

# Resituating culture

edited by Gavan Titley

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## Resituating culture: an introduction

*Gavan Titley*

This is another book about culture. Moreover, it is another book about culture with a title that appears to make a radical claim. Culture is a concept that is often regarded as overexposed, overextended, and possibly over-theorised, and a radical title could understandably be dismissed as a bid for relevance amidst the cacophony of culture talk. Yet it is precisely this dense field of constant reference, and certain dominant currents within it, which motivates this invitation to resituate the idea of culture. This publication stems from a research seminar that aimed to analyse the power, properties, boundaries and possibilities attributed to culture in a range of contemporary discourses, and to assess the import of these discourses for working with youth in European societies. The seminar contended that, in public discourse, culture remains significantly accented in static and essentialist terms, and instrumental in a range of political interventions. In our societies, ideas of culture as the more or less immutable and bounded ways of life of racialised national and ethnic groups persist. The resilient prevalence of this transparent fiction is deeply problematic; as the primary source of ascribed identity it marginalises intersections of gender, class, sexuality and the realities of multiple identities and allegiances, and as political rhetoric it subjects these identities to reductive visions of belonging, entitlement and equality in Europe today.

The significance of culture as an idea is of particular import for the broad community of youth educators, researchers and policy makers active at local, national and European levels. The last ten years have seen – particularly under the aegis of the two European institutions involved in this publication – a concerted emphasis on campaigns, projects and educational activities that address racism and anti-racism, living in “multicultural” societies, human rights, youth participation and conflict transformation. It is a fair guess that all of these initiatives have, at various stages, had to confront culture as an apparent fact and implied value. Many of these initiatives have been instrumental in raising awareness around notions of cultural diversity and experiences of marginality. However, the basic suspicion present at the seminar – of culture as a new horizon of meaning and key witness for political rhetoric – was compounded by a realisation that the necessity to educate about culture may have generated dogmatic educational practices grounded in equally static and unreflexive ideas of culture. Organising and acting at a European level understandably generates a common vocabulary and a storehouse of theories and approaches, but it also generates conceptual and practice-based orthodoxies. In an expansive and integrating



Europe, shorthands of culture as bounded group, as nation or as everything are poorly equipped to engage with analytical, educational and political challenges.

Given both the diffuseness of culture as a contemporary keyword and its thorough imbrication in contemporary politics, it might be tempting to regard the idea of resituating culture as involving an attempt at conceptual reckoning, an interesting if futile stab at rescuing the utility of culture by chiselling away layers of encrusted meaning. Resituating, in our sense, does not involve an attempt to recalibrate precise notions of culture, but rather constitutes an ongoing process of resituating culture within shifting and involved discourses. In other words, considering culture today requires the negotiation of complex, uneven and disparate cultural flows and processes in relation to varying and overlapping senses of culture as a mode of framing and evaluating these flows and processes. Engaging with culture and cultural politics, we would argue, involves a form of cultural literacy that emphasises the discursive; the ability to recognise in uses of culture that “it is at one and the same time a mark of distinction and of the assumptions upon which such distinctions are forged” (Smith 2000: 4). To resituate culture is to embrace the constant necessity to historicise, contextualise and critique a disputed and multi-accented concept that is understood in divergent and overlapping ways within and across the realities and modernities of Europe.

#### -----> **The ubiquity of culture**

Culture has long been regarded as one of the most complicated concepts in the human and social sciences, and it is also a ubiquitous and banal feature of everyday description. Its usages tumble out of the newspapers on any given day; on a single day of recent newspaper reading I witnessed fears over the health impacts of globalised food culture, a push to correct the balance between work and life in corporate organisational culture – which may or may not be a subset of global business culture – a television series that aims to capture the dynamics of attraction in different sexual cultures, and a review of a book that sets out to tackle the atomised image of video game players by detailing the world of computer game culture. Thus culture, as Ulf Hannerz observes, is everywhere (1996: 31), and is deployed with random ease to suggest different versions of collectivity possibly infused with shared meanings, values and outlooks. Its vague senses of particularity, and the almost universal recognition of that assumed particularity, place culture as one of the central global concepts of our time.

Despite the apparently ceaseless mobility of culture as a vogue signifier, it never floats free of the traces and accents of its complex discursive attachments. Culture may be used to describe “ways of life” and life practices, collectivities based on location, nation, history, lifestyle and ethnicity, systems and webs of representation and meaning, and realms of artistic value and heritage. Its ubiquity and tangled senses could lead us to conclude, simply, that we require an extended vocabulary for framing human activity, or a heightened tolerance for the relativity of culture as a concept. Language, after all, is no more forensic than the realities that produce it, and any articulation of culture is likely to involve a range of overlapping meanings. Indeed, if we adopt the broad sense of culture that emerges in the debates and discussions of what has come to be known as British cultural studies, overlapping meanings of culture are an obvious product of culture as a space of contestation (Du Gay 1997, Barker 2002). Meaning is disputed and in flux, and culture, as a historically accented way of describing, framing and evaluating life and life practices, is a site of contest.



However, culture as a space of contestation involves the tendency to prefer and embed some meanings over others, and these preferences involve the interaction of power and meaning (Bauman 1999, Hall 1997). Culture is an operative concept that is often naturalised as a descriptive one; as Chris Barker puts it, “‘Culture’ is both a name for the domain in which contestation over value, meanings and practices takes place and a tool by which to intervene in social life” (2002: 67). In contemporary societies and public discourses culture has become a powerful and commonly held currency, and its diffuse descriptiveness is subsumed by the prescriptive senses now ingrained in it. While contemporary cultural theory between and across disciplines emphasises the fluidity of culture as a concept, its assumed and often vague senses of distinctiveness seem to provide, in a range of national and transnational contexts, a unifying language and self-evident marker of identity. Culture may involve reciprocity between senses of making and being made (Eagleton 2000), but there is a lot of evidence to suggest that the latter accent is in the ascendant.

Jane K. Cowan et al. observe (in an anthropological analysis of approaches to culture and human rights) that academic critiques of culture as intimating an organic, particular, bounded way of life, replete with internally coherent systems of meaning and values, have been helplessly paralleled by the “increasing prevalence of culture as a rhetorical object – often in a highly essentialised form – in contemporary political talk” (2001: 3). This volume is informed by a concern that many political debates in the European landscape, that are highly relevant to workers in the broad field of youth, are conducted through the lingering prism of a rhetoric of culture that is descriptively inadequate and politically reactionary. The idea of culture as the essentialised way of life of a people, often implicitly linked to geopolitical territory, retains a disturbing degree of orthodoxy in Europe today.

### -----> The culture of differences

Where, then, are these notions of culture most obviously at work, and why is it so hard to convincingly erode them? To return to Cowan’s observation, culture as a rhetorical object has always leant itself to political co-option; as Terry Eagleton points out, “It is one of those rare ideas which have been as integral to the political left as they are vital to the political right, and its social history is thus exceptionally tangled and ambivalent” (2000: 22). With this in mind, it is possible to argue that certain hard-edged rhetorics of culture in an age of globalisation thrive only on the rhetorical possibilities provided by reductionist notions. The lingering phantasm of cultural imperialism, for example, retains an implacably provocative charge despite the inadequate theories of agency and cultural process that underpin such arguments (Tomlinson 1991). Thus *Time* magazine, in a recent special double edition providing vignettes of European change since the end of the second world war, included the somewhat startling description of Euro Disney as “cultural Chernobyl”<sup>1</sup> to illustrate contemporary European fears of “American cultural imperialism”. Similarly, the vastly overexposed notion of a “clash of civilisations” – which vaguely imagines “civilisations” as amplified cultural meta-units – has been critiqued as being of such import primarily because dramatic dichotomies grounded in cultural fundamentalism are appealing in a geopolitically complex world, and also because they fit snugly within the prevailing news values, structures and formats of major US media networks.<sup>2</sup>



Many of the contributions here, however, detect the prime politicisation of culture in the interplay between certain notions of multiculturalism and cultural nationalism. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to satisfactorily review the involved debates and literature that multiculturalisms have evoked; indeed it is beyond the scope of this publication to even map the senses in which multiculturalism is used across either the Europe of the European Union or the Council of Europe. That said, the last five years or so have seen a renewed focus in Europe on the resurgence of cultural nationalist and far-right politics in states with forms of multiculturalism, and in post-communist “countries in transition”. This is evident not just in high-profile electoral gains in countries such as Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and France, but in the centrality of self-serving “immigration debates” across a spectrum of public spheres and national politics. As Gerard Delanty (2000) has observed in relation to western Europe, ethnic-cultural nationalism, fostered by “the decline of the nation-state as a dominant point of reference”, has reclaimed citizenship to a politics of cultural identity and belonging, and constructs migrants as both culturally other and as contributing to the erosion of state provision. However, he points out that this very nationalism is a product of social fragmentation and neo-liberal attacks on the welfare state.

Given the broad context of cultural politics, contributors to this publication were invited to re-communicate relevant thinking on culture and cultural analysis in their fields of research, while contributing their own perspectives and analyses. In a disparate body of themes and approaches, a common thread that emerges in this collection is the disjuncture between culture as a prism for organising life and ascribing identities, and the situated, fluid and ambivalent interaction of other factors in shaping people’s identities and allegiances. Avtar Brah, in an essay that surveys disciplinary senses of difference in relation to her influential work on “diaspora space”, makes what appears to be the simple observation that difference means different things to different people. Analysing difference, Brah argues, is not a question of recognising differences that present themselves or wait to be uncovered, but rather a matter of tracking how “arbitrary signifiers” of difference are ascribed particular meanings in historical contexts where uneven power relations produce consequences from processes of demarcation and classification. Difference, like identity, cannot be allowed to rest as a static notion, but is rather seen as the complex interaction of ascribed and subjective senses of self intersecting across such fields of power as class, gender, ethnicity, racism and nationalism.

Following this mode of unsettling analysis, other essays disavow the orthodox explanatory power of cultural difference, and argue that certain ideas of culture construct difference as a discursive inevitability. This not only elides important commonalities, but also the crucial intersectionality of identities in process and the contexts of power in which cultural differences are ascribed, reified and often instrumentalised. This analysis is particularly pronounced in contributions that engage with the somewhat naive discourses of culture and cultural diversity that underpin liberal multiculturalist projects. Alana Lentin examines some of the legacies of the “cultural turn” in anti-racism work, and argues that the assumption that racism can be combated through the recognition and celebration of cultural diversity ignores the profound racialisation of nation states, and the obvious positions of material and political inequality that racialised minorities find themselves in. This is an analysis echoed in Arun Kundnani’s deconstruction of the logic of cultural reductionism at the core of what he terms the “British multicultural experiment”, which rather than amounting to an emancipatory valori-



sation of cultural differences, involved a politics of containment that ultimately locked black people into reified cultural groups – impervious to both inner differentiation and political instrumentalisation – and deflected attention from civil rights and critiques of institutional racism central to anti-racist politics. Both Lentin and Kundnani emphasise that the recognition of cultural difference, while often presented as a response to grassroots identity politics, is frequently a top-down strategy that prioritises a discourse of culture removed from the matrix of factors through which difference is imagined, performed and evaluated.

Diego Herrera's examination of school performance among Moroccan youth in Spain is critical of ingrained attempts to relate educational achievement to ethno-cultural groups viewed as "hypostatic realities", and argues that patterns of variability must include the dynamic intersection of class, gender, family biography, and the experience of inter-group relations in social context. Similarly, in arguing for reflexive intercultural education with professionals in a range of service encounters, Iben Jensen illustrates how fixing identities in ethno-cultural terms results in members of ethnic minorities having to constantly invalidate the positions normatively ascribed to them, a delicate task in specific situations where general power dimensions are intensified by the nature of, for example, a work interview. While the ascription of cultural difference in this instance attempts to over-determine the position of the individual, John Wrench examines how collapsing these ideas into generalised rubrics of diversity may actually result in the elision of the specificities of racial discrimination. In addressing the current vogue for diversity management in the workplace, Wrench argues that while carefully planned and implemented approaches to diversity can complement equality strategies, a current danger is that swathes of pre-existing strategies may merely be re-branded as diversity management, and consequently prove incapable or unwilling to confront racism and discrimination in the workplace. These essays challenge the almost absolute conflation of culture with ethnicity in the multiculturalisms under discussion, and the willing and unwitting depoliticisation of racism in popular celebrations of cultural diversity. This is not to suggest that such initiatives and rhetorics do not have a role to play, but that they fail to process how "racism connects with and reinforces other power differentials in a specifically racialised way – across gender, class, sexuality, disability as well as political formations" (Lentin and McVeigh 2002: 37).

The invitation to re-communicate these forms of analysis therefore aims to inject challenging and dissonant thinking into orthodoxies of culture, but not on some blinkered correctional impulse. This collection of research – drawing from and combining meta-theory, textual analysis and empirical and ethnographic work – is aimed at complementing and supporting the perspectives of youth educators and workers in the "messy realities" they act in, and in furthering the kinds of conversations that ground research in social imperatives. An ongoing and unnecessary dualism often lazily accepted in youth and NGO work is one between theory and practice, or the abstract and the concrete. As many of the contributions illustrate, this is often an artificial division that ignores the conditions by which social research is produced, and the ways in which "theories" lurk, perhaps subsumed and undeclared, within the principles and methods of practice. The work presented here, then, is offered for translation and adaptation within contexts unknowable to the researchers, and the publication is presented as avowedly partial; resituating also begins with the reader.



-----> **Culture and complexity**

In their own contexts, the essays gathered here approach contemporary cultural existence as being influenced by disparate cultural flows and sources of meaning, and take as a foundational premise the state of affairs described below by Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash:

Culture which was assumed to possess a coherence and order, to enable it to act as the grounds for the formation of stable identities, no longer seems to be able to perform the task adequately. The linkages between culture and identity have become more problematic as the sources of cultural production and dissemination increase, and the possibilities of inhabiting a shared cultural world in which cultural meanings function in a common-sense taken-for-granted manner recedes. In effect, both inside and outside the academy, we are all asked to do more cultural work today. (1999: 1)

John Tomlinson develops this perspective in his discussion of the accelerating connectivity that many people experience in their life-worlds, and focuses on the ways in which cultural existences are being transformed by differentially perceived and experienced networks of “interconnections and interdependencies”. His discussion of deterritorialisation emphasises that the actual geographical location of “a culture” – a location potentially loaded with historical-political significance – is receding as a horizon of coherent meaning, and faces multiple challenges as a horizon of legitimacy and delimitation. Amidst this complex connectivity, the enduring essentialism of culture may actually be read as a reaction to deterritorialisation: a re-assertion of belonging and legitimacy in the face of real and perceived flows of people, finance, images and ideas.

Kathryn Spellman’s essay on the post-territorial identities of Iranians in London is a fine-grained example of Tomlinson’s theoretical perspective; cultures, however imagined, are increasingly deterritorialised and networked through migration pathways, and for the migrants in her study, a “shared cultural world” is mediated and differently experienced through transnationalised socio-cultural systems and relations. As Spellman emphasises, the expression of Iranian identity in this context involves expression through a variety of forms, which must be related not only to a complex intersection of sociopolitical factors but also to their “encounters with the shifting circumstances in Britain, Iran and the wider diaspora”.

The contributions in the section on youth, culture and youth culture also reflect on the unpacking and reworking of perceived links between culture, place and identity. In examining “post-subcultural” hip-hop cultures, both Rupa Huq and Olivier Cathus proceed from the almost everyday banality of “glocalisation” in and across musical styles, and argue that hip-hop manages to be both resistant, commodified and articulate within situated contexts and a multi-billion dollar global industry. Benjamin Perasović, in an expansive theoretical reflection, argues that while the term “youth culture” continues to circulate, many young people would not find that it encompassed their shifting life paths and cultural routeways.

Positing the fluidity of living culturally in opposition to the rigidity of living in cultures is not an end in itself, however, and acknowledging this is important to avoid – to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak – the fallacy of spectacular political triumphs achieved in the seminar room. The gulf between primarily academic conceptualisations of cultural fluidity and hybridity and instrumentalised and naturalised ideas of culture as a way of life are not tackled by privileged assertion. This is the



case whether it is research asserting to policy, policy asserting to educational practice, or educational practice attempting to assert these new orthodoxies of culture in contexts where they find, for a variety of reasons, limited register. Bald assertions of cultural hybridity, in particular, are often guilty of assuming that demonstrating the mythic significance of ideas of authentic, bounded cultures automatically and inevitably punctures their political significance.

Against this, Jonathan Friedman has perceptively argued that hybridity only meaningfully exists as a social phenomenon when it is identified and valorised in interaction: “the problem with hybridity, as of purity, is a question of practices of identification” (1999: 249). It is interesting to illustrate this point by referring to a charming text entitled “The right to a cultural identity”, produced by the Freedom Party of Austria. Article 2.2 openly acknowledges and celebrates a historical analysis which sees Austrian *Heimat* evolving from the co-existence and co-operation of different cultural-national groups (a longitudinal form of diversity management, perhaps) and argues that “The *awareness* of the special *qualities* of one’s own people is inseparably linked to the willingness to *respect what is special about other peoples*” (1997).<sup>3</sup> There is no attempt to disguise historical hybridisation here in the name of cultural purity: instead, it is openly embraced as proof of the openness and fairness that must now reluctantly be rescinded for future – racialised – migrants. Indeed, by co-opting the logic of the celebration of diversity within a vaguely elaborated framework of cultural relativism, this argument exploits the depoliticised impotence of multiculturalism alluded to earlier in this introduction. Cultural difference can be recognised and celebrated as long as the agents of difference remain where they belong (See Colm O’Cinneide’s essay in relation to this argument).

As Les Back details in his important book *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture* (1996), education about culture, multiculturalism and racism needs to be aware that proselytising “right-on” attitudes and formulations often find very little resonance with intended audiences, and that this can neither be dismissed as ignorance nor validated as a measurement of veracity. This, he argues, is particularly the case in relation to debates on the politics of culture:

The choice is presented pointedly as one between viewing cultures as rooted and fixed and a vision of cultural processes as in a constant state of flux producing creative and promiscuous routeways of identification. What is omitted in the deafening row over “essentialism” versus “anti-essentialism” is the complex interplay between these two impulses at the everyday level. (1996: 7)

The everyday, then, witnesses the constant situatedness of ideas and morphing of categories. Anna Bagnoli, in her chapter, shows how exchange students, in reflecting on their experiences abroad, acknowledge that processes of continual hybridisation constantly intersect with strategic and assigned articulations of an essentialised national identity. Debbie Ging and Jackie Malcolm, in explicitly addressing the sometimes fraught relationship of the researcher to the categories and ideas of national minorities, argue that – in terms of celebratory multiculturalism – essentialised projections have to be read in relation to their strategic utility in particular contexts of power and inequality. Bryony Hoskins, in critiquing the supposed hold of “conventional femininity and masculinity” over young people’s sexual practice, details how these supposed norms may now form part of a larger grammar that is knowingly employed in relationships and sexual encounters. Resituating culture does not mean a wholesale assault on an



established orthodoxy of culture in order to replace it with another, but rather a commitment to finding ways in which “culture” can be recalibrated as a significant set of analytical possibilities in contexts where it is overloaded with existential and political significance.

There is a distinction to be drawn, however, between anti-essentialism as a politics and a political commitment to the possibilities of anti-essentialist analysis. Wolfgang Welsch, in a discussion of what he terms transculturality, observes that understandings of our cultural realities are always intimately related to our conceptual understandings of culture: “If one tells us that culture is to be a homogeneity event, then we practice the required coercions and exclusions. We seek to satisfy the task we are set [...] whereas if one tells us or subsequent generations that culture ought to incorporate the foreign and do justice to transcultural components [...] then corresponding feats of integration will belong to the real structure of our culture” (1999: 200). For Welsch, culture is a propagandising concept, and the descriptive inadequacy of static notions entails a responsibility to resist and offer alternatives to their prescriptive extremes.

Several contributions included here map dimensions of this propagandising tendency, and emphasise that rampant culturalisation is perhaps at its most blinkered when it purports to be engaged in progressive politics. Colm O’Cinneide, in a thoughtful overview of key debates on citizenship, equality and multiculturalism, argues that while there will always be tension between processes of legal conceptualisation and the cultural realities they attempt to legislate for, in the case of multicultural citizenship, attempts to ground rights in culture have had the effect of compounding anti-immigrant and anti-minority racism by normalising ideas of fundamental, determining differences. Following Malik (1996) he contends that this approach invites the assertion of cultural differences, and the inflation and reduction of all to that horizon of legitimacy, which ultimately “diverts focus away from the compelling need to achieve substantive equality of citizenship for all”. Irene Becci, in critiquing the abject lack of reflexivity in republican responses to the “veil issue” in France, perceptively examines how secular ideology constructs minority women in cultural terms only; their veiled bodies are read as being intrinsically oppressed, and their visual symbolism is irreconcilable with the vaulted norms of French public culture. By insisting that this apparently immutable cultural difference be limited to expression in the private sphere, the assumption made is that this assertion of equality implicitly guarantees gender equality as a consequence. But as Becci argues, by forcing veiled women to disappear from public secular space, proponents – including feminist advocates – practice a confinement central to widespread forms of patriarchal domination.

Culture, in the broadest sense, is never not political, and a key aim of resituating is to argue for tracking the planes of meaning on which culture is working, and being made to work. In offering a partial and committed input to this ongoing process, this volume presents a diverse body of recent research and reflection structured in porous thematic sections. However, it is more relevant to see the publication as whole organised around what Sara Ahmed describes as an “intimate responsibility for the other” (2000: 137, quoted in Sheller 2003: 8), a responsibility that demands transcending the orthodoxy of culture as the central or only measure of that otherness.



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### *Endnotes*

1. "Europe then and now. An extraordinary trip to the heart of the continent". *Time*, 18-25 August 2003.
2. For an example of this see Ian Buruma, *Guardian*, 2 October 2001. Interestingly, Buruma also argues that the most serious flaw in this thesis is that in its attempt to sketch a political map of the world in inflated cultural terms, it manages to evacuate politics from the analysis altogether, and fails to account for a wide variety of national and international political instrumentalisations. For an eloquent polemic on the paucity of sources in Huntingdon's work, not to mention its wilfully self-serving delineation of "cultural faultlines", see Edward Said, "The clash of definitions", in *Reflections on Exile* (2000). London: Granta.
3. Emphasis (in italics) in the original: ([www.fpoe.at/fpoe/bundesgst/programm/chapter4.htm](http://www.fpoe.at/fpoe/bundesgst/programm/chapter4.htm)) accessed 14 August 2003.



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**Part 1**

**Connexity and self**





## 1. Global culture, deterritorialisation and the cosmopolitanism of youth culture

*John Tomlinson*

### Introduction: globalisation as “connectivity”

In what follows I want to think about the relationship between the globalisation process and that complex human condition we call “culture”, and conclude with some implications for “youth culture”. First, however, I will briefly indicate what I understand by the ubiquitous but much misunderstood term “globalisation”. Globalisation is a complex process because it involves rapid social change that is occurring simultaneously across a number of dimensions – in the world economy, in politics, in communications, in the physical environment and in culture – and each of these transformations interacts with the others. It is a complicated process at a very high level of generality, and this makes it difficult to grasp in its entirety. There are, moreover, all sorts of difficult and controversial theoretical issues concerning its causality, historical and geographical sources, relationship to other concepts like modernity and postmodernity, social consequences and differential impact. It is this complexity and, indeed, the inherent difficulties of empirical enquiry on this scale that have been responsible for many of the unresolved debates in this area, and the adoption of polarised and politically entrenched pro- and anti-positions.

However, at its core, there is a something going on which is quite simple to describe – and I will call this a process of accelerating “connectivity” (Tomlinson 1999). By this I mean that globalisation refers, fundamentally, to the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependencies that characterise social, economic and cultural life in modern societies. At its most basic, globalisation is quite simply a description of these networks and their implications – for instance in the various flows of capital, commodities, people, knowledge, information and ideas, crime, pollution, diseases, fashions, beliefs, images and so on – across international boundaries. This increasing connectivity is, in some ways, an obvious aspect of our lives. It is something we can all, at least in developed societies, recognise in everyday practices in our use of communications technologies – mobile phones, computers, email, the Internet – in the built environment we inhabit, in the sort of food we eat, in the way we earn our livings, and in the way we entertain ourselves. It is obvious that we are living in a much more globally “connected” world today than even thirty or forty years ago. But what does this all mean culturally? Does it mean, as many people suppose, we are inevitably being drawn together, for good or ill, into a single global culture?



-----> **A global culture?**

One reason why people believe globalisation will lead to a single global culture is that they see the effects of connectivity in other spheres, particularly in the economic sphere, producing an integrated system. Whereas it was in the past possible to understand social and economic processes and practices as a set of local, relatively “independent” phenomena, globalisation makes the world, to quote Roland Robertson (1992), a “single place”. Obvious examples of this are the way in which the economic affairs of nation states are locked into a complex global capitalist economic system that restricts the autonomy of individual states, or how the environmental effects of local industrial processes can rapidly become global problems.

However, increasing global connectivity by no means necessarily implies that the world is becoming either economically or politically “unified”. Despite the reach of globalisation, few would dare to claim that its effects currently extend in any profound way to every single person or place on the planet, and speculation on its spread must surely be tempered by the many countervailing trends towards social, political and indeed cultural division that we see around us. This is a point that is frequently made by theorists of development; what used to be called the “Third World” does not partake of the globalised economy or of globalised communications in the same way as the developed world. So we have to qualify the idea of globalisation by saying that it is an uneven process, with areas of concentration and density of flow and other areas of neglect or even exclusion (Massey 1994). Globalisation, it seems, is not quite so global! Despite this, there persists, at least amongst western critics, a tendency to think about globalisation as the production of a single all-encompassing “global culture”. To understand this tendency, I believe we have to place it in a long historical context of the imagination of a unified world: as a form of cultural universalism. Therefore I will consider, very briefly, three examples of this sort of imagination and suggest that they have more in common than at first appears.

My first example predates the current phase of globalising modernity, originating from thirteenth-century Europe: a representation of a unified world in cartographic form, a “Mappa Mundi”.

-----> **Imaginary one: the Ebstorf Mappa Mundi**

The Ebstorf Mappa Mundi, dating from 1284 and attributed to the English cartographer Gervase of Tilbury, is, like most early medieval European world maps, a mixture of topography and theology. The sources of such cartographic imagination are complex, drawing on Aristotelian notions of form and the more directly topographical style of Roman imperial maps. What is most striking is the complete domination of the representation by elements of Christian theology. Jerusalem, the Holy City, is placed at the centre, and the orientation of the map places the east at the top, where is also depicted the Garden of Eden, scene of God’s creation of mankind. The tripartite division of the map is inspired by the Biblical story of the repopulation of the earth after the Deluge by Noah’s three sons, Ham, Shem and Japheth. These elements obviously reinforce Christian myths of origin, and in so doing represent the world as “unified” within the faith of Christianity. Most striking of all is the binding force of the figure of the crucified Christ – seen in the Mappa Mundi only in the head, hands and feet, literally embracing the world and giving it life from the cross.



Here, then, we find a very early, pre-modern example of an imagined, theologically revealed “globalism”. The problem with it, as is all too evident to us from our vantage point in history, is the entirely spurious nature of its universal pretensions. Just as the medieval cartographer ignored – or was ignorant of – the rival claims of the non-Christian world (of the Islamic Ummah, of Buddhism or Confucianism, for instance) many universalising narratives seem to work by ignoring or, worse, denigrating cultural difference. Slavoj Žižek points to the peculiarly exclusive nature of the universalising tendencies of Christianity:

In other “particularistic” religions (and even in Islam, in spite of its global expansionism), there is at least a place for others, they are tolerated, even if they are condescendingly looked upon. The Christian motto, “all men are brothers”, however, means also that, “Those who are not my brothers are not men”. Christians usually praise themselves for overcoming the Jewish exclusivist notion of the Chosen People and encompassing all of humanity – the catch here is that, in their very insistence that they are the “Chosen People” with the privileged direct link to God, Jews accept the humanity of the other people who celebrate their false gods, while Christian universalism tendentially excludes non-believers from the very universality of mankind. (Žižek, 2001: 144)

Though Žižek has a point here – at the level of Christian dogma – we have to be careful, of course, not to suppose that the practice of all Christians is so exclusive. For on the liberal wing of Christian ecumenism there are clearly inclusivist sympathies that shade into forms of internationalism barely distinguishable from secular humanism in their implicit conditions of membership. As Terry Eagleton reminds us, many other cultures have denied the status of “human being” to strangers; therefore, “One should not be ethnocentric about ethnocentricity” (Eagleton 2000: 57).

The point to press is that this tendency towards unwarranted universalising, or the tendency of what we might call particular cultures to masquerade as universal ones, is not restricted either to religious worldviews or to “pre-modern” cultures, but can be seen at the core of European Enlightenment rational modernity. The privileging of the western cultural experience along with its particular version of rationality and its cultural and political values over that of the rest of the world can be seen in cosmopolitan thinkers from Kant onwards. In his seminal text on cosmopolitanism, Kant not only looks back to classical Greece and Rome, but forwards, speculatively, to a time when the continent of Europe “will probably legislate [...] for all the others”.<sup>1</sup> It is not just that one or other particular cultural imagination projects itself towards universality; but that a particularly influential one at the heart of the global transition towards modernity does so. For my second example, therefore, I want to move six hundred years forward to a European thinker who, though quite distinct in his political-economic views, none the less stands in the same Enlightenment-Cosmopolitan tradition as Kant.

### -----> **Imaginary two: *The Communist Manifesto***

Perhaps the most vivid imagination of a global culture from a nineteenth-century thinker was Karl Marx’s depiction of a future communist society. In his various writings on the nature of communism,<sup>2</sup> Marx presents a particularly bold picture of a world in which the divisions of nations have disappeared, along with all other particular, “local” attachments, including religious beliefs. It is a world with a universal language, a world literature and cosmopolitan cultural tastes. Thus in



*The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels write in a way that seems to anticipate the current globalisation process:

In the place of the old wants satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In the place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature. (Marx and Engels [1848] 1969: 52-53)

But Marx combines this vision with a deeply Eurocentric attitude to other cultures. He welcomes the way in which the bourgeois era sweeps away pre-modern “civilisations” on the way to the coming revolution and the communist era that, he insists, “can only have a ‘world-historical’ existence”. To this end, Marx is quite happy to see the destruction of non-European cultures. The manifesto continues:

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians’ intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. (Marx and Engels [1848] 1969: 53)

The fact is that Marx was a convinced cosmopolitan, an internationalist who despised nationalism as a reactionary force in all societies, set against the true cosmopolitan interests of the proletariat, the “workers of the world”. But for all his progressive views and the brilliance and percipience of his political economy, his view of culture was firmly rooted in a European tradition which, following Kant, Hegel and others, unquestioningly took its own experience as the pattern for universal experience. Indeed, it might be argued that it was this Eurocentric cast of Marx’s thought which led him to underestimate the enduring power of ethnic and religious attachments (or their transformation into nationalism) in the modern era. Marx’s universalising modernism was, in a curious way, as blind to cultural difference as the universalising Christianity of the medieval mapmaker.

Marx’s views, formed in the mid-nineteenth century – similarly turbulent and dynamic period of global capitalist expansion as our own – remain relevant today, though not in the form that he might have imagined. For what he saw as an ultimately benign aspect of the progress of transnational capitalism, which he argues “must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere” as an agent of historical change, appears to today’s cultural critics as precisely the reverse. Marx was unabashedly optimistic about globality; by contrast, today’s neo-Marxists are intensely pessimistic. Perhaps the dominant cultural perspective on globalisation today is the fear that globality will bring not unity but merely uniformity: a “homogenisation” of culture deriving precisely from the triumph of capitalist commodification.

-----> **Imagination three: “McWorld”**

This brings me to my final example: the sort of dystopian scenario captured in Benjamin Barber’s term, “McWorld”:

McWorld is an entertainment shopping experience that brings together malls, multiplex movie theatres, theme parks, spectator sports arenas, fast-food chains (with their endless movie tie-ins) and television (with its burgeoning shopping networks) into a single vast enterprise that, on the way to maximising its profits, transforms human beings. (Barber 1995: 97)



What Barber's formulation summarises is a widespread contemporary assumption that globalisation implies a global culture as a form of cultural imperialism: the spread of western-capitalist (particularly American) culture to every part of the globe, and the consequent threat of a loss of distinct non-western cultural traditions. What is feared is the total domination of global culture through the unopposed advance of formulaic Hollywood movies, rock music, consumer goods and fast food: Disney, Coca-Cola, Marlboro, Microsoft, McDonald's, CNN, Nike, etc. This is what the American neo-Marxist critic, the late Herbert Schiller, characterised as "homogenized North Atlantic cultural slop", and what the film maker Bernardo Bertolucci with even more disdain referred to as "a dreadful American mono-culture, a kind of totalitarianism of culture" (in Tomlinson 1997: 125, 130).

Of course, these fears are not without grounds. Take any index, from clothes to food to music to film and television to architecture (the list is only limited by what one wants to include as "cultural") and there is no ignoring the fact that certain styles, brands, tastes and practices can be encountered virtually anywhere in the world. But what does this distribution of uniform cultural goods actually signify, other than the power of some capitalist firms to command wide markets for their products around the world? Well, if we assume that the sheer global presence of these goods is in itself a sign of a convergence towards a single capitalist culture, we are probably utilising a rather impoverished concept of culture – one that reduces a "culture" merely to its material goods. If culture, at its root, is the production and the experience of meaning through symbolisation, the thesis of global cultural convergence must contain the idea that people's interaction with these goods penetrates deeply into the way in which we construct our "cultural worlds" and make sense of our lives.

The problem with the cultural imperialism argument, in most of its manifestations,<sup>3</sup> is that it merely assumes such a penetration: it makes a leap of inference from the simple presence of cultural goods to the attribution of deeper cultural or ideological effects. This assumption has to be treated with scepticism because it ignores the hermeneutic nature of cultural appropriation. Culture simply does not transfer in a unilinear way. Movement between cultural/geographical areas always involves interpretation, translation, mutation, adaptation and "indigenisation" as the recipient culture brings its own cultural resources to bear, in dialectical fashion, upon "cultural imports" (Lull 2000). Eating McDonald's hamburgers, smoking Marlboro cigarettes and drinking Coke may be bad for you in all sorts of ways, but they do not in themselves provide much evidence of a capitulation to western cultural values. One of the less noticed implications of the current wave of anti-western terrorism is precisely the demonstration of the resilience of cultural opposition. Indeed, Terry Eagleton is not wide of the mark when he argues, provocatively:

Globally speaking, it does not look as though the West is particularly well placed to win the culture wars [...] If high culture is too rarefied to be an effective political force, much postmodernism is too brittle, rootless and depoliticized. Neither shows up particularly well when compared to Islam, for which culture is historically rooted and inescapably political. It is also a form of life for which considerable numbers of people are prepared to die, which may not be a wise policy, but which is more than can be said for Mozart and Madonna (Eagleton 2000: 81)

What all this suggests, then, is that arguments which extrapolate from the global ubiquity of capitalist consumer goods or western media products to the vision of an unopposed, uniform, homogenised western-capitalist culture are to be



doubted precisely because they trade on an impoverished concept of culture and an inadequate grasp of the often refractory nature of the cultural process. Perhaps we can now see the inner logic that unites the three different imaginations of a global culture I have sketched. It is a question of perspective. What unites the medieval map maker, the nineteenth-century political economist and twentieth- and twenty-first century critics of cultural imperialism is that they all extrapolate and generalise from one particular cultural experience to a global fate. The issue is not therefore one of cultural optimism or pessimism, but, as it were, of the available sources of a global imagination. In the following section I will suggest that these sources may actually be changing as a result of the impact of globalising forces, and that the example of contemporary youth culture provides some of the most vivid illustrations of these changes.

-----> **Deterritorialisation**

The implication of the foregoing is that we need to re-think the impact of globalisation in the cultural sphere. If we have inherited a tendency to assume either utopian or dystopian visions of “globality”, it is becoming clear that these visions are not only ethnocentric, they are, partly because of this, poor predictions of actual cultural developments. The lesson to be drawn is that we may need to approach cultural processes not via the macro perspective of globality, but precisely the opposite way, by understanding the effects of globalisation as they are felt within particular localities.

The vast majority of us live local lives, but globalisation is rapidly changing our experience of this “locality”, and one way of grasping this change is in the idea of deterritorialisation. As Nestor Garcia Canclini describes it, deterritorialisation implies “the loss of the ‘natural’ relation of culture to geographical and social territories” (1995: 229). Deterritorialisation, then, means that the significance of the geographical location of a culture – not only the physical, environmental and climatic location, but all the self-definitions, clear ethnic boundaries and delimiting practices that have accrued around this – is eroding. No longer is culture so “tied” to the constraints of local circumstances. What this implies, it is important to grasp, is not that globalisation therefore destroys localities. Localities, on the contrary, thrive in globalisation. This is the source of that often-noted paradox that globalisation tends to produce intensities in ethnic identification, even to the point of the violent contesting of localities along ethnic lines (Kaldor 1999). However, the connectivity of globalisation also ensures that cultural experience is in various ways “lifted out” of its traditional “anchoring” in particular localities as the places we live in are increasingly penetrated by the flows of culture.

Certainly, we continue to live in places that retain a high degree of cultural distinctiveness. London clearly has its own cultural “feel” quite different from that of Budapest or Beijing. The crucial point is that this particularity is no longer the most important determinant of our cultural experience. The impact of globalisation is to change the very texture of locality. This deterritorialising aspect of globalisation is felt in very ordinary everyday practices: as we push our trolleys around the aisles of global foods in local supermarkets; as we visit local Italian, Mexican, Thai, Indian or Japanese restaurants; as we settle down in our living rooms to watch American soap operas, news coverage of a bombing in Tel Aviv or a Samoa versus England match in the Rugby World Cup in Australia; as we casually phone friends on other continents, aware of their distance only in terms of a time difference; or as we search Google instead of visiting the local public library. These activities are now so taken



for granted in the affluent, developed parts of the world that they seem almost too trivial to consider as signalling deep cultural transformations. Yet they do. It is through such changes that globalisation reaches deep into our cultural *umwelt*, the implicit sense we all have of our relevant environment, our understanding of what counts as home and abroad, our horizon of cultural and moral relevance, even our sense of cultural and national identity (Tomlinson 1999: 113 ff., 2003).

It is within youth culture that we can see some of the most striking examples of these changes, for instance in the sort of “hybrid” cultural identifications that have emerged around popular music forms like hip-hop (Gilroy 1993: 33 ff.). These complex transmutations of cultural practices and forms as they pass rapidly and effortlessly across national boundaries through the transnational cultural economy perhaps provide a figure for a future “globalised popular culture”. They are different in character from the integrating, “essentialising” nature of national cultures in being more loosely textured, more protean and relatively indifferent to the maintenance of sharp discriminations of cultural origin and belonging. I recently examined a PhD at the University of London, the subject of which was contemporary Korean popular music culture. What dominates the youth music scene in Korea, it seems, are various versions of hip-hop and rap music – appropriations of Black American forms. At first glance this looked to me like a pretty dismal situation. Nothing, so far as I could see, remained of an authentic Korean cultural identity in the music itself. Indeed some of the musicians actually denigrated attempts to make the music more distinctively – that is to say harmoniously – Korean, describing this as “bubble gum rap” in comparison to the more aggressive Black American version that they wished to emulate.

I quickly came to realise, however, that the attraction of this music was precisely in its not being Korean. The young hip-hop performers and fans valued the intrinsic internationalism of hip-hop culture as a means of protest against the rather strict traditional work-oriented national cultural values of their parents’ generation. Here then was an example of active deterritorialisation, of the dissolution of the link between culture and place, the escape from tradition, seen as a sort of liberation. Of course we should not read too much into this example. It is unlikely that the bonds of nationality will be so easily broken, and some of the young Korean hip-hop rebels of today, like their western hippy counterparts in the 1960s, may be tomorrow’s cultural conservatives. But there is none the less the indication of a significant shift in the horizon of relevance here, of an increasing cultural openness and, perhaps, just the beginnings of a more cosmopolitan sensibility within globalised youth culture.

-----> **The cosmopolitanism of anti-globalisation**

To conclude, I want to raise the possibility that a virtue of deterritorialisation may lie in the potential it has to generate a cosmopolitan outlook arising from what the late Edward Said described as a “post-territorial identity” that is not tied to the narrow agendas of nationalist, ethnic or sectarian identifications. The cultural accomplishments of a non-ethnocentric cosmopolitan sensibility are derivable from the critique of globalism I have offered in under the heading “A global culture?”; they include the ongoing suspicion of universalising narratives and the cultivation of a hermeneutic disposition sensitive to, but unencumbered by, the ties of locality and particularity. What I want to suggest is that we can see some signs of this in another instance of globalised youth culture, that is to say, in the anti-globalisation movement itself.



It has often been remarked that one of the ironies of the anti-globalisation movement is that it is an integral part of globalisation. At one level, of course, this is simply a play on terminology: whilst the target of the anti-globalisationists is what in shorthand may be called the “top-down”, corporate globalisation of the multinationals and the dominant nation states, there is clearly a wider connectivity involved which embraces the “bottom-up” globalisation of INGOs like Greenpeace, Amnesty International and the global anti-capitalist movements. But there is a rather deeper, less formalistic, implication of this situation, and this is what I have in mind in referring to the intrinsic cosmopolitanism of the anti-globalisation movement. This cosmopolitanism is not necessarily explicit in the political programmes of the anti-globalisation movement, but it exists both in the network organisation of the movement and in the forms of “deterritorialised identities” which may be emerging among the activists.

As Shepard and Hayduk (2002: 1) claim, the anti-WTO protestors in Seattle comprised “a radical coalition of students, youth, feminists, environmental, labour, anarchist, queer and human rights activists”. It is pretty obvious – from the symbolic content of the trashing of McDonald’s or Starbucks outlets for example – that the protests were as much against the available, branded, gendered, identity positions of consumer capitalism as against global inequality or environmental damage. Accounts by activists (see Boyd 2002), moreover, typically stress the “identity affirming” nature of these congregations of “new tribes” (Maffesoli 1996). It seems to me that the possibility of cosmopolitanism depends crucially on some such shift in identity. Clearly a progressive, democratic regime of global governance is hard to imagine without changes in the institutional framework of the nation state system as it currently exists, and this in turn implies a radical shift in political orientation involving new, experienced allegiances to democratic transnational political formations: to new cosmopolitan cultural identities (Cheah and Robbins 1998). This is certainly a daunting task, and it is not encouraged by the turn in global relations following the events of 11 September 2001. However, encouraging in the longer run are precisely the indications in the (largely youth-based) anti-globalisation movement, if not of a coherent political project, at least of an emergent post-territorial cultural sensibility. It is on the basis of this sort of cultural shift that a future form of progressive cosmopolitan politics may perhaps one day be built.

#### Endnotes

1. Kant (1784): “The idea of a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view”, quoted in Derrida, J (2002), “Ethics, institutions and the right to philosophy”, p. 7. In this text, based on a lecture given under the auspices of Unesco, Derrida suggests that Kant’s writings can be understood as “predicting, prefiguring and prescribing” modern international institutions like Unesco.
2. Marx’s speculations about the coming communist society are scattered throughout his writings and he generally resisted providing a systematic account so as to distance himself from what he saw as naive “Utopian socialism” not grounded in historical materialism. None the less in *The Communist Manifesto* and elsewhere he offers many concrete examples of what life in communism might be like. See Ollmann (1979) for a discussion.
3. For detailed discussions see Tomlinson 1991, 1997, 1999, 79 ff; and Thompson 1995.



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## 2. Diasporic spatiality, difference and the question of identity

Avtar Brah

For some decades now, there has been much contestation over the question of difference, diversity and the problematic of identity. We have deconstructed these categories every which way we can, so much so that passing references to these issues are now commonplace. Yet they continue to generate debate in the academic world no less than in politics, and consensus about their meaning is far from imminent. One area where agreement is elusive concerns the problematic of theorising “alterity” and “identity” against the weight of recent decades of deconstructionist, poststructuralist, feminist, postcolonial, and anti-racist critiques. The question remains: to what extent have we succeeded in displacing the self-referential “sameness” at the heart of several centuries of “modernity” with a vision of multiple and “situated” ways of seeing, hearing, knowing and feeling? In the light of recent events such as the Iraqi war, how ready are we to tune-in to other stories and temporalities without “Othering” those who articulate them? In what ways might conceptual categories of space and time throw light on “real life” social and cultural formations of place and mobility in varying and variable contexts?

### -----> Difference in identity

Questions of difference, diversity and identity are central to examining these questions. The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a plethora of critiques of modernity that served to interrogate the ways in which the Enlightenment *cogito* of rationalism could legitimate its highly particular and subjective outlook as a universal and objective worldview. Despite these contestations, this worldview continues to thrive. Indeed, it may be argued that it found its apotheosis in the Iraq war and we are still living with its fall-out. The issues involved, however, are far more complex than a straightforward case of the binary between the “West and the Rest”. On the contrary, once the discourse of rationalism (as opposed to the faculty of reasoning which all humans possess) is established, it begins to circulate globally, being selectively appropriated and used by all manner of groups seeking to justify their interests and projects through the rhetoric of rationality, democracy and justice. The stakes in the analysis of “difference” are indeed high. The problem is that the term means different things to different people.

How to conceptualise alterity and difference is a subject that has exercised scholars of philosophy, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, politics and science. Reams have been written within each discipline, attributing its specific meanings



to these terms. If these critiques have any validity, the concept of difference itself is not pre-given but rather, following Michel Foucault, comprises a constitutive moment in the formation of these academic disciplines. The epistemological drive to differentiate, classify and construct typologies of difference, whether relating to fauna and flora or to groups of people (species, orders, classes, sexes, sexualities or races, for example), which has formed a major feature of “modern” *episteme* is, thus, itself a ruse of power. Knowledge is not power, as is sometimes claimed, in and of itself. Instead, what is at stake is the configuration of processes whereby knowledge is constructed, legitimated, disseminated and deployed.

Differential modalities of power circulate and flow in the interstices of processes underpinning discursive formations, institutional practices, emotional landscapes and the exigencies of human existence. Power and regimes of knowledge imbricate with specific socio-economic, political and cultural institutions and practices, and together they mark specific bodies, subjects, subjectivities and agencies. We are constituted as subjects – American, European, South Asian, East Asian, black, white, man, woman, hetero/gay/lesbian/trans/bisexual, and so on – in and through historically specific dynamics of power in particular contexts. None of these are neutral categories. The question of European identities – always an unsettled and unsettling question – is intimately tied with discourses and social practices which both constitute and represent us as differently and differentially positioned subjects within and across different modalities of power.

Power, as we know, is immanent within all social, cultural, emotional and psychic processes. The point therefore is not whether a certain “difference” exists a priori. Rather, it concerns the way in which under given historical circumstances an arbitrary signifier – a colour, a body, a religious creed, a social arrangement or custom, or a set of cultural practices – assumes particular meanings; that is, it becomes a certain kind of difference etched within asymmetrical power relations with specific outcomes and effects.

Deployment of the word “difference” as a concept in order to analyse the foregoing sets of phenomena is beset with difficulties. In part, the problem is inherent in language itself, in so far as the words we use as concepts are simultaneously used as part of everyday acts of communication. We tend to assume that we all know what commonly used terms such as difference and identity actually mean. Of course, there is a sense in which this is partially true. These terms could not have become part of everyday lived culture if this were not the case. But it is important to bear in mind that by the time a word becomes part of what Gramsci calls our “commonsense”, it has already been refracted through multiple mediations and is not “transparently” knowable; certainly, it cannot mean the same thing to everyone in precisely the same way. Understandably, then, commonsense terminology is likely to become even more opaque when converted into theoretical concepts.

Correspondingly, clarity is impaired by the all too common conflation of theoretical concepts and the phenomena they are designed to analyse. A significant implication of this for scholars is that we try as far as possible to clearly indicate the precise sense in which a concept is being mobilised. Additionally, there is the classic issue of reification. It is amazing how easy it is to reify and slide from treating fluid and continually changing phenomena to that which we heuristically define as economic, political, cultural, psychological or psychic, as if they were always already existing objects things or structures. Again, this calls for continual vigilance, not least in the conceptual use of “commonsense” terms such as difference.



The need to rethink the idea and concept of difference remains important for both political and analytical reasons. Politically, it is important that we continually address and challenge practices that subordinate, suppress, oppress or exploit people deemed to be “unacceptably different”. Constructions and representations of difference, which are used to legitimise such practices as racism, sexism, homophobia, class inequity and inequality, rape, torture, massacre and genocide in the name of politics must be designated unacceptable. But they are all linked phenomena, with particular manifestations in given contexts. Understanding these contingent linkages is critical. We need an everyday politics geared to help generate “dialogic imaginations”, to quote Bakhtin, and “dreams” *à la* Martin Luther King Jr., Tony Morrison, Arundhati Roy and Bapsi Sidhwa, which foster networks of solidarity and connectivity without erasing the uniqueness of others. Equally, we require conceptual tools that will enhance our understanding of psychosocial and cultural processes, and shed light on constructive ways towards the regeneration of ethics capable of dealing with problems without falling into simplistic relativism.

Such intricacies of intersecting processes mean that the notion of difference cannot be analysed within the confines of a single academic discipline: its very complexity reveals the limits of disciplinary boundaries. Yet interdisciplinary study is not without its own difficulties, since the concept of difference is associated with varied and sometimes conflicting meanings within different theoretical frameworks and subject disciplines. Bringing them together into conversation (a task that I have found singularly productive) may, however, lead to “talking at cross-purposes” unless the distinctive meaning of concepts within differing academic or political fields and the use to which they are put in a given “creolised theoretical complex” are spelt out, appreciated and understood. In sociology, for example, the concept of class difference has particular resonance over and above intra-disciplinary differences, such as the Weberian or Marxian usage of the term. In the fields of philosophy and political theory the concept of difference has served as the site for developing a critique of the nature of modern western thought with the aim, *inter alia*, of decentering the concept of identity associated with the notion of a unified, self-referencing, logocentric, universal subject of “Reason”.

Within linguistics and literary theory, the concept has played its part in the critique of structuralism. Poststructuralist theories of difference draw upon insights from philosophy and theories of language in rethinking the very process of signification. In anthropology and the emergent field of cultural studies, attention is centred on the problematic of cultural difference. In feminist theory, the concept of difference has been productively utilised in interrogating differences within the category woman – differences of class, ethnicity, generation and so on. In psychoanalysis, difference signals the trauma of separation, an ongoing process throughout adulthood but one that is set in train when a baby first sees its own and mother’s reflection and “(mis)recognises” “self” as different from “(m)other”. In postcolonial and anti-racist theory the idea of difference has been theorised as the relationship of “metropolis” and “colony” as mutually constitutive elements; that is, they are both relationally altered by colonialism and imperialism. On the other hand, there are essentialist constructions of difference. An example of this would be the discourse of race as a basis for dividing humanity into categories of inherent, immutable difference, the effects of which may be witnessed in the multifarious processes of racism.



This partial and far from exhaustive list of different academic/intellectual discourses of difference has a special bearing on the analytical frame for the study of alterity with which I have been trying to work, in that it draws on insights from these various sources. This frame operates with a complex of concepts designed to address questions of subjectivity and identity in their mutually constitutive entanglements with socio-economic, political and cultural processes, which, in our era, entail encounters with late capitalist social relations. This analytical complex includes a specific way of theorising difference/identity, and the concept of diaspora space, which encapsulates the articulation of three other concepts, namely, diaspora, border and politics of location.

As noted above, the problematic of difference is also the problematic of identity. Here Derrida's singularly innovative concept of *différance* is especially helpful with its simultaneous invocation of "differ" and "deferral". Identity, then, is always in process, never an absolutely accomplished fact. This does not mean that the human subject cannot or indeed does not feel that s/he has identity. Analytically, however, the problematic is to tease out or deconstruct what it means when a subject refers to "having identity". The first point of interest here concerns the way in which the term is being used. For example, is the term being employed to highlight unconscious processes that go into the construction of subjectivity, or is the term employed to foreground political identity? This distinction is crucial even though the two modalities of identity are far from mutually exclusive. In the former case, inner workings of the subconscious and the unconscious are paramount, and identity connotes latent processes of psychological investments in culturally specific social ways of doing things. So, for instance, a woman may have deep investments in conforming to the ideal of a good woman or alternatively she may have far more at stake, emotionally, in following feminist ideals, which may clash with certain social norms.

Processes involved in the constitution of subjectivity are marked by contradictory processes of identification, projection, disavowal, desire and ambivalence. When a person proclaims a specific identity, this is a conscious action seeking to make sense of "self" in relation to the lived "social" through the relative opaqueness of inner conflicts of psychic life. In this sense, identity is always decentred and fragmented. To the extent that any conscious claim to identity is both socially and psychically contingent, the coherence and centred quality of self that is invoked is a deferral of difference, as Stuart Hall has so cogently and persuasively argued for many years. On the other hand, political identities are by definition attempts at creating shared, common goals through conscious agency. The two need to be distinguished in analysis even as they are virtually impossible to separate in life. There is no simple one-to-one relationship between the "social" and the "psychic", but the two are none the less mutually interconnected. Despite the many critiques of Althusser's work, his conception of how individuals are "interpellated" or "hailed into place" as subjects through the irreducible articulation of psychic and historically-specific institutional sites remains illuminating (Brah and Coombes 2000).

How might we simultaneously hold on to social, cultural and psychic dimensions in our analysis of the problematic of difference/identity? I have tried to do this in part by analysing difference along four intersecting axes:

- Difference, theorised as social relation in the sociological sense, taking on board the systemic and recursive structures, policies, forces and dynamics of power. This axis foregrounds economic, social and political aspects concerning how, for example, class or gender differences are constructed, or



how a black and white body is attributed different meanings in a context of unequal power relations such as those in transatlantic slavery.

- Difference, explored in terms of human experience. Here, following a long-standing feminist debate, the concept of experience is addressed, not in terms of some notion of transparency of “knowing”, but rather along the lines of considering experience as a way of narrating the symbolic representations (both individual and collective) of material life.
- Difference understood as subjectivity, taking on board emotional life and unconscious processes as well as conscious agency. In order to understand these processes, one has to employ psychoanalysis as well as Foucault’s notion of discourse and micrologies of power.
- Difference analysed in terms of its relationship to formations of identity, distinguishing social/political identities from processes of subjectivity.

This approach (Brah 1996) relies on insights from different theoretical traditions. This is made necessary by the complexity of the task of understanding intersectionality between and across multiple fields of power such as class, gender, racism, caste, ethnicity and nationalism. Identity, as Michael Taussig (1993) emphasises, is a relationship, not a thing. By definition the socio-cultural and emotional/psychological elements are simultaneously interconnected in this relationship. A related issue concerns the multiplicity of processes of “Otherness” implicated in social contexts, such as the “Othering” of different categories: women, black people, Muslims, Gypsies or Jews. The idea of the “Other” is also a frequently invoked term in contemporary writing. It is often used as if its meaning is self-evident when in fact it can signify different things in different discourses. As noted above, in psychoanalysis “otherness” is inherent in the critical moment when an infant begins to construct her/his own self-image as separate and distinct from another. This moment of self-recognition or “identity” emerges from a look “from the place of the other”, in this case the mother. Self and other are understood as continually enmeshed from then onwards and become the site of love, hate, envy, pleasure, desire and ambivalence.

The psychoanalytic meaning of “other” is distinct from that associated with the term “Other” in discussions of social phenomena such as capitalism or colonialism. The latter usage primarily denotes analysis of economic, political and cultural institutions and practices through which specific subjects were constructed as innately different or inferior. In the discussion of social relations, especially class, the term “otherness” refers to discourses and practices associated with class differentiations. Stuart Hall (1996) makes an innovative intervention in this debate when he urges the use of the concept of articulation (things are connected as much by their difference as similarity) by way of bringing discourse analysis into fruitful conversation with psychoanalysis. He makes use of articulation to underscore “the notion that an effective suturing of the subject to subject-position requires, not only that the subject is ‘hailed’, but that the subject invests in the position” (Hall and Du Gay 1996: 6).

In a psychological sense, sameness is impossible. We become human through our sense of unique otherness. In a cultural sense, we need to develop non-oppositional notions of similarity and difference. The “subject” of subjectivity – one that we encounter in art, music, dance, in moments when we laugh, mourn or sleep – may be elusive but not absent when we act in the world as politicians,



economists or policy makers. Social/political identities are more powerful because of psychic investments, although this is not always a fully acknowledged dimension of social life.

-----> **Identity as diasporised time-space**

The facet of identity that general “identity talk” most frequently employs is that of social/political identity. It is evident that in so far as it is a cultural phenomenon, social identity is intrinsic to social interaction. Political identities are constituted in the process of bringing issues into the public arena. In saying this, I do not wish to endorse the public/private binary that feminist scholars have so convincingly critiqued. I merely wish to indicate that political identities are constructed in the attempt to secure consensus over the aims of a political project. Hence, in large part, formation of political identities belongs to the arena of conscious action. Confusion in academic and public discourses arises, however, when the idea of conscious agency subsumes processes of subjectivity or what is going on in the emotional landscape of the individual or the collectivity. I have come across strong opposition to poststructuralist notions of identity as de-centred, fragmented and in process, on the grounds that such a conception does not provide a basis for political action. In reality, the idea of identity as fragmented refers predominantly to the processes of subjectivity, and not necessarily to conscious political action, although conscious action is always marked by “interior” emotional investments, ruptures and contradictions. Jane Flax (1991) makes a helpful distinction between a “sense of coherent self” that all subjects need for purposeful action, and the idea of an essential core that a human is born with and which merely flowers in the fullness of time. Unconscious life continually articulates with conscious action, making voluntaristic notions of agency quite problematic.

Conscious agency and unconscious subjective forces are enmeshed in the everyday rituals of eating, shopping, watching television, listening to music, attending political meetings or other social activities. These rituals provide the site on which a sense of belonging – a sense of “identity” – may be forged in the process of articulating its difference from other people’s way of doing things. I have called this desire to belong a “homing desire” (Brah 1996). But the way in which these differences are understood is what shapes the social outcome. It depends on whether such differences are experienced simply as unproblematic ways of doing things differently or invested with valuations and emotions of hierarchy and unacceptability, in other words, seen as a threat to one’s way of life. Such ordinary ways of being at once similar and different can thus become politicised so that fluid, mobile and shifting boundaries, that in one case merely signal a particular specificity, can now congeal into rigid and impervious boundaries of immutable difference.

In terms of our identifications (or contra-identifications, for that matter), we are all diasporised across multiple social and psychic “borders”, and the homing desire is a desire for security and belonging. The political question is how we help create socio-economic and political conditions that are conducive to the nurture of caring and empathetic subjectivities. My thinking about diasporicity across space and time is embedded in the memory of an incident in my undergraduate days in California when I was studying Einstein’s theory of relativity alongside poetry. I was fascinated by common insights and thematics in these two very different discourses of physics and poetry. Recently, I went back to the theory of



relativity that I find fascinating but still hugely difficult to fathom. But this time, something that Einstein says made a different kind of sense: “I wished to show that space-time is not necessarily something to which one can ascribe a separate existence, independently of the actual objects of physical reality. Physical objects are not *in space*, but these objects are *spatially extended*. In this way the concept ‘empty space’ loses its meaning” (1961: 2)

Space then does not exist outside of its conditions of existence, outside the meanings it assumes in discursive practices. Einstein is referring to physical objects, but his ideas seem to apply also to human subjects. If the metaphor of space-time is to serve as an analytical tool, it is necessary to specify the specific conditions under which particular spatialities and temporalities assume particular configurations of power. A focus upon the spatiality of global relations today, for example, draws attention to the varied discourses of globalisation emanating from a wide range of sources from the high citadels of the IMF, World Bank and corporate capital, through political discourses of nation states, to the voices of environmentalists and other campaigners, and to the narratives of displacement by refugees, asylum seekers and labour migrants. These different discourses need to be distinguished. As Doreen Massey (Amin, Massey and Thrift 2000) argues, some discourses of globalisation ignore economic and political forces that treat people as disposable labour, and subject large sections of the world’s population to poverty, hunger and disenfranchisement. Faced with the uncertainties unleashed by radical social change, people become relatively more susceptible to appeals to political discourses of identity such as patriotism. Few of us are impervious to the emotional undertones of the discourse of “my people”. It is not surprising, therefore, when appeals to essentialist forms of group-identity lead to situations of conflict all over the world.

### -----> **Diaspora space**

In my work, I have been trying to analyse the politics of difference. Under what circumstances do essentialist nationalisms become the order of the day? What fosters bonds of solidarity and connectivity? Such questions foreground the simultaneous importance of locality and transnational movements – of people, capital, commodities, information, technologies, signs and symbols – in contemporary identity formations. I address the intersectionality involved in this multi-directional traffic through the concept of diaspora space, which encapsulates the analysis of identity and difference outlined above.

Some of the main features of the overall framework are as follows:

- It distinguishes between diaspora as a conceptual tool and the historical/contemporary experiences of migration and dispersion, emphasising the need to specify not only who travels, but when, how and under what circumstances emigration or immigration takes place. As a conceptual tool, diaspora must address both the internal heterogeneity of historical and contemporary diasporas (in terms of gender, for instance) and the forms of heterogeneity and stratification extant within the receiving society.
- The concept of diaspora is theorised in terms of a Foucauldian “genealogy” that has been reworked through psychoanalytic, feminist, and Marxian/sociological insights. This is a genealogy that takes seriously both the systemic formations of social inequity and inequality and the contingent articulation of subjectivity and agency. It reconfigures the concept of agency not merely through concepts of the subject and subject position, important



though these are, but also through attention to the psychic. As such, there is a simultaneous foregrounding of economic, political, cultural and psychological issues.

- The question of home and belonging is addressed through the idea of a homing desire as distinct from the desire for a homeland, in order to problematise the notion of origin as well as take account of the fact that not all empirical diasporas sustain a wish to return to a place of “origin”. Hence, the concept of diaspora places the discourse of “home” and “dispersion” in creative tension. There is acknowledgement of the homing desire with all its cultural and psychic implications for subjectivity and identity but there is also a parallel critique of discourses of “fixed origins”. When does a geographical location become home? What is the difference between “feeling at home” and “naming” a place as home? The concept signals the processes of identification across a myriad of geographical, psychic and cultural boundaries.
- Diasporic identities are at once local and global, constituted in and through networks of transnational identifications with “imagined” as well as “encountered” collectivities.
- Having distinguished diaspora as a heuristic device from its lived manifestations, the concept of diaspora in my schema is brought into conversation with Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorisation of “borders” and, with the longstanding feminist debate surrounding the “politics of location”. The intersection of these three is analysed through the term diaspora space.
- The concept of diaspora space is designed to take account of the entanglements of genealogies of “dispersal” with those of “staying put” so that the “native” is rendered as much a diasporian as the diasporic subject is nativised. The concept of diaspora space is quite central to this analytical frame. Its point of departure is the insight that all parties to an encounter are deeply marked by the encounter, albeit differently depending upon the specific configurations of power mobilised by the encounter. The feminist idea of politics of location refers to positionality of dispersion across gendered spaces of class, racism, ethnicity, age and other axes of differentiation. Each encounter, therefore, both mediates and is, in turn, mediated by this positionality of dispersion in and through contingent borders and boundaries of various types. The issue of ethnicity, analysed here through the work of Fredrik Barth and Stuart Hall, is a significant element within diaspora space.
- Importantly, diaspora space embraces the intersection of difference in its variable forms, placing emphasis upon emotional and psychic dynamics as much as socio-economic, political and cultural differences. The concept of diaspora space builds on my work around questions of difference where I have tried to distinguish between difference understood along four articulating axes: social relation, experience, subjectivity and identity. When understood as part of diaspora space, these axes of differentiation are refigured in particular ways.



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## **Part II**

### **Multiculturalisms and interculturalisms**





## 1. Citizenship and multiculturalism: equality, rights and diversity in contemporary Europe

*Colm O’Cinneide*

Since the end of the second world war, inward migration has gradually yet significantly altered the ethnic, cultural and religious composition of European societies. This has affected different European states in different ways, which is perhaps why little consideration has been given to whether the increasingly multicultural nature of European societies requires a reconsideration of the common concepts of citizenship and rights that have underpinned European constitutional orders since 1945 and before. Specifically, are existing theories of state citizenship and individual rights within Europe sufficient to cope with increased ethnic and religious diversity? In the wake of the events of 11 September 2001 and the ensuing focus on Europe’s Muslim communities, adopting a coherent and rigorous theoretical approach to answering this question has become crucial in achieving the successful integration of minority communities, and in particular the youth of such communities.

### → The limits of republican citizenship

The relationship between the individuals and groups that make up a population and the state within which they live, including the legal rights, obligations and opportunities for political participation that form key elements of this relationship, can be described using a term which is notoriously difficult to define. Citizenship can be seen as the terms on which an individual is recognised as a “member of a political community, entitled to whatever prerogatives and encumbered with whatever responsibilities as are attached to membership” (Walzer 1989: 211). European (and North American) societies have in general developed a particular model of citizenship that Kymlicka has described as a “unitary republican citizenship, in which all citizens share the identical set of common citizenship rights” (Kymlicka 1989: 147).

The essence of this model lies in its recognition of only one class of citizen, with each individual enjoying equal legal, socio-economic and political rights but with no special rights or obligations conferred upon particular social, class, religious or ethnic groups (Barry 2001).<sup>1</sup> The origins of this “unitary republican” concept of citizenship lie in the Enlightenment, and its philosophical roots are to be found in Kant, Rousseau and, in contemporary political philosophy, Rawls. The legal systems and constitutional architecture of most European states are based upon this model, as are the principal international human rights treaties, and it finds its purest contemporary expression in the jurisprudence of the French constitutional court.<sup>2</sup>



The extent to which this model of citizenship is unthinkingly accepted as the only valid form of citizenship in Europe today cannot be underestimated. Migrant communities, for example, are urged repeatedly through political rhetoric to become fully integrated citizens by accepting national “values” that are inevitably linked to this model. Arguments for the recognition of minority group rights, the provision of special state support targeted at particular ethnic groups and the use of compensatory positive action mechanisms are often dismissed as fundamentally incompatible with the concepts of individual rights, non-distinction on the grounds of group identity and the neutrality of the law that are seen as core elements of the unitary model (Taguieff 1992). In the context of youth education, secular education is frequently presented as the ideal, and group affiliation and the construction of self-identity on the basis of religion or ethnic group is discouraged.

The historical attraction of unitary republican citizenship lies in its claims to universality (all citizens are treated with formal equality) and neutrality (no special recognition is given to particular class, ethnic and religious groups), which in turn developed in response to Europe’s long history of religious intolerance, ethnic violence and aristocratic and clerical oppression (Barry 2001). However, its claims to universality and neutrality have recently come under sustained attack. Initially, the challenge has come from a feminist perspective: the alleged universality of republican citizenship has repeatedly been shown to conceal the actual status of women as second-class citizens. Feminist analysis has systematically exposed the gendered nature of supposedly neutral legal rules, political structures and constitutional rights (Yuval-Davies 1997, Olsen 1983). It also has attacked the lack of special support structures for women – such as child-care facilities – the absence of which precludes any genuine equality of citizenship and opportunity between women and men in general.

The success of this critique can be seen in the gradual (if painfully slow) progress in the economic, legal and political fields towards redressing and compensating for built-in discrimination against women. A new expanded concept of citizenship and rights is emerging that incorporates a gender perspective. However, very little similar questioning and re-evaluation of the alleged neutrality and universality of the European model of unitary republican citizenship has occurred from the perspective of ethnic and religious diversity, despite the unitary model being the product of what were largely homogeneous European societies, where ethnic and religious group identities were broadly similar (Kymlicka 1989).<sup>3</sup> Just as its origins in a patriarchal society meant that its claims to universality and neutrality glossed over its gendered nature, it is increasingly apparent that those claims also obscure the extent to which the European model of citizenship discriminates in effect against ethnic and religious minorities that were not originally part of European political communities (Balibar 1991). Its presuppositions as to the nature of the relationship between the individual and the state are rooted in a white European view of the world.

-----> **The marginalisation of anti-discrimination**

This can be demonstrated by reference to the piecemeal and limited evolution of protection against religious discrimination and racism. These abuses are practices of peripheral concern to white Europeans but structure, limit and distort the life possibilities of many of Europe’s “new” ethnic and religious minorities. A constitutional order based upon a comprehensive concept of genuinely equal citizenship would presumably see this as a fundamental negation of the guarantees of



full participation that are part and parcel of full citizenship. However, the legal and constitutional framework of individual rights that has been developed as part of the unitary model has repeatedly proved inadequate to protect minorities from such discriminatory treatment, being often based upon the perceptions and needs of white Europeans, not the affected minorities (Fredman 2002, Flagg 1993). The European Convention on Human Rights, for example, which represents the common standard of minimum rights protection throughout Europe, does not contain at present in its otherwise extensive catalogue of rights a free-standing guarantee of equal treatment and freedom from racial or religious discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

Constitutional bills of rights and national legal systems have similarly proved to be lacking. Even when states or the EU acting collectively have introduced anti-discrimination legislation to compensate for these defects, it has frequently been limited in impact and scope. The UK race relations legislation does not, for example, protect at present against religious discrimination where the religious group in question is not defined in ethnic terms. Other forms of legislation only apply to employment, or require proof of intent, which tends to deprive the statutory protection of any real teeth (Open Society Institute 2003).<sup>5</sup> Public policy and policing initiatives to combat racism have also been limited and lacking consistency, political will and input from affected communities. The struggle against discrimination has therefore been relegated to the margins, and is treated as a subsidiary concern to the European citizenship model.

The unitary model's emphasis on neutrality and universality also contributes to a deep reluctance to take positive action to remove structural discrimination and to provide appropriate support structures for linguistic and cultural minorities. The extent to which this is true varies considerably from state to state. What is clear is that mainstreaming, preferential treatment and other public sector initiatives designed to eliminate patterns of gender discrimination are comparatively advanced throughout Europe, but similar initiatives in the context of race and religious discrimination are largely underdeveloped (O'Connell 2003). "Special" action focused upon the problems of ethnic and religious minorities is seen as incompatible with the universality of the republican model; however, special action in the context of gender is not seen as problematic, despite similar patterns of discrimination applying to both women and ethnic/religious minorities.

All this represents a failure to take race discrimination seriously as a fundamental denial of equality of citizenship. Racism is conceptualised within this model as an aberration caused by regressive individuals, rather than a deeply-rooted structural problem in European society (Goldberg 2002). The denial of equality of opportunity brought about by racism or religious bigotry has the effect of relegating vulnerable minorities to the level of second-class citizens, a process the rhetoric of formal equality, individual rights and unitary citizenship obscures. This is made worse by political rhetoric that downplays the extent and gravity of racial discrimination while emphasising the need for immigrant communities to integrate, implicitly identifying a problematic "second tier" of citizens.

-----> **The denial of equal citizenship to minority communities**

The unitary republican model not only marginalises anti-discrimination initiatives and thereby indirectly contributes to the creation of a second-class tier of citizenship, it also directly excludes particular ethnic and religious communities from full citizenship as a result of its own ingrained presuppositions. The claims of universality and neutrality made for the unitary model gloss over its ideological



origins in Enlightenment liberal philosophy and the attempt to balance secularism and Christianity throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These origins continue to shape the normative values and expectations of personal conduct that govern how this model is applied in practice.

This becomes particularly apparent when disputes involve ethnic and religious minorities that practise forms of conduct and religious observance that vary from the European norm. Rather than adopting a position of neutrality towards different religious and social norms, the unitary model as applied in contemporary Europe requires minorities to adopt dominant Eurocentric norms of conduct if they wish to be treated as full and equal citizens. This not only conflicts with the nominal ideals of unitary republican citizenship, but also ensures that communities that fail to adopt are characterised as having less than full citizenship, which results in social exclusion, racism and a perception that such communities remain alien to the body politic (Modood and Berthoud 1997: 144-145).

In Europe, this pattern can be seen in the treatment of Muslim and other ethnic minorities. Considerable problems arise in criminal law (in particular policing policy and sentencing), the provision of public services and interrelationships between ethnic communities and public authorities, where state authorities, in planning and service delivery tend to rely upon expectations of conduct and behaviour based on white European norms (Performance and Innovation Unit 2003, Home Office 2001). This results, for example, in failure to provide public assistance and services to women from ethnic minorities, who may often lack competency in the relevant lingua franca and face cultural obstacles in accessing public services. Despite these obstacles, appropriate services are often not made available to them, as service delivery is designed to cater solely for the needs of the white European norm. Another example is the extremely low level of representation of Asian and African ethnic and religious minorities in European parliaments and elected bodies. Since members of such communities lack access to the established networks and structures that tend to produce parliamentary candidates, and often do not match the expected profile of an “acceptable” candidate, politically engaged individuals within these communities remain marginalised and generally excluded from the political process (Ali and O’Cinneide 2001).

-----> **Youth education, the headscarf issue and secularism**

Educational policy witnesses the most dramatic use of Eurocentric norms to shape service delivery and definitions of acceptable dress and conduct, and this is often seen in the lack of resources and appropriate guidance dedicated to the successful integration of particular cultural groups within the educational system. However, it is the “headscarf” controversy in Germany and France that most clearly demonstrates how compliance with the dominant European norm is a precondition for full citizenship under the “pure” unitary republican model. In Baden-Württemberg (Germany) and France, attempts have been made to prohibit the wearing of the Muslim *hijab* in state schools, on the basis that its status as a religious symbol would symbolically undermine the secular status of state schools.<sup>6</sup> The ban is presented as a logical application of the universal and neutral stance of unitary citizenship towards different beliefs: the prohibition on the wearing of visible religious symbols extends across all faiths, and is designed to ensure a secular, non-denominational educational space (Poulter 1997, Bauberot 1998). However, while the ban has a negligible impact upon Christians and those from traditional European backgrounds, it has a disproportionate impact upon



religious Muslims from traditional backgrounds. The wearing of the *hijab* is deeply rooted in particular Islamic societies, and is seen by those who wear it as central to their religious and cultural identity as women. No religious symbol in the European tradition has nearly the same personal and cultural significance.

Prohibiting the headscarf therefore not only discourages participation in state education by those from a religious Islamic background, it also signals that affiliation to traditional forms of Islam is incompatible with full citizenship. The impact of such a ban is even more damaging for ethnic groups such as the Sikhs, where the wearing of particular religious symbols is a central religious obligation (Parekh 1998). Yet the ban on the *hijab* and similar religious symbols lacks any real rationale: there is no logical reason why the wearing of a religious symbol by individuals would undermine the secular ethos of a school or a curriculum (Barry 2001, Parekh 2000). How exactly would the wearing of a headscarf in itself cause religious feelings to creep into teaching? The headscarf ban is also justified on the basis that it is a symbol of female degradation and oppression. While a strong case could be made for this, many Muslim women see it as a symbol of religious and cultural self-affirmation and voluntarily adopt the *hijab*. In addition, many forms of European dress and media similarly make use of degrading symbolism, but are not prohibited (Parekh 2000, Hirschmann 2002, Carens and Williams 1998). To ban the headscarf because of its symbolic value is to send out a strong symbolic message that affiliation with Islam is in some way incompatible with the unitary republican model of citizenship.<sup>7</sup>

The *hijab* issue is a classic example of how a measure claiming to be justified as a universal and neutral step in actuality requires conformity with the dominant norm. Religious Muslims are required to behave like Christians and secular Europeans; the European norm of not wearing visible religious symbols in public spaces like schools is made a universal norm, and those who refuse to meet this norm are conceptualised as “non-integrated” aliens within the body politic. Secularism becomes a tool to exclude certain categories of citizen from full participation and equality of status, in particular the current threatening “Other”, religious Muslims (EUMC 2002).

-----> **Group rights and “multicultural citizenship”**

This ideological bias of the unitary republican model has resulted in academic and political calls for the introduction of new models of citizenship. Much of this discussion has originated from North America, due to the considerable influence of the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor’s calls for a new “politics of recognition”. Taylor (1992) contrasts the “politics of equal dignity” where everyone is treated as identical with identical rights and immunities (a concept that is the foundation of the unitary republican model of citizenship) to the “politics of difference”, where the unique identity and practices of individuals and groups are recognised and accorded respect within a national body politic. He writes that “it is precisely this [unique identity of each group] which was being glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity”. Taylor’s work, while advocating the combination of both a politics of equality and difference, has been hugely influential in attempts to develop new models of citizenship that embody a “politics of recognition” combining both elements.

In North America, impetus has been given to this process by racial politics and the Native American question, and also by feminist thinkers and, in Canada, by the issue of how Canadian citizenship can accommodate the Quebecois and Canada’s



sizeable migrant communities. Kymlicka (1989, 1995) is the leading advocate of a “multicultural citizenship”, arguing within the liberal tradition for the recognition of minority and group rights as part of an expanded citizenship that recognises and incorporates the diversity of group cultures within a multicultural state (Glaston 1995). Kymlicka (1995) therefore calls for the recognition of minority and group rights within the broad parameters of the unitary citizenship model, including the granting of autonomous self-government where appropriate, language rights and the right to education in a manner compatible with that group’s norms.

Others have questioned whether the liberal tradition and the unitary republican model are at all capable of adjusting to multicultural societies. Tully (1995) argues for a transition to “contemporary constitutionalism”, whereby “the cultures of all members [of society] are recognized and affirmed by others”, with this principle forming the central pillar of a new model of citizenship in place of the formal commitment to universality and neutrality that characterises the unitary republican model. Iris Marion Young (1989) has argued that the denial of recognition and affirmation to minority cultural groups and modes of living that do not conform with dominant norms is deeply embedded in contemporary societies, and that the unitary republican model of citizenship glosses over these patterns of inequality and power distribution in society. She argues that “groups cannot be socially equal unless their specific experience, cultural and social contributions are publicly affirmed and recognised” (Young 1990). The politics of difference that Young advocates would include the use of positive discrimination, formal group representation in political processes and the recognition of group and minority rights as part of a fundamental restructuring of the citizenship model to give equal recognition to multiple forms of group identity (Young 1997).

In the UK, Parekh (1995) has developed a comprehensive theory of “dialogical multiculturalism”, arguing that multicultural societies are made up of a plurality of diverse cultures, and that no one particular political doctrine or vision of the good life, including liberalism, should form the ideological basis of such a society. Instead, such a society should accept the desirability of cultural diversity and structure its political life and institutions accordingly, with cultural pluralism and intercultural dialogue as central values and a common commitment to institutional preconditions such as a free press and basic civil rights (Parekh 2000).

Do these attempts to formulate new forms of multicultural citizenship give rise to a coherent alternative to the unitary republican model? The areas of dispute between the views of these theorists and the unitary model are sometimes exaggerated. For example, Kymlicka (1995: 10) considers that “national minorities” (that is, minority groups such as Native Americans, the “original” inhabitants of the country in question) have a claim to a greater degree of group rights than migrant ethnic groups. This distinction, which is arguably problematic, does mean that his practical proposals for giving effect to “multicultural citizenship” have more relevance for long-established national minorities such as the Basques, Scots and Bretons than for relatively recently arrived migrant communities within Europe. Nevertheless, at the core of all these alternative models lies the theory that positive recognition of the separateness, equality and pluralism of the different ethnic and religious groups within a body politic is essential. The right to education within one’s cultural traditions, minority representation at the political level, positive state support for minority group institutions and identity, group-centred public service provision and the accommodation of diverse group



identities within common structures such as the state education system are all examples of the practical initiatives that such an approach might give rise to.

### → The limits of multicultural citizenship

This concept of multicultural citizenship has come under strong attack, in particular in its advocacy of group rights. Paul Gilroy (1992) and Brian Barry (2001) have questioned the concept of fixed cultural groups that they argue lies at the heart of multiculturalism, arguing that it is based upon an excessively simple model of a multicultural society necessarily divided into homogeneous and mutually exclusive cultural groups. This form of “difference multiculturalism” is seen as defining ethnic minorities as unchanging cultural communities, based on a static notion of culture that ignores the constant flux and changing nature of social groups (Turner 1993). Theorists of multiculturalism have fiercely denied that they rely on fixed notions of group identity, and argue that multicultural citizenship, with its emphasis on the recognition of group rights can also adequately incorporate recognition of the changing nature of social groups. Modood (1998) has, for example, argued for a concept of multicultural citizenship that aims to accommodate a diversity of group identities, including hybrid forms. This would ensure that the full diversity of religious beliefs within a society be represented and recognised in democratic institutions and public debate.

However, problems remain with this model. What happens if a group or cultural practice involves the denial of free choice or a full exposure to basic education to the individuals within that group (Spinner 1997)?<sup>8</sup> What happens if the culture of a community conflicts with the basic rights to equality on which the multicultural model is based (Okin 1997)? What happens if the institutional arrangements that are designed to reflect group identity cease to reflect the reality on the ground?

While much of contemporary debate on multicultural theory concerns these issues, the key difficulty with theories of multicultural citizenship is the way in which it presents the challenge faced by multicultural states as the reconciliation of differences between groups. Malik (1996) has argued that theories of multicultural citizenship emphasise the differences between ethnic and religious groups and encourage the assertion of cultural difference. This makes cross-cultural interaction more difficult, strengthens competition and tension between communities and diverts focus away from the compelling need to achieve substantive equality of citizenship for all. Instead of contributing to the formation of a universal citizenship rooted in equality of respect, multicultural theory serves to reinforce theories of group difference and cultural autonomy that underlie anti-immigrant and racist ideologies. It encourages the perception that racial groups are ultimately “different” in a fundamental way, that interaction between these groups needs to be carefully controlled, and shifts attention away from the anti-racism struggle (Gilroy 1992).

The ever increasing use of the rhetoric of multiculturalism by the far right in Europe demonstrates the validity of much of this critique. It encourages an acceptance that certain values are “normal” European values, and that while cultural diversity may be acceptable, an excess of such difference within a society can be destructive. It also encourages differentiation between certain ethnic cultures, seen as exotic and compatible with European values, and less acceptable cultures; the current enthusiasm for “Bollywood” Indian culture in the UK, often associated – with less than total accuracy – with Hindu Indian identity, can be contrasted with the suspicion directed towards Islamic culture. The multicultural



model may also encourage group insularity and deter full participation and inter-cultural dialogue across assumed group boundaries.

Recent events in the UK have given substance to this critique of multiculturalism. The UK, while remaining formally committed to the unitary republican model of citizenship, has gone a considerable distance along the multicultural path in terms of recognising group identities. From the late 1960s, the *laissez-faire* policy originally adopted by the UK Government to immigrants from Asia and the Caribbean was replaced by an approach that favoured integration but rejected assimilation within the dominant British culture (Performance and Innovation Unit 2003). Roy Jenkins, then the UK Home Secretary, expressed this new shift in a speech in 1967:

Integration is perhaps a rather loose word. I do not regard it as meaning the loss, by immigrants, of their own national characteristics and culture. I do not think we need in this country a melting pot, which will turn everybody out in a common mould, as one of a series of someone's misplaced vision of the stereotyped Englishman [...]. I define integration, therefore, not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, coupled with cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance. (Jenkins 1967)

Jenkins, following this influential speech, played a very significant role in the introduction of the UK race relations legislation, which was until recently the most comprehensive in Europe (Lester 1994). Subsequent to this, however, successive UK Governments have embraced a policy based on the adoption of multiculturalism within the formal framework of the unitary model, partly to ease race tensions, partly in response to pressure from ethnic and religious minorities themselves (Poulter 1998). Increased recognition was given to different community groups and cultures, with funding directed towards different community-specific groups, and this was accompanied by a growing redefinition of racism as the denial of the right to be different, rather than a denial of equality (Malik 2002).

-----> **Citizenship transformed**

While producing gains in the form of a growing recognition of the needs and diversity of minority communities, multicultural policy has also tended to enhance differences between ethnic groups, encourage a degree of complacency over the extent of racism in British society, and give rise to patterns of segregation in housing and employment (Malik 2002). In the wake of the riots in the north of England in 2000, a series of reports into the disturbances were critical of the extent to which different communities were living “parallel lives”, in particular focusing upon the segregation of youths in schooling and recreation, and recommended a new focus on achieving “community cohesion” (Cantle et al. 2001, Ouseley et al. 2001). In response, the UK Government, while acknowledging the multicultural nature of Britain, announced a shift towards an emphasis upon “community cohesion” and developing a common sense of citizenship while simultaneously launching new “tough” anti-immigration measures (Home Office 2002).

Does this pendulum swing from multiculturalism back towards an emphasis upon the unitary citizenship model indicate the bankruptcy of challenges to this model? It is perhaps more accurate to say that the critique of the unitary model advanced by multicultural theorists, combined with the obvious failure of the existing European concept of citizenship to ensure equality of citizenship for Europe's ethnic and religious minorities, should compel a re-assessment of the ideological



and cultural bias that distorts the application of the unitary model. Just as feminist critiques have successfully challenged the relegation of women to a second-class tier of citizenship, so too should these critiques from the anti-racism perspective result in a redefinition of what it means to be a citizen of a European state. This should not mean the abandonment of an attempt to establish a common, universal sense of citizenship: it should rather require that new forms of republican citizenship be developed that are capable of fully including Europe's ethnic and religious minorities within the framework of a common citizenship and political culture.

The model of participative citizenship developed by Jurgen Habermas (1994), Seyla Benhabib (2002) and Rainer Forst (1999), based around Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy, offers perhaps the most fruitful conceptual basis for such a transformed model of citizenship. Habermas has set out what he sees as the necessary ingredients for a constitutional state that recognises the substantive equality of all its citizens and composite groups while also giving effect to a transformed model of unitary citizenship. In so doing, he rejects both a rigid adherence to the unitary republican model and the focus on group rights of multicultural theories of citizenship:

I would insist [...] that the constitutional state carefully keep both the shared political culture and common civic identity [of the constitutional state in question] separated from the subcultures and collective identities which are, as a consequence of equal rights to cultural membership, entitled to equal coexistence [...]. The national legal order, although ethically impregnated in terms of the political culture shared equally by all citizens, must remain neutral with respect to these prepolitical forms of life and traditions. Remaining "neutral" means – and this is the critical edge of neutrality – decoupling the majority culture from the political culture with which it was originally fused, and in most instances still is. (Habermas 1995)

Habermas therefore argues for a conception of citizenship that is founded upon a collective political and civic identity, as well as a commitment to the fundamental values of deliberation, dialogue, human rights and equality, but which is also "decoupled" from the majority culture (Waldron 1995). Such a concept of citizenship would require a full commitment to anti-discrimination and a concept of human rights that would extend to the guarantee of substantive equality. More than this, it also requires the re-assessment of existing practices to ensure that genuine equality of participation is possible, and that obstacles to full participation by all minorities are identified and eliminated.

-----> **Conclusion**

Implementing this ideal of citizenship in legal and political discourse in contemporary Europe will require a series of policy steps. Educational policies such as the *hijab* ban that deny equality of citizenship without compelling justification are unsustainable. Anti-discrimination and the teaching of a common civic identity need to be combined as fundamentals of civic education, and multicultural and cross-cultural initiatives need to avoid the trap of essentialising ethnic and religious groups. The impact of public policy initiatives and service delivery upon ethnic and religious minorities also needs to be monitored and assessed, perhaps by using the model of the recently introduced UK race relations policy (Commission for Racial Equality 2002). There will of course be times when giving effect to this transformed model of citizenship will generate conflicts of principle between different religious and ethical worldviews. Such conflicts are inevitable, and there will be hard choices to be made, no more so than in the area of



education and the extent to which secular spaces are required to be maintained in a multicultural society. However, if anti-discrimination and full participation are both recognised as guiding principles, then such debates can take place within the framework of this transformed concept of citizenship on a basis of genuine equality of respect.

*Endnotes*

1. Different European states adopt different versions of this model of citizenship. The French constitutional structure does not recognise any form of minority groups, requires the separation of church and state and treats secularism in the public spheres of political debate, education and law as an essential component of republican citizenship. The UK and certain Scandinavian states, by contrast, recognise a state-supported established church. Nevertheless, all share to various degrees a common adherence to the basic elements of the unitary republican model.
2. See, for example, Case 99-412 DC, Conseil constitutionnel, 15 May 1999 (on the constitutional incompatibility of certain provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages), paragraphs 5-6 and 10.
3. Note that Brian Barry has contested this, arguing that the unitary model developed in response to the deep divisions and religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and therefore from its inception was concerned with a degree of social and religious diversity comparable to (if not even greater than) the make-up of contemporary European societies (Barry 2001).
4. Protocol No. 12 to the Convention, opened for signature in November 2000, is designed to remedy this defect: so far, only five countries of the Council of Europe have signed up to the protocol, which requires ten signatures for it to become legally binding on signatory states. See <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/cadreNews.htm> (accessed on 15 August 2003).
5. The EU Race Equality and Framework Equality directives introduced in 2000 require member and applicant states to introduce comprehensive legislation covering discrimination in employment, vocational education and “social advantages”: nevertheless, the directives do not require the extension of the legislation to cover the provision of goods and services, or to the performance by public authorities of their public functions such as policing, health care or housing. See Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, and Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.
6. For the Baden-Württemberg position, see the Federal Administrative Court decision upholding the ban, July 4 2002, BVerwG 2 C 21.01. For recent developments in France, see “Headscarf row erupts in France”, BBC News Online, 25 April 2003.
7. Note also that the ban on the wearing of religious symbols could in France also extend to members of the judiciary and other categories of public officials, effectively barring religious Muslims, Sikhs and others from some of the most important positions in a democratic society.
8. See *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 US 208 (1972), where the US Supreme Court ruled that a state requirement that all children attend school until the age of 16 violated the right of the Amish community to freedom of religion: the Amish regard attendance in secondary education as contrary to their religious values and norms.



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## 2. Constructing the hybrid identities of Europeans

*Anna Bagnoli*

The lives of young people in Europe today take shape in the context of many uncertainties (Beck 1992), and in a world where mobility is an ever more important condition for accessing the labour market. In a globalised world, movement on a worldwide scale involves the flow of capital, business and information, and of people, cultures and lifestyles. Global capitalism encourages people to be geographically mobile, free and unattached, and flexible enough to adapt to the changing requirements of the labour market (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). Mobility has thus become the ultimate value (Bauman 1998), and the act of departure, the ability to be on the move and to adapt to rapid changes appear to be actually more important than the destination itself (Sennett 1998).

Mobility in the European Union has significantly altered with recent economic and political changes. If, on the one hand, Europe has taken on the character of a fortress for the people who are trying to access it from outside, whose mobility is increasingly being restricted (Massey 1995), on the other hand, the movement of European citizens between member states has been greatly facilitated. In a context where the demand for labour is polarised between highly skilled and competitive positions and unskilled jobs, two very different worlds of migration co-exist: that of the “global nomads” (Bauman 1998), who migrate to find employment that may be adequate to their skills and qualifications, and that of the “post-industrial migrants” (King 1995), the economic migrants of today, who are available to work at any low rate of pay.

Moving is therefore becoming a part of daily life for the young citizens of Europe: it is a life option which may be now easily constructed, and which is also likely to become a prerequisite for a job in the near future.<sup>1</sup> The movement of young Europeans is a new and typically contemporary form of migration that falls in the “global nomads” category. It is the migration of a vanguard of young people who actively take advantage of the new possibilities of movement, and in so doing express the aspirations of the other young people of their generation who stay local but would often like to have those experiences themselves.

The centrality of movement in the globalised world has greatly increased the degree of cultural contact, making the cultural other an extensive presence in our daily life to the extent that it may be theorised that space has very little relevance to the construction of late modern identities (Giddens 1991). However, to what extent are the identities of these young migrants redefined by their experience of moving? Institutional programmes of exchange rely on the idea that a firsthand experience in another country educates young people to be more empathetic



towards and communicative with other cultures, but is that really the case, and if so, in what ways does that process happen? In the next sections I will address these questions in relation to the results of a study on young people and identities that I conducted as part of my PhD programme at the Centre for Family Research at the University of Cambridge (Bagnoli 2001).<sup>2</sup>

-----> **The identities of young migrants in Europe: an autobiographical study**

An autobiographical project, which I designed by taking as a framework my own life experience of migrating from Italy to England as a young woman, the study actively involved a total of 41 young people as co-researchers.<sup>3</sup> The autobiographical nature of the project meant that sharing the identity of the migrant was a crucial component of the relationships established between my subjectivity and that of every participant. The study of identities was approached with a qualitative methodology that, making use of a variety of different autobiographical methods, aimed to encourage participant reflexivity, be sensitive to their different styles of self-expression, and allow them to fully participate as authors of their autobiographies (Bagnoli forthcoming).

A first open-ended interview familiarised participants with the research themes, asking them for a self-description, which included the visual technique of the self-portrait (ibid.). Participants were then asked to write a one-week diary, and to provide a photograph of themselves that they particularly liked. A second interview was arranged, guided by the diaries (Zimmerman and Wieder 1977) and the rest of the autobiographical materials collected.<sup>4</sup> This multidimensional approach was very successful with the young people, who participated with enthusiasm, guiding the research according to the directions that they preferred.

-----> **A dialogical, “self + other” model for the study of contemporary identities**

The working model of identity on which I based this research can be described as a “self + other” model because of the constitutive importance it assigns to the other in the process of self-definition. Relying on the assumption that we construct our identities in a dialogue with the other, defining who we are primarily through the relationship to what we are not, this model is derived from recent theories of the self which highlight a multiplicity of levels and a dynamic character in its composition; the theories of “possible selves” (Markus and Nurius 1986), and of a “dialogical self” (Hermans 2001a, 2001b, Hermans and Kempen 1993, 1998). This dynamic model has the advantage of appreciating the complexity with which different cultural discourses participate in the process of identity construction in the contemporary global and “postcolonial” context (Bhabha 1994).

In contrast with the standard western view that equates self-definition with separation and autonomy, this approach looks at identities as dialectical constructs, intrinsically relational, and shaped by otherness. Identities may therefore be appreciated along a multiplicity of dimensions, as shifting narrative constructions, made of diverse and often conflicting selves (Markus and Nurius 1986), and constantly being negotiated. Decentralising both notions of self and of culture (Hermans 2001a), the “self + other” model can account for the co-presence of different cultures in one’s self-construction, as well as integrate the dimensions of uncertainty and of the imaginary (Hermans 2001b).

As outlined by Markus and Nurius (1986) in their theory of “possible selves”, an array of different and even contradictory self-representations comprise the totality of our self-knowledge, framing the direction of our future actions. Possible selves



may act as incentives and role-models – representing our goals, what we would like to be, our wished-for selves – or else they may stand as threats and feared selves, and remind us of what we are afraid of becoming. In a dialogical dimension (Hermans 2001a), they may be viewed as multiple voices speaking within the same subject, and engaging in a process of inner dialogue between different and contrasting worldviews. Within this model, the role of the other can be broadly understood as a multiplicity of voices, arising from both within and without the subject. Present within one's individual consciousness in the form of representations of significant others, this other can be thought of as pertaining to the world of everyday experience as well as to the world of one's imagination. Acting as role-models or as threats, these representations may directly arise from our own life experiences. They can also be based on the inner dialogue we may entertain with figures which have a mere "imaginal" quality (Hermans, Rijks and Kempen 1993), yet still be of significant centrality to our lives.

The dialectical nature of the "self + other" model can account for the impact of different identity narratives on one's self-constructions, whether they respond to the logic of dominant, context-provided identities, or to alternative discourses and narratives of resistance (Smith 1993). It can therefore appreciate the ways in which people position themselves and negotiate between different discourses, allowing the asymmetries in power existing in societies between different cultures and social groups to emerge (Hermans 2001a). In its complexity, this model supersedes the one-dimensionality of other paradigms, such as the acculturation studies paradigm (Berry and Sam 1997), which, presupposing a linear model of cultural change, views cultures as mutually distinct and internally homogenous. Thanks to its dialectical perspective, the "self + other" model can read identities as hyphenated and hybrid constructions (Caglar 1997), made of heterogeneous and even contrasting elements. It is therefore an appropriate tool for studying the process of identity construction in the contemporary world, where cultures are making contact and mixing to an unprecedented degree (Bhatia and Ram 2001), and people may easily be part of both the in-group and the out-group at the same time (Chryssochoou 2000).

### -----> **The ambivalence of migrant identities**

In the stories of migration that these young people narrated, education, relationships and employment appear to be the three main factors motivating a move. Migration is also often associated with an experience of loss (Bagnoli 2003), such as breaking up with a partner, dropping out, finishing school or changing jobs. By far the most common reason for moving is related to education. For young Italians in particular, a study programme abroad – typically a period of language study – is the most popular way of first leaving home. Studying abroad may be undertaken with the help of an educational institution, often with an Erasmus project, or individually, through an au pair stay. For the English it is very common to take a year out, an experience that may be seen as a sort of institutional "moratorium" (Erikson 1982), allowing a phase of "free" experimentation, yet within a pre-set and rather rigid structure.

Relationships often motivate a move, and they may do so either as push or pull factors. The break-up of a relationship and the divorce of one's own parents are typical examples of push factors. On the other hand, the wish to reach one's own partner abroad is a common pull factor behind an episode of migration. Building on the concept of a chain migration (Grieco 1987), I have defined "psychological



chain” as another type of movement that is rather frequent, originating in a shared interest between young people and some significant other for the culture of the host country. Rather than the existence of a social network in the place of destination, here the shared construction of a psychological link is the factor motivating a move. Finally, employment may be a reason for migrating, either to find a job, to avoid unemployment or to change a job.

From these migration narratives a clear tension emerges between a “here” and a “there”, between the spaces of the home and of the host country. This duality characteristically defines the existential condition of the migrant as “a state of in between-ness” (Lawson 2000). When moving to another country migrants go through a process of reconstructing home, which involves both settling into the new environment and changing their relationship to their homeland. Returning home is always a possibility for the migrant, and a dream of return may in fact be extremely important for the redefinition of identities. Migrant identities accordingly reflect this ambivalence of separation and entanglement, which makes the self long for a place when living in another, identifying with home when abroad, and with abroad when home (King 1995).

It is through a process of “remoooring” (Deaux 2000) that migrants, thanks to support networks, are able to successfully reconstruct home and reposition themselves in the culture of the other. In these migration stories three factors were found to be especially important in helping migrants in remoooring: the expectations with which the young people moved, their ability to form a social network in the host country as well as to maintain existing ones in the country of origin and their command of the language. In the next two examples I will focus on the role of language in the process of reconstruction of migrant identities, indicating how differently it may be experienced, either as a medium that emphasises one’s own marginality, or alternatively as a resource supporting a creative redefinition of identities.

The first case is that of Michelangelo.<sup>5</sup> A 26-year-old engineer, Michelangelo first left Italy on an Erasmus project, after which he decided to stay in England, working in Cambridge. During the first interview he repeatedly mentioned feeling uneasy about his English, particularly his pronunciation. I asked him to explain with an example of what made him worry so much:

*Michelangelo:* If you’re in Italy among Italians [...] and one foreigner enters the group: he speaks perfect Italian but has a strong accent. Well, in my view you will hear this, no matter how good his Italian is. If he has got a strong accent he will always sound to you as an outsider<sup>6</sup> [...]. If my pronunciation was alright and could pass as English, then it would not come so much to mind that I am a foreigner.

Being a foreigner means being an outsider to Michelangelo: it means being singled out as different, as the token Italian in every social interaction because of his awkward pronunciation. This is a condition that he lives in with difficulty and he would much rather pass as English if he could. “Passing” (Goffman 1968), radically erasing his difference in order to appear identical to the majority, is Michelangelo’s dream: he would like to lose all traces of his Italian accent in order to not be placed in the role of outsider. More accurately, the role he plays could be described as that of outcast, a position of marginality in relation to the dominant culture. Here, in terms of the acculturation framework, the migrant wishes to lose his difference and be assimilated (Camilleri and Malewska-Peyre 1997).



-----> The experience of speaking a language less than fluently is common among migrants; however, it may also be lived differently and positively. That is the case of Jo, a 26-year-old teacher of English who lives in Florence. She writes in her self-portrait of “becoming Italian” (Figure 1):

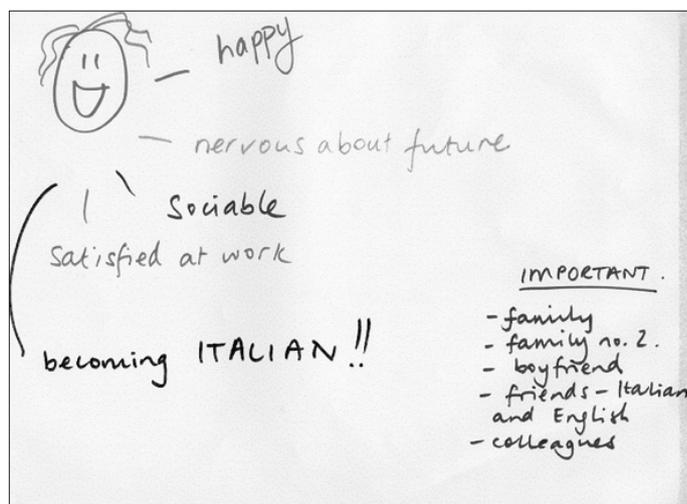


Figure 1 – Jo’s self-portrait

Jo: People say that I’m becoming more Italian. They say it’s just the way I speak, the way I use my hands a lot more when I speak, the way I’m a lot more confident, and little words that just keep coming out in Italian that I can’t find in English, words like “*magari*”.<sup>7</sup> In English I can never find an equivalent, so I always say: “*magari*”.

Rather than suffering because she cannot find the exact translation for the term “*magari*”, Jo is happy to play with her different linguistic repertoires, disrespectful of the laws of grammar. She is confident that by grasping the concept of “*magari*” she has also achieved a new dimension to her identity, something that she indicates as “becoming Italian”. The emergence of a hybrid speech that crosses different linguistic codes and bridges gaps without the aid of translation is a phenomenon which typically occurs in migrant narratives. Here a difficulty of translation has become a resource. The hybrid speech of migrants makes a creative – if perhaps grammatically incorrect – use of language, which reflects the acquisition of new dimensions of meaning as well as the changing of identities. Jo’s position in relation to her acquired system of meaning is therefore not one of marginality, but of full participation: her participation will always be mediated by the fact of being a foreigner. She is an English woman in Florence and therefore an outsider, yet this difference is lived as a plus and as a creative resource.

Both an insider and an outsider and a synthesis of remoteness and nearness (Simmel 1971), the “stranger” or foreigner is defined by duality, being able to be involved and detached at the same time. Yet an outsider may also easily become an outcast, “the potential wanderer” confronting society with its dark side (Bauman 1998). It is between these two possible ways of living the experience of



migration and repositioning the self in the culture of the other that these young migrants reconstructed their identities, which oscillated between the perception of being an outcast at the margins of society, and an outsider, detached from society, but uniquely positioned for a privileged view.

-----> **The creative potential of outsiders**

A few of these young migrants narrated their everyday experiences as outsiders in the world of the other. For these young people migrating had also meant achieving a whole new knowledge perspective from which to experience the world. That new dimension, that “third space”, allowed them to play with and go beyond their existing cultural repertoires, creatively reconstructing their identities as “hybrid” (Bhabha 1994). In the words of Johnny, a 26-year-old teacher of English and a colleague of Jo, the special character of this position clearly emerges:

*Johnny:* I’m now in the middle position in that I’m a foreigner, I speak a little Italian, and I live in the town, but I’m not a Florentine, I never will be a Florentine, but sometimes you’re in the middle of these two camps and that’s a difficult position.

Being a foreigner in Florence means being in a “middle position”, “in between” two cultures and systems of reference. Johnny is aware that this is a social role that may be difficult to sustain, and that can easily be the cause of much unhappiness. However, he also knows that something very precious may be achieved from this position:

*Johnny:* I know that I can’t walk into another world, another culture, and immediately everyone presumes that I’m part of it, I’m not. But I wouldn’t enjoy it, or look at it, in a certain way, if I wasn’t an outsider, I mean, my perspective is of an outsider [...] you can look at something slightly detached, which for me is interesting, because I like to write about these things, and so for me it’s almost a positive.

As an outsider, Johnny is able to look at the society around him with a degree of detachment. He greatly appreciates the advantages of his “middle position”: inhabiting this further dimension where he participates in both the English and Italian cultures, he is able to reflect on his life, recording his experiences in a diary, and creatively reconstructing his identities. The young people who lived their condition as migrants with the sense of being outsiders were also able to reconstruct their identities as hybrid. It is through some illuminating metaphors that they expressed this hybridity. Johnny, who migrated to Italy after attempting a variety of different routes, condenses his life story with a poignant image:

*Johnny:* Until recently I found it very hard to stick to one thing! [...] I think I would like to have more self-discipline, more self-discipline to write, more self-discipline to learn the language, these things, but I’m very [...] like a butterfly, you know, I land and [...] I forget.

“Like a butterfly”, Johnny has been moving from one experience to the next without sticking to any, as well as without having any definite plan of landing anywhere. His avoidance of commitment, while offering him possibilities for self-reconstruction, also makes him feel he ought to “be better” and have more “self-discipline”. Yet the labour market may render a more disciplined or committed trajectory harder to trace: it is in fact the light and discontinuous flight of the



butterfly that may be more easily undertaken (EGRIS 2001). By offering a privileged dimension from which to experience the world, being a foreigner opens wide possibilities for alternative scenarios in which to reconstruct the self. Mark, a 23-year-old PhD student, enjoys the “sense of freedom” that he experiences living in Florence:

*Mark:* You’re a foreigner, which puts you in a category outside all other categories of the society you’re living in [...] you’re like the joker in a pack of cards, the wild card: no one quite fits you in, because you come from another category, so you are much sort of freer, no one really knows quite what to assume about you, except that you’re a foreigner.

Like “the joker in a pack of cards”, the foreigner enjoys the special freedom of being outside all known categories: the only assumption which can reasonably be made about the self regards one’s nationality, and the rest is left totally undefined. That leaves the migrant with a vast array of possible selves to play with, re-inventing one’s own identity at will. Identity construction is thus essentially an individual task that lacks any sense of commitment, responsibility or connection to some wider social narrative. The individualised nature of this positioning (Beck 1992) is made explicit also by Bianca, a 22-year-old au pair in Cambridge:

*Bianca:* I do not feel this need to go back home. I mean, if I could find a good job, something here, I would take it. If by going back home I could find a job which made me travel all the world I would take it. I am a bit of a nomad, I do not get that attached to places, or to people [...] and then of people you can meet so many that it is not a problem.

Presenting herself as a “nomad”, Bianca contests the assumption that she would get attached to places or to people. Moving is what counts, and moving to England has indeed meant to her reconstructing her life and identity in a fundamental way. Being a “global nomad” means being able to move with the requirements of the labour market as the only commitment (Beck 1992), achieving the possibility of redesigning identities fluidly with none of the ties which fix other less mobile and privileged people to space (Bauman 1998). The stories of these butterflies, jokers, and nomads describe a new and individualised form of migration (Beck 1992). For the young people of contemporary Europe, migration is one of the life options available. Like butterflies, these young migrants fly on their own, according to a plan that responds only to their individually defined goals. As a life-project, their migration is also not definitive, and retains a non-committal character that always includes the possibility of return. Moving therefore allows them to question society’s standards, achieve a multiplicity of identity constructions and define “choice biographies” (Beck 1992).

However, not all people who move have the willingness or indeed the resources necessary to achieve cultural competence in an alien structure of meaning, and to reconstruct their identities as hybrid. Even amongst this sample of migrants – a vanguard of the young people of their generation – only a minority were able to enjoy the creative potential of being outsiders. These stories also show that the condition of migrant and foreigner is related to suffering, and that the perception of being an outsider can easily turn into that of an outcast experiencing an acute sense of marginalisation. For the majority of these young migrants, living in the “middle position” did not translate into a new and hybrid identity, but essentially meant nostalgia and pain for being away from an often idealised home.



-----> **Towards hybrid European identities?**

The results of this research have indicated the existential condition of the migrant as a “middle position”. A characteristic ambivalence about the spaces of home and of the host country defines migrants’ lives; it is an ambivalence that runs through all the stories narrated by the migrants in this study. Repositioning in the host country is also related to a process of reconstructing a relationship to the country of origin. The thought of home always implies a possibility of return and may be the cause of much suffering. Migrant identities reflect this ambivalence, oscillating between the different yet contiguous roles of outcast, when the migrant feels at the margins of society, and outsider, when the detachment of this “middle position” becomes a resource. These two modalities of reconstructing the self were here explored in connection with the ability to communicate in the language of the other. These stories have also shown that only a minority of these migrants – a privileged group themselves – were indeed able to reconstruct their identities as hybrid, creatively taking advantage of their special position. For the majority, a nostalgic idealisation of home seemed to be predominant.

These results lead to more general reflections on the process of identity construction in the contemporary world. Due to the facility with which we come into contact with the cultural other in our daily lives, the processes that we have seen in relation to migrant identities may be considered as a pattern which describes the ways in which identities are constructed in a context of rapid social change. The facility of movement and increase in cultural contact experienced in late modern societies may indeed open new possibilities for self-construction that involve the hybridisation of cultural repertoires. However, this research also shows that constructing oneself by means of a dialogue with the other is not a straightforward process. “Foreclosing” identities (Erikson 1982) in terms of boundaries and borders may be far easier than opening the self to include the other and facing those uncertainties that the other may stand for.

There are important implications to be drawn from this research at the political level. Spending a period of time in another country is often an important learning experience for a young person, yet it is not always an experience which results in a better ability to communicate with other cultures. Indeed, from the evaluation exercise of a programme promoted at European level (Hoskins 2003), it emerged that one of the main difficulties mentioned by participants was exactly how to bring together people of different cultures, going beyond stereotypes and prejudice. Educating to a culture of dialogue has a crucial value in the contemporary world and should be followed through a variety of routes, in addition to exchange programmes. Learning to communicate with the other, with the skills and resources necessary to engage in dialogue, should be an integral part of European educational curricula, and as such should be accessible to everyone, not only the privileged few.

Much more could be done to foster dialogue between cultures and fight the re-emergence of racism, which in times of uncertainty such as those we are living in typically surfaces in the form of prejudice against immigrants. European initiatives could strengthen those projects that, even at the local level, aim to combat racism, adding an emphasis on the construction of inclusive and hybrid European identities. However, the current European context, with the resurgence of far-right ideologies and the adoption of repressive migration policies (Massey 1995), is turning the “post-industrial” migrants coming from outside the Union into the “human waste” (Bauman 2003) of late modern societies. These policies, by



distinguishing insiders from outsiders on the basis of the definition of borders and boundaries, are in fact based on the very opposite of a culture of dialogue.

The character of contemporary societies makes the existential condition of the foreigner – with the identity dynamics that we have observed here – an experience which may be easily lived by everyone, even when we stay local. It is therefore fundamental, for the policies which aim to promote European citizenship and identities, to recognise the multidimensional and dialogical nature of the process of identity construction in the contemporary world. The adoption of a dialogical paradigm, such as the one that guided this research, able to read the different cultural discourses of which our identities partake simultaneously, may suggest innovative strategies for intervention, better suited to interpret and change the complex reality that we are living than the more static models of identity and culture of the past.

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#### *Endnotes*

1. A growing number of European projects, such as the Youth Programme, promote the training and learning of young people through formal periods of exchange between European countries.
2. This project was supported by the European Commission with a Marie Curie TMR Fellowship.
3. There were twenty young migrants in the sample, with an equal representation of men and women; half were English migrants to Italy, and the other half were Italian migrants to England. The fieldwork study was conducted in Italy and in England, in the Provincia di Firenze and in Cambridgeshire respectively, and lasted from late February 1998 until early October 1999. Their migration was defined as first generation and with a time frame of at least six months. The participants were 16 to 26 years old and came from varied backgrounds.
4. The resulting multi-level data were commonly analysed according to the criteria of qualitative narrative analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Masiach and Zilber 1998), and with the aid of the Atlas-ti computer software (Muhr 1994).
5. All names are fictional and were chosen by the participants themselves.
6. Used originally in English.
7. “*Magari*” is an adverb expressing a hypothetical situation and a wish with little chance of success. The Hazon English-Italian Dictionary translates it as: “even; perhaps, maybe; even if; if only” (Hazon 1981).



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### 3. School success of Moroccan youth in Barcelona: theoretical insights for practical questions

*Diego Herrera Aragon*

This is not a conventional article about the academic performance of minority students. You will find few statistics related to the level of achievement of Moroccan students in Barcelona, little interest to discover the causes that determine “their” academic failure, but a conscious effort to look into their daily school life with justice and optimism. I am aware of the limitations of this option, both technically and scientifically. Although there has never been any systematic effort to record the academic performance and paths of Moroccan students living in Spain, it seems that many of the insights made in this field have forgotten to embed what should be one of the most important attitudes in any critical approach: the epistemological suspicion.

This is not to say that Moroccan students, or migrant minorities in general, do not suffer the effects of school ethnocentrism and xenophobia, as it has been proved by different studies about multicultural education and school dynamics in Spain and other western countries (McCarthy 1994, Gillborn 1995, IOE 1996, Carbonell 1997). However, in order to justify rethinking the relationship between ethnic identity and school performance, we need to emphasise the diversity of located points from which one can experience, interpret and plan social and educational projects, even inside what we construe as “Moroccan youth” and their families. We also need to consider the possibility of these students performing well academically in spite of the “cultural” and “structural” barriers that would affect Muslim groups, according to certain points of view.

To do this, I plan to make a strategic use of John Ogbu’s theoretical framework by applying part of his thesis on the academic performance of minority students to the Spanish context. Some North American and European authors have already made similar efforts to understand why some minority groups are more successful than others. This exercise, nevertheless, can entail at least two risks: on the one hand, the tendency to naturalise group hierarchies via an uncritical use of the ethnic criteria that serve to define the samples and, on the other hand, the imposition of a biased interpretation of what “success” means if we are not sensitive enough to consider the political dimension of any official definition.

Alerted to the perverse consequences of these attitudes by the works of authors like Margaret Gibson (1988) and Signithia Fordham (1996), and by my previous experience in different research projects, I co-authored four studies on the vast



subject of “minority education” between 1999 and 2002 (see References). Their ethnographic data constitute the corpus of information used in this article to talk about the strategies used by Moroccan youth to manage the cultural, linguistic and social barriers they face both in school and in their wider community. In so doing, I propose to shift our gaze from Ogbu’s immigrant/involuntary typology to the patterns of variability along ethnic, class and gender lines that exist within this minority group. Results from our ethnographic research point out that high academic performance among Moroccan youths does not necessarily entail rejection of ethnicity or simple conformity. Rather, some of these youths adopt an instrumental view of education that promotes the development of new and proactive cultural identities inside and outside the school arena (Herrera 2002, Bonal et al. 2003).

-----> **Patterns and questions**

My studies of young Moroccan students call attention to the specific nature of this immigrant group’s “folk theory” of success (Ogbu 1998) and educational strategies. More specifically, they examine the interrelationship between the original cultural background of Moroccan families in Barcelona, their experiences prior to immigration, their specific social and economic situation in the new setting, the structure and dynamics of the community in which they have settled, and the influences of these forces on educational projects and school performance.

Many of the families that have migrated from North Africa over the last decade come to Barcelona not so much to flee poverty as to improve their family’s welfare and economic situation. They believe educational and job opportunities are much better for their children and relatives in Barcelona than in rural or urban Maghreb. They also believe that they can adapt relatively easily to life in Spain because of the availability of specific employment niches, the emergence of a community of co-ethnics, the possibility of turning to family members for assistance if necessary, and the possibility of reproducing their symbolic universe due to the geographical closeness between the peninsula and their homeland (Herrera 2002).

Many Moroccans arrive in Barcelona with few saleable skills apart from a practical knowledge of farming or undervalued academic qualifications. Out of necessity, most of them have no other choice on arrival but to accept backbreaking jobs as bricklayers, maids and farm labourers, usually under precarious conditions and for minimum wages. Given this outlook, Moroccan families have to struggle financially, but some of them, after a decade of austerity, hard work and the sharing of resources and commodities with members of the extended family, have been able to purchase their own car or flat or even to set up a corner shop in specific neighbourhoods.

Although there is burning evidence of racist attitudes and hostile attacks directed at migrant minorities in Spain (ECRI 1999, Martínez Veiga 2001), most of the Moroccan adults interviewed try to minimise the negative consequences of their interaction with the host population and to avoid a strategy of response and counter-response. Moroccan families, even those from rural regions, who attract more of the attention and susceptibilities of local people, are generally protected from the most harmful effects of xenophobia not only by a strong ethnic identity and a positive community sense, but also by the determination of their immigrant project of social mobility (Herrera 2002). Accordingly to Ogbu one important



distinguishing feature of migrant minorities is that they have a positive “dual frame of reference” (1998), at least during the first generation. This may provide them with motivation to succeed and to develop a pragmatic trust towards the institutions controlled by the dominant group of the host society, like the school system and the labour market.

The situation for Moroccan youths, who have regular contact with peers, schoolmates and teachers, is considerably different. Both in school and in the street, Moroccan youths encounter strong pressures to conform to the dominant culture and a climate of racial hostility that permeates their experiences and detracts from the quality of their lives. Many of them experience sharp conflict between some of their family values and those promoted by the school and youth culture. They also have to deal with criticism, condemnation and tough forms of symbolic abuse directed at their clothing, diet, religion, language and, most specially, for resisting assimilation (Alegre and Herrera 2000).

As I came to understand the structure and dynamics of Moroccan communities in Barcelona, I also came to see that educational performance patterns were not as I had anticipated, even when Spanish students, on average, were doing better in secondary school than Moroccans. Differences of achievement, although perceptible, do not simply occur along purely ethnic lines, but also according to the specific interplay of attributive and contextual variables (on one hand, gender and social class, on the other hand, new and former social setting and family values). That issue proves the existence of diversity in school performance along and across ethnic minority groups (Herrera 2002, Bonal et al. 2003). Furthermore, both the high rate of “academic failure” recorded in Barcelona at the end of compulsory education (between 25% and 30%, according to official criteria – Vila, Gomez-Granell and Martínez 2002) and the relatively low “school life expectancy” among working class students after compulsory education (INCE 2000), problematises to a certain extent the stigmatisation of Moroccan/Muslim youths as academic failures. Certain barriers related to the minority status of Moroccan parents do prevail: low income, little experience in formal education, lack of familiarity with mainstream culture and limited knowledge of the Spanish official languages. In addition there exists a climate of severe prejudice and cultural misunderstandings in school and other institutions. However, many Moroccan youths who arrive in Barcelona during the early elementary years, and many of those who arrive at a later age, persevere in school and meet at least the minimum requirements for a secondary school certificate or a graduation diploma (Herrera 2002).

-----> **An interpretation**

How can we account for the particular experiences of academic success of these Moroccan youths, which share few of the characteristics that the literature has associated with success in school? The answer, I believe, lies in part in overcoming the “culture versus structure” epistemological dichotomy and in the consideration of the “community forces” (Ogbu 1998) on the academic engagement or disengagement of minority students. Newer studies in the field of sociology and anthropology of education consider both the “cultural discontinuity hypothesis” and the “structural inequality theory” deficient frameworks for explaining the school performance of minority students (Jacob and Jordan 1987, 1993). In the first instance, cultural and language differences between home and school do not



necessarily cause poor performance (Gibson 1988), and secondly, social inequalities and school discrimination do not always lead to oppositional practices against this institution, or lack of investment in formal education (Erickson 1987).

Furthermore, neither framework explains why some minorities are more successful in facing adversity than other previously established groups (for example, Punjabis versus African Americans in the United States; Moroccans versus Gypsies in Spain, etc.). Nor do these theories pay attention to kin/community culture aspects (beliefs about effort, discipline and authority) that could eventually help minority students to perform well academically, or to the school-adaptation possibilities of those minority groups that have a negative learning experience even when they have overcome the initial obstacles (for example, lack of linguistic competence, and estrangement from the dominant culture and its values). Ogbu's comparative studies on the variability in school performance patterns among different kinds of minority groups in 1974 ("immigrant minorities" and "involuntary minorities") represent an important exception in this sense. For almost three decades, his work and that of other authors close to him has produced mounting evidence to suggest that the educational strategies and school performance of minority students are critically influenced by (a) the specific history of majority-minority group contact, (b) the minority group's perspective on its own situation of subordination, and (c) its interpretation of the socio-economic opportunities available to its members (Ogbu 1974, 1978, 2003, Matute-Bianchi 1986, Gibson 1988, Gibson and Ogbu 1991, Suarez-Orozco 1991, Fordham 1996). In Ogbu's view:

The way minorities interpret their history – whether they became minorities voluntarily [for example, through immigration] or involuntarily [for example, through conquest, colonisation or slavery], together with the impact of societal treatment or mistreatment – shapes the pattern of the collective solutions they forge for the collective problems in society at large in education. Because of their different modes of incorporation, voluntary and involuntary minorities tend to interpret similar problems differently and forge different solutions to those problems. (2003: 51-52)

According to this "cultural-ecological" perspective (Ogbu 1998), minority group behaviour may be seen at least in part as a socio-cultural adaptation related to their own structure of possibilities. Ogbu posed the following question in his first major publication:

Can we adequately explain the high proportion of school failures among the subordinate minorities [for example, involuntary] without taking into account the historical basis for their association with the dominant whites and their experiences in that association? [...] The high proportion of school failure among subordinate minorities constitutes an adaptation to their lack of full opportunity to benefit from their education in contrast to the dominant group. (1974: 3)

Which perceptions of and responses to school rules, expectations and culture predominate among Moroccan families in Barcelona? How much do these appraisals have to do with their status as an immigrant minority and their dual frame of reference? Do Moroccan students conceive the teaching-learning process as a way of becoming assimilated into the dominant culture, or as an investment to acquire marketable credentials and additional skills? How do folk theories of success shape the "structural rationales" (D'Amato 1993) that guide Moroccan youth performance?

Based on my own fieldwork and ethnographic research on minority student compliance and resistance in school, I suggest that there is a direct and strong



relationship between the school adaptation patterns of Moroccan students and their family's immigrant status (and related mobility project). The focus of my gaze has been the role of family and community forces in promoting academic success, but I have also considered how the articulation of social and cultural relations of power inside and outside the school can operate to discourage first generation Moroccan students from complying with school expectations. In general, however, available data shows that:

- Most Moroccan families and youths alike view formal education and the credentials it confers as instrumental to their strategy of upward social mobility in Barcelona. These youths believe that success in secondary school (through vocational training or higher education) will help them improve their social status and economic welfare (Herrera 2002, Bonal et al. 2003).
- Although parents are generally concerned about the existence of uncomfortable conditions in schools related, for instance, to racial hostilities or to pervasive pressures to westernise their children, most of them assume that academic success is the result of hard work and discipline. They would not accept “social disadvantages” or “teacher incompetence” as excuses for poor performance or disruptive behaviour (Alegre and Herrera 2000, Herrera 2002).
- Both Moroccan boys and girls have a strong rationale for compliance with school rules and authority and, at the same time, keep within the Maghreb fold. The watchfulness of parents and a well-organised set of community forces would not sanction conduct likely to shame a family's reputation (for example, taking students temporarily out of school, making them work hard, etc.) (Alegre and Herrera 2000, Herrera 2002).
- Moroccan youth predominantly advocate a strategy of “accommodation without assimilation” (Gibson 1988) towards the dominant structures and dynamics of the host society. The realisation of this pattern may differ depending on the nature of the social, cultural, and economic resources available in each settlement, and on the relative position these youths occupy within it according to their particular histories and characteristics. None the less, most Moroccan parents encourage their sons and daughters to become proficient in the skills of the dominant culture while also counselling them to remain loyal to their cultural origins (Alegre and Herrera 2000, Herrera 2002, Bonal et al. 2003). Here is how some interviewees put it:

“We would like our son to study. The first thing he does when he arrives home is the homework. After that he usually watches Moroccan or Spanish TV. We say to him all the time ‘Study. Study hard’, because he wants to be an engineer.” (Father)

“Yes, I would like my sister and brother to study here in Barcelona because in Morocco there are no opportunities. She is studying Catalan in a school and after that we plan for her to go to a private college to study tourism management. My brother has just arrived from Morocco and has failed many subjects. Next year he will probably do the same course.” (Sibling)

“I have to do many things at home. But this is normal because they are my family. My parents always tell me ‘First of all do your homework’. And once I have finished it I help them or I do other things that I like. [...] They are not tedious parents because they realise that I behave well. I do my things and then they allow me to go with my cousins. I really like to go out with my cousins.” (Girl)



The condition for performing well in school may not be the displacement of “old” values by “modern” ones, but rather an additive process in which Moroccan youths embed instrumental competences and public attitudes to get ahead in mainstream society while maintaining an expressive adherence towards their re-contextualised group culture. Certainly, results from European research suggest that high academic performance does not necessarily imply unconditional adherence to the dominant culture, and stresses the historically dynamic nature of immigrant adaptation patterns and identities (Suarez-Orozco 1991, Crul 2000, Lindo 2000, van Nieker 2000, Bonal et al. 2003). In our case, ethnographic data show that many Moroccan youths living in Barcelona maintain a utilitarian relationship with the larger society and a strategy of “multilinear acculturation” (Gibson 1988) that promotes the development of proactive identities according to the school requirements. Yet it would be a misunderstanding of these findings to conclude that most Moroccan students cope successfully with school expectations when clearly they do not. For many of them, the combination of socio-economic disadvantages and institutional barriers is difficult to overcome. Some recent research on minority education has focused precisely on the patterns of variability existing inside immigrant groups (Hermans 1995, Crul 2000, Tsolidis 2001, Bonal et al. 2003), helping us to shift our gaze from Ogbu’s holistic theory to explore the specific intersections of ethnicity, gender and class that exist within these groups in particular settings.

-----> **The complication of theory**

While Ogbu’s perspective has had tremendous influence on highlighting the impact of status and power relations on students’ achievements, I will suggest that a more sensitive and encompassing framework is needed to account for the variability of minority school outcomes in European countries in general and in Spain in particular. Previous cross-national comparisons have pointed out that Ogbu’s “migrant” versus “involuntary” minority distinctions do not fit as comfortably in Europe as they do in traditional immigrant-receiving countries such as the United States, Canada or Israel (Gibson 1997). At the same time, this research on minority education posits the role of complementary factors such as specific legislation, labour market structure, school dynamics, gender and social class that may operate in specific situations. According to this evidence and my own research the heuristic value of Ogbu’s framework could be subject to further thoughts:

- Qualitative research highlights the variability of educational performance both across and within minority groups. Moroccan students are, in the aggregate, less willing to deal with school expectations than, for instance, their Chinese peers; however, each group is internally differentiated along social class, gender and ethnic lines in ways that are also associated with the discriminatory effects of social dynamics on particular groups and biographies. Enclosing Moroccan youth as members of a voluntary or immigrant minority should not be the central issue: this should be the identification, analysis and fighting of forms of oppression that cut across each other in sometimes dramatic ways. A combination of racist and sexist stereotypes, for example, could make it difficult for Moroccan boys to succeed in school in spite of the positive influence of their family values.
- It is scientifically problematic to perpetuate our practice of naming minority groups when it entails the reification of “ethnicity” as a hypostatic reality.



Obviously this is not part of Ogbu's agenda, but the dichotomous use of his typology could reinforce dominant stereotypes of "model minorities" (notably from Asia) as academically diligent whilst others (especially of African descent) are seen as being ready to blame the school authorities for their lack of cultural sensibility. Legitimate questions also remain regarding how "failure" and "achievement" are usually taken as dependent variables rather than deconstructed as powerful artefacts of the education system.

- A major criticism of the model is that it overlooks generational differences that affect the collective history of minority groups, the nature of family biographies, and the dynamic interplay of identities negotiated within ethnic minorities and with the dominant culture. Empirical evidence shows how the situation of some first-generation Moroccan youth and families living in Barcelona resembles that of Ogbu's involuntary minorities, or that of De Vos and Suarez-Orozco's "disparaged" minorities (1990), because of their persistent exclusion from the social and the economic system. These factors could even have a greater influence on students' achievement than the initial terms on which Moroccan families were incorporated into Barcelona's society, and are closely related to the recent development of reactive ethnic identities among some Moroccan youths (Alegre and Herrera 2000, Herrera 2002).
- Researchers who have connected the academic performance of minority students with the micropolitics of the school would think that Ogbu's framework gives inadequate attention to the variety of factors operating inside this political institution (Gillborn 1995, Cummins 1996). Systematic barriers to Moroccan students' academic improvement in Barcelona include, for example, low teacher expectations, ethnocentric curricula that deny alternative experiences, and low representation of co-ethnics among staff (Alegre and Herrera 2000, Herrera 2002, Bonal et al. 2003). Under these conditions, it would be easy for Moroccan youths who experience discrimination to radicalise both primary and secondary cultural differences between them and the majority group in a similar way to the African American youths interviewed by Signithia Fordham (1996) in her research on the construction of African American school success and failure.

The case of Moroccan students in Barcelona alerts us to the fragility, limitations and political agenda of any theoretical artefact. Yet it seems reasonable to argue that explanations of the academic patterns of minority students in specific settings should move beyond orthodox readings and also include an analysis of how broader social structures and ideologies – racism, sexism, meritocracy, etc. – find their way into school dynamics (for example, expectations, curriculum, counselling and tracking) and are embodied in student experiences and performance.

### -----> **General implications**

The general purpose of this article has been to analyse how ethnographical evidence of the variability of school performance across and within ethnic minorities poses direct challenges to theory. In so doing I have explored two related questions: what are the strengths and shortcomings of Ogbu's "cultural-ecological" model when applied outside a "settler society" (Ogbu 1998)? And what are the possibilities for Moroccan youth to perform academically in a cultural organisation that embodies power relations operating in the broader society? Based on the data available, the case of Moroccan families and youth in Barcelona appears to provide us with a situation where their status as immigrants – and thereby, their



mobility projects and educational strategies – plays a central role in the expression of a proactive orientation to school very similar to those described by Gibson (1988) and Suarez-Orozco (1991). The pragmatic purpose of school is emphasised, the conflicts that emerge in school-family relations are considered but deflated, and school success is personalised as an outcome of hard work and discipline.

At the same time, empirical work at the school level provides an impetus to theorise ethnicity and academic performance in dynamic rather than static terms, as elements of fluid processes of constructions and oppressions that take place in a political context that insists on legitimising academic failure on the backs of specific groups. Perhaps most important, the research directions that would prove most fruitful in accounting for the school success of depreciated students such as Moroccans in Barcelona and Spain could be those that connect both the macro- and micro-levels and remind us of the agency of individuals. In this regard, I suggest the interest of exploring the terms in which school perceives and poses the meaning of ethnic minority students' identities. Do teachers depict ethnicity as a manifestation of a static and ancestral culture, stirring up prejudices rather than combating them? Or are ethnic identities interpreted from a less deterministic point of view, as relational and sensitive constructs crossed by other categories of difference that define inter-group power relations, and open to accommodation into specific historic situations and changing economic structures, both in the host society and in the country of origin?

In contrast to the United States, Canada and some European countries, Spanish educational policy does not address ethnic issues frankly. During the 1990s, Spanish multicultural rhetoric was severely criticised on the grounds that it was constructed upon compensatory ideologies that tended to discredit minorities' cultures. Unfortunately, this reality has not been challenged. Resistance to racist education has been strong among some particular school districts and "after-school" youth clubs, but concerns of social justice and equality of opportunities do not seem to be on the agenda of mainstream political reforms (Herrera, Albaiges and Garet 2003). "Intercultural education" (as the new rhetoric has been officially renamed) has become socially uncommitted for many academics because of its naive complacency regarding current power relations and its decaffeinated attitude towards the commodification of education.

My own earlier work, and related ethnographic research on minority student compliance and resistance in schools (Gibson 1988, Cummins 1996, Gibson and Ogbu 1991, Crul 2000, Tomlinson 2001), has provided me with the stimulus and the theoretical rationale to hypothesise that Moroccan youth will follow, in the aggregate, different patterns of school performance from those of newer arrivals whenever racism and other discriminatory practices do not persist in schools and other major institutions. I assume as well that the eventual use of distinctive Moroccan marks (for example, religion, clothing and dressing) to stigmatise their identity could lead to the radicalisation of their primary and secondary differences, the "impermeabilisation" of their cultural adhesions, and even to the development of resistant attitudes towards the dominant culture and school expectations.

Focusing on issues related to the reality of institutionalised racism in the educational system, the "song and dance" of intercultural rhetoric, and the marginalisation of structural discrimination issues in the new educational policy agenda does not deny the validity of the "family mobilisation" thesis or the influence of



community forces on student performance, but highlights the fact that human relationships are embedded within a matrix of historical and current power relations between different social groups.

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#### 4. The practice of intercultural communication: reflections for professionals in cultural encounters

*Iben Jensen*

The article is based on a study conducted in Denmark in the late 1990s. At that time I was shocked to observe instances of verbal and active discrimination on the part of teachers in Danish public schools towards students with an ethnic minority background. Of course I also observed more reflective teachers – who worked hard to create a multicultural school – and therefore I convinced myself that we, as a national collective, were moving towards re-establishing a democratic discourse which required a new professional discourse about teaching in a multi-ethnic society. Six years later we do have another, more professional discourse in the schools, but we also have a political discourse in Danish society that has radicalised what it is legal to say in public.

During this same period the mass media has been over-representing topics concerning refugees and immigrants (Hjarvad 1999), creating what Pierre Bourdieu would term an omnibus issue; an issue capable of forging a common identity among “indigenous” Danes. In 2001, the parliamentary elections were won by the Liberal Party, (Venstre) and the Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti). The consequence of this is that the current political context of intercultural communication must be taken into account. Doing a professional job that involves intercultural communication involves building a strong professional identity, and professional practitioners in multi-ethnic societies – nurses, social workers, lawyers and teachers for example – comprise a new target group for intercultural communication research. Traditionally, professional practitioners have been confronted with handbooks and readers based mainly on functionalistic theories that attempt to provide answers to possible questions (Martin and Nakayama 2000, Samovar, Porter and Jain 1981, Asante and Gudykunst 1989, Hofstede 1980, Okabe 1983, Prosser 1978). Increasingly, however, professional practitioners have found that simple answers to questions of cultural difference do not work in multi-ethnic societies. The complexity of society demands a critical approach beyond these questions and answers.

I will argue that a poststructural approach is able to handle the complexity of the concepts that are necessary for describing multi-ethnic societies. Shifting from a functionalistic to a poststructural paradigm is an opportunity to be more critical, for example in analysing the ways that institutional discrimination works in job interviews, and more generally, in how the construction of “the other” as a



homogeneous (national) group can easily be used to keep different ethnic groups in certain relative positions in society. I will also argue that it is both necessary and possible within a poststructuralist approach to develop analytical tools that relate to the practitioner's everyday experiences. The functionalistic approach has already proved that practitioners want approaches that can be applied in practice in everyday life. Therefore I contend that a key challenge in the field of intercultural communication is the development of analytical tools based on complex concepts describing complex societies (Bauman 1999, Jensen 1998/2001). This article is divided into three parts. In the first part I discuss how the field of intercultural communication research can help professional practitioners in multi-ethnic societies. In the second part I present four analytical tools for intercultural communication as seen from a poststructuralist perspective, and argue that they provide a model for intercultural communication. The third part will discuss the concept of cultural identity in relation to intercultural communication.

-----> **Intercultural communication in a global context**

Intercultural communication research has by definition been fundamentally related to the understanding of national cultures. Cultures were nations, and apart from the short passages in most intercultural texts and readers admitting that people within a nation could be more different from each other than from people across cultures (Samovar, Porter and Jain 1981), the whole idea of intercultural communication was linked to national culture. Yet ten years ago Ulf Hannerz argued that rather than continuing to discuss different national cultures, we should see all cultures as creolised, particularly given emerging discussions of globalisation (Hannerz 1992). Globalisation can be seen as referring to two opposing and interlinked processes: globalisation processes – in which we are moving closer to each other through consumerism, ideology and shared knowledge about each other – and localisation processes, which make us focus intensively on our local nation or local ethnic group (Featherstone 1990, Hylland Eriksen 1993). In approaching the centrality of globalisation to mobility, Jonathan Friedman argues that this applies primarily to an elite (1994: 23). Zygmunt Bauman agrees, but adds that it makes sense to see mobility as the idea of a society that is not open to everybody. Globalisation has, according to Bauman, caused a new polarisation in societies that divides people into groups of tourists and vagabonds. The tourists can travel free with few restrictions, whereas vagabonds are forced to travel by war, poverty or hunger. The vagabonds are not welcomed like tourists, but are met by the high walls of immigration policies and barbed wire (Bauman 1999).

Although Bauman can be criticised for oversimplification, he nevertheless indicates some important discourses in western societies that construct whom to include and exclude, a social practice I find crucial to research in intercultural communication. It is often argued that there is no difference between intercultural communication and other kinds of communication (Gudykunst 1994, Sarbaugh 1979). However, in multi-ethnic societies a key difference is precisely that intercultural communication involves a legal discourse in discussing which of the participants in a communication process “really” belongs to the majority culture. Intercultural communication in a globalised world is forced to take these circumstances into account and include crucial questions of globalisation and cultural identity.



-----> **What does the “classic” research field offer practitioners?**

In short, the field of intercultural communication research can be divided in two main traditions: a functionalistic approach based on an essentialist view of culture, and a poststructuralist approach based upon a complex concept of culture. The functionalist research tradition has tried to predict how culture would influence communication, focusing on identifying culture as a barrier against more effective communication (Samovar, Porter and Jain 1981,<sup>1</sup> Samovar and Porter 1972/1991, Brislin 1986, Gudykunst 1983, 1994, 1995, Hall 1959, Sarbaugh 1979). These works offer practitioners tools to describe what they can expect of intercultural communication. The functionalist research tradition also includes competence research that tries to establish criteria for the personal acquisition of intercultural competences (Gertsen 1990, S oderberg 1994, Kincaid 1987).

The Dutch management researcher Geerd Hofstede’s *Culture’s Consequences* (1980) has had an enormous influence on this research tradition in intercultural communication. Hofstede investigated the relationships between employees and managements in forty different cultures, and on this basis he developed cultural dimensions of power-distance (small/large), uncertainty avoidance/anxiety, individualism/collectivism and masculinity/femininity. The dimensions are all based on the idea that cultures are homogenous national cultures that do not change over any significant period of time. Very often Hofstede’s dimensions are applied uncritically in spite of the fact that they were developed more than twenty years ago.<sup>2</sup> William B. Gudykunst, a pioneer in the field of intercultural communication, has legitimised the use of Hofstede’s work in more recent times. In 1995, he published “Anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory: current status”, building upon Hofstede’s dimensions and developed from the perspective of nations as homogeneous static societies. Hofstede’s model can be seen as an offer to categorise the world through some simple frames that we can recognise from everyday life. He offers those interested in intercultural communication an immediate explanation of how communication in management might be influenced by culture.

In their important book *Communication with Strangers* (1994), William B. Gudykunst and Yun Kim attempted to describe an intercultural communication process. They argue for intercultural communication as a dialogical process in which those involved are both addressee and addresser. Their model describes interpersonal intercultural communication as influenced by psycho-cultural, socio-cultural and cultural filters, and framed as a process by environmental influences (Gudykunst and Kim 1984: 14). The authors explain that “without understanding the strangers’ filters, we cannot accurately interpret or predict their behaviours” (Gudykunst and Kim 1984: 35). In relation to poststructural approaches the model omits the aspect of power; this is arguably central to every aspect of the models filters, but is somehow not mentioned. The model hints at the question of social differences, but presents the category of national culture as the most dominant and relevant to every communication process.

-----> **Poststructural offers?**

The most important offer of this approach is a critical perspective where intercultural communication is critiqued in relation to questions of power, political discourse, constructions of “the other” and so forth. Compared to the offers of functionalist approaches, poststructuralist approaches do not initially appear very



useful. The majority of researchers working with a poststructuralist approach are either philosophical (Applegate and Sypher 1983, 1988, González and Tanno 1999, Jandt and Tanno 1994, 1996) or discussing issues related to a theory of intercultural communication (Collier and Thomas 1988). Collier and Thomas, for example, discuss intercultural communication from the perspective of the individual. They define intercultural communication as involving those “who identify themselves as distinct from one another in cultural terms” (1988: 100). This definition differs from the dominant paradigm of the time by taking the actor rather than the culture as its point of departure; it is the interpretations of the participant that determine what culture they belong to. Fred Jandt and Dolores Tanno, in addressing issues of ethics and method, have addressed the importance of critiquing constructions of “the other” in intercultural research (Jandt and Tanno 1996). Jandt’s reader introduction to *Intercultural Communication Identities in a Global Community* (1995) introduced students to poststructuralist approaches (1995, fourth edition 2003), and in 2003 he published *Intercultural Communication: A Global Reader*, which discusses identity in relation to communication, and intercultural communication in relation to the impact of the Internet and online global communication, gender differences in communication and the increasing influence of globalisation in diverse aspects of communication.

From the tradition of constructionist thinking, the Japanese-American Muneo Yoshikawa has contributed a study of intercultural dialogue in which he presents “The double-swing model” (1987). The model is the sign of infinity,<sup>3</sup> and Yoshikawa was inspired by Martin Buber, who works with a duality in the relationship between “you and I”. Yoshikawa emphasises that both communication parties play the role of addresser and addressee. In the double-swing model, communication is seen as an infinite process and the two participants will both change during their meeting. Yoshikawa underlines that the goal for communication is not to eliminate differences but to use the dynamics that arise through the encounter. From a philosophical perspective Yoshikawa is inspiring, but in another model that is not related to social context it obscures the power relations between different actors. The final researcher I wish to mention here is John Gumperz, who has been working with the ethnography of language. In conducting a range of studies on inter-ethnic communication he has shown how misunderstandings are related to different and divergent expectations, behaviour, forms of politeness and verbal misunderstandings. As a researcher who places intercultural communication in a social context – and who works with the training of professionals in multi-ethnic societies – he is relevant to the thrust of this article. In particular, it is worth noting how his 1982 study of job interviews in Britain describes situations very close to observations made in Denmark in 2003.

-----> **An intercultural communication model**

In a study of intercultural communication in complex, multi-ethnic societies, I developed a model for intercultural communication from a poststructuralist approach through four analytical tools (Jensen 1998/2001). The model describes an intercultural communication process between two actors who are both addressers and addressees. It emphasises the interconnectedness of the participants in the communication process and stresses that the communication process is an infinite, ongoing process (Yoshikawa 1987). The aim of the model is to let the practitioner or student think through an intercultural communication process and reflect upon it from a critical perspective.



### 1. *Positions of experiences*

Example: an interview in Denmark:

Turkish-Danish boy: “I am so tired of people shouting at me. I don’t like to go by myself – so we always go more than one – we like to go two or three together.”

Ethnic Danish girl: “It is not true. I have never heard anyone shout, and a friend of mine is from Korea, and no one shouts at her – or at us.”

They are both telling the truth, but their “positions of experiences” are completely different. The ethnic Danish girl is part of the majority and does not know how girls from Korea are treated differently from the Turkish-Danish boy in the public space. The concept of positions of experiences refers to the fact that all interpretations are bound in individual experiences, and although the experiences are subjective, they are related to the social position of a person. From an everyday perspective, theoretically represented by Berger and Luckmann (1966), the term experience is central. In intercultural communication we have to acknowledge that our communication partner possesses other experiences, is socialised to experience his or her world as real, and that it is impossible to ignore one’s experiences (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The concept of positions of experiences is developed from the philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer – and inspired by his notion of horizons of experience – who sees interpretations as being related to the experiences of the actor. We understand the world on the basis of our own experiences, and our experience of the world is limited by our vantage point (Gadamer 1975/1989). In relation to intercultural communication this means that we cannot only relate cultural differences to differences in interpretation, but must also take this horizon into account.

Positions of experiences is also inspired by engaging with the concept of positioning, described by the social constructionists Davies and Harré (1990) as follows:

Positioning, as we will use it, is the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines. There can be interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another, and there can be reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself. However it would be a mistake to assume that, in either case, positioning is necessarily intentional. One lives one’s life in terms of one’s ongoing produced self, whoever might be responsible for its production. (1990: 40)

Positioning between ethnic majorities and minorities are often produced along national and ethnic differences. Minorities often struggle to get another positioning from the majority, not only in the media but also in the everyday positions they are given (Hussain, Yilmaz and O’Conner 1997, Jensen 2000). Seen as an analytical tool, positions of experiences provides an awareness of how different positions are crucial to the interpretation of communication, and a reflection that persons in intercultural communication always have different opportunities to give different positions of themselves. Essential to a critical intercultural communication perspective is the awareness that social positions and experiences do not float in space, but are created in social structures and spaces in relation to the given conditions of the individual. This point of view resembles Bourdieu’s notion of habitus (Bourdieu 1986, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992/1996). Moreover, the idea of positions of experiences focuses upon individual differences, but is interconnected with structural differences. In the case of intercultural



communication, ethnic background is always a part of a person's experience, but the actual role it plays in communication is negotiated with other relations.

### 2. *Cultural presuppositions*

Cultural presuppositions refer to knowledge, experience, feelings and opinions we hold with respect to categories of people that we do not regard as members of the cultural communities that we identify ourselves with. Cultural presuppositions are everyday constants, often very simple negative stories or knowledge about groups you want to describe as different from your own group: "The woman does not speak Danish, although she has been here for fifteen years". The concept of cultural presuppositions is also inspired by Gadamer's work, and especially Gadamer's simplified doctrine that "All understanding is a matter of presuppositions" (Bukhdal 1967). No matter what kind of knowledge we have about other groups – however partial and prejudiced it is – it is the basis for the interpretations we make. The cultural presuppositions of an actor will always be part of the discourses available in society.<sup>4</sup> The intention of the concept of cultural presuppositions is to create awareness of the ordinary processes by which people outside of their own social communities are often characterised (negatively) on the basis of one's own values. While the actors' understandings are constructed on the basis of discourses in society, cultural presuppositions could be described as the actors' actual use of discourses in society. In an analysis of an intercultural interview for example, and an interview with an intercultural issue as a topic, it is possible to discern discursive formations.<sup>5</sup> Cultural presuppositions are a simple but applicable tool for awareness of the discourses and discursive formations in everyday life, for example in how a client categorises "others".

### 3. *Cultural self-perception*

Cultural self-perception is the way in which an actor expresses a cultural community as the one he or she identifies with. Cultural self-perception is strongly connected with cultural presuppositions, as it is through constructions of "others" that we construct narratives about ourselves. Cultural self-perception can point to the idealisation that often occurs when partners in discussion represent different values or different cultural communities. Cultural presuppositions and cultural self-perception also stress the import of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is the way you see your own culture as the natural centre, and regard other cultures comparatively. However, cultural self-perception can also be negative. Pierre Bourdieu describes in *La misère du monde* how an Algerian boy is not only working class, but also ethnically different, and has internalised negative views of himself in relation to others (1998). In professional, intercultural encounters it is extremely important to be aware of the asymmetry of the communication process. Normally it is the professional who has the power to define the communication, to interpret the communication and to decide the consequences of the communication. The analytical goal of this tool is to gain access to the ways in which actors understand their own cultural communities.

### 4. *Cultural fix points*

Cultural fix points are the focal points that arise in communication between two actors who both feel they represent a certain topic. For a topic to be seen as a "cultural fix point" it requires that both actors identify with this topic, and that they position themselves in a discussion. Cultural fix points are not entirely



arbitrary, but relate to societal structures. Intercultural communication is normally related to misunderstanding and conflicts, although it is argued that most intercultural communication is problem free (Jandt 1995). To be able to focus on exceptions, I see fix points as a way of sharpening views, as the aim of this concept is to identify patterns in the conflicts that are characteristic of given periods. In Denmark in the 1990s, for example, we could point to gender roles, arranged marriages, the education of children and headscarves as fix points in ethnic relations. It is impossible to predict whether these aspects will be of significance, but we can investigate whether they are significant in actual situations because cultural fix points demand that both actors identify with a topic.

These four analytical tools allow the researcher to approach how the actors interpret each other's expressions in everyday life, and they offer the possibility of a systematic methodology for general analyses of intercultural communication processes. I also see these analytical tools as offering practitioners a vocabulary of intercultural communication and a stimulus for reflecting upon their own everyday reactions to their clients, patients and others encountered in professional interaction. However, those tools are also closely linked to the construction of identity in relation to others, and as I have argued earlier in the essay, cultural identity is a very important part of intercultural communication.

#### -----> **Cultural identity in intercultural communication**

I have always wondered why intercultural communication involves so many emotions. Thinking about the concept of cultural identity brings us at least partly closer to an explanation. Stuart Hall argues that "the game of identity" is played everywhere in society, but of course the term cultural identity carries a variety of different meanings (Hall, Held and McGrew 1992, Hall and Du Gay 1996). Thus we can point to a functionalist understanding of cultural identity where the goal is to find a national mind, a particular characteristic identity of the population as a whole (Røggilds 1995). Within the humanities, the term is often related to the idea of using and exchanging symbols as parts of identities (Fornäs 1995: 240). Stuart Hall regards cultural identity as follows: "Cultural identities – those aspects of our identities which arise from our 'belonging' to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and, above all, national cultures" (Hall, Held and McGrew 1992: 274). In working with the ideas of the decentralised subject and multiple identities, Hall argues that the self is fragmented, and does not contain one identity but several often contradictory identities. The subject's identity is not given, but the subject occupies different identities at different points in time (Hall, Held and McGrew 1992, Gergen 1985, 1991, 1997):

Identity becomes a "moveable" feast formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us [...]. Within us are contradictory identities pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about (Hall, Held and McGrew 1992: 277).

According to Hall, the reason we see ourselves as coherent persons is that we construct narratives about ourselves: "If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves" (ibid: 277). In a continuation of Collier and Thomas' (1988) use of cultural identity, Hall's use is very interesting for the development of intercultural communication in complex societies. By working with a realisation of multiple identities, we develop skills for pinpointing the identities that, for example, young people who live in diaspora express. The young people do not



express that they are torn between two worlds, but that they live in two worlds. Multiple identities are also relevant to the development of fix points; it provides us with an explanation as to why certain topics create heated discussions, as they actualise different identities during communication and may involve connotations that the participants are not prepared for.

When identity is formed in relation to others it also involves a political twist (Gergen 1991, 1997). “Othering” is a social process, in which the majority often constructs and normalises its distance from other groups by fixing difference: they have another religion, lack national linguistic qualifications and so forth. (Kelly 1998, Razack 1998, Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1996). For example, a Turkish-Danish girl may be constructed as traditionally Turkish by Danish girls, and seen as inauthentic or confused if she chooses to position herself closer to Danish girls (Jensen 1998/2001). The girl can choose between being in the group by positioning herself as Turkish – as the ethnically Danish girls expect – or otherwise occupy a lower status in the group. In both cases the ethnically Danish girls are the defining group. Through their construction they maintain the right to include or exclude the Turkish-Danish girls. In everyday intercultural conversations this means that ethnic minorities have to constantly invalidate and overcome the majority’s simplified understandings of them.

#### -----> Cultural identity as an analytical tool

Hall’s interesting idea of cultural identity does have an important weakness in relation to intercultural communication: it assumes that national identity remains the primary identity. This implies that we have not completely dissociated ourselves from intercultural research’s reductionism with national culture as the most important explanation in a communication situation (Jensen 1998/2001: 16-19). To counter this, I suggest that the actualised identity depends on the topic the participants are talking about. Some conversations will actualise national identity while other conversations will not concern national ideas at all. However, the conversation still has to be seen in an intercultural context. Thus I propose that we use an understanding of cultural identity which is not delimited by race, ethnicity or nationality, but as one that constantly includes further aspects of identity such as gender, work, hobbies and so forth. Figuratively speaking, we can see cultural identity as a yellow dandelion. Every little yellow leaf symbolises a fragment of our identities. In practice all identities are in the flower all the time. It is only analytically that we can distinguish and fix the floating identities, and it is possible only temporarily to point out specific fragments of identities (Jensen 2001). This avoids a hierarchical structure where certain identities are seen as the determining ones.

In practice the concept of cultural identity can be used in two ways: (a) in training professional practitioners to see people as more than belonging to ethnic minorities, where focusing on other aspects – age, gender – gives the practitioner the possibility to be conscious of their cultural presuppositions of the client; and (b) in training practitioners to be conscious of their own cultural identity in interaction: when does the nurse actualise her gender identity? When does she use her professional identity? In relation to professional practitioners, their professional identity is of obvious interest. In the Nordic countries, and in nationally-based educational systems, it takes a lot of reflection and discussion for professional practitioners to develop a multi-ethnic professionalism.



-----> **The professional cultural encounter**

I have argued that global changes have underlined the importance for professional practitioners in multi-ethnic societies of working explicitly with intercultural communication. It is important for the research field to be more aware of relevant political discourses, especially so in a country dominated by negative discourses of the “other”. Professionals need analytical tools regardless of their political views. To be a professional in multi-ethnic societies involves different degrees of intercultural awareness. To have intercultural competence as a practitioner demands knowledge of the types of analytical tools I have presented, and to engage with concepts like globalisation, culture, language and cultural identity – and hopefully it also means working with anti-discrimination and equal ethnic rights as basic assumptions.

*Endnotes*

1. Between 1972 and 1995, functionalist communication research monopolised the practice of education in intercultural communication in the USA and in almost all other western countries. The highly influential textbook by Samovar and Porter, *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, has been published in six editions for example.
2. See Jensen and Løngreen (1995: 40-2) for a critique of Hofstede’s work and Jensen (1998/2001: 180-183).
3. To be precise it is a Möbius band, which can be illustrated by a cut rubber band, twisted around once and shaped into the sign of infinity. By following this shape you change sides over and over again.
4. “A discourse is a particular type of representation. A discourse is a group of statements, which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed” (Hall 1997: 201).
5. “Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever [...] one can define a regularity [...] we will say [...] that we are dealing with a discursive formation” (Foucault in Hall 1997: 202).



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## **Part III**

### **Racism and anti-racism**





## 1. The problem of culture and human rights in the response to racism

*Alana Lentin*

What happens when resolving to fulfil laudable principles becomes a way of not confronting pressing political problems? This is ultimately the question that this essay hopes to address. I intend to look critically at two themes – culture and human rights – central to the struggle against racism in the west. Both are often proposed as ways of conceptualising the response to racism and are central in the work of international institutions such as the Council of Europe. Although each has its origins in significantly different intellectual traditions which will not be entered into here, I wish to show that, with regard to anti-racism, they are more interconnected than might be imagined.

Living together in modern, diverse societies has been thought about both in terms of culture, that is, as the differences between peoples conceived as belonging to different cultural groups, and in terms of individuality and the rights of each person to equal treatment as a member of a given society. The problem often lies in the reconciliation of the two, often conceptualised as polar opposites from the western liberal point of view. I want to argue that when examined in the context of anti-racism, such differences become less entrenched. Instead, both culture and human rights have been proposed as ways to escape racism's tenacious grasp by those sharing a political standpoint: that of mainstream anti-racist movements and state and international institutions.

This form of officially sanctioned anti-racism has constructed itself in opposition to an anti-racist activism grounded in the lived experience of the racialised. It puts forward a universalistic anti-racist formula that is said to appeal to citizens regardless of their "race, creed or colour". In so doing, it often relegates the autonomous anti-racism of black and minority ethnic peoples to the realms of the particularist, with no relevance beyond the single "community". The practical result of the constructed opposition of universalistic and particularistic approaches at the heart of anti-racism is ultimately the disunity of the anti-racist movement in Europe.

In the interests of re-evaluating our methods in order to understand the reasons for this lack of unity, I propose a historicised examination of the recent history of some of the discourses central to anti-racist politics. Understanding how culture becomes central both for the way we make sense of racism and as a solution to it is vital if we are to reassess the efficiency of dearly held principles at this time of, in many ways, unprecedented racism on a global scale. Pinpointing the origins of the "culturalisation" of the language of anti-racism will also reveal how the



discourse of rights has returned, in recent years, as the remedy of choice for racism's ills. This story, as we shall see, beyond the particularities of the articulation of the anti-racist project, is tightly bound with the image of Europe Europeans sought to project in the aftermath of the Holocaust and racism's "golden age". A closer look might indicate ways of reconciling diverse anti-racisms, long mired in misunderstanding.

-----> **More culture in a pot of yoghurt**

The explanation of human diversity in terms of cultural differences and the application of this notion to the fight against racism is often attributed to "minority" groups and their campaign for equal recognition (Taylor 1994). It is often assumed that anti-racism in the west has been subsumed under a newer phenomenon – identity politics – which has transformed the campaign to end racism into one for the rights of discriminated "communities", from indigenous peoples to lesbians and gays. While the identity politics phenomenon is most certainly a real one, largely an offshoot from the general move in the 1980s towards a new social movement politics based largely on identitarian concerns (Offe 1995, Touraine 1984, Melucci 1992), I want to argue against the presumption that it has taken anti-racism over from the bottom up.

Pierre-André Taguieff (1992) claims that the aims of anti-racism have been diverted by what he sees as the dominance of "communitarian" politics. Rather than being based on universalistic principles of secularism and individual rights, the struggle of racism is being reduced, in his view, to the self-defence of minority groups competing with each other, it is implied, for the highest position in the hierarchy of victimhood. For Taguieff, individual origins should have no bearing on their treatment in society and it is around that principle that the anti-racist movement should be organised. All reference to skin colour, ethnicity or religion pervert the universalistic aim of "true" anti-racism, namely to eradicate the significance attached to such difference from the public sphere and to bring about a veritably colour-blind society.

Charles Taylor (1994), writing from a very different perspective to that of Taguieff, finds his theorisation of the politics of recognition upon the ideal of authenticity which, in a misreading of Frantz Fanon's attitude to *negritude* (1963, 1967), he attributes to the anti-colonialist revolutionary. Taylor assumes that minority groups calling for equal recognition in western societies present themselves as the bearers of an authentic identity with all the assumptions of uniqueness that this implies. He fails to recognise Fanon's own ambivalent attitude to authenticity or *negritude* which, far from embracing blackness wholeheartedly, tentatively proposes it as a pragmatic solution to racism. Blackness exists for Fanon only in so far as it has been brought into existence through the relationship with whiteness. Racialisation creates black people as the inferior opposite to white people, whose power subjugates and ultimately dehumanises non-whites. Therefore, to embrace blackness is also to accept a label that is imposed rather than chosen. For Fanon, culture and identity often take on importance not for themselves, but as tools in the quest for liberation. He states that "it is not because the Indo-Chinese has discovered a culture of his own that he is in revolt. It is because 'quite simply' it was, in more than one way, becoming impossible for him to breathe" (1967: 226).

However, Taylor's assumption – that the mobilisation of a discourse of authentic cultural identity is a bottom-up phenomenon that accompanies the greater



inclusion of “minorities” in the polity – is a widely shared one. I want to argue that in order to understand how the language of cultural difference and relativity becomes so marked in the discourse of anti-racism, we have to shatter the belief that this is a situation forced upon us, as Taguieff would have it, by aggrieved minority groups. On the contrary, a brief history of the evolution of anti-racism following the end of the second world war reveals how the language of culture is proposed by institutions and becomes the dominant paradigm both for understanding racism and for conceptualising anti-racism. The attribution of identity politics to the racialised alone ignores the extent to which anti-racism has been dominated by a culturalist approach which also governs access to funding and decision making.

I wish to propose that the emphasis placed on culture as an alternative to “race” bypasses the need for Europeans to engage with the history of racism as integral to that of the western nation state. As a consequence, much of the anti-racist activism of black and minority groups in Europe, influenced greatly by the anti-colonialist movement of the 1960s and 1970s and founded upon a critique of state, institutionalised racism, has for a variety of political reasons since the 1980s been forced to conform to a culturalist agenda or risk marginalisation and even extinction. In the next section I shall ask what precisely the historical trajectory of post-war institutional responses to racism and their role in establishing culture as the dominant paradigm in anti-racism is. What political purposes does the emphasis on culture serve?

#### -----> **Cultural alternatives: anti-racism at Unesco**

The Unesco tradition in anti-racism is the approach at the root of the mainstream anti-racism practised by many organisations and international institutions (Barker 1983). It can be summed up as follows:

- It often takes a psychosocial attitude to racism, seeing it as the problem of pathological and/or ignorant individuals;
- It therefore proposes individually based solutions emphasising the need to overcome ignorance through education and a greater knowledge of the other;
- Whereas it admits the wrongdoing of governments, it avoids connecting racism with the historical development of the modern European nation state, thus seeing racism as an aberration rather than a potential outcome of modernity (Bauman 1989).

This form of anti-racism becomes dominant precisely because it focuses on the need to find an alternative to “race” to adequately describe human differences. The antidote to racism, accordingly, is the denial of the viability of “race” as a category and the introduction of alternative conceptual tools based on culturalised understandings, such as ethnicity and, more recently, identity. By concentrating on the need to replace “race” at all costs, proponents of this form of anti-racism denied the necessity of historicising the emergence of racism, not as a mere pseudo-science, but as an ideology that came to dominate politics from the end of the nineteenth century until the second world war. This neglect has led today to a failure to disentangle “race” and state. Indeed, their interconnectedness remains largely obscured despite admissions of institutional racism and the perceived need for affirmative action programmes in many countries.

Unesco first brought together its panel of “world experts” in 1950. The statement (Unesco 1968) that this panel produced and the pamphlets written by its members



formed the basis of the anti-racist policy of the post-war international institutions. This policy was largely adopted by western governments. Two aspects of the Unesco project can help us to understand the way in which culture takes on such importance as the principal means of conceiving human difference today.

- Unesco aimed to tackle racism on its own terms, namely as a pseudo-science, reasoning that disproving the scientific validity of “race” would lead to the demise of racism.
- The project’s authors (mainly the anthropologists involved) aimed to provide an alternative explanation of human difference to that of “race”.

This work should be seen in the context of the anti-racist anthropologists who, from the inter-war years onwards, were committed to demonstrating that racial hierarchy was scientifically bogus and that humanity should be seen as divisible by cultures, ethnicities and the like. Unesco wanted to be able to provide answers why human groups differed from each other in appearance, traditions and levels of “progress”. This was perceived to be all the more necessary as the immigration of non-Europeans meant that indigenous populations were, many for the first time, coming face-to-face with others that they often thought of as racially inferior or, at the very least, dangerously unfamiliar.

The main proposal made by Unesco, and most forcefully by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Race and History* (1961), was that human groups could be divided according to cultures which were relative to each other. The idea that each culture contributed “in its own way” to humanity as a whole sought to counter the widely accepted belief that a hierarchy of “race” divided Europeans and non-Europeans. Lévi-Strauss celebrated the diversity of humanity, demonstrated by what he called the “distinctive contributions” of each cultural group. He stressed his belief that different levels of progress between such groups could not be attributed to any innate differences. Rather, progress came about as a result of interaction between groups. The historical chance that led to the onset of modernity in the west meant that other cultures that rubbed shoulders with it experienced more rapid progress. Those that remained isolated did not. The Unesco tradition in anti-racism, to which Lévi-Strauss’ work was central, was translated into a specific approach to opposing racism based on the belief that racism could be overcome by recognising that the real problem was one of ethnocentrism, by promoting the benefits of cultural diversity in enriching society and by encouraging greater knowledge of other cultures among western societies.

This package of solutions to the persistence of “racism without race” creates three sets of problems:

- By proposing that racism is a misconstrued attitude based on misleading, pseudo-scientific information, it implies that it can be overcome at an individual level without questioning the role of the state. Therefore, slavery, colonialism, the Holocaust and contemporary discrimination against immigrants are transformed into aberrations rather than composites of the politics of modern nation states.
- Proposing culture as an alternative to “race” does little to refute the widely accepted belief that groups are organised hierarchically according to level of progress. This is especially problematic in “solidarity-type” anti-racism. The idea that white people had a duty to help new immigrants produced a paternalistic attitude. This attitude unwittingly reproduced the idea of western superiority over so-called “Third World primitiveness”.



- The idea that people can be assigned to different groups according to culture does nothing to avoid the essentialisation of “race”. This legacy remains with us today in our tendency to talk in stereotypes about “Muslim values”, “black attitudes” or “Asian work ethics”.

-----> **It's a culture thing ...**

The Unesco approach to the fight against racism gave birth to two structuring ideas that continue to dominate mainstream anti-racism to the present day. Firstly, racism is construed as a perversion of the “natural” trajectory of western, liberal-democratic nation states. Where it has become the policy of governments, it is assumed that it has come from the fringes to momentarily take over the centre: the situation is rectified by the ultimate triumph of democracy. The state, from this perspective, is comparable to a sick person, and so racism is pathologised, psychologised, individualised and thus removed entirely from the realm of politics. Secondly, the refusal to engage with race as a political idea leads also to the depoliticisation of anti-racism. By replacing race with culture, the proponents of the Unesco approach are unable to deal with the fact that no matter how scientifically false “race” is, the reality of racism is implacable. By advocating greater cultural knowledge as the best means to combat racism, anti-racists cannot but continuously avoid the quandary of racism’s persistence. Racism continues to dog us even without “race” precisely because intercultural awareness can only ultimately go so far. It cannot trigger a real self-analysis at the level of the state of the extent of racism’s penetration into our institutions, political cultures and worldviews.

What has been the effect of the predominance of culturalism in mainstream anti-racist practice? Within this logic, the members of non-white and/or non-European cultural groups have often been thought of as internally homogeneous. Members of these purported cultures are essentialised as such: so-called “minorities” are pigeon-holed and as a result rendered invisible. Once an individual has been assigned to his or her cultural group, tucked away at the fringes of society (both metaphorically and often geographically), any sense of hybridity or heterogeneity is lost from sight. Many theorists, artists, musicians and writers have emphasised the fluidity of cultural identities. But without challenging the underlying reasons for why culture dominates our understandings it is unlikely that this will have a significant impact in the realm of politics and policy making. Thinking culturally about difference is the default for not talking about “race”, thereby avoiding the charge of racism. But the need for such a substitute obscures precisely the fact that the hierarchy put in place by racism has been maintained. It no longer exists as blatant persecution. It is more ambivalent. It can continue precisely because it is rejected from our official discourse (Goldberg 2002). The ultimate signal that it has been rejected is the fact that it has even been replaced. Benign culture takes over from virulent “race”.

Nevertheless, racism persists. This is even admitted by elites. Their response is also formulated in terms of culture. Multiculturalism, interculturalism and diversity management have, over the years, been different ways of talking about the same thing: how to “integrate” difference and curb the problems that it may lead to. It is now widely accepted that the policy of assimilation is doomed to failure. However, it is also increasingly obvious that culturalist policies have not brought about the end of racism. This is because neither multiculturalism nor its updated version – interculturalism – questions the very reason for the focus on culture.



People targeted by racism generally see through the idea that recognising cultural differences, providing for them and encouraging others to learn about them will bring an end to discrimination. However, my research into anti-racism in Europe (Lentin 2002) revealed that state commitments to tackling racism still adhere to the principles of the Unesco declaration. At local, national and European level virtually the only anti-racist projects that receive funding are those that mobilise culture in one form or another. Mainstream anti-racist organisations, such as Arci in Italy and SOS Racisme in France, propose culture as the best way to break down barriers and increase tolerance. They organise concerts of so-called “ethnic music”, food festivals and even intercultural football games. As one of my interviewees pointed out:

I don't think we got any money from the European Union at all [...] what was funded was not anti-racist work. It was cultural work, multicultural work. The best way to get funding was multicultural work not stuff that was going to be critical of state institutions.

It is clear that the state perception is that culture is inherently stripped of politics. It is therefore possible to be seen to promote anti-racist initiatives without calling into question the participation of state institutions in racist discrimination. Even the admission of institutional racism in the UK has led primarily to policies of “inclusion” and “diversification”. These policies fail to scratch the surface to reveal the often deeply racist premises upon which these institutions have been built. In our multicultural societies, it is widely held that it is futile to historicise the development of the concepts we take for granted. Instead we can revel in our cultural richness, ignoring all those for whom the official embrace of diversity makes little everyday difference. Ultimately, it is easier to promote positive images of cultural diversity that reflect well on the ability of progressive societies to integrate difference and to deal with instances of racial violence on a case-by-case basis than to admit to the structuring effects of racism upon our national societies.

-----> **What's wrong with rights?**

Critics of cultural relativism and the role it has played in anti-racism advocate a return to principles of individual equal rights (Taguieff 1991, 1992). It is assumed that by treating each person as an individual with equal abilities, and potentially opportunities, the reification involved in a culturalised approach to problems of discrimination can be overcome. Such critics, as we have seen, attribute the dominance of culturalism within anti-racism to what they see as the power of identity politics mobilised by minority groups. On the other hand, I have suggested that cultural relativist ideals have been fundamental to dominant institutional paradigms and have shaped the opportunities available to activists to influence the anti-racist agenda, often resulting in the silencing of critical state-centred projects. Therefore, human rights, proposed as an alternative to cultural relativism, should be seen not as radically breaking with culturalism but as continuous with the effort to influence the campaign against racism from the top down.

The emphasis placed on individual human rights has a long history in the struggle against racism going back to the anti-slavery campaigns of the 1800s. In that sense, although it is enjoying a renewed popularity, construed as a response to the inadequacy of cultural relativism it both predates and has continued to co-exist with “particularist” approaches. Despite the apparent opposition between the two, like culturalism, the emphasis on rights fails to engage with the relationship of “reciprocal determination” (Balibar 1991) between “race” and state.



While the focus on culture displaces racism by viewing it as based upon a misunderstanding of the true nature of human difference, the focus on rights negates the significance of racism because it bases itself upon the ultimate equality of individual human beings. This approach is problematic on two counts which do not differ widely from the difficulties posed by culturalism.

Firstly, a human rights approach is consistent with what Goldberg (2002) calls historicist or progressivist racism. In Goldberg's account, this is one of two types of racism that develop and continue to overlap over time: naturalism and historicism. Naturalist racism lasted from the seventeenth to approximately the mid-nineteenth century and was defined by the idea that racial inferiority was inherent and scientifically provable. Historicist racism, altogether more sophisticated, dominated from the mid-nineteenth century on. It continues to inform neoconservative ideas such as "colour blindness" and what Goldberg calls "raceless states".<sup>1</sup> Emerging mainly under the conditions of colonial administration, and later of immigration, it relies on the assumption, based on the posited need for "racial realism" (Goldberg 2002: 82), that "inferior" others may become "civilised" through a process of assimilation. Historicism functions by creating the illusion that "race" is not, or is no longer, relevant. It advocates that discrimination and inequality may be overcome over time through the progressive advancement of non-Europeans.

This is entirely linked with the second problem raised by the human rights approach, namely the standard against which such progress is gauged. Balibar (1994) has argued that racism and universalism cannot be considered separately because both are concerned with a constructed vision of ideal humanity. The human rights promotion of a universalised individualism fails to deal with this relationship between universalism and racism because it does not question the standards set by the very people they see as irrelevant, that is "whites" or westerners. Europeans are the setters of the standards of ideal humanity because their hegemony is assured; it is assured because the standards have been set in their own image. It is this that Balibar speaks of when he describes racism and universalism as each containing the other inside itself: a universal vision of humanity cannot be constructed without reference being made to that which it excludes. Therefore, the universalism of Europeans was constructed in their own image yet set as the norm.

Human rights is in many respects a naive discourse and one which has several questionable repercussions. It both avoids and compounds the problem posed by failing to problematise whiteness, instead seeing it as inextricably bound up with the ideal vision of humanity which we are all encouraged to attain in the interests of greater equality and liberty. By avoiding a discussion of how this norm was institutionalised, namely through the historical practice of racism which ensured the dominance of the "Anglo-European moral tradition" (Goldberg 2002: 224), human rights participates in compounding the logic of racial historicism. It does so also by refusing to admit the impossibility of equality as premised on the assumption that each and every individual has the opportunity to attain the humanity encapsulated by the universalist vision. If the universalistic ideal of humanity is founded upon the European, white model it will simply not be possible for the others that human rights seek to protect to gain entrance to that community of individuals.

None of this is to say that individual freedom and the equality of rights is not a noble cause and that we should fall back on a cultural relativism that also ignores



the heterogeneity and internal conflicts within so-called cultures. On the contrary, I am arguing that the choice between human rights and cultural relativism is a wholly artificial one because both rely on a view of humanity organised according to differential levels of progress. While cultural relativists unproblematically accept that this situation of diversity may remain a permanent one, human rights advocates seek to bring about a uniformity of humanity predicated on the ideal of equal rights. What neither position sees is that both tacitly assume the existence of a (superior) model of humanness against which those conceived of either as culturally different or fundamentally subordinated can be contrasted and towards which they may, it is assumed, progress over time.

-----> **Conclusion**

In the present political climate, the problems posed by both culture and human rights can be seen more clearly than ever before. Racism is being reconfigured yet again in reaction to what is being painted by western leaders as a crisis of asylum and immigration. In the popular press, the arrival of a new generation of non-European migrants is being construed as a problem of incompatible cultural differences. This euphemistic reference to culture barely conceals the racist assumptions that engender highly different responses to white and non-white others. Whereas in the period until the end of large-scale post-war immigration in the 1970s this was seen as a problem on a collective scale – whole groups of people, living in communities which clashed with the national way of life – today, reactions have become more individualised. Migrants are seen as desirable or undesirable according to criteria based on individual attributes, mainly governed by economic rationale. The variable requirements for IT experts, domestic workers or tomato pickers are an illustration of this. Individuals are treated as disposable and judged on their basis of their usefulness alone.

Within such a context neither cultural awareness nor equal human rights can have an effect on combating the racism faced by migrants in today's Europe. This is because state racism is being reconfigured in a way which externalises its targets more emphatically than ever before. By keeping out those we do not want and accepting only those who can be of service, western states are involved in a reconfiguration of the vision of ideal humanity that is fundamentally opposed to any principle of human rights. If we do not accept that those that differ from us can live among us and be treated equally as individuals here, is it possible to claim that universal human rights are being truly respected? In light of the yawning gulf between regions is it not that to speak of equal rights is to bypass the real problem: unequal worlds?

*Endnotes*

1. Goldberg shows that a historicist view informed abolitionist movements (and I would add mainstream anti-racist ideas). These movements posited “racelessness” as the obvious response to racism, a view that became common-sense to post-war state rationality. However, the failure of historicism to eradicate racism, replacing naturalism with “the infuriating subtleties of a legally fashioned racial order” (Goldberg 2002: 203) meant that many of the old racisms remained while being glossed over with apparently progressive attitudes that favoured nurture over nature.



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## 2. The rise and fall of British multiculturalism

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For the past two decades, thinking on race relations in Britain has been dominated by what I would call a “multiculturalist settlement”. That has meant that anti-racism has been degraded, on the one hand, to a set of policies designed to legislate against individual acts of discrimination, and on the other to policies designed to recognise, promote and celebrate so-called minority cultures – or “multiculturalism”. The first half of that settlement, enshrined in the 1976 Race Relations Act, has been limited in effect as racist practice has learnt to disguise itself in codes and suggestion.<sup>1</sup> The second half is now unravelling; from the state’s point of view multiculturalism no longer “works”. The establishment needs a revised strategy to manage a racially divided society as effectively as multiculturalism did in an earlier time. It seeks to replace the old multiculturalist formula of “celebrating difference” – itself a response to the urban riots of the early 1980s – with the new concept of “community cohesion” which has emerged since the riots in the north of England in summer 2001.<sup>2</sup>

From the point of view of anti-racism, the limits of what could be achieved within the multiculturalist framework have long since been reached. The passing of the old multiculturalist settlement provides an opportunity to revisit the history of these changes, to better understand the prospects of challenging racism today. Such a history must be critical; it must move beyond the assumption that anti-racism can be reduced to just the celebration of diversity or the recognition of cultural difference. Diversity is simply a fact of humanity and is, in itself, morally neutral. In specific contexts, where the fact of diversity is being denied in a particular way to exclude certain groups, the assertion of diversity would be progressive. However, to institutionalise the “celebration of diversity” in multiculturalist policies and to imagine that in so doing one is tackling the problem of racial inequality is dangerous. Such policies serve to turn culture from a social process into an abstract object – fixed, reified and naturalised. The cultural life of black<sup>3</sup> people then comes to be seen anthropologically as in need of political protection, like an endangered species. The contingency and politics of cultural articulation are thus hidden, and the politics of culture is reduced to the narrow assertion of the right of “a culture” to recognition. In sum, when multiculturalist policies turn culture itself into nature, almost as if it were genetically encoded, our cultural freedom is lost. For “what we call freedom is the irreducibility of the cultural order to the natural order” (Sartre 1968: 152). “Britain is a multicultural society”: the phrase is bandied about religiously, but the meaning is rarely examined. The whole panoply of multiculturalist clichés – “ethnic” communities



are always “vibrant”, always making “positive contributions”, always to be “tolerated” – serves more to obscure than to clarify. Besides, these glib pronouncements are now at the end of their useful life.

From an anti-racist perspective, multiculturalism was always a double-edged sword. At times it was an effective riposte to Enoch Powell’s Anglo-centric politics of anti-immigration that emerged in the late 1960s. Powell, an opposition minister in Edward Heath’s Conservative Party, prophesied that black immigration to Britain would lead inevitably to the sundering of Britain’s social fabric. Against this New Right popular racism, multiculturalism challenged the myth of an ethnically pure society and stood as a demand for the very survival of non-white communities in Britain. As the politics of black communities became radicalised, however, mere survival in Britain was not enough. Those who were born and grew up in the UK wanted to remake society, not just be tolerated within it. The uprisings of the early 1980s were the most obvious expression of this shift as, from 1981 to 1985, youths in a number of urban areas in the UK exploded into conflict with the police. At this point, multiculturalism changed from a line of defence to a mode of control.

Multiculturalism now meant taking black culture off the streets – where it had been politicised and turned into a rebellion against the state – and putting it in the council chamber, in the classroom and on television, where it could be institutionalised, managed and reified. Black culture was turned from a living movement into an object of passive contemplation, something to be “celebrated” rather than acted on.<sup>4</sup> In the process, multiculturalism became an ideology of conservatism, a way of preserving the status quo in the face of a real desire to move forward. It was not an alternative to the liberal model of the state but a supplement to it, a way of preserving liberalism in a racist society. As postmodern theories of hybridity became popular in academia,<sup>5</sup> cultural difference came to be seen as an end in itself rather than an expression of revolt. The concept of culture became a straitjacket, hindering rather than helping the fight against race and class oppressions.

While multiculturalist policies institutionalised black culture, it was the practice of “ethnicised” funding that segmented and divided black communities (Sivanandan 1990). The state’s strategy, it seemed, was to re-form black communities to insert them in the British class system, a parallel society with their own internal class leadership that could be relied on to maintain control. A new class of “ethnic representatives” entered the town halls from the mid-1980s onwards to become the surrogate voice for their own ethnically defined fiefdoms. They entered into a pact with the authorities; they were to cover up and gloss over black community resistance in return for free rein in preserving their own patriarchy. It was a colonial arrangement that prevented community leaders from making radical criticisms for fear of jeopardising funding for their pet projects. Different ethnic groups were pressed into competition with each other for grants. As Sivanandan put it, “equal opportunities became equal opportunism” (1989). The result was that black communities became fragmented, horizontally by ethnicity, vertically by class.

Worst of all, the fight against racism came to be redefined as a fight for culture. Asian communities, in particular, were allotted their own parallel cultural bloc, where Asian leaders were allowed a cultural *laissez-faire* largely free from state intervention. The community leadership tried to insulate their clans from the wider world that they saw as threatening to the patriarchal system on which their



power depended. The cost to Asian communities was huge, measured not only in political subjugation, but also in cultural stagnation. This state of affairs meant that Asians lived a double life, forced to wear one face within their community and a different one outside. Ethnicity was recognised in the family and in the community, but banished in the public spheres of school, work and politics. As multiculturalism matured, the political ambitions of Asians focused on challenging this public/private division by winning cultural rights in the public sphere. But the culture being fought for was largely defined in terms of a fixed identity, unchanged in its transmission from 1960s South Asia to 1990s Britain.

The confusion between anti-racism and ethnic recognition spread also to schools, where teaching other people's culture came to be perceived as the best strategy to overcome segregation.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately the "ethnic minority culture" taught to whites did little to give them a meaningful appreciation of black life, based as it was on hackneyed formulae of steel bands, samosas and saris. And since white children were perceived as having no special culture of their own that would be taught, their parents soon started to complain of favouritism to blacks in the classroom. Competition over ethnic funding was thus joined by competition over classroom time. Genuine education about other people, their histories and their struggles, was replaced with the grim essentialism of identity politics. A generation grew up who were not given the tools to understand how their own towns and cities had become increasingly divided by race. Historically, the nation state had been the form in which peoples were wrapped in their cultures. But now the state was failing to carry off this task. Instead, it seemed to stumble along, seeking to balance the demands of black cultural recognition, on the one hand, with a growing mood of white victimhood, on the other, while leaving the underlying structure of the "parallel cultural blocs" model intact.

Today this multiculturalist settlement is in crisis, contested both from above and below. From below, the publication of the Macpherson Report in 1999 (the result of a campaign by families who had been victims of racist violence) brought official recognition of the problem of institutional racism in the police<sup>7</sup> and thus threatened to change the terms of debate from cultural recognition to state racism. Secondly, since 1997, a government that is explicitly "multicultural" has also launched a frightening attack on new immigrants or asylum seekers.<sup>8</sup> Multiculturalism, it transpires, is now perfectly compatible with anti-immigrant populism. Thirdly, it is becoming clear that many whites feel victimised by multiculturalism, and some are prepared to express these fears through the electoral process by voting for the far-right British National Party, a party that believes in creating an "all-white Britain".<sup>9</sup>

Looked at from above, multiculturalist policies are no longer doing what they were intended to do – that is, manage a racially divided society. Furthermore, propping up a conservative minority culture is no longer a viable option for the state. Rather than being an effective way of integrating communities, cultural identities, particularly Muslim identities, now seem dangerous. The 1980s solution to riots – a higher dose of culture – now appears to make the problem worse. Whereas previously black youths were assumed to be rioting because of a lack of culture (what was referred to as "ethnic disadvantage"), youths are now perceived to be rioting because of an excess of culture; they were too Muslim, too traditional. Until recently, Asian culture connoted passivity, entrepreneurship, hard work and education. Asians were the "model minority". Pundits predicted that they faced a "Jewish future", that is, increasing economic success combined with





cultural conservatism. But that has not happened, except on a small scale. Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities in particular remain mired in poverty, and the rebelliousness normally associated with white and Afro-Caribbean youths has infused working-class Asians. Their old image of passivity has given way to one of aggression and criminality, an image seemingly confirmed by the riots of summer 2001, and then heightened by the “war on terrorism”. The current fear is that Asian youths have been infected by white working-class “laddishness”, and that they are no longer reliably well behaved.

For the state, the *laissez-faire* allowances of earlier times had to be ended and cultural difference held on a tighter rein. Multiculturalism was now part of the problem, not the solution. Since 2001, we have been presented with the new doctrine of community cohesion, which is intended to encompass the entirety of the government’s anti-racist strategy. A set of core values is to put limits on multiculturalism, and black people are required to develop what the government calls “a greater acceptance of the principal national institutions”. Racism itself is to be understood as an outcome of cultural segregation, not its cause, and segregation is now seen as self-imposed. The ultimate problem is now identified as cultural barriers rather than institutional racism or deprivation. The landmark recognition of institutional racism contained in the Macpherson Report into the death of Stephen Lawrence is diluted. The racism of the police that led up to riots in the northern English towns is played down. The state imagines itself, instead, as a neutral facilitator of cultural exchange. The new solutions that are proposed involve cross-cultural contact, interfaith dialogue, twinning of schools and a general fostering of understanding and respect.

On a national level, the government has declared that new immigrants must now take an “oath of allegiance” to the British state and adopt British norms. Immigration policy is being used here as a way of disciplining settled black communities; explicitly linking race and immigration policy has not been in vogue since Enoch Powell. A national debate was meant to take place to clarify the rights and responsibilities of a British citizen and to clarify what the oath of allegiance pledges an allegiance to, apart from the Queen. However, being British has always been understood in terms of belonging to the “national family” rather than in terms of citizenship *per se*, so this debate failed to go anywhere. In September 2003, the government published its report on the question of oaths of allegiance and “citizenship tests” for non-British nationals, or as the Home Office puts it, how to “make people proud to be British” (Home Office 2003a, 2003b). It became clear that immigrants (and indeed people who had been resident in the UK for decades but had not opted for a British passport) would now be tested on their loyalty to a Britishness that in reality no longer exists, and which most British people themselves would never subscribe to. The phrase “I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Second, her heirs and successors” (2003a), which will be the main element of the new “ceremony of naturalisation”, has nothing to do with citizenship and everything to do with preserving the mythical idea of an essential – and therefore racialised – Britishness. Under the community cohesion doctrine, it is no longer possible to be black first and British second.

Contradictions are already being thrown up between the old and new models, most notably around Islam’s relationship with Britishness. In the logic of the multiculturalist consensus, faith schools were to be encouraged and, under Blair, won government support. Encouraging a Muslim identity in schools was seen as



likely to produce responsible, respectable citizens. But from the new perspective of community cohesion, Muslim schools are dangerous breeding grounds for separatism. The government has yet to resolve such competing claims. The question of imams in prisons is similarly conflicted; previously they were seen as an effective way of bringing wayward Muslim youths back into the community, now they are dangerous ideologues indoctrinating youth with anti-western values. As the west enters into a new phase of imperialism, *laissez-faire* is giving way to direct intervention and political control is supplementing economic domination: order needs to be imposed on chaos. Cohesion and integration become the new mantras, up to and including a global level. Under the pretext of anti-terrorism, western countries are attempting to establish new structures of surveillance and control over immigration and migrant communities, and to construct what is described as a system of global migration management. Over the coming years, the power of the state to regulate and control the lives of black communities will be hugely expanded, and as this new agenda takes hold, even the very limited anti-racist work that goes under the heading of “community cohesion” will be stripped away.

In the face of such a concerted attack on civil liberties, the priority for anti-racist struggle is the struggle for civil rights: for protection against institutionally racist police forces, for the right to asylum and for protection against arbitrary detention. However, for the first time in years, political spaces are being created where racism and imperialism can be addressed as connected issues. There is the flowering of a new politics stemming from the opposition to the US-led “war on terrorism” and there is, for the first time, a significant delinking of British Asian voters from the Labour Party. We are in between times, and the politics of black communities is opening up.

#### Endnotes

1. The 1976 Race Relations Act made it illegal to discriminate against a person because of his or her race, nationality or ethnic origin. Its impact was both practical and symbolic: it gave victims of discrimination a chance to win compensation at an industrial tribunal and it put the authority of the state behind efforts to eradicate overt discrimination. However, in spite of the significant change achieved, discrimination has continued to survive in more covert forms that are harder to demonstrate in a legal context. One example is employers rejecting application forms for vacancies on the basis of the applicant’s post-code – if that postcode is perceived as belonging to a “black” area. In small and medium-sized companies in the services sector, discrimination is often practised through informal means. For example, an investigation by the BBC in 1999 found that black applicants were rejected for jobs in pubs in Leeds and Bradford. One employer claimed that he rejected an Afro-Caribbean applicant because his large size might be intimidating. Another claimed that an Asian woman was rejected to protect her from the racism she might face from customers (BBC News, 1999).
2. From April to July 2001, the northern English towns of Oldham, Burnley, Leeds and Bradford saw violent confrontations between British youths of Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnicity and the police, culminating in the clashes of 7 to 9 July in Bradford in which 200 police officers were injured. The clashes were prompted by racist gangs attacking Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities and the failure of the police to provide protection from this threat. In terms of



the damage caused and the shock they delivered to the nation, the 2001 riots were the worst riots in Britain since the early 1980s (See Kundnani 2001).

3. The term black is used here with its political meaning in the British context, to refer to people whose ancestry or birth is in the Caribbean, Africa or Asia and who share a common experience of British racism. Although many people in Britain of Asian heritage do not describe themselves as black in common parlance, the use of the term in this way has analytical value in describing the relationship of a number of culturally diverse communities to the racism of the British state. The term Asian is used to refer specifically to those communities in Britain whose roots lie in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The term Afro-Caribbean is used to refer to those communities whose roots lie in the slave trade from Africa to the Caribbean and subsequent migration from the Caribbean to Britain.
4. William Whitelaw, the Home Secretary at the time of the Brixton riots of 1981, took the view that giving institutional space to black culture (for example, through “multicultural” television programmes on the then new Channel Four) could help prevent future rebellions. “If [different races] don’t get some outlet for their activities you are going to run yourself into much more trouble,” (quoted in Docherty, Morrison and Tracey 1988: 11).
5. In the influential work of Homi Bhabha this tendency reaches its most extreme form. Social action is reduced to a form of writing, Derrida’s theory of *différance* is deployed to explain its structure, and political struggle itself becomes no more than the constantly shifting “indeterminacy” of signs (see, for example, Bhabha 1994).
6. From the early 1980s, “multicultural education” became common in British schools with a racially mixed student community. This educational practice assumed that providing white children with knowledge of black cultures would in and of itself overcome racism. Lessons were introduced in which “ethnic” dress and food were displayed and Hinduism, Islam, Rastafarianism and Sikhism were taught. The approach was lambasted as “saris and samosas multiculturalism” by those who felt the changes were only superficial.
7. In 1993, a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, was murdered by a racist gang in south-east London. At first, his death followed the usual pattern of black victims of racism: silence in the media and dereliction from the police. But over the following years, Stephen’s parents campaigned relentlessly for his killers to be brought to justice, even making legal history by launching the first ever private prosecution in a murder case. Though they lost the case, the publicity generated resulted in a public inquiry led by Sir William Macpherson. It reported in 1999 and, for the first time, officially acknowledged that British police forces were institutionally racist.
8. Tony Blair’s New Labour government, which came to power in 1997, has continued and intensified previous administrations’ demonisation of new immigrants, with a series of acts of parliament designed to deny asylum-seekers access to refuge and welfare in Britain.



9. Speaking in May 2003 – after the party won five new council seats in local elections in Burnley – the British National Party’s leader Nick Griffin said: “People voting for the BNP know exactly what they are getting. Our absolute ideal is an all-white Britain” (*Lancashire Evening Telegraph*, 3 May 2003). At the time of writing, the BNP’s popularity is higher than that for any fascist party in Britain since the 1930s. They have eighteen councillors and a chance of gaining their first European Parliament seat in the May 2004 elections.

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### 3. Managing diversity, fighting racism or combating discrimination? A critical exploration

*John Wrench*

European employers are showing increasing interest in “good practice” in combating racial and ethnic discrimination in the employment sphere. This follows growing evidence of widespread discrimination across EU member states during the 1990s and a general increase in campaigns and awareness raising in Europe, including the initiatives associated with the 1997 European Year Against Racism. Whereas it used to be assumed that the problem of labour market exclusion was one which affected primarily first generation immigrants, it is now clear that ethnic minority young people, even when they are born and educated in a European member state and are legal citizens of that state, are still unjustifiably excluded from employment opportunities. Research has shown that this cannot simply be explained by poorer language ability or lower educational attainment. Well-qualified and fluent young people are still disproportionately excluded from the employment opportunities they deserve because of straightforward racism, prejudice and discrimination related to the colour of their skin, their ethnic or religious background, or a different sounding name (Zegers de Beijl 2000). Research has also shown that ethnic minority workers regularly experience problems once they have a job, such as less access to opportunities for promotion, training or higher pay, or verbal or physical harassment (Wrench, Rea and Ouali 1999).

In recent years there have been a number of exercises both at member state and European level to highlight examples of organisational case studies which can serve as models of good practice for others in combating racism and discrimination in employment. In 2003 there was an added stimulus to this interest in the form of the two new European Union equality directives. Council directives 2000/43/EC<sup>1</sup> (Racial Equality Directive) and 2000/78/EC<sup>2</sup> (Employment Equality Directive) had to be transposed into national arrangements by 19 July and 2 December 2003 respectively. The directives place a duty on all member states to improve existing legislation against employment discrimination and create bodies to advise and assist victims of discrimination.

In the context of a heightened sensitivity to issues of employment discrimination across EU member states, the recent spread of ideas of diversity management from the US and Canada to Europe is of great interest. Diversity management seems to offer the possibility of mainstreaming anti-discrimination and equality practices into European companies in a business friendly manner





(Thomas 1990, Kandola and Fullerton 1998). Diversity management is said to be characteristically different from previous employment equity approaches directed at under-represented minority ethnic groups, such as equal opportunity and affirmative action approaches, in a number of ways. For one thing, its rationale is primarily one of improving organisational competitiveness and efficiency, and gaining market advantage. In relation to this it stresses the necessity for recognising cultural differences between groups of employees, and making practical allowances for such differences in organisational policies. The idea is that encouraging an environment of cultural diversity where peoples' differences are valued enables people to work to their full potential in a richer, more creative and more productive work environment. An advantage of diversity management is said to be that it avoids some of the "backlash" problems associated with affirmative action, as unlike previous equality strategies, diversity management is not a policy solely directed towards the interests of excluded or under-represented minorities. Rather it is seen as an inclusive policy, one which therefore encompasses the interests of all employees, including white males.

There are a number of questions raised by the recent generation of European examples of organisational "good practice" in combating discrimination, and in the heightening profile of diversity management. For one thing, it seems that across different member states, the things that are defined as examples of employer good practice in combating racism and discrimination are often wildly different, and some seem to stretch the definition of "anti-racism" or "combating discrimination" to a surprising extent. Another is the noticeable change in terminology over the years. Initiatives which used to be called "combating racism in employment" are now more likely to be called "mainstreaming diversity". Is this just a fashionable change in title? Or does it reflect a genuine shift to a recognition of the business advantages of diversity, and the incorporation of more ambitious equality policies? Is diversity management a logical extension of other employment equity approaches, or a replacement of them? Does diversity management encompass anti-racism, or sidestep it?

Bearing these questions in mind, I decided to attempt a clarification of European organisational practices against racism and discrimination and create a typology with which to order and classify the very different activities labelled as organisational measures to promote ethnic equality. This was done initially by drawing on two collections of case studies which came out at the end of the 1990s, stimulated by the European Year Against Racism. One was the *European Compendium of Good Practice for the Prevention of Racism at the Workplace*, which consisted of case studies from the fifteen countries of the European Union (Wrench 1997). The second was the report "Gaining from diversity", initiated by the European Business Network for Social Cohesion to promote the exchange of experience across Europe on the practical experiences of business in addressing the opportunities and challenges presented by Europe's ethnic diversity (Stewart and Lindburg 1997).

After looking at these collections of case studies, I would like to suggest, at the risk of some oversimplification, that there are six different levels or groups of activity in measures to combat discrimination and improve the employment inclusion of immigrants and ethnic minorities, the final being diversity management. This classification aims to serve as a device to help make sense of current and



future developments in the area and help us compare the variety of organisational responses in this field.

The six categories are as follows:

1. Training the immigrants
2. Making cultural allowances
3. Challenging racist attitudes
4. Combating discrimination
5. Equal opportunities policies with positive action
6. Diversity management

-----> **Training the immigrants**

This consists of measures directed at immigrants and ethnic minorities to assist in their integration into society. Formal training might be provided for newly arrived immigrants to improve their education and skills, and to help them learn the language, culture and customs of the new society. A case cited in both the “Gaining from diversity” and the Compendium reports was that of the Swedish telecommunications company Telia, with its special training for unemployed white-collar immigrants, in co-operation with the Stockholm County Labour Market Board. Amongst those taking part were unemployed systems analysts, computer engineers and economists, and the training corresponded to future employment requirements in the company. One of the aims was to increase the proportion of immigrants employed in the company, and in this it succeeded.

-----> **Making cultural allowances**

Allowances are made for specific religious or cultural needs of minority groups within the organisation. These measures might encompass the recognition of religious restrictions on diet in company canteens, allowing workers to celebrate religious holidays other than Christian ones, or allowing the wearing of certain items of clothing, such as the headscarf or trousers for women. A Belgian electrocoating company took a number of initiatives for the benefit of workers of Maghreb origin wishing to observe certain religious practices – for example, by allowing them to withdraw to the changing rooms to pray during breaks. A similar example cited in “Gaining from diversity” is that of the McDonald’s restaurants in France, which take the religious practices of their employees into consideration by adjusting the hours of Muslim employees during Ramadan.

-----> **Challenging racist attitudes**

Policies at this level work from the assumption that the main barriers to change are the attitudes and prejudices of people, so publicity and information campaigns or training to change peoples’ attitudes are introduced. The Stockholm City Council, for instance, offered a course on racism and xenophobia at work for work supervisors and teachers from a health care college, addressing prejudices and hostile attitudes and providing the opportunity to discuss xenophobia and racism. In Germany, a “Living with foreigners” campaign was started jointly by the German trade union and employers’ federations, the DGB and the BDA. This targeted around one million apprentices in German industry, using training packages and media materials aimed at countering attitudes of intolerance and xenophobia.



 **Combating discrimination**

These policies focus on trying to produce changes in people's behaviour rather than trying to change people's attitudes. Measures could include the introduction of fair recruitment and selection procedures, training on how to operate these procedures and how to comply with anti-discrimination legislation. It could also cover anti-harassment policies and training, and the introduction of disciplinary measures against racism and discrimination within an organisation. Addressing discriminatory behaviour by removing unfair barriers to opportunity is seen to be important in creating a "level playing field". The Belgian anti-discrimination code of conduct for the temporary employment agency sector falls under this heading. This was signed by employers and trade unions in that sector after a survey of agency staff had revealed that most received discriminatory requests from employers. The training aimed to make staff aware of the problem of racial discrimination, and instructed them on how to respond to employers who made either coded or explicit requests not to be sent any foreigners, and how to ensure that only functionally relevant requirements are taken into account when selecting temporary staff.

Other examples include the cases of a major British high street retailer and a Dutch public sector organisation, both of which introduced training courses for staff who sit on recruitment and selection panels to help them avoid ethnic discrimination and bias. KLM in the Netherlands appointed eight employees as *confidantes* for complaints regarding racial discrimination. Any employee who wishes to discuss discrimination or make a complaint may contact one of these *confidantes*. A 24-hour telephone number explains the procedure and gives out *confidante* telephone numbers. In London, Barclays Bank provides an information booklet on how to deal with racial harassment, including informal methods (how to respond, how to document incidents) and formal methods (filing a formal grievance procedure).

Equal opportunities policies with positive action. A combination of the above approaches may be used in a general equal opportunities package. This could comprise an equal opportunities statement for the organisation, a handbook for employees setting out the policy's intentions and procedures, and a target, such as the long-term aim of reflecting the ethnic mix of the local population in the workforce. Often there will be monitoring of the ethnic background of the workforce. The positive action initiatives are those over and above the simple provision of equal treatment and the production of a "level playing field" through the removal of discriminatory barriers. There is an argument that such measures are not enough if members of under-represented minority groups start from very different and disadvantaged positions, sometimes because of the operation of racism and discrimination in the past. Positive action goes further than equal treatment. Whereas equal treatment would mean treating people who apply for jobs without discrimination, positive action means, for example, making an extra effort to encourage groups who might not normally apply. Therefore, positive action is in fact doing something extra for previously excluded minorities, something one is not doing for the national majority.

The Dutch department of public works, for example, is responsible for flood defences and water management, traffic, transport and communications. The department is located within a highly multi-ethnic part of the Netherlands, and the head of personnel believed that this should be reflected in the workforce.



Extra wording was added to recruitment advertisements to the effect that, all other things being equal, priority would be given to ethnic minorities, as well as to women and disabled people. To stimulate applications, contacts were then initiated with migrant organisations, and agreements were concluded with local temporary employment agencies that requests for temporary staff would be met in the first instance by candidates from one of the ethnic minorities. Preliminary interviews were conducted with applicants of minority ethnic origin where information about the organisation and its procedure was provided, along with advice on how to improve letters of application and CVs. During selection, personnel officers took care to see that the correct procedures were followed in the case of applicants of minority ethnic origin and that no improper arguments were used to reject them, and line managers underwent training in selection skills to avoid bias in selection interviews. The organisation monitored the ethnic composition of its workforce over time, allowing managers to review their progress and make appropriate policy changes. Indeed, the monitoring demonstrated that they had progressed significantly towards their long-term targets of greater ethnic minority representation.

### -----> Diversity management

The most ambitious level is that of diversity management, which can include many of the elements of the other approaches and adds diversity philosophy and practice to this in a whole-organisation approach. Following the distinction made by Thomas (1990) we can divide this level into two stages. The first is the stage of “valuing diversity”, where there is a positive desire to work towards an ethnically mixed workforce and a recognition of the positive benefits that a diverse workforce can bring to the organisation. The second stage is that of “managing diversity”, which goes further than this by actively managing the diverse mix of employees in ways to contribute to organisational goals and develop a heterogeneous organisational culture.

The only case of an openly embraced organisational diversity management philosophy in the aforementioned reports is that of AB Volvo in Göteborg, Sweden. The company responded to a series of racist incidents by putting out an advertisement entitled “What would Volvo be without immigrants?” This pointed out that Volvo owed much of its success to the seventy different nations represented in 30% to 40% of its workforce. There was a policy of instituting diversity management throughout the various Volvo corporations. One programme includes multicultural training for employees, efforts to include more work opportunities in the firm for immigrants, and adding diversity as part of the criteria for evaluating the quality of operations. The diversity commitment is set out in Volvo’s corporate philosophy:

Volvo is a global organisation with different cultures from all parts of the world. Involving people from other parts of the Group is an excellent way to gain strength, build confidence and develop networks. We will seek new paths by working in groups with co-workers who have different backgrounds and skills, across national borders. Internal mobility will be developed in order to broaden competence, to the benefit of both the Group and the individuals in it. (Stewart and Lindburg 1997: 26)

### -----> Criticisms of diversity management

Diversity management, as the latest, most ambitious and most sophisticated employment equality strategy in this typology, would seem to be a positive



development. Its emergence suggests that at last activists for racial equality have seen their struggle move from the fringes of the organisation to the mainstream, aided by the fact that their moral case for equality is now backed up and reinforced by good business arguments, such as enabling organisations to recruit and retain labour more successfully, or to benefit from the creativity of a diverse workforce. In the past few years interest in diversity management has noticeably increased in EU countries. Surely this is a development to be welcomed? Yet not everyone thinks so. The spread of diversity management into the arena of European human resource management has been followed by a body of criticism.

#### *The misuse of the term diversity management*

One criticism which has followed on from the spread of diversity management discourse is that it lends itself to adoption by those who are attracted to its business-friendly and fashionable overtones, yet who are doing very little in reality to combat ethnic inequality. The six-fold typology enables us to clarify whether some activities are wrongly classified under diversity management, when according to the typology they are more appropriately classified as something else. We can illustrate this from one example which came to notice. In 2000, at an international workshop on diversity management, a Norwegian company set out its “experiences of managing diversity”. This was an organisation of 500 employees with about 20% of production and warehouse workers from a minority ethnic background. The “Managing for diversity” initiative it described consisted of the following practices. Firstly, the company provided courses in the Norwegian language, tailored to issues in the working environment, and 50% of the course was allowed to take place during working hours. The second element was the recognition that the food provided on company training programmes and union courses should not, for example, include pork if Muslim or Jewish workers were to attend. A third initiative was to allow non-European workers to take extra unpaid leave for certain holiday periods so as to give them more time for visits to their countries of origin. Finally, the company reported that it had been suggested, as a future activity, to hold a meeting with Norwegian workers with negative attitudes to ethnic minorities, in order to try to neutralise these views.

The company claims to have been “working with diversity” for many years, and categorises its experiences as “managing diversity”. However, if we use our typology to classify this company, we can say that it is not at the level of diversity management. The policies it describes cover levels 1 and 2 in the typology, and show the first signs of awareness of a need to move into level 3. This example illustrates the relatively loose use of the term diversity management, a usage which is becoming increasingly common in Europe, particularly in contexts where such organisational policies are uncommon.

#### *Diversity management as a soft option*

Some equal opportunities activists have specific criticisms of diversity management. Trade union activists, for example, might believe that activities to combat racial inequality should come from them, rather than from a diversity initiative from management. They are suspicious of the way that diversity approaches are wrapped in the discourse of human resource management – for them, racism and discrimination are things which should be combated, not managed. At the 1997 UK Trades Union Congress (TUC) Black Workers’ Conference a motion was passed which noted “with concern” the increasing trend amongst personnel and human



resource management practitioners to seek to replace existing equal opportunities policies and procedures with those titled “managing diversity” or “mainstreaming”, calling on the TUC to support initiatives which expose the inadequacies of these developments.

There are several aspects of diversity management that the British trade unionist and other equality activists could be concerned about. One is that diversity management might be used to prioritise the “soft” rather than the “hard” equal opportunities practices. It can be used to give the impression that an organisation is doing something for excluded groups whilst avoiding many of those aspects of equal opportunities activities which are likely to be unpopular with employers. For example, employers might be more receptive to the provision of “intercultural awareness” training and less receptive to stronger measures such as targets to produce a workforce which reflects the ethnic make-up of the locality, anti-discrimination training to modify the behaviour of white managers and employees, or the introduction of an anti-harassment policy. If a diversity management approach consists of little more than the celebration of cultural diversity, it will sidestep many of the stronger elements which have existed within a broader equal opportunities and affirmative action approach.

#### *Diversity management dilutes the focus on racism*

A third criticism is that diversity management dilutes policies against racism and ethnic discrimination by mixing them with policies relating to other groups. For advocates of diversity management, its advantage is that it broadens the appeal of equal opportunities by moving it away from policies for racial and ethnic minorities to the inclusion of other groups. But a strength from one perspective is a weakness from another. Critics say this does not allow for the fact that some groups have suffered historically from much greater prejudice and exclusion than others. Some have been marginalised for generations with strong and negative social meaning attached to the traits they possess as a group, and this will not necessarily be the same for all those groups considered to fall into the diversity calculus. This criticism is not peculiar to Europe – for example, in America, a member of the Society for Human Resource Management was quoted in its journal as saying “Race was a sacrificial lamb to launch diversity and make it palliative to corporate America. And who is corporate America? White males. And they don’t want to hear about race” (Grossman 2000).

#### *The replacement of the moral case by the business case*

For employers, diversity management has a number of potential advantages. One is that it will make it easier to attract and retain workers at a time of labour shortage. Currently, the labour shortage argument seems to be the main stimulus for employers to turn to diversity management in Europe. However, labour shortages are things which vary with time, sector and geography, and it is quite possible to envisage circumstances when there is no labour shortage. In this case there will be no reason for employers to adopt employment equity policies. Another alleged business advantage of diversity management is the enhanced creativity that is said to stem from a diverse workforce, as well as other positive effects on organisational culture. If this is true, then legal pressure or moral arguments for employers to combat ethnic discrimination are unnecessary. However, an American review of the literature (Williams and O’Reilly 1998) concludes that the “diversity is good for organisations” mantra has been overstated. For



example, most of the research which supports the claim that diversity is beneficial for groups has been conducted in a laboratory or classroom setting. Laboratory studies neglect the variable of time, and research in short-lived groups is not a strong foundation for judging the effects of diversity in a real organisation. The smaller number of studies which have looked at groups in an organisational context are less optimistic, with evidence of stereotyping and conflicts within groups. Some field studies have shown that race and gender diversity can have negative effects on group processes and performance. After reviewing the literature, the authors conclude that, under ideal conditions, increased diversity may have a positive impact through, for example, the increase in skill and knowledge that diversity brings. However, they argue that empirical evidence is just as likely to suggest that diversity will impede group functioning, and conclude that simply having more diversity in a group is no guarantee that the group will make better decisions or function effectively. Diversity, they argue, is a “mixed blessing” and requires careful and sustained attention to be a positive force in enhancing performance. Similarly, a later literature review by two American scholars (Wise and Tschirhart 2000) found that many of the promises and claims of diversity management for improving group and organisational performance were not rooted in the findings of empirical research. They conclude: “Given the weaknesses in the body of research on diversity, we can draw no firm conclusions for public administrators. We cannot claim that diversity has any clear positive or negative effects on individual, group or organizational outcomes.”

If some of the stated advantages of diversity management are at best debatable, and others are dependent on fluctuating market conditions, then this raises serious questions about leaving issues of employment equity in the hands of managers in organisations. This point constitutes perhaps the most fundamental criticism of diversity management, namely that it removes the moral imperative from equal opportunities actions. Arguments for the introduction of equal opportunities and affirmative action policies relate to equality, fairness and social justice. Critics argue that diversity management has moved equal opportunities away from a moral standpoint and turned it into a business strategy. Whilst this development is seen as an advantage by many people, in that it increases the likelihood of the policies being adopted by employers, others see it as a long-term weakness. The problem is that fighting racism and discrimination will now only be seen to be important if there is a business case for it. With a diversity management approach, racism is indeed argued to be unacceptable, but only when it is recognised that the outcome of such racism leads to inefficiency in the utilisation of human resources. If, for example, a change in market conditions means that racism and discrimination do not lead to inefficiency, then there will be no longer be any imperative to combat it. In the American context, Kelly and Dobbin warn:

Perhaps diversity management will succeed in winning over middle managers because it embraces an economic, rather than political, rationale. But precisely because it is founded on cost-benefit analysis rather than on legal compliance, perhaps diversity management will come under the axe of budget-cutters when America faces its next recession. (Kelly and Dobbin 1998: 981)

The context of the move to diversity management in the USA was the New Right discourse of *laissez-faire* in relation to government activity, and a complete faith in market principles, so that external non-business constraints promoting equal opportunities are seen as illegitimate. Some diversity theorists such as Thomas (1990) argue that previous equal employment opportunity and affirmative action



policies which have focused on group membership are “unnatural”. In response, Grice and Humphries argue:

To Thomas, affirmative action is referred to as “unnatural” because it interferes with the “natural” functioning of a market comprised of competitive individuals aspiring for upward mobility. What Thomas doesn’t say is that the categories natural and unnatural are equally the products of discourse. Anything can be defined natural or unnatural if you are in control of the parameters by which that categorising is based. The market is held up as the ultimate natural while things like intervention based on an ethical argument is held up as decidedly unnatural. (Grice and Humphries 1993: 17)

Thus, although some see the use of diversity management as an acceptable substitute for more “political” interventions such as affirmative action, others see this as a more worrying development which reflects a broader trend at a societal level, namely, the intrusion of the market into areas where previously there was action by democratically elected government. As Hobsbawm writes:

Market sovereignty is not a complement to liberal democracy: it is an alternative to it. Indeed, it is an alternative to any kind of politics, as it denies the need for *political* decisions, which are precisely decisions about common or group interests as distinct from the sum of choices, rational or otherwise, of individuals pursuing private preferences. (Hobsbawm 2001)

For some critics, serious questions are raised about whether individuals within organisations pursuing private preferences constrained by the market can be left to be the custodians of employment equity practice.

-----> **Conclusion**

In this paper I have raised some questions relating to the spread of diversity management in Europe. In the process I have suggested a classification of organisational policies which is intended to help us clarify some of the conceptual confusions surrounding the terms diversity management and other organisational practices. One use of the classification might be to illustrate how the term diversity management can be wrongly applied. Diversity management should have certain minimum components and is not simply a term which covers any policy relating to the employment of immigrants and minorities. Having said this, there clearly is still significant variety in the content and balance of practices which can legitimately fall under the heading of diversity management. This is something that causes concern to some observers. For example, it is possible to have a diversity management policy which ignores, or is rather weak on, any element of anti-racism and anti-discrimination, and which sidesteps some of the stronger elements of equal opportunities policies, including positive action elements. There is a danger that the lack of previous experience of anti-discrimination policies in some European countries will mean that forms of diversity management which develop there will be restricted to the feel-good “celebrating cultural diversity” type. A policy which, in terms of the classification, consists only of a combination of level 1, level 2 and the “celebrating cultural diversity” aspects of level 6 may be considered unsatisfactory and incomplete as an organisational measure, if the aim is to achieve the equal integration of under-represented minorities into employment.

The spread of diversity management in Europe could prove to be an invaluable development for getting employment equity issues on to the agenda in places where more traditional approaches would not have been successful. However, a “celebrating diversity” approach alone is not going to do anything to bring about



fairer recruitment practices and increase the representation in employment of second-generation immigrants and ethnic minority young people in Europe, and organisations that do not have a diverse workforce cannot begin to manage diversity. In many countries of Europe there is a strong tradition of social engineering and redistributive policies by government, and diversity management can operate in the context of these. Diversity management policies are not a substitute for strong and properly enforced legislation on access to employment and numerical representation. This is why the new EU “Race” and “Equality” directives are important as a constant stimulus to anti-discrimination awareness and practice. Diversity management should be a way of mainstreaming anti-discrimination activities, not a substitute for them.

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#### *Endnotes*

1. Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.
2. Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.



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## 4. Interculturalism and multiculturalism in Ireland: textual strategies at work in the media landscape

*Debbie Ging and Jackie Malcolm*

This essay is based on qualitative research undertaken by the Working Group on Media and Interculturalism, based at Dublin City University. The working group is a series of ongoing research projects exploring recent initiatives in the Irish media that have introduced and activated discourses on multiculturalism, interculturalism, anti-racism, diversity and citizenship. The purpose of this project was to explore how the Irish media is contributing to structuring (and normalising) the discourses in which, and through which, public understandings of and responses to socio-cultural changes are being formed.

We were initially interested in what we perceived as a tendency, in mainstream popular and public discourse, to construct Ireland as a “site” that was experiencing considerable increase in the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers, leading to national and localised “problems” that required political intervention and solution. Some journalistic discourse suggested that an appropriate way to respond to refugees and asylum seekers, in terms of policy-making, social contact and integration, was through an imaginative empathy with their position based on the memories and experiences of Irish emigrants. Very little acknowledgement was made of the fact that migration is caused by complex political, economic and socio-geographical global changes. Thus, the project aimed to critique some of the fundamental but unquestioned assumptions that are driving the discourses and informing media representations, and to suggest different discursive terms and frameworks.

The qualitative research was undertaken in the context of an open forum, the purpose of which was to use a mode of analysis that enabled critical analyses of the texts without divorcing them from their conditions of production and distribution.<sup>1</sup> Individuals from a range of key institutions and agencies contributed to the forum by chairing panels and giving presentations.<sup>2</sup> The originators or commissioners made presentations of the texts; they provided specific examples of their approaches and rationale, their working methods and processes. This activated discussions between panel members and participants (including students and teachers from third level education institutions, graduate and postgraduate lecturers and researchers, members of NGOs and lobby groups) that informed a broader analysis of how the texts articulate with, and against, different theoretical paradigms of cultural diversity.



The focus of the forum was the practice of representation and the ways in which images and texts (in the arenas of public information, education, print and broadcast media) are being understood and used by audiences. The presence of “active readers” of the text gave producers and originators valuable insights into what is at stake when texts are produced and circulated, how the texts might be understood and interpreted, and how they produce common reference points or dominant discourses. Workshops facilitated dialogue with some of the key personnel and organisations shaping public discourses, and enabled participants to critique the ideological positions underpinning current policy-making and media practices. As the discussions progressed, there was an accumulating awareness of how the texts interrelated and activated congruent, or conflicting, discursive terms and parameters. The modes of analysis brought to the texts is therefore informed by, but not restricted to, theories of representation. For this paper, we have selected texts which have had the widest circulation and impact upon Irish society in terms of framing dominant discourses.<sup>3</sup>

### -----> **The Irish landscape**

One of the most fundamental, but unquestioned assumptions driving the discourses and informing policy initiatives in Ireland is the notion that pre-1990s Ireland was a monocultural society in which racism had no cause to exist. As Gavan Titley suggests, a “new temporal orthodoxy of pre- and post-1990s Ireland”<sup>4</sup> has consolidated a myth of homogeneity so central to the ideology of the nation state that it denies the ethnic and religious diversity that has existed in Ireland for many years. Not only does Ireland have well-established Jewish and Chinese communities, its colonial history has also resulted in the construction and protection of identity formations as diverse as Unionist, Loyalist, Republican, Catholic, Nationalist, Protestant, Anglo-Irish and Diasporic, both in the Republic and Northern Ireland. The Irish Traveller community is another identity formation that has been at the centre of recent public discourses around racism and ethnicity. However, until the late 1980s, the discourses that underpinned Irish cultural and political studies, and that articulated this complex “multicultural” landscape, were framed by postcolonial theories and a focus on the impact of emigration.<sup>5</sup> These discourses are being displaced by Ireland’s rapid transition from the economic periphery to the centre, whereby the state is now charged with taking responsibility for determining the fate of so-called “non-nationals” and the complex sets of socio-cultural relationships that will continue to evolve and develop.

Irish media discourses are replete with contradictory and conflicting responses to the arrival and presence of asylum seekers and refugees: the visible evidence of “easily recognisable differences”<sup>6</sup> is producing a tendency to uncritically describe and celebrate Ireland as “multicultural”, as an end state already firmly in place and, sometimes, as inevitable but welcome proof of Ireland’s progression to global modernity. While these concepts are undoubtedly well intentioned, they frequently suggest a society in which disparate cultures – all individually coherent and intact – co-exist in mutual harmony. This results in a (sometimes wilful) failure to take into account and address the material inequities that are produced and maintained between racialised and non-racialised members of communities. However internally problematic these discourses are, they are also compounded by the fact that they circulate alongside news coverage of increasingly restrictive legal measures that are limiting the rights of asylum seekers to claim refugee status and jeopardising the ability of all asylum seekers and refugees to access basic needs and resources.



Noticeable increases in the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland began as early as 1994. However, despite the adoption and use of terms such as multicultural, anti-racist, intercultural and so forth, there is a distinct absence of any sustained, rigorous analysis or debate in public discourses of the ideological positions that are at the root of these paradigms. They are largely employed as descriptive terms in ways that fix and disguise their prescriptive import, the assumptions upon which they are based and which continue to operate in public discourse. They also short-circuit possibilities for more informed, challenging and imaginative ways of articulating and representing the complex matrices of identity positions and experiences being generated in contemporary Irish society.

### → **“Multiculturalism” versus interculturalism**

Irish policy makers and campaigners tend to rely on labels such as “multicultural” or “intercultural” interchangeably, but these terms are highly contested in both academic and political contexts.<sup>7</sup> Competing categorisations such as “multi-ethnic”, “multi-lingual”, “multi-denominational” and “multi-racial” are infrequently considered, although they have been more widely used and insisted upon in Britain. The term interculturalism is often applied to educational strategies, although it surfaces in a wide variety of sometimes conflictual practices. Interculturalism is perhaps best understood as a critique of, or alternative to, the limits of multiculturalism. Whereas multiculturalism as a concept envisages and produces the dominance of one “majority” culture over a host of smaller “minority” cultures, interculturalism proposes a parity of cultures. However, it is also used synonymously with multiculturalism in the sense that it conceptualises “cultures” as relatively fixed spheres or entities (and endorses mutual understanding between them in the interests of conflict management).

In Ireland, both Edna Longley and Declan Kiberd have theorised multiculturalism (or “multi-culturalism”) in relation to Irish nationalism. Longley is critical of a “minimalist” form of multiculturalism, signified by cultural co-existence rather than by cultural exchange. She argues that interculturalism is a more productive term than multiculturalism; parity of esteem, she argues, can lead to a situation where each (or every) identified group becomes isolated within a static definition of its own identity, whereas interculturalism places an emphasis on the dynamic which exists between groups, the ways in which they learn from each other through dialogue and reciprocity. Kiberd is also critical of the US-dominated multicultural model and instead advocates the “necessarily messy, disputatious, promiscuous multi-culturalism” that Stuart Hall has called “a multiculturalism without guarantees”.<sup>8</sup> Philip Watt,<sup>9</sup> working from the context of monitoring and influencing policy in Ireland, describes an intercultural approach as one in which policy promotes interaction, understanding and integration among and between different cultures, with a focus of attention on the interaction between the dominant and minority ethnic communities. An intercultural approach will invariably lead to a reflection on issues of how power is distributed in society. The European Commission is advocating the concept of interculturalism through policy statements and specific programmes. Watt also indicates the increasing visibility of interculturalism as a dominant concept underpinning policy areas in Ireland, particularly in relation to educational policy.

Ronit Lentin argues that both multiculturalism and interculturalism, as they are being put into play in Ireland, are best understood as a set of political policy responses to cultural or ethnic diversity that are seen as “problems”.<sup>10</sup> She



contends that the debate is never about minority cultures themselves, but rather about how they impact on western culture. Her main critique of multiculturalism is the way in which it conceptualises “the community” as a collection of reified and fixed “cultures”. Lentin contends that multicultural policies tend to involve contradictions between collective and individual rights, even though the state has a responsibility to cater for both. She argues that policy makers working with a multiculturalist ethos ignore questions of power relations because they deal with representatives of minority communities who do not necessarily represent other intra-community interests (such as those of women, young people, disabled people, gay people). Lentin argues that current multicultural policies in Ireland all stem from a basic “politics of recognition” of cultural difference, rather than a “politics of interrogation” of Irishness. Such initiatives are directed – from the top down – by bodies such as the NCCRI, the government’s “Know racism” campaign and the Equality Authority, which do not fully take into account the racialisation of so-called minority groups. Relevant to the Irish situation and to this argument is the Chicago Cultural Studies Group’s call for an examination of the relation between multiculturalism and identity politics.<sup>11</sup> A particular danger associated with identity politics, they suggest, is the romance of authenticity, according to which native voices are privileged because they are conceived of as somehow transparent. They suggest that the ideological norms of positivism are fundamental to the operations of the nation state. Within this model, “cultures” acquire visibility at the expense of the multiple and overlapping structures through which difference is mediated.

#### -----> **Models at work in the Irish media**

In Ireland, the popular press has been widely criticised for negative and racist coverage of asylum and refugee issues. According to Kensika Monshwengo, “the treatment of the refugee issue by the Irish media influenced popular opinion negatively and dangerously in relation to refugees and asylum seekers in particular, and foreigners in general”.<sup>12</sup> However, there have been a number of significant interventions aimed at tackling racism and promoting cultural diversity. At the end of 2000, the state broadcaster, Radio Telefís Éireann,<sup>13</sup> commissioned *Mono*, “RTE’s first intercultural series”, which went on air in April 2001. *Mono* is not aimed at a minority audience, but rather targeted at the general public with a view to challenging perceived notions of what it means to be Irish. What is of particular interest in the case of *Mono* is the way in which it has modified its initial textual strategy/mode of address to adopt a more critical and challenging approach to Ireland’s ethnic diversity. Thus, while the first series of the programme was primarily concerned with the personal experiences of ethnic minorities living in Ireland and generally focused on “positive” stories, the second series continued to include this type of material, but also addressed more problematic issues facing minorities.<sup>14</sup>

Overall, the mainstream press has been noted for its lack of positive intervention. The *Irish Times*<sup>15</sup> is the only newspaper that has appointed its own Social and Racial Affairs Correspondent, although the recent MAMA Awards<sup>16</sup> acknowledged a number of journalists and small-scale publications for their contribution to promoting multiculturalism.<sup>17</sup> In effect, coverage has been primarily concerned with informing the public about legislative issues that are affecting the living and working conditions of refugees and asylum seekers, and giving positive coverage of community projects, anti-racist initiatives, conferences and seminars, etc. It has



also given occasional space for personal narratives of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, although this has been difficult due to censorship legislation that prevents journalists from interviewing asylum seekers without the permission of the Minister for Justice.<sup>18</sup> Although this legislation is ostensibly based upon the need to “protect” asylum seekers, it effectively excludes their experience from the public sphere.

The National Union of Journalists has addressed the implications of how these practices might be improved or redressed in a number of ways. Union members are required to follow specific rules regarding race coverage: a journalist can only mention a person’s race if this information is “strictly relevant” and he or she must not “originate or process material” that encourages “discrimination, ridicule, prejudice or hatred”. It has also organised conferences, campaigns and training for practising journalists. These efforts and investments are primarily concerned with the ethical and professional responsibilities of individual journalists, and ways in which support can be given to journalists as well as the development of strategies to improve coverage. These modes of critical self-reflection and professional practice draw on the understanding that both racist coverage in the media, and censorship of personal narratives, can be categorised as infringements of basic human rights according to the European Convention on Human Rights. Thus, through the established Irish print journalist platforms, the tendency is to mobilise a critical discourse of human rights, as well as an uncritical discourse of celebrations of diversity. The more complex debates around racism and interculturalism that critique and interrogate the use and understanding of terms such as racism, multiculturalism, citizenship, etc., have taken place primarily in the opinion columns of two prominent journalists and commentators, Fintan O’Toole and John Waters, as well as in contributions from Ronit Lentin in *Metro Eireann*.

Besides the mainstream press, several small-scale publications have emerged that specifically address notions of change and diversity in Ireland. Of these, *Metro Eireann*, which describes itself as a “multicultural newspaper”, is the best known and most widely circulated. The primary aim of the publication is to provide up-to-date news and information to Ireland’s fastest growing ethnic and immigrant communities. *Metro Eireann*’s editor describes the paper as “non-political and non-campaigning, but celebrates and creates cross-cultural understanding and cooperation through its contents. It also promotes diversity through the arts, entertainment and *metro Eireann* debates”.<sup>19</sup> The term multicultural is asserted by the editors to describe the content and intent of the paper, as well as to publicise and mediate it to readerships. It uses the term most obviously in a descriptive sense, to “reflect the new diversity in Ireland” and to “tell the stories of immigrants and ethnic minorities”.<sup>20</sup> Ethnic groups are often uncritically celebrated and/or presented as authentic, transparent or static. Although this indicates an editorial policy that sustains a liberal multiculturalist approach in its unproblematic affirmation and celebration of difference, the paper also includes consistent critiques of institutional racism, government policy and legislation. This strand of discourse is provided mainly by established Irish journalists, academics and critics.

The examples of *Mono* and *Metro Eireann* raises a highly complex problematic, in which we ourselves as researchers are implicated. While academics often stress the need for members of minority ethnic backgrounds to become involved in media production as journalists and media practitioners, there is also a tendency to critique the approaches subsequently adopted by the members of these groups. It must therefore be acknowledged that, for the different players, there



are radically different issues at stake. While some commentators occupy the necessary position of privilege to critique strategies of representation or to interrogate the policies of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, others are more concerned with the need to represent the interests of a group or groups of people who might, for very obvious reasons, be reluctant to criticise the “host” culture or the legislative procedures which will ultimately decide their fate. In this context, the presence of more accessible or “positive” multicultural strategies in the media can be understood as a necessary, more celebratory, phase of multiculturalism that precedes a more critical phase, in which increased dialogue and exchange between the various groups involved might accommodate more complex and nuanced debates on the dynamics of interculturalism. Thus, while it is crucial to problematise strategies of positive representation of minorities, acceptance of minorities on the host’s terms and/or essentialising concepts of culture, it is also necessary to acknowledge that these might not be abandoned until they are perceived as no longer useful by the public and/or the interest groups involved.

-----> **Public information campaigns**

Over the last three years, high-profile public information campaigns have been circulated through the media from three different sources: the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Amnesty International and the “Citizen Traveller” campaign.<sup>11</sup> As one-off campaigns designed to address and counteract perceived problems in society regarding racist attitudes and behaviours, they are characterised by highly diverging modes of address that are indicative of the broader conflicting media discourses in Ireland, and the extent to which those discourses offer incompatible versions and accounts of whether we are, and how we are to become, “multicultural.” They do, however, bear traces of a Kiberd’s “necessarily messy, disputatious, promiscuous”<sup>12</sup> multiculturalism.

The “Know racism” campaign was developed in partnership with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and various NGOs. The objectives of the campaign were to “address racism and promote a more inclusive intercultural society”. The website ([www.knowracism.ie](http://www.knowracism.ie)) is oriented specifically towards the “host” Irish community, as explained by Joe McDonagh, chairperson of the steering group: “Ireland has undergone major changes in the past few years. Our society is now a multicultural society. We must accept the responsibilities and challenges that change brings us. Irish people are traditionally generous, friendly and hospitable. It would be wrong to allow fear of strangers and intolerance to spoil this traditional spirit and change our attitudes towards the minority ethnic people who live and work among us.” This undoubtedly well-intentioned statement nevertheless makes recourse to a plethora of myths that are rigorously critiqued from a range of theoretical positions. The notion that Irish society was somehow homogenous prior to the arrival of the “new minorities” has been variously critiqued. The allusion to racism as a “fear of strangers and intolerance” suggests that the originators of the campaign prefer to situate (but not name) racism with the ignorant or “underexposed” individual. This presupposes that individuals are similarly charged with solving the “problem” by changes in attitude or tolerance, a position that excuses state and other institutions from their part in creating and sustaining racialised minorities.

The billboard campaign that forms part of the “Know racism” strategy attempts to offer a more complex representation than the “minority ethnic people” of the



worded statement. It features an image of Jason Sherlock, an Irish footballer of mixed parentage, alongside the caption “He’s part of a small ethnic minority. Dubs with All-Ireland medals.” This might be read as progressive or genuinely intercultural in the sense that it implies that we are all, at various complex levels, members of minority groups and that Irish identity is no longer homogenous (for example, Dubliners are different to people from other regions). However, this is undermined by the emphasis on and need to produce a “positive image” that is recognised and validated on the terms of the majority culture, with the suggestion that ethnic minority groups must relativise their own position in the “dominant culture” while it is the task of the majority culture to find easily comprehensible ways of acceptance and toleration. The billboard campaign seems to mobilise a politics of recognition, but is ultimately more attuned to an assimilationist model of multiculturalism.

Amnesty’s “Leadership against racism” campaign, developed in the lead up to the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR 2001), operates primarily from a position that upholds and protects international human rights. The Irish campaign was directly linked to a series of surveys carried out by Amnesty with two distinct constituencies. The first survey focused on levels of racism among the Irish population and concluded that a minority was opposed to greater ethnic diversity, while one third was ambivalent. The campaign directors felt that this signalled a clear need for political leadership against racism, whereby the ambivalent or undecided sector would be the main target group. This resulted in a provocative billboard and newsprint campaign that called into question government inaction. It featured images of key politicians – the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Bertie Ahern, the Tanaiste (Deputy Prime Minister), Mary Harney, and the then Minister for Justice, John O’Donoghue – with the slogan “Some say they’re involved in racism, others say they’re doing nothing about it”.

The text was reproduced in full-page advertisements in national newspapers, with accompanying text explaining the rationale behind the campaign. The purpose of the campaign was to confront the government directly, and to provoke debate on a problem that was being neglected. According to Amnesty Ireland’s legal officer, Fiona Crowley, “public and media attention was dramatic, and even beyond our hopes, discussions of racism abounded on the airwaves and in the public arena. It was firmly on the political agenda”.<sup>23</sup> The second-phase survey researched the views of ethnic minorities towards racism in Ireland. The findings, together with recommendations, were summarised and reproduced as the second media campaign, in a newsprint advertisement that was accompanied by a photographic image of an ethnic minority model and the caption “She comes from a place where she’s spat at and discriminated against. Ireland”. Amnesty Ireland suggest that the responses to the second phase marked a sea change in public and media opinion as “it could no longer be convincingly denied that racism had a foothold in Ireland” and add that the second phase was more positively received than the initial attack on the government. Significantly, the campaign did not invoke a politics of interrogation, nor did it mobilise or promote “multiculturalism” or “interculturalism”. As an organisation primarily concerned with human rights issues, it drew on these discourses and positions to foreground racism as endemic to Irish society and institutions, and made some of the most provocative and unequivocal charges to governmental departments and politicians.



In 1999 the Irish Government provided a sum of IR£900 000 to fund the “Citizen Traveller” campaign over a three-year period. It was introduced alongside two important legislative measures, the Employment Equality Act of 1998 and the Equal Status Act of 2000,<sup>14</sup> and was designed to improve relationships between Travellers and the settled community in Ireland. The “Citizen Traveller” campaign is of particular interest to these debates in Ireland as it addresses racist discrimination against an indigenous community, bearing out Mairtin Mac an Ghaill and Ronit Lentin’s arguments that racism is not confined to issues of “race” or colour. The core objectives of the campaign were to build on and enhance the work of Traveller organisations to assist in changing common misconceptions related to the Traveller community, to create an environment to position Travellers as an ethnic group within Irish society with their own distinct culture and to promote and encourage the Traveller community to embrace their identity in a positive way. The campaign, involving billboards and outdoor posters, was intended to “promote the visibility and participation of Travellers within Irish society, to nurture the development of Traveller pride and self-confidence and to give Travellers a sense of community identity that could be expressed internally and externally”.<sup>15</sup>

One particular set of billboards featured a series of portraits of individuals of different ages and gender, with accompanying “identity tags” (for example, “carpenter”, “husband”, “story-teller”, “slagger”, “traveller”, “father”, “citizen”). By explicitly offering multiple identity reference points, the campaign both utilises and re-inflects a politics of recognition that allows for the community to be seen as coherent but internally diverse and changing. A further aspect of the campaign was to emphasise the recognition of Travellers as a “distinct group with their own unique cultural heritage and identity” as a basis for rights to accommodation, health care and education. Despite the apparently positive legislation of 1998 and 2000, the government introduced further restrictive legislation on Travellers’ access to accommodation, and this prompted the campaign organisers to produce billboard images in direct response to these policies. This included the slogan “Suddenly, in caring Ireland, to be a Traveller is a terrible crime” and an image of a tricolour flag with a symbol “no caravans”. The campaign was ended by Justice Minister McDowell on the grounds that it had failed to bridge the divide between Traveller and settled communities. Like Amnesty’s “Leadership against racism” campaign, one of the notable elements of the Citizen Traveller project was its use of market research and its direct address to “neutral” or “ambivalent” members of the population. They are also campaigns that name and foreground the material conditions created by governmental policy, or its absence.

### → Conclusion

In very general terms, it is possible to categorise recent media interventions in Ireland in terms of an emphasis on either “cultural identity” or “human rights.” The work of Amnesty International and the *Irish Times* tends to foreground the issue of human rights and is less concerned with interculturalism. In contrast, the “Citizen Traveller” campaign, which deals with a much older and more acknowledged racism, simultaneously utilises and challenges a politics of recognition to interrogate change and conflict in Irish society. The “Know racism” campaign, *Metro Eireann* and *Mono* have tended to focus on the “reflection” of an Irish society that is “already multicultural” leading to the production of positive (if not celebratory) representations of ethnic groups.



The multicultural media strategies that currently dominate present a number of problems, most notably in their tendency to treat different cultures as static and intact, to ignore the material inequalities that exist between racialised and non-racialised groups (as well as the institutional structures which facilitate/construct these inequities) and in their assumption that the media can render society more multicultural merely by positively reflecting an existing diversity. As Phil Cohen has argued: “The multicultural illusion is that dominant and subordinate can somehow swap places and learn how the other half lives, whilst leaving the structures of power intact. As if power relations could be magically suspended through the direct exchange of experience, and ideology dissolve into the thin air of face-to-face communication.”<sup>16</sup>

#### Endnotes

1. Held in Dublin City University (21-22 March 2002). The full report on the Forum on Media and Interculturalism is available at: <http://www.comms.dcu.ie/interculturalism/frame/frameset.htm>
2. These included the National Union of Journalists, the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, the School of Communications and the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (Dublin City University), Dublin Institute of Technology, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the Department of Education, Trinity College Dublin, the *Irish Times*, *Metro Eireann*, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Irish Traveller Movement, Amnesty International and Radio Telefis Eireann.
3. It is informed by the original research findings of the forum as well as critical input that was subsequently offered by peers and colleagues, primarily in two contexts: “What is the culture in multiculturalism? What is the difference of identities?” University of Aarhus, 22 to 24 May 2003 and the Seminar on Resituating Culture: Reflections on Diversity, Racism, Gender and Identity in the Context of Youth, European Youth Centre, Budapest, 10 to 15 June 2003.
4. Titley, G. (2004) “Everything moves? Beyond culture and multiculturalism in Irish public discourse”. *Irish Review*, No. 31.
5. Given Ireland’s history of emigration, it is perhaps unsurprising that initial media commentaries suggested that a “multicultural ethos” might be best achieved through imaginative empathy with refugees and asylum seekers based on the memories and experiences of Irish emigrants. However, the extent to which such historical accounts might strike a chord with the relatively affluent, globally mobile and largely apolitical youth culture of present-day Ireland is questionable (according to a recent *Irish Times*/TNS MRBI poll, 57% of 15 to 24-year-olds in Ireland say that politics has no relevance to them).
6. McGuinness, M. (2002) “Geographies with a difference? Citizenship and difference in postcolonial urban spaces”. In Blunt, A. and McEwan, C. (eds.) *Postcolonial Geographies*. London: Continuum.
7. During the forum, a range of critiques were offered of the different terms (descriptive and prescriptive) that can be employed to analyse the different media strategies. This paper has selected those that are most relevant to an Irish context, and the most recurrent during the presentations and discussions. They are by no means exhaustive, but they do give a representative account of the research that was undertaken with the presenters, practitioners and audiences.





8. Hall, S., cited in Longley, E. and Kiberd, D. (2000) *Multi-Culturalism: The View from the Two Islands*, Cork: Cork University Press and the Centre for Cross Border Studies, Armagh.
9. Philip Watt is Chairperson of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism in Ireland (NCCCRI).
10. Lentin, R. and MacVeigh, R. (2002) *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland*. Dublin: Beyond the Pale Publications.
11. The Chicago Cultural Studies Group (1992) "Critical multiculturalism". *Critical Inquiry*, 18, spring, pp. 530-555.
12. Monshengwo, K. (2001) "The potential of public awareness programmes". In Farrell, F. and Watt, P. (eds.) *Responding to Racism in Ireland*. Dublin: Veritas, p. 160.
13. Besides *Mono*, RTE has commissioned a one-off television drama, *Black Day at Black Rock*, and a documentary on the asylum-seeking process, *No Man's Land*. The soap opera *Fair City* has also run storylines involving asylum seekers and members of immigrant communities.
14. According to presenter Bisi Adigun, the changes have occurred because it was felt that the viewing public needed to be exposed first to the positive aspects of a multi-ethnic society before more critical discourses could be opened up. There was a concern that viewers would be alienated if they felt the series was primarily about Irish racism. According to Adigun, the series has developed from a multicultural to a more intercultural perspective.
15. The *Irish Times* is a liberal broadsheet newspaper, with a circulation of 117 565 (Audit Bureau of Circulations, January to June 2003).
16. The Metro Eireann Media and Multicultural Awards were held in Dublin in May 2003.
17. These included Michael O'Farrell (the *Irish Examiner*), Latif Serhildan, the *Cork Evening Echo* and *DiverCity Magazine*.
18. Section 19 of the 1996 Refugee Act.
19. Onyejelem, C., paper presented at the Forum on Media and Interculturalism, Dublin City University, 21 and 22 March 2002.
20. Ibid.
21. Citizen Traveller is an amalgamation of key organisations representing the interests of the travelling communities in Ireland (<http://www.itmtrav.com/citizenrav.html>).
22. Longley, E. and Kiberd, D. (2000) *Multi-Culturalism: The View from the Two Islands*. Cork: Cork University Press and the Centre for Cross Border Studies, Armagh, p. 57.
23. Crowley, F., paper presented at the Forum on Media and Interculturalism, Dublin City University, 21 and 22 March 2002.
24. These developments were aimed towards the promotion of equality and the elimination of discrimination towards Travellers.
25. See [www.itmtrav.com/citizenrav.html](http://www.itmtrav.com/citizenrav.html)
26. Cohen, P. (1988) "The perversions of inheritance". In Cohen, P. and Bains, H.S. (eds.) *Multi-Racist Britain*. London: Macmillan, p. 13.



*Web references for the texts discussed*

The *Irish Times*, social and racial affairs coverage: <http://www.ireland.com/>

*Metro Eireann*: <http://www.metroeireann.com>

“Know racism” campaign (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform): [www.knowracism.ie](http://www.knowracism.ie)

“Citizen Traveller” campaign (Pavee Point, Irish Traveller Movement, Parish of the Travelling People, National Traveller Womens’ Forum): <http://www.itmtrav.com/citizenrav.html>

“Leadership against racism” campaign (Amnesty International): <http://www.amnesty.ie>

*Mono* (RTE): <http://www.rte.ie/tv/mono/contact.html>

*Funding sources*

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

School of Communications, Dublin City University

Teaching and Learning Committee Travel Award Scheme, Dublin City University





## **Part IV**

### **Culture and gender**





## 1. The veil debate: when the religious other and the gendered other are one

*Irene Becci*

Over the last ten to fifteen years, the Muslim headscarf has been at the centre of a passionate debate about gender equality, laicity and cultural rights in Europe.<sup>1</sup> In the UK, Germany, Italy and France, there have been concurrent cases of teachers being fired for wearing a headscarf or of veiled schoolgirls being expelled from school. However, it is the French laic republican debate that has dominated the public debate on the issue. This is the case for various reasons, including the high levels of intensity that this issue provokes and the unique nature of this kind of laicity in Europe, understood as the strict separation of religion and politics. In France, feminists and the guardians of laicity argue that the veil is a symbol of the subordination of women to men, posing as religious particularism.<sup>2</sup> Whether it refers to teachers or schoolgirls, this critique addresses the proselytising impact of the headscarf – seen as a religious symbol – and its essentialising effect on gender roles and religious belongings. Schoolgirls, in this instance, are often seen to be manipulated by fanatical parents.

Laicity is an important historical achievement of the Enlightenment. It is considered a model for governing the relations between religion and politics; by limiting religious issues to a private realm it guarantees equal treatment in and by the public. The veil is thus seen as a direct challenge to universal values of equality, its existence allowing particularism to enter the republican universal value-system. This view contains several assumptions that I would like to unpack in order to discuss them more fully. There are at least two main levels implied in the veil debate. As far as laicity is concerned, this principle rests on a particular modernist conception of the opposition between a political and a religious realm. The religious orientation perceived as incompatible with modernity is Islam. This is placed in opposition to laic Europe; in this case veiled women are actively dangerous to the nation's ideological pillars. Furthermore, the veil is the sign of male domination; in this case, the veiled women are victims, or at least alienated. Some continental feminists target the veil because they consider it a form of patriarchal domination: "In western feminist discourse 'veil' is politically charged with connotations of the inferior 'other', implying and assuming a subordination and inferiority of the Muslim woman" (El Guindi 1999: 157). No other cloth – even if clearly a religious sign – has ever caused such a hubbub.<sup>3</sup>

The veil is disturbing because it is seen as a symbol of another religion and because it is used by women. The conflation of these two different elements in one piece of cloth has triggered confused feelings. As a consequence, responses



to it take on a moralistic tone and lack any kind of reflexivity on the levels of religion and gender. If we separate these two levels in the light of a critical re-reading, however, we can see how certain assumptions need to be reconsidered. Firstly, I will refocus the laic public-private distinction through a discussion of literature that illuminates the topic from the point of view of Islam. Secondly, I will address the public-private distinction from a feminist point of view by considering some positions on the veil affair.

-----> **The western terms of the relation between religion and politics**

The theory of secularisation belongs to the larger theory of differentiation, be it from an evolutionary, functionalist or historical perspective. It stresses the role played by four related developments in undermining the medieval worldview: the Protestant Reformation, the formation of modern states, the growth of modern capitalism and the early modern scientific revolution.

The Protestant Reformation had a twofold effect: it played a deconstructive role by undermining church-based claims to universalism, thereby introducing a new religious superstructure and legitimating the rise of bourgeois individualism and the new entrepreneurial classes.<sup>4</sup> As Wolfgang Schluchter points out, this new worldview places religious beliefs on a subjective level “as a result of the rise of alternative interpretations of life which can no longer be integrated into a religious worldview” (1989: 254). For institutionalised religion, the process of secularisation has had the effect of depoliticising religious institutions: the church is confined to a private realm through the differentiation process of the state. Jean Baubérot (1994, 1997) introduces an important distinction to secularisation theory. What he calls the logic of secularisation, as opposed to the process leading to laicity (laicisation), is a parallel specialisation of religion and the different spheres of social action. The secularisation process more congruent to Protestant countries has not generally led to conflicts between the church and state. In most cases, the former has been incorporated into the bureaucratic machinery of the state, while the latter is sovereign in its action, leading to what Françoise Champion (1993) reads as a long-term process of progressive subordination of the church to temporal power.

*Laïcisation* characterises countries in which catholicism is the dominant confession and where the state became increasingly autonomous from religious power. The process leading to laicity *lato sensu* (present not only in France, but also in Spain, Italy, Portugal, Austria and parts of Germany and Switzerland) is, in Baubérot’s understanding, loaded with tension and conflicts. According to him, a state can be laic on mainly two levels: the juridical-institutional and the political. The first is what is more generally called the separation between state and church. On the second, political power is mobilised in order to subtract people and spheres of social action from the influence of the church. In this view, conflict is discussed in terms of how the two institutions share power. Baubérot comes to the conclusion that the state has never had monopolistic reign, but has always been in competition with other institutions. In order to theorise the link between religion and political power, Claude Lefort (1986) considers nineteenth-century thinkers who favoured a strong state, believing that they could disconnect it from religion, even while using a repertoire borrowed from theology: the state was seen as an entity *per se* disconnected from society and in an overarching position, like God in Christian theology. By contrast, Lefort considers it necessary to



question the significance of religion's historical role in the political order. This, he argues, involves untwining the meaning of religion and politics in the western world.

Talal Asad partly accomplishes this in his *Genealogies of Religion* and in *Formations of the Secular* (1993, 2003). The medieval church's discourses, teaching and practices had the authority to decide on the true and the false, the sacred and profane. It was during the Middle Ages, Asad argues, that "some of the historical shifts [occurred] that [...] produced our concept of religion as the concept of a transhistorical essence" (Asad 1993: 28). In the Middle Ages, there was confrontation between contrasting worldviews – such as scholasticism and humanism – within a single religion. They had different conceptions of the human being, its nature and of God. When the Reformation and humanism dominated, they both put the individual human being, and not the human as a universal, at the centre of the world. On this idea a new concept of religion emerged as a set of private beliefs. The first attempts to systematise a universal definition of religion were made in the seventeenth century, during the wars of religion. Subsequently, Kant (1990 [1793]) theorised the difference between one religion, valid for everyone at any time, and confessions, which were historically and spatially conditioned vehicles of religion. Whereas religion was, and continued to be, a set of rules attached to specific processes of power and knowledge, it was theorised as something abstract and universal. The forms of knowledge, its pre-conditions and effects varied according to time, societies and places where they were produced. Therefore, Asad claims, there "cannot be a universal definition of religion" (1993: 29). Not only are "its constituent elements and relationships [...] historically specific", but the definition of religion itself is also "the historical product of discursive processes" (1993: 29).

If power creates religion through a process of authentication of truth-based utterances and practices, it is even more important to rethink certain key concepts in which religion has been implicated in the western secularisation process.<sup>5</sup> I will address here the idea of the confinement of religion to the private realm. In seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe, a central preoccupation of politicians was the construction of a strong state. Religious beliefs, as the Reformation had shown, could lead to disorder and division rather than provide the state with a common morality. Asad shows that this is one plausible reason why the idea of placing beliefs in the private realm was widely accepted; in the private realm, different beliefs were able to co-exist. In relation to the dominant interpretation that the modern idea of pluralism promoted religious toleration, Asad argues that it was rather a necessary response to the need for strong state power and the fight against sects in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Through the establishment of this separation of public and private, political power could accelerate the diminution of religious authority that was underway.

Religion was thus constructed as a new historical object: it was rooted in personal experience, could be expressed in terms of belief and faith, depended on private institutions, and was practised in one's spare time. However – and this point is crucial – the formation of state power in the contemporary Middle East has involved a very different genealogy (Asad 1993). In most states where Islam predominated, there was an historical alliance between the two authorities that constructed the land: one was in charge of religion, the other of political power. They viewed themselves as complementary – supervising each other reciprocally – and were not in conflict. In this context, religious criticism entailed political



opposition. The construction of nation states in the nineteenth century presupposed a society composed of “sovereign, self-owning agent[s] – essentially suspicious of others” (Asad 2003: 135), resembling each other, secular in the public sphere and freely – individually – participating in public life. From the beginning, the liberal public sphere was an exclusionary one – it excluded among others women and members of religious minorities. Only the dominant religion was understood as public and central to the formation of national identities. According to Asad, Islam is not part of this understanding, and is therefore seen as incapable of contributing to the formation of national identities.<sup>6</sup> Asad’s own formulation of the most critical point in the secularisation thesis is very clear:

If the secularisation thesis no longer carries the conviction it once did, this is because the categories of politics and religion turn out to implicate each other more profoundly than we thought [...] the nation-state requires clearly demarcated spaces that it can classify and regulate: religion, education, health, leisure, work, income, justice, and war. (Asad 1999: 192)

The secularist interpretation overemphasises religion’s historical shift to the private realm and underlies most theories about the relationship between state and religion in the western world. Finding a way to conceptualise the state’s central importance in the definition of religion seems to be crucial in order to revisit the secularisation thesis. What I call “theories of state domination” (Becci 2001) offers tools to rethink the logic of power which configures the religious field. According to Jacques Zylberberg and Pauline Côté (1993), believing is primarily a political activity. Secularisation theories ignore this political dimension and this is why, according to these authors, they have not succeeded in questioning the legitimacy of state domination over the elements of social action that used to be relatively autonomous. Secularisation theories have also neglected “the fundamental role of political governance, which has become that of the state, as a matrix, engine and mediator of modern institutions” (Voyé 1996: 118).<sup>7</sup> The authors also describe the development of religion in modernity in terms of an increase in the domination of state over society and of its generalisation to almost all spheres of social action. As a consequence, religious institutions have been included in “state-dominated social space” and have progressively been deprived of their functions, resources and organisational autonomy (Zylberberg and Côté 1993: 529). In this approach, the state governs religious presence and experience in the social sphere through “fiscal, educational, medical, civil and criminal legislation, as well as those concerning labor, trade, migration, culture and communication” (Côté 1999: 60).<sup>8</sup>

With this in mind, Asad (1999) links the current notion that we have of religion to the construction of nation states. Since modern nation states seek to regulate all aspects of individual life, he contends that it is almost impossible to avoid encountering its ambitions even in the religious field. In the French debate on the “veil issue” an underlying idea is often that veiled women are not really French. The French laic model presupposes therefore the existence of an image of citizenship into which religious otherness does not fit. The fact that a simple headscarf clashes with so many laws, subjectivities and representations illustrates the implicit meanings of the idea of private.<sup>9</sup>

-----> **Women confined to the private realm by feminist discourses?**

Elizabeth Altschull, a French teacher, narrates in *Le voile contre l’école* (1995) her experience of veiled schoolgirls. She defines herself as a strict laic person and describes the individual and collective struggle of teachers against the headscarf.



However, since she often refers to veiled schoolgirls simply as the “veiled” and thereby reduces their identity to a headscarf, the focus easily shifts from a piece of cloth to the schoolgirls themselves. The veiled girls become the target and are placed in opposition to feminists. This is a rare case in which women’s solidarity seems to be absent or in which feminists display a paternalistic attitude towards other women. It certainly is necessary to fight against gender discrimination, wherever it occurs. Therefore it is essential to listen to what those discriminated against have to say and to act accordingly. However, the voice of Muslim women or feminists themselves is often absent from this debate. Who is veiling, what does it mean to them, and how is veiling related to social practices and understandings? All these questions have been addressed by some social scientists, but have been only rarely discussed in public debate.<sup>10</sup> From Altschull’s perspective, teachers are threatened by the apparently rapid growth of veiled schoolgirls, and her arguments are motivated by an unrestrained belief in laicity. However, what laicity exactly means is seldom seriously discussed; it is taken for granted that laicity implies a guarantee of equality, including gender equality. It would seem to me, however, that patriarchy is a universal organisational system of human interactions that can be made visible by reflecting on our interactions. Thus, considering the headscarf issue as the expression of male domination in other religious cultures has distracted attention from patriarchal asymmetries in western societies. Most laic feminists recognise that wearing a headscarf is an individual right, yet what disturbs them in particular is its visibility in public. Consequently, the veil is permitted in the private realm, or – more tellingly – veiled women are asked to disappear from the public space. This is a critical point, as it reproduces the structure of male domination that confines women to the private sphere.

In 1970s France the word patriarchy was imbued with new meaning by feminist movements, involving a general notion concerned with the whole of the social structure. Patriarchy, in this sense, is present and has been historically prevalent in all societies and all cultures. Michel Zimabalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere argue that:

[...] everywhere we find that women are excluded from certain economic or political activities, that their roles as wives and mothers are associated with fewer powers and prerogatives than are the roles of men. It seems fair to say then, that all contemporary societies are to some extent male-dominated, and although the degree and expression of female subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of human social life. (1974: 10)<sup>11</sup>

A universal concept of patriarchy implies that male dominance is not just an effect of, for instance, capitalist society, or a leftover from feudalism, but an independent and dynamic structure in its own right. Therefore it is not only present in “other cultures” – such as Muslim ones – but is everywhere at all times, also in a laic country.<sup>12</sup> It is only through historical and comparative research that we can address the question of the universality of patriarchy (Cohen, Howard and Nussbaum 1999). Historicising patriarchy in the case of the veil means examining the meaning that it has for those who veil, by understanding the various aspects that veiling engenders in and outside Europe, and locating, through the “veiled other”, commonalities with our patriarchal structures in order to act jointly against gender discrimination. This involves a critical perspective on one’s own conceptions, in this case questioning the European configurations of politics and



religion and orientalist views on the Islamic world that are evident in reactions to the veil. As El Guindi argues:

[...] approaching Muslim women's rights through liberal feminist agendas cannot be effective because these agendas are based on the western experience and derive from western values; hence they are irrelevant to most issues of concern to Muslim women. [...] Feminism within the context of Islam can provide the only path to empowerment and liberation available without challenging the culture as a whole. (1999: 182)

The veil has an infinite number of uses and it is rooted in varied histories with geographical and temporal shades. Islam did not introduce veiling: it has existed for thousands of years in the Mesopotamian/Mediterranean region. Following historical and geographical movements, it concerns primarily women, but also partly men, and is not always associated with seclusion. For men, the veil is a "symbol of rank, power and authority" (El Guindi 1999: 128). Veiling in Egypt is also linked to an idea of privacy according to which women can choose not to be seen or not to see. There have also been various forms of veiling in the western tradition. For women, the veil in Christian culture follows a logic of purity, whereas in Islam it is linked to reserve and respect. Therefore, does the veil not have the same meaning for Catholic nuns or Jewish orthodox women as it has for Muslim women? Such parallels lead to confusion and bias the public debate. The problem seems, therefore, not to be the veil as such, but the fact that Muslim women, placed in the role of other, are wearing it.

Moreover, gender certainly plays a major role in all religions.<sup>13</sup> Women are in practice less privileged than men in all religions, and there are strong gender inequalities also within western cultural and religious traditions.<sup>14</sup> Contrary to Christian and Jewish Bible-based theology, the Koran does not provide any reason for depreciating women. As with other religions, women are attributed clearly different roles and men generally have more power. Religion depends on the wider social patriarchal structure in which it is embedded: it can be used to discriminate or to favour peace and equality. In Turkey, Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria, the period between the 1920s and 1970s witnessed a degree of progress in limiting the use of religion to subordinate women. This period was unfortunately followed by several social and political crises that brought a backlash in terms of gender equality.

Furthermore, and in order to enhance the processes of emancipation for all women, it is essential that women be able to participate in all levels of social life and on transversal dimensions. In spite of the gender inequality that characterises the western religious sphere, there is ample evidence that women are more "religious" than men: they are faithful church attenders, take care of the religious education of children where relevant, and adhere more closely to the teachings of their faith communities.<sup>15</sup> It seems that women mainly occupy those positions in religious life that are considered private. It might therefore be more interesting, from a feminist point of view, to understand how these aspects of social life can enter the public debate. Within the processes we have recently been observing – what José Casanova has termed the "going public" of religions – women should be encouraged to appear publicly, whether they be Catholics or Muslims (Casanova 1994).<sup>16</sup> In the contemporary European spectrum of established religions, Protestantism appears to be one of the most emancipated religions with regard to gender equality.<sup>17</sup> Some studies conducted in the Netherlands have shown that this is due to a growing involvement and importance of women



in the church (Watling 2002). Thereby they challenge (mainly male) authorities and cause fragmentation and diversity.

A final point I will mention relates to the fact that Islamic knowledge is also structured by wider relations of power – such as the struggle between the self-titled secular state against what it calls “Islamic terrorism” – and gender relations. Some historical elements of feminists positions concerning the veil in Egypt, for instance, highlight this power structure. As El Guindi tells us:

As early as the 1870s and 1880s, before Egyptian organized feminism developed, Egyptian women were publishing their writings and were engaged in public speaking. Women had already begun to debate their position on these issues when men, in search for factors behind the demise of their country, began questioning existing social practices with regard to gender and formulated what many considered to be feminist positions in the process. These men were highly educated, had legal training, and had been exposed to European thought. Consequently, a men’s discourse on women’s issues [...] emerged in the Arab world. Unlike its position in women’s organized feminism, the veil was central to men’s “feminist” discourse. (1999: 178-179)

Veiling in public is often seen by western feminists as a practice that puts women openly under men’s authority. Indeed, the veil is associated with hiding, the withdrawal of women’s presence and therefore with imprisonment, inaccessibility and seclusion. Ironically, the main trend observed in western societies is that of requiring veiled women to disappear from the public sphere and privatise their faith. Excluding women – in particular migrant women – from access to public roles such as teaching, or exerting pressure on them at school, means depriving them of the resources to choose from different life possibilities. Most importantly, it reproduces the mechanism of telling women – in this case those of lower social status – what to do.

## Conclusion

Considering young, mainly migrant, schoolgirls as the perfidious and strategically manipulated vanguard of a dangerous Islam threatening European universal values can only be considered a distorted perspective.<sup>18</sup> We should ask ourselves if our categories of perception are not distorted by fear and be clear about using “our emancipation” not to define the needs of others, but rather to define our relation with others.<sup>19</sup> Edward Said (1978) has shown how dominant strands of western understanding of Islamic practices are wrapped in orientalist attitudes and assumptions. El Guindi expresses this idea in the following way: “the Orient provides Europe with a contrasting basis against which Europe’s identity can be constructed” (El Guindi 1999: 37). Acknowledging this relation is an important step, I think, on the path of mutual understanding and for constructing a common basis for the pursuit of equality.

## Endnotes

1. According to Gaspard and Khosrokhavar (1995), the first such incident occurred in 1989 in France.
2. The latest book on this issue, Badinter (2003).
3. A third point – too long to discuss here – is the fact that we are talking mainly about migrant women. They represent a socially, politically and economically distinct group, opposed to an occidental image of life. Their exclusion from social activities on the basis of the veil involves for them triple discrimination as a migrant, as a woman and as belonging to the “wrong” religious group.





4. I am referring here in particular to Weber (1976).
5. An example illustrating this argument is the role played by pain in Christianity and Islam. Whereas in the current Catholic perception, pain has to be fought against and overcome, the medieval Christian valued pain as a mode of participating in Christ's suffering. The secular worldview regards pain as inimical to reason: decreasing pain is seen as increasing self-empowerment. During the Middle Ages pain was not only valuable individually, it was also used by the religious authorities as a judicial procedure to establish the truth. Judicial procedure depended on the inflicting of physical pain and in the twelfth century it was legitimised and employed by the church. In the practice of penance bodily pain was linked to the pursuit of truth. The body was a medium to attain knowledge and heal the soul. Painful experiences, "are not simply mediated culturally and physically, they are themselves modes of living a relationship" (Asad 2003: 84). Pain is also strongly present in Islamic narratives. Today, the devout Muslim seeks to cultivate virtue and repudiate vice by a constant awareness of her own earthly finitude, trying to achieve the state of equilibrium. Penalties can be "a necessary part of learning how to act appropriately" (Asad 2003: 9). This stands in marked contrast to modern ideas and practices on pain.
6. According to Michael Wintle (1996), for instance, the key influences on European experience are the Roman Empire, Christianity, the Enlightenment and industrialisation.
7. Author's translation.
8. Author's translation.
9. I refer here to the notion of implicit meanings as theorised by Mary Douglas (1978).
10. A range of good examples are provided by the research of Gaspard and Khosrokhavar (1995), Salvatore and Amir-Moazami (2002), Weibel (2000) and Saint-Blancat (1999) among others.
11. As far as the disputed issue of the existence of matriarchal societies is concerned, I suggest considering Heide Göttner-Abendroth's research (1995). She is convinced that matriarchal societies existed. However, her definition of matriarchy is not simply the female version of patriarchy. For her, matriarchal societies are societies that were created and shaped by women and where women were dominant without dominating. Thereby she means that in many societies women had determinant roles, but they never appeared as dominating someone else. Another element might explain why we know only little of possible matriarchal societies. Most early archeologists and anthropologists were men and their access to information was certainly filtered by that fact. We know today that most anthropologists got the information they needed for their studies from men and not from women, often because the men did not want them to speak to their women. Through this biased information many anthropologists concluded that the image of a society they could reconfigure was dominated by males with women at the margins.
12. A universal concept of patriarchy does not imply that patriarchy is a natural phenomenon that sees biology as the only determinant factor, that all societies are and have always been patriarchal, or that there is only one type of patriarchy. It does not mean that there is a direct relation of domination of women by men. Patriarchy can be perpetuated by structures. A universal concept unfortunately carries with it some problems I will try to avoid here. It



obscures the tremendous variations in women's positions and in the forms of male dominance, and it does not carry any notion of how women might act in order to change their situation. See Showstack Sassoon (1987).

13. See in particular Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (1996).
14. A good example from the Christian world is the (non-)ordination of women in the Catholic Church. Most of the exclusion of women from positions of church leadership and from ordination to the priesthood or full-time religious office is not an integral part of the original sacred texts but has been introduced by male clerics. Very recently Pope John Paul II re-affirmed the will of the church not to allow women to be ordained. No sacred text ever states that only men can baptise, teach publicly and make public sermons, give the Eucharist, preside over official Liturgies, be in contact with sacred objects, represent Christ symbolically, or have authority.
15. Evidence collected by International Social Survey Programmes 1991 and 1998 is unambiguous on this issue. For more information see: [http://www.gesis.org/en/data\\_service/issp/index.htm](http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/issp/index.htm)
16. His deprivatisation thesis means roughly the entry of religion from a strict private sphere to civil society.
17. However, fundamentalist Protestant sects worldwide idealise woman as the self-sacrificing wife and mother, whose existence is limited to her home. They preach a powerful message of solid, changeless familial relationships. We know well that these kinds of contents are often indirectly transmitted in public teaching – for instance the professional orientation of girls and boys, etc. – and it is not easy to control. Also, some studies on mysticism have shown that the success of an individualistic religiosity in Protestantism has slowly marginalised female mysticism, which tended to be rather collective and emotional.
18. Altschull is a flagrant example of this attitude. At no moment does she discuss her position or approach the question in a reflexive manner. Instead she describes – as if she were accomplishing a French citizen's duty – how she prolongs this affair into a restless conflict.
19. Jasser illustrates this attitude in her conclusion, when she writes that “[u]ne jeune fille française d'origine arabo-musulmane a besoin de références de justice et d'émancipation issues des deux cultures à la fois afin de choisir ses propres valeurs et de les ancrer dans une dimension universelle. Il s'agit donc de mener, au nom de l'égalité et de la justice entre les deux sexes et entre les citoyens, une seule et même campagne contre le voile et contre l'exclusion des jeunes lycéennes voilées” (Jasser 1995: 70).



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## 2. Gendered spaces of exchange: Iranian Muslim religious practices in London

Kathryn Spellman

The greater visibility and politicisation of Muslim groupings in European societies have led to a number of discussions on community identity, and how religious beliefs and practices should be managed and recognised in the public domain. In 1997 New Labour's official approach to minority groups in Britain stated its aim to enable minorities "to participate freely and fully in the economic, social and public life of the nation, with all its benefits and responsibilities that entails, while still being able to maintain their own culture, traditions, language and values" (Runnymede Trust 1997: 1). In line with their campaign to cater to and celebrate the multicultural character of British society, the Labour government has encouraged Muslim groupings to come forward to help determine how "British Muslims" should be represented in wider society. Finding appropriate leaders and representational bodies is not an easy task, however, when considering the many and changing identities that lie behind the umbrella term "British Muslims". Who are the actors involved in shaping and defining political and popular discourses on "Muslim identity" in Britain? Who is excluded? How much say do women and youth have in constructing and expressing their cultural identities?

This chapter aims to move away from holistic models of ethnic and religious relations that tend to either gloss over or view telling aspects of minority groupings – such as religious practice, gender and class relations, and generational struggles – as static and culturally homogenous. Drawing on research carried out on the everyday lives of some Iranian Muslims living in London, this essay will take a close-up and detailed look at the processes involved in identity construction.<sup>1</sup> It will focus mainly on the emergence and re-emergence of religious spaces that have been used to reinforce, negotiate and challenge predetermined visions of Islam and delineated gendered norms of behaviour. To do so I will explore "snapshots" of different Iranian Muslim practices and traditions, concentrating mainly on a woman-only gathering called *sofreh*, a rite of passage for girls called *jashn-e ebâdat*, and the mystical aspect of Islam known as Sufism.

Incorporating these seemingly "invisible" arenas not only sheds light on the contestations involved in community development, but also the hybridisation of exchanges between different discourses and practices of religion and gender socialisation. As Werbner (2001: 134) writes: "cultures may be grasped as porous, constantly changing and borrowing, while nevertheless being able to retain at any particular historical moment the capacity to shock through deliberate confections



and subversions of sanctified orderings”. Building on such nuanced approaches, this paper highlights negotiated patterns of cultural production and expression, and how they shape and impose meaning on to women and younger generations.<sup>2</sup> It will also show how cultural pathways are carved and reworked by minority groupings, which can in turn provide the confidence and mechanisms needed to build new roles and rights in European societies.

#### -----> **Case study – Iranians in London**

The majority of the estimated 75 000 Iranians living in Britain, who are from a range of socio-economic, religious, ethnic and political backgrounds, left Iran due to the political struggles surrounding the Iranian revolution and the formation of the Islamic Republic (Spellman 2000: 39-50). Many thought their time in Britain was temporary and assumed they would return to Iran as soon as the political situation was stable and secure. A number of factors including the Iran-Iraq war, the resilience of the Iranian Government after Khomeini’s death in 1989, and their continued absence from Iran, led to the realisation that their time away was going to be longer than expected. Although they continued to be absorbed with the political and social transformations in Iran, it was around this period that many started to think seriously about the realities of dislocation and what the future held for their personal, family and professional lives in Britain.

While successful adaptation to aspects of British society has been important for many Iranians, they have also made concerted efforts to preserve and renew aspects of their heritage and the Persian language in London. During this period, for instance, Iranian cultural, religious, media and business activities mushroomed. It is important to stress that the ways in which Iranians rework and, in turn, express their identities through cultural, religious and media forms is a complex process which has to be considered in light of the intersection of interrelated factors including age, wealth, gender, religion, ethnicity, information capital, and their encounters with the shifting circumstances in Britain, Iran and the wider diaspora. The ways in which the combinations of these factors fuse or collide throws light on the ongoing pursuit of identifying the dynamics that allow the co-existence of multiple identities in European society.

#### -----> **Being an Iranian Shi’a Muslim in London**

It became evident during my first set of interviews that many men and women, young and old, were grappling with questions surrounding Islam and their Muslim identities. Both practising and non-practising Iranian Muslims articulated the feeling that their religion and culture had been hijacked and misrepresented both by the regime in Iran and the popular, political and academic discourses on Muslims in Britain. How to be an Iranian Shi’a Muslim in Britain was further complicated by conflicting codes of gender that were being produced, reproduced and politicised in public spaces in Iran and across western Europe.

In Iran, for example, gender relations were central to the political ideology of Khomeini and his supporters in their attempts to adapt their Islamic discourses to day-to-day practice. Changes in the policies concerning women’s legal status, appearance and behaviour were important instruments used to mark the boundaries of the Islamic community (Paidar 1995: 232). Throughout the period of the Iran-Iraq war women and men were subjected, often harshly, to redefined codes of gender. Various manifestations of popular culture and religious practices were also transformed or banned in order to prescribe the newly constructed “original”



Islamic project. Paradoxically, the governmental policies controlling dress codes and gendered access to public space have made it possible for some women, particularly those from families that customarily isolate and alienate women from public activity, to work and learn in the public arena (Adelkhah 1999, Mir-Hosseini 1999). Inadvertently, women's public involvement has shed light on the impracticality of many governmental policies.

In Britain, I listened repeatedly to Iranians criticising the brands of Islam propounded by the Islamic Republic and other Islamist groupings around the world. I was told that "real" Shi'a Islam cannot be judged by politicised notions of Islam, or the stereotypes and media images that portray Muslim women as "oppressed" and Muslim men as "terrorists". While many complained that the media totalised "Muslim culture" and projected it as being irrevocably gender inegalitarian, others felt that they were not being represented accurately by British Muslim leaders, mainly of South Asian background, who were effective in influencing the government's approach to minority groups. It was also conveyed that the existing negative stereotypes linked to the South Asian population in Britain, and the history of their colonial experiences, damaged and created barriers to their chances of social and economic acceptance in London.

Feeling out of tune with different visions of Islam in both Britain and Iran prompted many Iranians to discuss and debate the meaning and authenticity of Islam, and how it was being portrayed in the public domain. Many comments made by Iranians resonated closely with Poole's analysis on media representations of British Muslims:

The absence of normal stories in which Muslims appear, and the narrow diversity of roles that result from the selection of stories seen as specifically dealing with "Muslim affairs", results in a consistently narrow framework of representation. This firmly established itself in the 1990s, but stemmed from events in the late 1980s (the Rushdie and Honeyford affairs) that defined "what it meant to be Muslim" and that attempted to construct a closure around these definitions. (2002: 99)

Poole's conclusions, similar to those of my interviewees, showed the need for better descriptions in news stories to represent the rich variety of Muslim life, including that of non-practising Muslims.

Many also noted the absence of mechanisms to transmit their values and beliefs to their children in London. There was an increasing awareness, for instance, of the need for facilities and leaders to cater to Iranian customs and religious traditions such as wedding ceremonies, significant dates on the Shi'a Muslim calendar and funeral arrangements. Emerging viewpoints were produced, expressed and embodied in Iranian religious spaces, such as Sufi orders, religious charity groups, private mixed-sex religious gatherings, *rowzehs* (gatherings concluding with a moving story of Imam Husain and Karbala), mosques and schools (some connected to the Iranian Government, others categorically not). The diversification of Iranian Muslim religious gatherings and the various outlooks espoused by their leaders illustrates the complexity of the constructional process in which individuals engage as they confront the tensions between different definitions of belonging and differentiation. How have Iranian Shi'a Muslim religious traditions been established and re-established in Britain? How are gender roles appropriated and shaped in relation to the circumstances in Iran and Britain? How do Iranians living in London become familiar with the styles of the new religious centres and their leaders?



-----> **Sofrehs: women-only gatherings**

To tap into these questions let us first turn to ethnographic research carried out on women-only gatherings called *sofrehs*. This research is focused on loosely-knit networks of Iranian women who attend religious gatherings that are held at the prayer leader's home in central London. A *sofreh*, which can literally be translated as "tablecloth", becomes a part of a Shi'a Muslim women's ritual when holy figures such as Abu'l Fazl or Hassan Motjaba are called on through prayers and stories and are asked to help solve personal problems and crises. As special food items are blessed the women silently put forth their vows (*nazr*), such as: "If my daughter does well in her exams I'll send money to a shrine in Iran" and "If my son's wife becomes pregnant I will sponsor the next *sofreh* gathering". Grandmothers, mothers and daughters have been present at the gatherings I have attended, but the majority of the women consist of middle-aged or elderly women and represent the first generation of Iranians in London.

It is not in the scope of this article to give a detailed account of the various *sofrehs* held in the name of Shiite holy figures but it is important to note that the components of the *sofrehs*, such as the food, the stories and its primary purpose of requesting personal favours have been transferred to the London context with little change. It is worthwhile, however, to briefly highlight a few of the diverse and changing meanings and roles of the *sofreh* performance throughout twentieth-century Iran to show how such gatherings have been informed and moulded by the development of various political discourses and have been used by women as spaces to rework gender roles and articulate religious, socio-economic and political identities.

-----> **Sofrehs and historical conjunctures**

Bamdad writes that during the Constitutional Movement of 1906 the few women who emerged on the political stage turned their traditional religious and social gatherings into political meetings, where they would discuss, organise and circulate the latest political news (1977: 14). Other studies note that *sofrehs* have been used as space to create a "women's domain" that lends to the development and expression of women's relations with other women (Betteridge 1989: 154). Betteridge's study of urban women in Iran discusses the integral role that women's religious gatherings played for women from more traditional families. The gathering provided women with an opportunity to socialise outside of their own households and was one of the few occasions that allowed women to spend a sizeable amount of their family's money. Bauer's (1985) study of migrant women living in poor neighbourhoods in South Tehran in the 1970s discusses the way in which *sofreh* gatherings were also channels used by prayer leaders to denounce the un-Islamic behaviour and appearance of women portrayed in the media and the rich women of North Tehran and to put forth the codes of conduct (which would have been defined by the particular prayer leader) appropriate for a "proper" Muslim woman.

In the Pahlavi era of the 1960s, a few of the *ulama's* intellectuals became politically vocal about many subjects, including women and the family. The campaign on women included appeals to reject western styles and norms that were seen to destroy family values and degrade women by making them frivolous "sex objects". Instead, women were urged to restore Islamic values by embracing the new Shi'a model of womanhood which represented women as mothers and revolutionaries (Paidar 1995: 57). For example, the lay religious radical Ali Shariati



(1990) criticised the way in which upper classes were using *sofrehs* to flaunt their wealth and labelled them “silly ladies’ parties” under the pretence of religion.

After the establishment of the Islamic Republic some women’s religious networks became politicised and served as a conduit for the revolutionary discourse. In addition to mourning for the martyrdoms of Shi’a holy figures, the women discussed the latest political news and mourned for the martyrs of the anti-Shah movement. The religious networks were also used to quickly and effectively spread the latest political reports and oppositional literature and tapes (Friedl 1994: 163). Presently in Iran such gatherings are important spaces for women to sort through and contest the discourses through which women’s issues and family concerns are produced and addressed (Torab 1996, 2002, Kamalkhani 1998, Adelhah 1999). They also provide women with the space to compete and gain leadership, particularly younger women who have embarked on religious training or have specialised in subjects such as law and education.

-----> **Sofreh gatherings in London: the rise of a female leader**

When one of the female leaders, who I will call Ms Parvizi, first started to hold *sofrehs* in London they tended to attract Iranian women who wanted to stay clear of the religious perspective of the Iranian Government. Ms Parvizi is skilled in reading the Koran and is considered to be a pious and clever woman of great strength. In London during the 1980s, she performed wedding ceremonies for couples and arranged various kinds of religious meetings. She eventually specialised in *sofreh* rituals and is now known by many religious and non-religious Iranians in London as a “professional *sofreh* organiser”. Her interpretations of the Koran, which are usually described as religiously “moderate”, generate different reactions depending on the attendees’ particular backgrounds. She also plays a central role in distributing charitable funds, disbursing religious taxes, and arranging package journeys to Mecca and other pilgrimage sites.

The women mainly attend Ms Parvizi’s *sofrehs* because they want to ask God to help them with personal and family problems. They often described it as an effective and direct method that enables women to “push God” in their favour. Many said that for the first time in their lives they were actively searching for a moral framework for themselves and their families. According to a woman in her forties, her friends spent the 1980s in night-clubs and casinos, then travelled to Mecca and the spent the 1990s in *sofrehs* and charity functions. For some of the Iranian women, *sofrehs* have been used to help make sense of their lives outside of Iran and to maintain and negotiate their Iranian and Muslim identities in London.

*Sofrehs* are also a place in London where women can speak Farsi and exchange information concerning births, marriages, illnesses, deaths, graduations, news from Iran, visas and passports, Iranian cultural and religious events in London, and gossip. It has become a forum for some women to fulfil their duty of hospitality, assert their socio-economic status and rebuild and strengthen personal networks.

-----> **Khatami’s presidency**

As Ms Parvizi’s business started to grow and the politics in Iran started to change, the distinction between those who supported and those who opposed the regime at the *sofrehs* and other Iranian gatherings became increasingly blurred. Sorting through alternative and competing interpretations of Islamic belief and practice in London became further complicated by the power struggles between elements of



the Iranian Government and the ensuing discussions on the role of Muslims in Britain. These tensions became particularly apparent when I arranged meetings with the women outside the gatherings and learned more about the formal and informal social, political, religious and familial networks. I found that the women who attend the various *sofrehs* come from different backgrounds of education and prosperity and often associate themselves with different Shi'a institutions. Some of the wealthier women, who would consider themselves to be moderately religious and wear a decorative scarf in public or no scarf at all, took me to the Shahmaghsoudi Sufi Order and upscale meetings of the Kahrizak charity organisation, which collects money for a hospital outside of Tehran. With less affluent women, I went to mixed-sex religious gatherings held privately in homes and occasionally to programmes at the Holland Park *Majmah* on Thursday evenings.

I also met some of the *sofreh* attendees who were known to be more pious and often complained outside the gatherings that Ms Parvizi's *sofrehs* were too centred on food and gossip rather than prayer and devotion. Some of these women wear a *hijab* in public, and are involved in activities at more orthodox Shi'a institutions such as the Iranian community centre in Hammersmith and the Institute of Islamic Studies in Maida Vale. They are also involved in the activities at the Holland Park *Majmah*. Some of these women have their children enrolled at the Iranian Cultural and Educational Centre, a school financed by the Iranian Government.

*Sofrehs* thus became a place for women to discuss and compare the religious discourses and practices that are promoted at the emerging centres, including their varying perspectives on and approaches to raising children, dress codes and so on. A brief description of religious activities that stem from two Iranian religious centres, namely the Iranian Cultural and Educational Centre and the Shahmaghsoudi Sufi Order, illustrates the spectrum of religious practices that have emerged.

#### → The Iranian Cultural and Educational Centre

The Iranian Cultural and Educational Centre is one of sixty, independently funded, Muslim primary schools in Britain. It has around 200 full-time Iranian students, a Saturday school offering Arabic lessons, and a Sunday school offering Persian and Islamic studies to around 250 Iranian children (Spellman 2000). The school uses the formal and informal curriculum currently being taught in schools in Iran and observes the Iranian religious and national calendar of holidays and events. It is through the curriculum that the school appropriates the state's discourse on gender roles and expectations. For example, after the revolution the Islamic Republic designated Fatima's birthday as the ceremonial day in which 9-year-old girls begin to take on their religious and social responsibilities (Torab 1996: 160-166, Adelkhah 1999: 120). It is when they are required to permanently wear a *hijab*, pray and fast, and adhere to rules of modesty. This rite of passage, called *jashn-e ebâdat*, is also carried out by the Iranian school in London.

The ceremony I attended consisted of singing, poetry and storytelling and was followed by each of the twelve girls reciting words from the Koran and then receiving special presents from the mullah. These included a prayer carpet (*sajjâdeh*), prayer stone (*mohre tasbih*), headscarf (*maqna'e*), a loose robe (*mânto*), a framed certificate of distinction and some sweets. The ceremony was followed by girls performing *namâz* with the mullah. I spoke to several of their mothers, from variable economic backgrounds and based in central London. They considered the ceremony to be a very important event in their daughter's life and



compared it to the first communion practiced by Catholics. They emphasised how the ceremony is carried out in an identical manner in Iran.

I asked several mothers if they were concerned that their children were not interacting with non-Iranian and non-Muslim children and were not taking a more active role in mainstream British life. They stressed the need to follow the Iranian state's school curriculum due to the likelihood of moving back to Iran. They also wanted to ensure that their children upheld the Iranian state's version of Islamic beliefs and practices. They pointed out how most British schools do not recognise and/or monitor many of their key requirements such as dress codes, adherence to prayer times, halal food in cafeterias, and religious and national holidays. The school's curriculum and the invented tradition *jashne-e ebâdat* was largely criticised by women and girls at *sofreh* gatherings and other Iranian gatherings. Many viewed the ritual as another official tool of the Iranian Government, used to impose its extreme ideals early on in a girl's life. It is important to stress that the Iranian school in question is numerically small and certainly does not represent the vast majority of Iranians who attend Iranian schools, including those who are practising Muslims. Many interviewees wanted to make sure that I understood, along with the wider public, that the ritual was created by the Islamic Republic, and not representative of the Iranian population in London and their religious practices.

#### → The Maktab Tariqat Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi (Islamic School of Sufism)

In a very different vein, let us take a brief look at the tradition of Sufism, which is a term applied to the mystical tradition within Islam which emphasises the love of God and the grasp of divine realities. Sufi orders, which vary greatly in their beliefs and practices, have gained currency among some Iranians, young and old, who are living in western societies. Generally speaking, Iranians reported that Sufism provides a channel to shape and express their Muslim and Iranian identities while staying clear of the politicised and culturally remote versions of Islam in both Iran and Britain (Spellman 2000).

The Maktab Tariqat Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi (Islamic School of Sufism) has developed an all-encompassing religious discourse that is socially relevant for Iranians living outside of Iran. Since the Iranian revolution it has opened over fifty centres in the United States and over fifty in Europe, Asia and Australia. There are eight branches in Britain, located in London, Newcastle, Brighton, Oxford, Leeds, Cheltenham, Bolton and Manchester. Each branch offers a number of activities, including weekly religious services, Koranic and *Hadith* studies, concentration and meditation classes, seminars for assertiveness training for women, stress management, Sufi poetry, Farsi language courses, music lessons, and courses on healing and sporting activities. The order has its own research and publication centre, a museum located in Karaj, Iran, and a memorial building which is located in California and which was designed by the current leader, Salaheddin Ali Nader Shah Angha, in honour of his father. The various branches are connected via sophisticated pages on the Internet, which are constantly updated and use the latest technology, and can be read in nine languages: Farsi, English, Arabic, Italian, French, Swedish, Spanish, Russian and German.

Those who attend the weekly gatherings in London are educated, come from middle and upper-class backgrounds and are involved in many social and professional activities and networks. Generally speaking, the realisation that London was a permanent home left many members without an overall framework for life,



certainty of their roots or a secure place in society. They often spoke about like-minded Iranians around the globe and how they are all united by their leader Pir Angha, whose lineage apparently traces back to the Prophet. It was often said that the metaphysical and spiritual pathways of Sufism transcend the aggressive religion of the Islamic regime and its rigid codes of gender. While the order has a conservative outlook towards family, marriage and sexuality, it encourages young women to assert their individuality and not to wear a veil.

While they repeatedly stress how, through Sufism, they are actively taking part in and learning about the “purest” form of Islam, the order’s discourse also appears heavily influenced by California-styled, therapy-based, new religious movements. It encourages its members, for instance, to overcome shortcomings through positive thinking techniques and disciplining of the body. The order provides the methods for those searching for self-realisation and personal fulfilment, while also serving as an ethnic and spiritual base for middle and upper-class Iranians living in secular countries outside Iran. Whereas some women at the *sofreh* gatherings spoke positively about the order, many found the Sufi practices heterodox and religiously impure.

-----> **Conclusions**

With the ethnographic material in this chapter, I have tried to show a glimpse of what lies behind the umbrella term “Muslims in Britain”. Discerning how one should live as an Iranian Muslim in London proved a difficult task when faced with different visions of Islam and Muslim practices that are generated by the Islamic regime in Iran and culturally unfamiliar representations in popular, political and academic discourses in Europe. The snapshots of various religious practices indicated the various gulfs between different visions of Islam and lines of gender socialisation that are mediated through religious centres in London. Ms Parvizi’s *sofrehs* are one of the many “invisible” spaces where women come together to think through the different interpretations and representations of Islam in Britain, Iran and beyond. It is a space in London where women reinforce, rework and/or challenge the diverse positions produced in different social and religious centres, such as the Shahmaghsoudi Sufi Order and the Iranian Cultural and Educational Centre.

In dealing with exclusion or political transition these examples demonstrate how some Iranians have used religion as identity-building vehicles, which are being moulded within and across nation-state borders. They also examine in detail the processes involved in identity construction and demonstrate how religious traditions and practices are hybridised spaces of exchange for some Iranians living in Britain. Tapping into religious and social bases, and how they become rooted and reworked in relation to prevailing conditions, can reveal the linkages and blockages between different levels of co-operation in European societies. Much more needs to be done in studies to include “invisible” social spaces and consider how they can serve as bases for people to build or rebuild solidarities and re-create the foundations for participation in both formal democracy and civil society. While it is unrealistic to hope that liberal and conservative Muslims (just like liberals and conservatives in any religion) will share the same views on gender roles and women’s issues, it is important to listen to the contestations and negotiations that are being carried out by minorities – men and women, young and old – in European societies. It not only substantiates and brings meaning to the notions of culture, multiculturalism and diversity but also makes it possible



to identify shared aspects of the religions and their common struggles for public recognition and fair representation.

#### Endnotes

1. This article is based on material gathered for my PhD thesis, "Religion, nation and identity: Iranians in London", University of London, 2000. See also Spellman, K. (2000) *Religion and Nation: Iranian Local and Transnational Networks in Britain*. Oxford: Berghahn Books. I am extremely grateful to all of the Iranians who helped me throughout my research and allowed me to observe their religious gatherings. I would like to thank the participants of the "Resituating culture" seminar and those who attended the "Public spheres and Muslim identities" Summer Academy for their helpful comments on this material.
2. See Gilroy (1990), Hall (1992), Bhabha (1995), Brah (1996), Calgar (1997) and Werbner (2000), who challenge essentialism and aim to de-couple ethnicity from culture, nation, race and nature.

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### 3. How important are cultural norms of gender in young people's accounts of sexual practice?

*Bryony Hoskins*

The construction of language, and in particular the development of categories, has directed research towards certain conclusions. We develop our understandings of the world through the use of language, and these understandings become our cultural norms. Nowhere is this more the case than in constructions of gender in sexual practice. In this article I examine gendered cultural norms and the consequences of maintaining these categorisations for sexual health. I then consider where “in culture” this language is reproduced. The story of gendered sexual practice is fairly well documented in literature, but this essay takes the different approach of questioning the links between the assumptions of gender and young people's talk about sexual practice. This article will highlight literature in which young people identify and use discourses different from these traditional uses, employing the notion of multiple femininities and masculinities that change the traditions and the languages used. Finally, I will explore evidence from my own empirical research where the dominant features of sexual practice are no longer the categories of gender.

#### → Cultural norms of gender

Firstly, I will address the main constructions of sexual practice associated with “conventional” cultural understandings of femininity, masculinity and heterosexuality in feminist literature. By “traditional” (Sharpe 1994, Willott and Griffin 1996, Stewart 1999), “conventional” (Stewart 1999: 277, Holland et al. 1998: 129) or “established” (Willott and Griffin 1996) frameworks I am referring to research that is guided by a gendered notion of a dominant norm of femininity and a dominant norm of masculinity within an unequal power relationship. The following quote describes sexual practice in the context of conventional femininity:

The female's sexuality is supposed to lie in her receptiveness and this is not just a matter of her open vagina: it extends to the whole structure of feminine personality as dependent, passive, unaggressive and submissive. Female sexuality has been held to involve long arousal and slow satisfaction, inferior sex drive, susceptibility to field dependence (a crying child distracts the attention) and romantic idealism rather than lustful reality. (Oakley 1996: 36)

The characteristics traditionally associated with femininity, according to Oakley, are passivity and submission, particularly within heterosexual intercourse (Holland et al. 1998). Ussher (1997) and Campbell (1999) represent the conventional



understanding of femininity as childlike: innocent and ignorant of sexual knowledge and practices. As Jackson (1999) notes, like childhood, established femininity is represented as a state of powerlessness and through an identity as victim. It is argued by Hollway (1989) that a feminine identity positions a woman as needing a relationship with a man and needing to feel physically desired by him. As Thompson (1992) describes, the needs of femininity are interwoven with stories of romance and love and generate the search for the ideal man to form a couple and live happily ever after with. Another apparently feminine characteristic – discussed by Ussher (1997) and Holland et al. (1998) – is not to enjoy sex, but to participate in it in order to maintain the relationship with the man. Thus sex becomes a bargaining tool of the relationship (Thompson 1992).

Crawford et al. (1994) and Hollway (1989) describe how femininity has positioned women as an object that tries to be beautiful to please and keep a man. According to Ussher (1997), to be feminine a woman must be emotional, caring, romantic and have a desire for children. The necessity to believe in love and romance is emphasised by Holland et al. (1998). An important element of this love is to demonstrate that you completely trust your partner (Holland et al. 1998). As Lees (1993) states, only under the circumstances of love, trust and a long-term relationship can a feminine woman desire to have a sexual relationship with a man.

In discussing “femininity and the life course”, Lees (1993) and Sharpe (1994) argue that practices of conventional femininity gave women a pathway to follow in life, and regulated their whole existence in a position of inequality within a heterosexual relationship. This pathway was determined by the events and categories of marriage, wifehood, children and motherhood (Sharpe 1994) and was provided incessantly to girls and women through cultural outlets such as weekly magazines (McRobbie 1978). From her analysis of magazines, McRobbie (1978) suggests that what is prescribed for young girls is a unitary feminine pathway that is considered natural, and that leaves little possibility for alternative choices. This pathway is almost exclusively contained within the “private” sphere (Sharpe 1994) and events such as marriage and having children are shrouded in discourses of love, romance and living “happily ever after” (Lees 1993: 115). Lees (1993) argues that one consequence of this clear-cut life course is that young women began relationships with boys with marriage and children in mind.

What I find striking in this literature is the contrast between femininity and masculinity. The research literature on femininity predominantly centres on sexual relationships and teenage pregnancy, and considerably less on the life course and career. In research on masculinity the life course – career/unemployment, crime – is a central focus, with some consideration of sexual relationships. Thus the literature on sexual practice focuses predominantly on femininity.

One reason for the lack of research on conventional masculinity and sexual relationships is that men’s sexual relationships have been assumed to be “normal” whereas women’s sexual relationships have been treated as “other” (Edley and Wetherell 1995). The stimulus for problematising masculinity came from second-wave feminists who located the male gender within a model of the patriarchal oppression of women (Edley and Wetherell 1995). Characteristics associated with



conventional masculinity are presented as opposite to those of femininity. Connell (1995) identifies the traditional masculine man with the muscular heroes of films such as Rambo and Rocky. Segal (1997b: xi), before developing her critique of conventional masculinity, describes this identity as powerful, competitive and aggressive and it is expressed by Holland et al. through the metaphor of “gladiators” (1993: 1).

Masculinity is constituted by Hollway (1984: 231) through the male sex drive: “I want to fuck. I need to fuck. I’ve always needed and wanted to fuck” (Hollway 1984: 231). Holland, Ramazanoglu and Sharpe (1993: 1) argue that sexual practice has been considered to be the “central site” of men’s formation of masculinity; masculinity within the sexual relationship requires a man to be all-knowledgeable about sex and to believe that birth control is a female problem. Campbell (1999) describes masculinity within sexual intimacy as constituted through a primitive and biological need to “fuck”. She continues by arguing that men believe they are supposed to initiate and control sexual encounters. This has been described as the “sexual pursuit of women” (Segal 1997a: 79). To “complement” (Segal 1997b: 79) conventional masculinity’s need for sex, men also have a “fear of real intimacy” and therefore lack a desire for relationships.

For Holland, Ramazanoglu and Sharpe, to be the first to have sex in a peer group of boys, or to have lots of sexual encounters with girls, is considered an achievement, akin to “winning in a competition” (1993). They further suggest that one reason for this is that masculinity needs to be proved – by boys and men – in this way in order to demonstrate heterosexuality. According to Campbell (1999), one way that men prove their heterosexuality is through multiple sexual conquests and making women pregnant. Holland, Ramazanoglu and Sharpe (1993) and Lees (1993) argue that men regulate masculinity through abuse; by calling those men who fail or lose in the competition for sexual prowess “wimps”, (Holland, Ramazanoglu and Sharpe 1993: 12), “women” or “poofs”, invoking femininity and/or gay sexuality (Lees 1993: 33). Holland, Ramazanoglu and Sharpe (1993) argue that men hide from the vulnerability that masculinity creates in them by exerting power over women; this can be seen, for example, when women are forced by men to comply with their sexual “needs” so they gain “masculine” status within their peer group.

In the above literature, men with gay identities are not constituted within masculinity but are treated as the other of masculinity. Thus this research presents an underlying argument that men who have sex with men, or have a gay identity are not masculine and effectively have no gender (Wight 1999).

In relating masculinity to the life course, Lees (1993) argues that young men see marriage as inevitable, and that they consider it as an opportunity to have someone look after them, their children and to follow their orders. Although Lees (1993) recognises that there have been some changes in young women’s femininity in terms of their expected life course, masculinity has remained substantially the same. She argues that men still want traditional marriage. In studies of masculinity and work – in particular those of Edley and Wetherell (1995) – the single unitary understanding of traditional masculinity has been replaced by a framework of multiple understandings. Edley and Wetherell (1995) problematise the traditional masculine identity of the man in the public sphere of work and career who is considered to be the “breadwinner” in the family. As with femininity, Edley and Wetherell (1995) argue that the masculine identity and life project has altered. They argue that changes to masculinity have been brought about by



recent histories of economic change – such as unemployment and the decline in manufacturing and heavy industry – that have challenged the male place in the public sphere and the importance of physical strength.

-----> **Consequences of gender inequality**

The literature under discussion argues that the reason young people tend not to use “safer” sexual practices and that women are less able to control or desire sexual practice is that their relationships are based upon fixed, unequal, gendered and heterosexual identities. Holland et al. (1998) suggest that the repercussions for young people of not conforming to this cultural gender pattern are wide-ranging: condoms not being used in penetrative sex, women’s sexual pleasure not being considered important and men physically and verbally forcing penetrative sex onto young women. Unequal gendered power relationships within heterosexual sex is the key element to understanding young people’s sexual practice, as argued by Holland et al. (1998) and Crawford et al. (1994). According to Holland et al. (1998), the notion of femininity in which the woman is the object that needs a man gives women no agency or power to regulate their desires and sexual practice. They claim that women who identify with femininity position themselves as powerless. Fine (1988) argues that the women who self-identify with traditional views of femininity lack subjectivity and personal entitlement within sexual encounters, and are those most likely to find themselves with unwanted pregnancies and to follow them through to full term. In her ethnographic study, it was the “quite passive and relatively quiet” young women who became pregnant and not those “whose bodies, dress, and manner evoked sensuality and experience” (Fine 1988: 49).

The traditional feminine position of powerlessness means that, even if a young woman has knowledge of sexual safety, she runs the risk of not being able to act upon this knowledge. Empirical research suggests that identification with femininity prevents the implementation of expert knowledge in sexual practice. Campbell (1999) demonstrates through interview texts how men will not listen to the knowledge or desires of a woman, because men are supposed to be all-knowledgeable about sex. Part of the regulation of women is that they must be observed to be pure and innocent (Macpherson and Fine 1995). Holland et al. (1996) and Jenny Kitzinger (1995) therefore argue that for a young woman to be knowledgeable of sexual diseases, carry condoms, and regulate sexual encounters indicates that she is sexually experienced and could therefore gain the sexual reputation of a “slag”. The research of Holland et al. (1998) demonstrates how the use of condoms is difficult within a heteronormative gendered relationship. They suggest that in many sexual relationships the use of a condom involves social tension as it subverts the traditional male role; “When a young woman insists on the use of a condom for her own safety, she is going against the construction of sexual intercourse as man’s natural pleasure, and woman’s natural duty” (Holland et al. 1990: 119, Patton 1993).

The use of the condom itself, according to Holland et al. (1990), questions the loss of self to passion and orgasm because it is a form of control. Condoms are considered to be a hindrance to sexual performance for men. In this framework femininity gives no agency to ask for, or power to insist on, “safer” sex. Holland et al. (1998) argue that masculinity’s sexual urges prevent understanding of the need to control sex or to listen to the needs of the partner. It is emphasised by Campbell (1999) that a man displays his masculinity and heterosexuality through



sexual conquests and impregnating women. This in turn therefore encourages unprotected promiscuous behaviour. From this research it is possible to conclude that men's masculine fulfilment of urges – as well as the display of heterosexuality – is in direct opposition to sexual safety.

Taking this argument further, Woollett et al. (1998) emphasises that masculinity gives men the power to regulate sexual practice. Woollett et al. (1998) suggest that this power is given to them through the assumptions of the male biological “sex drive” (Hollway 1989) and that this is seen as a contributing factor to the use of physical coercion in sex. Holland et al. (1998) and Brownmiller (1975) argue that as a consequence of this if a woman resists the feminine role and refuses to have sex, masculinity gives the man the right to force sex upon the woman. Holland et al. (1998) argue that behaviour that coerces women into having unwanted or unprotected sex is either violent or contains the threat of violence. A quarter of the women interviewed for the Women Risk Aids Project discussed having had unwanted sex due to male coercion (Holland et al. 1991, 1992) such as threats, physical assault and rape. Holland et al. (1991, 1992) describe how heterosexuality and masculinity incorporate many forms of coercion in its “normal” existence.

-----> **Reproduction of norms in language**

In order to create changes in the language used to describe and understand sexual practice, it is important to explore where it is reproduced. Obvious sites of reproduction for traditional gendered and heterosexist language are right-wing political and religious discourses (as noted by Fine 1988). In the discourse of family values, for example, it is believed that teaching about sex “promotes promiscuity and immorality, and the undermining of family values” (Fine 1988: 30). Family values extend from politics into schools through the discourses that are used in sex education classes. Fine argues that femininity is reproduced and maintained through family values discourses that authorise the suppression of a discourse of female sexual desire, promote a discourse of female victimisation, and explicitly privilege marriage and heterosexuality over other practices of sexuality (1988: 30).

Rhetoric defined by Aggleton and Warwick (1997: 82) as advocating “the return to traditional values” anticipates that society will return to an age of monogamy and chastity that never really existed. This “family values” rhetoric is clearly recurrent in religious discourses such as “born again” Christian and Catholic discourses which declare that women should not have free choice over their bodies, their futures and over whether they wish to continue a pregnancy. An example of this is the law in states such as Texas (2003) that forces women to watch videos about killing foetuses before having an abortion, and to be informed that they are increasing the risk of breast cancer by having an abortion even though there is no medical evidence to confirm this link. Anti-abortion discourses and “family values” were again promoted by the Pope in his most recent speeches in Croatia (2003), when he said that women who have been raped – including cases of rape in war – should not have abortions, and that women should continue to play their role in the domestic and caring sphere.

The gendered understanding of sexual practice has been shown by Fine (1988) to influence sex education to the extent that it is based upon the expectation that women can control their sexual desires – unlike the uncontrollable masculine sex drive – and therefore women should be responsible for maintaining the “moral”



high ground and saying “no”. Feminine sexual pleasures and the experiences of adolescent women are criticised, stigmatised and morally regulated in the school environment (Tolman 1994, Fine 1988). Fine (1988) and Thomson and Scott (1991) both argue that the anti-sex language directed towards young women has led to increased risk behaviour in sexual liaisons and to the construction of women as victims. One outcome of the “family value” discourse is that women depict themselves as having no self-identity and living in constant fear of being the “potential victim of male sexuality” (Fine 1988: 30). She defines the discourse of victimisation as including the language of defence: against disease, pregnancy and “being used”. Fine concludes that this leaves no space for women to explore and experiment with their own sexual desires (1988). The language of defence is encouraged through a discourse of individual morality; a woman can have only one position within her relationship and her life course, and this is to subscribe to abstinence and self-control until marriage. As passive defenders of their virginity, the only decision left for a woman is whether to answer yes or no, not what type of contraception to use and what type of sex (Fine 1988).

Clearly the language of family values reproduces the categories of traditional gender and sexual practice. However, the literature discussed above assumes that young people’s sexual practices are regulated purely by institutions (political, religious and school) rather than by the young people negotiating and changing the discourses to fit their own lives.

#### -----> **Young people using different discourses**

It is my contention in this essay that these discourses and categorisations of sexual practice do not necessarily fit with how young women and men consider themselves today. Some recent research has shown (Segal 1994) that women have more agency in sexual encounters and are often the initiators. In research in the Netherlands, Vanwesenbeeck (1997) found some changes to gendered sexual practice, in particular by confident young women who did not need approval and confirmation from men. It was suggested that these women used their position of attractiveness to men to be powerful, and therefore be both subject and object at the same time. This is similar to the way in which Jenny Kitzinger (1995) describes the success of the pop star Madonna; she is not called a “real slag” because she is in control, summarised as “I’m sexually attractive but I’m powerful” (1995: 192). Vanwesenbeeck contends that women no longer have romantic images of sex where “pleasure falls from the sky” but instead are “convinced that you have to go for it yourself” (1997: 177). The findings show that these women feel themselves to be in control and able to negotiate in sexual practice, and that they have developed different discourses through which to voice these sexual practices.

A critique of the conventional gendered approach considers multiple views of gender, sexuality and heterosexuality: femininities, masculinities and heterosexualities. This move does not necessarily connect to more positive readings of young people’s sexual practice but it opens up space for alternative ways of understanding gendered relationships. It creates more possibilities for changing relationships and alternative discourses than those caught within unequal power dynamics. This move to recognise multiple identities follows poststructuralist thinking in rejecting a simple unified model of identity:

Conventional approaches to identities [...] have failed to grasp the multiplicity, fluidity and the context-dependent operation of youth identities and identifications (Rattansi and Phoenix 1997: 121)



The conventional framework of gender is unable to explain the complexities and inconsistencies of gender patterns. An interesting example of this is from Stewart (1999) who found in her research that femininities were in a state of “flux”. She stated that some of these ways of doing femininity could be disruptive of heterosexual norms and positive about women’s sexual desires. She gives examples of young women’s practices:

[...] initiation of sex, their planned loss of virginity, the stating of conditional terms for relationships, their participation in casual sex, their efforts to ensure their own sexual pleasure is catered for, their refusal of unwanted sex and their amendment of behaviour accordingly (Stewart 1999: 277)

As Stewart (1999) argues, each one of these aspects is seen to contravene conventional gendered and heteronormative practice. She finds examples of young women who are happy to initiate sexual encounters. They use an active discourse of desire, and could learn from previous sexual experiences to empower themselves and take control over a period of time and in different relationships. Young women in this study also challenge conventional heterosexuality by practising non-penetrative sexual acts (Stewart 1999).

The notion of multiple masculinities has a different history to that of its counterpart, femininity. Discussions of masculinity have enjoyed a wide audience – not particularly in relation to sexual relationships but in the area of gender identities (Connell 1995, Edley and Wetherell 1997), how men are believed to be in “crisis” (Kimmel 1987, Segal 1997b), and cultural representations of the “new man” (Hearn 1996). For empirical research focusing on multiple masculinities in young men’s sexual relationships, I turn to Wight (1996). His research suggests that some young men are not using discourses of conventional masculinity to describe their sexual relationships. He builds on Hollway’s (1984) description of available discourses and subject positions, finding within his analysis of text two different ways of men discussing sex. He gives examples of men using what Hollway (1984) identifies as the feminine “have/hold” discourse as both object and subject, and a new discourse called “uninterested” where men suggest that they have no interest in sexual encounters (Wight 1996: 152). The have/hold discourse, in the context of feminine talk, is where a person positions themselves as either a subject actively trying to maintain a relationship or as an object wanting to be held in a relationship. Based on a study of fifty-eight 19-year-old working class youths from Glasgow, Wight (1996) suggests that half of his participants use the have/hold discourse, positioning themselves as an object by stating that they “want to be held in a long-term monogamous relationship”, and most of them envisage this for the future (Wight 1996: 160). The have/hold discourse is used by some of them to describe love for a partner and discuss their position of vulnerability when telling their partner. Wight (1996) argues that there are also examples of romantic discourses of unrequited love in the young men’s talk. However, he also notes that some men still use a predatory male sex drive discourse that follows the conventional model of masculinity and that this is particularly the case for those who are gang members.

In my own interview-based research of young people in the UK (Hoskins 2001), the young people discussed sexual relationships without simply following the traditional gendered discourse. I found that young women could discuss sexual pleasure, although for some this language often inter-played with the traditional understanding of gender. I noted how some of the young women used talk of intimacy and closeness to discuss the pleasure of penetration. There were examples

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of some young women who articulated no desire for relationships, placing a greater emphasis upon their future, and of some young men expressing the need for relationships and placing less importance upon sexual fulfilment. I found that young women spoke using sexual knowledges and that these knowledges could be actively constituted within sexual practices. Knowledge of condom use is described as socially essential; it would be embarrassing not to be able to use them. Further distinctions arose between my research and previous research on young people's sexual practice, when my participants (both female and male) positioned themselves as being able to successfully insist upon condoms if the partner is reluctant. Although in interviews there were also accounts that followed the traditional language of gender, this just emphasised how diverse and different young people are, and that simple and fixed gender distinctions cannot represent a complete understanding of sexual practices. My contention in this essay is that the category of gender was frequently not the dominant feature of young people's language of sexual practice.

The key categories that the young people from my research used were trust and time (Hoskins 2001). Trust was used to describe how bound or closed the relationship was. The three discourses that young people used to construct these bonds were monogamy, accountability and confidentiality. The monogamy discourse was used to insist on complete fidelity within the relationship; if sexual encounters occurred with others then the relationship stopped. The accountability discourse was used by the participants to show their partners' monogamy through accounting for their actions and locations at all times. The confidentiality discourse was used to constitute the telling and keeping of secrets within the relationship; if the information were disclosed to others the relationship would be broken. Time was the second major category that young people used to describe their sexual relationships. Young people described life plans such as having a career and financial stability before having children. The life plan was supported with the discourse of using "safer" sex to protect future plans. One construction of "safer" sex was that the condom and pill both provide protection against pregnancy. Another was that they used condoms as a protection against HIV/Aids. HIV/Aids was described by some young people as causing the end of the life plan.

-----> **Conclusion**

There is a long history of constructing sexual practices through dualistic categories – masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality – that have reproduced a language with unequal and unhealthy consequences for sexual practice. One consequence is the development of a research framework where there is a fixed unequal power relationship between a woman and a man. The man enforces his biological and natural drive to "fuck", while a woman can show no desire for sex and only gradually relinquish her body to him. In this terminology, heterosexuality dominates as the cultural norm and homosexuality is understood as other and not normal. The reproduction of this categorisation has clearly been noted in political and religious discourses and when young people use these understandings it has a negative impact on their sexual health.

The conventional framework of a single femininity and a single masculinity within an unequal power relationship has been found to have two main problems. Firstly, the framework does not allow for the discussion of multiple identities or alternative ways of approaching sexual relationships. Secondly, such work focuses



only upon the negative aspects of young people's sexual relationships, particularly concentrating on the dominance of heterosexuality, masculinity and young people partaking in high-risk sexual strategies. The literature that opened up room for different discursive practices of young people's sexual relationships – namely that which examines multiple femininities and masculinities – was still based on some restrictive assumptions made prior to the collection of data: assumptions that gender and sexuality provide distinctive categories that are always the most important features for describing sexual practice. Sometimes these categories may be important, but it should be examined when this is the case and in relation to alternative categorisations coming from the voices of young people themselves.

My own empirical research produced three main findings. The language used by participants was often less conventionally gendered and heteronormative than is reported in the previous literature. Dominant features of young people's sexual practices were not necessarily based on gender distinctions, but articulated by them in terms of trust and time.



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## **Part V**

### **Youth, culture and youth culture?**





## → 1. The notion of youth culture in contemporary context

Benjamin Perasović

Culture is a wide, polysemous and complex notion. Many authors, such as Eagleton (2000), remind us of Raymond Williams' claim that culture is one of the most complex terms in the English language. Nevertheless, the notion of youth culture has appeared in social sciences and humanities, in everyday speech and within the media world for some fifty years, in some cases for much longer. Furthermore, public (media) discourse in the majority of European countries today (not only the "transition" countries of the east and the south) is dominated by stereotyped images of youth culture.

There are two basic dimensions to this stereotyping. One pertains to ideological constructions that are later used by politicians who speak of "our youth" and who – contrary to the logic of a fragmented society – suggest an image of homogenous "youth" and "youth culture". The other dimension pertains to young people and their culture as key actors of deviant behaviour. Western Europe is slowly abandoning the ideological approach that shapes young people into "the Youth", and in eastern Europe previous dogmas are becoming increasingly transparent as a result of transition processes. Yet media sensationalism and prejudices that view youth culture as the greenhouse for deviation appear equally residual in practically all European countries. This does not mean that politicians have ceased to instrumentalise youth – especially in electoral times – but this was much more the case in previous decades. Within the one-party systems of the past, as well as within recent nationalistic discourses, ideological constructions of "the Youth" had grotesque shapes and tragic consequences. Nowadays, it is still possible to detect instrumentalised, ideological constructions of youth, even in the sphere of civil society, but media sensationalism and moral panic are much more ascendant, influencing all levels of society and leading to more harm.

With this in mind, and in order to address what the notion of youth culture means today, we need to take a look at the development of theory and research, and the establishment of a specific youth area that the social and humanistic sciences deal with, regardless of the terminology used. After reviewing the approaches and notions developed, I will present several examples of relations between the notion and reality, that is, of the usefulness of certain terms in concrete social contexts.

### → The notion of youth culture in social theory

By the second half of the 1970s and in the 1980s, there were serious attempts to establish the sociology of youth (sub)cultures. Though the term "subcultures" has



been rejected in recent works, it is still possible to recognise the area of discussion, regardless of whether the authors use terms such as youth culture or insist on interpretations of the notion of lifestyle and identity. Discussions of this field should also include those who continue to speak of counterculture and (new) social movements. Nowadays, these fragments of the lifeworld are most often referred to in terms used by the actors themselves, and are possibly shaped by notions engendered by the spatial turn in social sciences, for example the idea of geographies of youth culture.

The phenomenon of subculture has been approached through three basic sociological paradigms (functionalist, Marxist, interactionist), as well as through their mutually exclusive, but none the less complementary variations. The most recent trend, in the wake of postmodernism, is to abandon such “grand narratives”, and this has partly given rise to a genuine renaissance of quality sociological studies containing ethnographic insights. The majority of the authors who are today attempting to present the development of a special sociology – never strictly established and often reduced to youth subcultures – trace their roots to the Chicago school of the 1920s and 1930s. Without emphasising the notion of subculture as such, the Chicago authors delineated critical points in this area of research and left us a legacy of issues that cannot be overlooked, such as the actors’ definition of the situation. By the 1950s, subculture had become a well-known notion-hypothesis of American sociology. While the Chicago school was characterised by qualitative orientation towards data – possibly under the influence of Mead’s paradigm and the beginnings of interactionism – those authors who in the 1950s formulated the hypothesis on delinquent subculture belong to a somewhat different theoretical heritage, associated with Robert Merton.

For Cohen (1955), Cloward (1968) and other authors (such as Ohlin or Short), the “culture of the gang” became an almost traditional cultural pattern among male adolescents in working-class neighbourhoods in larger American cities. The notion of culture is here – as with later authors on the sociology of subcultures – understood anthropologically, as a way of life. Subculture is presented as a reaction or solution to a certain problem, and the problem is located in the class structure of the society. For example, impediments that prevent desirable social mobility mean that young people from working-class and underprivileged families cannot achieve the imperative of high social status. In the absence of a legitimate means to achieve this aim, they invoke “illegitimate” ones, creating subcultural groups as an answer to society and as a place of their own promotion.

From these beginnings until relatively recently, the notion of youth subculture in American and British sociology was connected solely with lower class youth. The picture presented in the early sociological and theoretical formulations of subcultures, with “corner boys” and “college boys” (the former represent street “gang” boys, that is socially immobile working-class adolescents, and the latter their more socially mobile peers at college), has persisted to this day. The authors who were developing a theory of delinquent subculture, demonstrating in the process that the majority of the activities of the “street corner gang” were not delinquent, agreed on three types of youth subculture: criminal (also called the subculture of a semi-professional thief), conflict (when status and reputation are earned through fights and struggles with similar groups or by conquering territory) and the subculture of withdrawal, which referred to drug use.



From the 1960s new approaches, influenced by interactionism, enabled a sceptical revolution in the sociology of deviation. Though interactionist authors were not emphasising the notion of subculture, considering it enough to speak about the culture of a certain social group, however specific or “small” they might be, they contributed to the sociology of marginal groups and subcultural phenomena with their shift of perspective from signified (“delinquent”, “deviant”) subject to the process of signification itself, and the actors involved in labelling and stigmatising individuals and social groups. The 1960s were also important for the sociology of youth subcultures because of a concerted focus on the growth of media worlds, media mediations of everyday life and the large-scale development of free-time industry, and also a focus on the high tide of social movements and the appearance of counterculture. Counterculture as a concept was not new to academic circles. Even before the expansion of anti-war protests, hippies and mass communitarianism, student movements and other radical initiatives from the end of the 1960s, Yinger (1960) proposed the notions of subculture and counterculture. He wanted to emphasise conflict situations in which we recognise the emergence of counterculture, while subcultures were considered a culture within a culture. Yinger did not deny the existence of conflicts between certain subcultures and the wider culture, but he wanted to differentiate normative systems of sub-societies from those that emerge in conflict situations because, in his view, the emergence of counter-values is typical for countercultures.

However, as the decade after Yinger’s publication was marked by an explosion of dropout, nomadic, rebellious youth cultures, the notion of counterculture remains associated with the work of Roszak (1978), who proposed counterculture as a central concept for approaching the various protest-spiritual movements of the second half of the 1960s. Counterculture was a generational phenomenon, as in Roszak’s description of youth’s opposition to the (predominantly technocratic) American society of the time. This opposition included left-wing rhetoric, but the crucial foci were work on oneself, self-change as a precondition of social change, the rejection of scientific ideology and technical rationality as rulers of the planet and its life, the discovery of ancient wisdom, spiritual practice and psychedelic drugs.

After Roszak, it was no longer possible to mention counterculture independently of the concrete actors who articulated the “great rejection”, which introduced confusion into the use of these terms beyond the Anglo-Saxon circle. Theories of youth subcultures were dominated by class determinants; American neighbourhood gangs and street corner boys were a subculture within working-class culture. In the context of Britain and its sociology, mods, rockers, skinheads, punks, football hooligans and others were presented as typical subcultures of working-class youth. Due to this focus on class, counterculture – both as a notion and as a group of actual actors – was designated as a subculture of the middle class in British sociological writing (Hall and Jefferson 1976). If counterculture is really merely a subculture of the middle class and designates only one era of American history, there is no sense in using the term at the general level of theory and research in other contexts, even allowing for Hebdige’s qualifications (1980). Counterculture designates actors (movements, initiatives, groups and individuals) who come from broad philosophical, spiritual, social-theoretical and political worldviews, and who want to build alternative institutions, media (from fanzines and newspapers to pirate or legal radio), their own “free” schools, hospitals, kindergartens and places for nourishment. They also develop alternative ways of



shared life, in communes or similar models of co-operation. Counterculture attempts to elide the difference between the sphere of work and the sphere of free time, to join art and everyday life, and it rejects the Protestant ethic. As far as possible it opposes co-operation with “the system” and the existing institutions out of a fear of co-option.

In subcultures, by contrast, the difference between the spheres of work, school and home in relation to the realm of free time among peer groups is well known. One gains one’s subcultural identity in the sphere of free time. Through engaging with image, clothing, hairstyle, demeanour and slang, and through following certain musical styles or appropriating certain objects (from motorcycles to drugs), young people create their own lifestyle and subculture in interaction. This subculture represents symbolic resistance; it remains in the sphere of free time and within the boundaries of its rituals and selective consumption. This distinction remains meaningful, but also must be made meaningful through research and ethnographic confirmation in diverse space and time.

In the narrative of youth and culture – following the early Chicago school and its urban ethnology, functionalist interpretations from the 1950s, the interactionist spirit of the 1960s and the sundown of counterculture as youth’s mass resistance to conventions of the dominant culture – the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the late 1970s and 1980s placed youth subcultures at the centre of its interest. Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige, Paul Willis and Phil Cohen, among others, represented an almost paradigmatic axis for subcultural research for a considerable period of time, and their works are still the most cited in this area. In the broad Birmingham school interpretation, subculture retained many elements already designated in Albert Cohen’s approach to delinquent subculture in the 1950s. Despite many differences between Birmingham’s prevailing Marxisms and functionalism, subculture was jointly emphasised as a solution to the problems of social class structure.

While Merton’s disciples discussed structural blockages to culturally established aims – pointing to the favouring of middle-class values in educational processes to the detriment of lower class pupils, for example – which gave rise to subcultural solutions, the Birmingham school spoke of the contradictions of capitalism, and the double articulation of resistance in subculture towards their parent working-class culture and towards the dominant culture in general. However, both schools see subculturalisation as a response to social structure. For the Birmingham school authors, subculture is a symbolic attempt to resolve the contradictions that young people inherit and test in their parent class culture. Beyond the discussion of sociological paradigms, the Birmingham school exerted influence on many subculture researchers, which is not surprising given the conspicuous common characteristics in youth cultures and the patterns that appear co-temporaneously in various socio-cultural contexts.

Wholly outside of the British context and its particular racial, economic and political dimensions, punks formed various scenes across Europe, including some of the formerly socialist countries. Researchers were able to employ some basic notions from the British cultural studies approaches, but clearly needed to situate them in their own context. For example, when Phil Cohen (1972) divides subcultural style into four key terms organised in two groups – the first pertaining to clothing and music and the second to argot (slang) and ritual – his interpretation



that clothing and music are more “outside”, while slang and ritual are more “inside” a subcultural group is not as important as the relevance of these categories to ethnographic experience in the countries outside the Anglo-Saxon sphere, which enables a researcher to assess the importance of clothing, slang, music and ritual in the everyday lives of the actors in question.

The notion of subculture has always involved a double meaning, and using it without thinking about this duality can create discursive confusion. Subculture often denotes a concrete social group in its time and space: a group of punks from Brixton or Kreuzberg in the mid-1980s, a group of football hooligans from Split at the end of the 1980s or a group from the street corner that Whyte (1955) observed in the neighbourhood inhabited by Italian immigrants. However, the term subculture often refers to a group of values, norms, beliefs, symbols and ways of life. It insists on a “symbolic structure” that may be analysed independently of individual actors who live these norms, values and styles. It is through such symbolic structures that an individual, not only a group, can belong to sub-cultural lifestyles. Someone can be a punk without having an informal group or a gang; affiliation with a certain subcultural style is not necessarily expressed in the peer collective. An individual can participate in rituals (such as concerts) independently and without the mediation of a small group, thus confirming their identity outside of the stereotypes or firm intra-group rules of punk, or similar gangs.

Lawrence Grossberg (1992), whose work engages with the Birmingham school’s ideas in the context of the United States, objects to the concept of separate sub-cultures (punks, heavy metal, skinheads and so forth), a criticism that coincides with the experience of other European countries. Grossberg notes, for example, that within American conditions of subculturality, a large number of young people may mediate their identity and lifestyle through various streams of rock (or similar) music, but they do not belong to any of the profiled common denominators of youth subcultures – such as rock culture – emanating from Birmingham sociology. Understandably, such objections can appear in many other environments – even more removed from the influential British contexts – but young people there still find moments of mediation of their lifestyle and identity through hard rock, punk, hardcore, dark/gothic, heavy metal, hip-hop and other forms.

During the 1990s the influence of the Birmingham school waned for a number of reasons, among them the ways in which the analysis of rave (sub)culture questioned or rejected the main premises of the existing sociology of subcultures (Redhead 1990, Thornton 1995, Merchant and MacDonald 1994, Malbon 1999). This was due to several obvious reasons: as opposed to previous subcultures that were comprised of limited groups of young people, rave became a mass phenomenon. Women play a significant role in rave culture, while punks, rockers, mods and skinheads are mainly male (and masculine) subcultural styles. Furthermore, rave – techno, trance, house, etc. – is not entirely and essentially a working-class phenomenon. Hence, it cannot be considered “resistant through rituals” or a “symbolic solution to contradictions collectively experienced in parent class culture” as was customary in previous influential studies. Central to this new wave is a re-validation of the actors’ definition of the situation, which had often been lost in structuralism and the Marxism of the Birmingham school. This general picture may be seen as a change of paradigm, where the interactionism of Goffman continues to hold for subcultural research in postmodern conditions.



### -----> **Mystifications of youth subcultures**

Within the academic world, but also in media representation and common usage, there are many prevalent mystifications of youth (sub)cultures. Negativistic mystifications mainly revolve around the notion of deviation, where perhaps the majority of youth subcultures are considered deviant, unacceptable and threatening to the morals and order of society. Youth cultures thus mystified are marked by violence, drugs, sex, vandalism, cults and extremism. Hence they are considered regressive, decadent, hedonistic, escapist and asocial. However, there is another type of well-known mystification, which constructs youth (sub)cultures as almost always rebellious, anti-establishment, critical, progressive and representative of points of resistance to the system. While it seems necessary to simply avoid all mystifications, it is worth asking what it is that the notion of youth (sub)cultures actually means. Simply put, it points to an area where young people, in various ways, build their “way of life”, which more or less differs from the way of life of their parents or other young people.

Youth cultures need not be in conflict with a narrow or wide parent culture. They can highlight that what may be regarded as generationally specific qualities exist in similar patterns in “adult” society (as a case in point, let us remember that football hooliganism, and the way in which the culture of the terrace-warriors strongly employs the masculinity of competition and alcohol use, reflects the parent culture as if in a mirror). The market and media world of images and possibilities are able to offer and create new styles, which are sometimes called “cultures of taste”, sometimes derided as products of the logic of capitalism and cultural industries, and sometimes seen as “lifestyle shopping”. Subcultural (tribal, expressive) identity is undoubtedly most often represented as achieved identity, but the example of football hooliganism demonstrates that ascribed identity (which can be local, ethnic, national) can be placed in the centre of playing with images and achieved subcultural identity. Football hooliganism as subcultural lifestyle is not the only example of specific play with ascribed identity in the process of creating other subcultural identities; hip-hop is also a good example of such a mix between ascribed and achieved dimensions of identity in youth cultures.

In considering theories of youth (sub)cultures now, we could conclude that there is a need to abandon concepts that are too widely applied and contested, but that could lead us to abandoning the importance that clothes, appearance, slang and other similar factors can have in the everyday life of young people. This is especially the case in relation to the commercialisation and consumerism of youth lifestyles. Though the tribalisation of youth is in significant part conditioned by the market, and it seems as if previous revolt has been co-opted into the world of spectacle, that does not mean that young people (especially in strongly traditional countries) are not still suffering stigmatisation, marginalisation and even criminalisation because of their appearance or some other aspect of their everyday (everynight) life.

### -----> **The notion of youth culture in the Croatian context**

In Croatia, apart from a general reception of basic notions such as subculture and counterculture, the research of subcultural phenomena began in the late 1980s. The notion of youth subculture has been adopted without the obligatory class criteria, so that only general arguments about a social group (or symbolic structure)



whose values and norms are in opposition to the values of the dominant (narrow or wide) parent culture are retained from the basic definitions. From the very beginning it was clear that concepts that placed hippies as middle class and punks as working-class actors were insufficient starting points in the Croatian context. Moreover, offering class determinants as the core explanation of subcultural styles also became questionable within the context of Britain. Linking the identities of hippies and punks – like frozen actors – to social class could not explain new dimensions of punk in the 1990s, which moved it much closer to ideas of counterculture than subculture.

Croatian authors (mostly from the field of sociology and urban ethnology: Buzov et al. 1989, Perasović 1990, 2001, Lalić, Leburić and Bulat 1991, Lalić 1993, Prica 1987, 1990, Kalapoš 1995, Tomić-Koludrović 1993) predominantly respect the widespread interpretation that places subculture primarily within free time, though obviously identity achieved within a subculture remains present in various ways in school or at home. One of the first youth groups to be noticed in Croatia was that of the local “street corner boys”. They usually represented the first generation of immigrants, were strongly masculine and competitive and sometimes engaged in petty crime and violent behaviour. This subculture existed for decades, retaining some patterns of violence and territorial identification in combination with many other subcultural styles, most often that of football hooligans and skinheads. The spread of rock culture and the appearance of domestic actors enabled a field of identification for “hashmen”, a subcultural style typical of 1970s Croatia. Some elements of this style have been retained or periodically recreated in youth culture scenes to this day. The third subcultural style to mark 1970s Croatia was that of the “fops”. This style has never entirely left the scene either; it has intermingled with the dominant culture, it provides various strategies for suggesting a higher social status and has been a special point of reference for many other subcultural styles.

The beginning of the 1980s in Croatia will be remembered for a strong revival of punk identity, which was merely outlined in the 1970s and drowned in the wider “new wave” music, only to return in the second generation independent of the scene of domestic music actors. The mid-1980s were marked by fragmentation, while crossover processes appeared towards the end of the decade. Heavy metal (already fragmented into speed, death, trash), dark/gothic, hardcore, rockabilly and other streams gained independence and created separate but also overlapping identities. Football hooliganism became a part of the urban subcultural scene in the mid-1980s, too. It was followed by the appearance of hip-hop, and in the 1990s by rave (techno, house, trance and so forth). The mid-1990s saw the revival of a punk/hardcore spirit and a network of related fanzines, as well as the arrival of skinheads who predominantly joined the stadium rituals and re-created the old style of the neighbourhood warrior. The development of punk identity in the 1990s demonstrated a sensitivity to ecological, feminist and non-violent approaches, developments that question the thesis that masculinity is a predominant characteristic of the punk scene.

Stanley Cohen’s influential notion of moral panic (1972) has proved to be a recurrent concept in the Croatian context. In general terms, the mainstream media have initiated several trenchant and possibly hysterical moral panic campaigns, finding “folk devils” among punks, dark/gothic followers, football hooligans and ravers. Croatian sociologists have had a difficult job in unmasking and defusing moral



panics in an atmosphere that favours “pro or contra” logic. The transition from the socialist state and one-party system to democracy and capitalism was tragically followed by war and destruction, yet the model of moral panic has not changed at all in these completely different contexts. If we take football hooligans as an example, we can trace the same group of people across two different periods of moral panic. The Bad Blue Boys – fans of Dinamo – earned the reputation of being right-wing, ultra-nationalist fighters and of being anti-socialist elements, because they expressed Croatian nationalism at a time when singing a traditional song was worth a jail sentence. After the war – in which many of them participated as volunteers – they continued supporting Dinamo, but the authorities changed the name of the club from Dinamo to Croatia Zagreb. The Bad Blue Boys never accepted this re-naming, falling into conflict with the authorities and the President of the Republic. They organised several protests, petitions, and boycotts of matches, and were involved in heavy fighting with the police forces. The same group of football hooligans – labelled as Croatian nationalists in the previous political system – were accused in Croatia’s “democratic” media of Yugoslav nostalgia and anti-Croat actions, merely for insisting on the re-instatement of a name. Football hooligans were described as being “paid by Soros” in the state-controlled media of the time. Labels change, but the process of labelling remains the same.

Many sociological theories from the past and the present could be applied in the Croatian context, from rude boys and their conflicts within working-class neighbourhoods, to contemporary rave culture and the cross-class and gender aspects of that phenomenon. Yet it is also important to note that subcultural styles in Croatia do not always follow the scheme of working-class/middle-class determinants; a significant number of lower class actors participate in subcultures or affective alliances that emphasise soft shapes, introspection, non-violence, psychedelics, openness and multiculturalism, while significant numbers of middle-class youth participate in masculine, violent and antagonistic subcultural styles. Thus lower class youths can be seen participating in anarchist, techno-hippy, new age, eco-tribal, pacifist punk scenes and alliances, while middle-class youths can be found among football hooligans, skinheads and similar groups.

Ethnographic and sociological studies of youth (sub)cultures in Croatia have tended to deal less with discussions about notions and paradigms, and more on understanding the phenomenon in question and articulating alternative policies. Despite the influence of centres of subcultural research, Croatian authors in the 1980s did not merely copy British sociologists, nor did they treat their guiding notions of class, subculture, ritual and resistance as absolutes. These ideas were not discarded entirely, but situated and evaluated in concrete research.

Regardless of whether we employ older terminology – such as subcultures – or more recent notions such as (neo)tribe, affective alliance or expressive community, the research of youth cultures will often reveal many shared problems and issues. This is likely to include media discourses and stigmatisation, problems connected with drug use, perception of sexual roles, violence, relations between actors, family and society’s institutions. This is why work on understanding these phenomena and on unmasking the prejudices towards and stereotypes of youth cultures in circulation often point to concrete measures such as an alternative social work or harm-reduction policy in the area of drug use.



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## 2. The uses of hip-hop culture

Rupa Huq

*“For years I have been very worried about these hateful lyrics that these boasting, macho, idiot rappers come out with.”*

UK Culture Minister Kim Howells  
quoted in the *Daily Telegraph*, 8 January 2003

*“Weapon is my lyric”*  
*Overlord X*, 1989

This paper explores transnationalism and its relationship with local hybridities in rap and wider hip-hop culture. Rap can be seen as campaigning anti-racist rebel music as much as commercial machine or as educational tool. I will attempt to say something about, to paraphrase Richard Hoggart, the “uses” of hip-hop culture and the way that a range of different rap scenes co-exist in different situational settings in the early twenty-first century. This demonstrates how youth creatively fashion context-dependent musical-cultural forms in street-speak vernacular tongues that reflect their local environments, potentially providing a counterbalance to the negative version of globalisation whereby a top-down process of cultural homogenisation forcibly flattens cultural diversity. Rap is closely associated with the US but I will take a closer look at rap music in the UK and how it has been used in educational settings both in the teaching of music technology and French. I want to begin with a scene-setting ethnographic episode that illustrates how hip-hop culture is being played out in contemporary British urban settings today.

Spring 2003. A hip-hop show is taking place in a disused church converted into a community centre and sound-recording studio in Longsight, an ethnically mixed neighbourhood of inner south Manchester, notorious for gun crime and gang violence.<sup>1</sup> The rappers have all taken part in the Cultural Fusion project financed by the National Foundation for Youth Music in London and the North West Arts Board. For their resulting NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) in music they have composed, recorded and performed live rap. Nicole, one of tonight’s performers, addresses the invited parents, peers, siblings and friends in a broad Mancunian accent:

Everyone who comes in and out of these doors knows [...]. It’s a good way of keeping us off the street. There’s a lot of talented people in Longsight; singers, rappers, MCs. Respect to the tutors who’ve helped us. They haven’t been like a lot of adults who talk down to young people. Big up to the tutors. Respect.<sup>2</sup>



She is followed by David Sulkin, a be-suited emissary from London who informs us that Cultural Fusion in Manchester is just one of the projects that the National Youth Music Foundation has supported over the past year, spanning hip-hop to chamber orchestras, with a budget of £32 million from the National Lottery. Following his contribution a presentation of NVQ certificates takes place. The show will be returned to later but in the meantime this incident neatly highlights the entanglement of rap with public sector sponsorship, informal and formal education as well as its use as a medium to keep youth on the “straight and narrow” path away from “the street” with all its negative associations. Nicole’s comments also show rap slang in action. However, I will begin by discussing some of the salient features of rap and hip-hop and draw on the content of an interview conducted with members of HD, one of the Cultural Fusion rap groups.

### -----> Defining rap: the music and message

Rap can be both verb and noun. Rose (1994: 2) defines it as “a black cultural expression that prioritises black voices from the margins of America”. Rap has been traced as following black musical oral forms such as gospel, blues, jazz, soul and reggae. None the less rap production eschews many traditional or authentic musical traits. Since its beginnings in late 1970s New York, DJs have supplied the backing track while MCs and rappers provide vocals utilising turntables and microphones. Techniques such as scratching and looping are then applied to the vinyl records (sampling material). A range of software programmes too are now widely used to repeat and reassemble electronically sampled extracts and live instrumental passages. The delivery of texts assumes central significance rather than the tune – as Overlord X’s lyric in the epigraph demonstrates. Thus rap’s spoken-word form dispenses with the traditional musical requirement of singing in tune. Importantly in addition to rap, broader hip-hop culture includes the non-musical bodily expression of breakdance, sartorial statements via hip-hop fashion, rap slang and the visual display of graffiti.

Rap has repeatedly outraged conservative campaigners for supposedly rejecting family values, often with racist undertones. Cashmore (1997: 170) remarks: “rap was sexist, homophobic, anti-semitic and about as politically incorrect as it was possible to be”. Rose (1994: 104) notes that rap’s “resistive, yet contradictory, positions are waged in the face of a powerful, media-supported construction of black urban America as the source of urban social ills that threaten social order”. Reactionary pro-censorship pressure groups such as the PMRC (Parent’s Music Resource Centre) have been the most vocal in condemning various artists for supposedly promoting violence and guns (Lipsitz 1994). Arguably, by highlighting contemporary urban issues, rappers provide valuable social critique. The gangsta-rap artist Ice Cube of NWA explains that the band’s lyrics reflect their neighbourhood of Compton, Los Angeles: “NWA are reporting what’s going on in our town – the fighting, the poverty, the drug selling – aren’t fairy-tales or scenes from a movie. This is our reality” (in Johnstone 1999: 314).

Authenticity has always been a desirable quality in both youth culture and popular music. For Shuker (1998: 20) it is “a central concept in the discourses surrounding popular music” connoted by originality, creativity, sincerity, uniqueness, musicianship, live performance and independent label operations. The self-image of rap music often stresses this, for instance in the expression “old school”, which refers to pioneering early rap, seen as more “real” than subsequent commercialised versions. Other nomenclature includes “keeping it real”, which is the



opposite of “selling out” by losing touch with one’s original ideals, usually provoked by material success. The fact that it is seen as emanating from the street or ghetto is testimony to rap’s claims to being an authentically produced bottom-up popular musical form. Of course rap has steadily become a commercial concern, widely available via multinational record companies. Negus (1999: 96), for example, talks about the rap industry as positioned “between the street and the executive suite”. Crucially, rap comes in many guises and it is hard to generalise about it in straightforward terms.

HD, an amateur Manchester rap group, recognise that commercialism is a necessary element of a financially-rewarding successful career, a stage preceded by an underground existence. This was voiced by group members Mathew (MJ) and Ravelle (RM) during an interview in 2003:

RH: Commercial rap is seen as bad because it sacrifices purity ...

MJ: Everyone don’t want to be underground all their life. You want to start making [at least] a little bit of money so you’re gonna have to step it up to ... commercial. I couldn’t just go straight into commercial without proving myself ... With hardcore you can get your street credit [sic] first, you can spit lyrics so when you do do commercial, if anyone tries to diss [disparage] you, you can tell ’em straight, “look I’ve already been there, done that”.

The expression “street credit”, usually abbreviated to “street cred”, is interesting as it implies the building up of quantitative amounts of credit, akin to economic capital. The alternative explanation “street credibility” is more vague and qualitative, and is more in line with the idea of social capital. HD add:

RL: Sometimes you don’t necessarily “go commercial”, it’s just more people are buying it so more people say you’re commercial. On an album you don’t just get commercial tracks.

MJ: You just put out a few commercial tracks [as singles] to learn the fans to ya ... that’s when they’re gonna start listening to your album, [then] they might listen to a few of your hardcore stuff.

Bourdieuian logic dictates that taste groups come with boundaries, for example in “commercial” rap for hip-hop fans who appreciate the music only on a superficial level and “hardcore” for the more discerning. Taste is a classifying system in which people are differentiated from others who do not share the same taste, but here the unequal distribution of economic capital in turn filters through to cultural capital. However, the claims of HD suggest that a single hip-hop act can combine a surface level commercial side for the wider public of pop chart followers (on singles) with a parallel hardcore, less compromising content reserved for fans who will seek out album tracks.

Since the Frankfurt School theorists of the early twentieth century wrote on popular culture, commercialism has been frowned upon by popular culture theorists such as Adorno as it is seen as inherently anti-authentic. Some musical forms have been about denying the importance of material wealth, such as what is commonly understood to be indie rock. Befittingly enough for a multi-million dollar industry, however, some rap styles make no attempt to hide that they are about unashamed conspicuous consumption. This open celebration of capitalism is evidenced in the hip-hop expression “bling bling” (*Guardian*, 21 May 2003), referring to the ostentatious consumerism of jewellery and furs. Rap can be seen to mirror its times. The growth of the sub-genre gangsta-rap has been traced to the



Los Angeles disturbances of 1992 triggered by the Los Angeles Police Department's beating of black motorist Rodney King. Similarly the emphasis on money by US rappers can be seen as consistent with the American value system that itself celebrates consumer capitalism, an ideology that prospered under Reagan and both Bush presidencies. Rap fashion proudly parades the designer label culture of sportswear accompanied by the wearing of jewellery.

Rap is often described as postmodern for its intertextuality and recycling of source material from earlier musical eras (McRobbie 1999, Shusterman 1992, Potter 1995, 1998). Krims (2000: 8) remarks: "It seems at times that rap music would have to be invented by postmodern theory, had it not been there." Postmodernists have seen pastiche and cut and paste as inherent in rap. The "break" or climatic part of a record is what rap records are constructed around. Appropriately enough the assembly of the new track takes place in a fragmentary fashion. Records are broken and lose their fixity as a final product instead becoming ripe for manipulation. The human beat box – the approximation of back beats with the vocal chords alone – is as attractive as the air-guitar in the circumstances of urban poverty, and unlike conventional musical instruments, costs nothing. Gilroy (1987: 211) comments: "A patchwork or collage of melody, voice and rhythm is created when these sounds come together with rapped vocal commentary and chants which draw on Afro-America's older traditions of communication." Back (1996: 192) goes further: "The DJ is close to what Lévi-Strauss (1976) called a cultural 'bricoleur', or a craftsman who makes use – in this case of musical fragments in order to create new music". With the advance of technology, sampling has become more sophisticated so that within a tune the sound patterns can be radically reconfigured, as this comment from Mathew of HD illustrates:

MJ: We do use samples but we mash 'em up. We might do a pitchshift on them and take 'em down an octave and so on. At the end of it we've took a sample but we've smashed it so much to bits that you can't realise that it's from something else.

Post-fordist, post-industrial and postcolonial are other labels for the rap era. It is a mass market leisure product resulting from twentieth-century migration. Rap is usually understood to be an all-American musical culture. However, it embodies alternative rather than mainstream American values. Rap is identified with black youth and seen as emanating from the mythologised locale of "the street", a site that is the opposite pole of suburbia with its in-built connotations of whiteness. Rose (1994: 100-101) notes that "a large and significant element in rap's discursive territory is engaged in symbolic and ideological warfare with institutions and groups that symbolically, ideologically and materially oppress African Americans. In this way rap music is a contemporary stage for the theater of the powerless". There is a sense of double standards in criticism of rap music for violence and sexism when these sentiments have not been subject to the same degree of condemnation in other more mainstream white popular cultural forms. Misogyny in rock lyrics is longstanding, evidenced in tracks such as "Run For Your Life" (The Beatles) and "Under My Thumb" (The Rolling Stones). Springhall (1998: 7) claims that moral panics in relation to popular cultural phenomena are often based on the perception of popular culture as inferior to high culture or art. Critics find popular music particularly debasing and rap, as a predominantly black popular musical form, has a higher threshold still to contend with (Hooks 1994).



Mitchell (2001: 10) highlights “the locality, temporality and ‘universality’ of hip-hop” in the way that rap has been indigenised outside America. He stresses how international rap “has involved an increasing syncretism and incorporation of local linguistic and musical features” (Mitchell 2001: 11). The hip-hop scene in France, for example, is a rap variant that I have written about previously (Huq 1999b, 2000, 2001). UK-produced rap also demonstrates linguistic innovation in rap slang, for example in the name HD, for “Helletic Domains”. Recent years have witnessed a British bhangra/hip-hop crossover. In 2003, the artist Rajinder Rai aka Punjabi MC had a worldwide hit with “Mundian Te Bach Ke” (Beware of the boys), a bhangra-rap hybrid which combined the bassline from the theme tune of the 1980s TV series *Knight Rider* with a bhangra beat and Punjabi lyrics. The song had originally been played at bhangra gatherings five years earlier but made the UK mainstream charts when it began receiving airplay from BBC Radio 1. Rai was quoted by the *Sunday Times*: “A lot of people who buy it won’t have a clue what it means” (12 January 2002).

### → The uses of hip-hop: rap in the classroom

The Cultural Fusion event in Longsight, Manchester, demonstrated many of the features commonly ascribed to hip-hop. The sense of it as a group venture was clear in the way that the acts performed, supporting their co-participants. Technical difficulties with the backing tape, for example, dictated that female vocalist Jamokee had to deliver a cappella version of “Killing Me Softly”. She was met with encouragement from others present who even filled in some of the parts. There was also much interaction among the nine acts. The final act, the “Combined Cultural Fusion Choir”, included all the evening’s performers. The large number of female performers counteracted the popular perception of rap as a male preserve/macho genre (see Rose 1994). The use of hip-hop vernacular was much in evidence throughout. In terms of fashion, comfortable sportswear dominated with brand names and labels openly displayed.

The mixed ethnic, mixed gender band HD, a sprawling eight-strong collective, turned out to be Cultural Fusion’s most memorable act. The performative and theatrical aspect of their music was clearly at the fore with the members ducking and diving, switching positions and sharing vocal duties on the track “Hyperlyrics”. The band stressed their origins on the track with the initials M-A-N-C-H-E-S-T-E-R repeatedly spelt out in a key refrain. Much analysis of rap music tends to concentrate largely on lyrics, a time-honoured tradition in popular music studies. Importantly lyrics (text) cannot be divorced from their situation (context). Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994: 64) noted in their observations of a group of young people on an A-level media studies course in the UK that rap for them was less about any relationship with black America than a means of positive self-esteem offering a consciously political critique of racism and fixed notions of national identity. An interview that I carried out two weeks later with core members of HD both supports and contradicts elements of this claim.

When I interviewed them, HD had been in operation for two years. The group were keen to stress that the eight-member group contained different personalities and rapping styles. These assumed identities were reflected in their pseudonyms.<sup>3</sup> Members fitted in their hours on the project around other school-level and further education commitments. Mathew Jay, 17-year-old rapper and producer, was studying for a BTEC national diploma in music technology at college. Ravelle Leacock, also a rapper and producer aged 17, was doing A-levels in physics, art



and environmental science with a view to a career in architecture. Marc Leacock, Ravelle's 20-year-old cousin, was studying multimedia while Hamza Mbeju, 17, was a business student. Rosie Garvey, at 14 still at school, was the group's only female. She firmly denied that there was any issue with her being a female rapper in a man's world although this may be in part due to the focus-group dynamic of the interview. All lived with a least one parent. Intriguingly enough the initials HD stand for "Helletic domains". Mathew explained: "I came up with it. It means evil territory; like gang life and so on ... [it comes] with the habitat." At once we can see linguistic innovation and re-invention in this neologism derived from the word "hell". Again the "reality rap" aspect was stressed:

MJ: We're just saying that our life; it ain't no fairyland. It's about spitting rhymes, about situations that you've been in, like depression or being angry but not like going on like you're flaming terminator when you've never done it. All I write about is stuff that I've got opinions on and stuff that I've experienced.

NVQs entail no examinations but project requirements observed by examiners and moderators. Participants undergo a minimum of thirty hours of music production and performance. However, Owen Thomas attested that some covered up to forty or fifty hours, explaining that "once they come here I can't get them out of the building". Some Cultural Fusion candidates are former young offenders. The idea of music as a positive outlet was voiced repeatedly:

RH: Longsight's got a bit of a reputation hasn't it?

MJ: That's why Cultural Fusion's a good way of getting us away from that. I think music's made a huge impact on my life. It's what I live for. Music's my saviour at the end of the day ... being able to come here and trying to achieve my dreams ... it keeps me focused and keeps me out of trouble.

RH: What do you make of that whole media label of Manchester as Gunchester?

ML: When I was young I used to get mixed up in that shit then I was seeing a social worker and I'm here now. It's kept me off the streets so I think it's a good thing.

This is reminiscent of Sara Cohen's (1997: 31) Liverpool study where music was seen to offer: "a social life, a sense of purpose, and dreams and aspirations outside any responsibilities of work, family or home [...] an important source of collective and individual identity". The interviewees of Fornäs, Lindberg and Semhede (1995) and Finnegan (1989) also make similar statements. Among Cultural Fusion's objectives are the provision of eventual employment. HD members Ravelle and Mathew had, at the time of interview, already begun tutoring younger children in CuBase technology through Cultural Fusion, which they were remunerated for under the government's Connexions youth training scheme. Our discussion covered the possibilities of rap as an occupation:

RH: Could it even turn into a career for you?

ML: I'd like to use it as a career but I'm not good enough. I need to be better.

RG: I'm not in it for the money right now because I'm young. I just do it because I like it but [eventually] I see it as a career, definitely.

RH: Would you need to go through some more training?

RG: My school's trying to get me work experience in a studio for sound engineering and they recommended that I go to Salford Music College after I finish.

Mathew claimed that he had taken up his college course to qualify himself in studio management to insulate himself against the possible outcome of not



succeeding in signing a recording contract. If a deal was not forthcoming he could run a studio as an alternative. This shows a rationalised response to risk. This new type of risky career structure (see Beck 1992) alluded to by McRobbie (1999) and Banks et al. (2000) is thus formalised within the educational qualifications framework of college courses which are responding to the new economy. Although it is recognised that qualifications are needed to go into music in studio management or full-time tutoring, part of the attraction of rap is that you do not need any formal training to get started. Members use a mixture of skills learned at school, on the job, through listening to other recorded rappers and improvisation:

RL: I sort of play the piano. I've not got any grades or anything but I am able to play different tunes. I read a bit of music as well. At school I was like shown ... that's how I learn, by looking at something.

RH: As a producer then you construct the tracks with software? Doesn't that do away with the need for formal musical knowledge?

RL: You don't even have to play the instrument because when you go to CuBase you can just do it all from the computer ... but you have the option to play it manually. I play manual.

The performance aspect of this creative process was also stressed in keeping with the Cultural Fusion objective of confidence building:

RH: What's it like performing live?

MJ: It's just like the energy that you get on stage. If you're just stood there people are gonna think "What's he doin'?" But if you're moving and getting into it and showing you're not shy and showing that you're enjoying it on stage it's gonna make them [the audience] feel good and enjoying themselves.

RH: Do you ever take part in those sort of competitions like in the film *8 Mile* where rival crews are rapping and trying to outdo each other?

RL: The only time we ever battle is like when we're messing [around] between us or sometimes we sit and rap or we'll be on the bus or wherever and we just do it.

This again demonstrates the portability of rap. The rapper's main tool is their vocal chords, unlike an instrument that might be lost or stolen.

Rap has also been used in a learning context in teaching the French language, even though breaking with linguistic convention is one of the most noteworthy features of French rap. The educational potential of rap has been recognised by the French Music Bureau, a part-industry, part-government financed campaign to export French music worldwide. This is evident in the compilation CD series *Génération Française* issued to French teachers worldwide with accompanying book (*livret pédagogique*) containing full lyrics and a graded range of suggested classroom activities.<sup>4</sup> Baker (1993: 62) notes how in the USA rap has been broadcast on the children's television programme *Sesame Street* to teach children the alphabet. In 2000 and 2001 the London French Embassy's French Music Bureau organised UK tours by French rappers Sian Supa Crew and Djolof tied in with French language workshops delivered by the groups to French classes in local schools. Children were given tuition on how to rhyme in French and deliver the resulting lyrics in a rap style.

As a result of coverage on UK Channel 4 television's *Planet Pop* programme, the *Face* magazine and the *The Times Educational Supplement*, the French Music



Bureau was besieged with calls from other schools clamouring for rap bands to come to their language lessons. The deconstruction of rap texts in a classroom context in this way is much more acceptable to pupils than traditional grammar exercises and there is an argument to be made for it, also highlighting how language cannot be divorced from culture. After all, French hip-hop arguably says much more about contemporary French society than many outdated textbooks relied on by schools that still propagate images of France centred on the Eiffel Tower or other outmoded stereotypes.

French rap is being used to export the French language overseas even as traditionalists attempt to safeguard “pure” French. French rap is performed in a street-speak encompassing African, Arab, Gypsy and American roots, disregarding traditional grammar rules and using neologisms liberally. There is accordingly a burgeoning literature on *le français branché* (“cutting edge French”) (Ball 1990, Verdelhan-Bourgade 1990) paralleling the work of Hewitt (1986, 1990) and Rampton (1995) on the lexicon of black British youth. The rap lyric anthologies of Bocquet and Pierre-Adolphe (1997) and Perrier (2000) were both issued in a poetry collection series in keeping with Lapassade’s (1990: 5) labelling of rap as “*la nouvelle poésie orale des métropoles*” (new urban oral poetry). The codification of this slang has taken place in specialised French dictionaries (Andreini 1985, Oblak et al. 1984, Festin 1999, Merle 1999, Pierre-Adolphe, Mamoud and Tzanos 1995). Perhaps only when these new words enter the *Robert* or *Petit Larousse* (standard dictionaries) will we be able to state that *le français branché* has found a place at the centre of the French language rather than languishing on its margins.

The United States still has a strong influence on rap outside its borders. At the Cultural Fusion evening, acts rapped in both American and Mancunian accents. *Dubet* (in Calio 1998: 27) has observed of rap in relation to French youth: “*New York fascine plus qu’Alger*” (New York fascinates French youth more than Algiers), stressing the exoticism of the American dream as opposed to one’s more tangible roots. Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) quoted earlier, talk about how tenuously the youths they studied were linked with black America. Similarly, Afrocentricism was not a principal concern for HD, although the group members I interviewed all had Afro-Caribbean heritage in one way or another:

MJ: Africa is just the motherland of all black people. That’s all I know. Is our music inspired by that culture? Not really.

RL: I don’t think those topics are irrelevant but where I am now I choose to write about stuff that’s happening around me in Longsight.

MJ: What I think really affects my lyrics is that England as a place is really ethnic ... I think it is more equal now for ethnics and like white British.

RL: I like the Asian hip-hop crossover.

The band also rejected the much-made claims that rap is necessarily a black music form (Baker 1993, Rose 1994), instead seeing the strength of one’s lyrics as a marker for the right to participate and citing Eminem as an individual who had opened it up.

-----> **Conclusion: rap as postcolonial locally situated youth culture in a global context**

In the UK today, a new wave of moral panic surrounds rap, allegedly for glamorising violence. In many ways this is simply the latest installment in the popular music tradition of shocking the establishment. The suggestive hip-swivelling of Bill Hayley and Elvis Presley, the menacing pouts of the Rolling Stones that



provoked the plea “lock up your daughters”, punk’s nihilism and the supposed drug culture of acid house are all in some degree precursors to controversy over rap and hip-hop culture. Indeed rap itself has repeatedly courted controversy.<sup>5</sup> The same year that Culture Minister Kim Howells spoke out against rap in the UK, rap acts took an unprecedented number of nominations at the UK’s annual music industry Brit awards. Eventual winners included 21-year-old black Londoner Ms Dynamite and white American rapper Eminem.<sup>6</sup> While rap lyrics have been held responsible for inciting violence, much rap in the UK and USA contains messages based on the enduring themes of romantic love, such as those by best-selling act Ja Rule. HD were all vehemently critical of recent press speculation that hip-hop bred a culture of violence, citing the Cultural Fusion project as a positive example of the application of rap. As Ravelle commented, “Urban music is a scapegoat”.

Rap, then, has become a key part of twenty-first century global culture, produced and consumed by youth of culturally diverse origins, as well as from more “mainstream” moorings. Its high-profile fans include the heir to the British throne Prince William, and the fictional youth culture anti-hero Ali G. While the UK rap/garage collective So Solid Crew attracted criticism for glamorising violence in their lyrics, the music journalist Peter Paphides (2002: 5) explains their appeal thus: “tracks like ‘Haters’ and ‘Ride Wid Us’ glamorise a life that most of us can only live vicariously”.<sup>7</sup> It is one thing to buy a record and another to actually interact with the people and ideas that it conveys. When two teenage girls were shot dead over the New Year holiday of 2003 in Birmingham, UK, the incident fuelled moral panic. News reports alleged that the assailants were playing Ms Dynamite on their car stereo. Yet this in itself demonstrates the fallacy in assuming “hypodermic syringe” type media message reception models in the vein of the Frankfurt school. Ms Dynamite has resolutely propounded anti-violence messages.<sup>8</sup> However, disjunctures may easily occur between listening and action. Youth construct their own meanings. The following excerpt of interview data shows that for Mathew of HD foreign-language rap is not entirely impenetrable. Here it is primarily the beats – rhythm – that are of importance:

MJ: Like Sian Supa Crew, which is a French group, I like their stuff. I don’t have a clue what they’re saying but I can tell what the flow [delivery] is like. [It’s the same with] MC Solaar ... but it’s a lot harder for them to make it than us. The British obviously speak English ... but like the Americans can’t [even] understand certain bits of our language.

In other words the linguistic disadvantage can be compensated for by the more attitudinal characteristics of rap delivery. Furthermore the simple label “English” masks a range of differences between, for example, the USA and the UK, or Manchester and London. Claims that rap can break down barriers between different ethnic groups need to be kept in perspective. There is also intra-rap strife, exemplified by the shootings between East Coast and West Coast American rappers. In France there are divisions between north and south Paris as well as Paris and Marseilles. As we have seen rap can, through various mediums, contribute to youth identities in articulating multiple messages such as the celebration of capitalism or in the positioning of young people outside the dominant order, or even fulfilling both roles at once. Studies of pedagogy in hip-hop are a growing area of rap scholarship (Dimitriadis 2001, Weaver, Dimitriadis and Daspit 2001, Weaver and Daspit 2001). Various links can be made between the Cultural Fusion project in action and recent developments in educational theory. We have also seen how reflexive biographies and individualised trajectories are also being



played out by the members of HD. Here work and education are fused in a process of situated cognition or “learning on the job” (Lave and Wenger 1990). The growth in rap scholarship serves as a legitimising influence on the music. The number of different approaches taken by commentators who have written about it in terms of Afrocentricism, postmodernism, multiculturalism and education, to name but a few, is perfectly in keeping with a music which is multifaceted and often described as polyvocal (see Rose 1994). All of the above then serve as diverse and healthy examples of the uses of hip-hop.

#### Endnotes

1. Longsight was featured on the BBC national news the week of 5 May 2003 on an item about Manchester police’s firearms amnesty and local gangs.
2. Fieldwork note: I attended the Cultural Fusion presentation at Slade Lane, Longsight, Manchester M13, 29 April 2003. I interviewed the group HD at the same venue during rehearsals on 7 May 2003. All interview transcript material is taken from this second date.
3. The band’s pseudonyms also show frequent deliberate mis-spellings and wordplay in the tradition of London garage rap group Big Brovas (Brothers) or even the Beatles:  
 Mathew Terror  
 Ravelle Wiz d.o.m  
 Marc Vizion  
 Hamza Big Shade  
 Rosie Universal  
 When I asked about the meaning of their track “Hyperlyrics” Mathew told me: “That one’s like statements. The lyrics are stating like who we are and what we do. It’s like to get that vibe; characters mixed together.”
4. Volume 4, for example, includes the celtic rap of Manau from Corsica, Toulouse’s Zebda and Djoloff as well as raï artists Faudel and Sawt el Atlas. Suggested classroom exercises include oral, written and creative writing.
5. Headlines such as “Rap culture has hijacked our identity” by Joseph Harker in the *Guardian*, 6 March 2003, and “UK hip-hop needs ethics code” ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/entertainment/newsvid\\_2073000/2073162.st](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/entertainment/newsvid_2073000/2073162.st)) serve as updates of earlier versions such as “Has rap gone 2 far?”, a cover story from *Melody Maker*, 5 February 1994.
6. See Gibbons, F. (2003) “Rappers hit the Brits big time” in the *Guardian* 14 January 2003, p. 5. In terms of official recognition, it took until 1996 for the appropriately named Alliance Ethnik (sic) to become the first French rappers to be named best group at France’s Victoires de la Musique awards.
7. Three members have been arrested for firearms possession and one was jailed in 2002. In November 2001 two people were shot at a So Solid Crew London concert. They have argued in their defence that they are only articulating what amounts to unpalatable social reality in their music. The band’s Asher D has been quoted in the *Sunday Times* (12 January 2002) as saying: “A lyricist is in the same category as an author. Every writer has got a good imagination. We’re not murderers ‘cos we talk about guns and we don’t hate women ‘cos we talk about hating chicks.”
8. See “Ms Dynamite is right – Our society needs a miracle” in the *Independent*, 21 January 2003.



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### 3. From youth culture to mass culture? Hip-hop as Trojan horse

Olivier Cathus

Born in Harlem and the South Bronx, and then spreading through the black areas of American cities and all around the world, hip-hop has long been considered an urban and emerging youth culture. Even if there is still a lively “indie” hip-hop scene, the aim of this essay is simply to update its situation by examining it both in France and in the United States. Should we now consider rap as part of mass culture, instead of its alternative? From a European perspective – perhaps the “Old Europe” one – some people maintain that everything has already been imagined by the Ancient Greeks. I will draw from their myth of the Trojan horse to illustrate my argument. What, then, is inside the horse? Of course, it is not the rappers themselves, more used to “ride the riddim like an horserider”, according to a recurrent dancehall line, than to hiding inside the horse. Instead, we might find inside elements of a neo-liberal doctrine being smuggled in: “Rappers who criticize America for its perpetuation of racial and economic discrimination also share conservative ideas about personal responsibility, [and] call for self-improvement strategies in the black community that focus heavily on personal behaviour as the cause and solution for crime, drugs, and community instability” (Rose 1994). Swap “the system” for “America” in this sentence and it would fit the European context as well.

#### How hip-hop developed in France<sup>1</sup>

Before proceeding further with this argument, we have to survey the situation of French rap. After the United States, France is the second biggest rap market in the world.<sup>2</sup> This next section provides a flashback of how this market started and developed. To illustrate the “Trojan horse” metaphor – and despite the European context of this research project and the many specific ways hip-hop has adapted itself to the countries where it takes root – we cannot avoid the significance of the globalisation of cultures. Whether it is a new music genre or a pop star, contemporary mass-media diffusion ensures rapid worldwide fame or notoriety and, arguably, an influence on local cultures. For this reason, I will also refer substantially to American examples. Historically, the first wave of hip-hop began in France in the early 1980s, with a focus on dance (smurf, breakdance).<sup>3</sup> Hip-hop dance was so big it had its own TV programme by 1984: *Hip Hop*, on the French channel TF1, a popular programme whose audience was really quite young. Although it was produced by a commercial channel, it was not created by it. It was closer to the idea of a programme “made by the people



for the people”, and its young presenter Sidney invited kids to show their dance prowess on air. Schoolyards became a mass training place for hip-hop dance. Rap was its discrete soundtrack, just in the background, providing beats to breakdancers but not really capturing their attention. It was only a few years later, in the late 1980s – when the media spotlights were directed elsewhere – that rap found its proper place and stimulated vocations, notably among former dancers. The rapid growth of rap at this point can be related to its choice of French. It was not spontaneous for young people to rap in French; its former neglect could be explained in the difficulties encountered by previous generations in making the French language fit with the rhythmic structures of rock. Rap is a good way to express yourself, rap is words, so why would you rap in English if your speech is not fluent? Everywhere it has developed locally, rap has developed through the vernacular. In the French this development is interesting, involving a mix of slang, *verlan* (a way of speaking syllables backwards), Arabic and English words, and also very old French words and idioms from the vernacular.

In countries where a rap scene exists – meaning almost everywhere – local artists also appropriate rap to express their own opinions and themes. In fact the reality is even more complex: rap has often developed locally in at least two different ways. I realised this while in Rome in the early 1990s when I noticed two distinct ways of being into rap. On one side were the activist rappers, linked with the *centri sociali*, the local artistic squats. These young Romans had an outfit still quite inspired by alternative 1980s rock – Doc Martens, black denim – yet rap was their way to express political opinions. On the other side were the clubbers, who looked more like rappers, or at least as one might imagine them. They had all the appropriate gear, the right sneakers and street wear, with the right brands and logos. Yet this signified their superficiality; for them, rap was just the latest fashion to adapt to.

In the French context, rap had already developed via two branches by this time, but not in the same way. The cradle of French rap is the big city suburbs, and it is above all else an urban culture. Allied to this, France has a large population of black people – unlike Italy – and French rap was apparently closer to the original American model because of its “blackness”. French hip-hop mirrors the “black-blanc-beur” generation (that is, black, white and Arab, *Beu’* being *verlan* for Arab), comprising the ethnic identities of the suburban youth who grew up together at school. Indeed, Black-Blanc-Beur was the name of the first major hip-hop dance company. Suprême NTM, one of the most important French rap groups, has a track titled “Noir et Blanc” on their 1991 debut album where two rappers, black and white, make this positive statement: “Il est blanc, je suis noir. La différence ne se voit que dans les yeux des bâtards [...] Différence ethnique, alliance de cultures. Voilà les raisons de notre progression” (“He is white, I am black. Only the bastards see the difference. Ethnic difference, culture alliance. These are the reasons of our progress”). At the same time, there were few black rap groups with members from West Indian or West African backgrounds. A real hip-hop movement, called *le Mouv’* (short for *mouvement*), came into the frame. It developed its independent record labels and fanzines, and flourished until artists were signed directly by major record companies, and took the first steps to commercial success.

Meanwhile, rap developed in various regional dialects and languages: in Breton, Basque and Occitan. The artists rapping in local dialect were often not as young<sup>4</sup>



as the B-boys<sup>5</sup> from the suburban movement. Some came from an indie rock background, some from jazz: for example, Bernard Lubat, founder member of the *Compagnie Lubat de Gasconha*, had been a famous jazzman since the 1970s, while Claude Sicre's *Fabulous Trobadors* were looking for similarities in hip-hop, Brazilian repentistas' rhyme "battles", and the Occitan medieval tradition of troubadours. Some saw this as merely an epiphenomenon, and felt that only the urban material was authentic hip-hop. Regardless of whether they were considered relevant by the *Mouv'* people, regional artists felt that rap was the most contemporary way to express their rebellion, regional culture and identity. Rap has been a means and medium to contest both the global system and the Jacobine organisation of the French institutions. Regional languages were long forbidden at French republican schools, and still were at the beginning of the twentieth century, for in the counties there were still many rural people who did not speak French. In the early 1970s, a neo-rural movement and folk revival attracted attention to the French regional languages, dialects and cultures. The micro-local set up of rap – rooted in one's hood at the city scale – found an echo in the regions.

Urban French rap also developed its own differences; if soul, funk and American rap songs were most frequently sampled, some artists wanted to affirm their cultural and/or ethnic identity by using music from Africa and the Maghreb.<sup>6</sup> This form of rap marks a shift into a "glocal" culture, with local languages flowing on global beats. In its urban context, French rap has developed its own themes. Rap is an art of storytelling and the lyrics are quite often narrative. It depicts scenes from everyday life and gives a voice to the urban youth. For this reason, since its beginning, NTM – one of the most famous French groups – has presented itself more as "a loudspeaker, than a leader" of their generation. A recurrent theme in French rap is that of police racism and brutality, including the murders of young people. Some of the most prominent French groups, such as *Ministère A.M.E.R.*, NTM or, more recently, *La Rumeur*, have had legal problems because of the content of certain lyrics criticising the police.<sup>7</sup> While the French hip-hop movement reflects a real ethnic diversity, another branch of the movement has started to develop communitarian claims, based on critical descriptions of racism in French society and the increasing social gap between suburbs and inner cities.

The most relevant example of this is probably the Sarcelles-based collective *Secteur Å*, where the letters S-E-C-T-E of *Secteur* are an acronym for *Société Exportant sa Culture en Territoire Ennemi ou Etranger*. The ambition of Kenzy, its CEO, is to launch the first national TV channel for French black people, based on such models as BET. Inspired by American success stories such as Puff Daddy's, or the Wu-Tang Clan's, it also shows how a part of the rap scene is increasingly business oriented. French rap now has its own FM radio channel that sets new standards for songs to be aired, and which makes French rap far more conformist than it was. Festive rap songs turn into hits while some artists are rapping clichés together like beads on a string.<sup>8</sup> This is basically rap as a commercial enterprise, as Kenzy admits:

Ma guerre [...] consiste à infiltrer les foyers français. A aller chez les petites Nathalie pour leur faire écouter mes artistes. A distribuer mes disques en hypermarché, pour que Georgette, la ménagère de moins de 50 ans, puisse les trouver à Carrefour. *(My war consists in penetrating French homes, going to the little Nathalies to make them listen to my artists. To distribute them in hypermarkets, so Georgette, the under-50 housewife, can find them at Carrefour).*



This contemptuous statement is an exact illustration of what L.A. rapper Ice-T called “home invasion”.

-----> **Getting busy is an *otium* (of the people)**

I do not intend to discuss the notion of culture in this essay; I would just like to recall its actual Latin meaning. *Cultura* is associated with important notions and ideas: it demands effort and patience, and has a long-term importance. While mass culture is usually associated with pure entertainment and escapism, it is quite interesting to see these notions of effort and patience resituated in the context of youth. I would suggest that the greatest quality of hip-hop is that it is a DIY (“Do it yourself”) culture. Hip-hop culture has different disciplines that all require serious training and skills. Besides this, rap has long been lauded for its motivational aspects. From Chuck D. to MC Solaar in France, conscious artists have always asked their audiences to learn, to consider knowledge a weapon. Because of rap young people simply grab a notebook and start writing – many of them for the first time outside of school – and learn to articulate their ideas.

In this learning process, however, DJ-ing was left aside and not sufficiently considered, as if real skills were not needed to produce this kind of music. Apart from the dexterity required in the art of turntablism, to make and produce this music you have to learn how to programme a computer with a range of software. In the same way, graffiti art involves elaborate techniques that also imply a lot of talent and training; prior to the realisation of a fresco on a concrete wall, graffiti artists spend a lot of time making sketches in their notebooks. In the beginnings of French hip-hop, the young people who were involved insisted on precisely that aspect: rap gets you busy, and they were already thankful for that. They were happy to just get busy,<sup>9</sup> and escape the boredom of wasting time, sitting on a bench all day, spending their evenings in the lobbies of their housing blocks, the end of the *galère*.

In “Le temps des jeunes” Amparo Lasen Diaz – a member of Groupe de Recherche sur l’Effervescence et la Dynamique des Identités Nouvelles (Gredin) – shrewdly characterises this time as *otium*. In Rome, *otium* was opposed to *negotium*: it was not only a time for entertainment but a period for reflection and knowledge. In a contemporary context, in her essay exploring how young people in France and Spain deal with time, she describes *otium* as those activities that give more meaning to life and take it to a higher level of being. In this understanding, hip-hop can definitely be seen as a kind of *otium* (Lasen Diaz 2001). Hugues Bazin, author of the first attempt in French sociology to sketch a landscape of hip-hop based on fieldwork (Bazin 1995), suggests that socio-cultural politics should install hip-hop as a social and artistic project in suburban areas through workshops where rap artists would train young people how to write.<sup>10</sup> Such a project may appear quite heretical in countries where, unlike France, such public cultural policies and projects do not exist. In fact, this opinion is not shared by many hip-hop activists and rappers who argue, on the contrary, that hip-hop should stay independent of politics and institutions. Whatever you call it – youth culture, subculture or counterculture – what is fundamental to its relevance is that hip-hop belongs to its actors, those who make it, whether they are famous or not.



-----> **Hip-hop, sideways and cycles: from youth culture to mass culture?**

I recently heard perhaps the ultimate form of rap in the Paris subway, when a pair of mature beer-bellied Roma boarded a metro and began to rap for money. It certainly made a change from the hackneyed “Ochi Chiornye” or “Kalinka” played on the fiddle supported by a beat-box, but I wondered about the ways these men were expressing themselves, telling passengers what their lives were like, even if the passengers did not understand a word of their rapping. If it were just for the money, does this not bring us to the core of the recurring question? As the tough-guy writer Nick Tosches writes, without the promise of financial gain, there would not have been any rock’n’rollers (Tosches 2000). From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, while I was conducting fieldwork for my PhD, French hip-hop had its first major hits but was not yet the big business it undoubtedly is now. Our research goal was to identify some aspects shared by most of the pop(ular) musical genres of the last century, in France as well as in their own (usually American) cradles. At that time, I underestimated the importance of the alienation process, as developed by Theodor W. Adorno.<sup>11</sup> It seemed that the hip-hop movement already had a critical mind, and was aware of the potential manipulations of the mass media.

We were used to referring to George Clinton’s funky metaphors from his 1970s albums with the bands Parliament and Funkadelic:<sup>12</sup> “Psychological manipulation has been skilfully merged with advertising and electronically-transmitted media communications to create the new controlling system of ELECTRIC SPANKIN.”<sup>13</sup> Youth cultures, we held, are usually sceptical and ironic towards everything disseminated by the media. Therefore if youth is this aware why should we worry about alienation any longer? The real funk would just arrive and (star)fight to free the masses from its placebos and commercial avatars. Yet, despite the orthodox position that academics cannot survey “the people” from a pedestal and deny their consciousness, agency and often derision for the system and establishment, we may have to admit that life is not that simple either. Things are not always as they are portrayed in a Funkadelic album’s sleeve notes.

Born in the black neighbourhoods of New York in the 1970s, hip-hop evolved from a festive style to a more conscious one; “real hip-hop” was identified by its street vibe and “street cred”. The aim of the lyrics was to reflect a reality, the reality of the streets and of the ghetto. Furthermore, some hip-hop artists encouraged the urban youth to learn and be aware of their own history – neglected by wider society – and to develop Afrocentric theories. KRS-One was one of the precursors of gangsta-rap, a genre that would become most famous in its West Coast style. They saw rap as “edutainment”: both education and entertainment at the same time. According to Robin Kelley, Professor of History and African studies at New York University, “Gangsta rap was a critique of ghetto life. So much of it was about turning the cameras on crime and violence and the police. It wasn’t meant to be any kind of uplift narrative. It was a form of reportage – turning the mirror back on the black community” (Coates, 2003). With this context of development in mind, and once we have distinguished between various forms of hip-hop and a wide range of rap styles, we can focus on gangsta-rap as its most commercial and controversial form and ask: has rap music become part of the very system it was criticising as it developed?

Of course, this dynamic is not something new; mass medias (or should we say the culture industry) has always tried to incorporate pop(ular) musics and commercialise them. The cyclical dynamics of social change as described by the fourteenth-century Tunisian historian Ibn Khaldun still provide a relevant



metaphor for understanding the history of pop musics and youth cultures. In brief, his cyclical dynamics described how tribes of nomads would attack a city, take control of it and assume power. A century later, perhaps, as the former invaders became weakened by a *pacha* way of life – the dissolution of hedonism and corruption – another tribe would emerge from the desert and defeat them. Much like the settled nomads who subsequently lost their rough and raw character, youth cultures and musics lose their subversiveness and rawness as they reach the top of the charts, and the next generation emerges once again with louder and rawer material. In pop music, the life expectancy of a career is short in relation to the time it takes the next generation to come knocking on the door: an obvious dynamic when you look at how punk rose from the ashes of progressive and mainstream rock or how rap stood against the hollowness of disco.

Is rap “middle of the road” or just “middle of the sideways”? Bertrand Ricard has suggested that rock, for instance, is a *culture oblique*, neither deviant nor mass culture (Ricard 2000). He argues that while it is close enough to mass culture to influence it by rejuvenating it, and in a feedback loop, also being influenced by it, rock is aware enough of mass culture’s business strategies to keep a distance from it. This is a notion worth transplanting to other styles of music, in this instance rap, while weighing its ongoing relevance. Youth and teenagers are an enormous commercial target; and examples abound of business searching for the new cool and trying to integrate it into their versions of the “street vibe”. What has changed, according to Naomi Klein, is the speed of this phenomenon (Klein 2000). Keeping in touch with street cool, where “cool” is synonymous with “black” in American culture, is a real commercial imperative. This is illustrated by new business strategies, such Nike’s cynical “bro-ing” projects. Bro-ing, for “brother-ing”, involves industry tracking the latest trends in urban black areas, adapting them for marketing purposes and spreading these newly developed products by distributing them to the opinion leaders of the area.

The history of pop(ular) musics is also an history of *encanaillage* (Cathus 1998), where getting *encanaillé* is another word for being cool. The figure of the *canaille* (etymologically related to dog, and we know how symbolic the dog is in many social imaginaries) is a kind of rascal, and understanding the fascination for bad boys – pimps, gangsters, lads and so forth – especially among youth, is crucial. To best illustrate *encanaillage*, I will evoke the most typical French example of it. Back in the days of musette – a generic term for such dancing rhythms as the java, polka, musette and waltz – the working class balls were where the bourgeoisie would come for their thrills, to party and escape or attempt to forget the weight of restrictive formal social codes. Within this collective, effervescence would take them higher. The day after, suffering from some form of social hangover – as described by Emile Durkheim in his elegant academic prose – a vague shame for one’s actions was combined with the need to sometimes break out and get loose (Durkheim 1911 [1912]).<sup>14</sup>

But *encanaillage* takes several forms. It can also be “virtual” or imaginary, as the upper classes do not always come to party with the people. Through the years and musical styles, whether rock, punk or rap, some of the most provocative and dangerous figures have been an important source of identification for teenagers and youth. Snoop Dogg is an epitome of the *canaille* figure, not least because he actually identifies himself with a dog. By exploiting some gangsta and gang backgrounds in marketing and merchandising his own character, he also reproduces stereotypes of the black man as pimp and gangsta: “White America has always



had a perverse fascination with the idea of black males as violent and sexually insatiable animals” (Coates 2003). Could this be related to the fact that white kids from the “vanilla suburbs” are now the core audience of gangsta-rap? Snoop provides them with what they are looking for, for his own purely commercial reasons, and achieves Ice-T’s concept of “home invasion” while giving the kids a way to get virtually *encanaillé*.

Youth culture is a way to grow up and out of the family. It provides role models to teenagers seeking self-confidence. When some American rap superstars seem to be motivated by the sole ambition of accumulating more money, (as 50 Cent’s and Snoop Dogg’s recent album titles explicitly express: *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* and *Paid tha Cost to be da Bo\$\$*) have these role models become bad influences? Am I guilty of getting old to even ask such a question? Chuck D. from Public Enemy or slam artist Saul Williams would probably share this point of view. “When you like a good beat, you nod. When you agree, you nod. What if there is a good beat but you disapprove of the lyrics, do you still nod?” asked Saul Williams during one of his shows. So what is the relevance of this question? In French, I would suggest a pun: have we moved from getting *encanaillé* to *enc-aliéné*? Apart from generational conflicts, youth cultures are quite often anti-establishment and subversive. Commercial rap has now integrated into the system. The “concrete jungle” it lived through has been transplanted to another scale, embodying the social Darwinism doctrine developed by Herbert Spencer. The “survival of the fittest” has been substituted by the “survival of the hottest” (which was the way TV actor Lorenzo Lamas described the basic rule of a new reality show programme, in which he was president of the jury).<sup>15</sup> As a sociologist, personal opinions (whether they are moral or political) should not interfere and influence research and fieldwork. Being in an institutional but non-academic context, I think it worth focusing on these related aspects of hip-hop, as the Trojan horse of neo-liberal doctrines, while acknowledging its *otium* role for the youth.

#### Endnotes

1. For an insightful synthesis on French rap in English, see Huq, R. (2001) “The French connection: francophone hip hop in contemporary postcolonial France”. *Taboo*, Vol. 5, No. 2, San Francisco: CaddoGap Press.
2. Some French rappers are already part of mainstream music. A couple of years ago, for example, the top-selling French rappers sold over 500 000 albums, going gold 5 times over. With the global music market in crisis, sales of over 100 000 appear to constitute a good score in 2003.
3. See Backmann, C. and Basier, L. (1985) “Junior s’entraîne très fort ou le smurf comme mobilisation symbolique”. *Langage et Société*, No. 34, one of the first academic publications on French hip-hop.
4. “Not as young” is a euphemism, as some of them were already in their late forties.
5. Originally short for Break-Dancer Boy, becoming the generic name for people into the hip-hop movement.
6. Rap hitmaker Passi even argues that it is better to give the copyrights of samples to Africans rather than to Americans (“Le funk, la soul, on connaît. Si l’on fait une reprise ou un sample, autant piocher ailleurs. Mieux vaut donner les copyrights à des Africains qu’à des Américains”) (Béthune 1999).





7. For their songs “Sacrifice de Poulet” (cop sacrifice) and “Brigitte Femme de Flic” (Brigitte, cop’s wife), Ministère A.M.E.R have been prosecuted for public abuse and provocation. This year, having written in an article about alleged crimes by the French police against suburban youth, La Rumeur were prosecuted for defamation by the Ministry of the Interior. Their lawyer has advised them to fight back.
8. The most heavily clichéd of these stories in French rap tells of how a hold-up (or a burglary, or a robbery) fails, the wounded narrator runs away from the police, we hear his last words to his dear ones, and so forth.
9. *Get Busy* is also the name of one of the first and most famous French rap fanzines.
10. Hugues, B. (1999) “Emergences culturelles et formes populaires”. *Cultures en Mouvement*, No. 21, October 1999. Part of the dossier “Hip hop & techno: rythmes de passage?” directed by Olivier Cathus.
11. Adorno was amazed by the endless effect of syncope on apparently willing masses. He would still be today. The famous recurrent line “and the beat goes on” would make him feel vindicated. It would be interesting to study how in contemporary rap or R&B producers (such as Dr Dre, Timbaland, the Neptunes or RZA) are sometimes more important than the rappers themselves. If you are looking for success, the beat and sound appear to be more important than the lyrics.
12. Of course, we knew Clinton himself was not taking his conceptual jokes seriously. What he would call “funk-a-logical” is “something that’s perfectly clear before you understand it. Once you understand – it makes no sense”. “You cannot make sense and still be funky”. Despite this, we found them relevant to describe some realities of American society and of the alienation process.
13. Funkadelic (1980) *The Electric Spanking of War Babies*, Warner Bros.
14. In this short passage, we would question who is speaking; Durkheim as a person or an academic? We can see how effervescence is sometimes a way of getting loose and *encanaillé*. “Au sein d’une assemblée qu’échauffe une passion commune, nous devenons susceptibles de sentiments et d’actes dont nous sommes incapables quand nous sommes réduits à nos seules force ; et quand l’assemblée est dissoute, quand, nous retrouvant seul avec nous-même, nous retombons à notre niveau ordinaire, nous pouvons mesurer alors toute la hauteur dont nous avons été soulevés au-dessus de nous-même” (Durkheim 1991 [1992], pp. 370-371).
15. A TV-programme called *Are You Hot? The Search for America’s Sexiest People* on ABC TV Channel.



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