into greater awareness and understanding between cultures. However she didn’t feel that cultural institutions such as the main museum curated work that acknowledged the

interests or even the existence of Asian artists and communities; she felt that they were unrepresented within such spaces.

James et al (1997) similarly connect representation to established official cultural institutions commenting that “through her [Macdonald’s] ethnography of an official institution of representation” (1997, p. 11) to highlight how choosing and framing “images and artefacts within the museum setting is also to engage in acts of translation and sense-making” (ibid). The perspective of cultural institutions as part of representing the nation is also shared by Bennett who comments that

Museums have served as important sites for the historical production of a range of new entities (like art, community, prehistory, national pasts or international heritage) which, through contrived and carefully monitored ‘civic experiments’ directed at target populations (the workingman, children, migrants) within the museum space, have been brought to act on the social in varied ways. The role that museums have played in mapping out both social space and orderings of time in ways that have provided the vectors for programmes of social administration conducted outside the museum has been just as important, playing a key role in providing the spatial and temporal co-ordinates within which populations are moved and managed. (2005, p. 525)

Of the visual arts housed within such cultural institutions, Peter Stupples writes how they may act as “instruments of cohesive identity. That sense of cohesion may be exercised both positively to give individuals a sense of belonging and cultural affiliation, to bring groups together for collective endeavour, as well as negatively to exclude, to bracket out the Other.” (2003, p. 127). Zakia, and others who felt similarly, are right to seek out representations within existing cultural institutions since they undoubtedly leave their imprint upon individuals and community groupings. We must therefore question to what extent such spaces might become, or be influenced by, third space theory. In Chapter Three I considered how physical institutions hold the framework in place. In order to challenge the framework alternative spaces must be identified, or existing spaces re-negotiated to produce greater opportunity and modes of cultural re-articulation. Within these spaces the subversion of a bifurcated cultural outlook and engagement may take place moving through and beyond binary perceptions. However, as we will see in more detail, the research findings provided little evidence that this was taking place within the established cultural institutions.

Consequently, a key element within the research was the role played by culture in positioning identity as also cultures' ability to reposition identities. It was therefore vital to consider how factors such as 'translation and sense-making' (MacDonald, in James et al 1997, p. 11) work towards the production of a seemingly collective national culture as well as the influential role played by cultural institutions within the social sphere, shaping the perceptions and experiences of communities.

Creating a framework through cultural institutions

Bright and Bakewell also suggest that there is a need to recognise the varying strata that inform identities, art and culture when they comment how

Given histories of colonialism, international participation, and ethnic, economic and gender stratification that inform modern and postmodern conditions, identities on multiple registers – not just racial or ethnic – are a significant feature of contemporary political cultures. Ethnographic approaches to art allow important access to the conditions, practices and meaning negotiated in contemporary, cultural landscapes (1995, p. 6)

There are two key areas for development, firstly the subjective factor of the arts made possible through the existence of cultural institutions.⁷¹ The research findings also demonstrated how cultural institutions have habitually provided a space for the visioning of the nation to take place (Bennett, 1995; 2005). The research subjects identified cultural institutions as producing a sense of the nation as simplistic, working to establish the binary paradigm of inclusion or exclusion, a theme on which numerous writers have written (Anderson, 1983; Cohen, 1986; Gilroy, 1993; Puwar, 2004; Spivak, 1988; amongst others). Even whilst the vision of the nation, frequently considered 'pre-eminent and invested with truth' (Rutherford, 1990, p. 22), is part of a contrived set of 'myths and memories' (Smith, 1986); one of a number of ways in which 'history, culture, power' (Hall, 1990) work to ensure that the status is maintained by "excluding and marginalising that [which] they are not" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 22).

Wherever possible, the need for what is perceived as alternative artistic or cultural establishments or spaces are denied, a theme outlined above in Chapter Three, by

⁷¹ Smith (1986) has highlighted how selective formations of a national culture persist because notions of the nation have been founded upon both objective and subjective factors such as the permanent "cultural attributes of memory, value, myth, and symbolism. These are often recorded and immortalized in the arts, languages, sciences and laws of the community which though subject to a slower development, leave their imprint on the perceptions of subsequent generations and shape the structures and atmospheres of the community through the distinctive traditions they deposit" (1986, p. 3 – 4).

individuals such as Goodhart or Tebbit. This is further evidenced by the manner in which alternative cultural reading practices are hard fought over and controlled by those in positions of power. One such powerful cultural institution is Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG). BMAG is considered by one of its workers to be “the last white bastion of middle class Englishness” and could certainly be seen to hold a dominant position within official representations of the nation’s culture. The institution is based in a prominent building in the heart of the city centre, an area considered to be the ‘cultural quarter’ (Bennett, 1995a). It has a large staff and guaranteed revenue funding, a rare position for any regional arts institution, symbolically powerful it unquestionably holds a strong cultural position within the region. BMAG has a considerable reputation since it is home to what is regarded as a substantial fine art collection, specifically work by the Pre-Raphaelites. Exhibitions are often programmed years in advance and both the museum and the gallery frequently show work that tours internationally. BMAG receives substantial yearly revenue that is in addition to in-kind support, along with sponsorship and benefits from the ‘Friends of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery’, as well as its considerable relationships with large business sponsors. Recent collaborations have included support for exhibitions by Ernst & Young who wish to be associated with the institution. Staff at the museum made a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a new exhibition hall, and the refurbished Waterhall now houses contemporary exhibitions, examples of which have included entries for the Jerwood Competition, 2002 and high profile temporary, touring, exhibitions.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery clearly provides a perspective into the cultural institutions that receive government support. However, I am also interested in exploring what Trevor Phillips considers ‘a typically British way of dealing with difference’, as he comments

We showcase diversity in all the visible ways we can. We create special moments for the black and Asian folks. We even give them special spaces to do their cultural thing. But when it comes to the big stuff – the decisions about where the money goes for example, they are notably absent from the table. This kind of tokenism is better than what we used to have – but it still leaves minority Britons outside the door (2004)

It should therefore not surprise us that cultures designated as ‘other’, whose presence does not contribute to a particular way of visioning the nation (Bennett, 2005, Goodhart, 2004), are rarely provided spaces in which they may freely represent or express themselves. The Drum frequently experiences difficulties in

working with the diversity of African, Asian and Caribbean communities, the cultural heritage, contemporary needs and wishes of whom are also incredibly diverse, although this is not evidenced in the spaces available. Whilst patterns of opposition, domination and subordination also occur between peripheralised or minority cultures, there are few spaces where such interaction is evident. We rarely see or hear about the interchange that takes place between South Asian artists, such as any exploration of the cultural heritages of Sikh, Hindu or Muslim communities or East Asian groupings. There is little representation or debates regarding the cultural interaction between African and Caribbean communities – bar a media focus upon tensions between inner city gangs. The cultural spaces allowed those who are not perceived as supporting a notion of British culture as contained, or who do not have a pure culture ‘in mind’, are rare.

The Drum is a multi-purpose arts centre based in Aston, Birmingham, an area with high unemployment, high crime levels and a large Black and minority ethnic community. The organisation’s main aim is as a venue for Birmingham’s Black arts. The money for the development of the site came from City Challenge (a government led initiative which targeted funds towards inner city areas), Arts Council West Midlands (the regional arts development agency and funding body for the arts in the West Midlands), the Probation Service and Birmingham City Council, alongside a large Arts Council, England lottery payment for capital expenses. The initial aim was to redevelop the venue as part of the urban regeneration of the area. The location was decided by the previous existence of the Aston Hippodrome Cinema, which had closed a few years previously.

Geographically, almost any other regional (or national) arts venue is located in the city centre. The Drum stands a mile and a half outside the city centre on a busy road. It has revenue funding for a limited period. Each year it has to re-affirm its position and every three years the board must produce a fully comprehensive business plan. However, as with London’s Roundhouse, the Drum experienced numerous financial problems and received considerable financial assistance ‘stabilisation’ funding, from Arts Council England, to remain open. This was partly due to the expectation that the Drum’s board and employees would be able to raise sufficient funds to pay for equipment and resources, put on community events and cover losses made on events that failed to break even. The Drum received a relatively small grant, particularly when considering on-going running costs and has,

to date, not received any sponsorship from businesses for exhibitions, theatre productions or community projects.

The physical spaces offered to these differing institutions correspond to the extent to which they each maintain particular understandings of the nation, its culture and communities. Those, such as Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery clearly connect with memory and history in a way in which the Drum neither does nor can. The role of 'border keepers' within the social and cultural sectors cannot be ignored in the framing of such positions and in recognising how the existing cultural, social or political sphere frames the responses of such cultural institutions and the research subjects.

To apply Bhabha's third space to these physical spaces may seem inappropriate, particularly since third space theory has been utilised as a mode of articulation, a means by which one might describe processes of production that blur existing boundaries. How then might this apply to physical cultural spaces? Bhabha's conceptual posturing requires that we move beyond binary structuring and redesign cultural – amongst other – institutions, to see beyond existing boundaries and categories to open out cultural meanings where there exists no fixed primordial unity (Bhabha, 1994). Yet, it is precisely such physical institutions that hold the cultural framework in place, even whilst at the same time they may argue and negotiate against it. If such frameworks are to challenge themselves (for it is more than a singular framework), they must identify alternative, ambivalent sites, a third space where there is continuing, on-going negotiation of cultural practices, communities' norms and values.

The third space now becomes a physical and cultural space within which the subversion of dualistic categories may take place, moving beyond the realm of binary thinking and oppositional positioning. The third space therefore provides a spatial politics of inclusion that "initiates new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" (Bhabha 1994, p. 1). It is within these sites that the research subjects have a clear role to play in their ability to transverse cultures, communities and groupings. These spaces were provided as a result of the action research carried out towards the research, with the *Venue* we sought to identify a physical space and with *Changing Views* to engage with both a metaphorical one but also to engage with physical spaces such as those outlined above.

It is therefore crucial that we continue to develop spaces where new models of representing cultural interaction are sourced. Particularly since, as members of migrant communities engaged “within the cultural and political circles of the dominant society” they “began to argue in favour of new models of representing the process of cultural interaction, and to demonstrate the negative consequences of insisting upon the denial of the emergent forms of cultural identity” (Papastergiadis 2000, p. 3)

Within the formal cultural and creative sectors these spaces rarely come easily but are, as we shall see structured and controlled. In contrast, the site with which we engaged in developing *Changing Views* was one of greater choice and mobility for the research subjects.

Changing Views was guided by parameters set by myself, the artists engaged and the community development workers working alongside participants on the project. It was also influenced by Birmingham City Council’s remit. However, it provided the research subjects with a vital space to question dominant cultural spaces and take advantage of opportunities to both represent and engage with a number of alternative cultural readings, both in terms of artistic production and consumption. Within this we sought to encourage open debate and to enable the research subjects to employ models and systems with which they felt comfortable. We worked with their lived experiences and expected to provide a route by which they could contribute to culture from the broader perspective of their lived experience.

In order to challenge cultural frameworks, alternative spaces must be identified, or existing spaces re-negotiated to produce greater opportunity and modes of cultural re-articulation. Within these spaces the subversion of a bifurcated cultural outlook and engagement may take place moving through and beyond binary perspectives. However, as I will show in more detail, the research findings provided little evidence that this was taking place within established cultural institutions, although these represent only a partial reality.

Consequently, a key element within the research was the role played by cultural institutions in positioning identity or in cultures abilities to re-position identities. It is therefore vital to consider how factors such as ‘translation and sense-making’ (MacDonald, in James et al 1997, p. 11) work towards the production of a seemingly collective national culture as well as the influential role played by cultural institutions within the social sphere, shaping the perceptions and experiences of communities.

The impact of a lack of cultural representation

However, within the findings there was evidence that the research subjects struggled with the lack of cultural representation. They saw this as impacting upon community engagement and representation. The absence of sufficient cultural representation within cultural institutions was echoed in – although not solely responsible for - the manner in which the research group struggled with cultural representation in their daily lives. The following comments highlight how they engaged with others in communicating culturally specific knowledge⁷²

- Zakia People ask us questions, they ask stuff to do with our religion, people ask questions about what dress do you wear, how come you have to wear a head scarf and all this kind of stuff
- Amajeet I'm proud to be Indian and I do say to my friends that, but they don't understand, you see conversations would be different if I had Asian friends. Then I think am I being too Westernised and stuff and then when I'm trying to explain to them they just don't understand. If I went to an Asian school I'd be way out, because I go to a school where there are more white people it makes you aware of the culture anyway.
- Kamajeet They're always questioning you, 'why can't you do that', 'why can't you do this', and I'm like just go read up on it, they're like so stupid. They're so narrow-minded – sorry.

The lack of awareness by the wider public of the issues that mattered to particular groups was clearly elucidated by the research subjects. As Modood comments, "individual self-esteem critically hangs upon group dignity and group status." (1992, p. 5) He stresses how "in many ways the respect that individuals seek is tied up with the respect their group receives, so it is very difficult for individuals to have some sense of their own worth when the group they belong to is being systematically disparaged and devalued" (ibid). For my participants, this lack of respect may be as a result of, or result in, a lack of cultural recognition or engagement.

In responding to such a scenario, Bromley suggests that "the alternative is always forced to occupy a subordinate – and secondary – space and is tolerated, patronised or suppressed, depending upon the level of its challenge to the hegemonic." (2000, p. 1) Such engagement undoubtedly has an impact on the way in which people

⁷² However, it is also important to acknowledge the need for balance here. It isn't possible for cultural institutions to carry out a fully comprehensive educational role; institutions cannot replace the experiential or information giving role which individuals may carry out.

understand themselves, their position within society, their sense and level of engagement, in addition to the operating framework (and supposed shared values) within which they are positioned.

Derrida has similarly highlighted how cultural production can play a critical role in re-definition and self-valuation. He focuses on the need to find new ways of writing a variety of texts “so that the power of people in positions of authority, the cultural producers, to impose their perceptions and interpretations is minimised” (in Stringer, 1996, p. 154). The current social and cultural order establishes and maintains structures that are unlikely to welcome resistive representation that asserts the power of those subordinated (Fiske, 1994).

Experiencing binary perspectives within *Changing Views*

This resistance to representation was clearly articulated in this project. All of the participants were aware that the pieces that they made would be included in an exhibition that I was to organise. Working alongside community workers we looked at potential exhibition space. One of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery’s spaces had initially been identified. The space, called the ‘World Cultures Gallery’ had received some criticism from museum curators and arts and community workers, even though, previously, the gallery had won an award for its innovative approaches in engaging with diverse cultures. I certainly found it patronising that art from the world’s cultures be given one gallery space, the contents of which were on permanent display and covered continents as diverse as Australia, South America, Asia and Africa without any sense of these cultures having ‘moved on’. Yet, this also highlights how the representation of singular monolithic identities is necessary if minority communities are to remain culturally contained. We had hoped that the *Changing Views* exhibition might have been shown in this space, at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

Whilst this, in itself, is a shockingly poor representation of the heterogeneity of the diverse cultures and cultural products of these continents, what is yet more surprising is that even given governmental pressure to adjust cultural services, no wide-scale changes had been made, or planned, for this gallery space. The changes that were made were those of presentation, with updated labels, renewed material, some updating of records and further information on the local demography. A small

number of participatory workshops were also held, with school children visiting the museum and the resulting work exhibited in the museum.

We had hoped that the *Changing Views* exhibition might have been shown at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, in Gallery 33. In this case it might have complicated the seemingly homogenous representations on display. It would have allowed for some sense of the *process* of culture within these continents, rather than the stagnant message which the gallery portrayed. Categorisations would have become at a minimum a little more complex, and plural perspectives and positions highlighted.

Hosting the exhibition would have demonstrated the museum's commitment to representing the manner in which 'othered' minority communities are taking on aspects of 'British culture' whilst implicitly changing what that term means (Bennett, 2005). As Stephenson and Papadopoulos confirm "theories about the autonomy of migration no longer focus on how migrants become integrated into the societies in which they reside (of course this happens) but on how people move and change these societies *de facto* – by integrating and rearranging the given restrictions and conditions of their mobility" (2006, p. 436).

In keeping with this, the exhibition would have highlighted how the seemingly 'official' culture held onto by Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery was in fact being influenced by the city's diverse communities. We had hoped to reflect how culture "is not composed of static, discrete traits moved from one locale to another. It is constantly changing and transformed, as new forms are created out of old ones. This culture ... does not arise out of nothing: it is created and modified by material conditions." (Mullings in Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 44)

We felt that this would have highlighted the manner in which interchange is taking place between what is perceived as British culture and 'othered' minority cultures, whilst implicitly changing what British culture means, a theme that I will explore further in Chapter Five. Of this realm van den Bosch comments that

The art museum in particular stands between two contradictory tendencies: one is the dominant art historical narrative, and the other is the new sense of cultural diversity. The international art market and its influence on art practice since the 1960s have led to a rapid turnover of styles and the institutionalisation of art galleries and museums. Much of what is described as

new involves the recycling of art practices attached to a few novel signs. (2005, p. 83)

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, power dynamics came into play and the museum's exhibitions committee decided that because quality could not be guaranteed the exhibition should not go into the main museum. We begin to see how, whilst the spaces might be seen as shared, there was a consistent sense of culture being divided and the decisions made by the powerful few. Our experience with Gallery 33 highlighted how Britain is not seen as part of the world but in possession of its own unique but multi-faceted cultural categories, "while basic relations of power remain unchanged a cultural globalisation that loses locality, identity, and cultural context in a world culture that lays claim to the universal does not constitute a complete break from the past" (van den Bosch, 2005, p. 83)

Cultural institutions undoubtedly establish binary codes of their own thereby shaping collective modalities. Laying in place such a bifurcated infrastructure impacted on the participants' perspectives, specifically in relation to their own negotiation of categories. The institutional views were echoed in those of the participants who then drew upon terms based upon binary perspectives, and utilised singular terminology in referencing what was frequently perceived as culturally authentic. This constructed a framework where a sense or structure of feeling (Macey, 2000) of exclusion was the norm.

This exclusion was deep and involved not only representation but even a sense that some groups had a culture or history. This was clearly elucidated by a curator for a national heritage charity who rather casually commented "some ethnic groups have a tradition of history and some don't have any."⁷³ Thus, culture, as Hall (in Woodward 1997, p. 51) has written is itself a production and the stories that produce it are perpetuated by the maintenance of a highly specific sense of history, nation and values. The curators' words suggest how cultural institutions fabricate specific entities and aesthetics, drawing these in to shape the social (Bennett, 2005). Here, there are many groupings, yet, as Bhatt observed, some are more culturally imbued than others (2006). Culture is constructed, as Chambers suggests "in the idea of roots and cultural authenticity there lies a fundamental, even fundamentalist form of identity that invariably entwines with the nationalist myths in the creation of an 'imagined community'" (1994, p. 73). The research subjects were therefore

⁷³ Personal interview with the author, January 2006

contextualised within a cultural hierarchy framed within the social, cultural and political sphere (Jan Mohammed and Lloyd, 1987; Sassen, 2006). For Abizadeh even our subjective identifications are dependent on the social context (2001, p. 28). Any discussion of alternative reading practices or cultural difference must therefore be understood within the context of the existing social and political relations prevalent at any time within history (Brah, 1996; Zahir, 2003a). This close association is also picked up by Fanon and related to the juxtaposition of national principles with “culture-as-political-struggle” (in Bhabha, 1994, p. 35). The institutional habitus that the curator evokes forms the basis for producing the participants’ own subjectivities.

Furthermore, it is not only a binary that is being transposed but a hierarchy of identities, cultures and histories.

Indians there is a tradition of decoration and an interest in this area, whilst I’ve always thought that there was much less of a tradition of heritage from the Caribbean community

The same curator goes on to stress that not all cultural institutions, including heritage properties, would be of interest to all communities

It’s not relevant to their history, so won’t do for everybody since each ethnic group has its own history. We could risk making something out of something that’s hardly there, everyone is so anxious to find points of interest but one has to be honest about it.

Of such an approach, Horne suggests “dominant versions of reality tend to suit dominant groups and to uphold a certain social order” (1984, p. 1). The curator further went on to point out that

Most of the properties don’t really have such a connection with colonialism or slavery. Some of the families were actually part of the British movement against the slave trade.

The curator’s response is interesting at a number of levels. First, being part of the British movement against the slave trade is surely relevant to any individual with an interest in colonialism or slavery. His failure to recognise how this might also be of interest or connect with individuals is worth noting. Perhaps, he is actually establishing boundaries between those who are entitled to a connection and those who are constructed as existing outside the imagined community, whenever and whatever this may be.

He is not alone in producing such constructions. The content of a recent (May 2007)⁷⁴ critical debate session that I facilitated was enlightening. It included a number of freelance visual arts curators who openly concluded that art is not for everyone. Some art is for certain communities, and one should be able to express and acknowledge this within the wider arts infrastructure. Interestingly, in another session the following day, I raised this perspective with another group of arts professionals. There was vehement disagreement about such a viewpoint of what seemed to them to be “art for arts sake”. The above comments therefore highlight the role played by art contained within cultural institutions. Art is both part of the culture of the nation whilst also shaping and responding to the ‘imagined community’. In the following section I will therefore consider in more detail the manner in which cultural institutions play a marshalling role of assimilation in providing a space to shape the social framework.

Yet, many theorists including Venkatesh, argue that there “is no such thing as a pure culture” (1995, p. 6). He is right to include “except in the minds of people” (ibid) as a caveat, since, in response to the operational framework outlined above, the research subjects consistently referred to an authentic, singular or pure, culture. Uzma one of the artists working on the project referenced authenticity in terms of her conceptual, artistic, thinking within *Changing Views*. She saw the participants as operating within and contextualised by a specifically bifurcated culture, even whilst recognising that they also explored this position from an artistic and conceptual perspective

I was pleased with the way that the girls worked: they explored techniques, art form and their own self as to where they stand within their dual culture. I was happy with the way they located themselves – I think they were proud of their identity.

Uzma saw the participants as clearly standing ‘in between’, positioned within a dual culture and subsequently framed from a binary perspective. The conceptual terrain was one of drawing together concepts, techniques and art forms from a binary perspective that addressed segmented but supposedly authentic cultures. The research subjects worked with artists who were actively engaging in this field and provided both new skills and greater insight into the arts infrastructure and cultural

⁷⁴ The research was carried out as part of my paid employment and was for Arts Council West Midlands, ‘Mapping the African, Asian and Caribbean Visual Arts Sector’

institutions. Whilst the artists provided a structure they were guided by the participants, as Ranbir, one of the artists commented

“The girls were very much interested in using contemporary techniques and being in Britain – so I’ve tried to use traditional aspects of the art in a contemporary way. When I started with the girls their main idea was to do something which is more important in this country than in Bangladesh.”

The complexity of being “Indian ... but being in British culture” was also explored by Saryjit, another of the artists working on *Changing Views*. She spoke about communicating this within her arts practice

I started incorporating some of their [her family’s] language and some of their views into my work in relation to photographs of us when we were young and also present day photographs. I then did installation pieces which was really about how we, the Sikh family in Britain, it was trying to question to what extent are we meant to be Indian and not being in or working in India but being in British culture, you know, in England, or a foreign country. It was trying to put a question up about the types of notions that people work with. It was a projected image on a very transparent piece of cloth and there was a fan going in the room so this image was constantly moving and even torn in pieces as well

Clearly, if the segmentation and cultural containedness endorsed by both the research subjects and the cultural institutions that framed them, actually existed then the possibility for belonging, within Britishness would be a considerable challenge. The host nation would be a fully formed completed culture, even whilst identifying what this is and how it might operate is an increasingly unfeasible task. This is neither the case for the host nation nor for any culture or identity, whether ‘marginal’ or ‘central’. In the quest for changing cultural institutions, the celebration and utilisation of a non-hierarchical cultural structure, that does not imply cultural superiority or inferiority is central. For as long as specific values are applied to certain forms of cultural difference, denoting an inferior or a superior status will be used as a means through which to differentiate and negotiate hierarchical positions.

Engaging with notions of unified cultures

Within this chapter I argue that a key element in perpetuating fixed understandings of the nation is to ensure that the dominant myths and history are carefully maintained. It is therefore essential that they remain uninterrupted from what one could term the presence of other myths. Gilroy spoke of such selective remembering when he

highlighted how certain narratives are written out of history and memories; rather than seeking to offer a comprehensive viewpoint, they are used to construct a highly specific sense of history and of the nation (Gilroy, 1987, 1993b; Bennett, 2005). One can therefore conclude that if selective representation of shared memory and history takes place over the past, a factor Gilroy stresses, the screening of the present and recent history is equally inevitable. Those groups who remain absent from the selective remembering of the nation's past, are unlikely to be readily included in the present.

Within *Changing Views*, the research subjects drew upon singular, unified, notions of culture. Whilst this was evidenced in both contemporary and historic representations, the passage of time certainly allowed greater objectification of cultural heritages. In a conversation with Amajeet and Kamajeet we discussed the ceramic pot that they were producing. Rita, the artist working with them, described the design of the pots as well as some of their uses

We've worked with ceramics, starting off with decorating pots similar to the traditional ghara and then moving on to work in design and sculpture. Some of the group have used a combination of media, mosaics, gold inks, and acrylic paint, allowing them to achieve a range of effects and textures.

The traditional pots were used more as objects for carrying food and water in native India because there weren't the modern conveniences. The pots which the women and girls are working on now are more like decorative vessels – they aren't meant to be used in that kind of way, but purely to be seen for pleasure.

Here we see how a one dimensional history is attributed, not only to the pot itself but also to 'native India', where 'there weren't the modern conveniences'.⁷⁵ The pots are therefore positioned from a specific perspective, mono-cultural, native and traditional and as a necessary utensil. The research subjects worked with a particular way of seeing that did not demand complexity or historic engagement with heritage or national culture, British or otherwise. However, the conversation itself must also be positioned from the perspective of taking place within *Changing Views*. Terms that might have received greater clarification were far more simplistically used given the assumed make up of the engaged audience. Consequently, within this context the research subjects worked with a particular way of seeing that did not demand an

⁷⁵ Rita was not the only person to refer to India in such a manner. Sundeep also referenced an extremely reified perspective when she commented "Although I say Indian when asked what's your culture, we do live more to the British standards than, y'know we don't live in little huts and stuff. We have got modern stuff and it's more like the British culture."

accompanying explanatory complexity, whether this applied to historical or contemporary objects. This unquestioning, unified perspective was also expressed by Amajeet and Kamajeet, when producing two images for the pot. The first image was their representation of a traditional Asian woman, the second a contemporary woman

- Kamajeet On one side we were going to do a traditional Punjabi woman and then on the other side a modern one but then it was like, well what is a modern woman?
- SZ *It's interesting that you got the idea in your head but then when it came to doing it ...*
- Kamajeet Yeah what represented it, that's why we decided to just do a traditional woman.
- SZ *Because they're easier to cast?*
- Kamajeet And people know what it is, if we'd drawn a modern woman – they [the audience] wouldn't have known what it was.

Their conversation provides us with an insight into the ease and comfort that individuals feel in reifying the unknown. Both Amajeet and Kamajeet were comfortable in the historical representation of a 'traditional Punjabi woman' in one image. They did not communicate any sense of historical complexity. However, when asked to represent a figure with which they were more familiar, that of a contemporary Punjabi woman, they struggled to do so from a singular perspective. Within this arena they recognised the challenges and felt that it was impossible. Ultimately they decided against the use of a singular image to represent a contemporary woman, a response they did not apply to historical representation.

As Bhabha writes, the other is always fixed, unchanging and rigid, crucial to this is the stereotype, since "the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (1994, p. 66). We can see here how the stereotype, frozen in time and history, can play a role in fixing the other; not only to the 'centre' but even to those on the 'margins' since Amajeet and Kamajeet also facilitated the objectification of what they understood as a traditional Punjabi woman. Within *Changing Views* they did not relate the diversity that they applied to modern women and their own cultural period, to what they saw as a traditional Punjabi woman.

Cultural hybridity and third space within cultural institutions

For some of the research subjects, the segmentation of cultures was more obscure and begins to demonstrate how movement may take place towards processes denoted in theorisations of third space. So, Kulsum, for example, sought to challenge superficial readings and represent greater complexity in her life by means of her creative work in miniature paintings. She painted a theatrical image within which the viewer could see a face representing her behind a pair of sweeping stage curtains, “it’s to do with theatre but with a change to it, you don’t put everything into it, only some things”. Within the image Kulsum sought to highlight the need for people to see past superficial façades and look beyond stereotypes, prejudices and existing limitations regarding who is seen to belong within notions of Britishness and national identity. She stressed that “it’s hard to see the two cultures you really have to look at the drawing.” For Kulsum, the painting expressed something of her own cultural journey and what she saw as an increasing challenge to distinguish her cultural identity as British or Asian. Her comments provide insight into the possible processes working within Bhabha’s third space, the manner and point at which the existence of ‘two cultures’ becomes ambiguous.

A similar viewpoint was evidenced in Zakyya’s comments. She also explored her work from a multiple perspective “I think it’s more British and a bit Asian, like the way that the paper is made but what we put on it is a mix”. For the workshops, the participants hadn’t just created miniature paintings but had also produced their own paper using a range of methods and apparatuses both old and new. Hence, since the paper had been made using age old techniques, demonstrated by the visiting artist Uzma, this was seen as Asian. In contrast the images on the paper were an unidentifiable mix. The influence of the environment, with workshops set within the school, led Zakyya to consider the work to be ‘more British’ and ‘a bit Asian’.

Zakyya was just one of a number of the participants who spoke about the different contexts from which she felt she was drawing together her own sense of cultural identity. “I think that we do mix our cultures, because in our daily life when we’re at school we bring in our culture from home”. Her school environment provided a space within which she could draw together what she perceived as different cultures within her home environment. Even whilst she sees these as very different terms of cultural engagement, she is also aware that she is drawing them together in order to produce her own sense of engagement and cultural identity. Consequently we see evidence

of boundaries, yet equally we also see the peculiarity of certain types of 'cultural sympathy and culture-clash' (Chambers, 1994, p. 75).

There is clearly a dichotomy here; the research subjects were buying into notions of essentialist, homogenous and binary constructions, 'us' and 'them', 'our culture', 'their culture'. Yet some of them were also problematising such concepts as they re-negotiated understandings of a single linear narrative, forcing open, as Chambers writes, multiple sites of narrative (1994, p. 75) and mixing cultures to create a new culture. Negotiations pertaining to the third space are rarely simplistic, the clarity/simplicity utilised by Zakyya or Kulsum is rarely a consistent feature of cultural engagement and change. In part, this is due to the complexity of that which is normalised, that which is considered other as well as the modes through which the two are seen to interconnect.

What constitutes difference and 'the weight and gravity it is given in representation' (West, 1993, p.204) are an important part of the framework under consideration. In the following section I will demonstrate how engagement with difference and representation can produce quite particular challenges within cultural negotiations. This is particularly the case where that which is considered may not be acknowledged as complex, but is defined as simplistic or perceived from a binary perspective. In the following example I want to demonstrate how the use of such binary perspectives is unhelpful within contemporary society, and incompatible in relation to community and cultural interchange and exchange. The complexities involved in negotiating culture through creativity must be considered when reflecting on how diverse representations might co-exist. In part, this is a problem of who is able to represent, where and on what terms. In considering this I will review the play Bezhti staged in Birmingham Repertory Theatre's small scale space The Door in mid December 2004. Here, I will highlight how the example of Bezhti drew the complexity of minority groupings into the experience and politics of a mainstream cultural institution.

Bezhti

I was first contacted about Bezhti when the producers wished to hold a post-show discussion and they were looking for someone who might facilitate this. Due to the work that I had undertaken as part of *Changing Views* I was seen as someone who could chair this process. I agreed in principle but requested more information on the

play (since I knew nothing about the play at this point), the audience (invited or open to the public) and the discussion theme before agreeing to take the role. However, before this information had been sent to me, the decision had been taken not to host a post show discussion. The reasons for this decision may be better understood within the context of the staging of *Bezhti*.

Bezhti was a theatre production staged in The Door, a space for emerging writers, directors and performers. It was written by an emerging writer, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti. The play was marketed as a new black comedy and was her second play at the Rep. Her first was *Behsharam* (Shameless) which played to full houses at the Rep and at Soho Theatre in London. Bhatti had also written *The Cleaner*, an hour long film for the BBC and a feature film *Pound Shop Boys*. Of the play, the Rep marketing commented

Past her prime, Min joyfully spends her life caring for her sick, foul-mouthed mother, Balbir. Today, for the first time in years, they're off out. Min's hoping to wish someone special a happy birthday, but Balbir's got greater ambitions for her daughter. With Elvis the home help in tow, mother and daughter head to the local Sikh Temple. When Balbir encounters old friends, a past trauma rears its ugly head. Min and Balbir's illusions are about to be shattered as they become cruelly immersed in a world of desperate aspiration and dangerous deals. In a community where public honour is paramount, is there any room for the truth?⁷⁶

The play explored the experiences of a Sikh single parent family, focusing on the relationship of a mother and daughter, as well as their experiences in visiting the Sikh Gurdwara after many years.⁷⁷ As the play unfolds we see murder, rape and abuse take place within the Gurdwara. The central issue in the trouble surrounding the play was that the rape scene took place in the same room that the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book is placed. The Guru Granth Sahib is viewed as a living Guru and is therefore seen as especially holy. It was the existence of this particular religious aspect which caused such offence, therefore drawing strong criticism from members of the Sikh community who felt that the play was disrespectful towards Sikhism since it included acts of violence within the spiritual heart or inner sanctum of the Gurdwara.

⁷⁶ Taken from the Birmingham Rep website at www.birmingham-rep.co.uk

⁷⁷ A feature that I found interesting was that the 'home help' called Elvis was played by a young Black actor. The subplot suggests that he hoped his and Min's relationship would develop beyond a platonic one.

The Rep had undertaken some initial discussions with members of the Sikh community, who whilst they disapproved of the play generally, made one request, that the scenes in the play be moved out of the Gurdwara but specifically out of the room holding the Guru Granth Sahib. This request was rejected by Birmingham Repertory Theatre who commented that it affected both their and the artist's artistic license and freedom of expression. Some members of the Sikh community felt vocally, and ultimately violently, that the theatre had not acknowledged or considered their experiences or feelings in producing and hosting the play.

The play was due to run for five days, it ran for four, on the final day the protestors who had been consistently and non-violently present became violent, entering the building and intimidating staff. On the day in question, a Saturday, the police had informed the theatre that they would be unable to monitor the demonstration because they had to attend to the large numbers of people visiting the bars and clubs also located on Broad Street. The level of violence anticipated each Saturday required their full attention. The Rep was therefore placed in a vulnerable position due to the activities of those enjoying their regular, if frequently violent, night out.

The media portrayal of certain kinds of violence is normalised whilst, in contrast, that which occurred at the Rep was amplified. Patterns such as these demonstrate how cultural frameworks are developed and perpetuated, producing modes of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and interaction. The secularity of randomly violent interaction has been normalised. In contrast violence that is driven by belief, culture, or values attributed to a particular cultural perspective is seen as symptomatic of the challenges of a supposedly multi-cultural society. It is within paradigms such as these that Bhabha's third space is shaped and held in place.

It was because of the ultimately violent response from some members of the Sikh communities that the Artistic Director and General Manager of the Rep Theatre chose to close the show; with 'deep regret' that they had felt forced to take such action. The writer of the play experienced a number of threats and felt forced to go into hiding due to concerns for her welfare. Clearly, members of the Sikh community saw the play as politically, religiously and culturally detrimental – blasphemous even – in the comments it was making regarding Sikhism.

This incident wasn't only reported in the local media, it was picked up nationally and carried internationally, The Times of India, New Delhi ran a story on the 21st December 2004 titled 'Sikhs 'upstage' Bhatti play'. The article commented that

Sections of the UK Sikh community were triumphant late on Monday as they forced the first closure of a modern British play on grounds that it was blasphemous. Meanwhile a controversy erupted over the Sikh community's right to be so overtly offended by a form of art. ... sparking the first major incident of Sikh violence in half a century. On Monday, at least one leading opposition MP objected to the Sikhs' violent protest of the play ... which depicts rape and murder in a Gurdwara.⁷⁸

In the UK, reaction to the play was also wide ranging with articles covering events from a range of perspectives. One article⁷⁹ considered the situation to be between "freedom of speech and respect for beliefs" asking the question 'are the two incompatible?' Clearly, this example raises a number of issues⁸⁰ however I will focus on those relevant to the argument here.

Earlier in this chapter, and in Chapter Three, I considered the role played by cultural institutions. In Chapter Three I highlighted how they support the visioning of the nation but also how they shape the social framework through the selected visibility of othered, minority groups. The example of Bezhti draws together an established cultural institution and what became seen as a challenging theatre representation by certain groupings and processes of engagement and consultation.

In contextualising these elements, it is important to note the role played by political pressure from government and therefore from key funders such as the Arts Council. This pressure requires regularly supported organisations, such as Birmingham Rep, to develop relationships with audiences that reflect the community demographic; they need to be inclusive in their work. The theatre therefore engaged in consultation with members of the Sikh community. However, questions such as why they were specifically consulting with members of the Sikh community and what they hoped to achieve by this did not appear to have been asked,⁸¹ so there was no sense of any

⁷⁸ Taken from The Times of India, New Delhi, Tuesday 21st December 2004, p14

⁷⁹ The Observer, 26th December article titled 'Tempest of rage shakes Sikh temple', p13

⁸⁰ In drawing on Bezhti as an example it is important to acknowledge the issues surrounding censorship and freedom of speech which were absolutely connected to the showing of Bezhti, although it isn't possible to cover these within the confines of my research.

⁸¹ Research based on a conversation with Arts Council England West Midlands' Drama Officer in Winter 2004/05

intersectional understanding that may have been applicable – even if only from a marketing perspective.

There was no necessity for them to consult. The play was being shown in *The Door*, a small space not seen as a ‘financial earner’ so unlikely to attract much public attention beyond existing arts attenders who were less likely to censor the play in such a way. There was little sense that the Birmingham Rep had considered what might happen if members of the community felt strongly against the play.⁸² We have seen above that the requests made by the group were not especially onerous, although the writer clearly felt differently since the play was performed unchanged.

They worked with the play’s author to develop a piece of work and then, once completed, invited members of the Sikh community to view the work and feed into a post-show discussion. They chose to contact the Sikh Forum, a group of older males, who were frequently pushed forward as ‘community leaders’, an undeniably difficult term which means a great deal superficially but in reality means very little, particularly when contextualised from the perspective of Alleyne’s (2002) thinking outlined in Chapter One.

Those with a relative awareness of this group might not have made them a first point of contact for such a production. *Bezhti* was produced from a strongly female perspective; with the two lead characters both female. Inviting an all male group to comment on the play might therefore seem at odds with the content of the play. The group are reserved in their thinking in relation to arts and creativity and rarely engage in contemporary arts practice. Members of this group have been critical of the council’s organisation of the Vaisakhi festival, an event which has consistently sought to engage with as many stakeholders as possible with the aim of producing a relevant event for its diverse audience. Clearly then, choosing this group as representative was inadequate, if comprehensive dialogue was to occur.

Processes of community consultation and engagement must undoubtedly be multi-faceted. *Bezhti* clearly highlights the conflict that may take place when the art produced by one individual is thought un-representative, or even, as in this case,

⁸² Of their approach, a regional producer commented, in a private conversation with me at the time, “they weren’t expecting this from the Sikh community, they would never have produced such a play about the Muslim community.”

blasphemous towards a social grouping, even whilst a binary perspective would position them both as other.

Both Bhatt (2006) and Sharma (2006b) consider the complexities of what Sharma terms ossified cultures, although from quite different perspectives. Bhatt's starting point is the criticisms that have been directed at cultural festivals, such as those made by the Sikh forum above, but particularly the response of local government and funders. He comments that the Baisakhi⁸³ Mela held to celebrate the Bangladeshi New Year has been attacked as contrary to Islam, "corrupting, impure (since it incorporates 'Hindu' and secular rituals from Sylhet) and hence to be forbidden as 'unIslamic'" (2006, p. 98). These attacks have continued and gathered momentum through the support of the far-left in Tower Hamlets, London, resulting in the future of the mela coming under threat. For Bhatt this signals a "defeat for secular nationalists in the face of the Islamic Right and far-left" (ibid).

Bhatt leads us to question why this "pattern of state adjustment with and promotion of the extreme South Asian religious right" (2006, p. 99) continually repeats itself and argues that this has much to do with the manner in which culture is essentialised and authenticated. He considers it possible to "speak of a definitive culturalist episteme for our multicultural times" (2006, p. 100), a structure that draws much from the binary perspectives already identified in my research.

For Bhatt, the central discourse focuses upon "'the west and the rest', 'orientalism and occidentalism' and other grand geo-spatial binaries" (ibid), therefore dividing 'the west' and 'the rest'. "Cultural reification is at the centre of claims of the kind that '9/11' demonstrates that we live in a multi-ethnic world" (2006, p. 100) even whilst it lacks any real exploration of what 'the west' or 'the rest' might actually mean from a multiple perspective. Cultural entitlement and recognition is therefore dependent on such reified, cultural otherness which adheres to a specific sense of authenticity and religiosity as otherness.

Sharma similarly picks upon such polarity and outlines how hybrid spaces are founded upon "a dichotomy which constructs that which is mixed, fused and dynamic as culturally progressive, and in contrast, that which is ethnically fixed, authentic and bounded as culturally backward and almost primordial" (2006b). Subsequently, "the

⁸³ Baisakhi or Vaisakhi are inter-changeably spelt with a b or a v, both are acceptable.

hybridity on offer means those Asians who cling to their ossified cultures cannot seek entry into the modern world, being unable to negotiate the spaces of progressive multi-culture” (ibid). Yet, Bhatt’s notion of cultural engagement suggests that individuals who are assigned as representative of ossified cultures also connect but on the very grounds of their difference.

Sharma (2006a) applies this thinking to the film *East is East*, but it could equally be considered from the perspective of Bezhti. Here the supposedly mixed, fused and dynamic work of the author Bhatti, which challenges a certain version of ethnically fixed Sikhism, is supported by a major cultural institution. In *East is East*, Om Puri’s character, George Khan, is precisely the other who is seen to represent supposed authenticity, with his regular visits to the mosque for direction. A similar argument could be charged at the Sikh Asian elders who “cling to their ossified cultures” (ibid). By doing so, they are perceived as backward, unable to enter into open dialogue with cultural spaces such as *The Rep*, and therefore failing to navigate progressive multi-culture (Sharma, 2006a).

When considered in this context it is less surprising that the cultural institution in question failed to seek a range of views or perspectives on the play, since engaging the other was seen as a binary, rather than multiple, approach. They sought feedback from the most prominent community organisation, a male group, without reflecting on the role or purpose of the production itself. They might, for example, have benefited from far more constructive feedback had they engaged with the Sikh Women’s Forum, a well established group who participated in *Changing Views*, who were interested in arts and creativity and were well informed about cultural activity within the region.

However, there were also internal discussions that failed to take place. The theatre relied upon the writer having what must be impossible intelligence in relation to community responses to the play. The work was produced on the terms of the artist’s relationship with the *Venue*, they were seen as being forward thinking and challenging, but also representative of ‘the community’, a problematic concept that I considered in Chapter One. The community was perceived in a homogenous manner, instead of considering the multiple perspectives possible as highlighted by Bhatt and Sharma above, they saw the community as singular. The fact that the play was controversially received may have changed this. Alternatively, staff working at

the theatre may now see members of the Sikh community as being ethnically fixed, authentic and bounded (Sharma, 2006b), closed to negative portrayals.

The negotiations surrounding Bezhti highlight how cultural clashes can exist within cultural groupings or religious denominations. Yet, whilst patterns of opposition, domination and subordination also occur between peripheralised or minority cultures there are few spaces where interaction may be acknowledged or negotiated. I highlighted earlier the lack of cultural spaces available and the cultural marginalisation facing spaces such as the Drum. We rarely see or hear about the interchange that takes place between Asian artists and there is an equally marked absence of the arts or culture exchange and interaction between groupings such as African or Caribbean.⁸⁴ So, Brah (1996) is right to pick upon and stress the importance of power relations in how one is positioned and viewed, commenting that within both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic groupings, cultural clashes can be as much a sign of the power relations underpinning cultural hierarchies as it is about a culture itself.

Ultimately, the example of Bezhti highlights the challenges facing hybridised subjectivity in Bhabha's third space. Whilst selective hybrid constructions may be produced on the basis of a central grid which determines and locates complex cultures, the social political framework is multi-sited. We must not only consider how complex identity and culture connect with the concept of whiteness but equally that heterogeneity exists within marginalised cultures which also challenge cultural transformation in multiple ways. The continuing use of a reference that speaks solely to an invisible white centre constantly questions the capacity of minority cultures to be hybrid and complex within themselves. So, whilst Bhabha may speak of individuals being "free to negotiate and translate their cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38) we see how, for individuals such as Bhatti, they are no freer than any other individual but are clearly positioned within a cultural, social, political framework.

Derrida's work is useful in theorising cultural difference whilst also questioning the prevailing hierarchy and consequently those categories which are made available. Rutherford draws on Derrida's battle against dependence on any guarantee of meaning, thereby transcending signification through 'logocentrism'

⁸⁴ Although in the last five years there has been growing coverage of the negative, and violent, interaction between African and Caribbean and Asian groupings.

by invoking its claim to universal truth, such a system of knowledge hides cultural diversity and conceals the power structures that preserve the hierarchical relations of difference. Central to this logocentric form of thinking is a system of binary operations and distinctions. Those terms that are pre-eminent and invested with truth, achieve status by excluding and marginalising what they are not ... One term in its discursive and material operation, represents the centre; the excluded term is the margin. By assembling the heterogeneous possibilities of meaning within language into fixed dichotomies, binarism reduces the meaning, regulates and disciplines the emergence of new identities. It is at this point, where the potentialities of meaning are congealed into fixity that the margin is established. But it is more than a simple boundary marking the outer limits of the centred term because it functions as a supplementary marking what the centre lacks but also what it needs in order to define fully and confirm its identity. It is then an integral though displaced part of the centre, defining it even in its non-identity (1990: 22)

It is therefore vital to acknowledge difference as unchangingly temporal; it will always alter depending on time and place. Yet, there is always an awareness of or an understanding with regards to definitions of difference; at any one point we are able to identify that which is different to the culture of the nation even as this constantly shifts, a feature explored through the consideration of border keepers or social agents.

The too visible and the not visible enough

The research findings highlighted, in multiple ways, how all individuals are culturally and socially positioned. We have seen how cultural institutions for the visual arts carry a prominent and symbolic position both in the visual portrayal of the culture of the nation as well as in negotiations of contemporary visual artists who represent the nation.⁸⁵ In the following section I will consider the different approaches that cultural institutions demonstrated towards tools of engagement such as 'the too visible' and 'the not visible enough' (Hall and du Gay, 1996, p. 56).

The following comments demonstrate how, whilst the culture of the nation was not seen as simplistic or understood as shared by the research group, there was a clear sense of those who were included and those excluded from dominant cultural institutions

⁸⁵ Whilst it isn't possible to enter into detail here, considerable discussion is given to artists such as Anish Kapoor, Chris Ofili (Turner prize winner) and Steve McQueen (Turner prize winner) who are seen to have 'broken into' the contemporary visual arts sector.

- Paul They have a very posh feel to them
- Joyce I tend to think its very white middle class people that would be part of the national cultural heritage; they are not the people that physically or visually look like you
- Katherine You are very aware that the demographic is white, middle class, mostly elderly or elderly with children, it's about slightly older people with very different interests, different origins, different backgrounds to you
- Shafiq It's old boy networks and musky houses – very old school

The participants reflected on the individuals they saw as representing central or dominant cultural institutions and were therefore very much a part of the heritage and identity of the nation. Their comments highlight how perceptions of what was British as well as who is British were formed, not by a definition of what Britishness *is*, but by what was seen as *not* being British, as belonging to other cultures (Sharma & Sharma, 2003). Britishness was therefore shaped not on the basis of a clearly prescribed authentic culture with known values, but upon an empty signifier, the imagined community. This connects with what Yuval-Davis (2006a) terms belonging, a reference to an emotional attachment that I consider associated with seeing oneself within the culture of the nation. Whilst each of the responses quoted above differed, they shared a sense of not being included or feeling no belonging within the cultural heritage of the nation.

What is particularly intriguing here is that the respondents quoted above represented what might be considered a cross section of cultural backgrounds: Paul and Joyce considered themselves British-Caribbean; Val, African; Shafiq, British-Muslim; and Katherine, White-British. Their responses demonstrate both the complexity of the culture of the nation as well as its simplicity, since whilst each person's perception of the cultural heritage of the nation differed from that of others, they all positioned themselves as not belonging to what they perceived as the national cultural heritage. From this perspective, Friedman (1994) was right to emphasise culture as a motivated creation, shaping the manner in which subjects are themselves created.

Veil

Heightened visibility was undoubtedly seen to operate in the case of the Veil exhibition. Veil was held at the New Art Gallery Walsall between February and April 2003. It was a touring exhibition curated by a well established arts organisation

based in London, the Institute for International Visual Arts or inIVA. My engagement with the Veil exhibition, as well as that of the research subjects, came about through *Changing Views*. Having been working alongside Walsall Creative Development Team to consult with individuals and communities within the area I was asked to produce an artist and communities' response to the Veil exhibition.

The Veil exhibition almost certainly fell into the arena of heightened or hyper-visibility and spectacularization, even whilst the accompanying catalogue worked hard to combat this. Dent considers the spectacular (1992) an uneasy position since "there is always a price of incorporation to be paid when the cutting edge of difference and transgression is blunted into spectacularization" (1992, p. 24).

The work contained in the exhibition was quite controversial, exploring notions of veiling, where the veil is often perceived as "an item of clothing dramatically overburdened with competing symbolism" (Lewis, 2003, p. 10). Such heightened visibility (Thompson, 2005) can be just one more way of attributing a place where that perceived as other is considered separate or external to the culture of the nation. In this instance, the exhibition sought to "address the gap between individual experience of veiling and its complex and contested status in [a] variety of public arenas. In an agenda-setting selection this project unites historical material, personal accounts and critical writing with contemporary visual art to show how the heterogeneous use of veiling, as dress, act and visual trope, is endlessly repositioned by changing world events and constantly re-framed by the nuanced shifting responses of veiling communities" (Lewis, 2003, p.10). There is no doubt that religious beliefs and practices have been increasingly repositioned and re-framed by community change, even prior to 9/11 or 7/7.

Curators of the exhibition commented that a key aim of theirs was to profile the work of minority artists, who were often marginalised, to what they termed mainstream audiences and arts venues. The curators were interested in crossing hierarchical boundaries and changing mainstream perceptions of the artists involved.⁸⁶ The exhibition was not concerned with changing perceptions of Muslims who practiced hijab; indeed, in much of the marketing and publicity the hijab or niqab was rarely mentioned. Much of the interest in veiling is not so much on issues of gender and

⁸⁶ This was a central aim for the exhibition, although I consider it a particularly problematic area within the exhibition and in its reception; see a published article by myself in *Fashion Theory*, Volume 7, 2003, pp 319 - 325, for a fuller examination of this area.

the treatment of women more generally but on this particular item of clothing as emblematic of oppression.

The curators operated with clearly set parameters, seeking to buy into the gallery's mainstream audiences. The curators were clear that the exhibition was not about considering the needs or thoughts of Muslims, practising or not. Rather they were interested in shifting the work of predominantly 'invisible' artists into the visible mainstream. It could be argued that this was a noble aim, one which acknowledged some of the issues identified earlier, the invisibility of many artists and the lack of spaces within which alternative narratives or cultural representation could take place. Yet, Sharma and Sharma (2003) have eloquently argued of increasing attempts to locate and control authentic otherness and argue that "the racism of integration and proximity for Orientalism – keeping the proper distance from the Other – is irreconcilable, yet essential to securing the continuation of white hegemony." (2003: 315) We see how, within the cultural sector, in order to maintain quite particular cultural distinctions, certain visibilities have been tied in with the representation of the exotic 'other'.

It is therefore less surprising that ultimately, the exhibition, rather than the individual works included within it, was designated 'other' by local Asian and Muslim communities. The subsequent effect of this was that the exhibition or cultural product alienated sections of the community who may have been interested in the subject matter of the exhibition. Whilst community cohesion can be limited from many directions and for multiple reasons, including choice, fear, or lack of knowledge, the evidence highlighted greater sensitivity to representation on the part of minority communities.

Veil was an example of how a large arts organisation, seeking to produce dynamic, boundary crossing and therefore highly visible work, presented work to minority groups but unequivocally not on their own terms (Horne, 1986). As Horne comments, "in the showings of the public culture some ethnic groups will be dominant; some may not be there at all; others may be present, but not on their own terms" (1986, p. 159). It is important to acknowledge that minority groups are not alone in being present 'not on their own terms'. Stanfield and Rutledge were right to recognise that the central focus is not to disturb the "social, political, and economic arrangements of the dominant group" (1993, p. 21), a facet that recognises the

complex issue of class, which echoes across cultural institutions internationally, although not one that it is possible to consider within the thesis.

The Veil exhibition highlights particular shapes of representation and demonstrates how certain cultural forms and groupings are positioned as 'too visible'. However, I also want to portray how the 'too visible' was also not simplistic but was itself relational, constructed and situated. In the following section I argue that artists' and those particularly bound up within the arts sector, experience a greater level of engagement and benefit from a more symbiotic relationship in the representations created and delivered by cultural institutions. It was this awareness that led me to position the research within cultural institutions but also to engage individuals who were not traditionally present within these spaces.

In further examining this, I want to consider the producing arts organisation that developed the Veil exhibition. Established in 1994, the Institute of International Visual Arts is a London based nationally operating organisation. Its mission is to create "exhibitions, publications, multimedia, education and research projects, designed to bring the work of artists from culturally-diverse backgrounds to the attention of the widest possible public".⁸⁷ Within its work it aims to "explore the creative possibilities provided by the constant interaction of cultures in the contemporary world", similarly through its publications the aim is to "offer wide-ranging voices and viewpoints that present the cross-cultural aspects of the visual arts in a wider perspective" (ibid). Funded by Arts Council England, InIVA is based in a new building, Rivington Place, in London's East End where it houses a library for public use, project and exhibition spaces.

The New Art Gallery Walsall, which hosted the Veil exhibition, worked with Walsall's Creative Development Team to host locally relevant programmes; one event was an open discussion on the exhibition. Due to the on-going development work between the Gallery, Creative Development Team and the newly established Asian Arts Steering Group there were a number of people present who identified as practising Muslims. This included some of those who had engaged with the Creative Development Team as a result of the grassroots work undertaken within *Changing Views*. They were therefore far more comfortable in their questioning of cultural institutions than they might otherwise have been.

⁸⁷ Taken from their website www.iniva.org.uk in May 2007

They commented to curators and artists that they found the exhibition disempowering, that it pandered to a Western, Orientalist perspective and failed to acknowledge any religious or cultural implications pertaining to their own experiences. They saw the too-visible here as derogatory, in their opinion this was a negative, unwanted, representation. For some of the Muslim women present at the open discussion, hoping to see what *they* felt to be a fair representation of themselves, or even something relating to their experience or culturally relevant, the exhibition was far from an 'act of reclamation, empowerment [or] self-definition' (Parmar, 1990a, p. 116). Rather than a resistive reading, or an exhibition that they felt may have offered greater insight into the Veil, or the reason behind Muslim women wearing the veil, the women felt that the exhibition failed to address any such issues. Reasoning on this issue, Fiske (1994, p. 510 – 511) has highlighted how resistive reading practices can pose a direct challenge towards more powerful groups, specifically in relation to a greater understanding of social relations and meanings. Unfortunately, the feeling of some of the Muslim women present at the discussion was that this did not take place.

Of considerable interest to them also, was the censorship of two pieces of work. These pieces were censored by the local authority who felt that they could potentially damage community relations in the area. Interestingly, these pieces were not considered negatively by a number of local Muslim groups, who participated in the debate. The pieces showed the Statue of Liberty veiled and the Houses of Parliament as a mosque with a minaret.⁸⁸ The decision, by the local authority, was almost certainly made on political rather than religious grounds coming, as it did, so soon after 9/11 and with such heightened sensitivity surrounding all things considered Islamic, particularly given the approaching war within Iraq. Muslim women attending the discussion commented that these pieces were some of the few works that they found interesting, and thought provoking, yet councillors at the local authority chose these to be censored, claiming it was on the grounds of community cohesion.

We saw in Chapter One how expressions involving the term community, such as 'community relations' and 'community cohesion' are complex fields of negotiation concerning which much is assumed and little clarified. It isn't possible within the

⁸⁸ The censored images can both be seen at <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/islam/eng/2003/01/veil/img-04.html> accessed October 2007

confines of the thesis to consider these terms to any depth except to comment that they speak of community without any real clarity as to whom or what they refer to. So, in this instance, the lack of cohesion could come from those defined as 'white British' it may not necessarily apply to Muslim communities yet, as we saw in Chapter One, with the notion of shared values, assumed understanding is implicit.

Significantly here, the Muslim women who participated in the debate felt powerless in terms of self-representation; they felt that a dominant cultural institution had accepted an exhibition that socially denigrated them and their belief system, as Lewis comments "we cannot read a text without allowing for its productive role in the encoding of social difference." (1996, p. 28) In this instance, the women felt that the exhibition produced a socially negative difference, specifically in terms of minority majority relationships. Whilst the exhibition included a range of work by women, it was seen negatively by practising Muslim women who wore the veil or hijab.⁸⁹

In contrast, the Iraqi-British curator considered the exhibition to demonstrate a multiplicity of artists, cultural producers and views around veiling; an exhibition that empowered the producer. The artists featured in the exhibition included women of Muslim origin. Similarly, the commissioning curators at the gallery were pleased with the quality and content of the exhibition and felt that it raised a complex issue with insight, something directly commented on negatively by Muslim women who attended the forum. The curator, who was of Muslim origin, although she did not consider herself to be a practising Muslim, felt that their view was limited, that they failed to see the manner in which the exhibition challenged certain stereotypes and codes. For her, the exhibition was a fair representation of a symbolically powerful artefact from both a religious and non-religious perspective.

These vastly differing responses highlight the ever changing role and position which religion and responses to religion can play. Crucially, moreover, representation, environment and context are constantly shifting⁹⁰ as can be clearly evidenced by the changing religious and cultural environment since 9/11 and 7/7. The Veil exhibition offered a highly specific view, was funded by an established visual arts organisation (inIVA), it received considerable attention and prominence in the area because of

⁸⁹ Issues around the wearing of hijab, or purdah, are extremely complex and symbolically laden. This is therefore not a subject into which I can enter into any detailed discussion here.

⁹⁰ For more on this subject please see Zahir, S., 2003b. 'Changing Views': Theory and Practice in a Participatory Community Arts Project. In: Puwar, N., and Raghuram, P., Eds. South Asian women in the Diaspora. London: Berg.

this. The views of Muslim women who visited the exhibition received little attention; limited, contained, value was placed on their opinions by inIVA. There were clearly versions of Islam that were perceived as being more – and less – acceptable.⁹¹

There was, of course, the potential that a similar outcome to that encountered with Bezhti might transpire and there are undoubtedly echoes in this example of that of Bezhti highlighted earlier. However, through the engaged practice of the Walsall Creative Development Team and working alongside individuals who had participated in *Changing Views*, the New Art Gallery Walsall accessed those interested in and willing to have an engaged discussion regarding the role and position of the arts within gallery spaces. This ensured – as far as possible – that dialogue was engaged and open on all sides. As highlighted above, the New Art Gallery Walsall had already observed the requests (demands) of Walsall Local Authority who insisted on the removal of two pieces of work.

Still, however, curators and institutions engaged with artists who could be viewed as dynamic, culturally progressive and mixed. In contrast Walsall Creative Development Team (WCDT) supported Muslim women who were more likely to be seen as culturally backward, clinging to an ossified culture. However, this configuration must also include the work that WCDT carried out with local artists. Through their engagement they sought to represent the multiple positions held by individuals, even the potentially multiple positions held by one individual. Without expecting or determining a particular representation, WCDT sought to engage and connect with individuals on multiple levels within multiple spaces. They facilitated the production of an artistic response to the Veil exhibition, working with local Muslim (self defined as both practising and non-practising) as well as non-Muslim artists.

Veil provides us with one example through which the structures shaping cultural institutions are both supported and challenged. The on-going questioning and development work of organisations such as Walsall Creative Development Team ensured that representations such as Veil were questioned from multiple perspectives. Both individuals who engaged in the audience discussion as well as artists, either emerging or practising within the region were engaged in the process and positioned so as to challenge the existing hegemonic cultural framework. The

⁹¹ For an excellent insight of this, see Ahmad, F., 2003 'Still 'In Progress?' Methodological Dilemmas, Tensions and Contradictions in Theorizing South Asian Muslim Women.' In: Puwar, N., and Raghuram, P., Eds. South Asian women in the Diaspora. London-Berg.

inclusivity of the discourse, with both artists involved and individuals engaged through research, outreach and development, provided a discursive third space within which cultural and symbolic attachments could be explored and questioned. Problematically, however, such multiply engaged spaces rarely feature within dominant contemporary cultural institutions.

Cultural institutions resistant to change

Since few cultural institutions engage non artists/ individuals within their spaces, it is unsurprising that the participants were concerned about their work being seen in a cultural institution. They outlined particular ideas about the work that cultural institutions hold, which were strongly associated with the work of professional artists. In keeping with this, they saw such spaces as inaccessible in terms of having their work on display, as Sophia suggested “they expect it to be perfect to go out in an art gallery”. Kelly expressed her concerns about the quality of her work, “I didn’t know it was going to be on display – otherwise I could’ve done a lot better design than I have done. I don’t like it.” Whilst the participants were interested in how they might engage with such formal spaces, they were also cautious as to the extent of such engagement. So, for Saima and Rezna there was also a sense of people engaging with their work, as

Saima I think that’s good, that people will go and look at our art
Rezna Will we get to go and see our vases ourselves with our names underneath?

The concerns expressed by the participants must, however, also be contextualised within the multiple lines that intersect culture and are systematically found within formal arts institutions. Within the following section I pick upon two instances of how the boundary lines operate within the arts and cultural frameworks and how this impacts on the themes of inclusion and exclusion within cultural institutions, in addition to how negotiations relating to Bhabha’s third space might be contained and held in place.

The first example is that of a commission which was awarded at a similar time to the development of *Changing Views*. This commission was one given to an international visual artist, Katerina Grosse, by the Ikon Art Gallery in Birmingham. The commission entailed the production of a large-scale piece of graffiti art on the wall of Birmingham’s Central Library. The work was an innovative venture for the

contemporary art gallery yet the route taken to appoint an artist was precisely the same as that used to select any other high profile artist.⁹² In contrast, the art form itself was well established for many practising artists none of whom were considered part of the high art establishment. Whilst Grosse had undertaken spray painting in her previous work, this was the first time that she had undertaken any external graffiti based work. At some substantial cost the work took place and received considerable criticism from a cross section of the community including graffiti artists working in the region, some of whom have an international reputation for their work.

The commission was not given to someone local, although this would have been an excellent opportunity for someone from a non-mainstream background to enter the privileged high arts world. Rather, the commission went to someone who had developed their practice through the educational system. Yet, the distinction between them and the artist selected is clear, the assumption was made that only a so-called fully trained artist could fulfil this brief; such an approach is ironic given the art form. This is by no means to denigrate the work that took place but rather to highlight the manner and processes through which formal cultural institutions might operate and the questionable role played by notions of quality within this.

It is paradoxes such as this that many artists are already dealing with on a daily basis and which form the basis for a cross section of conflicting cultural positions even prior to further value being attributed to difference. As Hall comments “within the discourses of history and culture” (1990, p. 226) the social dynamics around difference and quality attribute power and position. Two very different systems and social relations of varying value are involved within this example. The first is that which attributes value to high art; art which is perceived to stem from years of academic study within an institution,⁹³ gradually developing a profile within the arts establishment by taking on commissions for key stakeholders.

The second system is that which is perceived as popular culture. In the case of an art form such as graffiti art, it could be argued that the route for progression involved developing skill and ability through vandalism and damage to property, or the sub-

⁹² I refer here to the means of publicity (or lack thereof) about the commission. Community based artists knew nothing about the initiative until they viewed the finished work on the library walls.

⁹³ Varying values are also attached to each institution since a hierarchy exists within arts and other institutions too.

cultural world of the graffiti artist.⁹⁴ The majority of the artists involved in this art form are generally considered to be untrained: few have received a full institutional education. Yet, the distinction between them and the artist selected is clear, the assumption was made that only a so-called fully trained artist could fulfil this brief.

Until recently the arts elite or establishment saw graffiti art as an emblem of urban culture,⁹⁵ supposedly reflecting the gritty realism of the streets, whilst at the same time an expression of urban decay, elements that became part of its attraction in drawing on the other. It is only recently that it has been utilised to highlight the cutting edge of the arts establishment and the ability of art to cross boundaries. Yet, the art form itself was well established for many practising artists none of whom were considered part of the high art establishment. It is paradoxes such as this that many artists are already dealing with on a daily basis and which form the basis for a cross section of conflicting cultural positions even prior to further value being attributed to difference. This example also provides us with greater understanding of the complexity of cultural interactions that occur within cultural institutions, even whilst at the same time arts practice is frequently fashioned to fit within policy and strategy defined and by cultural institutions.

A second example that highlights the intricacy of the framework and how notions of quality are tied in with imagined communities in complex ways was the case of a refugee artist who hoped to exhibit at the main art gallery in Coventry. The head curator at the time was shown slides and images of the artists work. The work was exceptional; yet the artist was informed that there may be space to display a couple of pieces in the community gallery. A small space poorly lit which received little if any public attention. The artist went on to receive praise from the Visual Arts Officer at Arts Council England, West Midlands and has now exhibited work at a number of other galleries in Birmingham. The problem was that they were seen as 'other', a refugee or asylum seeker first and an artist second – if at all. This particular challenge is interesting because the head curator, who's role it was to define quality, did not fall into the bracket identified by Dyer as 'men, whites, heterosexuals, the able-bodied' (1993, p. 4). Consequently, whilst the evidence shown suggests that cultures consist of a multitude of identities and diverse cultural formations the formal institutional framework rarely provides open spaces by means of which organic

⁹⁴ However, the phenomenal success of the artist Banksy has perhaps changed perceptions to this art form to some extent.

⁹⁵ However, exact definitions of urban art or culture do not currently exist.

exchange might occur. We are consistently faced with the notion of culture homogenised. Multiple identities and diverse cultural formations are dismissed or suppressed with surprising consistency.

This was also evident in the manner in which cultural institutions resisted work that might be considered challenging to the social framework. As Van den Bosch states “museums are social institutions that are part of, as well as dependent on, changes in society.” (2005, p. 81) Bennett (2005) has similarly highlighted how the role and remit of museums has undergone considerable change over the centuries; to this I would particularly add the last ten years as a period of substantial change. The contents of museums, or more specifically the works on display within them, have become socially and politically charged. There are huge expectations placed on museums and increasing pressure from government departments and bodies that they prove their worth through supposedly objective factors such as increasing audience figures.

It is important to note, however, that many museums have continually resisted any explicit engagement with social or cultural commentary and are particularly keen to avoid any sense of political engagement or question raising whatsoever even whilst, as Van den Bosch comments, the traditional role of the museum is changing from “the preservation and display of the heritage of the specific social groups who formed its clientele. Nowadays, it is understood that heritage is culturally constructed and historically contingent. Museums’ collection and exhibition policies have become political issues.” (2005, p. 83)

An example of museums negotiating this terrain came as a result of *Changing Views*. Whilst the project itself was by necessity time limited, my relationship with Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery continued to some degree as a result of my freelance employment. I was therefore in a community action panel meeting when the following exchange took place.

A discussion was being held on the contents of a new, permanent, exhibition which was to trace the history of the Bullring area of Birmingham city centre. The group talked about the open market selling predominantly fresh fruit and vegetables and the storeowners who worked there. The discussion moved on to the pub bombings in the early seventies and their location, ultimately the group felt that these were more

associated with New Street than with the Bullring. However, the comment was made that:

CAP member	The Bullring is now privately owned land, it's no longer public property – perhaps the exhibition could include something on that.
BMAG curator	I think that that's a little too political for us to engage with.
CAP member	And the Irish pub bombings weren't political?
BMAG curator	Well, no, they were some time ago, and history changes things.

The example illustrates how the decision making process takes place. Prior to considerable pressure from funders and local government, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery had expressed little if any interest in focusing on increasing audiences from minority communities. This hadn't been a political necessity for them. Following social change, primarily brought about with the Parekh (2000) and Macpherson (1999) reports, there was increased pressure to engage. The above exchange aptly highlights one of the terms of engagement. It is clearly important that the work isn't perceived in any way as political, or like Amajeet, Kamajeet and Rita earlier, we are able to engage with it through the lens of history. It is therefore unsurprising that we experience such a specific narrative of the nation within the parameters set out by cultural institutions. We see how complexity works against simplicity when binary positions and single signifiers are expected.

Conclusion

The examples illustrated above highlight the intricacies contained within cultural institutions and how processes of cultural production, consumption and representation provide a grid which, whilst complex, offers little challenge to existing cultural modalities. We have seen both the significance of culture and specific artistic practices but equally the extent to which they are framed within the prevailing cultural context. The examples demonstrate how the lines that operate do not move in only one, simplistic, direction but are multi-faceted. They demonstrate the resistance facing individuals such as the research subjects who seek to engage and connect with both the work and individuals positioned within cultural institutions.

Whilst the research subjects explored syncretic processes they largely drew upon what they perceived as pure or authentic culture in conceptualising their creativity, production and cultural consumption. By doing so, I suggest that they risked

conflating and reifying culture, potentially evading multiple positions that could have been more culturally revealing. The sense of there being an authentic culture with an inherent material property was reflected in many of the comments made by the research subjects. The existence of an authentic culture was frequently drawn upon as a baseline against which cultural judgements were assessed. In facilitating *Changing Views*, we sought to challenge this apparent cultural monopoly, yet much of the discourse focused upon a continuing binary perspective. The absence of cultural heterogeneity was similarly reflected in cultural institutions and mainstream representations with a sense of cultures as segmented and the existence of an authentic norm.

Evidence of a bifurcated cultural perspective was present in the programming and responses of a number of cultural institutions. These frequently defined individuals as belonging to distinct cultural pathways and referred to a unified, singular culture of the nation. I have argued that cultural institutions served the vision of the nation by representing minority communities as either too visible or not visible enough, clearly positioning them as external to the nation's identity and culture.

In this chapter I have sought to highlight how dominant narratives, racism and notions of authenticity do not move in only one direction. The expectation for groupings to observe and adhere to particular cultural norms cross all cultures and do not only operate in relation to a single dominant narrative. Rather, they work in multiple directions through complex cultural segmentation, internal frontlines which not only 'cut through and bisect so-called black British identity' (Hall, 1998, p. 39) but all identities. The themes that I have explored in this chapter establish a sense of the challenges facing hybridising third space strategy, specifically within dominant cultural institutions. In the final chapter I will consider the degree to which such containment impacts externally, how are our lived experiences shaped in relation to hybridising third space strategy?

CHAPTER FIVE

Cultural third spaces

Introduction

The pressures exerted within cultural institutions and by the political narratives of the nation, do not tell the only story or express the only reality. There are multiple modes of cultural engagement and cultural practices. Clearly, the structures and norms that operate within cultural institutions are not easily replicated within culture as ‘a whole way of life – the common meanings’ (Williams, 1958, p. 5). In this, the final chapter, I will consider whether third space activity and engagement interacted beyond the confines of dominant cultural institutions. I therefore examine the participants’ wider engagement in cultural activity and draw upon the findings of both the *Venue* and *Changing Views*.

The research findings demonstrate the manner in which culture was continually being shaped and therefore dependent on context and situationality. However, cultural engagement was also subject to constant modalities such as those which focused on the body as a normalised source of one’s cultural identity. Acknowledging such norms, I seek to demonstrate the complex relationship between art, popular culture and life, born out, not just in racism and cultural clash but also through cultural fusion. I recognise that culture is equally lived out through daily experience, amongst peers, with family and through social encounters, not only reproduced within formal cultural institutions.

I suggest that the influence of popular culture enabled the research subjects to construct distinct identities that were multiply positioned and contextualised. Popular culture provided a space where there was freedom of engagement, even if still relative; social constructs operated to hold the research subjects in place. I therefore investigate the multiple ways through which the research subjects represented and re-negotiated fixed notions of Britishness. They navigated new routes which challenged existing terminology and called for greater complexity within limiting narratives. This chapter therefore mixes ethnography with hybridising third space theory since I sought to blur the boundary between academic production and cultural expression (Sharma, Hutnyk & Sharma, 1996) through the provision of both physical and metaphorical spaces for contemplation.

I highlight that both cultural production and consumption occurred multi-laterally, yet I also query the extent to which we may now be positioned to talk of a new culture. Whilst much of the evidence points us towards hybridising third space strategy, I question the extent to which the research subjects entirely challenged notions of authenticity and cultural, or historical, roots. In considering the theme of roots I refer to earlier findings relayed in Chapters Three and Four where I analysed the cultural processes that sought an authentic notion of Britishness.

Consequently, whilst we may call for a new politics of difference (West, 1993), the realities are that difference remains compartmentalised and constructed within the majority grid (Bhabha, 1990). Identities are multiply positioned, yet also held in place within the social and political sphere. Even so, there was a sense of cultural change, roots are not lost, but new routes are being identified and challenges are made to the binary of West and rest. It is from this perspective that I outline the limitations of third space theory, arguing that we seldom experience syncretism. Instead, where syncretic formations emerge, they are overly acclaimed, seen to resolve cultural clash, disrupt racist discourse and challenge political narratives of power.

I begin this chapter by considering how the research subjects related to culture as carried on the body, a theme evidenced in both case studies. I suggest that the consistent referral to culture as a physical identity impacted upon the extent to which cultural fusion was seen to take place, as well as the extent to which racist discourse constrained cultural interaction and cross-fertilisation. By investigating cultural clash, such as through the cartoons produced by the Jyllands-Posten, I highlight cultural interaction as complex and multi-faceted, thereby challenging binary foundations of culture. I further develop this argument by highlighting how the research subjects produced culture in relation to the external environment, whether familiar to them or uncertain. I suggest that they included within this a response to both potential and realised racist discourse. Equally, however, they also recognised the role of family and social encounters in navigating their cultural identity. I subsequently question the possibility of a new politics of difference, and suggest that whilst syncretism may appear normalised it is also positioned within the cultural hegemonic framework. In concluding, I suggest that individuals are more likely to be positioned multiply than syncretic.

Culture as carried on the body

We have seen how the frameworks holding culture in place are both complex and elusive; cultural hegemony operates in multiple directions. In this chapter I will be considering some of the ways in which both that which is culturally dominant and that dominated shifts. In Chapter Three I highlighted how the research subjects' cultural engagement was largely constructed by their social environment. The features of influence here are undoubtedly highly variable however I do want to consider some of the factors that consistently shaped their lived, cultural, experiences in the following section.

The correlation that certain identities are seen as carried on the body was made from multiple perspectives. The existence of particular perceptions based upon external representations was picked up by the research subjects. They opened out considerable discussion on the relationship between personal, religious and cultural identifications and provided evidence of how certain types of identity are perceived as integral to the body. As the following exchange highlights a very specific relationship was seen to exist

Sarah Can I ask a question, this isn't to Kelly 'cause you're not Asian are you
 ...
Kelly Not the last time I looked anyway

Kelly's response to Sarah's undoubtedly rhetorical question of 'you're not Asian are you' sets out a reading of Asian as "marked on or carried by the body. They are defined as internal to the person." (Friedman, 1992, p. 27) We can similarly see how Kelly's response is tuned into an understanding of the category 'Asian' as being an identity carried on the body, internal to the person before any decisions on cultural engagement, representation or production are made.

In the following dialogue, Sofia and Amarit demonstrate how patterns of perception are engaged in decisions of cultural authenticity. During their conversation a fairly extreme assessment of supposed authenticity and modes of engagement was made. They used the highly problematical term 'coconut', although the subsequent shift in their response demonstrates how their thinking almost certainly lacked any comprehensive analysis and was perhaps more connected to an exploration of or testing out contemporary terminology, particularly given that the space created was during the focus groups which offered a discursive opportunity. Their use of the term

highlights the manner in which categorisations and judgements may be almost randomly made, without specific contextualisation even whilst exploring potential positions. As Back suggests, within this complexity young people, such as the participants, are “in the process of working out this relationship in a syncretic culture that is both black and British” (1996, p. 149). My response deliberately sought to connect their comments to the conceptual thinking behind the research and to engage in the performative aspects of our discourse.

Sarah	Being able to accept yourself; accept yourself for whom you are
Sofia	It would be nice to accept people who are like coconuts – people who are brown on the outside but they’re really white on the inside
Amarit	They haven’t accepted themselves for who they are
SZ	<i>But if you’re saying that you’re brown on the outside and white on the inside – isn’t that like saying that there’s a big difference between the two?</i>
Sofia	But it doesn’t really matter what is on the outside – it’s what’s inside that matters

Their exchange highlights the complexities of interaction and how culture is marked. Sharma comments how the term coconut was applied to individuals perceived as being assimilated “which directly refers to the racial/ cultural authenticity of an Asian in relation to white identity” (1996, p. 47). The research subjects didn’t only associate the term with Asian belonging, it was also used when speaking of African and Caribbean identity, as Hayley commented “Sheena [a fellow student not engaged with the project] makes everything about people being racist, she called me a coconut, me!” Sharma rightly clarifies that the term “is not concerned with the question of Asian authenticity in relation to the signifier ‘Black’ (‘denotes a racial relativity’) but marks the limits of racial assimilation into a dominant racist, white culture” (1996, p. 47).

The participants here suggested that in order to accept oneself, one must adhere to a particular, authentic, way of consuming and producing culture. In Chapter Three I highlighted how culture consumption was determined as authentic and inauthentic. Here, we see how understandings of inauthentic consumption and production were perceived as not accepting one’s self. However, when questioned on the actual difference, between ‘brown’ and ‘white’, this viewpoint was clarified. It was about what was on the inside; what was outside didn’t matter. Yet, a correlation had been drawn concerning the relationship between identity as phenotype (Abizadeh, 2001; Saldanha, 2006) and identity as freedom of choice relating to one’s cultural lived experience.

Fragile though the above use of the term might be, 'coconut' has frequently been utilised to depict individuals' lack of cultural authenticity. This lack has inevitably focused upon the black/ white binary, hence the use of terms such as 'bounty' or 'coconut' (Ifekwunigwe, 1999). Identity is compared against a reified, supposedly authentic narrative that operates from a bifurcated perspective; one is either internal or external to a dominant narrative, one is either authentic or inauthentic.

Whilst Modood and Werbner may focus upon our apparent ability to have "moved beyond the old discussions that start from certain identities, communities and ordered cultural categories" (1997, p. 4) within the discursive spaces of the *Venue* and *Changing Views*, the research subjects consistently returned to the role played by fixed positions of black versus white, both questioning and supporting this perspective, as evidenced in the following exchange

SZ *Do you think that they [Asian/ British] will ever be the same?*
 Chorus of no's from those in the focus group ...

Somayyah I think that they're too different to ever be the same, because of our colour we won't ever be seen as the same

SZ *You think that it's mainly because of that visible difference?*

Somayyah Yes, mainly

SZ *So if we took away colour we'd be the same?*

Tasnim No, not really

Wajada Yes, no – we wouldn't be British

Kulsum Yeah, they think we're different just because of the colour

Wajada It would still be because of the colour

Huma It depends on who you're talking to

Wajada I think it depends on the colour of your skin ... people are always quick to judge you

The relationship between blackness and whiteness is significant but so too are the relationships that develop deeper understanding of complex intra-ethnic positions (Brah, 1996; Hall, 1990). In producing *Changing Views* and providing the discursive space of the *Venue* I had sought to produce relationships in another way. Particularly since as Sharma highlights (1996) for so long as the focus rests solely upon the relationship between blackness and whiteness there is little sense of the complexities found within each of these concepts (see also Back, 1996; Bonnett, 2000; Dyer, 1997; Nayak, 2003). Indeed, as highlighted above the research subjects consistently returned to discourse centred upon the inter-play between notions of blackness and whiteness.

The relativity of blackness to whiteness was a constant theme throughout the research, it was particularly utilised as a means by which authenticity could be attributed or denied. Particular attachments were made to values and how the culture that one consumed in daily life evidenced a particular set of values and engagement with a prescribed culture. We saw in Chapters Three and Four the importance attributed to values and their association to products, cultural consumption and content a theme consistently reflected in the comments made by the research subjects. Similarly in Chapter Four, cultural products were tested against a cultural hierarchical grid and located within cultural institutions depending on their fit to unidentified unspoken norms.

Relationships between cultural fusion and racism

The relationship between the acceptance of supposedly new forms of culture, fusion and racism was consistently recognised and discussed by the research subjects. I highlighted this in the findings from the *Venue*, in Chapter Three, and this relationship was also present in the experiences of the participants on *Changing Views*. They acknowledged the complexities within their own decision making processes and picked upon the role played by values in positioning their cultural identities. Whilst the research subjects recognised cultural transformation taking place they were wary of its implications which were not seen as producing new positions. Rather, their concerns focused on questions of cultural and social integrity and the lack of impact cultural fusion seemed to have on the perceptions and lived experiences of minority communities. These concerns were picked up by Amajeet and Kamajeet who saw the utilisation of particular signifiers as lacking the capacity to bring about any deep cultural shifts in terms of how communities were perceived

SZ Do you think that British culture is being influenced by Asian culture?
Amajeet I feel that it is and it's really good but sometimes you're like ...
Kamajeet ... but sometimes it's like you never appreciated it before and how
 come you are now just because it's the fashion, I don't think that's
 right. I don't agree with it, it's like when they want to say oh Indians
 are good their culture's good but when they want to, just, what's the
 word, denigrate?

Whilst they saw interchange and cross-fertilisation as positive outcomes they were wary of the extent to which these demonstrated any deeper social change. Creative interchange was seen as an almost superficial adoption of cultural products with little sensibility beyond this. So, whilst cultural products could be re-positioned against a

changed cultural grid this was not possible for individuals or minority communities who could quickly be 'denigrated' by majority communities.

Cartoons and Cultural Clashes

In the following section I want to consider a cultural example that specifically referenced minority, majority relationships, and considers the relationship between the west and the rest (Bhatt, 2006). This example is based on the cartoons published by the Jyllands-Posten, in September 2005. These cartoons were reproduced by a number of newspapers in over fifty countries. The cartoons depicted the prophet Mohammed in a range of satirical settings. The newspaper commented that this was an attempt to encourage debate relating to criticism of Islam and censorship. However, this did not prevent the slow groundswell of anger towards the twelve, non Muslim, artists and especially towards the Jyllands-Posten, the editor of which was forced to make a full apology for commissioning the cartoons. This groundswell eventually led to international demonstrations against the cartoons, and a number of wide reaching and in some cases violent, repercussions.

Critics of the cartoons considered them to be Islamophobic and racist, arguing that they were blasphemous to Muslims. The argument was also made that they were evidence of the on-going humiliation of a minority group; that they demonstrated considerable ignorance about imperialism and colonialism. In contrast, those who supported the publication of the cartoons considered them to illustrate an important debate, that of the role of religion and in particular Islam, specifically in relation to Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism. The claim has also been made that other, similar cartoons, were not picked up in the same way.

In response, particularly to the cartoons, Arts Council England produced a series of 'Arts and Faith' seminars which toured the regional Arts Council offices. The seminars encouraged discussion and understanding of the Islamic faith as well as how and why the cartoons might have instigated such reactions. Generally, the seminars were well received by staff at Arts Council offices, although those facilitating the sessions were consistently dealing with questions around inappropriate censorship (as opposed to appropriate?) and the right of artists to enjoy freedom of expression.

At a wider level there were also discussions regarding issues of censorship, representation, respect and one's right to freedom of speech; a considerable amount of which was within the artistic community. A letter to the Guardian from a cross section of the 'arts community', commented that "It is a legitimate function of art to provoke debate and sometimes to express controversial ideas. Those who use violent means to silence it must be vigorously opposed." Similarly, AC Grayling commented

It has become commonplace for people to claim to be 'hurt' or 'offended' in their religious sensitivities by what others say or do. It is important for the sake of free speech as a fundamental value that this effort at silencing others should not be conceded. In the two or three years before these words were written, different religious groups – evangelical Christian, Muslim, Sikh – variously attempted to shut down theatre productions, or to stop the publication of printed matter, or to have cartoonists punished, because something was said, acted or drawn that 'offended' the sensibilities of activists among these groups (2006, p. 19).

Grayling stressed that any interference with freedom of speech impacted on all communities, although he does acknowledge that with freedom of speech comes responsibility. It isn't possible within the confines of the research to elaborate on the larger debate of censorship and freedom of speech, although it was a consistent topic for conversation within the 'arts community' for some time after both Bezhti (covered in Chapter Four) and the cartoons. However, I would like to complicate Grayling's comment a little and argue that freedom of speech is something only available to those who are already in a position to represent themselves and others. Frequently those 'others' who feel misrepresented may have a heightened sensitivity in part because they are in a position of little if any control with regards to the representations to which they are subject, as highlighted by use of the Veil exhibition, in Chapter Four.

We therefore see how culture, identity, respect and belonging are constantly being re-negotiated, as well as the role that religion can play within such negotiations. The example of the cartoons highlights the tension between and within religious and secular society; between those for whom one's religion is of paramount importance as is their right to have their beliefs treated respectfully and those who do not share their – or even any – religious beliefs. This was also evident in the responses of the research subjects. Nagina, for example, commented: "I have a British nationality", but contextualised this within her cultural identity, of which she stated: "in terms of my cultural identity, I would say that I'm a Muslim" she clearly distinguished her

nationality as different to her cultural identity. Her comments highlight the decisions that the research subjects were making in negotiating multiple identity positions. Such positions impact not only across all religions but equally within secular society and are increasingly at the heart of much conflict within contemporary society (Hesse, 2000).

Cultural Production as lived experience

Central to these debates is the manner in which identity is always positioned, performed and relational to context and situation. The following section assesses further the impact of being visually other and investigates the research subjects' reflections upon this. Within the discursive space provided by *Changing Views*, Zakia commented on the decisions that she made in representing her identity by means of visual cues and daily social encounters. Since the group had been reflecting upon alterity alongside how being here had impacted upon their lived experience, Zakia reflected upon this

I feel very self conscious and I think people are looking at me because I'm wearing a scarf or because I'm wearing Asian clothes ... I never wore a scarf at Harborne school, people would bully you, it is hard sometimes depending on the environment you are in.

Her comment highlights how decisions pertaining to identity are positioned in relation to both the past and present environment whether open and inclusive, or closed and exclusive. Judgements relating to the appropriateness of one's clothing frequently provoked particular understandings in relation to cultural positioning. Zakia further commented that when she went into the city centre, a shared space within which she experienced a heightened visibility she adapted and wore 'westernised dress' whilst still observing her own shared value system, by wearing a scarf. Negotiating such centralised spaces (Phillips, Davis & Ratcliffe, 2007; Pain, 2001) required an assessment of the context subsequently accompanied by individual adaptation. As Day comments, our experiences ensure that we are "situated differently in public space, where encounters shape and reveal one's ideas about race" (1999, p. 307). It isn't possible in the research to include a study of human conduct in specific urban spatial settings within the research, although it is useful to be aware of how 'race' and interlocking systems such as gender, class and age generated differing experiences and were subsequently elucidated and performed depending on the context.

Zakia's reflections on the clothes that she wore, why she wore them and how she considered the context within which she would be positioned offer us an insight into both the metaphorical, physical and discursive negotiation of space. Consequently, where Bhabha identifies the formation of a third space as emanating from two original positions (1990) Zakia's field of discourse requires that her conscious translation take place within multiple spaces which are externally evident. From Bhabha's perspective this very translation engages the arena of 'interfection' and draws together previously juxtaposed signifiers. As Werbner comments "the forms of cultural and social hybridity they evolve are the product of historical negotiation, the constant juggling of moral commitments and aesthetic images from here and there, now and then" (2004, p. 897).

Crucially, Zakia's *telling* of her discomfort of wearing what she perceives as non-western dress within centred spaces highlights the manner in which signifiers frequently refuse to disintegrate (Jameson, 1991) as individuals are forced to counter limiting discursive fields through hybrid systems not of their own making. The complexities of situationality were evident in Zakia's changing experience, since her perspective on dress and veiling shifted when in what she perceived to be a safe environment

loads more Asian people used to wear a scarf and I thought, might as well wear a scarf, y'know because you wouldn't get people staring at you – at my old school people would bully you and stuff. I didn't really wear a scarf there but it is hard sometimes depending on the environment you're in

Yet, there are pressures here too. At Harborne School Zakia felt pressured not to wear a scarf, at her current school there was a pressure to wear a scarf since 'loads more Asian people used to wear a scarf'. The dominant discourse may change in multiple ways and will not always remain consistent. So, whilst Lisa Lowe in commenting on Orientalism might highlight the importance of the existence of the dominant discourse, which she suggests is actually incomplete without a critique which explains why "some positions are easily co-opted and integrated into apparently dominant discourses and why others are less likely to be appropriated" (in Lewis, 1996, p. 19) we must not forget that the dominant discourse is itself contextualised and revolves in complex formations and that which is dominant also changes.

Equally, the spaces within which such stories are told are themselves complex. *Changing Views* provided a particular space that was seen as acceptable to both parents and young people, as Sima commented “[my parents] are fine about me coming here, I just live two doors away so it’s OK, ‘cause Lily [one of the community development workers] told me about what we’re doing here and she talked to my mum”. This was key to Sima being permitted to engage in the project, particularly given that she added “we don’t go out much”. Sima was engaging in a space that was considered acceptable by her parents, so this perspective would also impact on the shape and content of her identity positioning.

Similarly, understandings of ‘normal’ also shift, Sunita for example, considered the decisions that she made regarding visual codes such as dress and attire

Sunita	When I need to, I dress up like an Indian girl, and when I don’t need to I dress up like normally, like I would.
SZ	So what do you wear at home?
Sunita	At home I just wear jeans and stuff, if we’ve got to go to my grandparents I wear a[n Asian] suit but normally I just wear jeans and my dad always tries to pressure me into wearing a suit but I don’t have to but I do wear one when I go to weddings and stuff, as I do have respect for my elders.

Here, in an inversion to Zakia’s perspective, Sunita also makes pragmatic distinctions between the clothes that she would ‘normally’ wear and those she associates more with visiting her grandparents. This involves having ‘respect for my elders’ and dressing ‘up like an Indian girl’. Within the space of the *Venue*, a very different space to that of *Changing Views*, Sunita draws upon multiple codes that are highly dependent upon changing social spaces. Her normal daywear, in which she feels comfortable at home, is ‘jeans and stuff’. When she considers it necessary, or appropriate to the changed social space, she wears an Asian suit. Dress styles are set within cultural parameters and have social boundaries which Sunita has either chosen to establish for herself or felt obliged to conform within, an element of which she states is parental pressure.

For Kaur and Kalra such approaches demonstrate individuals’ ability for reflexivity in negotiating what is seen as an authentic identity vis-à-vis the focus upon difference and particularity, these

need not be rigid oppositions. We might find a complicated entwining of the vectors as personal inclination and situation emphasize one more than the

other – latticed identities that might be rigid for one situation but loosen up for others. Thus we have an oscillation of the one and the many, the fixed and the unfixed, the essentialized and the de-essentialized, the particular and the hybrid, in constant processes of suturing and fracturing. (1996, p. 220)

The above examples are not evidence of cultural clash or cultural confusion but rather an example of the manner in which pragmatic decisions influence cultural transformational change and adaptation to suit both individuals and the varying environmental/ cultural contexts. Consequently, the research highlighted that continuous decisions were made regarding how the research subjects produced or consumed culture within the changing environment and in turn these were also differently performed depending on context and situation. But it also produced a sense of who they were – their own subjectivities were continuously in motion, performatively produced in these different contexts.

These subjective identifications were directly related to the act of shaping culture as part of one's lived experience, the process of life. The research subjects frequently oscillated between a single supposedly authentic position and many inter-connecting situated positions and possibilities. In keeping with the fluidity Bhabha associates with cultural movement within a third space, we see how on a micro level the participants were highly aware of their environmental positioning within contemporary society. The following comment by Mohy demonstrates how the research subjects engaged in both an unconscious and conscious decision making process

SZ *Do you feel you take things from both cultures? Mixing them together?*
Mohy I do but it's not conscious
SZ *OK, can you explain that?*
Mohy Like, clothes, I wouldn't think to ever wear anything but my English clothes to go around and to work but if I'm going to a wedding I wouldn't think to wear these clothes, I'd automatically wear Asian dress

A complex framework clearly existed with many of the participants identifying themselves as active negotiators of cultural norms, such as when acknowledging outward facing signifiers in relation to dominant cultures of the nation state. Consequently, clothing styles were assessed on the basis of the environment within which one was positioned. English dress was therefore worn 'to go around and to work'. It was seen as a mode of clothing less likely than Asian dress to draw racist comments or negative feedback. The controlling factors were external controls, rather than internal decisions or cultural transformation, particularly since Asian dress

was seen to be more appropriate within certain culturally specific environments. The social settings referred to above, weddings and visits to older family members demonstrate the spaces and contexts most, or least, impacted by transformational change. The theme of generational communication will be investigated later in this chapter.

The examples also demonstrate how third spaces do not easily emerge nor are they neatly formulated within isolated spaces by supposedly alterior communities. Whilst the 'third' may offer us a new sense of history, a new way of perceiving, and even a new way of representation, we shall continue to see how third spaces are long fought for and frequently arrived at through routes which are as much a symptom of racist engagement as they are a result of positive discourse or innovative cultural contact. We cannot leave behind social/ political problems when examining the research subjects' negotiation of and response to contemporary culture.

The notion of entirely trashing the monolithic to produce syncretic cultures is not plausible within contemporary society. Finding a 'third space' is therefore not simply a case of creating/ widening openings

it lies, rather, in reworking the very sense of history, culture, society and language that had previously excluded or silenced such voices, such a presence ... How can we learn to allow the other to remain as other? How can we live in difference, respecting alterity? (Chambers, 1994, p. 126, 128)

Yet, that is not to say that it is not achievable. Whilst a complete reworking of the sense of 'history, culture, society' may not be possible, there were numerous occasions when the research subjects challenged existing frameworks through elaborate re-formations.

Re-producing culture

In facilitating *Changing Views*, I hoped to both identify and create spaces which opened out opportunities where shifts within cultural production could take place. The following example investigates the experience of a group of older Bangladeshi Muslim women who participated in *Changing Views*. The women enjoyed their experience of learning new textile and stitch based techniques whilst engaging in dialogue relating to how their own culture and artistic awareness was changing. They talked about how they saw cultural forms as being far more religiously coded in

a way which they felt had, to a large extent, been lost in much modern culture; colours, signs and symbols held significance and importance.

Consequently, for these participants, the idea of sewing sequins onto peacocks, fish or elephants – all living souls – was not only a new idea, but one which crossed religious and therefore cultural boundaries. Whilst this may seem an incredibly small cultural shift to individuals more rooted within secular society, this was a significant experience for the group. Within this complex arena, the role of symbols and signifiers becomes ever more significant, as Brass comments, old symbols can “acquire new subjective significance, and that attempts are made to bring a multiplicity of symbols and attributes into congruence with each other” (1991: 63).

For the women participating, a safe space had been provided within which they could explore elements and influences within their cultural identity and consider how they might express this in the art and creative processes with which they engaged. However, this exploration still rested upon ‘symbols and signifiers’ and occurred within private not public spaces. Whilst for the participants these might have acquired new subjective significance, for those unfamiliar with the cultural content there would have been little understanding of the processes or cultural shifts taking place. This situation calls to mind both Huq (1996) and Yuval-Davis’ (2006) thinking on the complex issue of features that are known only within one section or group, or require translation through personal social agents.

The continuing need for social agents (Yuval-Davis, 2006) or cultural translators has wider implications. If cultural shifts take place only within what are largely private or personal spaces they will continue to pass by largely unnoticed, even whilst constant negotiation takes place. Only certain forms of culture are categorised on the basis of their hybrid content; contained diversity. Notions of hybridity are therefore dependent on their being defined and categorised as the joining together of unlike things. The challenge lies in distinguishing between organic or diasporic cultural transformations, a process that I consider to be based not on cultural content but dependent on wide ranging axes of power that determine how cultural forms fit within a centralised grid (Bhabha, 1990).

A challenge, to which the research could not respond, in a time of ever increasing international and global links, was to what extent the cultural transformations taking place occurred as a result of particular diasporic encounters and variations or

innovative cultural engagement. Cultural similarities and differences are by no means simplistic but operate within a complex framework that was not only racialised but multi-directional, acknowledging the intersectionality highlighted in Chapter One. Negotiating multiple, frequently competing fields of discourse is a focal point in the construction of identity. Interrogating difference and the cultural divisions (Bhabha, 1994) that construct social boundaries is crucial to exploring the manner in which power relations impact upon the politics of cultural belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006) and consequently the politics of cultural production.

We, therefore, see how the processes of assimilation and integration operate as cultural content is assessed dependent on its ability to be gradually incorporated into the dominant culture of the nation. Rather than being seen as representing the inclusion of difference, over time cultural products are assimilated into the dominant narrative of the nation. In order to illustrate this, I want to draw on one of the motifs used by the participants highlighted in the example above.

This motif was paisley which is now famous as the name of the 'teardrop' or tadpole shape pattern used on anything from haute couture to a wide range of everyday household items. It is also the name of a town in Scotland, Britain. Although the pattern did not originate from Britain, in the UK it is most often associated as a quintessential British design. For the workshop participants however, it held a very different history. In India the motif flourished in a number of different art forms, one of which was its use on shawls produced in Kashmir. It was through the importation of these that the design was brought back to Britain, by the East India Company in the mid eighteenth century. These shawls rapidly became extremely popular, and demand quickly exceeded supply. Consequently, copies were made with the reinterpretation of the Indian motif for so called European tastes. Paisley can actually be traced back to the Indo-European cultures of more than two thousand years ago. In Britain there is evidence of the pattern in Celtic art, although this died out in Europe under the influence of the Roman Empire.

In order to access such historical awareness we require some sense of the cultural transformation that has taken place and a willingness to engage with agents or translators who are able to identify the rich history, continuing cultural processes and signification involved within contemporary cultural content. It requires a willingness to identify culture as continually in process, to recognise hybridity (Bhabha, 1990). However, I would argue that equally necessary is an openness to engage with and

explore new cultural formations. Knowledge can be gained from multiple points (the internet provides us with unprecedented access to information) and is not limited to an engagement with individual translators or agents.

We have seen, in Chapter Four, how within formal cultural institutions the role of such agents is played by curators, the artistic ‘conceptualisers’ and those in positions of power within the arts and cultural sectors, who define strategy, programming and levels of engagement. We experience how, rather than culture evolving organically it is constantly determined by the framework that holds it within, or external to, the cultural grid of the nation. Bhabha, in writing on this theme, suggests that cultures enter into a mode of translation whereby any essentialism or originary culture is denied since “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity” (1990, p. 211). Consequently, if culture is already constantly changing, always in process, then the norm against which difference is positioned is equally in flux. There is no inactive monolithic ‘new ethnicity’ culture but culture that consists of never ending variations.

This was clearly expressed when, recently, I facilitated a creative workshop with a group of thirteen artists from a cross section of backgrounds; the artists both spoke about and showed their work. The following exchange highlighted in a microcosm the manner in which what is perceived as the norm is constantly changing, as is that which is feared or externalised. A musician present from Iran commented that he hadn’t felt comfortable bringing his tar (part of the sitar family, a fairly large instrument) on the train due to the recent attempted terrorist acts. Another musician, from Northern Ireland commented that ten years ago he would have been in such a position when transporting his guitar. These variations in cultural consumption and production may be influenced by a range of things, including the acceptability of the instruments carried by these politically charged bodies. Moreover, they were also aware of how these frameworks and social encounters positioned them.

The research subjects in *Changing Views* often deliberated on how the work that they were producing as part of the project might be perceived within the social framework. Kulsum, for example, when working with miniature paintings, reflected on how an audience might receive her work. She made particular cultural distinctions when considering the artistic content, commenting that because “the work we’re doing is pretty much Asian” she didn’t think that “a lot of British people wouldn’t exactly say – if they’d seen it – they would like to have stuff like that in their

house.” We can see how Kulsum was not only distinguishing between art seen as Asian and that labelled British, she was also demarcating a space or context for such cultural representation; she felt that British people wouldn’t want Asian objects in their homes.

Even so, it would be simplistic to say that the containment of cultural difference takes place in only one direction. We saw in Chapter Three the manner in which the research subjects also sought to exclude themselves from belonging within Britishness. A sense of containment clearly operated in a multi-directional framework. The examples evidenced above provide insight into wide-ranging containment that continuously takes place on many levels, highlighting the flexibility of identities and demonstrating how we see on-going evidence of ‘latticed identities’ (Kaur & Kalra, 1996, p. 220). As Bhabha has commented it is

difficult, even impossible and counterproductive, to try and fit together different forms of culture and to pretend that they can easily coexist. The assumption that at some level all forms of cultural diversity may be understood on the basis of a particular universal concept whether it be ‘human being’, ‘class’ or ‘race’ can be both very dangerous and very limiting in trying to understand the ways in which cultural practices construct their own systems of meaning and social organisation. (1990, p. 209)

One cannot therefore argue that the research subjects were exposed to a nonaligned third space, as although both projects sought to provide such spaces the extent to which we could achieve this was limited. Whilst cultural practices strive to extend new patterns of collective identity, they remain politically constructed. Consequently, in Kulsum’s reflections on the spaces that her work might access there is a sense of it failing to engage certain audiences. This feeling impacted on the research subjects’ sense of cultural positioning since they saw themselves as being excluded from the nation, even when acknowledging shared contemporary experiences (Nagel, 2001).

In Chapter One, I endorsed Dirlik’s view that Bhabha subsumed the social to the textual leaving behind any complexities or conflict in the (re)negotiation of contemporary identities and like Parry, I expressed concern that social agency is seen as recuperable at the level of enunciation, that individuals are seen as able to move outside or beyond the contextual and social setting.

The challenge facing those trying to analyse/ produce Bhabha's third space is how one might surmount the context within which producers are framed, in order to engage with cultural products in some way removed from conflict or dominant binary social and cultural constructions. The role that situationality plays can be vital, since as Parry writes Bhabha's approach "is descriptive of the textual processes and effects held to constitute social forms and conditions, and not of those forms and conditions as articulated in social practices." (1994, p. 14). That situationality could be negotiated was understood by the research subjects. In their daily lives they challenged constructions and worked within paradigms that were of their own making, these were undoubtedly embedded within their daily lived experience and recognised the complexities of latticed choices.

It is often those aspects of life that are not drawn out and commented upon that reveal most about the social framework through which culture is shaped, since we tend not to reason or linger upon that which is considered the norm. It is for this reason that I wish to specifically focus upon family interactions and how the patterns and situations constructed within families were manifested within the research.

Recognising the intersection of 'race' and family

Wade (2005) writes interestingly on the relationship between children and their parents, specifically in relation to hybrid processes. He explores the cycle of reproduction and relationships and considers how individuation occurs. He comments that "children produce new, more diverse practices that are set against the *apparently* homogeneous tradition of their parents. More individuality equals more diversity" (emphasis mine, 2005, p.608). For Wade whilst children are unquestionably connected to their parents they offer substantial cultural change. It is this difference which encourages us to see the contrast between "tradition and novelty, relationships versus individuals ... change and continuity" (ibid), concepts which are central to hybridity. Whilst the hybrid is related to what has gone before, this relation is played out in unpredictable ways; the uncertainty of generational discourse demonstrates how change has been effected.

Within the research this was evidenced by the manner in which older generations expressed fears regarding connections with Britishness and worries relating to the cultural responses of their children. Their primary worry was that their children would lose sight of their cultural heritage, a heritage to which they themselves maintained

strong links. Although this (imagined) link could also be to a reified or frozen culture, located at some point in the past and with a symbolic homeland which has, however, itself moved on. This point was also made by one of the research subjects, Sundeep, who suggested

I think that if I went to India and I met my mum's parents, I think they'd be more forward than my gran – my dad's mum. They've moved on more there than they have here. People talk about it over there, they're doing this, they've got that, they're more advanced there [in India] than here

There was evidence that older generations sought to maintain a distinctive culture which “assumes that though no specific attribute is invariably associated with all ethnic categories, there must be some distinguishing cultural feature that clearly separates one group of people from another, whether that feature or features be language, territory, religion, color, diet, dress or any of them” (Smith, 1991, p. 18). Earlier migrants sensed that what they perceived as previously strong distinguishing features of their home cultures was slipping away, as illustrated by Sundeep. Consequently, this seemed to leave younger generations with less in common with older migrants' sense of culture and cultural heritage. Older generations therefore saw younger people as having greater connections with what they perceived as the so-called majority British culture.

This was rarely further complicated by a recognition of other intersectional identities, such as gender. So, whilst some of the young people recognised the role played by situationality in shaping their parents cultural routes, they rarely drew upon this in acknowledging how different processes were engaged in their own cultural interaction and identity positions. However, on occasion, when drawing upon the intersection with gender, an understanding of more interactive engagement was demonstrated. So, Kulsum in reflecting on her own career path suggested that “in India, I think it can be easier to be a girl, but here there are pressures on you, I think about the difference between me and my mum, she expects me to be the way she was as a child, but she was growing up in India”.

One route by which older generations sought to maintain this connection was through strong religious guidance, as Nasreen, one of the parents, commented “at least if they take the religious part of their culture, that's the most important part of the culture that I want my children to take on. They can take up other cultures but I want them to hold onto the religion.” Working together on *Changing Views* the women

entered into considerable discussion on how they engaged with culture and the differing perspectives of their children in relation to the creation of new art products. The context was one where they recognised shifting cultures and engagement and discussed this. Yet, equally they collectively spoke of the elements which they hoped would stay, repeatedly this centred upon religion.

This perspective is also evident in the following example. In 2000, while I was developing one of the research projects, consultation around funding took place in inner city areas in Walsall, West Midlands. There had been considerable problems with violence and gangs connected to drug use and sales. Meetings were set up which were dominated by local mullah's from the nearby mosques. Young people and their parents attended these meetings where there was considerable debate and disagreement. The young people wanted to participate in a 'breaking' and djing project however, the mullahs made it quite clear that they were against such a project taking place, and were, in turn, supported by the parents. SRB funding had been given to the mullah, as perceived community leaders, to distribute to the community. However, since they were against the project advocated by the young people they refused to allocate money to this project and the project was prevented from going ahead, leaving young people in the area without this provision.

This example highlights the potentially complex relationship between religion, religious elders, community leaders, young people and their parents and the different cultural routes and values that are available to them. In this instance, the young people found themselves increasingly marginalised and disempowered, the mullahs were able to use might, and the public position given to them by funders, whilst the parents felt that they needed to chose between supporting a cultural way of life that they wished to perpetuate through the opinions and rhetoric of religious leaders, and what they saw as the seemingly rebellious cultural denial of young people present at the open discussion. The problems that can arise may leave young people feeling disempowered and alienated, as they see themselves as increasingly positioned away from a particular lifestyle that their parents may desire for them, although these relationships provide insight into a far more complex field than can be considered within the confines of this research.

Understanding the processes of third space engagement and interaction is not only the response of younger participants. The experience and perspective of older research subjects is also of note, particularly in terms of whether they acknowledge,

are accepting of or influenced by the route taken by their children and grandchildren. Many, as we saw, sought to maintain what slowly became perceptions of a 'frozen' culture from their symbolic homeland. Yet it is this understanding that is repeatedly translated to their children and grandchildren, whose own association with both a reified culture and a symbolic homeland continues to diminish over time and experience. The lack of complex understandings of older generation's customs and cultures resulted in younger generations referencing cultures as homogenous within some of their cultural negotiations.

That older generation's experiences are also affected by those of their children is frequently overlooked, as another older participant, Meena, commented, "I consider my children to be mixing far more which has subsequently also changed my cultural awareness". Parents saw their children playing a role in their collectively gaining a greater understanding of the wider social and cultural context. Sima, for example commented on the need for cultural engagement that could be enjoyed collectively, as a family

It has to be something that the whole family will listen to, if a film's on and it's OK then the whole family will sit and watch, but we can't sit and watch an English film in front of them, we have to respect our parents

This understanding of acceptable norms was reflected upon by Zakia who sought to engage with the complexities of the terrain. Her comments below pinpoint current thinking and how the young people both accepted and challenged established parental frameworks, but also how *Changing Views* provided a discursive space within which such reflection might take place

sometimes I really get mad, if my mum restricts me from doing something that I really want to do or that my friends will do something and I can't, like go to a movie or something like that, we always say 'oh my kids are going to be treated differently' but it depends, I try to keep an open mind, afterwards you think when you look back on it that maybe it was for the best, so although my parents are quite strict, they do tell me to wear a scarf, which I don't really mind, as I respect my parents.

Research in this area was developed by the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations who explored the extent to which parents felt that their children had acclimatised themselves to so-called 'mainstream tastes'. "They expressed the view that children are affected by school and 'street' influences as much as by domestic life. Children born in the UK therefore tend to absorb mainstream preferences until they reach the

age of asserting a more 'conscious' identity" (1985, p. 5). Whilst the report did not develop detailed analysis pertaining to 'mainstream preferences' it did highlight how, as for many young people, one's cultural identity required constant negotiation. More generally, it also highlighted the manner in which the cultural awareness of migrant communities was engaged by the experiences of younger people and children. As another older participant Rukhsana, commented,

The children's country is here, and although my culture is not the host's culture it is that of my children, the younger generation. However, just living here doesn't mean that I am living without any cultural identity, there is an identity here and of course, although I am living here, I want my children to believe in the same things, in Islam or whatever religion one is from, but also to be culturally aware of their background, aware of our traditions, values, given your rights. Different institutions, I'm thinking particularly of schools as I used to be a teacher, need to teach culture such as religion and language, so children can, although they're living here, still identify that they're also part of a different culture, and not just British culture but that their heritage is different from that.

Her comment clearly highlights how, for many older people, there is a sense that the process of building an identity in a new home country should not imply that no previous culture existed, nor mean its loss. Crucially, this is very clearly not based on a previous cultural or educational void, nor is it about rejecting cultural values that are already present (Bhopal, 1997). Rather, the aim is towards a - albeit unequal - blend. That this was perceived as challenging for parents, even to the extent of them seeing changes within the power dynamics of family relationships, was illustrated by Maria, who commented

when they were young I would say 'don't do this' and they wouldn't do it, but now things are changed, they say 'we know more than you do and we know how to do things better than you because we grew up here and we know the way of living here' so I've had to change my attitudes while we live here too.

She additionally stressed that she was "learning from them as well, as they tell me what the right way of doing things is and how to do it". Maria's comment highlights the manner in which the research subjects frequently saw 'the right way of doing things' as one-dimensional. Younger generations would focus upon how being born in Britain meant that they understood the supposed shared values better than their parents. In fact the experiences outlined here are unlikely to be so different to generational clashes taking place across the country in a range of settings, including families for whom generational clash is a very normal source of conflict and 'growing up here' is not an indicator of difference.

Yet Sima, in commenting on her parent's experience of living in England, draws in a factor that lays out the foundation for older generations' response. "They dealt with [being unaccepted] by keeping their heads down. They tried to be as English as possible and felt ashamed to be who they were. Not getting ideas above your station was the mantra." Whilst Dyer has stressed that "how social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life" (1993, p. 1), how this impacts from a generational and cultural perspective has received less attention, specifically how the ensuing framework might shape and manage subsequent cultural responses.

Moreover, this perspective provides greater insight into Sima's subsequent comments since she positions her parents very much within a reified sense of a symbolic homeland

I think they're living to the life in Bangladesh, they have to let it go – far more. We don't have that much freedom but then again, my mum and dad they do let us do what we really want to do, so long as it's in keeping with their rules.

Her response here, indicated how cultural variations within were occluded in the presence of difference within the perceived culture of the 'host community'. Consequently, it is not surprising that she also connects parental control to her parents' Punjabi background, commenting

Well we don't go out much. If we do want to go out we have to tell them where we are going and how long it will take and when we'll be back. If we're going to the city centre then I have to go there, phone and make sure they know we are OK. It's like a Punjabi thing when you have to let them know, we're here now and we're OK.

The conclusion that many of the research subjects came to was that the changing cultural framework positioned their parents as external to the culture of the nation, even whilst they were collectively engaging in *Changing Views*. They focused upon the journey from one country to another, a feature that they considered to be behind their parents' request that they adhered to norms that were perceived as other without greater specification. They saw this movement as evidence of what was considered to be a seismic cultural shift. However, many of the research subjects recognised the role that alterity played in situating their parents generation.

Younger generations rarely made explicit reference to the complexities – or intersectionality - that might be at play. Sima in the above example specifically associated parental concerns with her parents being from a non-British background, from Bangladesh, she referenced no complexity beyond it being ‘a Punjabi thing’. There was a failure to challenge the prevailing ‘delineation of concepts’ and ‘specification of objects and borders’ (Lemke, 2001) and how it framed ‘Asian’ as one-dimensional, integrating and simplifying complex signifiers.

Re-visiting notions of Britishness

I commented, in Chapter One, on the need to envisage national, anti-nationalist histories of the ‘people’ (Bhabha, 1994; Nagel, 2001). However, in order to do so, we must acknowledge as Venkatesh rightly outlines, that cultures evolve constantly either through “their own internal dynamics or external (global) influences” (1995, p. 6). We must therefore question the politics of polarity itself. Particularly since this was a feature that many of the participants reflected upon, so for example Kamajeet referred to a perceived authenticity in her parents’ background, when she categorised them as ‘proper Punjabi people’. Such perspectives of authenticity and wholeness were frequently reflected in the participants’ response in seeking to assertively position their own cultural engagement.

Kamajeet	Mum and dad were brought up like proper Punjabi people – if you see what I mean.
SZ	<i>What are proper Punjabi people?</i>
Kamajeet	You know you use the language at home, you know about the culture, you keep to your religion

For Kamajeet, in an exploration of one’s heritage there was an understanding of and engagement with an authentic Punjab. It entailed language, religion and knowing about one’s culture. Clearly her perspective could easily be considered inaccurate; even in recent history the Punjab has been subject to changed government, internal battles, multiple language and religions. Yet, Kamajeet’s sense of cultural belonging is set within a particular way of seeing the Punjab within a particular context and time. She classified this as “Indian, Punjabi, Khalistani” because she was “Sikh, well when Sikhs get their independence in India, which I doubt that they ever will but if we did, we’d call our land Punjab or Khalistan.” The motivations in looking to an authentic culture are therefore more complicated than merely cultural simplification, since she strategically chooses a particularised heritage.

My consideration of intersectionality in Chapter One was a key feature in acknowledging the constant complexity and multiple axes within continually forming cultures, as touched on with gender above. However, it is only when individuals such as the research subjects, sense that there is a national challenge to be made both widely and specifically to the so called culture of the nation, that they may cease to feel the need to further clarify their identity and look to binary connections. Yet, conversations with some of the research subjects suggested that this was some time away, as dialogue with Kamajeet and Amajeet demonstrates

SZ *Do you think that British culture and Asian culture will ever be seen as the same thing?*
Kamajeet No way
Amajeet No
SZ *So that Asian people wouldn't need to say that they were British and Asian?*
Amajeet I think now, in our generation, I don't think that it's going to happen. Maybe like ten million years from now or maybe that's a slight exaggeration
Kamajeet Are you saying that you think it would happen [to Amajeet] ...
 The Asian community has always been slow - I mean for changes, they've always been slow making changes
Amajeet It's like at the rate that we're going at now, it's like very very slow so I don't know what's going to happen

We are not talking, as Gilroy rightly contends, about this being “a collision between fully formed and mutually exclusive cultural communities” (1993, p. 7) but as Bhabha suggests, that in between space, the cutting edge of translation and negotiation (1994, p. 38). Yet, the comments made by Kamajeet and Amajeet seem to suggest that the perceived polarity between cultures will continue for some time to come.

Changing Views sought to provide spaces where contemporary understandings of alterity could be questioned and the bifurcation of culture challenged through active engagement in creative processes. The complexity of the terrain was demonstrated by drawing upon wide-ranging artistic processes and working with artists who could connect the research subjects to culture in its fullest sense. In a similar manner we sought, through the *Venue*, to highlight existing modalities and to encourage the participants to question both their own position and those of family, peers and framing institutions – including the youth service from which we sought support.

A new cultural politics of difference

It was therefore a positive outcome that a number of the participants on *Changing Views* felt, as Hayley commented, that the project showed “how times and stuff are changing; it’s nice to see how times have changed.” There was therefore a sense of culture shifting and notions of difference also undergoing change. We see evidence of “a new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses difference and which depends, in part, on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities” (Hall, 1988, p. 29).

The call for a new cultural politics of difference is therefore crucial in finding new ways to combat old prejudices, out of date categorisations and inaccurate, narrow representations; all too often represented in cultural institutions that dominate the cultural landscape, a subject which I covered in Chapter Four. West’s (1993) writings seek to combat cultural boundaries and challenge existing definitions of difference whilst acknowledging the need for a new cultural politics of difference which possesses the ability to

trash the monolithic and homogenous in the name of diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualise and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting, and changing. Needless to say, these gestures are not new in the history of criticism or art, yet what makes them novel – along with the cultural politics they produce - is how and what constitutes difference, the weight and gravity it is given in representation, and the way in which highlighting issues like extremism, empire, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nation and region at this historical moment acknowledges some discontinuity and disruption from previous forms of cultural critique.” (1993, p. 203 – 204)

A vital part of the new cultural politics of difference must be to re-examine Britishness and to encourage multiple questioning of cultural boundary lines. Within both case studies the norms of Britishness were consistently picked up, and the research subjects’ sense of alterity was challenged by means of their engagement with such norms.

The fluidity of cultural borders and sense of ‘mixing it’ can be seen in Jag’s musical consumption since he engages with a broad cultural palette that demonstrates the manner in which cultural specificities may change

- Jags I used to hear loads of music and I was into Grease, that was my first ever record – Grease. You have to get that record. As I was born in the 80s there was Madonna, ‘You Can Dance’ and all that and then Wham, and Human League, Heaven 17 and Meatloaf
- SZ So you like quite mainstream music?
- Jags Mainstream an like that’s when soul came into it, you had the 60s and then you had the Supremes, I liked that, I like oldies. Music like soul, I don’t like covers, I like the originals, they don’t do anything new with them; the only way of doing cover versions is when you change it. I was brought into all of this
- SZ Who brought you into it?
- Jags No-one really, when I was little, I was just into Top of the Pops. I never missed it and my auntie and uncle watched it, I just like groups like Enya and The Carpenters. They’re all white people, but then I got into Asian music, although I didn’t get really into Asian music, all of the bhangra and that, I did get into Safri Boys, Sufri - we know him. Then I was into rap in the 90s, it wasn’t very big or anything but from there I got into dance and soul and all of the Indie music was out.

As we saw in Chapter Three, Jags commented how he engaged with a range of religious festivals, to which he felt connected because his family included members who were ‘Christian or Catholic (sic)’. As with any young person, Jags connects with a wide range of musical styles without feeling tied to a sense of cultural authenticity in any genre. His attachments are drawn from a cross section of his lived experience, people he knows, Sufri and the Safri Boys, whilst his relatives connected him to popular culture such as Top of the Pops and mainstream music.

Multi-lateral cultural consumption

Finding one’s own set of rules and discovering a voice of your own does not take place in isolation. Rather, it concerns the creation of a discursive space within which one feels not only a partial but a fuller sense of belonging that may challenge existing identity concepts in its creation. In the following example, Zakia is positioning herself against families from abroad. In comparison to them, she feels ‘like I’m British’.

- SZ *So you’ve spent most of your life in Britain, do you feel British?*
- Zakia I feel like, especially when people from abroad come and y’know I compare myself to them and I think I’m entirely different from them and I’m used to the lifestyle here, it’s different, I feel like I’m British.

Zakia’s response must also be contextualised with her previous answer where she positioned herself as ‘Muslim and Bengali’. However, there is more complexity here than a singular challenge to existing identity constructs, multiple positions are adopted but each frames and connects with the other. Each position is

contextualised and specifically chosen by the research subjects according to their level of fit within the parameters of space and time.

Shifting notions of cultural consumption were multiply evident. Dialogue between Sarah and Kelly illustrates how cultural exchange between groups operates from a multi-directional perspective. In the following exchange Sarah, who as we saw in Chapter Three, classified herself as 'just British' highlights how she felt excluded from her peer group. Sarah considered all her friends to "have been of different cultures and 'races' ... I like it because I find out about culture and their religion". However, the majority of her friends switched between languages, leaving her feeling 'paranoid' and excluded. Ultimately, her reaction to this changed from asking the group not to talk Urdu to that of understanding another language too. In contrast, we see how Kelly actively sought out what she termed as 'black slang', utilising this in conversations with some of her peer group. She sought out a specific exclusivity through language that was not widely understood by many of her peer group or social circle

Sarah When these lot, they took Urdu, at first they used to talk Urdu in front of me and they used to be sitting there and I used to be sitting there paranoid and I used to feel so left out because I didn't know what they were talking about, so I asked them, I said can you not talk Urdu in front of me because I can't understand. In the end I also understood a bit of it as well.

Kelly That's like when I'm with my friends I always talk black slang in front of them and I know all of the black slang and I used to talk it and none of them understand it and these used to turn round and go what did you just say so I had to put the English back in.

Sarah So now we all adapt to our different conversations
Kelly It's just funny 'cause everyone that I hang round with knows what it means, like buff, so if I go 'buff me some bread' they know that that means pass me some so and so.

Sarah What does your mum say?
Kelly Sometimes she knows what it means but then sometimes she'll say what does that mean?

Sarah and Kelly's perspective highlights the manner in which cultural engagement does not move in a singular direction; rather organic change takes place which is multi-directional, since 'cultures constantly encounter one another ... consciously or unconsciously borrow from each other' (Parekh, 2000, p. 220). These do not have to be vast encounters which singularly shift cultural norms but can operate, as with Sarah and Kelly, on a micro level, changing patterns of behaviour and drawing in new cultural formations. The cultural engagement with which Kelly connects is

comprehensively covered by Nayak (2003). He highlights the range of subject positions taken up by white youth in relation to the production of blackness. For Nayak “the making of a new cultural heritage is at stake in this complex negotiation of white ethnicity and global change in the post-industrial city” (2003, p. 135).

Mixing it – a new culture?

I sought to demonstrate how this engagement with culture on multiple levels and this understanding opens out the diversity and cultural interplay that Bhabha refers to in contemplating how a third space might exist, namely through culture that is not based

on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity. To that end we should remember that it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in between space – that carried the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the ‘people’. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves. (1994, p. 38 – 39)

So Jags’, for example, spoke of being as much a part of ‘Englishness’ as anyone, clearly envisaging an anti-nationalist history for himself. He questioned the existence of (imaginary) boundaries and collective histories in order to include himself within Englishness, challenging the very notion of this term (Back, 1996; Gilroy 1993). Although we also saw in Chapter Three how Jags had the advantage of greater insight than many ‘outsiders’ since his family includes ‘white people ... we’ve got white people in our family’. One must therefore contextualise Jags’ comments with this in mind and recognize that since he possesses what might be considered ‘insider’ information he is considerably better placed to break down the collective myths and memories of those who are ‘included’ within the identity of the nation. Jags’ family, with its diversity, does not fit neatly into the homogenous portrayals of a national culture, hence providing Jags with insight into existing cultural complexities and enabling his role as a cultural translator, to utilise Bhabha’s term. That such challenges can involve a complex sense of balancing identities is suggested by Rita who comments

We are all mixing in a society with so many different influential cultures and religions. It’s important therefore for us, as individuals, to grow feeling balanced

Yet, we have seen how cultural discourse is constructed and is rarely open or fluid. If cultural discourse does take place it happens in spaces and channels where visibility is rare and wider engagement minimal in order for the narrative of the nation to continue. If artists such as Rita are to 'grow feeling balanced' this must not be in isolation through shifting collective norms which control cultural change and growth. This is not a simplistic or even an explicit process since "there exists no simple process whereby the 'bleaching' of difference occurs under the hegemony of white predominance; rather a subtle process exists in which cultural heritages are appropriated and placed together with a degree of fit, their meanings modified so that they take on a new life" (CRER, 1990, p, 8).

Reference to a new culture certainly encourages comparisons to Bhabha's third space, particularly since the third space requires the transformation of elements that, as we saw in Chapter One, are 'neither the one ... nor the other ... but something else besides which contests the term and territories of both" (1994, p. 28). Yet there is also a greater requirement of the third space than that of newness alone. For Bhabha, its importance is that it 'enables other positions to emerge' (1990, p. 211) which displace previous histories and establish new structures of authority (ibid). Bhabha has written eloquently that the notion of hybridity is the third space which enables other positions to emerge; the third space displaces previous histories. So we see the need for contexts which enable greater fluidity and openness in the identity choices and positions adopted by individuals such as the research subjects. Rather than selecting the appropriate identity category or position as pre-determined by the 'histories that constitute it' (Bhabha 1990, p.211) the third space argues for 'new structures of authority' (ibid) which are no longer sufficiently understood through received wisdom so as to be contained within specific, pre-selected, contexts, spaces and positions.

Positively therefore, within the context of *Changing Views*, a number of the research subjects saw further than cultural mix and spoke about the formation of a new culture, one formed from their experience of cultural production as a result of mixing what they perceived as distinct cultures. Tasnim, for example, commented how "they [the audience viewing their work] won't know that our parents are Asian, they'll just think we're British". In this instance Tasnim was considering the reception that their artwork would receive, and recognising that the contents of the miniature paintings (such as Kulsum's, above) were varied, difficult to label and reflections of multiple interests and the consumption of wide ranging products. Being able to trace roots

within the artwork was therefore not a simplistic process but resulted in an acknowledgement of their being British.

The expression a 'new culture' was used by Mohy, who suggested that they were engaged with "a culture created from the fusions going on between 'British' and 'Asian' cultures, now we're doing our own, we're mixing it".

However, Sophia questioned the extent of reach for such a syncretic culture, or the full displacement of cultural histories, commenting "I think that there will be a new culture – you know like 'multi-cultural', but I don't think it will ever be a complete mix." So, within contemporary society, whilst the notion of cultures mixing was consistently recognised by the research subjects, they also considered this to be a limited concept, as Kulsum comments

I don't think it will ever be seen as the same [British culture and Asian culture] because that's the difference between the two cultures but I do think, this generation that are mixing cultures, there will be a new culture, but it will never be a complete mix.

Syncretic or positioned multiply?

Within the research findings I consistently saw evidence of the research subjects' multiple position choices. Whilst hybrid third spaces may appear to be the desired condition, I felt that we were actually witnessing an ongoing multiplicity that was relational to the context, namely the time and social and cultural framework. This was particularly evident in some of the products produced by the research subjects as part of *Changing Views*.

Mohi contributed the following poem, on the basis that it remained anonymous when included in the *Changing Views* publication. The title, 'Culture Kaur' picks up on Mohi's second name as denoting a female Sikh and establishes the cultural perspective. In the opening phrase 'Indian, Sikh, Punjabi, British' the poem recognises the different identity positions that Mohi saw herself as collectively holding. The poem was produced by Mohi as a response to the complex but also overly simplistic questions that are asked on monitoring forms. I have included it in full here

Culture Kaur

Indian Sikh Punjabi British
Young old sometimes bold
Three gold fish and a cat
Nike hat
Nike trainers Nike pouch
Shalvar kameez
Kick box ouch
Jungle dancing
Cigarette smoking
Roti eating
Mis behaving
Punjabi speaking
English chatting
Hindi learner
Yellow metro owner
Hitchhiked to Tel Aviv
Aunties don't know I believe
Been to Spain
Abstract art is not the same
Jumped out of an aeroplane
Went to India saw some sugar cane
Went to India
Loved it to bits
Went to India
Met massee ji, mama ji and aunty Baksho
Felt sorry for the man in the rickshaw
Believe in god
Lost my faith, found it again
Mum told me stuff
Dad told me stuff
I know stuff
Boom Boom beats
Bhangra beats
My life's a contradiction but it's not fiction

The contents of the poem concerned the multiple facets from Mohi's life, picking up on faith, family, language, cultural consumption, key events and journey's that she felt had made an impression on her identity formation but equally those she chose to recall and transmit through a poem within the public arena. The closing comment, 'my life's a contradiction but it's not fiction' sought to express Mohi's awareness that to many her identity was full of contradictions and 'cultural clash' yet to her it was simply the daily fabric of life, her key moments were not so different to other people's. Even so, the contents of the poem draw upon features that are both relational to whiteness ("Indian Sikh Punjabi British ... Punjabi speaking English chatting, Hindi learner") and expresses complexity within blackness ("Jungle dancing ... Boom Boom beats, Bhangra beats")

However, this perspective must also be contextualised. The poem was placed on the insert of the front cover of the *Changing Views* publication although, as agreed above, no name was attributed to it. In some ways her sense of comfort with her identity and her concern to remain anonymous might appear to be a contradiction. It is undoubtedly a reflection of the challenges facing people, in terms of the narratives of groupings versus individual narratives and how these are differently performed depending on the context and space. So, for Mohi, this was because, as someone who had gone through a period of considerable reflection regarding her sense of religious identity, Mohi felt that she was now more comfortable with her Sikh identity and expressed concerns that she might be frowned upon by religious leaders or elders in the community because she smokes. From a micro perspective this informs us of the challenges facing individuals who might utilise Bhabha's third space as a space of enunciation.

The following dialogue highlights the extent to which difference is temporal and the dynamics between reified cultural expectations are challenged when juxtaposed with the realities of diverse experience and interests that owe much to performativity and the intersectional thinking I considered in Chapter One.

Sarah This question is to ... Zakyya, Nazia and Sophia, why didn't you bring your interests into your pictures. Why haven't you included your cultural enjoyment?

Sophia Because we've – I've grown up in Europe, here, in Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg and settled here and 'cause I went to Pakistan once, first time in six years ...

Nazia But just because our interests are here doesn't mean we haven't our own culture – inside

Sophia How can you put that in the drawing – if it's a celebration [eid] you can't exactly put that on to paper. You don't put Christmas on Kelly

Kelly Yeah but that's because I'm not religious

Sophia But you do celebrate Christmas

Kelly I celebrate it as a family time – just getting together

Sophia But then how isn't it your interest?

Kelly I've put stuff – my whole thing is about being with my friends, I've put that; being with people

Nazia First of all Eid and Christmas is a religious thing it's not a hobby or something like that

Sophia Yeah, it's not a hobby or anything like that – you do it because it's your religion or something

Nazia I won't do it just because of my religion but that's how it came round. The thing is here in our paintings we're just doing stuff like hobbies and things like that, what we enjoy not what we do and what religion we're in and stuff like that. So we're just drawing that. We're not saying that we don't enjoy those things though.

This conversation was one of many that highlighted the complexities of cultural representation. In producing this dialogue I hoped to show how Sophia's confused response to Sarah demonstrates that greater complexity is at work than the conflated identity positions referred to in Chapter Three. Sophia sought to express the changing environments that had shaped her identity. She worked to convey her cultural interests as complex, not only tied in with considerable movement between countries but also with being British, and as not identifying with a reified sense of Pakistan, 'I went to Pakistan once, first time in six years'. Their conversation begins to unpack the complexity of cultural identity, how one engages or associates with cultural festivals or religious occasions, what this says about identity but also, crucially, what it doesn't say. Consequently, Nazia focused on one's inability to represent oneself in an image, through a singular form. The dialogue highlights the negotiations that occurred throughout the research projects as individuals assessed cultural positions and identities, considered the suitability of signifiers and prioritised specific connections over others within this time and context.

What I find particularly interesting about this dialogue was the degree of commonality, which was largely overlooked in this discussion. In shaping their understanding of what might be included in the images they were producing – as well as how - they were also negotiating their understanding of culture, identity and the social framework. Not only were they learning more about each other but they were also participating in a process of investigation since notions of culture are also socially produced (Day, 1999).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to highlight how dominant narratives, racism and notions of authenticity do not move in only one direction. The expectation for groupings to observe and adhere to particular cultural norms is present within all cultures. There is no singular dominant narrative but an over-riding atmosphere to produce subjects-in-discourse as the desired norm. Even so, all groupings are impacted by the constant motion and interchange that takes place within culture as new horizons open out through shifting cultural products. These products, in turn, provide considerable convincing evidence of the processes of hybridity as they are engaged, by individuals such as the research subjects, in mutual learning and shared association, alongside appropriation and exploitation. Whilst these continuing shared processes – both positive and negative - refute notions of an authentic culture we

see how individuals draw on particular cultural outputs in their search for stabilisation and belonging within what they consider an authentic culture.

However, if we fail to recognise the cultural interchange and hybridising third space strategy that is constantly occurring within *all* cultures we risk moving back into binary perspectives of 'us' and 'them', the west and the rest, purity and impurity, valuable and valueless. It is best left to Maninder to demonstrate the culture sphere as it could be, if we could more fully engage in hybridising third space, a space of textual and social interconnection

I don't think of myself as having two cultures, I'm just an Asian person whose just doing anything, it's not British, it's not Asian, I don't see the difference any more

However, whilst Maninder focuses upon the freedoms of 'just doing anything' the research findings have demonstrated that a deep unwavering relationship exists between the dominant culture and its others, and this is not easily challenged. In *Changing Views* and in the discursive space of the *Venue* I sought to develop such spaces and to engage in and with alterity. How far dominant understandings of Britishness are likely to change through the continuing, and perhaps increased, engagement of individuals such as Maninder is both open and closed. We are not experiencing a major period of radical cultural transformation from which the cultural world will be envisaged anew. Yet, different ways of being within the nation are, as evidenced at the outset, in some ways positively received, even though the notion of a collective nation continues to be self-contained and resists genuinely questioning what mixed modalities of Britishness might mean today and how this might be visioned within a shared future.

Conclusion

Introduction

The aim of this thesis has been to analyse contemporary understandings of how cultural identities are bounded and categorised. It has demonstrated how identities are shaped by shifting environments as individuals adapt and change their cultural patterns and way of life. In parallel with this, the thesis has evidenced how founding cultural constructions remain fixed in place. Consequently, the research has grounded cultural interaction and production within the broader socio-political framework, acknowledging the vital role of the discursive context.

This conclusion is therefore framed within two sections. The first section considers the implications of the underlying methodology. It highlights how the two case studies shaped the thesis, producing findings that were connected across wide ranging, yet pertinent, axes. The second part of the conclusion recognises themes such as subjects in discourse, cultural bifurcation and institutional frameworks whilst acknowledging the role of hybridising third space strategy, multiplicity and syncreticism.

Case Study Findings

In determining the methodology for the thesis, my aim was to contextualise theory within practice led discourse. I therefore chose to employ a methodology that could pick up on movement, or the interplay, within and between identity and culture. I felt that it was important to move beyond the academy in order to intervene both in the worlds of art and culture but also with popular culture as part of the fabric of everyday life.

The research method upon which the thesis was based was therefore central to its development. The use of an active research approach enabled culture and identity to be explored as an on going (never completed) process. So, the methodological framework produced research findings that identified multiple axes of engagement. The holistic approach ensured that the findings recognised intersectionality but were not controlled by illimitability (Butler, 1990).

As a research method it required substantial investment, it took up a considerable amount of time and significant input was needed by all of those who engaged in the process. There is no doubt that the length of time taken with both the active and reflective phases of the research impacted upon the thesis. This particularly concerned conceptual shifts which occurred during the research. Of particular consequence is the manner in which racist discourse has been re-aligned post 7/7 and 9/11. However, whilst the research subjects were largely, although not entirely, operating within a socio-political framework prior to these events, their experience of culture, as well as racist discourse prevalent at that time still remain pertinent.

Moreover, the level of engagement in such an active research approach is extremely rewarding if one is to work with culture and identity as operating within a dialogic process. The case studies unquestionably provided a framework through which I could observe differing axes of engagement. This ensured that I benefited from a broader overview than the research theme alone, although this broad reach comes with its own challenges as covered in Chapter Two.

The methodology provided a space within which those frequently rendered 'powerless' in much research were not only provided a voice but were engendered to become the researchers themselves. The case studies enabled my direct engagement with arts and creative production as well as within cultural institutions operating within the field of arts representation and production. Few research methods would have provided me with the means to analyse the apparent lack of access and representation within cultural institutions (Bell, 1993) to such an engaged degree. From the outset I had sought a methodology that allowed diverse voices to be heard not only within the thesis but also in arts administration and policy making. So, both the *Venue* and *Changing Views* were not projects that I delivered but projects that the research subjects and I developed and delivered together.

Crucially, then, in both case studies, the research subjects shaped their own representation, negotiated labels, boundaries and strategically essentialised identities. They adjusted to changing situations and relations and evidenced this in the practice led approach of the research. Their identity categorisations and representation demonstrated ongoing movement and change such as that identified through the *Venue*, in Chapter Three, with Akeel's on-going negotiation of identity categorisations. We also saw in Chapter Five, Zakia, one of the participants of *Changing Views*, adjusted what she saw as an outward sign of otherness – wearing

a scarf - according to the situation. In the same chapter, Sarah, another participant demonstrated openness to new languages and the older women participating in *Changing Views* explored small shifts within their cultural transformation.

The range of research methods incorporated enabled me to review changing perceptions of terms, positions and categories. So, throughout the research findings there were points when the research subjects repositioned themselves and their thinking, frequently this occurred during discussion, either in interviews, focus groups or even in conversation, whilst producing work or reflecting on areas of project development. This was important to me, since from the outset, I had set out to address issues of agnotology, and to move some way towards curing 'the ultimate evil [of] stupidity' (du Bois, 1999, p. 58). The benefits were not dependent on the production of a thesis but integrated within the research.

However, this also raised challenges in producing a singular narrative. The results included considerable variation and the experiences and discursive nature of both of the case studies encouraged the research subjects to continually re-negotiate their identity positions and thinking. It therefore proved challenging to identify points of learning and shifts in relation to culture and identity positioning. Furthermore, the research subjects' performativity was contextualised within the confines of the case studies, how they engaged or produced their cultural identities beyond these spaces was less apparent. The parameters of the case studies had also been constructed, and were strongly influenced by my role and wider remit with each. So, in the case of the *Venue*, I was engaged as a youth and arts worker, employed on a project basis. In *Changing Views* I was a Birmingham City Council employee and Arts Development Officer. The findings of the research emerged out of the research subjects' relationship with me albeit within these differing contexts.

Even so, this sense of continuing dialogue was also vital in gaining greater understanding of artistic and cultural production as constantly shifting and adapting to external change and influence. In working with the research subjects I was well positioned to observe identity as produced and performed. It was a production as much through forms such as social interaction and discourse as in the creation of distinct objects. The research methods facilitated a micro understanding of culture as produced within daily life but also enabled me to consider the role played by cultural institutions, in part due to the lack of spaces for more complex minority representation.

I want now to briefly consider each of the case studies in more detail.

The Venue

Young people were actively involved in developing the *Venue*. They defined the overall vision and aims of the centre. They also discussed the name, the information that would be held, the programme of work as well as the interior design. So, their ideas and needs were at the heart of the work. Not only did they feed into a thriving youth and arts centre but by reaching into policy and strategy for the area and the city, they made a case for the development of a permanent youth and arts centre in Foleshill, Coventry.

Vitality, Coventry City Council also opened up to working with the young people and took on board their need for a youth centre in Foleshill. A number of the young people with whom we had worked went on to university, they commented that engaging with the project had helped their self confidence and been a positive contributor in successful university applications. These changes, whilst small, formed part of the broader social response. They ensured that prevailing agnotology was in some way addressed, and that there were lasting effects.

As with much arts and community engaged practice, funding is a constant obstacle. In developing the *Venue* I worked within the remit of the Foleshill Multicultural Open Forum. Whilst this drew in the benefits of successful funding, I was also constrained by the vision of the board for the forum. This group of 'elders' consistently prioritised the work done for the elders group and challenged the resources attributed to the youth centre, an area that I covered in Chapter Two. This had a subsequent affect on the level with which I could engage in working with the young people involved. I needed to attend a high number of meetings relating to the centre, respond to information regarding funding applications for projects and ensure that we adhered to required policies.

The level of work necessary increased the time that I needed to spend on the project to achieve the desired outputs. It also diluted the focus, since I needed to engage more broadly with youth service strategy and provision. To ensure that this time was also of benefit, wherever possible I worked with the research subjects in responding to this. Young people were supported to attend a number of the management and

planning meetings. They also fed into and evaluated programmes of activity. Ultimately, this led to research findings that were not only based on interviews, held towards the end of my time with the *Venue*, but on a working relationship which spanned over a year.

Changing Views

Similarly, my engagement with *Changing Views* was one of facilitation over an extended period of a year. The groups involved discussed the arts forms, venues, workshop spaces and the content of work. They were as much managing the process as participants on the programme. This resulted in an exhibition and publication over which the research subjects felt ownership. They decided where the work went following the exhibition at Soho House Museum and requested multiple copies of the book for friends and family. This sense of ownership was reflected in their decision to bring friends and family to view the exhibition, the visitor numbers achieved were far higher than those previously recorded within the exhibition space.

Equally, the participants of *Changing Views* enjoyed benefits that not only went beyond the needs of the research but impacted further than the production of a text based thesis. The launch event ensured a sense of the scale of the project, and the extension of the exhibition was a source of considerable pride for many of the participants, alongside the ultimate return of the pieces. The exhibition also benefited from a double page article in the Guardian (Arnot, 1999). This raised levels of self confidence, so one of the participating groups hoped to qualify for an 'enterprise allowance scheme' which would allow them to continue their embroidery on a small commercial scale. A number of the younger women on *Changing Views*, who hadn't previously accessed further education felt able to do so, in part due to increased parental confidence in mainstream provision resulting from their participation in *Changing Views*.

The research subjects undoubtedly saw particular arts practices as being marginalised. It was therefore important that, alongside the research subjects, I examined examples of selected visibility, such as that of Veil or Bezhti and analysed the research subjects' responses. This included their views on what was perceived as negative representation, art and culture not on their terms, whilst also considering cultural institutions' desire for dynamic seemingly innovative artwork.

Changing Views worked to challenge this marginalisation. I worked with the research subjects to produce work over which they felt ownership and the contents of which were seen as innovative but rooted within multiple spaces. For the research subjects, right from the start, there was a sense of making an impact upon the arts that were represented within cultural institutions or increasing opportunities to engage in creative production within community spaces. We were also fortunate that Soho House Museum was open to the project and displayed and publicised the resulting exhibition for considerably longer than the initially agreed two weeks.

However, we also faced substantial barriers, whilst we hoped to have the exhibition at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, this was not possible. The research subjects relied on my role, within this cultural institution, to deliver key elements. So whilst I sought to connect the research subjects with mainstream provision, the case study was heavily reliant upon my engagement and position within the institution.

In the second half of the conclusion I will consider the findings from the perspective of the research subjects' engagement with changing social and cultural frameworks and negotiating identity positions.

Negotiating cultural identities within the context of the nation

Contemporary society is seen as fragmented and polar. The culture of the nation is promoted as both extremely fragile, whilst also incredibly obdurate. Within the thesis I have examined the role of conflated categories in constructing identity as within or external to the identity of the nation. I have sought to demonstrate how external pressures, such as border keepers, modes of government, cultural institutions and existing representations, manipulate and conflate identity categorisations. These terms tie notions of community together, conflating them with understandings of ethnicity, 'race', nationality and crucially, culture (Lemke, 2001). In a similar fashion, the notion of shared and traditional values were utilised to maintain borders and concepts. The simplification of such categorisations works to produce subjects-in-discourse since they narrow understanding of identity as complex and continually in construction.

Essentialist readings are constructed within binary perspectives, so for many of the research subjects, the category British was consistently accompanied by another identity. This perspective provides the basis for terms that construct identities as

alterior; distinct from British culture. So, despite internal complexity within notions of Britishness itself, one is either within or external to the culture of the nation. Identity from a national perspective is therefore easier to contain since a normative pattern has been established. The desire for a collective identity both community and cultural, as well as shared values is evident, although these values are rarely explicitly determined or expressed. Within the thesis, I have suggested that this leads at worst to cultural ignorance and at best to knowledge based upon reified cultures and stereotypes. The foundations are set for cultural interpretations based upon notions of 'race'. This, I have argued, enables rather than challenges prejudice.

Examining how racist discourse operates within culture on multiple levels required wide ranging engagement. The thesis therefore draws together an understanding of and negotiation with the formal arts sector whilst also recognising the role of creativity within one's daily lived experience. It seeks to demonstrate the need for greater dialogic processes between these areas, and challenges the constructedness of the formal arts sector, while acknowledging the value of the research subjects' sense of cultural engagement within their daily lives.

Negotiating cultural identities whilst engaging with cultural institutions

The implications of the thesis focus upon the cultural sector. This is a key field within my professional practice, as a consultant working within this area but also as stemming from a cultural activist perspective. There has been considerable recent debate surrounding representation, production and artistic integrity for artists categorised as 'Black or minority ethnic'. Many of the claims focused upon the policies developed by Arts Council England which were seen as segregationist and lacked any genuine sense of engagement or change for black artists (Hylton, 2007).

When analysing the research, I had this in mind and wondered at the benefits of an entirely category free approach. If Arts Council England had not intervened with initiatives such as decibel, or with targeted funding streams, would they still have been in a position to provide the way forward that individual artists, the majority of whom were experienced and relatively established, anticipated? The research findings suggested to me that in fact the opposite would be the case. The research approach demonstrated not only through an analysis of the work that was represented, but by engagement with mainstream cultural institutions the lack of cultural liberalism evident within UK society. Cultures are determined on their level of

fit within the national grid (Bhabha, 1990) and suffer oppression by the systematic institutionalised mistreatment of denigrated cultures. I have shown that there are spaces within which they operate, such as the Drum, *Changing Views* or the *Venue*, but these spaces are controlled and limited.

Bespoke initiatives at least ensured that there was some sense of a presence, such as in the work of inIVA. Whilst the research subjects present at the discussion outlined in Chapter Four disagreed with the content of the work, they came to discuss and voice their thoughts and feelings on the subject. Without the space developed by the partnership approach between Walsall Creative Development Team, the participants of *Changing Views* in addition to the New Art Gallery Walsall's openness to this process, this opportunity would have been removed. So, if targeted initiatives and bespoke organisations were removed, it would be far too easy for larger cultural institutions to work only with artists with whom they felt an aesthetic connection or with whom they saw themselves as having shared values. Consequently the risks of only particular representations and narrowed understandings of contemporary, supposedly innovative, culture are increased. Individuals within cultural institutions might only connect with the hyper-visible, such as Behzti or work with particular representations of communities as traditional, ossified and powerless. They would probably be less interested in recognising multiple positions that showed minority communities to be no less or indeed no more diverse than culture considered mainstream.

Many individuals in cultural institutions produced a collective vision of the nation by representing minority communities as too visible or not visible enough, clearly positioning them as external to the nation's identity and culture. Cultural commentators and conceptualisers seemed happy and able to swing between the specific (the detail of white culture) to the generic (anything from the non Western canon). So, all too often, the research subjects were seen as categorised and shaped, at least in part, by ossified, traditional cultures that were no part of supposedly innovative, contemporary thinking Britishness. Continuously influenced by this perspective, the research subjects themselves frequently drew upon what they perceived as pure or authentic culture in conceptualising their creativity, production and cultural consumption. Products were seen as, for example, British or Asian or Black or at most, a 'mix of the two'.

Continuously positioned in such a manner, the research subjects often evaded the multiple positions that objects held, which could have been far more culturally revealing. The implication of this upon the creative elements of the research was that the products produced were seen from a similarly singular fashion. Objects were seen to belong within a reified or essential culture. They experienced cultural products as not included within the culture of the nation. If notions of Britishness are to be challenged, relating to objects as possessing a conflated cultural belonging must change, the examples of the Veil exhibition and the play Behzti demonstrate such challenges.

Cultural institutions reflect, comment on and endorse particular understandings of what Britishness means as well as categorising that otherness which is to be tolerated and supported within constructed parameters. So, frequently, both cultural producers and products served to demonstrate the imagined community and culture of the nation by highlighting the 'too visible' other (Bhatt, 2006). I have highlighted how simplistic, binary, perceptions were found within cultural institutions. In such spaces, individuals such as the research subjects were defined as belonging to distinct cultural pathways and seen as connected to another unified but singular culture. Therefore, in the following section I will consider pathways of cultural negotiation that reached further than formal cultural institutions.

Negotiating cultural identities beyond formal cultural institutions

Whilst within their artistic production the research subjects often drew upon bifurcated perspectives, this was largely not the case within their daily lived practice. Here, I consistently found that the research subjects were consciously and in some cases unconsciously, engaging with multiple cultural perspectives. Within such spaces, the research subjects demonstrated numerous deliberate and multiple shifts which evidenced variable, plural, positions. Through such adaptations, the research subjects demonstrated how they were not powerless (Bhatt, 2006). By performing their own mobility, they engaged in constant cultural dialogue not only along a one dimensional axis but from multiple axes that challenged understandings of authentic, segmented, culture.

Yet, even whilst in their daily lived experience they ably negotiated diverse cultural objects and subjects which were not labelled, they *also* produced cultural understandings from a binary perspective that was rooted in cultures as segmented

discrete entities. So, the notion of a dominant, singular, narrative which provided a basis for authenticity and belonging was not only contained within the domain of Britishness.

The research findings demonstrated a deep unwavering relationship between the dominant culture and its others, which is not easily challenged. The research subjects also sought to hold onto an uncomplicated identity, even where this existed alongside the multiple, complex, identity positions which they also utilised. So, whilst the majority of the research subjects engaged in constant cultural interchange they also referenced what were perceived as stable, unchanging collective identities which rooted them within a cultural authenticity.

The continuing existence of this dynamic determines the parameters and limits levels of engagement with hybridising third space strategy. Established cultural parameters label hybrid crossover and formations. Restrictions, guided by notions of cultural authenticity and roots, limit the degree to which the participants operated within the parameters of a nonaligned third space, as a space of potential textual and social interconnection. I will consider these thematic fields in more detail in the following sections.

Hybridising Strategy

The notion of hybridity offers a potential route towards greater cultural and community understanding. Consequently, in Chapter Four, I showed how hybridity becomes the mode by which cultures fuse and connect, across what are purportedly clear lines of difference. Hybridity, by necessity requires the acknowledgement of an authentic or fixed boundary, challenging this shifts how we engage with and perceive hybrid formations. It becomes the means by which subjects and objects are acknowledged and included within the so called culture of the nation. Hybrid objects are determined after their creation and assessed on their compatibility to the nation's culture. Hybrid subjects are determined by their level or degree of fit – or lack thereof - with the nation's community.

However, in Chapter Three I demonstrated that the nation's culture and community (Alleyne, 2001) are complex entities, more often determined by what they are not than what they are. I therefore query hybridising strategy and argue instead that political narratives within the nation state determine difference and sameness.

Ultimately, the aim is to produce subjects-in-discourse within a specific political, social and cultural framework, consistently referencing the notion of shared values as a means to validate and achieve this.

Yet, for the research subjects it was vital to recognise plurality and multiplicity, since it is only by acknowledging that all culture is part of hybridising strategy that it becomes possible to collectively build a sense of cultural belonging (Wang & Yueh-yu Yeh, 2005). Without this, even though they may be British born, individuals such as the research subjects will continue to feel a sense of dichotomy, British and other.

So, whilst the terminology may be new, it is important to recognise that hybridity as a process is on-going. In Chapter Four, I argue that this process is based on the need to determine and contain understandings of cultural difference. By use of examples such as the Veil exhibition and the play Behzti I highlight how notions of difference are also dependent on both viewer and producer. What is defined as hybrid will continually change as all culture engages in the complex process of cultural transformation and innovative change. The challenge lies in the fact that alongside this there is a dominant narrative which disregards those who are considered to question prevailing socio-cultural modalities. Objects and subjects that fail to fit within supposedly prevailing cultural norms of the nation.

Beyond hybridity to third space?

The research provided a strong starting point for drawing theoretical concepts together with lived experience. It opened out an opportunity for assessing the extent to which third space theory operates within artistic and creative production. Central to the research was an analysis of the level to which we perform identity within the socio-political context. I therefore assessed the extent to which third space theory was pertinent for the research subjects.

Ultimately, the research subjects saw their identity not as complex, or merged, but the adoption of multiple positions, consistently navigated. Rather than focusing upon internal conflict, the research subjects negotiated and rationalised their choices on the basis of multiplicity, on fusion, segmentation and on engagement that was far more likely to be based upon multiplicity than syncretism. They did not only operate in relation to a single dominant narrative but connected with culture from multiple directions which bisected all identities. In contextualising third space theory,

it is not surprising that I found that all identities are contained and shaped by the social, political, spaces within which they are located. One cannot remove one from the other or fully assess their impact upon each other.

Conclusion

I therefore suggest that we must engage arts and cultural practice to deconstruct binary positions within communities and to demonstrate intersecting cultural crossroads. This approach challenges a continuing engagement with 'race' as an overly simplistic construction. Equally, the multiple, intersectional, positions adopted by individuals such as the research subjects offer us much to consider when investigating culture and identity. Their experiences must be aligned alongside hybridising third space strategy, even whilst acknowledging the constraints and fixed foundations of the cultural grid within which they are positioned. Whilst syncreticism may be utilised as a transformational norm it does not resolve differences, nor dissolve existing narratives of power. Both subjects and objects are aligned within particular positions which can be challenging to navigate. We must make explicit the complexity of identity, which thereby positions us to question overly collective notions of community and therefore the prescribed segmentation and stratification of culture. As Alexander suggests

it is critical to take seriously the intersection of culture and structure which underlies the 'new ethnicities' paradigm, which does not allow for the easy reification of either culture or marginality. It is insufficient to continue to apply different versions of cultural identity to African-Caribbean and Asian communities; either to deny continuity, solidarity and history to the one, or agency and complex subjectivity to the other (2002: 567)

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RESEARCH – INTERVIEWS

Interviewees: The Venue and Changing Views			
Name*	Research Method	Context	Format & Date
Robert	One to one interview; on-going discussion and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i>	Aged 18, Indian,	On-going notes and transcript from recorded interview
Jagminder	One to one interview; on-going discussion and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i>	Aged 15, Hindu, English-Asian	On-going notes and transcript from recorded interview
Ramu	One to one interview; on-going discussion and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i> – continued support through to mid 20's	Aged 19 – mid 20's, Asian-British, Hindu	On-going notes and transcript from recorded interview
Raj	One to one interview; on-going discussion and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i>	Aged 18, Punjabi, Hindu	On-going notes and transcript from recorded interview
Navdeep	One to one interview; on-going discussion and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i> - continued support through to early 20's	Aged 16 – early 20's, British- Sikh	On-going notes and transcript from recorded interview
Michael	One to one interview; on-going discussion and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i>	Aged 15, Indian, Hindu	On-going notes and transcript from recorded interview
Sundeeep	One to one interview; on-going discussion and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i>	Aged 15, Asian, Sikh	On-going notes and transcript from recorded interview
Maninder	One to one interview; on-going discussion and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i>	Aged 16, British-Asian, Sikh	On-going notes and transcript from recorded interview
Akeel	One to one interview; on-going discussion	Aged 16, Arab, British, Muslim	On-going notes and transcript

	and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i>		from recorded interview
Sunita	One to one interview; on-going discussion and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i>	Aged 16, Black-Asian, Hindu	On-going notes and transcript from recorded interview
Matt	One to one interview; on-going discussion and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i>	Aged 18, British-Caribbean; Jamaican, Christian	On-going notes and transcript from recorded interview
Richard	One to one interview; on-going discussion and dialogue during the development of the <i>Venue</i>	Aged 18, British-Caribbean; Jamaican, Christian	On-going notes and transcript from recorded interview
Mandeep	One to one interview; on-going discussion	Aged mid 30s, Youth worker, South Asian, Sikh/Christian, British	On-going notes
Amarit, Zakyya, Maryam, Sarah, Sofia, Kelly	Focus Group; on-going discussion	Female group, aged 13 & 14, in a school room, African Caribbean, South Asian, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, White English, Christian	Transcript from recorded interview
Iram, Jaskiran, Hayley, Nagina, Sarah, Sophie	Focus Group; on-going discussion	Female group, aged 13 & 14, in a school room, African Caribbean, South Asian, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, White English, Christian	Transcript from recorded interview
Mehrun, Gurpreet, Sandeep, Helen, Neemita	Focus Group; on-going discussion	Female group, aged 13 & 14, in a school room, African Caribbean, South Asian, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, White English, Christian	Transcript from recorded interview
Jane, Sofia, Balbir, Tasmira, Sameena	Focus Group; on-going discussion	Female group, aged 13 & 14, in a school room, African Caribbean, South Asian, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi,	Transcript from recorded interview

		Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, White English, Christian	
Sima	Interview; on-going discussion	Arts Centre, Aged 18 South Asian, Bengali, Muslim	Transcript from recorded interview
Samera, Rezna	Interviews – the girls were best friends and asked to be interviewed together; on-going discussion	Arts Centre, Aged 10 & 11, Indian, Muslim	Transcript from recorded interview
Zakia	Interview; on-going discussion	Bangladeshi Girls Group, Aged 15, Muslim	Transcript from recorded interview
Rita, Nijjar, Balbir, Talbinder, Grace, Mohy	Sikh Women's Forum; on-going discussion	Older Sikh women	Transcript from recorded interview
Anita	Interview ; on-going discussion	Aged 19, British- Asian, Hindu	Transcript from recorded interview
Kamajeet Amajeet	Interviews – the girls were sisters and asked to be interviewed together; on-going discussion	Aged 17, Indian- Kalistani-Sikh Aged 16, Indian- Kalistani-Sikh	Transcript from recorded interview
Mohi	Interview; on-going discussion	Aged 23	Transcript from recorded interview
Group of 15 South Asian, Bangladeshi women – Rukhsana K, Anita, Lily, Tahmina, Kausar, Nasreen, Ranbir, Doly, Meena, Uzma, Aisha, Sofia, Mehrun, Rehana, Rukhsana M,	Bangladeshi Mental Health Group; on-going discussion	Between 40 and 65	Transcript from recorded interview with translator
Jamilla	Bangladeshi Mental Health Group; on-going discussion	Aged 50, Bangladeshi, 4 children, In the UK for 19 years	Transcript from recorded interview with translator

Artists (includes those involved in either the Venue or Changing Views Projects)			
Saryjit	Interview	Artist, visual arts, South Asian, British, Sikh	Transcript from recorded interview
Rita	Interview	Artist, visual arts/ crafts, South Asian, British, Sikh	Transcript from recorded interview
Uzma	Interview	Artist, visual arts, South Asian, Pakistani, Muslim	Transcript from recorded interview
Nayan	Interview	Artist, public art, Dual Heritage, British, Tamil Nadu, India	Transcript from recorded interview
Ranbir	Interview	Artist, Textiles, Mehndi, Asian, Hindu	Transcript from recorded interview
Joseph	Interview	Artist, sculptor, Dual Heritage, Nigerian, British, Adopted	Transcript from recorded interview
Maria	Interview	Artist, Visual Art, African/ British	Transcript from recorded interview
Clarice	Focus Group Session	Artist, Crafts, Caribbean/ British	Focus Group transcript from recording
Izzy	Focus Group Session	Aged mid 30s, Cultural Services, Muslim, Bangladeshi	Focus Group transcript from recording
Zirak	Focus Group Session	Aged late 20s, Artist, Refugee, Kurdish, Iraqi	Focus Group transcript from recording
Sharon	Focus Group Session	Artist, drama/ theatre, Caribbean/ British	Focus Group transcript from recording
Margaret	Focus Group Session	Artist, drama/ theatre, Caribbean/ British	Focus Group transcript from recording

* Names have been changed