

**New Ethnicities and Language Use: Cultures of Hybridity in a Group of Adolescents of mainly South Asian Descent in a London School in the late 1990s.**

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## Abstract

This thesis draws on anti-essentialist theorisations of ethnicity developed out of the British Cultural Studies tradition by authors such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and others. Of particular interest are the notions of 'new ethnicities', 'cultures of hybridity' and 'diaspora'. These concepts are used as the basis for an empirical study attempting to show how they might be realised at the level of ordinary everyday life. The research informants are a group of 30 male and female adolescents (The Blackhill youth) of mainly South Asian descent in a secondary school in the western suburbs of London. The thesis, using a variety of methods including a survey questionnaire, written accounts, informant-made audio recordings and individual conversational interviews, elicits their representations of their patterns of language use. These facilitate discussion and analysis of a complex tapestry of ethnicities which embrace not only language use, but also religion and popular culture. This investigation also demonstrates that if the study of ethnicity shifts its focus from a dependence on the visual (what people look like), to the aural (what they sound like), there is a basis for new understandings of how 'new ethnicities' might develop. The thesis suggests that rather than looking for a binary distinction between old and new ethnicities it might be more productive to look for a synthesis of residual, dominant and emergent elements in culture. This leads to a conclusion that the most important element in the 'cultures of hybridity' of the Blackhill youth is their Britishness which is integrated in intricate ways with both traditional and contemporary modes of being South Asian. Thereby, the emergence of distinctive *Brasian* identities is signalled.

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## Introduction

This thesis has, at its foundation, a proposition advanced by Stuart Hall concerning the concept of what he calls *Translation* which he argues,

describes those identity formations which cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and which are composed of people who have been dispersed forever from their homelands. Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusion of a return to the past. They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely. They bear upon them the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped. The difference is that they are not and will never be *unified* in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several “homes” (and to no one particular “home”). People belonging to such *cultures of hybridity* have had to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of “lost” cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism. They are irrevocably *translated* ... They are the products of the new *diasporas* created by the post-colonial migrations. They must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them. Cultures of hybridity are one of the distinctly novel types of identity produced in the era of late-modernity, and there are more and more examples of them to be discovered (Hall, 1992a:310).

The thesis asks, what might these ‘cultures of hybridity’ and Hall’s associated and highly influential theoretical proposition ‘new ethnicities’ (Hall 1988), look like in formation, in development and at the level of everyday life? In pursuit of answers to this question the thesis advances a number of linked arguments. Firstly, I argue that the British Cultural Studies tradition which inspired the thesis, has tended in its study of youth, including ethnic minority youth, to concentrate on the spectacular. As such its gaze has missed what might be learned from the study of ordinary youth and their routine behaviour. This thesis shows that the analysis of the everyday prosaic self-representations and behaviour of a group of young people can offer illuminating insights into the nature of one youth social formation looked at in a ‘new ethnicities’ and ‘cultures of hybridity’ frame. Secondly, I argue that the anti-essentialist strand within British Cultural Studies despite its aspiration to promote the idea of fluidity and the indefinite deferment of closure, has been nevertheless trapped by its concentration on the visual. Consequently, talk of ‘new ethnicities’ and ‘cultures of hybridity’ can appear to be chronically undermined by the essential enduring biological fixity of the skin colour of black and brown people in Britain and what this signifies in social, cultural, economic and political life. This thesis attempts to escape these

limitations by showing what becomes possible if the frame of analysis in ethnicity is based on a landscape of sound rather than of vision. Thirdly, I argue that sound in this context inevitably refers to the everyday language use of ordinary people which has been startlingly ignored in British Cultural Studies. The thesis shows why focusing on this aspect of cultural life might be important for an understanding of 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity'. Finally, the thesis attempts to show the importance of foregrounding the voices and self-representations of the youth involved in the study in a way that many leading British Cultural Studies theorists have neither successfully managed, nor necessarily wanted to do, preferring the scope of the sweeping magisterial authorial voice. In advancing these motivations the thesis seeks to temper theoretical formulation with the sober groundings of empirical data, and to find a way of reconciling the insights available from the cultural studies, sociolinguistic and sociological traditions.

In autobiographical terms the starting point for the research was a perspective developed from my personal positioning in British society. I was born in Britain to black parents who came from West Africa and have overwhelmingly lived my life in Britain, albeit with strong and continuing diasporic connections. This background has fashioned in me a deep experience of the nuances of living as part of a collection of visible, black and brown skinned, formerly colonised ethnic minorities, subordinated to a dominant white majority in a strongly racialised society. Our everyday experience, which we have constantly discussed, has been how our representation by the white majority has fluctuated between being ignored, being belittled and being stereotyped. Of particular interest to me has been the distance between the representations of ethnicity of visible minority groups deployed in public discourses in Britain by dominant forces, and the representations which have salience amongst the minority groups themselves. As Bhabha has commented,

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated ... (Bhabha 1994: 66).



In pursuing my interest in minority group self-representation I had previously discovered that the elicitation from informants of accounts of their own patterns of language use was a fertile source for the perception and charting of shifts in ethnicity. The sites I had chosen were educational ones in further and adult education and the informants ranged in age from 16 upwards. The research approach had not been intended to 'prove' that informants actually used language in the way they themselves described but to interpret the significance of the fact that they chose to select particular representations when asked. This work yielded two videos - *Afro-Caribbean Language Issues: Some student views* (Harris & Savitzky 1985), *West African Students, Language and Education* (Harris & Billington 1987) and two publications - *My Personal Language History* (Harris & Savitzky 1988) and *Language and Power* (Harris et al 1990). Central to my concerns was the idea that representations of ethnicity were contestable - not fixed; and furthermore that the agency and conscious experience of research informants was critically important in this process.

It was these antecedents and these interests which led directly in 1996 and 1997 to the research project, at a secondary school site, which forms the empirical basis of this thesis. There will be considerable discussion later of the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the thesis. Methodologically, a key research problem throughout has been how to maintain the primacy of the informants' voices without abrogating the academic's responsibility to offer analysis and interpretation. Theoretically, the thesis was originally inspired by the anti-essentialist current developed from one strand emerging from the British Cultural Studies tradition. A series of writings by Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer delineating 'ethnic absolutism' (Gilroy, 1987), 'new ethnicities' (Hall, 1988), 'diaspora' and 'hybridity' (Mercer, 1994), for example, provided a theoretical vocabulary with which to work on some of the problems already outlined in this introduction.

The term 'ethnic absolutism' precisely and powerfully described the tyrannical everyday straitjacket within which most black and brown descendants of the Empire had lived in Britain. It encapsulated the experience of seeing the rich variety of dispositions and behaviours of individuals and groups in family and community settings reduced to crude, supposedly eternal, essences. Ethnic absolutism was, as Gilroy put it,

... a reductive, essentialist understanding of ethnic and national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable (Gilroy, 1993b: 65).

It is true, as Gilroy points out, that many black and brown people themselves used ethnic absolutism as a protective cloak in their defensive fight against racism. This is a manoeuvre which Spivak (1984) has described as strategic essentialism. Being against ethnic absolutism was relatively straightforward, but did not offer a creative framework for the thinking through of questions of ethnicity. Hall's (1988) pluralisation of the concept stimulated possibilities for the loosening and destabilising of ethnicity so that it could be investigated as something capable of temporal and spatial change and emphasising its performativity and not its ascription. For Hall, globalisation plays a central role in this process because,

It does have a pluralizing impact on identities, producing a variety of possibilities and new positions of identification, and making identities more positional, more political, more plural and diverse; less fixed, unified or trans-historical (Hall, 1992a: 309).

In the British context I had encountered two further phenomena which needed to be sharply theorised. The first concerned the highly significant number of young people in London whose parentage, even within essentialised, binary, analytic frames, involved mixed ethnicity. The academic analysis of the 1991 census data offers copious evidence of the complexities suggested. For instance, there is the fact that among ethnic minority males aged 16 to 34, 40% of those designated as Black-Caribbean, 7% of Indians, 6.2% of Pakistanis, 16% of Chinese, 18% of Other-Asian, 19.2% of Black-African and 60% of Black-Other are 'currently living with a white partner' (Berrington, 1996:199-200). As Peach (1996:24) states: "A significant proportion of the ethnic minority population is derived from mixed unions and new ethnic identities are being forged which will be increasingly difficult to capture within the existing census categories ... Indeed, one of the lessons to be derived from the 1991 Census, is that new ethnicities are emerging in Britain". The other phenomenon which required attention was that many young people (and others) in Britain retained both real and imaginary global African, Asian and Caribbean diasporic affiliations *at the same time as* definite British identities. Mercer (1994) consistently argues that a helpful advance is to be found in a theoretical reconfiguration focusing on the discussion of the concepts of diaspora and hybridity. Mercer (2000) acknowledges that the lineage of this



opening can be traced to the writings of Stuart Hall as far back as the 1960s and 1970s. Elsewhere, Mercer states boldly,

I suggest that the emerging *cultures of hybridity* [emphasis in the original], forged among the overlapping African, Asian and Caribbean diasporas, that constitute our common home, must be seen as crucial and vital efforts to answer the “possibility and necessity of creating a new culture”: *so that you can live*. [emphasis in the original] ... In a world in which everyone’s identity has been thrown into question, the mixing and fusing of disparate elements to create new, hybridized identities point to ways of surviving, and thriving, in conditions of crisis and transition (Mercer, 1994: 3-5).

and further asks in relation to the ‘ “younger generation” of hyperactive, hybrid overachievers’ (ibid: 5),

what exactly was it about the condition of England, as compared to other European countries or to the United States, that made it such a fertile site for the flourishing of diasporic outlooks and identities in the 1980s? (ibid: 5).

To sum up, Hall, Gilroy, and Mercer, working within British Cultural Studies, have all written extensively on new ethnicities, diaspora and hybridity, identifying and opening a theoretical space which this thesis seeks to enter and develop with the assistance of empirical investigation. The site for this empirical investigation was a mixed comprehensive secondary school with more than 1400 pupils in the western suburbs of London which stated that more than 78% of its pupils were what it described as ‘bilingual’. I will call it Blackhill School<sup>1</sup>. This is a pseudonym in line with undertakings of confidentiality which I gave to the research participants and school ‘gatekeepers’.

Chapter One tries to locate the informants’ voices and representations within wider and deeper preformed British colonial and postcolonial discourses on culture and ethnicity. First, it argues that black and brown descendants of the Empire have historically endured dominant British discourses in a range of domains, including culture, which by turns either ignores or belittles them. This tendency is evident in the work of such arbiters of the worthwhile in British culture of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as Matthew Arnold, John Reith, F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot. Even more pertinently, the chapter argues, a number of worthy pioneers in the British Cultural Studies tradition, such as Orwell,

Williams, Hoggart and Thompson appear to have had a similar blind spot. Secondly, the chapter demonstrates how Stuart Hall serves as a link with, and bridge between, these pioneers and the extension of the tradition by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham. The chapter then reviews those aspects of the work of the Centre which make a valued contribution to the perspectives explored in the present thesis, identifies areas of omission and weakness and indicates where this thesis might make a novel contribution. Chapter Two outlines the methodological approach followed in an attempt to deal with the problem of how to effectively centralise informants' voices; to listen to and interpret the significance of some of their low key everyday utterances and self-representations. It will also review relevant empirical studies of 'visible' ethnic minority youth in Britain and the sometimes overlapping, sociolinguistic studies of this same youth, to examine how their approaches complement or differ from those adopted in the current thesis. After Chapter Two the thesis moves on to Part II which focuses on the Empirical Study – that is, a description of the study itself followed by a description, discussion and analysis of its findings. Part II consists of a series of chapters demonstrating some of the ways in which everyday patterns of language use might act as powerful markers of new, hybridised and diasporic ethnicities. Additionally, Part II is prefaced by a theoretical proposition, taken from the work of Raymond Williams, which suggests how we might come to understand culture as a phenomenon capable at one and the same time of encapsulating residual, dominant and emergent elements. This formulation is regarded as an important analytic device to help clarify how the Blackhill youth's ethnicities can be understood more subtly and beyond the confines of simple binaries like 'traditional' v 'modern', 'old' v 'new'. Chapter Three presents a detailed summary description of the findings of one of the data gathering instruments described in Chapter Two; the Language Survey Questionnaire. This serves as an orientation device which outlines some key parameters situating the Blackhill youth with respect to their representations of their overall patterns of language use. At the same time the discussion in Chapter Three points up the limitations of the survey questionnaire for that aspect of research concerned with understanding and interpreting social phenomena. Chapter Four, drawing principally on the interviews and written accounts of the Blackhill youth, will attempt something of a methodological experiment by trying to 'characterize a

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis, for ease of reference. I will refer to my research informants by the collective label 'the Blackhill Youth'.



culture and way of life' by the 'accumulation of formally unanalyzed detail' in the manner of Georges Perec (Becker, 2001: 72). That is to say it attempts to give the reader a sensed rather than intellectualised and analytic impression of a cultural 'structure of feeling' under the general and suggestive heading 'Inventories of everyday ethnicity'. Chapter Five analyses some of the important foundational structures of the ethnic formation of the Blackhill youth by examining both some of the conscious and the less conscious aspects of their patterns of everyday language use in, and close, to home. This analysis operates at two ontological levels, the real and the representational. The level of the real is established in the way they sound at every moment in speech. Phonologically, grammatically and lexically they are inescapably positioned and marked in a clear and enduring frame of a specifically London ethnicity which for them is embodied. At the level of the representational they give written and interview accounts of their complex interactions with, and degrees of relative attachment to, or detachment from, the intricate linguistic ecologies which they inhabit at home. The intricacy creates a finely woven tapestry of language use at home in which spoken interaction involving languages like Panjabi, Gujarati and English are employed sometimes artfully and knowingly, at other times in ad hoc fashion often with mixed elements from more than one language in a given utterance. Finally, again at the level of the real and the relatively unselfconscious, the Blackhill youth, particularly the girls, are shown to be partly constituted by a developing global teenage identity absorbed neither from the parental nor grandparental cultural traditions, nor to any significant extent from what is specifically London in its provenance. Chapter Six shows how the Blackhill youth represent important elements of their ethnicity as being forged in a developing sense of a set of interlocking community lives which they each experience. The structures of these lives appear to be sometimes influenced by adolescent interactions with their peers, sometimes by negotiated community relationships with religious inflections, and at other times by sporadic contacts with the lasting global networks constituting their diasporic families. In all of this, patterns of language use are evidently decisive in settling the specifics of the ethnic positionings of the Blackhill youth in community life. Chapter Seven demonstrates how, in developing their tastes in popular culture, whether it be Hindi or Hollywood films, Jungle music, hip hop, reggae, Rap or Bhangra, or the TV programmes they watch, the Blackhill youth are laying claim to a variety of ethnic affiliations in which once again patterns of language use are a centrally important factor. Appendix A presents an outline of the Blackhill youth featuring their pseudonym,

sex, religious affiliation and dominant pre-school home language. Appendix B lists the parental occupations of the Blackhill youth as stated during the conversational interviews. Appendix C gives an approximate ethnic and linguistic monitoring profile of Blackhill School at the time that the research fieldwork was carried out. Appendix D shows the collated results of the Language Survey Questionnaire, described and discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

In conclusion, this thesis claims to adopt a novel approach in that it chooses the representation of patterns of language use as a mediating modality for the perception of 'new' ethnicities in formation. In doing this the thesis attempts to effect a kind of reconciliation between dominant practices in the intellectual traditions of sociolinguistics and British cultural studies. It is rare for sociolinguistics to explicitly embrace the anti-essentialist theoretical developments in social and cultural theory already described in this introduction and on which the present thesis is based<sup>2</sup>. Typically, when sociolinguistics has wanted to advance an argument involving ethnicity, it has utilised the concept of speech community in which the composition of a given ethnic group is taken for granted as constituting a relatively homogeneous unit.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand the Birmingham CCCS tradition appears to give virtually no serious attention at all to the patterns of language use of their ethnic and cultural objects of study. References for the most part take the form of textual readings of language drawn from black expressive culture as represented in song lyrics (Gilroy 1987, Hebdige 1987/1990). A partial exception is Jones (1988) who in providing some analyses of representations of patterns of language use drawn from empirical research is influenced by Hewitt (1986) and foreshadows the approach of Back (1996). This thesis argues that patterns of language use or representations of these patterns are constitutive of the concepts of culture and ethnicity. In this respect it becomes possible to perceive a kind of dynamic tension between visual and sound discourses. The visual discourses represented in the Blackhill youth's skin colour, which marks them as members of the 'visible' minorities in Britain, appear to be a relatively fixed and stable signifier; the discourses of sound, however, represented in the Blackhill youth's patterns of language use - in their pronunciation and their lexical and grammatical choices, seem to be relatively unstable and to offer

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<sup>2</sup> Although see Rampton 1995 for a notable exception.

<sup>3</sup> See Rampton 1998 for a useful overview of the history of the term speech community within sociolinguistics. And see Alladina & Edwards 1991 for a practical application related to Britain.

multiple opportunities for voluntary and involuntary movement, variation and change. The extent to which these speculations, and the other possibilities outlined above, can be plausibly realised, forms the test on which the evaluation of the following thesis must be based.



## Chapter One: Theorising Culture, Race and Ethnicity

### 1.0. Introduction

The introduction to this thesis indicated that its theoretical base lay in the intellectual tradition which has come to be known as British Cultural Studies and whose most coherent and systematic formations have been those associated with the work of Stuart Hall and colleagues emanating initially from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). A particular focus is the anti-essentialist strand emerging from this tradition. The present chapter will expand on this perspective in two parts. The first part (Section A) will argue that some key post-1945 commentary and analysis on the Anglo-British cultural formation created, with respect to black and brown colonial and postcolonial subjects, discourses of 'ignoring' and 'belittling'. The second section (Section B) of the chapter offers a critical review of the CCCS literature concentrating in the first place on its acknowledged theoretical contribution to my thesis. At the same time it identifies certain omissions and limitations which the thesis will seek to address, and is particularly critical of the literature's paucity of empirical data and its over-emphatic focus on the spectacular as opposed to the ordinary and the everyday. But this section goes beyond just the work of the CCCS. It makes a link, too, with pre and post CCCS work on culture and society. In the end, though, it is the post-CCCS work which provides the most immediate influence on this thesis. The most potent link between these different phases is to be found in developments in the thinking and catalytic influence of Stuart Hall. Before proceeding, though, a point of clarification may be necessary. I do not intend my thesis to be read as a Youth Study in the Birmingham CCCS tradition; that is a study of youth as a hermetically sealed social category, characterised by resistance, acting in opposition to parental cultures even when reflecting them symbolically (Cohen 1980). My study is explicitly intended to be read as a study of a fraction of essentially British youth in everyday, unspectacular interaction with the cultural traditions and practices of their grandparents, parents and other elders. In such an approach these interactions are not assumed to be oppositional, antagonistic, representing acts of resistance, or reductive reflections of structural economic inequalities. Nor are they meant to be seen as indicative instances of the 'between



two cultures' tradition of analysis of ethnicity<sup>4</sup>. They are intended rather as an interrogation of some of the complex ways in which a section of youth and their parents, grandparents, and community elders negotiate *together* the interrelationships between residual, dominant and emergent cultural practices. All of this is presented from the perspectives of the youth themselves, mediated through their representations of their own patterns of everyday language use. As such my approach reiterates and develops an earlier critique (Harris, 1996), of the CCCS tendency to privilege the spectacular oppositional and resistance behaviours of the black male youth section of the Caribbean-descended population in Britain, implicitly decoupling them from the generation of elders and indeed virtually ignoring the practices and histories of these elders, particularly the females.

### **1.1. Section A: Discourses of 'ignoring' and 'belittling'.**

The empirical heart of this thesis is a series of what I will later call 'acts of representation' elicited from my research informants - a group of thirty adolescents of mainly South Asian descent (the Blackhill youth) in a class in a secondary school in the Western suburbs of London in the late 1990s. Throughout the thesis I am emphasising the importance I attach to these representations and the voices of the Blackhill youth. However, one of my strong points of critique of theorists in the British Cultural Studies tradition is how rarely they pay attention to the actual voices of black and brown social actors. This is a tendency which, I will shortly argue, has a lengthy lineage in Anglo-British commentary and analysis of culture. When the Blackhill youth offer their elicited cultural self-representations, as seen in Chapters Three to Seven, they do so not in a vacuum but within a widely influential tradition of cultural definition articulated on British soil. As the children and grandchildren of migrants, they have suffered as Cameron McCarthy has termed it,

through processes of what I wish to call alienated representation of the other; that is, practices of defining one's identity through the negation of the other - practices that Friedrich Nietzsche (1967) called "ressentiment" (McCarthy, 1998:xi).

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor (1981), Taylor & Hegarty (1985) and Anwar (1998) are representative examples of this genre. See also Ghuman (1997) and Ghuman (1998) for examples veering strongly towards psychological accounts of this kind of conceptualisation.

When they produced their self-representations of language use, ethnicity and culture in the late 1990s, the Blackhill youth were already experienced observers of a public discourse of Anglo-British cultural definition in which they and their friends and families had already been positioned alternately as ignored unconsidered objects, or objects for belittling unfavourable cultural contrast and comparison. In particular I am thinking of Anglo-British definitions of culture which are offered in contrast to the colonised Asian, African and Caribbean cultural ‘others’. I want to argue that in this tradition of thought the year 1945 constitutes an important and particularly apposite moment.

### **1.1.1. The importance of the 1945 moment**

Despite the dangers in periodising history according to specific year boundaries, I have identified 1945 as a useful point of departure for two reasons. Firstly, the end of World War Two marked a distinctive moment for black and brown people in the British Empire. Having, for the most part supported Britain during the war, they were no longer willing to return to pre-war subjugations and humiliations. In 1941, Churchill and Roosevelt had initiated The Atlantic Charter, a ringing declaration of the essential international requirement of democracy and human rights for all. In 1944 black and brown colonial subjects in London responded with a Charter for Coloured Peoples which they circulated worldwide demanding that the British state at least make good on its Atlantic Charter commitments (Ramdin, 1987). The following year the historic 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-African Congress was held in Manchester to articulate a direct demand for colonial freedom (Adi & Sherwood, 1995). This historical moment, it seems to me, represents a key transition point for the long established tradition in Britain of attempting to define Culture from the perspective of the tastes and practices of the white upper middle class English ‘gentleman’. This tradition, whose renowned and varied exponents included, for example, Matthew Arnold, F.R. Leavis, the Reithian BBC, and T.S.



Eliot<sup>5</sup>, had established a gendered and racialised stratification which placed black and brown colonised peoples as ethnic inferiors whose own tastes and practices could not be considered within the same cultural frame except for reasons of adverse comparison - a means by which Anglo-British ethnicity might seek to define itself. Even George Orwell, a compulsive writer on the nature of English ethnicity<sup>6</sup>, who placed himself on the political left found it difficult to escape this worldview,

Wintringham said that even in Spain some of the Russian delegates tended to treat the Spaniards as 'natives', and would no doubt do likewise in India. It's very hard not to, seeing that in practice the majority of Indians *are*<sup>7</sup> inferior to Europeans and one can't help feeling this and, after a while, acting accordingly (Orwell, 1942/1970a: 474 vol.2).

At bottom is the colonising project's fundamental disavowal of the notion of equality or even cultural commensurability. Two examples from Winston Churchill, one of the dominant totems of English cultural superiority of the era, illustrate the phenomenon. In 1931 he had expressed revulsion at the very idea that Gandhi should be met even on a quasi-equal basis by a key representative of the British Empire denouncing,

the nauseating and humiliating spectacle of this one-time Inner Temple lawyer, now seditious fakir, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceroy's palace there to negotiate and parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor (cited in Cross 1970:204).

Even in 1940 he declared 'I have not become the First Minister of the Crown in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire' (ibid. :232). At first

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<sup>5</sup> The deliberations of all these individuals on English culture are dominated by deep anxieties about class relations and the potential displacement of bourgeois 'high' culture by working class 'low' culture and by extension a reduction in the quality and worldwide influence of English culture. The argument is that these individuals completed their meditations on the nature of English culture at a time when Britain administered a worldwide empire whose black and brown people could travel only with documents marking them as British colonial subjects and as such must have been worthy of note in relation to these definitions of culture; it is not claimed that those named above are representatives of reactionary circles in England. On the contrary, in the context of their time they could be seen as, for the most part, cultural commentators with serious humane impulses. What is being suggested here is that with regard to the colonised peoples of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean they typically deployed discursive strategies of ignoring or belittling. For some exemplification see Arnold (1869) cited in Munns and Rajan 1995:26), Leavis (1943:143), Reith cited in Scannell and Cardiff, (1991: 7, 10) and in Briggs (1985:138), Eliot (1948: 13, 63. 91).

<sup>6</sup> Overwhelmingly Orwell's writing on the subject is labelled as being about the English, rather than the British, and would lead the reader to infer that he conflates the terms.

<sup>7</sup> Emphasis in the original.

sight this discussion might look like a diversion from the main line of argument in the thesis, but I want to emphasise, here, its importance. Throughout the thesis there will be a reiteration of the pivotal value of paying close attention to the voices of the Blackhill youth. So it is particularly necessary to show how little these voices have been attended to in the 20<sup>th</sup> century tradition of serious commentary on British culture. The contention is that there is much to be learned from their agentic self-representations, and that their routine omission constitutes a serious weakness in our understanding of culture and ethnicity in Britain.

It is in this context that I want to consider the lasting influence of the tone set above. I want to argue that in the post-1945 period, when significant numbers of black and brown colonial and ex-colonial subjects arrived in Britain as migrants, the ignoring and belittling tradition continued albeit in a modified and more benign form, even in the work of pioneers of the modern British Cultural Studies tradition. These figures, who placed themselves on the political left are Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and Richard Hoggart. Despite the sharp and specific critique of their stance which will be developed in the following section, in their different ways they have contributed to the perspectives underpinning this thesis; Williams with his complex meditations on the nature of culture, Thompson with his insistence on the vital importance of the agency of social actors, and Hoggart with his demonstration of how worthwhile it is to closely study the unspectacular cultural behaviour and tastes of ordinary people.

### **1.1.2. Continuing a tradition of ignoring and belittling?: Williams, Thompson and Hoggart**

It is worth noting here, Gilroy's observation that otherwise admirable and radical theorists of Anglo-British culture like Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson have a blind spot when it comes to analysing the relationship between Englishness as a cultural construct, and black and brown peoples who are British citizens or colonial subjects,

The intellectual seam in which English cultural studies has positioned itself - through innovative work in the fields of social history and literary criticism - can be indicted here ... a quiet cultural nationalism which pervades the work of some radical thinkers. This crypto-nationalism means that they are often disinclined to consider the cross catalytic or transverse dynamics of racial politics as a significant element in the formation and reproduction of English national identities' (Gilroy 1993a: 3-4).



Before going on to consider Williams, Thompson and Hoggart, I would like to insert a note on George Orwell who, although not customarily listed as a founding father of British Cultural Studies is generally regarded as a serious, perceptive and persistent analyst of Anglo-British culture.

### 1.1.3. George Orwell

I want to make a brief special mention of the non-fiction writing of George Orwell as represented in his collected essays, journalism and letters. Three aspects are of special interest. Firstly, Orwell wrote a number of detailed and closely argued analyses of what he took to be the particularities of English culture. Examples include *The English People* (Orwell 1943/44) and *The Lion and the Unicorn: socialism and the English genius. Part 1. England Your England and pt 2&3* (Orwell 1942/1970b). These were mainly tough-minded but affectionate patriotic pieces written during World War Two. They are tightly drawn portraits which are exclusive to their white English audience and intended to convey to them a warm glow of unity about who they are by defining what and who they are not.

A second relevant kind of writing provided by Orwell was his vehement, brutal and clear eyed writing about the basis of English imperial culture. One instance runs as follows,

What we always forget is that the overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat does not live in Britain, but in Asia and Africa ... One gets some idea of the real relationship of England and India when one reflects that the per capita annual income in England is something over £80, and in India about £7. It is quite common for an Indian coolie's leg to be thinner than the average Englishman's arm. And there is nothing racial in this, for well-fed members of the same races are of normal physique; it is due to simple starvation. This is the system we all live on and which we denounce when there seems to be no danger of its being altered (Orwell 1939a/1970).

The third kind of Orwell writing to note is his uneasy self-conscious excavation of his feelings of male English whiteness in colonial settings such as Burma. In these contexts he expresses his English cultural positioning and definition vis-a-vis the colonised subjects as a culture of command, of fear and of contempt. The following frank statement of racial superiority concerning some black Senegalese people he encountered in Morocco is worth quoting at length,

... a tall, very young Negro turned and caught my eye. But the look he gave me was not in the least the kind of look you might expect. Not hostile, not contemptuous, not sullen, not even inquisitive. It was the

shy, wide-eyed Negro look, which actually is a look of profound respect. This wretched boy ... actually has feelings of reverence before a white skin. He has been taught that the white race are his masters and he still believes it.

But there is one thought which every white man (and in this connexion it doesn't matter twopence if he calls himself a socialist) thinks when he sees a black army marching past. 'How much longer can we go on kidding these people? How long before they turn their guns in the other direction?

It was curious really. Every white man there has this thought stowed somewhere or other in his mind. I had it, so had the other onlookers ... It was a kind of secret which we all knew and were too clever to tell; only the Negroes didn't know it (Orwell, 1939b/1970).

The kind of English cultural writing of Orwell's, just cited, stands out from that of the other authors mentioned in this sketch. Orwell's writing does not ignore the colonised subject and for the most part does not try to represent the imposition of English economic and cultural colonialism as beneficial to the colonised. His writing also displays considerable reflexivity on these matters. It is, though, still true that his colonised subjects are not given a voice. They appear as bit players in his cultural imaginary. What we do not receive is a sense of how they might be experiencing colonialism as active agents.<sup>8</sup> In fact the parents and grandparents of the Blackhill youth, in common with other post-1945 Commonwealth or Empire migrants to the UK, experienced directly and explicitly the discourses of ignoring and belittling during their formative years in the colonies during Empire and immediately postcolonial days, followed by overt and often violent challenges to their right to be in the UK.<sup>9</sup>

I now want to extend the argument developed so far by turning to what might be called British Cultural Studies 'proper'. Although there are obvious dangers of oversimplification and overschematisation, close observers (for example, Nelson et al 1992, Turner 1992) tend to a consensus that British Cultural Studies owes its foundations and identification to the work of three key figures: Raymond

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<sup>8</sup> For an indication of how far prominent Indian Empire subjects like Gandhi and Nehru had to go to attain social recognition see Parekh (1989: 47). For Gandhi specifically see Dalton (ed.) (1996: 7-8). On Nehru specifically see Brown (1999: 25-26). For a Caribbean perspective on the struggle to assert intellectual, cultural and social parity see the accounts by C.L.R. James (1964: 31-34, 37), Eric Williams (1969: 23, 35), and George Lamming (1984: 15, 24-25, 29, 44, 63, 65-67, 83-84, 107)

<sup>9</sup> Note, for example, such historic events of resistance such as the Notting Hill Riots 1958, Southall 1979, New Cross Massacre Black Peoples Day of Action March 2nd 1981. It is worth noting that a key slogan during the Day of Action 2.3.81 was 'Come what may we're here to stay'. For brief narrative accounts see Ramdin (1987). For vivid contemporary accounts see relevant issues of Race Today Journal in the years in question.



Williams, Richard Hoggart and E.P. Thompson. The following section of the thesis intends to explore the place of Raymond Williams in the post-1945 attempt to reformulate, from an explicitly leftist position, the meaning of English/British culture; and will then add brief notes on Thompson and Hoggart.

#### **1.1.4. Raymond Williams - 'Strategic Silences'**

The phrase 'strategic silences' is taken from a passage of trenchant criticism of Williams' late (1983) remarks on 'race' and nation, made by Gilroy (1987). According to Gilroy, Williams' strategic silences on the configurations of what Gilroy terms the 'new racism' contributed 'directly to its strength and resilience' (ibid.:50). Gilroy goes so far as to equate Williams' delineation of authentic and inauthentic forms of national belonging with virtually identical formulations in the propositions of stalwart British right wing figures such as Enoch Powell<sup>10</sup> and Peregrine Worsthorne<sup>11</sup>. Gilroy is severe on Williams' failure to examine the historical relationship between racism and conceptualisations of Englishness/Britishness. As far as Gilroy can see,

The image Williams has chosen to convey his grasp of 'race' and nation, that of a resentful English working man, intimidated by the alterity of his alien neighbours is, as we shall see below, redolent of other aspects of modern Conservative racism and nationalism (ibid.: 51).

As mentioned earlier, Gilroy's specific critique relates only to comments made by Williams in late writing which does not purport to be his major work. However, what I want to examine here, more profoundly, is the stance of a writer like Williams, who spent a lifetime excavating the meaning of English/British culture, towards the subjugation of black and brown people in, and especially after, the British Empire. The period covered by Raymond Williams' major publications was a period of intense legislative activity in Britain surrounding the technical definition of who was entitled to call themselves British. The British Nationality Act of 1948, for instance, established 'the notion of a common British citizenship for all members of the empire and dominions' (Goulbourne, 1998: 51). Later, the 1971 Immigration Act sought to differentiate between different types of British citizen: British Dependent Territories citizen, a British National (Overseas), a

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<sup>10</sup> A leading Conservative Party politician who rose to notoriety in the 1960s and 1970s as the hero of right wing racist currents who admired him for his outspoken opposition to the presence and continuing inward migration of black and Asian people.

<sup>11</sup> Veteran journalist (b. 1923) who was once editor of the British national broadsheet newspaper The Sunday Telegraph.

British Overseas citizen, a British protected person and a British subject. Subsequently, the 1981 British Nationality Act 'reinforced the distinction between British Overseas subjects, who do not have rights of entry and residence in Britain, and United Kingdom citizens, who do have these rights' (ibid.: 54). All of these contortions had at their root a deeply felt sense of the incompatibility between Englishness/Britishness and being black or brown skinned. One would expect any serious analyst of the notion of English/British culture, and particularly one placing himself as an unambiguous socialist, to have grappled with this aspect of the question in a sustained and subtle way. Close scrutiny of a very full Raymond Williams bibliography (O'Connor, 1989) gives no hint that Williams addressed these issues in any significant way at all. This, in an era when questions of 'race', nation and belonging were being fiercely contested, both in discourse, and on the streets. From the 1930s to the 1970s movements for colonial freedom agitated and sometimes fought for political, social and cultural independence from Britain. Internally, major upheavals regularly occurred (e.g. The Notting Hill Riots 1958, The infamous 'racist' Smethwick Parliamentary election 1964, the entry to the UK of British passport holding East African Asians 1966-1972, The Enoch Powell 'River Tiber foaming with much blood' speech 1968, The Notting Hill Carnival riots 1976, the Southall Riots 1979, the black-led urban insurrections 1981). The most reliable statistical evidence available is revealing on the estimated size and growth of the Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic populations in Great Britain, 1951-91,

In 1951, the combined Caribbean and South Asian population of Great Britain amounted to less than 80,000; by 1961 it had reached 500,000 or about 1 per cent of the total population; by 1971 it was about 1,500,000 (3 per cent) and by 1981 it was 2,200,000 or 4.1 per cent. The 1991 Census figure puts the ethnic minority population at just over 3,000,000 or 5.5 per cent of the total population (Peach, 1996:8).

In short, then, my suggestion is that on the face of it, one of the leading figures in British Cultural Studies, during the peak years of his deliberations on British culture, has little or nothing to say on the place of black or brown people within that culture; in other words he participates in a 'discourse of ignoring'. Before settling for this judgement, it is worth taking a closer look at the foundations of this implication, starting with Williams' childhood.

Williams, perhaps unusually for an academic writer, refers explicitly and repeatedly to his own Welsh childhood and upbringing as a principal source for



his theoretical work on culture and society. One part of the general sensibility of that childhood was a routine racial mockery which was nevertheless unexceptional for the period. A childhood friend, Violet Trevett, recalls them being ‘... quite little, only 7 or so, with blackened faces and homemade toppers singing ‘we’re three little curly-headed coons’, and Jim [Williams] laughing like he couldn’t stop’ (Inglis, 1998: 41). On the other hand it is clear that Williams, as he grew up, was also attracted to a strong internationalist perspective. During the 1935 general election, Williams aged 14, determinedly heckled the Tory candidate, ‘We had prepared figures for what black labourers in South Africa earned and we got up and asked him how he could justify them’ (New Left Review, 1981: 31). At the same time in a public debate on imperialism when he was 16, Williams’ internationalism fully reflected the benevolent patronising tone of the era, ‘We must get at the native point of view because they do not always regard matters in the same light as we do. And they fail to see in what ways they are less civilised than we are ...’ (Inglis, 1988: 60). A peculiar omission given Williams’ insistent reference to his Welsh roots and the centrality of the Welsh working class and labour movement, is his failure to mention what would surely have been a remarkable and inspiring event in the late 1930s - Paul Robeson’s direct involvement with, and support for, the Welsh miners. In 1939 Robeson made a film *The Proud Valley* about the Welsh miners. Earlier, in 1938, together with 100 black people from Cardiff he had attended a meeting of 7,000 people in Mountain Ash commemorating 33 Welsh men who had died fighting for the International Brigade in Spain (Duberman, 1991). But even more significantly for the present discussion, Robeson saw his own role in Britain as not simply the provision of concerts for workers, but as pioneering and foundational in the development of working class culture here, ‘I gave up two years of my time then - way back in 1936-37- to help build workers’ theatres in Great Britain to help develop a working class culture in the full meaning of that term’ (Foner, 1978:14). I can find no reference in Williams’ work to these episodes even though Williams, as in the following passage, repeatedly gives pride of place to his Welsh roots as a core element in the development of his analysis of British cultural and social identity,

It happens that I grew up in an old frontier area, the Welsh border country, where for centuries there was bitter fighting and raiding and repression and discrimination, and where, within twenty miles of where I was born, there were in those turbulent centuries as many as four different everyday spoken languages. It is with this history in mind that I believe in the practical formation of social identity — it is now very

marked there — and know that necessarily it has to be lived. Not far away there are the Welsh mining valleys, into which in the nineteenth century there was massive and diverse immigration, but in which, after two generations, there were some of the most remarkably solid and mutually loyal communities of which we have record. These are the real grounds of hope. It is by working and living together, with some real place and common interest to identify with, and as free as may be from external ideological definitions, whether divisive or universalist, that real social identities are formed. What would have seemed impossible, at the most difficult stages, either in that border country or in those mining valleys, has indeed been achieved ... (Williams, 1983:196-197).

In fact on the question of ‘race’ in the construction of British cultural and social identity, Williams appears to have a persistent ‘blindspot’. A remarkable passage in his exhaustive interviews with Perry Anderson, Anthony Barnett and Francis Mulhern of *New Left Review* is typical. The *New Left Review* interrogators take him to task for his approving writing in relation to Thomas Carlyle when compared to his treatment of other writers,

In the case of Carlyle, you do criticize his later writings briefly, but you still conclude that his ‘purposes’ were ‘positive and ennobling’ and that overall ‘reverence’ was his essential quality ... In the case of Carlyle it seems incomprehensible that you could speak so unhesitatingly of ‘reverence’ as his essential quality. For Carlyle was an unbridled racist and imperialist ... Even as early as the 1840’s he was writing an essay on the ‘Nigger Question’. No other writer in the book produced a prose as frightful as Carlyle on these occasions, which you do not mention ... (NLR, 1981: 103-104).

To this onslaught Williams merely replies enigmatically,

Well, obviously there is truth in what you say. I would not want to claim that the balance is right. I don’t think it is ... If I were writing the book now, I don’t think I would withdraw my judgment of Carlyle, although I would make it with different reference points (ibid. 104-105).

What is the observer to make of this kind of evasive response to a direct accusation of giving comfort to a racist position on the analysis of British culture? A sympathetic, but ultimately unconvincing, response might be to argue that on these questions Williams was merely a British man of his time, (born 1921), and that it is anachronistic to expect anything else from him. What, though, of Gilroy’s accusation, mentioned earlier, of contemporary complicity with racially reactionary forces on the question of the legitimate cultural positioning of Britain’s black and brown migrants and their British-born children? An alternative explanation of the relevant passages from the work which Gilroy cites, (Williams, 1983), is difficult to construct. It could, for instance, be argued that such passages



and discussions are rare in Williams' work on cultural analysis. Perhaps, too, his reticence on these topics shows that he is being a good progressive in not usurping the right of people from the visible ethnic minorities to write themselves into the cultural account of Britain. However, this latter perspective may well be disturbed by other, intriguing, aspects of the available evidence.

In this regard it is clear that Stuart Hall, who later produced highly influential analyses of the place of black and brown former colonials in the formation of the cultural identity of Britain, was not only a key figure in the formation and development of what has been called 'The First New Left' (Kenny, 1995), but was also extremely close emotionally and intellectually to Raymond Williams. At Williams' funeral Hall is described variously as, 'at the centre of the occasion'; 'entirely sincere in [his] grief'; 'a lifelong associate of the dead man' (Inglis, 1998: 9-10). Hall, himself confirmed the accuracy of this picture in two principal ways. Firstly, in the closeness of his theoretical affinity with Williams' work,

my own work in cultural studies has so often followed, and in many instances been guided by, those key points which mark out Williams's own development ... apart from the influences which have naturally arisen in the course of working in closely cognate areas, there are several strategic points at which our careers have intersected. At very significant points in my own intellectual and political life, we have found ourselves shaping up to the same issues, or crises: and shaping up, if by no means in identical ways, then certainly from the same directions ... His dispassionate wisdom and support sustained me through some of the rougher passages of the early *New Left Review*. In the depths of the recoil from the manifest taming and political defeat of the 1964-66 Labour government we found ourselves in the same room again, working on the draft of the statement which eventually became the *May Day Manifesto* ... The fact is that in a broader, intellectual sense, I have often had the uncanny experience of beginning a line of thought or inquiry, only to find that, apparently coincidentally, he had not only been travelling much the same road but had given the issues a clearer, more forceful and clarifying formulation (Hall, 1989: 54-55).

Secondly, Hall is explicit in his affective identification with Williams,

Though I myself came from a very different background, to Oxford not Cambridge, and a decade later - beginning of the 1950s rather than the 1940s - those stark sentences carried enormous reverberations for me. I still feel a strong sympathy for that way in which the bright young lad from the 'periphery', coming to Oxbridge as the idealized pinnacle of an *intellectual* path, first experiences the actual *social* shock of discovering that Oxbridge is not only the apex of official English intellectual culture, but the cultural centre of the class system. I know at once what Williams means by remarking, in his usual understated way, that 'the class stamp of Trinity was not difficult to spot'; and also that inevitable path which led, in the search for some kind of refuge, to the discovery of the

Socialist Club - 'a home from home'. In the Oxford Socialist Club of a decade and a half later, there was also a moment when the Welsh, Scots and other 'colonials' took a look around the room and came to the startling conclusion that 'There is not an Englishman among us.' Williams arrived in Cambridge at the end of the 1930s as the bright 'scholarship boy' from the valleys. He records with feeling how that brash, radical certainty was constantly broken against the effortless assumption of superiority of the system: the sense, as he put it, that any critical statement he made could be immediately beached by a knowing reference to a comparative text he had not read; the sense of being 'continually found out in ignorance'; and being forced to look at himself, increasingly, with radical doubt. I still experience that indefinable sense of being absolutely placed and put down even today, whenever I cross the threshold between Oxford railway station and Broad Street, gateway to the 'dreaming spires'. In the light of these pages, I now know just what is meant by thinking of this as a 'colonial' experience (ibid:56-57).

As has already been intimated the present discussion is part of a sustained attempt to develop the central argument that, from the perspective of black and brown Britons, one of the canonical figures of British cultural analysis ignores their existence in his accounts of the constituent elements of that culture. Williams' approach, though, is not unusual but is rather a common reality in the analysis and representation of culture in Britain. Black and brown people have been consequently compelled, in their own discourses on their own cultural positionings in the belly of British culture, to speak within one or other of a circumscribed series of tropes - (i) 'we are the same as you' (ii) 'we are proudly different' (iii) 'our culture too exists' (iv) 'our culture is equivalent, or superior, to yours'. The value of this speculative argument is only strengthened by the above revelation from Stuart Hall, evidently one of the most highly respected, sure-footed academics in Britain, one who indeed has been a leader amongst academics, that even he in his late 50's felt 'absolutely placed and put down' by the Oxbridge milieu. How much more so might this apply to my adolescent research informants of South Asian descent, as they seek to place themselves culturally in the shadow of the whole edifice of the dominant power structures and ideologies of official and unofficial Britain?

The lacuna in Williams' work on culture is not restricted to matters of 'race'; it appears to be a feature, too, of his approach on questions of gender. Jardine and Swindells report on a direct challenge to Williams in the work of Bea Campbell,

Asked why 'women and the family do not make any entry at all' in *The Long Revolution*, Williams replied that he wished they had done so :  
'And I also wish I understood what prevented me from doing so,



because it wasn't that I was not thinking about the question' (Jardine and Swindells, 1989:125).

We see here, again, the limp evasion, the Delphic utterance. Yet when we return to the earlier question of the relationship between Williams and Stuart Hall it becomes obvious that there is much more; a deeper reality. While there is ample evidence of Williams' influence on Hall and his work there is no evidence that the influence was reciprocal. Hall was plainly a full participant in Marxist analyses of class and culture in Britain, but Williams, in the peak years (1950s -1980s) of black and brown migration and settlement in Britain as a fraction of the working class, did not reciprocate. In the cited Gilroy example above, not only does Williams completely fail to embrace this fraction, but is distinctly unsympathetic, while going out of his way to be sympathetic to its opponents. Even in the high profile May Day Manifesto 1968, (Williams, 1968), which was jointly edited by Williams, E.P. Thompson and Stuart Hall there is no mention even of the existence of this black and brown fraction of the British working class.

To sum up, then, we have what appears to be a repetition of the subordinate colonial periphery/dominant metropolitan centre syndrome identified earlier. The person from the periphery sees himself/herself as an active consumer and discussant in the world wide formation and dynamic developments of British cultural practices and mores. The person from the metropolitan centre ignores or belittles these efforts. Hall, the Rhodes scholar from the colonies participates fully in the debates on British culture with Williams and others on their terms, 'Having been prepared by the colonial education, I knew England from the inside' (Hall, 1992b: 490). Williams and others, important radical figures of the metropolitan centre, decline to engage with Hall and others of his origins on their distinctive perspectives, and simply behave as if such perspectives do not exist, or if they do, are of no importance with regard to any central questions; and we know that Hall was a participant elsewhere in vigorous debates about the symbiotic relationship between Britain and Caribbean and other migrants and newly ex-colonials concerning culture and identity (Walmsley, 1992).

In one of the earlier paragraphs in this part of the discussion I drew attention to the fact that Williams, Thompson and Hoggart are widely regarded as the founding fathers of British Cultural Studies. In these closing notes I want to very

briefly consider how the work of Thompson and Hoggart on British culture relates to the overall argument advanced in the present thesis.

#### 1.1.5. E.P. Thompson

The major work for which Thompson is best known, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (Thompson, 1968), as a work of relatively distant history (1780-1832), is beyond the scope of the present argument. It is worth noting, though, that in this foundational study which covers topics such as the liberty of ‘the free-born Englishman’, the part played by the Empire, the slaves, plantations, the East India Company and so on, is ignored. In strictly biographical terms Thompson is clearly identified with a campaigning anti-imperialism, ‘My political consciousness cut its teeth on the causes of Spain and of Indian independence ... and thence to “1956”, Suez, Cyprus, Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam, Chile’ (Thompson, 1978: iii). In addition he had, through his parents, who knew Gandhi and Nehru, a direct personal contact with the fight for Indian independence and with Indian culture (Soper, 1993; Chun, 1993). Thompson’s failure to seriously encompass the existence and agency of black and brown ex-colonials within his analyses of English working class culture is like Williams’ omissions mentioned earlier, susceptible to either a benign or a somewhat negative interpretation. The benign view might mirror the apology he offers in the Preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*,

Finally, a note of apology to Scottish and Welsh readers. I have neglected these histories, not out of chauvinism, but out of respect. It is because class is a cultural as much as an economic formation that I have been cautious as to generalizing beyond English experience. (I have considered the Irish, not in Ireland, but as immigrants to England) (Thompson, 1968: 13-14).

Even here one might ask why could he not, in his more contemporary work, have considered Caribbean people and Indians, at least as ‘immigrants to England’. A hint of the more negative interpretation can be seen in the following ironic observation which Stuart Hall felt compelled to make in 1959 in a letter to Thompson after the latter’s querying of Hall’s mood in an earlier meeting,

I am usually quiet not for any other reason than that I am usually quiet. Don’t for goodness sake think it’s because I’m disagreeing or bothered or depressed. The “happy West Indian” is a myth created by bourgeois imperialist writers to confuse socialists and the more advanced sections (Kenny, 1995:35).



Whatever the interpretation, the fact is that for Thompson, as for Williams, cultural analysis in Britain deploys strategic silences; acts of ignoring and belittling, with regard to the place of black and brown British subjects in the national polity.

#### **1.1.6. Hoggart**

*The Uses of Literacy*, Hoggart's seminal text in British Cultural Studies (Hoggart, 1958) is sharply clear about its objects, 'This book is about changes in working-class culture during the last thirty or forty years ...' (Hoggart, 1958:9). At the same time the extent of its interest is extremely tightly circumscribed,

The 'working-classes' described here live in districts such as Hunslet (Leeds), Ancoats (Manchester), Brightside and Attercliffe (Sheffield), and off the Hessle and Holderness Roads (Hull). My fullest experience is of those who live in the miles of smoking and huddled working-class houses in Leeds (ibid: 19).

To this extent Hoggart's work is insulated from the concerns of the present argument. However, it is important to remember the earlier demographic information showing that during the decade in which *The Uses of Literacy* was written and published (1951-1961) the Caribbean and South Asian population of Britain increased seven-fold to 500,000 - about 1 per cent of the total population; and that this population was overwhelmingly located in the working class areas of British towns and cities including Yorkshire addresses in towns such as Leeds and Bradford. Changes in working-class culture would surely include these changes. Hoggart, unlike Williams and Thompson, lays no claims to being a public Marxist or revolutionary in his analysis of culture; but follows them in the evident absence of 'race' as a significant factor in this analysis. Like Williams and Thompson he is also closely connected with Stuart Hall, whom he brought to Birmingham as his deputy in 1964 after he had founded the Centre for Contemporary Cultural studies there (Hall, 1992b). It is the work of Stuart Hall and a number of his colleagues during and after his time at the Birmingham CCCS, which stimulated the eventual theoretical framework of this thesis. The following section traces in outline the processes by which this came about.

## **1.2. Section B: The embodiment of an intellectual tradition – Stuart Hall in and out of the CCCS**

In this thesis it is possible, unusually, to delineate key elements of its theoretical location by following the trajectory of the intellectual journey of a single individual - Stuart Hall. We have already noted Hall's origins as a colonial scholarship boy at Oxford University in the 1950s; his intimate links with Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and Richard Hoggart; his central role in the formation of what has been called the first 'new left' in Britain (Chun 1993, Kenny 1995); and his pivotal role in the leadership of the Birmingham CCCS. What I want to show here is how successive shifts in his intellectual focus have contributed to the theoretical perspective of my thesis while displaying limitations, some of which the thesis itself tries to address. The span of Hall's thought, and the work he has encouraged from his students, colleagues and associates, has embraced amongst other things concerns with class, working class youth subcultures, feminism, race, and anti-essentialist postmodernist approaches to ethnicity and identity. I want to critically examine, briefly, each of these developments showing how they have contributed to my thesis and ways in which they exhibit limitations as far as the purposes of the thesis are concerned.

### **1.2.1. Class and the limits of class**

The early work of the Birmingham CCCS was guided by 'the underlying master-narrative of class' (Schwarz, 1994: 384). Stuart Hall, while concurring, is careful to emphasise that these were not the Centre's only concerns,

First of all, cultural studies was interested in class, in the beginning, in Hoggart's and Williams' sense, not in the classic marxist sense. Some of us were formed in critical relation to marxist traditions. We were interested in the class question but it was never the only question: for instance, you can see important work on subcultures which was done even in the early stages of the Centre ... theoretically, we actually went around the houses to avoid reductionist marxism (Hall, 1992b: 498-499).

A strand of the Centre's work, aside from the work on youth subcultures, made unvarnished reference to the fact and nature of working class culture in Britain (Clarke, Critcher et al, 1979). However, this was overwhelmed by 'the break into a complex Marxism' (Hall, 1980:25) and a preoccupation with structuralism and ideology, particularly, though by no means exclusively, focused on the work of Althusser and Gramsci (CCCS 1978, Clarke, Critcher et al 1979, Hall, Hobson et al 1980). I do not propose to dwell on this here although I will later refer to the



relevance which the centre attached to Gramsci's work in relation to the study of race. What I want to note is that the registering of the notion of distinctive working class culture(s) in Britain has an important part to play in my thesis. For many decades conventional discourses in Britain about black and brown migrants have been conducted within ethnically absolute boundaries which allow no room for class distinctions. Two brief examples will illustrate what is at stake. Firstly, the chronic debate and publicity about educational achievement in Britain is invariably projected in terms of the underachievement of ethnic minority groups, typically characterised as African-Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, in comparison to their 'white counterparts' (Gillborn & Gipps 1996). Surprise is expressed at the relatively higher achievement of those pupils depicted as Indian. What is missing is a social class analysis – a comparison between the achievement of working class white pupils and working class pupils of African-Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent. Similarly, no mention is made of the relatively middle class profile of a large number of 'Indian' migrants when they entered Britain. Even where some mention is made of social class this factor is under-researched and based on inadequate information as researchers openly concede (Gillborn & Mirza 2000). At the same time distinctions are not drawn, for instance, between black students of mainly working class Caribbean descent and those of mainly middle class West African descent. The point here is that the majority of black and brown migrants to Britain over the last 40 years have settled in the working class areas of British cities and as such have helped to reconstitute what the term working class culture must mean. References to my research informants' cultural practices, then, are not to some kind of essential South Asianness, but rather to their location as a part of a local fraction of a reformed urban working and lower middle class in Britain (see Appendix B). The penalties of failing to grapple with this argument can be seen in the confusion in the Labour Party and Government following the riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001, partly involving youths of South Asian descent. When they spoke in the British media with their Yorkshire and Lancashire voices, the Labour MP Ann Cryer<sup>12</sup>, and the Home Secretary David Blunkett called for solutions via their learning of English and putative tests of their knowledge of

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12 See, for example, her intervention in the House of Commons 17 July 2001 (Hansard:Column 8WH); and his attitude in the White Paper, on Immigration, Nationality and Citizenship, 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven', reported in the Guardian and the whole of the British press 8.2.02.

British culture. While the initial CCCS focus on working class culture is useful it did not deal adequately with the question of youth. However, another celebrated strand of its work on youth subcultures and class did and it is to this work that I now want to turn.

### **1.2.2. Youth subcultures and class: the muffling of ‘ordinary’ youth, black youth and girls**

The stimulus for this work came from Phil Cohen’s influential paper *Subcultural conflict and working-class community* published originally in 1972 at the CCCS (Cohen 1980). In Cohen’s formulation working class youth subcultures are symbolic, often transgressive effects of a decaying working class parent culture in transition. This idea is partly useful for the present thesis, in so far as I was interested in charting the nature of some aspects of the cultural relationships between the Blackhill youth and their parents and grandparents, whether decaying or not. Cohen is careful to argue that working class youth subcultures can be delinquent without being deviant and need not be either delinquent or deviant. In their construction of new ethnicities through their routine everyday cultural practices, it can be argued that many of my informants are doubly subcultural. They may be symbolically engaged in publicly transgressive processes vis-a-vis the parent culture of their local ethnic minority communities, as well as in relation to the dominant national culture and the local broad working class parent culture. The concept of the relationship between youth subcultures and class received extended attention in a CCCS publication (Hall & Jefferson, 1976). What is notable, though, is the absence of black and brown British youth as a significant factor in these pioneering analyses. They do not appear in any of the photographs illustrating the publication either on the cover or inside. The exception is a chapter by Hebdige (1976a) entitled *Reggae, Rastas & Rudies* which is nevertheless striking, within a section labelled *Ethnography*, for its etic quality and its hauteur,

... the black Jamaican remains suspended uneasily between two worlds neither of which commands a total commitment. Unable to repair this cultural and psychological breach, he tends to oscillate violently from one world to the other and ultimately he idealises both. Ultimately, indeed, he is exiled from Jamaica, from Africa, from Britain and from Brixton, and sacrifices his place in the real world to occupy an exalted position in some imaginative inner dimension where action dissolves into being, where movement is invalidated and difficult at the best of times, where solutions are religious rather than revolutionary (Hebdige, 1976a: 136-137).



The ethnographic approach to the study of working class youth culture at the CCCS yielded the highly influential SSRC-funded text *Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs* written by Paul Willis (Willis, 1977/1980). Although Willis avoids too explicit a tie between his work in this book and the CCCS's other youth subculture and class work, preferring to refer throughout to his informants' 'counter-school' culture, the group he describes clearly constitute a working class youth subcultural formation. Again, too, though, Willis' focus is on white working class boys and as such has obvious limitations as a point of reference for my own research. Another critique which can be developed argues that the working class youth subculture work emerging from the CCCS concentrated almost exclusively not only on white boys but also on the relatively spectacular cultural practices of this section of the population (Jefferson 1976, Hebdige 1976b, 1979, 1987, Clarke 1976, Corrigan 1976, Willis 1978). This critique of the male bias in working class youth subculture research was pointedly and spiritedly noted at the time (McRobbie & Garber 1976, McRobbie 1980/1991) and signalled a strong intervention from a feminist direction.

### 1.2.3. Feminism without 'race'

Stuart Hall has repeatedly drawn attention to the importance and troubled nature of the emergence of feminism in the CCCS's work (Hall 1980, 1992b, 1992c),

... it's not known generally how and where feminism first broke in. I use the metaphor deliberately: As the thief in the night, it broke in; interrupted, made an unseemly noise, seized the time, crapped on the table of cultural studies ... Talking about giving up power is a radically different experience from being silenced. That is another way of thinking, and another metaphor for theory: the way feminism broke, and broke into, cultural studies (Hall 1992c: 282-283).

Feminist women at the Centre formed themselves into a Women's Studies Group (WSG) arguing that they had been marginalised in the Centre's annual journal *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 'Ten issues, with only four articles concerning women ...' (Women's Studies Group, 1978: 7). These women expressed their intellectual and personal discomfort vividly,

Because women's lives are structured through their subordination, absent data about women cannot simply be filled in - you cannot just add girls' experience of school to boys' experience school, because the determinants of this experience are *different*, and have to be understood as such before even the question about girls' experience at school can be asked ... We found it extremely difficult to participate in CCCS groups and felt ... that it was a case of the masculine domination of both

intellectual work and the environment in which it was being carried out. Intellectually, our questions were still about 'absences'. Socially, but inseparable from our intellectual presence, as one woman put it at the time, we could either strive for a sort of 'de-sexualised' intellectual role, or retain 'femininity' either through keeping quiet, or in an uneasy combination with being 'one of the lads' (Women's Studies Group, 1978: 11-12).

Despite these difficulties the group managed to publish two significant empirically grounded research papers (Hobson 1978, McRobbie 1978). The feminist analysis of culture, produced by CCCS members, amongst others, influenced my approach to my thesis in a number of ways. Analytically I am primed to pay equally close attention to what *both* female and male informants say and do, with a constant dialectical movement between deferring gendered inferences and interpretations and the recognition that gendered performance and experience is one of the key organising and socialising structures in society. Methodologically, it has raised my level of sensitivity, as a man, in relation to some of the sensitivities involved in the use of the individual interview with female informants, as a research technique, and I will mention this in the next chapter. Secondly, my research focus has been equally on adolescent girls as on adolescent boys. A generation earlier I may well have been more tempted to concentrate on the spectacular cultural practices of the boys in relation to language, music and generally macho behaviour; whereas my thesis is determinedly interested in the everyday, ordinary, unspectacular cultural practices of subordinated ethnic groups, both female and male. This is a perspective of which even the CCCS working class youth subcultures group, despite my earlier criticisms, expresses some awareness,

The great majority of working-class youth never enters a tight or coherent sub-culture at all ... these [sub-cultures] may be less significant than what most young people do most of the time. The relation between the 'everyday life' and the 'sub-cultural life' of different sections of youth is an important question in its own right (Clarke, Hall et al 1976: 16).

Nevertheless, once again the early CCCS feminist intervention has limitations as far as the theoretical grounding of my thesis is concerned with respect to its total preoccupation with the concerns of white women and the silences and absences in its work with regard to black and brown British females. This was something which Carby (1982b), and Parmar (1982), though still arguing from a feminist perspective, soon made abundantly clear, and signalled the fact that satisfactory cultural analyses, even from those on the political left, could no longer ignore the



presence of black and brown Britons. As Stuart Hall put it, 'There were at least two interruptions in the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: The first around feminism, and the second around questions of race' (Hall, 1992c: 282).

#### 1.2.4. 'Race' and the constraints of essentialism

Hall makes it clear that as in the case of feminism the struggle to accord a significant and unconditional space for the analysis of 'race' in the CCCS's work was difficult, even bitter. In both cases a key ingredient was the appearance of protagonists for change who embodied the case they were expounding; on the one hand younger female scholars, on the other younger black and brown scholars. As Stuart Hall starkly puts it,

.... getting cultural studies to put on its own agenda the critical questions of race, the politics of race, the resistance to racism, the critical questions of cultural politics, was itself a profound theoretical struggle, a struggle of which *Policing the Crisis*, was curiously, the first and very late example. It represented a decisive turn in my own theoretical and intellectual work, as well as in that of the Centre. Again, it was only accomplished as the result of a long and sometimes bitter - certainly bitterly contested - internal struggle against a resounding but unconscious silence. A struggle which continued in what has since come to be known as .... one of the great seminal books of the Centre for Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back*. In actuality, Paul Gilroy and the group of people who produced the book found it extremely difficult to create the necessary theoretical and political space in the Centre in which to work on the project (Hall, 1992c:283).

Clearly, the foregrounding of questions of race (and ethnicity) at the CCCS represents a moment of key relevance for the theoretical focus of this thesis. Three texts are of seminal importance: *Policing the Crisis* (Hall, Critcher et al, 1978); *The Empire Strikes Back* (CCCS, 1982); and 'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack' (Gilroy, 1987). Here I will look in summary at why they were important and at the same time will comment briefly on some of their limitations as regards the purposes of the present thesis.

*Policing the Crisis* using, amongst other analytical instruments, Gramscian hegemony theory, showed exhaustively how mugging came to be socially constructed as a specifically *black* crime in Britain, and linked this with theories of a British capitalism and nation state in decline and crisis with 'race, crime and youth - condensed into the image of 'mugging' - [serving] as the articulator of the crisis, as its ideological conductor' (Hall, Critcher et al, 1978: viii). Hall later wrote at some length as to the relevance of Gramsci for the study of race and

ethnicity (Hall, 1986a). In his view Gramsci's insistence on historical specificity in social analysis is useful for the analysis of race in that it enables us to see that racism and forms of racial subordination do not constitute a homogeneous abstraction which operates in the same way everywhere in all conditions, just because we are agreed that they are evil phenomena. This means that they can operate differentially and unevenly in specific national, regional and local sites. In addition Hall argues that Gramsci offers a non-reductionist approach to the race/class question. He sees this as superior to longstanding extremes which attempt to privilege underlying class relationships over ethnically and racially differentiated ones or vice-versa. What follows from this is the possibility of seeing that a subordinated class group does not have to be homogeneous. In this way it becomes possible to analyse racial and ethnic subordination and difference within class subordination; and to do this on the basis of how racial, ethnic and class formations *actually* behave rather than on the basis of how they ideally and abstractly *should* behave. Further, according to Hall, Gramsci provides a number of analytic tools encouraging an examination of how the institutions and processes of civil society assist in the maintenance of racially structured social relations,

Schooling, cultural organizations, family and sexual life, the patterns and modes of civil association, churches and religions, communal or organizational forms, ethnically specific institutions, and many other such sites play an absolutely vital role in giving, sustaining and reproducing different societies in a racially structured form. In any Gramscian-inflected analysis, they would cease to be relegated to a superficial place in the analysis (Hall, 1986a: 438-439).

Following from this Gramsci accords a central importance to culture in the construction of a popular hegemony within a nation state - what he calls the 'national popular'. Hall adds, 'By culture, here, I mean the actual, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society' (ibid.: 439). In this way phenomena such as racism, including working class racism, can be seen to have serious ideological dimensions. Much of what Hall identifies as the utility of Gramscian ideas for the study of race and ethnicity runs with the grain of what my thesis is trying to achieve. The thesis is attempting to study a relatively subordinated racial, ethnic and class socio-cultural formation in its historical and local specificity and to do this by recognising the heterogeneity of the overall social formation from which it is drawn. The first part of this chapter devoted a considerable amount of space to trying to show in detail some of the processes by which the group I am studying are, as they offer self-



representations through speech and action, already constrained by hegemonic ideological constructions of their being which they cannot ignore. *Policing the Crisis* is thorough in demonstrating the minute workings involved in the societal construction of ideology in a specific case. However, one of its weaknesses is that its analysis is textual, rather than actively empirical, and as such is not interested in the voice of specific racially and ethnically subordinated individuals; assuming their victimhood rather than their agency. *Policing the Crisis* may well, as Stuart Hall states above, have represented a decisive turn in [his] own theoretical and intellectual work, but it is clear that many of the younger black and brown scholars were, in this respect ahead of him as they demonstrated in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

*The Empire Strikes Back* (1982), while continuing to locate the state's developing anti-black repressive policies, practices and ideologies in 'the organic crisis of British capitalism', substantially broadened the scope of discussions on race within the CCCS. Apart from analyses of racism, there were extended treatments of the negative characterisations of black families in British society and of the general 'pathologising' of black people (Lawrence, 1982/1992); of the rising implacable confrontation between black youth and the police (Gilroy, 1982/1992); and of the wholesale and consistent problematising of black children in connection with schooling (Carby, 1982a/1992). Carby also opened up a debate based specifically on a black (and Asian) woman's perspective on feminism (Carby, 1982b/1992) in opposition to an inattentive and uncomprehending white feminism; and Parmar (1982/1992) writes as an Asian woman on the ignored struggles, labour and otherwise, of Asian women. Both Carby and Parmar draw attention to the damaging nature of the kinds of discourses of 'ignoring' and 'belittling', related to black and Asian women, which I have argued are an important dimension for an understanding of the perspectives of my research informants. Carby puts it like this,

An unquestioned common-sense racism constructs Asian girls and women as having absolutely no freedom, whereas English girls are thought to be in a more 'liberated' society and culture ... The media's 'horror stories' about Asian girls and arranged marriages bear little relation to their experience. The 'feminist' version of this ideology presents Asian women as being in need of liberation, not in terms of their own herstory and needs, but *into* the 'progressive' social mores and customs of the metropolitan West. The actual struggles that Asian women are involved in are ignored in favour of applying theories from the point of view of a more 'advanced', more 'progressive' outside observer. ... it is very easy for this ideology to be taken up and used by

the state in furtherance of their racist and sexist practices. The way in which the issue of arranged marriages has been used by the government to legitimate increased restrictions on immigration from the sub-continent is one example of this process (Carby, 1982b/1992: 216).

The 'Asian' girls in my research cannot escape these antecedents and often seem to be talking against what could be called the absent presence of such discourses. It is, though, a weakness in *The Empire Strikes Back*, that it is imbalanced in its focus on black people of Caribbean rather than Asian descent as its writers are only too aware '... [We] have struck an inadequate balance between the two black communities ... Only one of us has roots in the Indian subcontinent whereas four are of Afro-Caribbean origin' (ibid.: 7).

At the same time, elsewhere in the book, Gilroy takes up again the question of 'race' and class where Hall et al. had left it in *Policing the Crisis*. He tries to carve out for black people a specifically racially coded version of class struggle, with Rastafarianism symbolically to the fore. *The Empire Strikes Back*, clearly reflected the change of tone in the CCCS evinced by the forceful entry of 'race' onto the stage. The arguments in the book convey a greater sense of engagement and passion than hitherto in CCCS work, undoubtedly due to the increased involvement of black scholars with a felt personal stake in their scholarship. There is also a strong and integral historical dimension to the work. This is especially marked in the work of Lawrence (1982/1992). It is also Lawrence who gives detailed expression to these scholars' antagonism to what they call the 'Sociology of Race Relations' tradition in Britain. 'After a year spent surveying the field of 'race relations' we were appalled by the myopia and parochialism which characterize this "discipline"' (Gilroy, 1981: 7). Lawrence accused race and ethnic relations sociology of aiding and abetting racist ideologies in Britain,

In the present situation, where 'race' has come to signify the crisis; where popular racist ideologies underpin and legitimate the institutionalized racist practices of the state; and where 'induced repatriation' is placed on the political agenda as the 'British solution to the "race-relations" problem', it becomes necessary to challenge the orthodoxies of 'race/ethnic relations' sociology (Lawrence 1982/1992: 96-97).



According to Lawrence, one of the most pernicious aspects of these orthodoxies was the pathologising of black families as a way of constructing them as responsible for their own oppression. Lawrence focused his attack on five texts: Rex & Tomlinson (1979), Khan (1979), Pryce (1979), Cashmore (1979), and Foner (1979). He alleged that the sociologists of race relations divided both black and Asian communities along generational lines in order to ignore the continuity, across the generations, of their active opposition to colonialism and racism. He argued that these sociologists strayed into pseudo-psychology to construct supposedly disabling conditions, in these communities, of 'identity crisis', 'culture conflict' as well as 'intergenerational conflict'. Lawrence further claimed that race relations sociology was led and dominated by white sociologists who were culpably unreflexive about the question of their relationship to the black people they studied; a relationship which racism inevitably structured. He contended that these sociologists ignored young Asian women, except when they wanted to portray them as problems; and ignored young women of Caribbean descent since they were were 'besotted' with depicting the conflicts supposedly initiated by young males of Caribbean descent, with the police and inside their schools and families. Lawrence concluded,

Whenever policies are being formulated to *deal* with black people and black youth, the 'race-relations' and 'ethnicity studies' sociologists are there in the background, where they are not actually there in person (Lawrence, 1982/1992: 135).

Another attack on the sociology of race relations was mounted by Bourne and Sivanandan (1980), who, though more sympathetic to Rex, agreed that race relations sociologists functioned to locate problems consequent on racial oppression in the persons of black and Asian people themselves rather than in the power structures of British society. Bourne and Sivanandan, too, had their textual targets - for example Banton 1959, Patterson 1963, and Deakin et al 1970 - but appeared to be equally concerned with the role of institutions in fostering this kind of sociology. A particular enemy was the earlier incarnation of the Institute of Race Relations which, it was pointed out, had its origins within the Royal Institute of International Affairs in colonial days back in 1952 with a brief to study 'other races' in the Empire abroad; by implication it was still engaged in the same enterprise except that these 'other races' were now domiciled in Britain in significant numbers. Other institutions marked as embodying this kind of sociology included the SSRC Unit on Ethnic Relations at Bristol University under

Michael Banton and later at Aston University under John Rex. Although Rex is given more credit than the others, because, it seems, he makes at least some consistently serious attempts to produce an analysis of race incorporating a class dimension; an analysis which attempted to influence policymakers to find a benign place for blacks and Asians within the system. Nevertheless, the key characteristics of the sociology of race relations were described thus,

There is a dangerous sociology abroad - a sociology of race relations, that is - and dangerous to the black cause that it seeks to espouse. It emanates from the new set-up of the SSRC (Social Science Research Council) ethnic unit at Aston (University) under John Rex. It purports to ameliorate the condition of the black minorities, and the black young in particular, by appeals to enlightened capitalism. And, in that, it could be allowed to pass the blacks by, except that at a time of concerted and massive attack on black people by the state, to hold the centre ground against academics who abstract and distort black experience (however unwittingly) becomes vitally important (Bourne & Sivanandan, 1980: 331).

It is a central concern of my research not to distort my informants' expressed experience, nor to replace it with my own structured abstractions. One weakness of the critics, within and without the CCCS, of the sociology of race relations tradition, is that they mount, in effect, a textual critique of their opponents' empirical research; this rather than counterposing empirical work of their own using the voices and perspectives of subordinated black and Asian people in Britain to challenge the findings of their sociology of race relations opponents.

Before leaving altogether the debates on race generated by the CCCS I want to mention one other book emerging from that tradition - Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987/1992) which provided an expansion and development of a number of themes elucidated in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Firstly, and importantly Gilroy insists on recovering agency and historical perspective in any analysis of 'race', in order to combat the definition of blacks, 'as forever victims, objects rather than subjects, beings that feel yet lack the ability to think, and remain incapable of considered behaviour in an active mode' (Gilroy, 1987/1992: 11). He rightly deprecates the fact that, 'This capacity to evacuate any historical dimension to black life remains a fundamental achievement of racist ideologies in this country' (ibid:11). Gilroy also tries to further develop a theoretical position which accords the category 'race' a key role for black people as a basis for action, although undoubtedly in his view it is also intertwined with class and other factors in complex ways. He attempts this



formulation in opposition to, mainly Marxist, analyses which propose that all other factors including 'race' are subsumed under the supreme organising principle of class structure (ibid: 27). In the end Gilroy finds a way forward by linking 'race' with social movement theory (ibid: 223). A powerful section of the book, perhaps for the first time within British Cultural Studies, sees a cultural theorist writing authoritatively with evident and fully engaged knowledge of an aspect of 'race' and culture. In it Gilroy marshals a detailed analysis of how black music, mainly reggae and soul, together with Rastafarian ideology and practice, provides a basis for the,

black expressive cultures which spring up at the intersection of 'race' and class, providing a space in which the competing claims of ethnic particularity and universal humanity can be temporarily settled (ibid: 154).

The impact of these expressive cultures on the general white British population, reminds us that, 'racial subordination is not the sole factor shaping the choices and actions of Britain's black settlers and their British-born children' (ibid: 153).

Gilroy is adept at using memorable phraseology to encapsulate highly useful theoretical frameworks and this book is permeated by significant examples such as 'black expressive cultures', 'ethnic absolutism' and 'diaspora'. Despite the fact that Gilroy's work is limited to textual analysis rather than empirical research, the development of these terminologies signalled a significant turn in the study and analysis of race and ethnicity in Britain. Nevertheless, these advances were themselves constrained by a continuing fundamentally essentialist approach to these questions.

#### **1.2.5. The anti-essentialist turn**

I have already outlined in the introduction to the thesis some of its key theoretical inspirations and I do not intend to rehearse this discussion here. I identified the theoretical focus as being anti-essentialist in relation to ethnicity, seeking to operationalise a 'new ethnicities' framework. I stated that important analytic concepts emerging from this position included the concepts of diaspora and hybridity which were expected to be particularly useful material sources of help in the process of data analysis and interpretation. This theoretical formation was especially linked with writing by Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer. What I want to comment on now, briefly, is the shift which these theoretical

moves appear to represent in Stuart Hall's thinking. To begin with the most obvious change of focus is from the constant and explicit discussion of culture and society in marxist terms to a preoccupation with questions of ethnicity and identity, apparently outside this frame. This movement clearly took place after Hall's time at the CCCS and during his time at the Open University; that is some time after 1979, and most noticeably from the mid-1980s onwards. A sceptical observer claims to be able to date the end of the relationship between cultural studies and marxism in Hall's thinking,

We can date the end of the affair ... In the initial publicity for his keynote address to the April 1990 University of Illinois conference on 'Cultural Studies Now and in the Future', Stuart Hall was billed as speaking on 'The marxist element in cultural studies'. In the event, the final printed version of the programme had him addressing 'Cultural Studies and its theoretical legacies'. The published form of the paper carries the same title and is concerned to elaborate the proposition that: 'There never was a prior moment when cultural studies and marxism represented a perfect theoretical fit' (Hall, 1992: 279). Born in the aftermath of the student radicalism of 1968, marxist cultural studies died with the collapse of the Soviet empire (Sparks, 1996: 72).

Hall, himself claims that this process began at the CCCS and acted to decentre and dislocate its work and attributes this to ' "the linguistic turn": the discovery of discursivity, of textuality' (Hall, 1992c: 283). He argues that the CCCS made theoretical advances through successive encounters with structuralism, semiotics and poststructuralism. He attributes to these excursions, openings to,

... the recognition of the heterogeneity, of the multiplicity, of meanings, of the struggle to close arbitrarily the infinite semiosis beyond meaning; the acknowledgement of textuality and cultural power, of representation itself, as a site of power and regulation; of the symbolic as a source of identity (ibid.: 283).

One curious aspect of Hall's approach in the mid-1980s was that while he was prepared to state that he had learned much from the work of Foucault, he was much more circumspect about acknowledging the influence of postmodernist ideas and perspectives on his thought. At times his disavowal was sharp and explicit,

... I think Lyotard, and Baudrillard in his celebratory mode, really have gone right through the sound barrier. They are involved, not simply in identifying new trends and tendencies, new cultural configurations, but in learning to love them ... So we are caught between two unacceptable choices: Habermas's defensive position in relation to the old



Enlightenment project and Lyotard's Euro-centred celebration of the postmodern collapse ... I don't know that with 'postmodernism' we are dealing with something totally and fundamentally different from that break at the turn of the century ... There are ... now some very perplexing features to contemporary culture that certainly tend to outrun the critical and theoretical concepts generated in the early modernist period. We have, in that sense, to constantly update our theories and to be dealing with new experiences. I also accept that these changes may constitute new subject-positions and social identities for people. But I don't think there is any such absolutely novel and unified thing as *the* postmodern condition. It's another version of that historical amnesia characteristic of American culture - the tyranny of the New (Hall, 1986b: 131-133).

Yet in perhaps his most comprehensive theoretical statement on the foundations of a position which allows discussion of *identities* and *ethnicities*, Hall is unambiguous about the compatibilities with classic postmodern philosophical formulations (Hall, 1992a)<sup>13</sup>. In this text he claims to be advancing arguments 'sympathetic to the claim that modern identities are being 'decentred'; that is dislocated or fragmented' (ibid.: 274). Hall sets out three different conceptions of identity - the Enlightenment subject; the sociological subject; and the post-modern subject, and it is clear that it is the latter formulation which is closest to his own evolved position,

This [the new more open-ended, variable and problematic process of identification] produces the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. 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 (Hall, 1987). It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. 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 (see Hall, 1990). The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with - at least temporarily (Hall 1992a: 277).

In other places in the chapter, Hall reiterates positions on hybridity, diaspora, globalisation and nations as imagined communities which have been theoretically

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<sup>13</sup>Unusually for such a formidable and influential theorist, Stuart Hall has produced no monograph encapsulating his arguments and positions. His oeuvre is scattered across a multitude of interviews, discussions, conference speeches and papers as well as co-authored book chapters. The text cited here is a major contribution to a text book for an Open University course *Understanding Modern Societies*.

influential in informing the research in this thesis. In general, despite his reservations about the origins of some of his work on identities and ethnicities in the theorisations of postmodernist philosophers such as Lyotard, without these insights on ethnicities and identities it would not have been possible for me to theoretically ground my thoughts and observations concerning the representations offered by the adolescents who are my research informants. Before closing this chapter I want to glance at some other empirical research studies of 'visible' ethnic minority youth in Britain to see if they share these theoretical sympathies.

Back (1996), is straightforward about its intellectual antecedents and is the only text to unambiguously claim the phrase 'new ethnicities'. It makes clear its indebtedness to Cultural Studies in general and the work of Hall, Gilroy and Mercer in particular in attempting to construct a measured countering of cultural absolutism and essentialism. The sociolinguistic study produced by Rampton (1995) makes extensive reference to the influence of Gilroy's work on ethnic absolutism and the cultural inadequacy of unitary notions of Britishness. Gillespie (1995) and Baumann (1996) are studies focused on the same geographical location as my own. Gillespie refers heavily to Hall's theoretical work which leads to the pluralisation of terms like identity and ethnicity. She also makes it clear that she finds the thinking of Mercer and Gilroy helpful as she incorporates concepts such as diaspora and hybridity into the interpretive frame of her research. Baumann on the other hand makes no reference to Hall's work and while referring briefly to Gilroy is markedly less influenced by these aspects of theory than Gillespie. Alexander (1996) and Alexander (2000), however, are studies of British youth of African Caribbean and South Asian descent respectively which *do* draw substantially on these traditions of theory. The former boasts a foreword by Stuart Hall confirming this, and the latter states its intention to 'challenge monodimensional, essentialist accounts of Asian youth identities' (Alexander 2000: 23). In stark contrast Anwar (1998) and Bhatti (1999) are two studies of South Asian-descended young people in Britain which manage to avoid any reference to the work of Hall, Gilroy and others, on the potential expansion of the scope of the terms ethnicity and identity. Sewell (1997) in his study of boys of African Caribbean descent does mention this work but is hesitant and in the end not entirely clear as to the extent to which he embraces its theoretical relevance to his concerns. Finally, I want to mention Hewitt (1986) and Hewitt (1992), two texts which have had a major influence on my awareness of the theoretical possibilities available to me, long before I embarked on the research study



described in this thesis. Hewitt (1986) although produced before the theoretical advances outlined in the latter part of this chapter, foreshadowed them. Its foregrounding of inter-ethnic friendship groups disrupted the hitherto customary portrayal of black and white adolescents as monolithic and antagonistic essential ethnic formations. Its use of a linguistic frame was liberating in the possibilities it opened up for seeing ethnicity as a syncretic and shifting category amongst British youth. Hewitt (1992) continued to show how the study of patterns of language use could assist the development of theory in this area and in this respect I have found his proposition of the term *polyculture* rather than multicultural and the idea of *local multiethnic vernaculars* especially helpful and suggestive.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have tried to do two main things. Firstly, my emphasis on the importance to the thesis of my informants' representations has driven me to try to establish the discursive space which frames them. To this end I have devoted a considerable part of the chapter to showing why what I have called discourses of 'ignoring' and 'belittling' originating in colonial relationships are particularly salient. I have demonstrated how putatively serious and radical cultural analysts in the British tradition including Orwell, Williams, Thompson and Hoggart have continued the tendency to ignore or belittle. This is not to say that there is not much to be valued in their work as later chapters will indicate. Secondly, I have attempted to show what I have gained from the theoretical trajectory personified by Stuart Hall before, during and after the days of the CCCS, as well as identifying some particular weaknesses and limitations in this work. My current theoretical understanding is, though, in the final analysis, assisted by the idea that,

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in a mere "recovery" of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past ... Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental "law of history" (Hall, 1996: 212-213).

The next chapter represents an attempt to explore the problems and opportunities involved in realising this vision empirically.

## Chapter Two: Hearing Voices, Reading Representations - Problems of Process and Method

### 2.0. Introduction

It has already been established in the Introduction and in Chapter One, that the thesis is concerned to ensure that the voices and representations of the Blackhill youth are central. Such an aim immediately raises the question of which research methods are most likely to be enabling in this respect, and what the problems might be in enacting them. This chapter first briefly reviews the methodological approaches adopted by other writers researching 'visible' ethnic minority youth in Britain over the past two decades or so. It then goes on to describe the site where the research fieldwork for the present study took place, and the unfolding research process, which was based on what I call four 'Acts of Representation' by the Blackhill youth. These were a language survey questionnaire, written accounts, individual conversational interviews, and self-made audio tapes. The chapter explores the opportunities, problems and limitations connected with the procedures used to elicit the data collected through these representational acts. Finally, the chapter examines the utility of a number of constructs by theorists of culture and social life, in assisting my research to both centralise the individual voices and representations of the Blackhill youth and at the same time to offer broader structured sociological interpretations and analyses.

### 2.1 Review of methodological approaches in some previous studies

We have already seen in the previous chapter the extent to which the Birmingham Centre for CCS while devoting considerable effort to the theorisation of contemporary youth gave limited attention to related empirical studies and even then none at all to empirical studies in which 'visible' ethnic minority youth were central.<sup>14</sup> As Back puts it, 'There is little in the cultural studies literature that attempts to describe the cultural dynamics of new ethnicities at the level of everyday life' (Back 1996: 4). I will now turn to a brief review of the methodological approaches taken by some of the (non CCCS) key empirical studies which *have* been undertaken in this field.

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<sup>14</sup> Although see Jones (1988) for an exception.



My principal aim will be to show that the majority of these studies rest their methodological claims on ethnographic warrants. I will argue that some are more convincing in this endeavour than others, but in particular I will be seeking to draw a distinction between these approaches and my own which does not constitute an ethnography but *will*, perhaps, claim to develop an ethnographic perspective. Bloome & Green (1996) draw a useful tripartite distinction between a) 'doing ethnography', b) 'adopting an ethnographic perspective' and c) 'using ethnographic tools'. I will expand on these distinctions later and show their relevance to my research.

This thesis takes up the challenge to identify just one of the localised 'cultures of hybridity' in Britain posited by Hall above; to describe it, and to demonstrate an approach to this task which adds to existing knowledge. Others, (for example, Hewitt 1986, Rampton 1995, Back 1996, Gillespie 1995, Baumann 1996, Alexander 1996, 2000, Bhatti 1999), who have pursued the same ambition have done so based on strong ethnographic claims. This approach, which emphasises prolonged contact and intimacy with selected informants who have been closely observed, attempts to offer, in textual form, direct, naturalistic, emic representations of the informants' lived realities.

Work by Hewitt in the early 1980s which culminated in the publication of the highly influential Hewitt (1986) was the first empirical text related to 'visible' ethnic minority youth to excite my interest and indeed to act as an inspiration both theoretically and methodologically. The work was all the more remarkable for its skilful use of empirical evidence to subvert the dominant noise from the clash between the racist discourses of the time and the strident racist/anti-racist binaries of the financially powerful municipal anti-racist movement so perceptively critiqued by Macdonald et al (1989) and Gilroy (1992). Hewitt provided evidence that not only were inter-ethnic black and white friendship groups a reality on the ground, but also that patterns of language use were symbolic sites of the signification of these friendships; especially original was his demonstration of white adolescent use of creole language and passive knowledge of this language form by many who were not active users. I was also struck by the manner in which Hewitt elicited much of his naturally occurring speech data from radio microphones worn by thirty adolescents in three schools during their lunch breaks.



He also used the same technique to obtain speech data in youth clubs and the street. Hewitt collected interview data from repeated interviews with an extensive group of informants over a period of eighteen months to two years. His prolonged period of participant observation which yielded this data was facilitated by his research-motivated activities as a part-time youth worker in four youth clubs in South London. Hewitt's work constituted a substantial ethnography which, however, did not concern itself with youth of South Asian descent; nor did a relatively neglected ethnographic study, Jones' (1988) investigation of the effects of Jamaican popular culture on white youth in Birmingham. The study conducted by Back (1996) shared many of the same characteristics as Hewitt's research. It covered overlapping geographical areas, was interested in black and white inter-ethnic friendship groups and his research persona for his ethnographic participant observation was also as a youth worker. In addition he was also a resident in the area. He strengthens his ethnographic claim further by indicating that much of his taped interview data was recorded in his own flat or in the young people's homes. Back does not claim to have used radio microphone techniques to collect speech data. He does, however, provide vivid verbatim accounts of naturally occurring music/sound system performances which partly, linguistically and otherwise, include the participation in the construction of 'new ethnicities' by young people of South Asian descent, although the principal focus of his work is young black people of Caribbean descent and young white people of English descent. One researcher who does make adolescents of South Asian descent her central focus is Gillespie (1995) who is concerned with the ethnography of media audiences. Gillespie's methodological approach is noteworthy for the strength of its ethnographic warrant. She reports that she lived and/or worked in the research area for more than 10 years before, during and after her main period of fieldwork from 1989-1991. She says that she lived with young adults of Punjabi family background, that she acquired serviceable usage of conversational Punjabi (sic) and was an active and valued participant in community activities such as legal and civic matters as well as trips, birthday parties and weddings and religiously inflected festivals like Diwali. She says that she was a welcome visitor in very many homes and in other 'private' spaces such as a sixth form common room. She is also very severe with those whom she feels claim to have produced ethnography without fulfilling the stringent requirements involved. Her research persona for much of the time, and some of her collected data were related to her activities as a local teacher. Apart from her data collection being based on taped interviews, small group discussions and what she calls 'spontaneous'



unselfconscious talk in natural settings, Gillespie accords considerable importance to a major 90 question questionnaire survey of 335 Southall youth aged 12-18 which she carried out with Gerd Baumann. Baumann's own ethnographic study in the same area which is incidentally the area in which most of my own informants lived, made a much weaker ethnographic claim and had a broader focus in that it was focused on young Southallians drawn from a number of ethnic groups. Several studies of 'visible' ethnic minority youth, claiming to be ethnographic, have schools as their primary focus (Mac an Ghail 1988, Mirza 1992, Sewell 1997, Anwar 1998, Bhatti 1999). Mac an Ghail provides the strongest and Anwar the weakest evidence that they are ethnographic in the classic sense. In all these studies the methodological procedures do not pretend to be innovative and the attention to youth is diluted by the substantial concentration on eliciting the perspectives of teachers, parents and other adults. As these studies are concerned to establish their chosen ethnic groups as strongly bounded they are not troubled by the methodological problems involved in developing studies within a 'new ethnicities' framework. Shain (2003) is a qualitative research study offering conclusions based on semi-structured interviews which resonate with strong reality claims about the existence of strongly bounded groups of what she calls 'Asian girls'.

Hall (2002) constitutes an ethnographic study of young Sikh people in Leeds which has some affinities with my own research in two ways. Firstly, it claims that its perspective concerns 'British Sikh lives in translation (ibid.:15). Secondly, it contains a short chapter entitled 'The Politics of Language Recognition', parts of which elicit the views of informants on their patterns of language. On the other hand, Hall like others mentioned earlier depicts her informants as 'living between two worlds' (ibid.: 16). Alexander (1996: 18) uses a network approach to produce a 'street-level account of the creation and manipulation of identity by a group of Black British youths'. In Alexander (2000), she reports on a substantial ethnography of a group of young people of South Asian (Bangladeshi) descent, founded on her lengthy and continuing activity as a youth worker in a youth centre. Alexander argues that she made every effort to produce a 'dialogic' ethnography in which the young people's voices and responses are prominent.

Whereas all the studies reviewed so far have been realised as published books, it is also worth mentioning a cluster of unpublished studies some with stronger

ethnographic claims than others, which have been carried out by researchers who also make some claim to be relative ethnic insiders. The studies concerned are by Raj, (1997), Huq (1999), Desai (2000), Pang (1999) Dudrah (2001) and Lakhani (2000). Raj (1997) claims to be 'an ethnography of Hindu Punjabis in London'. Huq (1999) writes about British musical youth culture paying particularly close attention to Asian youth. She acknowledges an intellectual indebtedness to the work of the Birmingham CCCS while criticising it for its lack of an empirical emphasis. She describes her own research as using 'mixed methodologies', including what she calls 'qualitative ethnography'. Dudrah (2001) also acknowledges the work of the CCCS but also criticises it because it 'lacks a substantive engagement with lived identities in the actual sense' (ibid.: 47). Dudrah claims that the work is a piece of qualitative research, including 19 hours of taped extended interview data, on British South Asian Identities and the popular cultures associated with British Bhangra, Bollywood films and Zee TV. Lakhani (2000) researching 'Young British Asians and the Politics of Ethnicity' references the work of Hall, Gilroy and Bhabha without clearly claiming an allegiance to it. This may be because she is writing from within the relatively recent disciplinary tradition of Cultural Geography. She makes a strong claim to be an ethnic insider in relation to her research informants as the basis for describing her study variously as ethnography or autoethnography. From this position she criticises other ethnographies of British visible minority ethnicities for not being holistic enough in their scope, adding that 'few studies have so far bridged the gap between empirical reductionism and theoretical abstraction' (ibid.: 18). Desai (2000) in his 'ethnographic study of a group of Bangladeshi young men in London', makes, as I do, emphatic intellectual acknowledgment to the influence of empirical studies by Hewitt, Back, Jones, Gillespie (see above) and Rampton (see below). Of all the unpublished studies I have been discussing in the present paragraph, Pang's (1999) study of the 'cultural identities of second generation British-Chinese' [youth in London] makes the strongest claim to the same anti-essentialist theoretical inspiration drawn from the work of Gilroy, Hall and Back as my own study, and states that 'the concept of "new ethnicities" is important to the current study' (ibid.: 27). Pang also declares an interest in the notion of 'disaporic culture' which informs my own research throughout but receives a particular focus in Chapter 6. Pang's work claims to contain substantial



ethnographic elements while disclaiming the status of being a 'full blown ethnography'<sup>15</sup>.

I will end this section by referring to two studies which take an unambiguously sociolinguistic approach. Sebba's study (1993) of the use of creole by black young people of Caribbean descent in London does not pretend to be ethnographic but does devote space to the methodological problems of obtaining naturally occurring speech data. His chosen solution is to induce his informants to self-record the data in his absence. In his substantial ethnography, Rampton (1995), explicitly influenced by the 'new ethnicities' theoretical developments, gives precise and detailed attention to the methodological consequences. Like others, above, he uses schools and youth clubs as his research sites, and participant observation as well as collecting audio-taped data from focused interviews. Like Hewitt he uses radio microphones to collect 150 hours of data from recreational activities in youth clubs and free time at school. One distinctive methodological procedure, however, is his use of retrospective discussion with participants of extracts selected from radio-microphone recordings. He also submitted all 500 extracts containing Panjabi for translation by local bilingual 17 year olds. Through these and other means he was able to identify the complex ways in which young people of Anglo, Caribbean and South Asian descent use 'each other's' languages.

My study, unlike those cited above, does not overtly claim to be an ethnography. I do not place an especially heavy emphasis on the value of my participant observation nor on the particular efficacy of my field notes. I did not see my informants in social situations outside the school research site. I did not 'hang out' with them. I did not visit their homes. They did not visit mine. I did not attempt to learn and deploy languages such as Panjabi and Gujarati or attend community events such as birthday parties or weddings. On the other hand, in different ways the methods I used clearly overlapped with those employed by those calling themselves ethnographers. Bloome and Green (1996) have usefully drawn a distinction between (a) doing ethnography (meeting the full criteria for ethnography as laid down by a discipline such as anthropology or sociology), (b)

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<sup>15</sup> See the references below to the work of Bloome and Green (1996) for one attempt to define ethnography.

adopting an ethnographic perspective (using the disciplinary criteria to guide the research without meeting the full requirements), and (c) using ethnographic tools (using methods and techniques associated with fieldwork). For them ‘doing ethnography’ implies an in-depth, long-term (perhaps lasting a number of years) study of a social and cultural group using participant observation. It also implies working and/or living with a particular group of people and thus experiencing their lives across a complete range of their social, cultural and employment practices. By contrast Bloome and Green state that ‘adopting an ethnographic perspective’ does not imply the same stringency in terms of length, depth, and scope. Such a study particularly aims to concentrate on a small number of specific aspects of the everyday life and social practices of a group of people. Finally, ‘using ethnographic tools’ refers simply to the use of techniques like participant observation, open-ended interviews, the elicitation of oral life histories and the utilisation of field notes. It seems to me that, by these definitions, my own research is perhaps best characterised as a piece of qualitative research which employs ethnographic tools in an attempt to work towards an ethnographic perspective. It is important, at this juncture, to set out more precisely and comprehensively where my thesis is methodologically located.

## **2.1 Methodological procedures and tools**

### **2.1.1 The research site**

The research was carried out at a secondary school called Blackhill<sup>16</sup> in the Western suburbs of London, close to the area ethnographically researched by Baumann (1996) and Gillespie (1995). This was an area in which many of the Blackhill youth lived. Blackhill, at the time of the research fieldwork in 1996-1997 was a Grant Maintained school<sup>17</sup> with more than 1400 pupils. The School's own 1996 analysis claimed that 20% of the students were white and that 78% were of ‘Asian origin’. In addition ‘only 19% of students stated that English was the principle (sic) language used at home.’; and ‘Asian languages are the most predominant, with almost 50% of our intake using both Punjabi and English in conversation everyday’ (Blackhill School unpublished document, 1997). In

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<sup>16</sup> Blackhill is a pseudonym in line with undertakings of confidentiality I volunteered when seeking permission to research at the school.

<sup>17</sup> In 1988 the Conservative Government legislated to allow schools to become Grant Maintained by opting out of Local Education Authority control after a ballot of parents. This enabled GM schools to control their finances and development. They remained as comprehensive schools but with a small margin of control over their intake.



addition the school attempted to characterise itself in terms of the socio-economic status of the students and their parents, stating that in national comparisons,

Our catchment area has lower than average numbers of students coming from households in which adults have higher education and are deemed of 'high social class'. We have above average numbers of pupils on free school meals ... Over double the average number of children living in overcrowded households. (Blackhill School Development Plan for 1997. July 1998: 3).

This information is taken from a Performance and Assessment Report of a type which was produced for all secondary schools, by a variety of official educational bodies. There are obvious weaknesses with it and it begs many questions. However, it is useful as a general guide to the rough socio-economic positioning of the Blackhill youth. As such it should be read together with the approximate accounts that the Blackhill youth gave, during their interviews, of what they understood their mother and father's occupations to be (see Appendix B).

The research was conducted over two extended periods. Firstly, during the spring term 1996. Secondly, from December 1996 to July 1997. The data outcome of the first period was 19 written accounts from a group of year 9 pupils, about their personal language histories which I used as a guide to potentially salient issues, concerns and methodologies, on which the research reported in this thesis might be based.

During the second period, the main research was conducted with a year 10 class at Blackhill in 1997 (about a third of whom had been members of the year 9 class which had featured in the 1996 research.) Data was collected during approximately 40 visits to the school at times when they were timetabled to be studying GCSE English. There were 31 pupils in the class, (reduced to 30 when one boy left the school at the end of the spring term 1997), 17 girls and 14 boys. This is the group that has already been identified as the Blackhill youth. All but four members of the class had strong connections with a South Asian ethnicity, in many cases combined with an East African one. 16 pupils claimed to have used Panjabi language with their families before they first attended school, 9 claimed Gujarati, 1 Kurdish, 1 Mauritian French Creole, 1 Swahili, 1 Urdu. Only two pupils in the class claimed to have spoken nothing but English with their families before they first attended school. None of the pupils in the class was white.

### 2.1.2. Researcher's role

I adopted four main research roles. Firstly, participant/observer in the classroom. This occurred in two ways. (i) when I taught a short unit (3 lessons) on linguistic diversity and followed this by conducting a language survey with the Blackhill youth; eliciting from them a set of written accounts entitled 'Language use in my life'; also eliciting from them a set of self-made audio tapes on the same topic (ii) occasions when pupils called on me for assistance with individual or small group work when their class teacher was busy with other pupils, or when the class teacher had to leave the classroom to pursue other duties. Secondly, observer/participant in the classroom which occurred in the many lessons when I watched and listened and took notes, commenting briefly when occasionally invited to do so by the class teacher. Thirdly, general observer as a regular visitor to the school when I also took notes on what I regarded as significant events. Fourthly, ethnographic interviewer when I conducted individual taped conversational interviews with all thirty pupils in the class (about 19 hours data).

### 2.1.3. Data Sources

Earlier I stated that I treated the research data collected during my fieldwork at Blackhill school, not as naturalistic accounts of 'reality', but as *Acts of Representation* offered to me by the Blackhill youth in response to my extended enquiries concerning their own assessments of the nature of the patterns of language use in their lives. These *Acts of Representation* were elicited by research methods which themselves require discussion concerning their efficacy and their limitations.

### 2.1.4. Act of Representation One: Pupil Language Survey Questionnaire

Although survey research has been typically associated with quantitative research and the use of statistical procedures (Cohen & Manion, 1989), Seale (1999) points to a respectable argument that the social survey has qualitative method as its foundation while being open to the inclusion of counting. Indeed Vidich & Lyman (1998) trace the origins of qualitative research in sociology to church and corporate social surveys in the USA in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and Tonkiss (1998) reminds us that UK figures from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries such as Engels, Mayhew, Booth and Rowntree combined quantitative social survey methods with qualitative research methods of observations and interviews. I am aware that one of the weaknesses of surveys are that they involve self-report on the part of respondents which introduces obvious problems of validity.



However, I have already made it clear that I deliberately sought the self-reports or self-representations of my informants because I was particularly interested in interrogating these. Linguistic diversity surveys have in the past decades been a fairly regular feature of the British educational context in geographical areas containing significant numbers of 'visible' ethnic minority pupils. Most have been frequent and localised at the level of individual Local Education Authorities and schools. A few have been of major wider significance and carried out by professional academics. These include the recent (Baker & Eversley 2000), those carried out by the Inner London Education Authority until its abolition in 1990, Rosen & Burgess (1980), and the Linguistic Minorities Project (1983). However, the latter remains, to date the most substantial such survey and its questionnaire is the one I used for the first part of my data collection.

All 31 of the Blackhill youth in the class completed a modified version of the Linguistic Minorities Project's Secondary Pupils Survey of linguistic diversity (see Appendix D). The modifications made were slight. Principally, the many cartoon-like illustrations in the original were dispensed with as were occasional archaic references such as to the assumed study of Latin by many pupils. I also left out the attempts in the original to route respondents through the questionnaire and which the Linguistic Minorities Project researchers found caused significant difficulties (Linguistic Minorities Project 1983: 64). However, this survey retained virtually word for word the 60 survey questions of the original. One other difference was that in the original survey respondents were anonymous whereas they were not in my survey. I did this thinking that I would later want to follow up what I regarded as significant responses. I don't believe that there were any problems in this approach and certainly none that were observable. None of the respondents objected to attaching their names to their completed questionnaires or showed anxieties about doing so. This may have been because my group of respondents constituted a class within an 'ethnically comfortable' environment whereas the LMP researchers had to design a questionnaire for a large scale survey of a total of almost 3,000 pupils in Bradford and Peterborough in what were often relatively more ethnically heterogeneous and tense environments, so that, they concluded, 'the very varied atmospheres in different classrooms, and the differing amounts of interaction between pupils must be borne in mind when interpreting the results' (ibid.: 64). The remaining difficulties reported by the LMP researchers, (pupil difficulty in completing the questionnaire because of its complexity and a significant amount of missing data for specific questions), were

not ones I encountered when administering the questionnaire survey. My respondents all completed their questionnaires during a single class, working on their own in my presence, and returned them at the end.

Nicholas (1994) has usefully summarised some of the weaknesses of the linguistic diversity survey as a research instrument within educational establishments. Apart from the specific problems of the self-report in relation to language use, there is the problem of the teacher as the elicitor of the data since teachers are typically both authority figures and elicitors of 'correct' information. At the same time, when 'visible' ethnic minority students respond to such questionnaire surveys in their school or college they are doing so in an ideological environment which has typically seen their 'other' languages as a serious problem in the pursuit of Standard English as medium of instruction, language for literacy and principal instrument of educational success. Also historically these students have been asked to offer their survey answers alongside peers who are relatively monolingual in English and express hostility to them on grounds of both ethnicity and language. In addition language diversity surveys have found it difficult to cope with the ambiguities surrounding language use. These include status boundaries concerning the labelling of language use as 'language' or 'dialect'-related, the handling of languages without a written tradition, and the eliciting of data from plurilingual respondents using instruments with a monolingual research design perspective. I think I partly overcame the problem of the teacher as elicitor by carrying out the survey without being the class teacher and by showing a consistent non-hostile interest in linguistic diversity at the research site for over a year before administering the questionnaire. This also helped me to overcome the problem of data elicitation in ideologically adverse environments. I was helped in this, too, by the fact that I and all the respondents were ourselves members of 'visible' minority groups and they knew that I had grown up in a bi/multilingual home. Finally, I believe that the unit of three lessons on linguistic diversity which I taught before the questionnaires were issued, created an atmosphere favourable to their enthusiastic completion. The unit explored the existence and workings of different language varieties and began by asking the pupils to identify, from video clips of a variety of TV soaps and other programmes, the regional varieties of English being used. The clips came from programmes such as *Coronation Street* (Manchester), *Brookside* (Liverpool), *Byker Grove* (Newcastle), *Rab .C. Nesbitt* (Glasgow) and *Eastenders* (London). The pupils responded well to this and, usefully for my purposes, many of them were spontaneously eager to identify



specific varieties of English with the speech of their cousins living in other parts of the country. From there our explorations extended to the fact that all people use language and that all language has pronunciation patterns, vocabulary and grammar and we worked through many examples in a dialogic way with me leading, probing and eliciting contributions. We paid particular attention to the specifics of the workings of London English. It was only after we had covered this ground that we turned to wider linguistic forms originating from outside the UK. It was here that the pupils offered unprompted accounts of the patterns of language use of Panjabi, Gujarati, Hindi, and so on, in their homes and communities. The typical UK classroom approach to linguistic diversity has been to directly plunge into facing pupils with leading questions about the 'exotic' languages they speak (see Harris, 1997), and I would argue this is part of what leads to the kind of respondent defensiveness alluded to above by both Nicholas and the LMP researchers<sup>18</sup>. In the end, though, my reason for using the language questionnaire survey as my first method of significant data elicitation was to map the territory which I would later be able to follow-up with intensive qualitative research methods including interviews. I also calculated that it was the least threatening opening research move I could make towards the informants. The survey is a relatively hands-off data gathering instrument with each question requiring minimal largely one-word responses, and in this case responses were provided individually and privately in writing. My overriding aim was to evoke from my informants, acts of representation concerning their patterns of language use, and through this perhaps a glimpse of their own representations of their ethnic positionings. Their responses to the language questionnaire constituted the first such act of representation.

#### **2.1.5. Act of Representation Two: Written accounts of patterns of language use**

After the language survey and the short taught unit (3 lessons) on language diversity in Britain, I asked the Blackhill youth to work on a two part project entitled Language Use in My Life to be completed during the Easter holidays 1997 and handed in immediately afterwards. The first part involved them producing an open-ended piece of writing entitled Language Use in my Life. All

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<sup>18</sup> My perception of typical approaches to linguistic diversity teaching was gained from many years of experience of visiting classrooms across London and of working with teachers in INSET contexts.

30 of them completed the task and handed their texts to me. My purpose here was to elicit a second act of representation but one which gave the informants an opportunity to be expansive, to transcend the limitations of the questionnaire format and to begin to deal with some of the complexities involved in describing patterns of language use. I deliberately asked them to engage with the project over the holidays in the hope that they might draw some members of their families into the task. When the projects were returned to me it turned out that many of the informants made explicit reference to helpful confirmatory consultations they had sought with their parents, and others. I am again aware of the limitations of self-report as a means of obtaining accounts of human social behaviour. On the other hand I was very confident of the value of what I could learn from information obtained in this way. Earlier work in classrooms across London had resulted in a publication (Harris & Savitzky 1988) which had been well received by many English teachers who stated that using it with pupils and students had transformed the quality and quantity of response received from them related to language. In addition when I had elicited similar data following a similar taught unit with a year 9 class the previous year their teacher had commented,

Simply by giving students a chance to write Personal Language Histories, I felt that students were freed to make a bridge between their linguistic world and that of the teachers. All students in the school should be encouraged to write these as soon as possible on entry to [Blackhill School] and to draw on the ideas throughout their secondary school life. I am convinced that doing this unit of work enabled some students to feel differently about school. I shall use three examples as evidence. Boy H, who had barely written more than half an unintelligible side of writing prior to the unit, wrote 11 sides about language. Boy C, who was one of the 'cool', detached males in the class was so involved he wrote an eight page essay (by far and away his best effort to date) and enjoyed participating in lessons, writing on the board etc. ... One Indian boy, Boy H, with severe learning difficulties, who had never voluntarily answered a question in class before, was now offering answers to questions and discussing the work in an animated way which I had never seen before. He was also writing, without having to be encouraged and he was checking work for himself. ... Finally, very bright Boy P, who had become disaffected between Years 7 and 9 and who had stopped reading and writing in depth, wrote a magnificent piece of work. In discussion with me he admitted to having been almost ashamed of his language background, which he tried to bury in popular western culture. He then told me that, as a result of the work we had done, he had chosen Punjabi as an option at GCSE (extract from unpublished document written for Blackhill School, by Ms W., 1996).

Nevertheless, I did, though, try to develop a methodology which would at least partly offset the limitations of the self-report and this was reflected in the self-



made audio tapes on language use in their lives which most of the Blackhill youth gave to me and which constituted their third act of representation.

#### **2.1.6. Act of Representation Three: Self-made audio tapes**

For the second part of the Language Use in My Life project the Blackhill youth were given blank 30 minute audio cassette tapes and asked to compile recordings in any way they wished which they felt illustrated typical language use in their everyday lives. Twenty three pupils compiled tapes and submitted them to me. In the field of sociolinguistics the proposed solution to the limitations of self-report has been the collection and analysis of what has been called *naturally occurring speech data*. However, the problems, ethical and otherwise, of achieving this have been well recognised (Wardhaugh 1992: 150-152, Fasold, 1987: 192-3). The technique I chose followed Sebba (1993: 11) who found ‘a number of people, in their late teens and early twenties, who were willing to take a tape recorder home with them and make recordings of themselves, their families and their friends in conversation’. In addition to the 23 who made tapes a further six who did not submit tapes, handed in written reconstructions of what they said were typical examples of some of the conversational exchanges which occurred in their lives; some of them said that they had not completed the project because they had had no access to a suitable tape recorder at home. One interesting aspect of this exercise was the ready adoption by many of the pupils of the role of sociolinguistic researcher and I had a number of discussions with them about the problems this entailed. For instance we talked about the required ethics of not recording people without their permission. In response to this they pointed out that when they attempted to record the naturally occurring speech of family members, with their knowledge and consent, these relatives either ‘spoiled’ the data by acting the fool or refused to reproduce the linguistic behaviour which normally occurred and which they, in their novel roles as ‘researchers’, wanted to capture. In the end we reached a compromise in which I said it was alright for them to obtain data surreptitiously provided they sought permission to pass it on to me. Another type of exchange involved some of the boys who asked me if it was alright to include swearing on their tapes since this was a normal part of language use in their lives. My reply was that they could include whatever they wanted on the tapes. However, this request and reply shows the extent to which the acquisition of naturally occurring speech data must always be regarded with caution and as being relative, multi-layered and susceptible to provisional interpretations only. Nevertheless, I feel that this third act of interpretation offers

openings to glimpses of some of the community, family and peer influences in language use experienced by my informants. I believe that these tapes contain at least some intimations of new, hybrid, diasporic ethnicities and in their approximation to some kinds of naturally occurring speech events move beyond the purely representational into the realm of the 'real'.

#### **2.1.7. Act of Representation Four: Individual conversational interviews**

Following the elicitation of the rich data collected by the above means, I interviewed all thirty of the Blackhill youth individually for between approximately 30 and 60 minutes each. The interviews were taped. The tenor of the interviews was shaped by the fact that I was someone whom at least a third of the pupil-informants had seen in their English classes and around the school during the Spring Term of 1996. Additionally, all of them had seen and interacted with me inside and outside these classes intensively from December 1996 until the period of the interviews between May and July 1997. They were quite clear that I was someone who was interested in their patterns of language use. The starting point for each interview was that I had been interested in what they had said about their language use in their survey questionnaire responses, written accounts and self-made audio tapes but accepted that all these sources of information were intrinsically limiting and wanted to give them a chance to expand on some of the points they had made there. In these senses then, the individual taped interviews had an ethnographic quality. I was very familiar to the informants, and conducted the interviews in a conversational style formulating my questions and prompts in an open-ended way which made it clear that I was there to listen to their perceptions rather than to 'get answers' to set questions. The term *interview* is in this respect a little misleading in that typically the encounters had a quality which was more like a discussion. Subsequent transcriptions of some of this data confirm this in terms of the frequency of overlapping<sup>19</sup> and latching<sup>20</sup> in the conversational exchanges. For these reasons I feel it is justifiable to describe my interviews with the Blackhill youth as conversational interviews.

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<sup>19</sup> A term in certain branches of linguistics describing what happens in spoken interactions when one speaker's turn in talk begins before their interlocutor has completed a previous utterance.

<sup>20</sup> This is again a term in conversation analysis referring to a following speaker's speech turn joining immediately onto the previous turn with no discernible gap between the two.



### **2.1.8. The interview as a research instrument**

According to Fontana and Frey (1998), what they call postmodernist ethnographers have, in recent times, questioned the authority and power of the research interviewer. The main concern of these ethnographers has been to develop a critical approach towards the interviewer's stance in relation to race and gender and at the same time to interrogate the nature of the power relationship between interviewer and informant and to ask what attention has been paid to the informants' voices and feelings. All of these are matters which must be considered in the present discussion.

#### **2.1.8.1. Interviews: 'race' and ethnicity**

Of my original thirty one informants all but four claimed a South Asian ethnic descent. This meant that I had to consider seriously the effect on my interactions with them of the historical conflict in Africa, the Caribbean and Britain between people of African descent and people of Indian subcontinental descent. This conflict had its origins in the British Empire's deliberate movement of Indian labour to locations in Africa and the Caribbean as competition for existing African labour between the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and the First World War<sup>21</sup>. Elements from both these subordinated groups have in the past 40 to 50 years migrated to the UK and settled here in significant numbers. In UK conditions this conflict has been muted but it has been there.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, when it came to the analysis of my interview data I considered in what ways, if any, my informants' interview responses were shaped by the echoes of historic African-South Asian tensions when they could see that I was visibly African. According to Egharevba (2001: 225), 'There is a dearth of discussion on the methodological dilemmas faced by minority ethnic researchers who research minority ethnic communities of which they are a part'. Describing herself as a 'British-born first generation Nigerian woman [who] came to conduct research on a group of South Asian women' (ibid.: 226), she concludes,

while factors such as gender, class, establishing credibility and rapport, language, religion, and culture are important, a shared minority status and understanding of racism between the researched and the researcher may affect the research relationship most significantly in relation to the type and level of information shared by the researched (ibid.: 226).

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<sup>21</sup> See Goulbourne, 1998: 25-49, for a brief account of this process.

<sup>22</sup> See Brah, in Back & Solomos (eds.) 2000: 431-446, for a relatively minor but deeply felt example.

The parallels with my own biographical trajectory and research informants are obvious, as indicated in the Introduction, and I came to much the same conclusions. However, this is not to claim that there might not be potential difficulties and awkwardness in such research contexts which need to be seriously considered.

There were moments during some interviews when I spoke about the specifics of my personal ethnic trajectory. However, I cannot remember any questions directed at me by the informants concerning these issues. In the data analysis, though, I gave particularly close attention to any moments which might indicate tensions or omissions on certain questions. In the end, what I am aware of is that there were occasions when informants hesitated when explaining certain things to me and I felt that the hesitation was because they felt that there was something that as an 'outsider' I might not understand; also, perhaps that this something might have been linguistic. In other words, they refrained from saying something in Panjabi or Gujarati because they knew that I did not understand these languages. There were, indeed, a few occasions when I actively encouraged them to set aside their hesitations and they proceeded to say something in these languages. On the other hand, there were other occasions when their hesitations were due to their uncertainty as to whether it was legitimate for them to swear when narrating an anecdote representing themselves, friends, family, or other characters. Many male informants made numerous comments expressing strong affiliation to the music, film, style and language of the African-Caribbean and African-American traditions. Also, many female informants, in a school site incident which occurred during the research process, identified strongly with a British R&B band whose African-Caribbean/British members utilised an explicitly sexual/sensual appeal to their fans. To summarise, I am confident that I did not encounter a serious problem of 'race' in connection with my interviews. One factor, in this judgement which may be relevant, is the fact that in the particular social space (a secondary school) which formed the principal research site, and in the wider society, both the interviewer (me) and the informants shared a common positioning in the discourses and actions of official national and local authorities, and media, as black and brown ethnic minority individuals.



### **2.1.8.2. Interviews: Gender issues**

On the question of the interviewer and gender relations, I accept that before I began interviewing I had concerns about whether my existence as a middle-aged black male might interfere with my capacity to initiate individual interviews with adolescent female informants of South Asian descent. Specifically, I was anxious in case these females should decline to be interviewed alone by me or show a marked reticence about becoming involved in the research. In the worst case scenario I feared that either before or after any such interviews there might be an incident involving strong objections by parents about their daughters becoming involved in such a situation. These anxieties proved to be unfounded. Here, I, myself, may have too easily absorbed the ethnic stereotype suggesting that all families of South Asian origin engage in the fierce, vigilant and slightly paranoid policing of every aspect of the lives of their female members.

At the same time, the interviews were conducted as the fourth element in my research data collection. The informants had all been given a chance already to complete a survey questionnaire, a written account of their language use and a self-made audio tape on patterns of language use in their lives. It had been made clear that they were free to consult their parents or other relatives if they so wished in completing these tasks. I know for sure that this parental support was forthcoming in some of the written accounts and the self-made audio tapes. Some of the informants, particularly girls, told me during the interviews that they had asked for help from their mothers in constructing representations of, for instance, Gujarati script. Several informants both male and female told me that they had enlisted the help of older family members in producing taped representations of spoken Panjabi, Gujarati and other languages. Perhaps then, these parents and others were reassured by what must have appeared to them to be a purely linguistic project or it may have been that they saw it as simply yet another project emanating from what they might have seen as a legitimate source - the school.

Another worry I had was that even if I overcame these obstacles the female informants would participate in the interviews but would be relatively taciturn or evasive in their comments, particularly on matters which they deemed to be sensitive or embarrassing with a male interviewer. I would not claim to be able to answer, conclusively, feminist critiques on this score, since it is undoubtedly the

case that there are topics on which male and female informants are likely to be guarded in their responses with interviewers of a different gender.<sup>23</sup>

There is within the field of sociolinguistics, a substantial feminist literature, including a British view (e.g. Coates 1993, 1996, Coates and Cameron, 1989, Swann, 1992), suggesting significant gender differences in language use involving male domination of female talk in mixed contexts and much more empathetic, authentic talk in female-female speech contexts. It would be foolish for me to discount the possibility of these effects in my own interviews. There are a number of actions I have taken to shed light on this issue. Firstly, I have looked at my transcripts to see whether the male interviewees talk more than the females and also whether I, as the interviewer, talk more in interviews with female informants than with males; to investigate whether or not female speech turns are shorter than male ones, or whether female informants are interrupted more or have their speech overlapped more by my interviewer speech turns. Without doing a quantitative count I can see no evidence that any of the foregoing applies. I do know, though that interviews with Blackhill girls were among the longest I conducted. Interestingly, many of the girls volunteered the lament that they felt that their brothers were favoured in their family and community cultures simply because they were boys. Many of them told me of small subtle acts of collusion by their mothers to encourage them to be independent of family and community cultural constraints on females which were policed and perpetuated by male members, fathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles and male cousins. These are tiny, but I think significant, pieces of evidence indicating that at least some of the female informants did not feel completely inhibited by gender differences between themselves and me as a male interviewer.

### **2.1.8.3. Interviews: Power relations in general**

Earlier, I mentioned the attention that Fontana and Frey (1998) drew to the need for the research interviewer to account for the nature of the power relations between interviewer and informant. No matter what mitigating evidence I might have just produced concerning critical questions on race and gender, there is no doubt that my research interviews were conducted under conditions of unequal

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<sup>23</sup> In sociolinguistics, Labov (1969), claimed that black adolescent male informants produced different and larger quantities of more complex talk with a black as opposed to a white interviewer. Cukor-Avila & Bailey (2001), in a thorough review, cautiously endorse this view.



relations of power. In the first place, in their existence under conditions of compulsory schooling in Britain, my informants were required, whether they liked it or not, to attend the school - the research site - every day, whereas I had complete freedom to enter or leave the research location as I pleased. Secondly, I exercised a kind of power of authority over them as an adult in a school. In schools most adults are licensed by the wider society to be in some sense *in loco parentis*. Finally, it was pretty clear to my informants that, whatever my activities were, they were endorsed by their English teacher who, as the Head of Department, was a senior member of the school community and behaved in a friendly manner towards me at all times.

On the other hand, my invitation to them to take part in individual interviews was very gently issued. I began at first with one male informant, Amaljeet, who had been particularly friendly towards me since I had begun my research with his class during the previous academic year. During my interview with him I asked him if he would mind finding out for me whether or not one of his friends in the class, Karwan, whom he had mentioned several times during the interview, would mind being interviewed by me. Karwan was happy to see me, and this is how my sequence of interviews began. The reason why I interviewed all thirty members of the class once each rather than interviewing four or five of them several times each, was that after the first few interviews I began to be approached by individuals when they passed me in the classroom or the corridors asking questions like “are you going to talk to me?”, or “aren’t you going to talk to me?” or “when are you going to talk to me?”. Obviously, a number of interpretations of these actions are possible. It could be argued that as the interviewer I exercised at least a negative power over potential informants - the power not to select them for interview - a powerful force for adolescents who generally do not like being left out of activities which make them feel special. This power would have been at its maximum after the first few interviews when those who had been interviewed were able to deploy a special kind of status over those who had not. Nevertheless, the particular point I want to make here is that I can confidently argue that my informants were voluntarily interviewed and were not pressured during the interviews to say any particular thing or to speak for any particular length of time. In these senses potential inequalities of power between interviewer and informant were at least partially mitigated.

#### **2.1.8.4. Interviews: Foregrounding the voices of informants**

The other general critical question identified by Fontana and Frey (*ibid.*), queried the extent to which a piece of research involving interviews focused on the voices and feelings of the informants. As I explained previously, all my methods of data gathering, including the interviews, have this focus. The problem in the research is not whether or not the voices and the feelings of the informants are being adequately reflected. It is, rather, how to develop an interpretive approach which goes beyond the mere setting down in text of the voices of the informants; how to prompt, as indicated earlier, a response beyond a critical reader's 'so what?'. There are two principal starting points with my interview data. As the informants' voices were listened to and transcribed I looked for patterns where these voices appeared to be saying similar things. At the same time I searched for the discrepant cases, the voices saying discordant things. These examples are where my attempted acts of interpretation began.

Fontana and Frey (*ibid.*) conduct a review of issues connected with the different kinds of research interview available to the active researcher. Surprisingly, though, they make only a two-way division. For them interviewing is either structured or unstructured. I am more accustomed to imagining at least a three-way division (structured, semi-structured, unstructured), and need this framework in order to place the type of interview which I conducted. Fontana and Frey offer a succinct definition of what they mean by structured interviewing,

a situation in which an interviewer asks each respondent a series of preestablished questions with a limited set of response categories (*ibid.*: 52).

On the other hand the only general overarching statement they make about unstructured interviewing describes what they call the 'traditional type of unstructured interview' as being the 'open-ended ethnographic (in-depth) interview' (*ibid.*:56). In drawing attention to this approach I am identifying an area which I believe to be complex, a little difficult, and with ample potential for ambiguity. I want to look briefly at two examples before returning later to some other points that Fontana and Frey make which are pertinent to my research.

The first example I will look at is drawn from a standard text on educational research (Cohen & Manion, 1989). According to Cohen & Manion,



There are four kinds of interview that may be used specifically as research tools: the structured interview; the unstructured interview; the non-directive interview; and the focused interview (1989: 309).

They go on to characterise the structured and unstructured interview in very similar terms to Fontana and Frey. However, in Cohen and Manion's view, there is also what they call the non-directive interview which they see as analagous to the therapeutic or psychiatric interview whose principal features,

are the minimal direction or control exhibited by the interviewer and the freedom the respondent has to express his subjective feelings as fully and as spontaneously as he chooses or is able (ibid: 309).

I would have begun to feel that this kind of interview was close to the type on which my own research interviews were based if it was not for the kind of refinement offered by Cohen and Manion in their description of the kind of interview they call the focused interview. They argue that some researchers, while sympathetic to the non-directive interview, need to utilise rather more economical research techniques for their own purposes,

A researcher has a different order of priorities, however, and what appear as advantages in a therapeutic context may be decided limitations when the technique is used for research purposes, even though he may be sympathetic to the spirit of the non-directive interview (ibid.: 326).

They cite Madge (1965), in arguing that there are researchers,

who wish to retain the good qualities of the non-directive technique and at the same time are keen to evolve a method that is economical and precise enough to leave a residue of results rather than merely a posse of cured souls (ibid.: 326).

In the end Cohen and Manion see the focused interview as being distinctive from the non-directive one in that there is 'prior analysis by the researcher of the situation in which subjects have been involved' (ibid.: 326). My research interviews took place after I had already had a substantial look at the informants' responses to a survey questionnaire, and at their written accounts, and I had some idea of the range and scope of their audio tape data. In addition I had closely studied an earlier set of written accounts.<sup>24</sup> The kinds of discussion and topics which I introduced or prompted during my interviews were developed from my prior knowledge of the kinds of self-representations which the informants had already offered during previous research procedures. Thus, my approach to my

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<sup>24</sup> In the previous year I had obtained written accounts of their personal language histories from a class including about a third of the informants from my research interviews.

research interviews, it seems to me, bears some close resemblance to Cohen and Manion's focused interview. I attempted to allow informants to speak as freely as possible, while simultaneously trying to ensure, as unobtrusively as possible, that they expanded on issues of interest to me which had arisen from their earlier self-representations or those of their peers.

A second example of the treatment of the research interview which contrasts with that offered by Fontana and Frey, is provided by May (1993). May argues that there are four types of interview: 'the structured interview, the semi-structured interview, the group interview and the unstructured or focused interview' (1993: 92). May's definitions match Fontana and Frey's and Cohen and Manion's as far as the structured interview is concerned, and Cohen and Manion's in relation to the focused interview. However, May introduces the semi-structured interview which he differentiates from the structured interview in that,

Questions are normally specified, but the interviewer is more free to probe beyond the answers in a manner which would often seem prejudicial to the aims of standardization and comparability (ibid.: 93).

In the end my interviews should be considered as focused interviews in Cohen and Manion's sense, but as I mentioned earlier I regard them as conversational rather than strongly interrogative.

May goes on to argue that what he calls the group interview constitutes a separate and distinctive type of interview whereas Fontana and Frey somewhat less lucidly describe the group interview as,

essentially a qualitative data gathering technique that finds the interviewer/moderator directing the interaction and inquiry in a very structured or very unstructured manner depending on the interview's purpose (1998: 54).

The group interview is one that I considered using during the research when I was considering following a detailed ethnographic approach, with a sub-group of four or five informants from my sample of thirty. This might well have involved studying and interviewing them in and out of the classroom, and in and out of school. I still consider that the group interview might be a useful research tool, should it be at all possible in the future, to present, to a group of the informants, selected extracts from the research data - tapes, transcripts, questionnaires and their written texts, and to elicit their responses and reflections on this data in a group context. This procedure, apart from its intrinsic research interest, would



provide, for the highly sceptical reader, a point of comparative verifiability and reliability concerning the quality of the interpretations of the research data.

#### **2.1.8.5. Interviews: Access and the presentation of self**

Fontana and Frey (1998), discuss a number of other technical issues related to the obtaining of research interviews on which I want to comment briefly. These include 'Accessing the Setting', 'Deciding on How to Present Oneself', 'Gaining Trust', 'Establishing Rapport', and 'Collecting Empirical Materials'. I had first accessed the research setting during the previous academic year when teaching a group of ten teachers on an innovative series of MA modules developed with colleagues at the local university. The principal novelty lay in the fact that the teachers concerned were being taught the modules together inside the premises of their own school. One of the teachers on the course, who happened also to be the Head of English, solicited my help in assisting her to carry out an investigation of her own into the underachievement of boys in her subject at GCSE level, and on the relationship between bilingualism and achievement in her subject. She invited me to attend her classroom, and to teach the class, on occasions when a particular year 9 class had their English lessons. In the following academic year when I wished to carry out the main body of my research, she gave me carte blanche to attend her year 10 GCSE English class whenever I wanted and to come and go as I pleased. As a senior teacher involved in the management of the school she also smoothed my unfettered access to the school with the school's official gatekeepers and senior management, by emphasising my importance to her own work. She facilitated my interviews with informants by excusing them from her classes whenever I wanted to see them and by allowing me to use her private office for the interviews whenever I wanted to. When she was using her office she arranged for me to have access to another private office. My open association with this helpful teacher and the fact that I taught her class on nine occasions over two academic years meant that the informants must have seen me as a kind of quasi teacher.

During my first academic year at the research site, both the teacher and I told the informants that I worked at the local university. However, over the period when the research was being carried out, the informants showed relatively little interest in this. Nobody asked me, as far as I can remember, what I did in my job, although during the first research year, one boy, grinning impudently and grandstanding to some of his peers approached me after a class (in which I had

been teaching them) to ask ‘do you get paid for doing this?’. When I answered in the affirmative he followed up with ‘how much?’. The resultant transgressive sniggering changed to impressed, admiring amazement when I named a figure between £25,000 and £28,000 per annum. Apart from this, the only broad presentation I made of myself was as someone interested in the patterns of language use in their lives. I would have been prepared to go into detail, if asked, but saw no need to volunteer additional information to informants making no demands for it, and not exhibiting overt hostility or suspicion about my activities.

On the other hand I admit to a strong aversion to making any strong research claims about ‘Gaining Trust’, or ‘Establishing Rapport’ with informants. I regard these as concepts connected with the informants’ states of mind and I do not wish to make any kind of claim about the value of my interviews based on these grounds, which I regard as patronising at best, and insulting at worst. All I have endeavoured to do is to report as accurately as I can what I sought to do, how the informants behaved and the research data with which they provided me. Finally, under the heading ‘Collecting Empirical Materials’, Fontana and Frey emphasise the crucial importance of field notes. With respect to the body of my interviews, I took no notes. After starting the tape recorder I conducted each interview as a conversation in which I gave undivided attention to the speaker with normal patterns of eye contact and so on. I did, though, following interviews, after parting from the informants, often write notes about comments and incidents which had occurred while we had been walking together to the interview site along school corridors, between buildings and across playgrounds. Apart from our own exchanges, during these journeys informants occasionally participated in exchanges with other pupils. I sometimes made notes, too, after the event, about additional incidents or nuances which had taken place during the interviews but which I thought might not be captured by the tape recordings.

One other interview factor raised by Fontana and Frey is the potential presence of nonverbal elements, and citing what they regard as a classic statement on the topic they identify four kinds of nonverbal technique,

*Proxemic* communication is the use of interpersonal space to communicate attitudes, *chronemics* communication is the use of pacing of speech and length of silence in conversation, *kinesic* communication includes any body movements or postures, and *paralinguistic* communication includes all the variations in volume, pitch and quality of voice (Gorden, 1980: 335).



On the question of proxemics I can only report that my interviews took place in a small office space in which the informants and I were compelled to sit very close together, with no intervening obstructions from furniture, with our knees/legs almost touching at times. Even now I am unable to make any useful comment on the significance of this. But as far as chronemics, kinesic and paralinguistic communication is concerned, I am certain that both the informants and I were influenced by them while the interviews were taking place. For my part I was aware of moments when an informant's speech speeded up, which I interpreted as indicating a relatively unconscious intense engagement and excitement concerning a specific topic or issue. Also, I was aware of the length of silences as being an important factor in the interviews. I needed to leave silences in order to encourage informants to say all that they wanted to say on particular subjects at specific junctures. At one moment leaving a silence when an informant has in fact finished speaking on a subject can create an awkward moment of slight social embarrassment. Not leaving the silence can result in overlapping speech and the potential loss or stifling of significant interjections or directions. I am certain that there were examples of both phenomena in my research interviews. Equally, I am sure that I made unconscious use of changes in the body movements and posture of my informants to give me cues as to their attitudes to certain lines of discussion and indications on considerations such as when they might want to terminate the interview. This area is enormously difficult to describe as a participant since these effects tend to be imperceptible and co-operatively achieved in unselfconscious interaction and are better noticed by a systematic outside observer. Variations in volume, pitch and quality of voice are easier to notice and may, for instance, indicate enthusiasm and excitement about an issue. Luckily, together with pacing and silences they can be captured accurately by the transcription process and represented textually, rendering them amenable to interpretation. The other nonverbal factors mentioned are likely to escape any analysis of my interviews, except for moments which were so pointedly significant at the time that I recorded them in my notes. They could only have been otherwise caught if the interviews had been video-taped. It will by now be abundantly clear that this thesis places great emphasis on the value and importance of the data obtained from the conversational interviews. However, Hammersley (2003) has drawn attention to 'the radical critique of interviews' which,

focuses on what is regarded as increasing over-dependence among qualitative researchers on interview data, and above all their use of such

data as a window on the world and/or on the minds of informants (ibid.: 119).

He refers to authors, (Dingwall, 1997; Silverman, 1997; Atkinson & Coffey, 2002), who criticise,

what they refer to as the ‘romantic impulse’ which treats open-ended interviews as capturing the ‘genuine voices’ of interviewees. Instead it is argued that any ‘voice’ is ‘not an experientially authentic truth. It is in itself a methodically constructed social product that emerges from its reflexive communicative practices’ (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 11 cited in Hammersley 2003: 119).

I am aware of these caveats and the associated dangers and have addressed them by considering the interview data as constituting one of four acts of representation rather than as being true, or naive indicators of some putative reality. This data is convincing only to the extent that it yields patterns of repetition worthy of commentary and analysis, and to the extent that the reader is persuaded by the ensuing interpretive argument.

I am reassured, as I grapple with these reflections, by the words of Bourdieu (1999) in an absorbing and original discussion,

... I do not believe that it is useful to turn to the innumerable so-called “methodological” writings on interview techniques. Useful as these may be when they describe the various effects that the interviewer can produce without knowing it, they almost always miss the point, not least because they remain faithful to old methodological principles which, like the ideal of the standardized procedures, often derived from the desire to imitate the external signs of the rigor of the most established scientific disciplines. At any rate it does not seem to me that they do justice to what has always been done - and known - by researchers who have the most respect for their object and who are the most attentive to the almost infinitely subtle strategies that social agents deploy in the ordinary conduct of their lives (Bourdieu, 1999: 607).

Before leaving the subject of interviews in the research process, it is important to insert a brief note on the process of transcription which ensues when these interviews have been taped.

#### **2.1.8.6. Interviews: the politics of transcription**

A number of authors (Roberts, 1997; Lapadat, 2000; Bucholtz, 2000) have commented on the paradox that while transcription is integral to the qualitative analysis of language data and is widely used in social research, the theoretical and



methodological issues it raises have received very little attention. According to Roberts, ‘all transcription is representation, and there is no natural or objective way in which talk can be written’ (Roberts, 1997: 168). As she sees it transcription involves an inevitable tension between accuracy, readability and the politics of representation. Bucholtz agrees, seeing transcription as ‘inherently embedded in relations of power’ (Bucholtz, 2000: 1439). She identifies two basic transcription styles: ‘*naturalized transcription* in which the text conforms to written discourse conventions and *denaturalized transcription*, in which the text retains links to oral discourse forms ...’ (ibid.: 1439). At the same time Lapadat confirms the value of the transcription process because it ‘promotes intense familiarity with the data, which leads to the methodological and theoretical thinking essential to interpretation’ (Lapadat, 2000: 204). I am sympathetic to each of these observations.

The process of transcription amounted to the practical realisation of my theoretical commitment to attend closely to and foreground the voices of my informants. The long hours of intense listening involved in transcribing the interview data was enormously productive in terms of the identification, generation, and understanding of the key phenomena requiring analysis and interpretation. My awareness of the selective, ideologically constructed nature of transcription led me to make a number of deliberate choices in the presentation of items from the interview data in Chapters Four and Five. Of the 29<sup>25</sup> audio taped interviews available for transcription I gave particularly close attention to 21. I also worked on the remainder but to a lesser degree of intensity, concentrating mainly on content analysis. I decided on the selective use of phonetic linguistic symbols to indicate aspects of the informants’ speech which I particularly wanted to highlight. In these cases I did not offer a fully phonetic transcription, but merely drew attention to the salient feature by bracketing it. For example where I wanted to emphasise the T- glottalling characteristic of London speech I did so by inserting the relevant phonetic symbol in the following manner bu/ʔ/er for butter to indicate the non pronunciation of the t sound which is regular in London speech. I also decided to include all the marked pauses, um’s and er’s, sighing, laughter, and giggles as well as the instances of overlapping and latched speech

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<sup>25</sup> In one of the 30 interviews I conducted the recording machine did not operate properly and all I could do to recover the situation was to write extensive notes about what was said immediately afterwards.

because I thought these might be revealing of uncertainties, discomfort, intense engagement or enthusiasm when particular topics were being discussed. I also dispensed with the punctuation conventions typical of written discourse so as to force attention to the quality of oral interactional discourse which typically does not present itself in well constructed sentences. To sum up, my presentation of the transcribed interview data in the way which will be seen in Chapters Four to Seven is conscious and deliberate and driven by explicit ideological and theoretical purposes. I want the reader to bear in mind wherever possible the voices of the informants, moderated of course by the requirements of readability.

So far I have offered an analytic summary of some key issues associated with the reflexive planning, initiation and carrying through of a substantial series of qualitative research interviews. Schwandt (1998) suggests that constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry are those which 'share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it' (Schwandt, 1998: 221). In the present thesis the conversational interviews were a key instrument in the pursuit of these goals.

## **2.2. Additional methodological aids to enquiry, analysis and interpretation**

Once I had gathered the research data in the ways and with the methods described above, I faced the problem of how to make good my repeated assertion that I wanted the voices and representations of the Blackhill youth to be central to the thesis. The danger was that the thesis might consist simply of a series of individual stories, mildly interesting in themselves, but of no wider significance. What was needed was a way of showing that taken together the individual accounts and representations in the research might be more sociologically indicative of broader social forces and structures; in this case suggestive of 'new ethnicities' or 'cultures of hybridity' in formation. I found a number of formulations by Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Alfred Schutz and Georges Perec extremely useful for demonstrating the importance of giving full rein to individual voices and representations while insisting that the consistent repetitions of these voices and representations in a specific milieu at a specific historical moment is itself constitutive of structured social meaning. Some ways in which these important matters of method and theory can be further refined through aspects of the thought of the authors just mentioned will be more fully explored in the remainder of this chapter.



Frequent reference has been made to the importance of listening closely to the informants' voices and paying alert attention to their representations in general. The concepts 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' might be taken in different ways to imply an unruly myriad of individual differences in social and cultural practices. I am ideologically sympathetic to this perspective and give substantial rein to it in Chapters Three and Four, by offering a focus on the particularities of individual experiences. However, I also argue that these individual experiences are not merely artefacts of voluntarist free will and therefore it is possible to indicate where they can be read as patterned and structured. I drew on the work of Williams and Schutz to justify the argument that the accumulation of significant quantities of contingent individual experience is indicative of the presence of significantly structured cultural and social formations. At the same time, I drew on aspects of the work of Thompson and Perce to show why prior respectful attention to the specifics of individual agency is important.

### **2.2.1. Williams and the Definition of Culture**

It is a characteristic of Williams' work to attempt to construct multi-faceted definitions of the term culture (Williams, 1976/1983). Here we will examine just one of these - his persistent reference to culture as being to do with a whole way of life,

But in theory and practice I came to believe that I had to give up, or at least to leave aside, what I knew as the Marxist tradition: to attempt to develop a different kind of theory of social totality; to see the study of culture as the study of relations between elements in a whole way of life (Williams, 1980: 20).

It seems to me that the attempt to identify and describe specific 'cultures of hybridity' benefits from this kind of definition. This is particularly so when the study of the structure of 'the whole way of life' is built on the foundations of a close analysis of the behaviours, practices and statements of individuals,

I shall try to do this by examining, not a series of abstracted problems, but a series of statements by individuals. It is not only that, by temperament and training, I find more meaning in this kind of personally verified statement than in a system of significant abstractions. It is also that, in a theme of this kind, I feel myself committed to the study of actual language: that is to say, to the words and sequences of words which particular men and women have used in trying to give meaning to their experience (Williams, 1958: xix).

It is certainly my intention, mentioned earlier, to focus strongly on the statements of individuals as a principal methodological practice in the task of trying to identify particular social and cultural formations. Williams (1980) defends the value of this kind of approach to the analysis of cultural groups, even though he is aware of the critique which suggests that small cultural groups are not worth studying since what can be said about them is commonly nuanced, ambiguous and enigmatic and not susceptible to strong statements of certainty based on statistical analysis. Williams, though, does not abandon the search to say, simultaneously, something of value about larger social and cultural structures in society. This search leads him repeatedly in his writings to make reference to one device which he proposes as a way of realising these dual ambitions. The device is the notion he refers to as ‘Structures of Feeling’, or ‘A Structure of Feeling’.

### **2.2.2. Williams’ Structures of Feeling**

Stuart Hall (1989: 62), finds Williams’ concept of a structure of feeling ‘quite unsatisfactory’ stating that it ‘continues to have disabling theoretical effects’. I find the reverse. For the purposes of my thesis it is just one useful way of imagining and analysing the dialectical relationship between the contingent representations of specifically located individuals and the wider social forces which constrain them and which they at the same time help to construct. For Williams a ‘structure of feeling’ is at bottom an expression of temporality, ‘this structure of feeling is the culture of a period’ (Williams, 1992: 48). This offers a potential for the methodological circumscription of the research process in the present thesis. Instead of an anxious rush to say something general and definitive about a putative universal class of young people of South Asian descent in the UK, the thesis endeavours to collect a variety of representations of specific individuals, in a specific geographical location, at a particular temporal moment in a specific institutional setting. If certain representations occur repeatedly in the separate accounts of named individuals who share the social space just described, it becomes possible to suggest tentatively that their representations might indicate a collective way in which a particular encounter with the world is being experienced in a contingent social context. In other words it might be possible to name and describe a ‘structure of feeling’. As Williams, puts it,

I do not mean that the structure of feeling, any more than the social character, is possessed in the same way by the many individuals in the community. But I think it is a very deep and very wide possession, in all actual communities, precisely because it is on it that communication depends. And what is particularly interesting is that it does not seem to



be, in any formal sense, learned. One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come 'from' anywhere. For here, most distinctly, the changing organization is enacted in the organism: the new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities, that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling (ibid.: 48-49).

Williams' elaboration is especially helpful in validating the methodological procedure of basing the thesis on the collection of such a large data set of individual representations. It also begins to offer a glimpse of a way of interpreting some otherwise elusive tensions apparent in this data. One such example is the fact that most of the informants suggest, throughout their representations, that their grandparents and parents have made considerable explicit efforts to train them in the supposed social and cultural contours of their ethnic group. Yet evident in their own representations is an overriding sense that these efforts are being replaced by different responses to the world which appear to work more comfortably for them; that is, they are arguably experiencing a new structure of feeling. One dimension of a potential structure of feeling concerns the question of language. The thesis speculates that inviting individuals to articulate representations of their patterns of language use might be a telling way of appreciating something of the way in which specific 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' might be formed. Once again we see an attempt to find the collective and the structural, starting from the specific and the individual. There is endorsement for this in Williams' further elaboration of the meaning of structure of feeling,

In spite of substantial and at some levels decisive continuities in grammar and vocabulary, no generation speaks quite the same language as its predecessors. The difference can be defined in terms of additions, deletions, and modifications, but these do not exhaust it. What really changes is something quite general, over a wide range, and the description that often fits the change best is the literary term 'style' ... For what we are defining is a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period (Williams, 1977: 131).

When my informants discuss their patterns of language use and other aspects of their ethnicity a certain tension is apparent. They often appear to be struggling at one and the same time to both claim and disavow affiliation to family and community patterns of language use and cultural practices. So, for example, at one moment they might disclaim expertise in family and community language use

or religious practices; at the next moment they deploy personal pronouns ('my religion', 'our language') to reclaim allegiance. Here, too, Williams theorises in a useful way when he suggests that any analysis of culture must struggle to identify elements which are dominant, residual and emergent. These in turn are constitutive aspects of structures of feeling and will be examined more fully in the introduction to Part II of the thesis.

### 2.2.3. Thompson and the importance of Agency

Stuart Hall once stated that there were two paradigms in cultural studies (Hall, 1981). These were the culturalist paradigm and the structuralist paradigm. For Hall, the former linked Williams' approach to cultural analysis to that of E.P. Thompson and Richard Hoggart. What was noteworthy in the culturalist paradigm was that,

The *experiential pull* in this paradigm, and the emphasis on the creative and on historical agency, constitute the two key elements in the *humanism* of the position outlined. Each, consequently accords 'experience' an authenticating position in any cultural analysis. It is, ultimately, where and how people experience their conditions of life, define them and respond to them, which, for Thompson defines why every mode of production is also a culture, and every struggle between classes is always also a struggle between cultural modalities; and which, for Williams, is what a 'cultural analysis', in the final instance should deliver (ibid: 26).

Thompson attaches prime importance in social and cultural analysis to the idea that human beings act consciously, individually and collectively, to advance what they take to be their own interests, and have the capacity to affect the course of their own history. In other words they have agency. As he neatly puts it in relation to the English working class, 'The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making' (Thompson, 1968: 9). I do not believe that it is possible to get close to a worthwhile understanding of how a specific social or cultural formation might be constituted without proceeding methodologically on these assumptions, and Thompson is severe on sociologists who think otherwise,

Sociologists who have stopped the time-machine and, with a good deal of conceptual huffing and puffing, have gone down to the engine-room to look, tell us that nowhere at all have they been able to locate and classify a class. They can only find a multitude of people with different occupations, incomes, status-hierarchies, and the rest. Of course they are right, since class is not this or that part of the machine, but *the way the machine works* once it is set in motion - not this and that interest, but the *friction* of interests - the movement itself, the heat, the thundering noise.



Class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationship with other classes; and, ultimately, the definition can only be made in the medium of *time* - that is, action and reaction, change and conflict. When we speak of *a* class we are thinking of a very loosely defined body of people who share the same congeries of interests, social experiences, traditions and value-system, who have a *disposition to behave* as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways. But class itself is not a thing, it is a happening (ibid.: 939).

Now read the passage again substituting ‘ethnicity’ or ‘ethnic group’ wherever the word class appears, in order to arrive at an understanding of some of the methodological assumptions guiding the thesis. In his coruscating attack on the way in which Althusserian structuralism contemptuously discounts these perspectives (Thompson, 1978), Thompson insists that the excavation of the category which might be broadly termed ‘human experience’ is an essential element in developing an understanding of what a particular social or cultural formation is and how it came to be what it is,

And we find that, with “experience” and “culture” we are at a junction-point of another kind. For people do not only experience their own experience as ideas, within thought and its procedures, or (as some theoretical practitioners suppose) as proletarian instinct, etc. They also experience their own experience as *feeling*, and they handle their feelings within their culture, as norms, familial and kinship obligations and reciprocities, as values or (through more elaborated forms) within art or religious beliefs. This half of culture (and it is a full one-half) may be described as affective and moral consciousness (Thompson, 1978: 363).

The idea that the respectful and rigorous analysis of agentive acts, statements and representations precedes and guides the search for structural frames of analysis and not vice-versa, clearly has powerful methodological salience in this thesis. I would argue that the methodological implications of linking individual agency and experience with identifiable social structure is assisted by aspects of what has been described as the phenomenological sociology of Alfred Schutz.

#### **2.2.4. Alfred Schutz, the life-world and the stock of knowledge**

A number of notions in Schutz’s work may well prove to be of great assistance in the thesis. They can help to answer the question of what wider value can be placed on the representational utterances, texts and performances of individual social actors, given the commitment to place these at the centre of the thesis. Schutz is greatly interested in the world of everyday life which he calls the ‘life-world’,

This is an intersubjective world in which people both create social reality and are constrained by the preexisting social and cultural structures created by our predecessors. While much of the life-world is shared, there are also private (biographically articulated) aspects of that world ... Overall, Schutz was concerned with the dialectical relationship between the way people construct social reality and the obdurate social and cultural reality that they inherit from those who preceded them in the social world (Ritzer, 1992: 217).

This captures something of the dialectical method I wish to employ in the interpretation of my research data. Useful, too, in this respect is Schutz's concept of the stock of knowledge.

According to Schutz, when individuals offer an interpretation of their everyday world they do so on the basis of 'a stock of previous experiences of it, our own experiences and those handed down to us by our parents and teachers, which in the form of "knowledge at hand" function as a scheme of reference' (Schutz, 1970:72). This sense of the collective reflected through the individual, helps to build apparently singular and subjective representations into structured forms. But Schutz is emphatic that the stock of knowledge is not static but is 'in a continual flux' (ibid.: 75).

At the same time members of a specific social or cultural group continually seek stability by taking recourse to ready made recipes in the form of schemes of expression for making sense of their world in a routinised fashion derived both from their ancestors and contemporary community authorities. Schutz argues that when specific groups share what appears to be a common social heritage,

'the subjective meaning the group has for its members consists in their knowledge of a common situation and with it of a common system of typifications and relevances. This situation has its history in which the individual members' biographies participate ... This acceptance of a common system of relevances leads the members of the group to a homogeneous self-typification' (ibid.: 82).

The methodological possibilities for the thesis are clear. If the research informants, who share a definable social space both in and away from the research site, offer self-typifications which are replicated on a significant scale, then there are strong grounds for inferring that a distinctive socio-cultural structure has been identified. Borrowing the concept of Verstehen (understanding and interpretation of the acts, utterances, motivations, and world experiences of individual social actors) from Weber and others, Schutz summarises the position succinctly,



The observational field of the social scientist, however, namely the social reality, has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, acting, and thinking therein. By a series of common-sense constructs they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their daily lives. It is these thought objects of theirs which determine their behaviour by motivating it. The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men, living their daily life within their social world. Thus, the constructs of the social sciences are, so to speak, constructs of the second degree, namely constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene, whose behaviour the social scientist has to observe and to explain in accordance with the procedural rules of his science.

Thus, the exploration of the general principles according to which man in daily life organizes his experiences, and especially those of the social world, is the first task of the methodology of the social sciences (ibid.: 272-273).

Schutz proposes, as we have seen, that there exist socially constructed commonsense stocks of knowledge which individuals bring to bear on their everyday experience to make it meaningful. If this is the case then methodologically I have a device at my disposal for characterising the foundations on which my informants' representational accounts rest. In other words, Schutz's concept allows me to contend that in my research each of the adolescent informants, who are of South Asian descent, is drawing on at least three major strands of commonsense stocks of knowledge.

The first is the commonsense stock of knowledge which defines what Sikh culture, or Panjabi language culture, or Hindu, or Gujarati language culture are. In my research data there are countless examples of instances where my informants make explicit references to such notions, which they attempt to use as frames through which they might interpret their everyday experiences and make them meaningful. One of the interesting features of these attempts is the extent to which most of the informants exhibit considerable tensions when they attempt to make their life worlds meaningful in this way. An example of this difficulty is frequently encountered, where, for instance, an informant from a Sikh family background having disavowed expertise in Panjabi language or any particular allegiance to Sikh religion or to the visible artefacts of Sikhism, nevertheless makes countless anxious references to 'my religion' or 'my culture'.

The second commonsense stock of knowledge on which they appear to be drawing is the one defining in what guises an adolescent of South Asian descent in West London in the late 1990s should inhabit the world. This is the stock of knowledge which allows one female informant to identify her preferred music as the white grunge band Nirvana rather than Hindi film music, or numerous female informants to express excited allegiance to the Black British R&B act Damage. Similarly, a significant number of male informants expressed and performed allegiance to African-American and/or Jamaican macho ways of being. The key point is that in behaving in these ways these informants seemed to be drawing on stocks of knowledge which appeared to them to be locally unexceptional but nevertheless important ways of making sense of the world.

A third, and equally important stock of knowledge on which my informants appeared to be drawing was that connected with the way in which official institutions such as their school, which was the research site, depict and define them. This stock of knowledge is of long standing, is deep and has spawned its own complex but well understood routinised common sense discourses. There are a variety of poles of origin of this stock of knowledge. One origin would be official British depictions and common sense knowledges of the peoples of India formed during the Raj.<sup>26</sup> Onto this would be added the stock of knowledge concerning the sections of these peoples who participated in a mass migration to Britain from the 1960s onwards and entered the society as unwelcome and supposedly illegitimate immigrants. After this the stock of knowledge developed further, during an era which began in the mid 1970s, with The Race Relations Act 1976, and which is still extant - the era dominated by official equal opportunities discourses in Britain. It is arguable that in this period, according to the prevailing official stock of knowledge, the Indians have become 'a nation of shopkeepers'; successful migrants with stable families and cultures - an example to all<sup>27</sup>. But more specifically a distinctive educational stock of knowledge has developed in Britain during this period. This stock of knowledge has circumscribed pupils of South Asian descent, amongst others, as people with strange languages and cultures which should be ignored (Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Committee, 1964), tolerated (Bullock Report, 1975) and even funded (Swann

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<sup>26</sup> See James (1998) for a popular narrative history account, and Visram (2002) for an 'Asian' view of the historical relationship in Britain itself.

<sup>27</sup> See *The Independent* newspaper 23.3.00 for a vivid example from the then British Home Secretary Jack Straw in a story headed 'Straw: Families should adopt Asian values'.



Report, 1985). Some specific special funding, known as Section 11 funding<sup>28</sup>, has been set aside to overcome the problems that these languages and cultures have been said to cause in the British educational system. In order to justify the additional funding, schools and other educational institutions have been required to construct monitoring systems in which the pupils are described in numerical aggregates of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Once described in these ways a commonsense stock of knowledge has developed concerning the properties and behaviours of such groups. Indeed schools have been required to institute policies and practices based on this stock of knowledge, and related to the raising of educational achievement, to satisfy central government, Ofsted inspectors and school governors. When I, as a researcher, investigated my informants on a British school site I was aware that the accounts that they supplied to me were at least partly shaped by the three stocks of knowledge which I have just identified. Holstein and Gubrium (1998) draw attention to Mary Douglas' (1986: 96) comments on Durkheim's observations on collective representations which she says he regarded as 'publicly standardized ideas [that] constitute social order'. For Holstein and Gubrium,

Interpretive practice can be understood to involve the articulation of publicly recognized structures, categories, or images with aspects of experience in ways that accountably produce broadly recognizable instances of the objects or events so categorized (1998: 147).

My view is, precisely, that my research informants both in institutional and community settings have been the at least partial prisoners of collective representations. One element in this process is what Holstein and Gubrium refer to as the rhetorics of everyday life and collective representation which in contemporary society is fuelled by,

... the large-scale and mass-media rhetoric or "publicity" (Gubrium, 1993) that promotes "images of issues" (Best, 1989) that may be applied to categorize experience. (Holstein and Gubrium, 1998: 148).

It is my claim that I have worked interactively with my informants in a research setting to uncover and explore alternative participatory representations which transcend or perhaps contest media, community and institutional representations.

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<sup>28</sup> Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966. Since 1999 this funding has come under the heading of the Ethnic Minorities and Travellers Achievement Grant (EMTAG) or the Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant (EMAG).

In this respect I concur entirely with Holstein and Gubrium's (1998: 150) observation that,

Practitioners of everyday life are not “organisational dopes”, mere extensions of organizational thinking. They exercise interpretive discretion, mediated by complex layerings of interpretive influence. They also carry with them the biographical basis for resistance, personal and interpersonal histories that compete with organizational categories as means for interpreting experience.

I have given, here, a brief account of some of the ways in which aspects of Schutz's approach might enhance the interpretive power of my research analysis. However, I must at the same time register a small word of caution. There is, in the concept of stocks of knowledge, a hint that the researcher need not be particularly concerned about how well founded they are. Yet I want to reiterate emphatically that I *do* think that the effects of concrete historical and contemporary events in the world can be demonstrated to have certain structural effects on the perceptions and behaviours of individuals. In short, political, economic, social and cultural power and domination exists and has real effects. The social researcher has a responsibility not to give the impression that in focusing hard on the local and the individual he/she is implying that such effects can be voluntaristically transcended.

#### **2.2.5. Perec and a methodological experiment**

In the previous part of the chapter I outlined a number of methodological mechanisms for capturing both the sense of individual agency in informants' representational accounts and the idea that these accounts are at the same time structured in specific ways. Yet in some respects what might still be missing is a mechanism for giving the reader, through the medium of written text, a deep feel for the components, drawn from informants' accounts, which constitute the 'structures of feeling' and 'stock of knowledge', while retaining their agentive flavour. One approach which might achieve this ambition can be found in some of the experimental methodological techniques deployed by Georges Perec and described by Howard Becker (Becker, 2001).<sup>29</sup>

Becker is particularly fascinated by the overall potency of Perec's varied attempts to 'characterize a culture and way of life, both the relevant beliefs and their coordinate activities, by the accumulation of formally unanalyzed detail' (Becker,

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<sup>29</sup> Brought to my attention by Les Back.



2001: 72). The possibility that I would like to tentatively consider is whether a similarly effective potency might be achieved by the cumulative presentation of descriptions and representations in ‘formally unanalyzed detail’ of a significant fraction of the 30 research informants in the thesis in order to capture something of the essence of the social and cultural formation under consideration in a way no other technique can match. I attempt such a methodological experiment with an exposition of this technique in Chapter Four.

Similarly, another approach to the methodological conundrum outlined at the beginning of this section is offered by Bourdieu et al (1999) in the publication *The Weight of the World*. Unusually, for a sociological publication reporting on research, many of the chapters consist of lengthy transcripts of interviews carried out during the research process including the contributions of both interviewers and respondents. It is not that authorial selections have not been made from the interviews for presentation to readers; it is simply the case that the effort to present long, relatively unmediated, stretches of informant representations gives the reader access to a different, broader, quality of ‘feel’ for the relationship between the individual agent and larger structures of a place and a period.

#### **2.2.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has located the thesis methodologically, describing the procedures followed and their motivations. In pursuit of these objectives the chapter has identified and addressed three broad areas of concern. In the first place it has outlined what might be methodologically distinctive about the present study when compared with the work of some other researchers on cognate themes. Secondly, it has carefully explored a range of important methodological contingencies relevant to my own research conducted at that time, in that location, with those particular informants. Finally, the present chapter has also looked for ways of grappling with the methodological problem of how to ensure that informant representations are central to the thesis without succumbing to offering merely a banal document of local description. This endeavour is part of an effort to assume sociological responsibility for committing to rigorous analytic and interpretive acts in order to present conclusions that at least hint at the possibility of structured generalisations. In this chapter the process was begun with the assistance of conceptualisations from the work of Williams, Schutz and Perce showing possibilities for the divining of social and cultural structure, while insights from the work of Thompson offered a stern reminder of the unavoidable salience of

agency. A continuation of the process will be seen in the next chapter which opens the second part of the thesis by concentrating on the empirical study I carried out, and the description, analysis and interpretation of its findings.



## **Part II – The Empirical Study**

## **Introduction to the Empirical Study**

### **The dominant, residual and emergent, in culture.**

In this second part of the thesis I move on to discuss the findings of the empirical study which was conducted on the methodological basis outlined in Chapter Two. First, in Chapter Three there is a factual description and preliminary analysis of the data collected by means of the language survey questionnaire. This is followed by Chapter Four which, utilising an experimental method which was discussed in Chapter Two, presents a series of portraits of selected Blackhill youth in ‘formally unanalyzed detail’. This offers a view of the nuanced depth and complexity related to language use and ethnicity which the language survey questionnaire implies but is inadequate to properly convey.

The subsequent discussion in Chapters Five, Six and Seven provides an interpretive analysis in the form of some general claims about the possible ways of identifying and understanding ‘new ethnicities’ and ‘cultures of hybridity’ in the lives of the Blackhill youth. This discussion together with Chapters Three and Four particularly seeks to demonstrate how the new in cultural practice, rather than replacing the traditional, co-exists with it. In other words in describing what is new in the ethnic and cultural practices of the Blackhill youth, it is in no way intended that there should be any easy implication that they have abandoned or wish to abandon entirely their inherited traditions. To sum up, then, Chapters Three to Seven are intended to be read as an extended exploration and demonstration of some of the ways in which these intricate dialectical relationships in culture are realised at the level of the routine, habitual, unspectacular practices of everyday life. To guide this perspective I want to utilise the theoretical formulation, drawn from the work of Raymond Williams, which suggests that culture should be perceived in terms of the articulation of the residual with the dominant and the emergent.

#### **Dominant, Residual and Emergent elements of culture**

The difficulty of working with these concepts is that Williams urges that the cultural analyst must both identify them as separate elements and yet understand that in lived experience they operate syncretically. In my research this might have resonance, for example, at the intersection of linguistic and religious practices. For instance, with respect to the Blackhill youth, Panjabi language use and Sikh religious observances which were dominant in their families in their grandparents’



generation may have been significantly replaced by emergent radically new practices. At the same time, however, the former practices live on for them with a specific residual salience. These young people continue to attend the Gurdwara, and they greet their grandparents in Panjabi on a daily basis to show respect. As Williams views it,

The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. It is crucial to distinguish this aspect of the residual, which may have an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant-culture, from that active manifestation of the residual (this being its distinction from the archaic) which has been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture (Williams, 1977: 122).

Williams states additionally,

By 'emergent' I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture (and in this sense 'species specific') and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel (ibid.: 123).

In a sense the Blackhill youth are negotiating doubly dominant, doubly residual and doubly emergent elements in culture. For them the dominant has operated both at the level of the Anglo elements of the dominant cultures of the British nation state and in the dominant strands of the relatively ethnically exclusive cultural practices of the generations of their grandparents and parents; the residual elements from both traditions are encountered and lived daily; they experience the emergent in the broader cultural arena as British born teenagers of the 1990s at the same time as experiencing the emergent in their narrower more ethnically exclusive environments. When they appear to oscillate between advocacy of emergent elements and the reclamation of previously discarded residual elements perhaps they are reflecting the need for defences against the penalties consequent upon black and brown Britishness,

In the subsequent default of a particular phase of a dominant culture there is then a reaching back to those meanings and values which were created in actual societies and actual situations in the past, and which

still seem to have significance because they represent areas of human experience, aspiration, and achievement which the dominant culture neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses, or even cannot recognize (ibid.: 123-4).

Perhaps, too, intimations of uncertainty and caution, evident both in the Blackhill youth's embracing of the emergent and in my own attempts to name the cultural phenomena which my investigations have identified, can be better understood in the light of the following observation,

What matters, finally, in understanding emergent culture, as distinct from both the dominant and the residual, is that it is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed it depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form. Again and again what we have to observe is in effect a pre-emergence, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named (ibid.: 126).

This struggle to construct an adequate language of description, analysis and interpretation linking the identification of 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' with representations of patterns of language use begins with the language survey questionnaire data.



## **Chapter Three: Language Survey Data - Charting the Terrain**

### **3.0. Introduction**

This chapter offers a description of, and an analytic commentary on, the data collected in the language survey questionnaire. The intention is to give a solid factual account of the nature and extent of the terrain underpinning the discussions ensuing in the chapters in the rest of the thesis. Using the word factual does not mean to suggest that the data elicited by the language survey questionnaire are true. Rather it is suggested that the answers provided by the respondents have been accurately collated and constitute a factual account of how they wanted to present themselves at one particular temporal moment. I have therefore been careful to state that for the present research the results of the language survey serve as acts of representation. In the survey there are numerous occasions on which the Blackhill youth are asked to offer information in answer to questions where more than one answer is possible. This is because they are young people living in a multilingual environment. Where they produce two or three alternative answers to a given question I have chosen to read significance into the ways in which the answers are ordered. In other words I have assumed that there is significance in the first choices of answer that the Blackhill youth make. For a comprehensive collation of all the language survey questionnaire answers in diagramatic form see Appendix D.

### **3.1. Description of data responses (n=31)**

#### **3.1.1. Language use at home and in the family**

When the Blackhill youth were asked which languages they used at home with their families before they ever went to school three languages stood out; Panjabi (13), English (8) and Gujarati (7). Altogether, 23 out of 31 respondents claimed to have first used languages other than English at home in their pre-school years. On the other hand it is important to note that 8 out of 31 claimed that English was the language they first used at home. The results show Panjabi was clearly the dominant home language in their early years. Another way of looking at these results is to notice that when Urdu language is added (1), then 21 out of 31 in the group claimed a South Asian language to have been what they first used in their families in the first five years of their lives. As mentioned earlier this finding is

complicated by the fact that the respondents present their pre-school environment as being a multilingual one. Thus, at the same time, most took the opportunity to claim that they had experienced a second choice of language at home, pre-school. Consequently, 19 out of the 31 respondents identified English language use or at least some English language use as being a second or additional language which they used with their families before they first went to school. Other languages performing this second or additional language function were Panjabi (3), Hindi (2), Gujarati (2), French Creole (1), and Persian (1). It is also interesting to note that these second language answers also show that 2 respondents claim that they used *only* English at home with their families in their early years and 1 respondent claimed to have used Gujarati only. In addition, a small number (3) of respondents reported that before they first went to school they used three languages at home with their families. One said that German was used as a third language, one said that English was used in this way and one said that Malay was used. Overall, 10 different languages were named by this group of 31 respondents as being used with their families before they first attended school.

All of the Blackhill youth were able to link a language which they used with their families pre-school with a specific nation state. In a number of cases they offered an even greater degree of precision by linking the language with a specific region within a nation state, e.g. 'Punjabi - India - Punjab', 'Gujarati - India - Gujarat', 'Hindi - India - Punjab'. In one case ('Kurdish - Kurdistan'), the suggested link referred to a region which exists in the nationalist imagination within a number of nation states (Iran, Iraq and Turkey for instance) without having official recognition anywhere.

There were a small number of examples in the responses in which respondents appeared to be chafing slightly against the limitations of the survey questionnaire format by trying to offer a more precise phrase rather than a single word as an answer; for example, 'Some English', or 'Little bit of English'.

Another feature which also recurred throughout the survey answers, was a variation in the way which respondents spelled some of the South Asian languages. The language whose current official designation is Panjabi was overwhelmingly written as 'Punjabi', while the current official label Gujarati was rendered variously as 'Gujrati' and 'Gujerati' as well as 'Gujarati'. 'Persian' was used where perhaps it is in contemporary terms more usual to see the term Farsi.



There is some suggestion that the variations may be connected with older, often colonial, versions of the spellings. For example, according to Dalby (1998: 486) ‘Punjab is an old-fashioned Anglo-Indian spelling of the word’ [Panjab], and White (1991: 232) writes of ‘the Anglicized term ‘Persian’ which in English denotes Farsi’.

The answers which the Blackhill youth gave to the question of which main ‘first’ languages they now used with family and friends showed that English (20 out of 31) is clearly depicted as dominant, with other languages far behind - Panjabi (4), Gujarati (4), Hindi (1), Urdu (1), Kurdish (1). Nevertheless, for more than a third of the group, a language other than English was recorded as still the main language used with family and friends at home. However, where respondents recorded a ‘second’ language mainly used with family and friends, English (10) came out in a dominant position, with Panjabi (7), Gujarati (4) in its wake. Additionally, ten of the respondents failed to respond to the invitation to indicate a ‘second’ language that they now used at home with family and friends, suggesting that once they had stated that English was the main ‘first’ language they now used with family and friends they meant that it was the *only* language they used in that context.

### **3.1.2. Language use with parents**

In the language survey questionnaire the Blackhill youth were asked which language they usually spoke when talking to their fathers. A clear majority (18 out of 30), indicated that when talking to their fathers they usually spoke in English as the first language used. No other single language came close; Panjabi (4 out of 30) and Gujarati (4 out of 30) being the nearest. When offered the chance to name a second language that they often spoke to their fathers it was significant that 20 respondents left a blank space. Taken together with the responses described above this seems to be a clear indication that a definite majority usually speak nothing but English to their fathers. 4 respondents to the second language question said that they usually spoke English as a second language to their fathers, or sometimes (1) spoke English to their father. 3 respondents said that they spoke Panjabi as a second language with their fathers. However, although another 3 said the same with respect to Gujarati, one of these added that this was a rare occurrence.

The pattern of usual speech to mothers matched that to fathers very closely with a majority (17 out of 31) saying that they usually spoke English to their mothers. There was a slight variation in that a higher number (6 out of 31) usually spoke Gujarati with their mothers compared with the 4 out of 31 who usually spoke Gujarati with their fathers. The pattern for the second language usually spoken to mothers, including the number left blank (20), was almost identical to that spoken to fathers. Of course, although, as mentioned earlier, a clear majority of the respondents claimed to usually speak English to their mothers and fathers, this still meant that a substantial minority (13 and 14 out of 31 respectively) claimed that they usually did not, with a small number of these stating that they usually spoke a mixture of a language other than English and English to their parents.

On the other hand when the focus of the questions switched to which language their parents usually spoke to them at home there appeared to be a slightly different pattern including some differentiation between the practice of their fathers and mothers. Barely half of the respondents said that their fathers (16 out of 31) and fewer than half (14 out of 31) said that their mothers usually spoke English to them. 13 respondents said that their fathers usually spoke a language other than English to them, but more than half (17 out of 31 - Panjabi 8, Gujarati 7, Urdu 1, Kurdish 1) said that their mothers usually spoke a language other than English to them, and this difference may well be a significant one. This is especially so when one considers that none of the respondents offered a second language that they said their mothers regularly spoke to them, whereas 14 (6 English, 4 Panjabi, 3 Gujarati and 1 Urdu) said that their fathers spoke a second language to them. One respondent even stated that their father spoke a third language (Hindi) to them. But overall the initial indications suggested that their parents were more likely to speak a language other than English to them than they were likely to speak such a language to their parents.

### **3.1.3. Language use with grandparents**

One technical weakness in the questionnaire was that there was no very clear allowance made for respondents actually having two sets of grandparents. It was very difficult for respondents, in the space available, to differentiate between two sets of grandparents who may in practice have contrasting profiles. Thus there was an intrinsic implication that respondents were left with the responsibility of having to select which set of grandparents' language use they wanted to represent for the purpose of the questionnaire. Consequently, one was left wondering



whether the grandparents chosen were ones who lived with the respondents, or nearby, or at the very least elsewhere in Britain. Or alternatively might it have been that the chosen grandparents lived abroad and were seen only during visits or were spoken to only from time to time on the telephone? A second observation is that the numerical sample of answers was sharply reduced. 9 (out of 31) respondents indicated that they had no grandfather on whom to report and 5 no grandmother. Once this has been said, however, a clear pattern was evident from the responses. Firstly, only 3 respondents (out of 22) said that they usually spoke English to their grandfathers and only 3 (out of 26) said that they usually spoke English to their grandmothers. Conversely, 18 (11 Panjabi, 5 Gujarati, 1 Kurdish, 1 Urdu) out of 22 said that they usually spoke a language other than English to their grandfathers and one claimed to speak a mixture of English and Panjabi to them. Similarly, 22 (14 Panjabi, 6 Gujarati, 1 Urdu, 1 Kurdish) out of 26 stated that they usually spoke a language other than English to their grandmothers. Again, one respondent claimed to speak a mixture of English and Panjabi to their grandmother. Only 4 respondents, referring to their grandfathers, and 3 respondents, referring to their grandmothers, claimed that they regularly spoke a second language to their grandparents and even then the claim tended to be accompanied by qualifying phrases such as 'sometimes' or 'very few times'. The space in the questionnaire for entering a second language was significant since it offered respondents an opportunity to indicate that they often, or regularly, or sometimes, spoke English to their grandparents. It is markedly noticeable that only 2, referring to grandfathers, and 1, referring to a grandmother, suggested that they did in fact do this.

When it came to the language that their grandparents spoke to *them*, an overwhelming majority of respondents, 17 out of a possible 22 (10 Panjabi, 5 Gujarati, 1 Urdu, 1 Kurdish) said that their grandfathers usually spoke a language other than English to them, while only 4 usually spoke English to them. The proportions for grandmothers were similar with 19 out of 26 reported as usually speaking a language other than English to the respondents (14 Panjabi, 6 Gujarati, 1 Urdu, 1 Kurdish), and only 3 usually speaking English to them. 3 respondents indicated that their grandmothers sometimes used a second language with them; 4 respondents said that their grandfathers also did so. Interestingly, one of the very few of the Blackhill youth not claiming a South Asian lineage nevertheless followed the pattern of indicating that a grandparent was much more likely than any other family member to communicate with them in a language other than

English. She stated that both her grandfather and grandmother sometimes spoke Jamaican Creole to her, albeit as a second language - presumably usually speaking English to her.

#### **3.1.4. Language use with brothers and sisters**

A question on what language they usually spoke to their brother or sister at home sharply reduced the number of respondents since 10 out of 31 said that they had no brother, and 6 out of 31 said that they had no sister. The second distinctive pattern to emerge was that an overwhelming majority (18 out of 21) said that they usually spoke English to their brother. An additional respondent claimed to usually speak English together with Gujarati with their brother. Only 2 respondents (1 Panjabi, 1 Kurdish) out of 21 claimed to usually speak a language other than English to their brother. The pattern for the language usually spoken to sisters was strikingly similar. Again an overwhelming majority of respondents, 23 out of 25, claimed to usually speak English to their sister, and only (1 Panjabi, 1 Gujarati) stated that they usually spoke a language other than English to their sister. One other immediately striking pattern was that all respondents left blank the space available to enter a second language usually spoken to a brother or sister. Taken together these answers seem to suggest that almost all respondents were strongly indicating that they usually spoke English and only English to their siblings.

Again, in answer to a question on which language their siblings usually spoke to *them* at home, an overwhelming majority, 27 out of 31 respondents, stated that their siblings usually spoke to them in English. Of the remaining 4 respondents, siblings usually spoke to them in Panjabi (2), Kurdish (1), Hindi (1). Only 6 respondents claimed that their siblings regularly spoke a second language with them. Of these the second language was English for three people, with 1 listing Gujarati, 1 listing Panjabi, and one stating 'sometimes Panjabi'. Only one respondent claimed that a sibling spoke a third language with them - in that case English.

#### **3.1.5. Issues of language use in the wider family**

The questionnaire sought, in a variety of ways, to probe the extent of language use in the wider families of the Blackhill youth. However, the questionnaire instrument itself was a little too narrow to pick up satisfactorily the complexity that such questions imply. Bearing this reservation in mind, 19 respondents



indicated that there were a range of additional languages which they had encountered being spoken in their families as first languages. These included Hindi (5), Swahili (4), Panjabi (2), Spanish, French Creole, Malay, Arabic, Chinese, and Jamaican Creole (all 1 each). Two respondents mentioned English. When I use the term 'wider family' one of the factors I had in mind was aunts, uncles and cousins. This wider definition of the family accounts for the number of respondents who identified the additional languages (8) encountered as second languages - Hindi (3), Panjabi (2), French (1), English (1), Gujarati (1); as third languages - French, German, Spanish, Panjabi, Hindi, English (all 1 each); or even (2) as fourth languages - Portuguese (1), and sometimes Urdu (1).

Uncles and aunts, then, appeared to broaden the range of languages present in the respondents' social environment with one respondent listing Italian as a first language spoken by an uncle in childhood and another entry associating an aunt as growing up with a first language depicted as 'A South African language don't know name'. Cousins, presumably closely linked to the uncles and aunts referred to, are depicted as more likely to have grown up speaking English than their parents. These cousins are shown to have grown up speaking dominant first languages in the following proportions - English (10), Panjabi (10), Gujarati (5), other languages (5); and second languages - English (9), Panjabi (5), Gujarati (3). In sum, the languages attached to uncles, aunts and cousins suggest a connection to East Africa (the persistent references to Swahili/Kiswahili) and to Indian ethnicity (regular references to Hindi).

The other factor I had in mind when referring to the wider family, was a series of questions in the questionnaire asking the Blackhill youth what languages their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles grew up speaking in their own childhoods.

The answers to these questions gave some account of the dimensions of multilingualism in the respondents' families but also, and more particularly, the depth of this multilingualism. The dominant first language spoken by respondents' fathers in childhood was Panjabi (13), followed by Gujarati (6), and Swahili (3). Only 1 reported a father who had grown up speaking English as a first language. However, this does not suggest an absence of English since 9 respondents claimed a father who had grown up speaking English as a second language, and 6 as a third language. The extent of the multilingual childhoods experienced by the respondents' fathers, is shown by the fact that 22 (9 English, 4

Hindi, 3 Gujarati, 2 Swahili, 1 Urdu, 1 Panjabi, 1 Chinese, 1 Arabic) grew up speaking a second language; 9 (6 English, 2 Hindi, 1 Swahili) speaking a third language, and 2 (1 Panjabi, 1 Marathi) a fourth language. The pattern of reported childhood language use by respondents' mothers was extremely similar to that for their fathers. This line of questioning also brought into the picture other languages not picked up by other questions. For instance, one respondent reported a father who had grown up speaking Pashto<sup>30</sup> as a first language. Another respondent mentioned Marathi<sup>31</sup> as a 4<sup>th</sup> language spoken by their father in childhood.

The responses with regard to grandfathers and grandmothers were very close to those relating to fathers and mothers. For example, for grandfathers, Panjabi (15) was again dominant as a first language spoken in childhood, followed by Gujarati (6) and Swahili (2). One contrast was that while the pattern for speaking English as a first language in childhood was similar - grandfathers (2), grandmothers (1) - the overall incidence of English was far less when one considers English spoken as a second language - grandfathers (1), grandmothers (1) - or as a third language - grandfathers (1), grandmothers (none). One respondent identified a language (Turkish) which had not previously emerged from the questionnaire answers, as a third language spoken by a grandfather and grandmother in childhood.

Despite the previously mentioned limitations of the questionnaire, with respect to the scope for recording information on uncles and aunts, the responses recorded for them here closely followed the patterns for parents and grandparents with Panjabi again dominant as a first language spoken in childhood for both uncles (16) and aunts (15), followed by Gujarati - uncles (7), and aunts (6) - and with English prominent in a number of cases - uncles (3) and aunts (4). Again, uncles and aunts confirmed family multilingualism in childhood with a number of respondents claiming that uncles and aunts grew up speaking second languages (for example for uncles - 8 English, 3 Swahili, 2 Hindi, 2 Gujarati, and 2 Panjabi), third languages, (for example for aunts - 4 English, 3 Hindi), and even fourth languages.

Another pattern that emerged strongly was the extent to which the Blackhill youth appeared to be inhabiting a highly multilingual environment through their wider

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<sup>30</sup> A language of Afghanistan/Pakistan.

<sup>31</sup> A language of India.



family, without being fully engaged in it as active participants. This was reflected in the number of instances (47) where respondents claimed that relatives spoke languages where they understood only some of what was said, instances (26) where relatives spoke in languages where they understood only a few words, and instances (28) where relatives spoke languages where they understood nothing at all.

### 3.1.6. The issue of linguistic proficiency

The questionnaire included a series of questions eliciting from the Blackhill youth their self-assessment of their degree of proficiency in the languages in their lives. Of the 'first' languages they say they used with their families prior to school the overwhelming majority still claimed to be able to understand these languages *quite well* Panjabi (10), English (7), Gujarati (6), Kurdish (1), Urdu (1). At the same time a number stated that they now understood these languages *only a little*, Panjabi (4), Swahili (1), and Hindi (1). None of the respondents claimed that they now had no understanding at all of the languages they had listed as the 'first' languages they used with their families at home before first entering school. Of the languages listed as the 'second' languages used at home pre-school, again the vast majority of respondents claimed to still be able to understand these *quite well*. What was highly significant here was the dominant position of English (20), when set against Gujarati (2), Panjabi (1), Hindi (1), French Creole (1). A few respondents indicated that they now understood these 'second' languages *only a little* - that is English (1), Persian (1) and Panjabi (1). Again none claimed that they now had no understanding of these languages. Of the three respondents who listed a third pre-school language 1 (Gujarati) claimed to now understand it *quite well*, and 2 German (1) and Malay (1) *only a little*. None said that they no longer had any knowledge of these languages.

In the dimension of speech the large majority said that they could still speak *quite well* the language that they had listed as the one 'first' used at home as pre-school infants - Panjabi (10), English (7), Gujarati (6), Hindi (1), Urdu (1), Kurdish (1). A minority said that they now spoke these languages *only a little* - Panjabi (3). Two, Panjabi (1) and Swahili (1) claimed that they could no longer speak these languages. For the languages listed as the 'second' ones used at home in infancy, nearly all respondents said that they still spoke these languages *quite well* with English once again dominant - English (21), Gujarati (2), Panjabi (1), Hindi (1). Two respondents said that they now spoke the languages Persian (1), and French-

Creole (1) *only a little*. While no respondent claimed to be no longer able to speak this ‘second’ language, it was noticeable that three respondents failed to answer here. The reason for this omission is not clear. At the same time, of the ‘third’ languages listed one, German (1), is stated to be now spoken *quite well* even though this respondent claimed to understand it *only a little*. None of the respondents claimed that they no longer spoke these ‘third’ languages.

When it came to the issue of literacy<sup>32</sup>, the answers showed a significant differentiation of response. Here there was a sharp reduction to a minority (13 out of 31) in the numbers of users of ‘first’ languages who felt that they could now write them *quite well* - English (7), Panjabi (3), Gujarati (1), Kurdish (1), Hindi (1). What is striking is the domination of English in this dimension of the 4 key language skills (understanding, speaking, reading and writing) and the relative eclipse of all the other languages. A few respondents claimed that they could now write these languages *only a little* - Gujarati (3), Panjabi (2), but a highly significant 13 respondents said that they could not now write any of these languages at all - Panjabi (9), Gujarati (2), Swahili (1), Urdu (1). This trend is even more pronounced in relation to the listed ‘second’ languages. Here most respondents (20) claimed to now be able to write English *quite well*, none claimed to be able to write any of the languages *quite well* or even *only a little*, while 8 said that they could not write these languages at all Gujarati (3), Panjabi (2), Hindi (1), Persian (1), French Creole (1). One respondent gave an amplified answer by stating that he had never known how to write Gujarati. It is highly likely that this was the case for many, if not all, of the other respondents who had very little way of indicating this due to the constraints of the survey questionnaire format.

Overall, what emerged most clearly was that virtually all respondents (30 out of 31), claimed that they could still understand, to some extent at least, one language other than English and all respondents claimed, in effect, that they had grown up in bilingual or multilingual families.

#### **3.1.6.1. Learning other languages**

Their answers to questions on additional languages they had learned or were learning, revealed the existence, in some dimension or other of the linguistic

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<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, when I formatted the questionnaire I inadvertently omitted a question asking respondents how well they could read various languages.



experience of the Blackhill youth, of an understanding of a number of additional languages, over and above the ones already mentioned. A large number (21 out of 31) mentioned German as a first additional language within their understanding. It is worth noting here that German was the dominant foreign language taught as a subject in their school. They also mentioned Hindi, Arabic, Urdu, French Creole, Malay, French and Gujarati (all 1 each). 14 respondents listed second additional languages of which they had some understanding (5 Hindi, 4 French, 2 German, and Gujarati, Panjabi and Swahili (1 each)). Some understanding of a third additional language was claimed by 6 respondents (3 Hindi, 2 German and 1 Urdu). Finally, 2 respondents suggested that they had understanding of a fourth additional language (1 Gujarati and 1 Sign Language). The latter may or may not have signalled the existence of a hearing-impaired family member.

A majority of respondents indicated that they would like to learn additional languages. Interestingly, very few listed South Asian languages despite their earlier ratings of themselves as lacking competence in these languages. The most popular languages mentioned were Spanish and Italian. Why this should be so must go unexplored at this stage due to the limitations on interpretative analysis imposed by the questionnaire format. The same applies to understanding the stance of the significant minority of respondents who either said that they did not want to learn an additional language or made no response on this issue.

### **3.1.7. Language use outside the home**

#### **3.1.7.1 Language use with friends at school**

All but one of the respondents claimed that they usually spoke to their schoolfriends in English during school breaks. In the one discrepant case Panjabi was the language usually spoken. However, some respondents (7) indicated that second languages were also spoken with their peers. These languages included what was described as ‘English & our language words e.g. Rasta Talk’(1), German (3) and ‘sometimes Gujarati’. A smaller number of respondents (5) suggested that they were involved in speaking a third language with their peers during school breaks. These included ‘our own words e.g. Rasta Talk’ (1), Panjabi or ‘a bit of Panjabi (3), and German (1).

### **3.1.7.2. Multilingual environment at school**

All the questionnaire respondents were conscious that classmates spoke languages other than English and showed a strong awareness of the names of these languages. This was shown by the listing of 13 different languages, most of them by large numbers of the respondents.

### **3.1.7.3. Community Language classes**

A substantial majority (21 out of 31) of respondents indicated that they had attended classes to learn their family or community languages when they were younger. Of these, two, Panjabi (10) and Gujarati (8), were dominant, with Urdu (1), Kurdish (1) and Arabic (1) also registering. Conversely, it is worth noting that a significant minority of almost a third (10 out of 31), said that they had not attended community language classes. The overwhelming majority of those who had attended community language classes claimed to have begun attendance during their primary school years (19 out of 21), with approximately half (11 out of 21), also discontinuing their attendance while at primary school and just under half (10 out of 21) stopping during the early years of secondary school. Thus none of the respondents who had once attended community language classes claimed to be still doing so by the age of 15. The dominant learning experiences at community language classes reported by respondents were related to the maintenance of culture and traditions (13) or religion (11). 10 responses claimed that only language was learned. One response was extremely precise in identifying writing as an activity promoted in the classes, while other responses mentioned history (7), music (3) and dance (3).

A separate set of questions covered overlapping ground with respect to earlier questions asked about the languages of the home in asking about what languages the respondents had learned out of school. According to the responses here, 24 respondents claimed to have learned to speak a language other than English out of school and 7 claimed not to have. There is a slight discrepancy here in that when asked which languages were involved, 25 respondents claim to have learned to speak a language, other than English, out of school - Panjabi (13), Gujarati (5), Hindi (1), Kurdish (1), French (1), Urdu (1), Swahili (1), and Arabic (1), with Japanese (1) making an appearance in the questionnaire responses. It is reasonable to make the assumption that this respondent learned this language at a class since there is no other hint of its existence anywhere else earlier in the questionnaire.



Two respondents, 1 Arabic, 1 Malay, claimed to have learned a second language outside school.

A majority of positive respondents (16 out of 25) claimed to still be able to speak quite well the languages they had learned. But 7 respondents (4 Panjabi, 1 Japanese, 1 Hindi, and 1 French), claimed to be able to now speak these languages only a little; and 2 (1 Arabic, 1 Swahili) said that they could not now speak at all the languages they had previously learned.

Only 4 respondents (2 Panjabi, 1 Gujarati and 1 Kurdish) said that they could now write these languages quite well. 5 (2 Panjabi, 1 Gujarati, 1 Hindi, and 1 French) said that they could now write the languages only a little. But very significantly, 15 respondents (9 Panjabi, 2 Gujarati, 1 Arabic, 1 Urdu, 1 Japanese, 1 Swahili) stated that they could not now write the language concerned, together with another respondent (Gujarati) who claimed to have never been able to write the language.

The pattern of answers for reading closely resembles those given for writing. Only 2 respondents (both Panjabi) claimed to now be able to read quite well a language earlier listed, though one of these claimed to also be able to still read Arabic quite well. 8 respondents (3 Panjabi, 2 Gujarati, 1 Kurdish, 1 French, 1 Hindi) stated that they could now read these languages only a little and a majority (14 out of 25) said that they could now not read the language at all, with an additional respondent (Gujarati) claiming to have never been able to read the language. Overall, an overwhelming majority of respondents (21 out of 25 for writing, and 23 out of 25 for reading) claimed to have retained little or no literacy skills in the languages they had learned out of school. These figures are even more markedly significant when measured against the overall number of questionnaire respondents (31).

Almost half of the respondents (15 out of 31) claimed to have learned their additional languages from family members in England, while 11 claimed to have learned them at out of school classes. Interestingly, 2 responses claimed to have learned first and second additional languages during visits to another country. One response claimed the self-taught learning of a first additional language, and one (Arabic) claimed that religious classes had been a site for additional language learning.

#### **3.1.7.4. Language learning at school**

Not surprisingly for secondary school students the Blackhill youth identified themselves as people learning languages at school. What emerged very clearly from the responses to these questions was that the dominant language other than English which the respondents had learned at school was German, and that they expressed a significant degree of confidence in their oral and literacy skills in that language and certainly a higher degree than in their so-called community languages. A few respondents seemed to have learned French at school at some point but their assessment of their competence was sharply negative. The other noticeable point was that virtually none of the respondents said that they had learned their community languages as a school subject.

#### **3.1.7.5. Multilingualism in the neighbourhood**

The majority of the respondents expressed an awareness that their home neighbourhoods contained multilingual people and in most cases felt able to name the languages concerned. Moreover, a minority showed considerable awareness of living in a neighbourhood environment featuring notices and signs in languages other than English. Some of their observations were even more acute in that they pinpointed some of the multilingual signs and notices as having religious significance as Sikh, Muslim or Hindu symbols.

At the end of the questionnaire the Blackhill youth were asked about their country of birth, how long they had lived in Britain and their religious affiliation. All but 3 of the respondents were born in Britain, and of those born outside two had subsequently spent the majority of their lives in Britain. The remaining respondent was a student who had arrived in the country for schooling purposes during the academic year in which the research took place and returned to India, dissatisfied, during the Easter break just after completing this survey questionnaire.

Respondents indicated that the religious groupings with the dominant affiliations were the Sikh and Hindu ones, with the Muslim and Christian ones on a par as minority affiliations.

### **3.2. Charting the Terrain: Discussion**

The weaknesses and limitations of the language survey questionnaire as an investigative tool have already been discussed, however the patterns of answers can be used as the basis for a tentative series of speculative inferences, about the



nature of the intricate interrelationships between language and ethnicity across the generations. This approach is worthwhile in two different ways. Firstly, as has already been seen, the theoretical current of cultural theory commentating on the construction of identities and ethnicities, which substantially informs this thesis, has been remarkably silent on the part that everyday routine patterns of language use might play in shaping the very core of these ethnicities and identities. To restate my challenging question at the beginning of the thesis: surely a person's patterns of language use constitute, along with their physical appearance, styles of dress and decoration, their history and ancestry, their religious practices, central components of their ethnicity and identity? The second way in which the current approach to the survey data is worthwhile is in comparison with the findings of other major surveys (Modood & Berthoud 1997, Linguistic Minorities Project, 1985).

### **3.2.1. Pre-school language use**

The first significant element worthy of comment is that most of the informants first used a language other than English at home in the first five years of their lives before they first went to school. In this respect they are likely to be significantly different from the overwhelming majority of British under 5's during the early to mid-1980s and still so today. This kind of distinctive linguistic identity was for this group of students heavily dominated by Panjabi and Gujarati speaking identities. But these bold statements have to be immediately complicated and qualified by the fact that almost a quarter of the group claimed that English was the first language they used at home pre-school, thus nominally aligning them with the majority UK early years experience. In fact two students claimed that they used only English with their families at home before they first attended school, while only one student claimed to have used only a language other than English (Gujarati) at home prior to school. Finally, the overwhelming majority of respondents who did not claim English as the first language that they used with their families pre-school certainly claimed English as a second language that they used in that context. To make sense of the reported experience of the respondents one has to envisage identities which can be characterised, in the early years of their lives, as multilingual identities.

The questionnaire demands for single-word responses constrained the possibilities for the respondents to indicate the extent of their pre-school identities. In other words, for example, the fact of their use of English or other languages could be

noted but not how much they were used, although some respondents attempted to break through these barriers by occasionally inserting phrases like ‘Some English’ or ‘Little bit of English’. Also, while all informants showed a strong awareness of their linguistic inheritance by being able to name the native sources of the languages other than English which they used at home pre-school, they were much less sure when it came to markers of contemporary expertise such as deploying up-to-date spellings and terminologies for the languages in question. For example, respondents were much less likely to use the standard modern spellings ‘Panjabi’ and ‘Gujarati’ than spellings such as ‘Punjabi’ or ‘Gujerati’ and ‘Gujrati’<sup>33</sup>.

The overwhelming majority of respondents claimed to be still able to understand quite well the languages they first used at home pre-school. This is not at all surprising where that language is English. However, for this to also be the case for languages other than English is highly significant. No respondents said that they now had no understanding at all of the first languages they had used at home prior to school. Although English was reported as having gained substantial ground as a pre-school language which was now still well understood, at one and the same time respondents claimed to retain a strong understanding of languages other than English. This suggests a complex aspect of ethnicity and identity comprising both elements in the formation of a distinct kind of linguistic ecology. In this linguistic ecology there appears to be a certain shift when it comes to the extent to which informants claim to be able to still speak quite well their pre-school languages. While most students said that they could still speak their pre-school languages quite well, a number said that they could now speak the languages, other than English, only a little or not at all.

Notwithstanding an error in the questionnaire administration which omitted the question as to how well respondents could read their pre-school languages, the most significant shift in the linguistic ecology occurs when the informants are asked the extent to which they can write their pre-school spoken languages. Very few of those claiming to have spoken pre-school languages other than English claimed to be able to write these languages quite well. A few said that they could write these languages only a little, but a very large group said that they could not

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<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that the ‘experts’ in the Linguistic Minorities Project were using the spelling ‘Gujerati’ as late as the mid-1980s (Linguistic Minorities Project 1985).



write these languages at all. At the same time most stated that they could write English quite well. I know this to be the case from the writing in English that the respondents produced for me as the written project on language use which formed the second part of the data collection in this thesis. I also know from much classroom observation, some of it as a participant, that their claims to be able to read English quite well were well-founded. It seems reasonable to infer that the insistent literacy practices in English which come as a naturalised part of schooling in Britain act to secure a particular place for English in the respondents' linguistic ecology while simultaneously displacing languages other than English from these spaces - especially, as I have suggested spaces involving literacy. This may be doubly significant when one considers the symbolic importance attached to Standard English literacy in British society as an emblem of a person's value or even moral worth.

Overall, a salient point to note is that all the respondents answered that they saw themselves as people who, in adolescence, could still understand to a significant extent, a language other than English which had not been studied compulsorily as a secondary school subject. In positioning themselves in this way they are clearly marking themselves as distinctly atypical in linguistic behaviour by way of comparison with the generality of the British population which has a tendency to being resolutely unilingual in principle and practice (CILT 2001, Nuffield Foundation 2000).

### **3.2.2. The ubiquity of English**

And yet, as has already been indicated, the positioning of the Blackhill youth cannot be so simply stated. In the clear majority their own questionnaire representations showed that the dominant first language that they used with their family and friends was English. However, there appeared to be a split within the group formation since more than a third of the group recorded a language other than English as the main language they used with family and friends. There is some clarifying evidence in the responses to suggest that for a section of those who claimed English to be the dominant language mainly used with family and friends, English was the *only* language they used to any significant extent with family and friends. These findings are highly pertinent in the light of the political atmosphere in Britain in the early years of the new millenium where public statements from the Home Secretary David Blunkett and others suggest, as was indicated earlier, that 'Asian' youth and their families are problematic citizens

because of their supposed failure to use English, particularly in family domains (see page 33 and footnote).

As has so far been suggested, it is not enough to seek to depict the informants in a binary of either using or not using a language other than English. A finer-grained distinction needs to be drawn between an aural dimension (listening and understanding), an oral dimension (speaking), and a literacy dimension (reading and writing), and the particular mix evident in a contingent situation in a specific domain. When the questionnaire respondents were asked what language they usually spoke to their fathers and mothers (oral dimension), a clear majority said that they usually spoke to them in English and there was a strong indication that a majority wanted to represent themselves as speaking nothing but English to them. But simultaneously one must take account of the fact that a substantial minority represented themselves as usually speaking a language other than English (Gujarati or Panjabi for instance) to their parents. Of these a small number portrayed their usual speech to their parents as a being a hybrid of English and a language other than English. We have in this latter phenomenon another early intimation of potential identity formations which trouble binary conceptualisations.

When the focus shifts to the languages that informants claimed to usually speak to their siblings an overwhelmingly decisive majority of those who had brothers or sisters said that they usually spoke English and only English to them. Throughout the present level of analysis it is important to acknowledge alongside those emerging patterns built on majority representations, the small number of discrepant cases. These cases may well mask potentially highly significant tendencies deserving close analysis and interpretation. So it is worth noting that among the responses to the question on languages usually spoken to siblings there were a small number of respondents who said that they did indeed usually speak a language other than English, or a mixture of English and a language other than English, with their brother or sister. Questionnaire response limitations do not encourage further inference or understanding. It is sufficient to note that as in other such examples produced repeatedly in the questionnaire responses, additional comment and interpretation will be deferred until the deployment of the next level of data analysis in response to the data emerging from representation two: the student written accounts of language use.



### 3.2.3. English use and multilingual interruptions

The responses for patterns of speech usually used with siblings appear to be reversed when respondents represent what language they usually speak to their grandparents. Here the overwhelming majority stated that they usually spoke a language other than English to their grandparents and never or very rarely spoke English to them. Again, at the next level of analysis it will be useful to explore why this was so, and why the small minority who *did* usually speak English to their grandparents did so. What we have been able to observe in the oral dimension is the emergence of at least three sharply differentiated dominant patterns. One with parents, one with siblings and one with grandparents.

When one switches to the aural dimension of their linguistic ecology the patterns change again. Just over half of the respondents said that their fathers usually spoke to them in English, and just under half said that their mothers usually did so. Further, there was a definite and perhaps significant tendency to claim that their mothers were more likely to speak to them in a language other than English than were their fathers. In addition the responses provided evidence that none of the respondents claimed that their mothers usually spoke more than one language to them whereas a substantial minority (just under a third) claimed that their fathers regularly also spoke a second language to them and in one case a third. All kinds of ethnically absolute speculations and inferences linked to gender-based positionings within families of South Asian descent are tempting in accounting for these variations, but they will be resisted at this stage and will await possible developments and clarifications emerging from later data. I have also chosen at this stage not to analyse the questionnaire responses along gender lines actively searching for differences on this basis but will consciously leave options open to do this if later data suggest that there might be value in this angle of approach.

An overwhelming majority of respondents claimed that their grandparents usually spoke to them in languages other than English. One interesting development is that a few respondents said that their grandparents sometimes spoke a second language to them whereas fewer of the respondents themselves had previously claimed to speak a second language to their grandparents. Another reminder of discrepant cases appeared with one respondent who stated that her grandparents regularly spoke Jamaican Creole to her, albeit as a second language in a context in which they presumably usually spoke English to her as a first language. The suggested discrepancy lies in the solitary appearance of this familial linguistic

pattern in an environment dominated by languages of a South Asian provenance. One other language (Kurdish) stands out in a similar way.

Nearly all respondents claimed that their siblings usually spoke in English to them and there appears to be nothing surprising in this as this pattern closely matches the pattern of speech they said they used for speaking to these same siblings. One might reasonably speculate that the reciprocal patterns of dominant English speech that respondents shared with their siblings might be replicated in the patterns of speech shared with their peers during school breaks; and this in fact proved to be the case at first sight. But a closer look appears to reveal that talk with peers during school breaks occurs in a much more complex multilingual environment. For one discrepant respondent, for instance, Panjabi was the language usually spoken. For another respondent the language spoken was 'sometimes Gujarati'. Two other components of this multilingual environment were particularly noteworthy. Firstly, a number of respondents said that German was a language that they sometimes spoke with their peers during school breaks. German was the key language studied by students in the school as an examinable school subject. Why they should speak it to each other outside classroom contexts is not possible to ascertain from the questionnaire data. However, it seems reasonable to conjecture that it represents a linguistic practice that is not customary amongst British adolescents in those moments in the school day when they escape the confines of the classroom. The second phenomenon was references made by two respondents, one to '... our language words e.g. Rasta talk', the other to 'our own words e.g. Rasta Talk'. It is not evident from these questionnaire responses whether the conversations concerned typically occurred between peers of Caribbean descent or of South Asian descent, or both, or between peers from a variety of ethnic lineages. Nevertheless, when these reported linguistic exchanges are taken together with those reported above connected with Panjabi, Gujarati and the dominant English, there are clearly grounds for speculating as to whether we see here the raw materials for Hewitt's theoretical proposition of the existence among urban British youth of a 'local multi-ethnic vernacular' or a 'community English' which he speculated may well constitute 'the primary medium of communication in the adolescent peer group in multi-ethnic areas' (Hewitt, 1992: 32).

So far in the present stage of analysis I have suggested that the language survey questionnaire with its inevitable quest for succinct either/or answers can be



inherently misleading and tempt the analyst into dangerously premature inferences. This potential problem seems to be aptly illustrated whenever the informants are invited to be slightly more detailed and specific in their answers. In these circumstances the respondents offer a significantly expanded vision of their linguistic hinterlands or what I have been tentatively calling linguistic terrain or the linguistic ecology of their identity. For instance, when they are specifically prompted (question 22) to cite any additional languages which they understand over and above those already mentioned, respondents identify languages such as Arabic, Malay and Sign Language. The intriguing possibilities that this raises simply serve to point up the important need to use other research methodologies to excavate the subterranean complexities beneath the shallow listings generated by the questionnaire format.

Another instance where this is made manifest are in the responses to those parts of the questionnaire which request information regarding the patterns of language interaction within a more widely drawn family circle, namely one encompassing uncles, aunts and cousins. Where this is first done (question 21), languages such as Hindi and Swahili rise to much greater prominence and languages like Portuguese, Spanish and Chinese emerge in the listing.

These tendencies are further extended when respondents are pressed (questions 34 & 35), to demonstrate their ability to list the languages that their relatives, especially their older generation relatives (Parents, Grandparents, Uncles and Aunts) grew up speaking. It is worth noting in passing that for this group of informants, in contrast to what the questionnaire envisages for their white British peers in the school system, everyone stated that they had family members who grew up speaking a language other than English. But the point is that this deeper excavation of the linguistic ecology again throws up language designations which had not hitherto appeared in the questionnaire responses. For instance Marathi, Pashto, Italian and Turkish appeared in the list of languages that informants said that their relatives had grown up speaking. In addition, one informant listed an aunt who had grown up speaking 'A South African language don't know name'. Indeed the persistence in the listings for uncles and aunts of references to Swahili suggest a diasporic connection to East African and Indian ethnicities which will be marked here but further explored in later stages of data analysis. An interesting shift revealed by this deeper level of excavation concerns the languages which respondents say that their siblings grew up speaking. Earlier it was noted that

there was a highly significant representation of siblings as overwhelmingly and primarily English speaking. Here, in the answers to question 35, the representation offered is that only a minority of these siblings grew up primarily speaking English. This may be simply a depiction by the respondents of their siblings' linguistic formations as a replication of their own - beginning with languages like Panjabi and Gujarati pre-school and moving decisively in the direction of English thereafter. But such an inference cannot be substantiated at this stage. In sum, the majority of respondents claimed to perceive their older relatives as people who had experienced multilingual childhoods featuring one, two, or even three languages or more, in addition to English.

The foregoing account needs to be immediately qualified. Respondents appear to have painted a picture of their familial environments as highly multilingual both in terms of the quantity of languages spoken and the depth of the multilingualism. Yet what is striking once the aural dimension is considered is the marked way in which the informants indicate that when these languages are spoken in the family they either understand only some of what is said, only a few words of what is said, or nothing at all. So an element of their identity formation appears to involve saturation in a variety of multilingual environments, including the family, with their own direct participation being intermittent, fragmentary and partial. They indicate in their answers an awareness of their immersion in a classroom environment peopled by multilingual peers and can mostly name a significant number of the languages extant there. Similarly, the great majority of them are highly aware of living in multilingual neighbourhoods and again can name the languages used by their neighbours. About a third of them state that they are aware of inhabiting neighbourhoods where signs, notices and symbols pertaining to languages other than English and religions other than Christianity are prominent; and they can name them.

One example of the chronic, but fragmentary, linguistic engagement with languages other than English is shown in the respondents' representations of the nature of their relationship with the learning of languages other than English in community language classes. On the one hand a majority of the respondents said that they had attended such classes, predominantly to learn Panjabi or Gujarati, and presumably at the instigation of their parents or other older relatives. On the other hand almost a third said that they had not attended community language classes. Of those who had attended none was still doing so. Therefore, we have



parents and older relatives eager that they should attend out of school classes to reinforce the maintenance of specific ethnic traditions and practices embracing language, religion, history, music and dance and an identity formation which at some level, and in some way, resists these efforts. By one means or another, from community language classes, from relatives, from trips to ancestral homelands or on their own, the great majority of the respondents had made significant efforts to learn a language other than English outside school. But if we slide as we did earlier, to the aural, oral and literacy dimensions of their linguistic ecology, we find a repetition of the shifting indefinite patterns of expertise and affiliation. For instance in the oral dimension, while a majority claimed to still be able to speak quite well the languages they had tried to learn, a significant minority said that they could now speak them only a little, and some said that they could now not speak them at all. Meanwhile in the literacy dimension well over half the respondents claimed that they could not write the languages they had once been learning, a small number said that they could write them only a little, and only a few said that they felt they could write them quite well; this pattern was closely followed when it came to reading. We can see, then, the limitations of a research approach which seeks to perceive an ethnic formation on the basis of either/or questions like 'does X speak or not speak Y language' and 'does X identify with Y language and culture'. The question of linguistic expertise raised earlier adds to the complexity when one considers the answers that the respondents gave concerning the languages they were learning as a school subjects. The key point is that most of the respondents were studying German at school. In contrast to what we have seen with respect to their nominal family/community languages they overwhelmingly represented themselves as being able to speak, read and write German very well or fairly well. Scarcely any rated themselves as having low expertise in the German language. Whether this is because they were in fact applying different standards or measures of expertise to the different types of languages, or whether their expertise in German was indeed greater because they were in fact receiving many hours of tuition each week in aural, oral and literacy skills in German is not clear at this stage. What is clear is that factors like this disrupt attempts to construct straightforward representations of ethnicity and identity around various simple measures of affiliation and expertise.

#### **3.2.4. Ethnic affiliations, British context**

One apparently simple measure of affiliation to which the informants were asked to respond was a question asking them to register their religious affiliation.

Several factors immediately became clear. Firstly, the dominant affiliations were related to religions strongly associated with South Asian contexts, that is Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim, in that order of prominence. These taken together accounted for all but three of the respondents. Secondly, Sikhs and Hindus were almost evenly balanced numerically and made up over three quarters of the total. Those identifying themselves as Christians were a tiny minority. These listings give no more than a vague imagining of a kind of ambience that might exist but this imagining inevitably rests on pre-existing essentialised notions developed as part of ethnically absolute dominant discourses concerning visible minority groups of South Asian migrant descent in Britain since 1945. As has been the case elsewhere in this analysis, more precise, subtle and complex characterisations of ethnicity and identity must await data analysis elicited by the other data gathering research methods in the thesis.

However, a useful basis on which these analytic developments might rest is the declaration of all but three of the respondents that they are British born and brought up. Of these three, one had been in Britain for 8 months but the other two had lived in Britain for 11 years, and almost 8 years respectively. Consequently, despite the limitations of the inferences which can be drawn from questionnaire survey data, it is possible to make at least one strong and confident statement of position. This is that, whichever way the linguistic data is interpreted, it is indisputably connected with some kinds of formation of ethnicities and identities which are at their core British ones.

Before closing it is worth glancing very briefly at what one of the most authoritative and contemporaneous surveys of British ethnic minority ethnicities and identities (Modood et al, 1997) had to say on the question of language with regard to people of South Asian descent. Broadly, its findings fit closely with those of my own survey, albeit mine is much more tightly focused and detailed. Modood and colleagues found, for instance that,

... within each ethnic group, a language other than English is more likely to be used when speaking to family members older than oneself rather than younger than oneself. This suggests the latter cannot comfortably speak that language or prefer to use English; (Modood et al 1997: 310).

Modood's team also reported that with regard to languages other than English the dominant relationship among people of South Asian descent is one of occasional



rather than routine participation - a tendency which is more marked amongst the youth since 'despite the fact that nearly all South Asians have facility in at least one South Asian language, the use of such languages is experiencing some generational decline' (ibid: 332).

### **3.2.5. Conclusion**

The utilisation of the language survey questionnaire as a data collection device was an important part of my research strategy in a number of ways. Firstly it afforded me a degree of ethnographic comfort. That is, as a researcher in the field, I felt more comfortable in attempting to elicit personal information from a large group of people whom I did not know very well as individuals, in not asking them for this information directly. The individual questionnaires were, therefore, a relatively unthreatening and indirect way to acquire initial data. Another way in which the questionnaire was valuable was as a building block in a progressively more intimate data collection strategy. Thus the written accounts were more intimate and sensitive than the questionnaires, the self-made audio tapes more than the written accounts, and the individual conversational interviews more than the self-made audio tapes. The other main importance of the questionnaire as I have already indicated in the present chapter was as an aide to charting the linguistic and ethnic terrain I wished to study. It was by this means that I was able to get the first intimations of a group of young people who began their lives with languages other than English, then made the transition to English language dominance by their teens, but retained community language use in a variety of complex ways in specific contexts with specific people, with varying degrees of proficiency, but limited literacy, and who were linked with a wider range of linguistic influences through their diaspora families. However, as was clearly established in Chapter Two, the language survey questionnaire has severe limitations as a tool for enabling delicate analysis and interpretation. This is why the other data collection devices I employed, and which were also described in Chapter Two, were necessary. Nevertheless, in the preliminary analysis provided in the current chapter, I have attempted to build from the respondents' answers an intense sense of how they choose to place their identities and ethnicities along pre-prepared aural, oral and literacy dimensions. I have tried to display a proper caution towards the possibilities for making any more than extremely tentative inferences and interpretations from survey data. Subtler, fuller and deeper excavations must await an analysis of the remaining differently collected data. As the Linguistic Minorities Project had previously observed,

... it is not enough just to say that bilingual children learn different languages. We must also realise that they come to perceive and use the languages in different ways, and that this gives their languages different meanings in their eyes. And the way children come to use them is not just a product of the linguistic skills of family members or the norms set by their elders, but of how their local network of social relationships is structured. The networks within which children interact need to be better known before we can understand fully their patterns of use - why they use a language or variety ... (Linguistic Minorities Project, 1985: 278-279).

The next chapter begins the process of coming to a better understanding of how these local networks of social relationships operate and how they relate to the selected patterns of language use.



## Chapter Four: Inventories of everyday ethnicity: are you feeling it?<sup>34</sup>

What speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extraordinary; the front-page splash, the banner headlines ... Behind the event there has to be a scandal, a fissure, a danger, as if life reveals itself only by way of the spectacular, as if what speaks, what is significant, is always abnormal: natural cataclysms or historical upheavals, social unrest, political scandals ... How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual? ... To question the habitual. But that's just it, we're habituated to it. We don't question it, it doesn't question us, it doesn't seem to pose a problem, we live it without thinking, as if it carried within it neither questions nor answers, as if it weren't the bearer of any information ... How are we to speak of these 'common things', how to track them down rather, flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they remain mired, how to give them a meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally speak of what is, of what we are ... Not the exotic any more, but the endotic (Perec, 1999: 209-10).

### Introduction

In the Introduction to the thesis and in the first two chapters I outlined my intention to try to reconcile a number of theoretical and methodological problems. In the Introduction I argued that one of my central concerns was how to 'deal with the problem of how to effectively centralise informants' voices; to listen to and interpret the significance of some of their low key everyday utterances and self-representations'. In Chapter One I stated a desire to depart from the tradition in British Cultural studies of youth of concentrating on the spectacular and the subcultural. In Chapter Two I highlighted a way in which the problem of how to simultaneously capture a sense of individual agency and a sense of social structure might be solved by approaches by Georges Perec which Howard Becker stated attempted to 'characterize a culture and way of life, both the relevant beliefs and their coordinate activities by the accumulation of formally unanalyzed detail' (Becker, 2001: 72). The above declarations from Perec provide an apt articulation of the nub of the problem with which I was wrestling in the earlier chapters. What follows is an attempt to realise the effect of providing a cumulative sense of both individual agency and the spatial and temporal ecology of a specific social and

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<sup>34</sup> the interrogative phrase 'are you feeling it' seems to have originated from African American musicians and is now often used among young, mainly black, people in the music industry in London. It concerns the hearer's reaction to a new tune. Two aesthetic statements are typical, with or without the initial prompting questions: 'I'm feeling it' or 'I'm not feeling it'.

cultural formation. To achieve this effect and to emphasise the unspectacular, commonplace, everyday nature of the informants' self-representations, there is a deliberate deferral to later chapters of any attempt to interpret or analyse the accounts. The reader is instead invited to *feel* new ethnicities in construction through the representation of patterns of language use. It was difficult to make the following choice of individuals. An examination of the informants' representations yielded, in each case, complex and often unexpected, particularities such that no individual could be said to be 'typical' of any ethnic group or sub-group. In the end I chose two girls and three boys; a boy and a girl describing themselves as Sikhs; a boy and a girl describing themselves as Hindus; and one boy describing himself as a Muslim. These choices reflected the representation of these groups in the data as a whole and each choice had an implied specific linguistic accompaniment.

#### **Amaljeet's everyday ethnicity**

Amaljeet describes himself as 'half cast' because 'my mother is sikh and my father is muslim' (**pilot written account, 1996**). He says that after he was born his father left him and his mother and he has since lived with his mother and her parents. He says that although his father is based in the USA he often stays with the family when he visits Britain. He says that his parents and grandparents were brought up in India and offers this as a reason why he himself knows Panjabi language very well. He says that when he was growing up he spoke Panjabi at home because his grandparents could not speak English. Amaljeet adds that although his mother could speak English he spent most of his time with his grandparents because she was out at work. His grandparents had a shop in the middle of Southall and,

In Southall they are not many English people so therefore I used to speak Punjabi all day with everybody. I used to speak Punjabi at the shop and at home (**pilot written account, 1996**).

He describes the kind of Panjabi he speaks at home as 'standard casual panjabi' (**pilot written account, 1996**). Amaljeet mentions that he had sometimes tried to speak Hindi at home to his grandfather's lunch and dinner guests but had usually made many mistakes and had been constantly corrected. But he says he had also learned a lot of Hindi through attending a religious mandal (group) with his grandparents. Before he first attended school Amaljeet mainly spoke Panjabi and



had low exposure to English. He says that this pattern continued at his infants school,

infants' school I went to it was mostly Indians there as well so we used to speak we never used to take notice of we just used to do what we used to do in class and that talk Panjabi with friends ... (interview).

He claims that it was not until he attended his middle school and junior school that English began to impose itself on his life because his peers were mainly white,

but when I came to junior school I learnt more cos most of the population there were white people cos it was a- in Northolt so I just that's when I properly got to speak English (interview).

Amaljeet recently changed his name, (aged 15), at the behest of his mother to a Sikh name having hitherto had a name with muslim associations.

Amaljeet says that Panjabi language is important to him. He remarks that if he couldn't speak Panjabi, people in the community would think 'he's not really interested interested in his culture ... he's not like right' (interview). He says that people would consider that his display of competence in Panjabi language showed that his grandparents and parents had brought him up in the right way. Amaljeet mentions that he has often worked in his uncle's restaurant in Southall to earn some money and that this experience has exposed him to a variety of languages such as Hindi, Urdu and Gujarati as he has listened to the customers speaking them with his uncle – especially Gujarati.

Amaljeet expresses a strong awareness of caste distinctions among Sikhs. He says that he belongs to the Jat caste which he claims is a high class group of farmers and landowners in India. He says that there are lower class groups that he knows as Churey and Turkhan who traditionally work for the Jats,

they're the ones that do the work for a living but we like we do we have big farms like our last generation gave us and we just work them up we get a lot of money out of that and uhm so that we make the low class do the work for us (interview).

Amaljeet says that he draws some distinction between community practices in India and those in London but,

In the British situation um it's not that sort of thing it's not much round here ... like in er in India you you don't get married to a low class as well cos otherwise then your parents kick you out (interview).

However, he talks about one of his male cousins who he describes as loving a Turkhan woman with whom he has been going out for a long time, but whom he is not allowed to marry. He says that his cousin's mother has forbidden the marriage and his cousin does not wish to go against his mother's wishes. Nevertheless, Amaljeet states that he is aware that community conflicts between castes have more drastic consequences in India than in Britain,

in India there's a lot of fights a lot of fights happen and like round here there's a fight just a little punch up know what I mean but there it's it's a serious thing (interview).

He mentions instances when his mother and his grandmother educate him about the influence and significance of caste. He says that his grandmother tells him the castes that his friends belong to, based on hearing their surnames. He gives one example of a friend whose surname is Bhogal which he describes as a Turkhan name.

Amaljeet says that in addition to speaking Panjabi well he had attended community language classes to learn to read and write it. He says he had attended classes on and off on Sundays for about two or three months. He remarks that he found it difficult to retain what he had learned in his memory and soon stopped going. He comments that he found it particularly difficult to master the script used for writing Panjabi especially compared with the script which he used for writing English and which he had already learned at school. He feels more confident about writing Panjabi using the Roman script he uses to write English and is very ready to do this,

‘Tu alright ha’

This is a typical sentence that would be said by a learner in Punjabi. It means are you okay (alright), it's not said in respect. A person who knows and understands Punjabi very well would say.



'Tusi cikh ho' meaning are you alright

... This conversation is one that I saw in a Punjabi film.

Binder: Kidha, tikhay

Rupi: Tikhaye

Binder: Hor das paaren dey aira

Rupi: Kid dasan.

Translated in English

Binder: Alright hows it going

Rupi: I'm alright

Binder: Anything going on (and he swears at his sister)

Rupi: Nothing's going on.

Jatt's have such ability to switch when they speak to an elderly person they use words which show respect e.g. Tusi. English does not have these sort of words (**written account**).

Amaljeet says that when he stopped going to the community language classes it did not bother him. He says that other children who attended the classes with him seemed to learn to read and write Panjabi very well and doesn't know why he found it so hard 'I just didn't catch on to it' (**interview**). He says that neither his mother nor his grandmother could write Panjabi so he did not feel it was all that important and says that his grandparents did not mind,

they didn't mind me leaving Panjabi school they weren't really worried about it I thought ... I can't get into it then what's the worth (interview).

Amaljeet says that he experiences, and has experienced, many different aspects of Sikh religion in his everyday life. When he has attended the Gurdwara he has found it very difficult to read or follow the kind of Panjabi used. He says that his family participates in religious rituals, often very lengthy ones lasting a number of days, sometimes in the home and involving a Giani<sup>35</sup>, and centred on the Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>36</sup> These rituals can be concerned with major events like weddings or with pleas for fortune in achieving pregnancy and successful childbirth or for luck with exams. Amaljeet mentions a large number of practices which he says represent observances which he thinks Sikhs are supposed to follow. He cites not eating meat, not drinking alcohol, not smoking. However, he says that he himself does not observe any of these, except for smoking which he says he tried but does

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<sup>35</sup> Person knowledgeable about Sikh teachings.

<sup>36</sup> Key Sikh religious text.

not do because he thinks it is particularly important to his family that he shouldn't. Amaljeet often makes reference to the ways in which his grandfather transgresses some of these ideal Sikh practices. He especially identifies his grandfather as being a heavy drinker, 'my grandad he's a strong drinker dad drinks everyone eats meat' (**interview**). In such references Amaljeet is approving and admiring of his grandfather 'he's my sort of role model as well I take after him and he drinks a lot' (**interview**). He says that one of his grandfather's other transgressions is swearing,

grandad he's he's gold medallist in swearing he knows all the swear words and my dad he he swears bu[?] they just say it like in a conversation they don't, they don't mean it (**interview**).

Amaljeet, also refers to other visible signs of being a Sikh, such as not cutting hair, wearing a turban and carrying a kirpan<sup>37</sup>, and points out that he does not observe them, although he mentions that he had long hair and a turban when he was a very young child. He says that he can't really remember it but thinks either his mother or grandmother had had it cut off when he was two or three years old. He believes that when his grandfather came to Britain in the 1950s he had been forced to remove his turban and cut his hair because of stipulations laid down by the factory in which he found work, although he had subsequently been able to restore them. Amaljeet states that he doesn't regard his mother's side of the family as being particularly religious but identifies his father's side, who are Muslim, as being religious. Amaljeet says that he disagrees with people who sport the visible signs of Sikhism while transgressing the ritual requirements of the religion. He declares that he takes seriously Amrit Pahul, a Sikh initiation ceremony, involving the ritual drinking of water regarded as purified, 'you drink that you're purified you don't do nothing wrong after that' (**interview**).

Amaljeet says that he speaks a lot of Panjabi with his peers at school especially at breaks and at lunchtime, and claims to speak more Panjabi than English to his friends in class. He says that in year 9 he taught a white British friend D. to speak some Panjabi. He also says that he speaks some Gujarati to Gujarati-speaking friends at school and that they are surprised at how good he is at the language.

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<sup>37</sup> A sword – one of the 5 K's which are key symbolic markers of Sikhism.



Amaljeet states that he and many of his friends speak Jamaican language, which he calls 'rasta talk', to each other,

once you get into (.) that department you you can't get out of it really so they've got into the rasta man talk and all that they can't come back to Panjabi like I know V. in our year he's he's Panjabi but he speaks rasta and all that he he doesn't he doesn't I don't think he knows a lot about his religion (interview).

Amaljeet's use of Jamaican language comes from inter-ethnic friendships forged in school and community, 'we don't say hello so we say wha gwan and all that we say it like that we don't talk English' (interview). He says he is aware that some people 'think you're weird because you're Indian why are you speaking like that' (interview).

Amaljeet was born in Britain, but has visited India twice. Once when he was about five and the second time when he was about eleven. He says that he enjoyed it and learned a lot, for example he learned a lot about drumming. But he remarks that he did not find the Panjabi he heard there easy to understand, 'when I go to India I get very confused because they speak very weird punjabi. In India they pronounce words differently' (pilot, written account 1996).

Music plays a major part in Amaljeet's life. He is a leading member of a traditional Panjabi dhol<sup>38</sup> drumming band, and often performs in school on important occasions, when pupils from different ethnic groups contribute essentialised presentations of their traditional cultures. However, when asked if his band ever wear the associated traditional dress from the Punjab, Amaljeet is emphatic that for them this denotes the practices of an older generation. His band in fact wear Ralph Lauren designer clothes and black Kicker shoes,

[the] older time ones yeah they wear their Indian clothes yeah the proper bhangra so like ... we're the Dholis of the new generation yeah so we wear Ralph Lauren clothes and all that we like we got our Ralph Lauren suits ... stripey trousers with blue shirts ... we wear um black Kickers (interview).

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<sup>38</sup> The dhol drum is a key instrument used in the production of bhangra, a traditional music of the Punjab, India.

Nevertheless three of the seven members of the band wear Sikh turbans, although Amaljeet himself does not do so, nor does he display other visible signs of his Sikh ethnic affiliation. Amaljeet also says that his band have designed a logo based on a Yves St Laurent motif. Through his dhol band Amaljeet maintains direct contact with the Indian diaspora in major shows in London in which he has played alongside well known bhangra artists from India, and alongside Indian (Bollywood) film stars. His band plays at private functions and student dances as well as at community festivals. However, Amaljeet is perturbed by the attitude of his parents who he says strongly oppose the idea that he should ever consider making his living from playing in his dhol band. He states that they regard this as something that lower class people do. Sometimes he seems to accept their view but he remains strongly committed to and absorbed by all his activities with the band. These include regular practising; designing, printing and distributing band publicity; rehearsing choreographed stage moves; and creating a stage costume 'look'.

Amaljeet is very proud of some of his older cousins who he says are among the biggest and best known professional DJ's in the South Asian communities in the West of London. He says he started working with another sound system run by other cousins when he was about 12, before he became involved in his dhol drumming activities. He comments that his cousins mix bhangra music with what he describes as 'English' tracks. Amaljeet says that apart from Bhangra music he likes reggae, swing beat, soul and jungle but not hip hop. He says that he is especially fond of reggae music and mentions Bob Marley, Freddie McGregor and Jah Shaka.

Amaljeet's speech includes local elements of London English pronunciation,

yeh like it's you they show car[ʔ]oons dancing to that there are car[ʔ]oons dancing (interview).

and Caribbean and London pronunciations together with London English grammar,

and um [d]at we organised it we done the posters and every[f]ing and then we er organised the DJ's it was a bit



hard to get the price but because they charge 450 a par[?]y  
450 pounds (interview).

London English grammar,

our family ain't too religious (interview).

and traces of lexical items directly linked with Indian forms of English,

with your uncle you jus speak with respect when I'm talking  
to my brother cousin brother you just use swear words  
swear and curse and whatever but they don't mind  
(interview).

My reactive feeling to Amaljeet's account of his own ethnic and cultural formation is of how fluid and open these categories can be once the discursive framework that allows such accounts to be constructed and carefully listened to, is offered. I have a strong feeling that his account in its unpredictability, complexity and subtlety may well give a strong sense of what the empirical realisation of the 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' theoretical formulations might look like and feel like. In Amaljeet's case, he both supports traditional cultural forms like the dhol drumming band related to Bhangra music and simultaneously subverts it in his choice of stage outfit. At the same time he declares some of his favourite music as reggae. He is strongly affiliated to Panjabi language but claims a strong affiliation to Jamaican Creole too. Yet at the same time when he talks he sounds like a Londoner. The question of linguistic sound and style will be taken up more fully in Chapter Five, and issues of musical taste will be commented on in Chapter Seven.

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### **Gurleetaa's everyday ethnicity**

Gurleetaa says that in her life 'Punjabi was the first language I came into contact with' (**written account**), but adds that,

In my house there are only two languages which are spoken, English and Punjabi. Punjabi gets spoken by the older generation of the house and English more by the younger generation of the house (**written account**).

Gurleetaa considers that although her early life prominently featured the use of Panjabi, her entry to school signalled a major shift leading to the increased and rapidly dominant use of English. But she says she did not find this shift problematic because on the one hand most of her classmates when she went to school were also Panjabi speakers and she also remembers a white British teacher who spoke a little to her in Panjabi although ‘with a sort of British accent so that sounded kind of um bizarre’ (interview). On the other hand her mother, who had once planned to be an English teacher at home in India, having being taught English there, helped Gurleetaa to learn to read and write in English,

RH: How did you deal with Panjabi say in your younger days?

Gurleetaa: erm that was probably the only language that was talked to me and yeah English was probably there but erm it was probably mainly dominated by Panjabi so I spoke that for the first five or six years and then you know English and Panjabi became mixed together (interview).

Although Gurleetaa uses both English and Panjabi at home, she sees English as clearly dominant in her practice while having certain aspirations towards developing her usage of Panjabi. She says that her use of English is so habitual that ‘if my mum talks to me in Panjabi I’ll answer back in English’ (interview). Gurleetaa, mentions that 4 years previously her father had had a stroke which had physically disabled him on his right side and severely restricted his speech. Even in these circumstances Gurleetaa does not feel constrained to speak Panjabi,

RH: so how do you deal with him then do you speak to him in English and hopefully

Gurleetaa: yeah we do all sort of speak to him in English he does understand it and he worked, he worked you know, and it's sor? of like we can speak to him in Punjabi but we tend not to because of force of habit and you know we do talk to him in English (interview).

Gurleetaa’s ‘we’ in this context, probably refers specifically to herself and her two brothers, one older (aged 20), the other younger (aged 11). She refers to them usually speaking English, but in addition she depicts the relative failure of her mother, despite strenuous teaching efforts, to increase her and her brothers’ expertise in, and use of, Panjabi. She says she cannot explain why she and her brothers are so resistant to developing their Panjabi further,



RH: right mm mm so you were saying earlier on that your mum had actually tried to teach you Panjabi

Gurleetaa: yeah=

RH: =a bit

Gurleetaa: yeah yeah she tried to get us to learn our um alphabet in Panjabi I can do a little bit, I can do like *ooraa airaa eeree sassa kaka khakhaa gaggaa* (u/o a e s k Kh g) and then that's where I stopped and then ...

RH: so why didn't it work then, I mean you said she was a sort of teacher type person

Gurleetaa: I don't know I have no idea I just think that we just didn't want to learn or something.

RH: mm

Gurleetaa: because she tried really really hard to teach my older brother how to do it and I just remember her trying to teach him it and it wouldn't work and we- we all know li[?]le bits of it you know (inaudible)like a joke you know.

RH: yes

Gurleetaa: er it's sor[?] of like that we all tried but it never sort of worked (interview).

Gurleetaa explains that she cannot read or write Panjabi. She feels that although she can speak Panjabi to some extent she cannot speak it fluently because she does not use it enough. She claims that she cannot conduct lengthy conversations in Panjabi but can communicate about what she calls 'basic things', in Panjabi. One of these 'basic things' is her practice of addressing her relatives by their Panjabi labels,

Gurleetaa: they're just um the words I can say you know a few things I can say with relatives you know in India you have different names for different relatives like your mum's er your mum's sister is a marsi and her husband is a marsa and your dad's sister is bhua and her husband is a puppar and so you know I can do things like tha[?] I can say um three types er um I can speak a li[?]le bi[?] but it's not great detail

RH: sure sure

Gurleetaa: when I just have to (interview) ...

Gurleetaa: er well what you do if there is someone older than you and they're your cousin you call them bhenji you know, it comes as a respect or if it was her brother then

you would say bhaji bu[?] um we don't normally say tha[?]  
we just them call them by their names or by nick names  
within the family but to certain er to all we should do really  
do as a sort of sign of respect call them by their names like  
we have to call my mum's dad biddaji and we have to call  
our dad's brothers jufjir and their wives jufdi and we have  
to call our mum's mum mufdi her brother's mumme and  
their wives mumya ... (interview).

She suggests that showing respect is a motivation for making such conversational moves in Panjabi. Gurleetaa reports that what encourages her to use Panjabi with her grandfather is that this usage is linked to a wider web of community related ethnic practices.

Gurleetaa states that she feels compelled to speak Panjabi to her grandparents not principally to show them ready and willing respect but to protect her parents from family and community accusations that in not producing Panjabi-speaking children they have failed in their duty as parents. She indicates that this influence reaches from across distant diaspora locations,

Gurleetaa: Yeah. It's like if I don't talk to my grandfather in Panjabi or to my grandmother or whatever it's sort of like you know they sort of look down onto my mother or to my father thinking that you know they haven't raised their children like they should be because they all really you know sort of India they have to stay like that

RH: mm

Gurleetaa: and so that would be a particular reason why I'd speak it.

RH: yeah sure.

Gurleetaa: because I wouldn't want my mum to have like a bad reputation within the family so I try my hardest to do that although my mum's dad is in India so I haven't seen him for like what 7- 8 years and my dad's er mum she doesn't live with us so you know (interview).

Gurleetaa claims that she consciously tries to improve and increase her use of Panjabi to please her mother by ensuring that by so doing she will be able to present herself as a worthy future candidate for marriage into a 'good' family. She suggests that in this context speaking Panjabi is just one of a number of attributes on which a prospective wife would be judged by potential in-laws,



Gurleetaa: ... more recently I've made the effort to you know respond to her speaking Punjabi so that you know I practise my skills because um there's always that thing because erm a few months ago my cousin sister you know it was an arranged marriage

RH: mm

Gurleetaa: and like you know they take a whole delegation of people from one side of the family to the other family

RH: mm

Gurleetaa: and one of the questions asked in the interview was you know 'can you speak Punjabi?' to the bloke she was getting married to and my mum, you know, she looks after us and she wants us to get married into a good family so she doesn't suffer the problem so that WE don't suffer the problems that she did

RH: mm

Gurleetaa: er so you know if I don't meet up with the recommendations that brings then you know it makes her feel bad and then you know it just sort of works like that so I can understand it perfectly from her point of view and I would like to be able to speak it as well (interview).

According to Gurleetaa the ability to speak Panjabi is sometimes linked with a number of other skills, like being able to cook well, that after marriage she would have to continuously demonstrate to sceptical in-laws, and particularly to her faintly, or actually, hostile mother-in-law. Gurleetaa refers to a time, early in her mother's own marriage when she was living in a house with a very large number of her in-laws and had to look after them all, had found her position problematic, and did not want Gurleetaa to suffer in the same way. As Gurleetaa puts it,

Gurleetaa: not er not like you know she obviously she'd learned to speak Panjabi but it's sort of like yeah if fam- if the other side of the family if my mum didn't let's just say she couldn't cook, yeah, then my grandma would you know she would be upset at tha[?] and then she would be spiteful to my mother so if I weren't able to speak Panjabi properly my future mother-in-law might=

RH: =I see=

Gurleetaa: =you know

RH: Yes. I see what you mean. I see what you mean (interview).

Gurleetaa does not mention any practical steps that she actually takes to give effect to her apparent concern to improve her Panjabi, such as for instance

attending community language classes. She has never attended community language classes.

Gurleetaa describes herself and her family as Sikhs but says that ‘my family isn’t particularly religious ... I think that there’s being religious and there’s being too religious ... and too religious is just sort of doing whatever the Guru Granth Sahib says ...’ (interview). On the other hand she claims to observe one of the 5 k’s by wearing kaccha (shorts). She does, however, rarely attend the Gurdwara, her previous visit having occurred more than a year previously. She says that this is because she does not have time to attend. At the same time, though, Gurleetaa says that she prays. Despite claiming that her family is not religious she says that consternation was caused in the family when her brothers took the relatively transgressive act in Sikhism of cutting their hair,

Gurleetaa: yeah I mean my brothers they cut their hair and that just caused a whole uproar thing in our family and when I went with my younger brother when he got his hair cut, just before he came to this school and I was absolutely I was so close to tears that you know he had this you know he had really nice hair as well and they just took it and they cut it and I had to walk out of the shop because I was so upset like it took him 11 years to grow that and that now it's just cu- it as it were and so you know that affects me as well it's alright now I feel ... (interview).

It is not clear from her comments whether Gurleetaa’s concerns about her brothers’ hair is aesthetic or religious. Gurleetaa recited in Panjabi a Sikh prayer which she says she used at a theme park before boarding a terrifying roller coaster.

When Gurleeta discusses her interactions with her peers she says that they speak in English rather than Panjabi because their Panjabi is not fluent enough for extended conversations, although she considers that her own Panjabi is the best in her friendship group. She says that she and her friends allot Panjabi a ludic function – ‘er we do we do it in a sort of fun way, sort of we just say i[?] just to be fun just to make a joke’, (interview) while leaving the discussion of what she regards as serious topics like racism to English,



Gurleetaa: or I'll go *buna* you know mean a vest it wouldn't be funny

RH: mm

Gurleetaa: but if I say it in Panjabi it's more humorous (interview).

Gurleetaa also identifies her interactions with her peers as moments where she uses slang and she makes a point of identifying the use of slang with London phonological speech tokens such as pronouncing /th/ as /f/ and says that it is something that she consciously tries to move away from even to the extent of 'correcting' its use by her younger brother. She mentions the use of this speech feature by characters in the TV programme *Eastenders* but sees it as the only token of London speech that she is conscious of using herself. Gurleetaa also associates the use of slang with her relationships with her friends and their joint consumption of popular culture particularly TV and films.

Gurleetaa identifies the use of outgroup language with influences from (especially American) TV and film,

An example of this travelling would be the word "diss", meaning to insult verbally. Within my own year at school, I have heard "diss" many times and I have also used this word. The word originates from America and the greatest influence on the younger generation to say this word is probably black American TV shows (**written account**).

She mentions specifically a fictional programme called *Moesha* about a black girl in the US as influential for words like this and other words such as 'homies', as well as the film *Pulp Fiction* for expressions such as 'big cahooner'. In her taste in films, TV and music Gurleetaa does not say that she identifies with the characters in these cultural sources or feels any sense of strong affiliation with them.

Gurleetaa does not cite 'black' musical styles as an interest or influence. She explicitly declares her dislike of Hindi language films and the music associated with it. She grudgingly admits to quite liking one Bally Sagoo hit and talks of being 'lumbered' with one his CD's by her older brother. She mentions that she has one Bon Jovi CD, but says that she particularly likes Kula Shaker and points out that they have eastern influences in their music although she is extremely vague about these,

Gurleetaa: ... er Kula Shaker they've sort of taken um eastern wha- eastern influences and put it into their music

which I think is really good and they've um released a song called Govinder and it's written in Sanskrit and sung in Sanskrit and erm my mother says it's sort of like um something, saying something praise to the god and you know that would be you know something

RH: something you like?

Gurleetaa: yeah yeah (interview)

Gurleetaa says that she has visited India twice, once when she was about six months old and once when she was about nine years old, when she stayed for about seven weeks. She remembers having to do far more household chores than she ever does at home in Britain, and under more difficult conditions such as having to pump water to wash dishes in the absence of taps. She says that her visit was to the Punjab region where her mother's parents and the rest of her mother's family live. She indicates that she enjoyed some aspects of her trip such as being taught how to make chapatis, but actively disliked the conditions of life in her father's family's pind.<sup>39</sup> Gurleetaa claims that she is strongly aware of the existence of her family diaspora but is extremely hazy about the precise details of its historical formation. She says she thinks that her father's family moved from India to East Africa (Kenya), where she thinks he may have been born. She thinks that his immediate family subsequently returned to India before moving to Britain.

Gurleetaa says that she sometimes engages with German language outside her German lessons at school. She states that this usually takes the form of inserting German phrases like *sehr interessant* (very interesting) or *sehr langweilig* (very boring) into everyday contexts when with her friends. She also says that she sometimes tunes into German satellite TV stations when she is at home and tries to watch German films; or through her satellite TV system to German radio stations which play what Gurleetaa calls 'English music' and feature German DJ's talking to their audiences about the music in German.

When Gurleetaa speaks she sounds as if she comes from London. This is marked, for instance, in her pronunciation by her t-glottalling, and in her grammar by the London-marked use of the verbal token 'done',

Gurleetaa: they've got two older er children, a boy and a girl, and they [done] BTECs and they [done] GNVQs and

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<sup>39</sup> Pind is the Panjabi word for village.



they were kind of jealous that my brother sor[?] of broke  
away from that trend and he cut his hair and so it was  
sor[?] of like you know

RH: mm

Gurleetaa: they're jealous and I think it's really pe[?]y to  
argue over something like that (interview)

Apart from when she is speaking Panjabi or using Panjabi cultural and religious lexical items when she is speaking English, Gurleetaa uses expressions which are specific to an Indian form of English. These include the use of terms like 'cousin sister' for female cousin and 'she gives it' where local Englishes in England typically use 'she goes' for 'she said'.

Gurleetaa also shows signs in her speech of patterns which have been commented on as typical of contemporary patterns of general British youth usage and perhaps connected with wider international influences. These patterns include upspeaking<sup>40</sup>, '... one thing I do remember is once my mum forgot me (rising tone, upspeaking) at school'. (interview) ; and the contemporary youth usage of 'like',

... you get people that you're housing for twenty years  
come back round your house twenny years later and they're  
like "oh hello we used to be in your pind". (interview)

Gurleetaa's account gave me a sensation of a differently constituted, but equally complex and interwoven set of ethnic and cultural elements, as Amaljeet's. On the one hand she appears to be living as a contemporary London girl as part of a family which is disinclined to be too religious with respect to the Sikh religion. On the other hand she seems to be strongly aware of the potential future influence on her life of the global reach of traditional diasporic strictures regarding proper behaviour for women and suitable wives. Yet, in turn, her potential responsiveness to the residual demands of traditional cultural practices might at first sight seem to represent incompatibilities with the side of her cultural life which cites her favourite music as being produced by white rock bands. Some of the everyday cultural negotiations between the individual, and local and global diasporic community demands, will be analysed in Chapter Six. The ways in

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<sup>40</sup> The use of a rising tone at the end of a phrase implying a question when no question is intended, sometimes referred to in the linguistics literature as uptalk or upspeak or Australian Questioning intonation.

which musical tastes position many of the Blackhill youth as typical British teenagers will be demonstrated in Chapter Seven.

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### **Karwan's everyday ethnicity**

According to Karwan's account the leading language in his home is Kurdish. However, he is clear that English plays a regular auxiliary role,

When we are at home we tend to use Kurdish but if we need to use different languages to help us talk and get our point across we do use the next best language, English (**written account**).

To be more precise, he suggests that in his home English has a useful mediating function as a recourse at moments when the limits of his receptive competence in Kurdish and his father's productive competence in English are reached,

If my father explains a program to me he talks in Kurdish, but if I have problems understanding he explains in English, and if I still don't understand he hands the problem to my brother, because we both talk the same type of English (**written account**).

There is a hint here, too, of the highly significant place of English in the home as a mode of communication between Karwan and his brother regardless of the general use of languages other than English, with his parents or other older relatives. On the other hand, and at the same time, Karwan was emphatic that he made a special effort to speak a community language, rather than English, with older relatives. Specifically, Karwan says that his motivation for doing so had something to do with respect,

If my parents have visitors it would be disrespectful to talk to them or among ourselves in English or in any other language, [but Kurdish] for many reasons. One reason is that we must not grow up not knowing our language and another is, we set/show a bad example and a lack of self respect (**written account**).

Another component of Karwan's everyday multilingualism in the home appears to be connected to visits from his wider diasporic family residing abroad or from family members marrying outside their ethnic group and consequently acquiring the languages of their partners which then become a presence during family visits



and gatherings of various kinds. In Karwan's case French and Portuguese are sometimes heard in domestic environments, he says, because one of his uncles is married to a French woman and one of his aunts is married to a Portuguese man. The evidence does not suggest that Karwan regards these moments as 'spectacular' but part of a low-key reciprocal exchange in which the French and Portuguese relatives have learned, and use, Kurdish,

Karwan: it's um my uncle he he's he he's married to a a a French lady

RH: mm

Karwan: my aun[ʔ]y:: is married to a erm Portugese man

RH: right

Karwan: an' an' his language you know it's just taught

RH: so so do you hear them speaking French and Portugese

Karwan: yes sometimes I do

RH: yeah

Karwan: bu[ʔ] er funnily enough my my er my aunty's husband he learnt sp- er to speak Kurdish and my uncle's wife has learned has learned as well (interview).

Karwan represents his parents as being enormously encouraging and committed to the maintenance of Kurdish language in the home, even though they can also speak English well. However, in addition, he also attended community language classes for the maintenance of his parents' ethnically identifying language. He continued his attendance for nine years. This appears to be partly because his mother was a teacher in such classes. Karwan's attendance ended when he was twelve years old. Karwan suggests that his initial attendance at the classes at a very young age was governed by pragmatic concerns – 'I used to go you know because because there was no one at home to look after me' (**interview**).

Karwan says that one of the things that he did when he was at his community language Saturday school concerned the muslim religion - 'i[ʔ] was basically how how the Kurdish go[ʔ] go[ʔ] in- introduced to the m-muslim religion' (**interview**). But what is particularly interesting is that while Karwan is equivocal about his own level of personal religious commitment he is much more sure in his representation that the levels of both religious commitment and transgression in his family are gendered. When asked how religious he regards himself as being he seems somewhat uncertain,

RH: so how do you think where do you place yourself

Karwan: I- I // <sup>41</sup>

RH: //religious not religious?

Karwan: I um I'm more I'm in the middle but more or less to the religious side

RH: right

Karwan: because I- I truly believe tha[?] that one day the world gonna end and and we're all going to be summoned

RH: yeah

Karwan: you know we- we're all gonna to ge[?] (.) <sup>42</sup> you know questioned by God (interview).

But he goes on to state firmly his view that it is the females in his family who are serious about religious observance,

RH: uh so I mean how how religious are you are you and your family?

Karwan: well my mum she's she's very religious

RH: yeah

Karwan: all my aunties and all my cousins well that's that's the female side

RH: yeh= <sup>43</sup>

Karwan: =you count to er- every female in my family are religious the males and the other fathers they're they're they slack a bi[?] (interview).

At the same time he depicts the males in his family (and by implication himself) as being transgressive in their practices with regard to religion,

RH: =what do you mean by slack what (inaudible)=

Karwan: =well in in in our religion we're not allowed to drink bu[?] (chuckles) all my uncles and all my parents I mean er my dad they all drink

RH: right

Karwan: erm certain things we can't do you you know w- w- we have to wear erm religious hats and pray and all tha[?] all the females do tha[?] bu[?] the males nah (interview).

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<sup>41</sup> // indicates overlapping speech

<sup>42</sup> (.) indicates a short but noticeable pause

<sup>43</sup> = indicates latched speech



Karwan is initially diffident about why he only occasionally attended Mosque on Friday afternoons. He eventually states that on Friday afternoons he messes about and plays football with his friends.

Along with other aspects of his linguistic world Karwan professes a strong affiliation to Jamaican language,

RH: when you're doing the mc'ing what kind of language do you use ...

Karwan: its its not proper English its not proper English some somethings you say are not even words its just you you just try and make make everyfing that you say rhyme ... and and and if there's no word to rhyme with what you've just said you just make up a a sound

RH: mm but I mean when you say its not proper English then what is it wha? what=

Karwan: = its its more or less slang slang different words an'

RH: associated with what kind of people though I mean where does it come from

Karwan: where does it come from to to tell the truth it's more yardie talk ... i- it's all MC's prefer yardie talk cos a I I dunno it's just easier to talk like that

RH: do you think that I mean do you know what country's associated with it in yardie talk

Karwan: er Jamaica and de Caribbean

... RH: so I mean and and you found that easy to do

Karwan: yeh I f- I find it easy to do because who the friends I hang around with Amaljeet an' Vijay an' do nine out of ten times when when we talk we're talking like that anyway ... it's just it's just a way of life now

RH: mm so I mean how did you get into talking in a Jamaican kind of way then

... Karwan: it was like Brixton was where I started learning things cos er where I lived was nine out of ten people were were Jamaican or or black ... an' I just go? it from them

... RH: so how lo- how how many years did you live there

Karwan: er::rr<sup>44</sup> about six years yeah

RH: from what age to what age

Karwan: from about five to eleven

...

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<sup>44</sup> the use of the double colon (::) indicates that the preceding sound is elongated.

RH: can you remember the first phrase you heard in Jamaican

Karwan: ye::h yeh the f- I can remember you know um the Desmonds<sup>45</sup> show ... it Porkpie 'yeh ma::n!' [Jamaican exclamatory intonation]

...

RH: mm so could you give me an example of that [speaking Jamaican]

Karwan: erm ( . ) like we say 'wha a gwan'

RH: mm

Karwan: tha[?] means ... what's happenin' if you say to Ms W [teacher] 'wha a gwan' she'll probably fink wha[?]'s tha[?] but if you if if I say that to Amaljeet now I say 'wha a gwan' he'll say 'yeh man coo' everyfinks coo' ...

... Karwan: ou? of all the accents I must admit I I love the Jamaican accent I love the way they talk it's just I w- I wanna learn every par[?] of i[?] every word because I I just I just enjoy talkin' i[?] (interview).

Karwan seems to link his original use of Jamaican language with the development of an inter-ethnic friendship, and with TV programmes and music which has caught his imagination. He does not mention any current friendships with other young people of Jamaican descent, but claims that Jamaican language is important to him.

Karwan says that he is beginning to be involved in musical presentation and performance. He makes reference to elder siblings and cousins who are well known professional DJ's serving their local ethnic minority communities. He represents himself as heavily influenced by these relatives and as aspiring to be like them. Karwan himself aspires to be an MC, and a number of his peers have remarked that he is beginning to be noticed as someone with talent in this area. For Karwan, his DJ relatives, and other informants with this profile, it appears to be that there are two key questions in styling their performances. One: how to incorporate Jamaican and other black-influenced language and style. Two: how to symbolically incorporate linguistically a closely felt specific community ethnicity. In Karwan and his DJ relatives' case – this meant Kurdish.

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<sup>45</sup> A popular British TV comedy show on Channel 4 which was based around a cast of black people of mainly Caribbean descent living in London. Porkpie was the nickname of one of the popular characters in the show.



What struck me about Karwan's representation of his cultural and ethnic self to me, was the discordant disruption it inserted into the dominant British discourses about Kurds which were already firmly implanted in my mind. These discourses typically do not allow for a Kurdish refugee to be imagined as a young man who is firmly proud of Kurdish language and traditions while professing proficiency in, and love for, Jamaican language; and a burning ambition to be a sound system MC. I felt encouraged that what emerged from paying close attention to Karwan's agency demonstrated the fertility of the empirical pursuit of the idea of 'new ethnicities'. Some of the ways in which individual agency leads to the development of particular ethnic and cultural affiliations will be analytically explored in both Chapters Six and Seven.

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### **Diya's everyday ethnicity**

Diya says that the first language she encountered in her life was Gujarati but she also began to speak English during the early development of her speech in her pre-school years. She says that she feels that although Gujarati came first in her life she cannot speak it as fluently as she can speak English. She states that the two languages are woven intricately through her everyday experience and that she does not think a day passes when she speaks only one language,

The language I use changes 24 hours a day depending on the people I am with. I don't think there has been a day where I have only spoke one language. **(written account)**

Diya depicts her father as being a fluent English and Gujarati speaker, but claims that she speaks to him only in English. She does mention, however, that she does speak Gujarati to him when the family are at home and her mother asks her to call him, or sometimes when she is speaking to her father and her mother cannot understand what they are saying, or again when the family has visitors who don't understand English very well,

Another time I speak Gujerati with my dad is when my mum doesn't understand what we are saying and when we have guests over. All the guests that usually come to my house are all Gujerati so when I want to ask my dad something I ask him in Gujerati so the guests don't find it rude, because sometimes they don't understand English and they will be thinking to themselves "are they talking about me." **(written account)**

Diya says that her mother speaks many languages like Gujarati, Hindi, Panjabi, Urdu but only a bit of English. Consequently, she comments that she feels compelled to mostly speak to her mother in Gujarati. She points out that what she regards as her own limitations in speaking Gujarati means that the Gujarati she speaks to her mother is always laced with English,

When there is a time when I am talking to my mum in Gujarati I always mix English into it. I think I do this because I can't speak Gujarati properly and I am used to always speaking English. So when I ask her for a newspaper I would say,

“Mum newspaper apis”  
When I really should be saying,  
“Mum chapu apis” (**written account**)

Diya refers to speaking English with her brother but also says that speaking English is a marked feature of the language use of the older male members of her family and that the use of Gujarati is a marked feature of the language use of the older female members of her family. She attributes this contrast to the greater participation of the males in working environments outside the home,

oh um I just usually speak it when I'm talking to u- elders people who are older than me apart from the men cos all the men they work and they can speak English so I usually speak English to them whereas the ladies they're usually at home and they don't know much English so I have to speak Gujarati with them ... (interview).

Diya: (.) um cos like I think they're all work yeah and um we used to have our own shop so they used to talk English and um so when they're like usually at home and my dad usually talks to me in English and so you talk back in English and you're used to that cos if I'm just talking to my dad in English I'll just talk in English=

RH: =mm

Diya: =and um (.) so when I'm with my uncles sometimes like they talk to me in Gujarati yeah bu[?] I always talk English with them unless when its sometimes when we're in front of everyone=

RH: =mm

Diya: =it's just th- they're just used to us talking to English to them=

RH: =mm



Diya: =whereas all the ladies um they hardly hear us speak English in front of them so it's like we have to talk to Gujara[?]i with them cos they hardly don't understand anything we say

RH: right in English

Diya: yeah (interview).

Diya says that her father who was born in Uganda came to Britain during his teens whereas she thinks that her mother's whole upbringing was in India and that she first came to Britain only when she got married. Diya says that she sometimes hears Swahili during family gatherings when her grandmother who was born in Uganda speaks it with one of Diya's uncles purely in order to teasingly check whether Diya and others can understand it.

Diya represents herself as being linguistically influenced by her immediate community environment which she depicts as being routinely multilingual and multiethnic,

My Neighbours are all Muslim, Hindu or panjabi (Sikh) so when I hear them talking I usually understand them and I pick upon what they say so I can remember it. I can still not speak any of the languages like panjabi or urdu but I think I can speak some Hindi. (**written account**).

Diya remarks that these attempts to speak Hindi are the product of commonplace interactions,

you know our neighbourhood it's like friendly and stuff so we're like we'll all talk to each and stuff and sometimes when like we have to go somewh- to our next neighbour's house to give them something it's like I usually end up talking in their language (interview).

Diya maintains that when she was about ten years old she had attended community language classes to learn Gujarati, particularly to learn how to read and write it. She says that she only attended two classes before she stopped going. She states that she joined the classes midstream, that the other children were ahead of her and that she found she couldn't understand the teacher's questions. She indicates that she had found the script in which Gujarati is written particularly difficult to cope with, both reading it and reproducing it. Diya says that she feels no need to learn to read and write Gujarati as her mother and others don't require her to. She says that she doesn't know why but 'well I don't really wanna learn it'

(interview). She contrasts this feeling with her experiences with languages like English and German. When it comes to German as compared with Gujarati she confirms her reason for finding it easier to learn,

RH: =to get (.) so I mean if you compared say your Gujarati with when you started German (inaudible)=<sup>46</sup>

Diya: =but the probl- the thing is you know with German you use the actual English alphabet= (interview).

Diya sums up her experience by saying,

When I was really young I went to learn Gujarati. I only went for a few weeks, then I left because I couldn't get it in my head. I learnt how to write and say the ABC's in Gujarati and soon I forgot it. Whereas anything I learn in English I remember it (written account).

Diya describes herself as a Hindu. She says she is aware that Gujarati Hindus are divided into castes and that her surname identifies her as belonging to the Lohana (business caste). Diya claims that she takes part in many major Hindu festivals, ceremonies and rituals. She says that her grandmother is religious and suggests that she is the instigator of Diya and her family's religious involvement. Diya mentions her own participation in festivals like Divali<sup>47</sup>, Navaratri<sup>48</sup> and Jaya Parvati<sup>49</sup>. Diya reports that these events involve her in family gatherings and celebrations, attendance at temple and a variety of fasting rituals,

Diya: ...<sup>50</sup> my gran she's really religious so every time a religious events come we either fast we celebra[?]e i[?] and um we go to the temple when like stuff like Divali and stuff=

RH: =yeah=

Diya: =comes and we celebra[?]e all tha[?]

RH: mm and then I me- I mean do you take an active part (or anything)

Diya: yeah

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<sup>46</sup> = indicates latching i.e. one piece of speech links directly to the next without discernible gaps.

(.) indicates a definite short pause.

<sup>47</sup> originally Hindu annual festival of light celebrated throughout the worldwide Indian diaspora in October/November.

<sup>48</sup> a nine night Hindu autumn celebration attended in family groups in which girls in particular participate in organised programmes of traditional dance.

<sup>49</sup> a fasting ritual in June/July observed by female Gujaratis involving abstinence from salt.

<sup>50</sup> ... indicates ellipsis – the omission of sections of text.



RH: yeah do you pray or  
 Diya: yeah um (.) do you know that festival thing I told you about it lasts nine days  
 RH: yeah what's it called  
 Diya: um (.) Navaratri  
 RH: Navaratri  
 Diya: yeah and um for nine days everyone comes round to my house and we pray to God and like I'll just sit up there and watch and um so we just take part in tha[?] we take part in Divali and there's this um kind of fasting you do (interview).

Diya describes the kind of fasting she does including the foods she eats and those that she doesn't. She indicates that her participation in these events and activities does not necessarily mean that she is either very knowledgeable or very committed to their religious nature,

... you can't ea? all that kind of stuff so you have to eat all this Indian food without salt and it doesn't taste very nice (interview).

... Diya: ... the last time when I went to India that was the time when I had to do this fast so it was alright cos I was around all these other girls who were doing it and stuff so that's easier bu[?] round here's qui[?e] cos not a lo[?] of people are really into it all that religion kinda stuff bu[?] i[?]s cause of my gran inni[?]

RH: mm

Diya: um I think I'll probably do it nex- start my one [special fasting ritual] next year

RH: mm what y- m- right through till you get married

Diya: yeah

RH: so wh- what what what's that one called

Diya: mm (.) ah I can't remember (slightly apologetic, embarrassed)

RH: uh huh huh (chuckles) can't remember

Diya: Jaya Parvati

RH: Jaya Parvati (inaudible)

Diya: yeah

Diya says that she mostly speaks in English with her peers when she is at school. She describes the English she speaks with them as slang and contrasts this with Standard English although she indicates that she cannot define clearly the difference between these two varieties of language. She also says that she

sometimes inadvertently includes slang in her attempts to write Standard English for her English teacher,

Diya: =I didn't really think it was slang I just thought it was just normal English so I just wro[?]e i[?] but when I found ou[?] and Miss went to my work I realised tha[?] after she told me what all of that i[?] was slang bu[?] erm if I went to do i[?] myself I don't think I would have realised=

RH: =yeah=

Diya: that I use slang (interview).

Diya says that she sometimes speaks Gujarati at school with one of her close friends. She claims that they do this when they want to talk to each other without other people understanding what they are saying. She remarks that this strategy often fails to work since many of their peers understand Gujarati, and on these occasions she and her friend resort to elaborate measures such as deliberately saying the opposite of what they mean to disguise their purposes.

Diya says that apart from one grandmother who was born and brought up in Uganda and now lives in London, she has another grandmother who lives in India. Diya mentions that she and her family stay with this grandmother, in the Gujerat region, when they visit India. Diya states that she herself has visited India three times. The last occasion being when she was thirteen when she stayed for about two months. She says that her visits to India have made her more aware of the limitations of her Gujarati; when she is forced to use English words for Gujarati words she does not know and finds she is not understood, when she is faced with the challenge of relatives and others who understand no English at all, and when these locals use Gujarati words that she has never heard before.

Diya comments that her mother sometimes visits Tanzania, where the family has relatives, bringing back gifts like t-shirts bearing dual language Swahili/English slogans. Diya says that these Tanzanian relatives are a reflection of an even wider diaspora of which she is a part,

Diya: so we've got no one in Uganda any more we've got in Tanzania and India=

RH: =mm=

Diya: =and we've go[?] relatives all over the place we've got some in Germany France (interview).



Diya describes how she is further exposed to this diaspora at religious events in London,

Diya: yeah um when we like have um we have religious events and we all get together in like a hall all the like in our religion we have castes so everyone's a different caste and like the one caste they all get together in some h- in a hall and then they sing and dance and everything and when we go there um it's like we get to know all these people that we never knew and find out they were par[?] they're like in on like our s- side of the family=

RH: =mm=

Diya: =and like my surname's like Chotai and um (.) round here London and everywhere there there are so many Chotai's and I never ever knew that (interview).

More routinely, Diya says that most weekends her family gets together with her father's four brothers, their wives and all their children. This means that Diya is thrown together on an almost weekly basis with about twenty of her cousins.

Diya says that when her father and one of her uncles are together they watch BBC programmes while the older females in her family usually watch Zee TV.<sup>51</sup> They watch mainly Hindi language soaps and films. They sometimes watch British TV programmes like *Eastenders* and *Neighbours* but this tends to be because others in the family are watching. Diya does say that her grandmother likes watching these programmes but because she doesn't understand English often asks Diya, in Gujarati, what is going on. Diya states that she herself, sometimes with others of the younger family members, wants to watch programmes that others don't want to watch. She says that she handles this by watching TV upstairs and not in the main sitting room. She claims that she watches *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* everyday as well as *Eastenders*<sup>52</sup>. She also lists *E.R.* and *X-Files* as programmes which she watches dedicatedly, watching one and taping the other for later viewing whenever they clash<sup>53</sup>. She says that she stores taped programmes for viewing on Wednesday evenings when she has nothing else to watch. She

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<sup>51</sup> India's first Hindi satellite channel, launched in 1992.

<sup>52</sup> *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are soap operas produced in Australia which are highly popular in the UK. *Eastenders* is one of the most popular soap operas produced in Britain. It purports to portray life in London's East End.

<sup>53</sup> *ER* is an American TV drama series set in a hospital accident and emergency unit. The *X-Files* is a US produced television science fiction drama series.

explains that if she has to choose between watching a televised football match and one of her favourite regular programmes she chooses the football because it is a one-off event and she can easily catch-up with her other programmes.

Diya says that she very regularly watches Hindi language films whose content she claims to understand very well. She comments that the girls in her family watch these films far more than the boys but does not know why this is the case although she thinks that possibly what she describes as their 'unrealistic' and highly predictable form might be one reason. Diya says that she listens to the Hindi language music accompanying these films but is not prepared to say that she actively likes it.

Diya stresses that she much prefers to listen to what she describes as 'English' music rather than to either Hindi film music or to Bhangra music, although she says she does like listening to Hindi remix music (Hindi film music mixed with Anglo-American musical styles and beats). She says that although she is aware that Zee TV has its own Hindi Top Ten programme she pays more attention to radio. She remarks that she, herself, does not listen to Sunrise Radio<sup>54</sup> although it is always playing in the kitchen in her home where it is listened to by her father and others. She maintains that in her own room she listens to Capital Radio<sup>55</sup>, Radio One<sup>56</sup> and Kiss FM<sup>57</sup>.

When Diya talks she has a noticeably London accent, for instance in her t-glottalling. At the same time she uses lexical items such as 'cousin sister' associated with a specifically Indian form of English; and also Gujarati and Hindi language lexical items, often in religious and cultural ritual contexts.

Experiencing Diya's self-representations cautioned me about the importance of taking care not to reach premature judgements when researching 'new ethnicities'. At first sight I saw her in relation to residual elements of traditional culture in that she belongs to a fairly religious family and, shows an awareness of caste and takes part in a range of Hindu festivals and cultural practices. However, I came to see

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<sup>54</sup> independent station originally launched in 1989 to broadcast to West London's Asian community later expanded its reach by other franchises around Britain and more recently by inclusion in satellite TV packages.

<sup>55</sup> London commercial radio station specialising in pop music, with an increasing national reach built by acquisitions and franchises.

<sup>56</sup> Britain's first and only truly national pop music station, launched in 1967.

<sup>57</sup> London radio station which began as a pirate becoming legal in 1990 and specialising in dance music.



that the dominant strand in her voice represented her as showing little interest in other aspects of the maintenance of cultural traditions such as learning Gujarati language. Despite her participation in Hindu rituals, according to her, her knowledge of their meaning was wafer thin, while her understanding of the meanings of the everyday cultural practices of her British teenage life was very deep. The management of interactions with community and family religions will be studied in Chapter Six, while the comparison between the Blackhill youth and unspectacular British teenage popular cultural consumption and tastes will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

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### **Amod's everyday ethnicity**

Amod says that both his parents were born in East Africa. He indicates that he is unsure whether his father was born in Uganda or Kenya, but says that he knows for sure that his mother was born in Nairobi, Kenya. He thinks that she came to Britain when she was about nine years old after the death of her mother. She attended a local school not far from the school Amod now attends. Amod states that his father also had a significant amount of his schooling and other education in Britain. Amod says that one of the reasons that his family returned to Britain was that neither his grandad nor his parents liked the schools in Kenya when compared to those in Britain.

Amod says that he, himself, was born in London and taken as a baby to live in Kenya returning to live in London when he was 7 years old. Amod mentions his memories of his early childhood in Kenya where he remembers that his family had servants. He says that these servants spoke Swahili which was the language his grandparents used to converse with them and at that stage of his life Amod says he learnt Swahili too. He adds that while he can still understand quite a lot of Swahili he can no longer speak it very well. He remarks that these days his parents no longer speak Swahili to each other except when the family has visitors from Kenya when the language is used for greetings and initial conversation.

Amod says that in his home Gujarati and English are the two languages in constant use. He judges that Gujarati is the most used language in his house

because his grandma does not speak English, and Gujarati ‘is the only language she can speak which the whole family can understand’ (**written account**). Nevertheless, Amod is clear in emphasising that the use of English in his home is extremely extensive, with him, his parents, his brother and grandfather all speaking English fluently. According to Amod, family members speak English when they have guests who don’t speak Gujarati. Amod says that when guests are Gujarati speakers both English and Gujarati are used.

Amod says although that he always speaks Gujarati to his grandmother, and either English or Gujarati with his parents and particular aunts or uncles, he prefers to speak English ‘because I find it largely easier to talk to people’ (**written account**). Amod says that he rarely speaks Gujarati with his brother because they feel more comfortable speaking English to each other. He attributes this partly to his brother’s limitations in speaking Gujarati. At the same time he says that neither he nor his brother can understand Hindi and Panjabi when his parents and grandparents sometimes speak it to visitors who are not Gujarati speakers.

Apart from learning Gujarati directly from his family, Amod says he attended a Gujarati community school for three years from the age of 9. He considers that as well as Gujarati language the school concentrated a lot on teaching cultural practices. While he was there he remembers that he learned folk-dancing and to play tabla drums. He says that he even bought tabla drums but that once he left the school at the age of 12 he stopped playing. Amod is not too clear about why he stopped going to the Gujarati community classes. One reason he offers is that the classes took place on Saturdays when his friends would meet up to go out as part of their leisure time. He does add, though, that he particularly disliked the folk-dancing, partly because of the attitude and methods of the teacher,

Amod: ... the Gujara[?]i classes were okay but I didn't like I didn't like the folk-dancing things like tha[?] but it was alright[?] otherwise

RH: wh- what did you think about the folk-dancing

Amod: pff yeah it was alright but the teacher we had he was a bit of he wasn't that good

RH: how did he sort of fall down?

Amod: he used to get angry too easily if you didn't if you messed up but I was always at the back we had a mixed class and it was like the sports hall and it was a class that



size I was always at the back so anyone near him he used to just shout if they got anything wrong (interview).

Amod says that the dropping of these classes did not signal an end to his endeavours to learn Gujarati in a formal way, since his mother hired a private home tutor to teach him, his brother and two cousins in pairs at separate times. He says that this tuition helped him to learn how to form and sound the Gujarati language script and left him able to read Gujarati a little and to write it a little too,

I can write as well I still remember all the alphabets and all tha[?] and I can still wri- wri[?]e things like my name and common things (interview).

Amod indicates that although he feels quite confident in his ability to understand and speak Gujarati there are times and contexts when he feels there are serious limitations to his capacity to understand it. This is particularly so in relation to religious events. Amod identifies himself and his family as Hindus and describes a week long ritual which occurs when a family member dies. The ritual is lead by a Pandit<sup>58</sup> who 'reads out the story of the Gi[?]a'<sup>59</sup> (interview). But,

it goes through the whole week and he um he says do i[?] in the memory of all the people who die and he it's s- it's read in all Gujara[?]i and tha[?] so I have to ask qui[?]e a lo[?] um

RH: mm

Amod: because there's some words tha[?] I don't know (interview).

Amod says that he participates in such prayer rituals but more broadly depicts himself as an uncomprehending semi-detached participant,

Amod: I don't think I'm really tha[?] into religion cos um (.) don[?] know really um (.) I think I jus- I just go cos it's there basically er so I know the meaning to some of them like to Divali<sup>60</sup> and all tha[?] and um but there are some

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<sup>58</sup> Hindu religious scholar.

<sup>59</sup> Bhagavad Gita one of the most well known of the Hindu scriptures.

<sup>60</sup> Major Hindu festival celebrated usually in November and sometimes known as the 'festival of lights'.

things tha[?] I don't qui[?]e understand like birthdays of gods and all tha[?] I don't understand why we celebrate i[?] cos (.) I don't believe that there are that many gods that we say there are I reckon it's just one person so (.) ... don't go to the temple that often I don- I don't (.) I've been to the new that the new that's open in Neasden but I don't//  
 RH: //(I've seen that it's amazing)  
 Amod: yeah that's amazing but I don't hardly ever kind of actually I haven't been in the last year (interview).

He suggests that his feeling of involvement in religion and prayers is fundamentally affected by what he sees as his limitations in Gujarati language,

Amod: yeah praying um praying I don't always understand i? that's difficul? I find that difficul? to understand because the words are different  
 RH: mm  
 Amod: they're not usually used (interview).

He identifies weddings as occasions where Gujarati language and cultural practices are also prominent and where again he feels relatively detached and uncomprehending,

Amod: ... there's certain things if it's like if it's erm my erm mum's brother w- w- wedding then I h- then there's some spe- certain thing I have to do I can't remember what it's called bu[?] I am one of the boys who has to take some things in to i[?] and I have to be I have to be there to do tha[?]  
 RH: yeah  
 Amod: and then they g- they give me money for doing tha[?] (interview).

Amod expresses the comfort he feels in speaking English, making it clear that with his peers as well as his bother and cousins, this is the dominant form of communication – a language of ease,

I don't know um with with my cousin she's she's the same age as me um I I speak Gujarati with them sometimes but most of the time it's English er er I just find I just feel more



comfortable speaking English with people my age  
(interview).

and,

and um with my friends it's I don't I don't know how to  
explain it? but it's just I just feel more comfortable  
speaking English with them (interview).

Amod claims that when speaking with his peers the form of English which dominates is what he calls slang, and which he associates with the use of specific linguistic tokens and the specific location of Southall,

RH: so wh- when you say slang what are talking about what  
does slang mean

Amod: right things like words like um 'inni[ʔ]' and (.) 'innit  
an tha[ʔ] and er it's all Southall language (interview).

Although Amod associates himself with the use of this form of language, he slightly distances himself from the strongest affiliation to it by adding that his own usage is slightly different since he lives in Ruislip rather than Southall. He also links the use of slang with the practice of cussing which he says that he and his peers do a lot. He says that cussing is something that his Panjabi-speaking peers do in Panjabi. He claims he only really understands bits of what they are saying but is familiar with what they are saying because so many of his peers at school are from what he calls Panjabi backgrounds. Amod also associates the word slang with popular music which he calls 'English songs', and he mentions Rap music in particular. He says that he listens to Rap music but not nearly as much as many of his peers. He describes his own musical tastes as being centred on 'top 10 music' and mentions Michael Jackson specifically as a favourite, but says that his interest is just in 'anything that r- really sounds good to me'. Amod states that he likes the 'background tunes' in the Hindi movies that he watches but does not like the 'Indian songs' in them because he doesn't understand the words,

Amod: like I like the background tunes bu[ʔ] because I don't  
understand the words I never understand the words in  
Indian songs erm so that's why that's why I don't like the  
songs

RH: are they in Hindi though

Amod: yeah they're in Hindi but erm it's just I don't know erm it's the way they see them I listen to the background music but I never listen to the words cos I won't understand them (interview).

Amod comments that he is, though, much happier with jungle or club remixes of Hindi film music since,

I don't listen to the words that much so um that's why I like the er remixes (interview).

On the other hand Amod claims that he understands the Hindi dialogue as opposed to Hindi song lyrics in Hindi movies, and says that he even sometimes goes to the cinema to watch them. He is critical of what he sees as the far-fetched non-naturalistic comic book style of these films which he contrasts unfavourably with the naturalistic and realistic style of 'English' films. As he sees it, in the 'Indian' films 'they punch one person and he flies abou[?] 100 metres' so that,

Amod: ... in English films most of it is reali[?]y in Indian films hardly

RH: yeah

Amod: or say the good guy in one gets sho[?] a hundred times he won't die but if the Eng- the bad guy gets sho[?] once he'll die (interview).

Nevertheless, he says he enjoys Hindi films and that when there are Panjabi language passages in them he asks any Panjabi friends who might be watching with him for a translation. Amod attributes his acquisition of some Hindi language understanding to his repeated watching on TV and video when he was younger of the Hindu epics the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. He says he was aided greatly in developing his understanding of the Hindi, by the accompanying English subtitles. He remarks that this is a pattern which is being replicated by his younger brother.

When Amod speaks he sounds locally London in his pronunciation (bu[?]), (any[f]ing), and sometimes in his grammar (I done bad), and occasionally Caribbean in his pronunciation too ([d]em),



Amod: and the thing about German is is it's like i[?] 's like i[?] 's like learning facts you see y- you le- learn you learn the lines and and you remember [d]em and I am good at tha[?]

RH: mm

Amod: so tha[?] 's tha[?] 's why I done well in i[?] but um I didn't concentrate on my spellings so that's why I done bad that's why I didn't get proper good marks well I did get good marks bu[?] I didn't I lost all my marks on spellings I didn't lose any[f]ing on reading or writing I just lost it on spellings (interview).

Amod, when he mentions German language which he is studying as a school subject, says that he and his friends rarely use the language outside classes except for occasionally greeting each other in German and more frequently swearing at each other in German. He also refers to occasions on which he watches parts of German language films on satellite TV.

Amod states that apart from spending most of his first seven years of life in Kenya and having relatives there still, he has visited Kenya on about 6 further occasions; more or less every year unless it was a year when his Kenyan relatives were visiting Britain. On the other hand he is emphatic that although his mother told him that he had visited India once when he was a one year old baby he had no desire to go there again, though he concedes, 'I know I'll be going there sometime I'll have to go there sometime' (interview). He says that he feels like this even though he has large numbers of relatives in India. He maintains that his attitude has been shaped by TV images of Indian life and by the reports of his peers who have visited India,

Amod: no I've never been India er I know my mum said I b- I went when I was one bu[?] I don[?] really want to go there

RH: why not

Amod: I don't know (.) I haven't got a good impression of it (moment)

RH: so what is it you're worrying about it

Amod: er erm o- overcrowding (.) a bit poor and (inaudible) I just don't think I don't want to go there

RH: and is there relatives there=

Amod: =yeah yeah loads

RH: mm and wh- where did you get these images from about (overcrowding) and

Amod: er that poor is um this is a lot of street people and I don't know I just don't like things like tha[?] cos I don't know erm (.) see things on TV and some some people say when it comes back 'oh it smells there a lot' and 'the toilets are in the ground and everywh-' I don't like things like tha[?] I know my relatives haven't got i[?] they've got proper houses and but still it's just (.) I don't really want to go there (light laugh) (interview).

As I considered Amod's ethnic profile I felt a strong sense of how any single relatively unmediated investigation of any given individual's agency would yield a portrait defying easy definition. Amod was born in Britain but has spent a significant proportion of his life in East Africa which he still visits on a very regular basis. Yet when it comes to another part of his diaspora family, those in India, he assumes the ethnic identification of the squeamish Briton abroad dismayed at the poverty, foul smells and deficient toilet facilities available there. Reconciling these seeming contradictions in a theoretically and empirically and coherent way is one of the central tasks of the thesis which will be taken up, especially in Chapters Six and Seven.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to saturate the reader with a cumulative evocation of ethnicities of time, place and age, mediated through representations of patterns of everyday language use and multilingualism. Here the sense of the everyday has been deliberately presented in a low key manner and with 'the accumulation of formally unanalyzed detail'. In this context, no attempt has been made to follow the explicit critique of everyday life in capitalist modernity and late modernity, with its explicit intentions of social transformation, developed by Lefebvre (2002) and Certeau (1984). The chapter's central focus has been on how to grapple productively with a key problematic for anyone interested in the everyday,

If ... everyday life is not simply a quantifiable, transparent, palpable actuality to be straightforwardly mined for information, then the question of how to register it needs to be posed. But this is not simply a methodological question about how to eke out information from a shadowy and recalcitrant realm, it is also (and necessarily) a question of how to present and articulate the daily (how to write it, picture it and so on). Indeed the question of how to register the everyday might insist that issues of method take place simultaneously at the level of our attention to the everyday and in our representation of it ... The 'coherent narrative'



and the 'rigorous argument' have been the dominant forms encouraged by social science approaches, but whether these forms of presentation fit the material world of the everyday life is ... in need of questioning. This is to place the question of *form* at the forefront of everyday life theory. If it is not going continually to miss what it seeks, then everyday life studies will need to consider both the form of the everyday and the forms most adequate or productive for registering it (Highmore, 2002: 19).

At the beginning of this methodologically experimental chapter I challenged the reader with the question 'are you feeling it?'. Whatever the responsive judgement, I think the exercise is worthwhile. I argued at the beginning of the thesis that I thought it was particularly important to pay close attention to the 'voices' representing the everyday unspectacular cultural practices of visible ethnic minority populations in Britain, particularly the youth. In order to do this convincingly I suggested that it is necessary as far as possible to limit and defer the mediating voice of the academic analyst. Hence the attempt to operationalise this through an experiment in methodology. I am, though, certain that it is rare in British contexts for this amount of concentrated attention to be paid in academic environments to the representational agency of ethnic minority youth. One of the vehicles for these representations, is the voices of the Blackhill youth in the form of their *spoken* voices. Accordingly, Chapter Five will now demonstrate what can be learned about the constitution of their ethnicities from their speech.

## Chapter Five: Structures of a linguistic ecology

### 5. Introduction

Earlier in the thesis it was argued that the study and analysis of culture and ethnicity in Britain has generally neglected the role played by people's prosaic patterns of language use; that is, scant attention has been paid to one of the central constituent components of human existence - the fact that in most waking moments and during most everyday activities human beings either speak, or listen to the speech of others. This thesis argues that paying attention to the way in which people use language, and to their perceptions of how they and their peers use language, is fundamental to developing an understanding of how cultures and ethnicities are constituted and enacted. Successfully executed, such an approach can assist in the sketching of the repeated patterns in the interactions of the Blackhill youth with their environment. The point of entry to this improved understanding comes through the consequent perception of some of the structures of the kind of linguistic ecology which they inhabit. However, doing this involves a conceptual shift of focus from the visual to the aural as a key signifier of ethnicity. Many theorists of culture and ethnicity such as Hall, Gilroy and others, while disavowing the tenets of notions of biological race as merely the artefacts of a variety of social constructions, nevertheless have their attention fixed on the visual – that is the struggles surrounding the presence in British, European and North American societies of sizeable minority populations distinguished by their possession of skin colouring ranging from black through various shades of brown, while the majority populations of these societies range from a kind of white to a kind of pink. Certainly, in Britain the relevant debates have substantially been about 'race' meaning skin colour and physical appearance; while purportedly being about culture and ethnicity they have never been about the arrival in Britain since World War Two of migrants deemed 'white', such as Poles, Lithuanians, Italians, Cypriots, Australians and so on. Gilroy has recently, (Gilroy, 2001), attempted to move beyond these constraints denouncing them as elements of ways of thinking, analysing and acting which he calls 'raciology'.

It can be argued that skin colour together with physical characteristics, has been, and still is, in social discourses globally, a signifier of enormous consequence; but it is a fixed signifier in the sense that it is something that no given individual or group can change. What they are born with in this dimension they carry till they



die. This then causes difficulties for the anti-essentialist theorists of the British Cultural Studies tradition. However much they depict ethnicity as a category which is open, fluid inherently unstable and not fixed, as long as they conduct the discussion in terms referring, for instance, to *black* people, they are trapping the analysis within a fixed frame. By contrast the social and cultural category of everyday language use, which they leave unconsidered, is available as a category capable of considerable change and movement from one generation to another; that is it is a category which is open, fluid inherently unstable and not fixed from one generation to another. I argue that a fruitful way of escaping existing confinements is to move to an analytical frame which shifts from a landscape dominated by the salience of the visual to one where the salience of the aural is brought into play. In other words, what can be said and imagined about cultures and ethnicities might appear very different when apprehended on the basis of a landscape of sound, a soundscape. This might usefully be construed as an invitation to ‘think with the ears rather than think with the eyes’.<sup>61</sup> I argue that doing so broadens the sociological imagination enabling the clearer perception of registers operating across communities, institutions, media and diasporas and ranging linguistically from the local London vernacular, to the globally diasporic South Asian, to the globally teenage.

This chapter builds on the rich and complex language soundscape sketched in Chapter Four, composed of the intricate interweaving, at one and the same time, of local and global elements, and of elements related both to the past and the present. The present chapter argues that the patterns of language use of the informants as a whole are an essential ingredient of their ‘new cultures of hybridity’ and of their ‘new ethnicities’. These are inscribed in their bodies, not only in the familiar form of their outward physical appearance, but also in how they sound when they speak. In this vocal dimension one can find traces of the local in terms of their London speech and the global in terms of their evident and concurrent production of, and interaction with, a range of the world’s languages, particularly Panjabi, Gujarati and Hindi and sometimes Caribbean derived Creole language. The fundamental argument here is that in the case of these young people there are two linked assertions. Firstly, I argue that in their ethnicities the local is emphatically dominant. Secondly, and consequently, their ethnicities are unambiguously dominated by Britishness. The evidence supporting these

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<sup>61</sup> I am indebted to Les Back for this summarising phrase.

propositions will be presented at two ontological levels. On the one hand it will be confidently argued that specific phonological and some grammatical features of informants' speech during interviews are both involuntary and 'real'. By way of contrast data obtained from informants' written and oral accounts are offered as representations of reality, in so far as they constitute self-reports on how language operates in their daily lives<sup>62</sup>.

### 5.1 The local in language: Maybe it's because they are Londoners

Neither of two major ethnographic studies of Southall, Baumann (1996), Gillespie (1995) pays close analytic attention to the local London inflections of the speech of the South Asian-descended youth of the area. Nevertheless, and relevantly, Baumann does make a brief reference to the young people he researched speaking 'a West London dialect of English interspersed with various Americanisms and Indianisms' (ibid: 2). Baumann amplifies this by describing the English language use of young Southallians thus,

Phonetically, it is clearly recognizable as a West London accent, and its lexis integrates Americanisms ('*bad*' or '*wicked*' for 'good'), Afro-Caribbean usages ('*cool, man*') and Indianisms ('*innit*' for 'isn't it', 'aren't you', 'aren't they', etc.) (ibid: 47).

A sociolinguistic study of a part of the South Asian community of the area, including the youth, and one claiming ethnographic status, (Saxena, 1995), has nothing to say on the matter. Although not researching ethnic minority youth in the same geographical location, both Hewitt, (1992 & 1989) writing of 'a local multiethnic vernacular'<sup>63</sup> or 'community English', and Rampton, (1995) referring to a 'local vernacular' show a strong awareness of the salience of the phenomena which this section of the chapter seeks to address. More specifically, Hewitt (1986) and Sebba (1993) show a marked recognition of its London inflection. What follows, in this section, is in no way intended to be an exhaustive analysis of all the features of the speech of the Blackhill youth which are redolent of Londonness. It represents, rather, a limited, but suggestive, selection of such features under three main headings; phonological, grammatical, and slang and tags.

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<sup>62</sup> The survey data analysed in Chapter 3, are offered as representations of reality. The informants' self-made tapes of language use in their lives, offer a mixture of representation and 'reality' in so far as they also contain relatively involuntary phonological and grammatical features in the speech of those heard on them.

<sup>63</sup> In the earlier formulation the term 'local multi-racial vernacular' is used.



### 5.1.1. London phonology: sounding London

Of immediate relevance, are some observations from variationist sociolinguists concerned with accent variation in Britain. Milroy, Milroy, et al (1994), and a wide variety of contributors to the volume *Urban Voices: Accent Studies in the British Isles*, Foulkes & Docherty (1999), have commented on ‘T-glottalling’ - the replacement of a /t/ sound by a glottal stop /ʔ/<sup>64</sup> in words of the type butter, letter, not, what. They observe that it has for a long time been on the increase in Britain, not just in urban areas such as London where it has been heavily stigmatised as a working class speech characteristic, but in many other regions and amongst the middle and upper classes. Milroy, Milroy, et al (1994) state baldly that ‘The spread of the glottal stop is so rapid that it is now widely perceived as a stereotype of urban British speech ...’. Wells (1986: 327) observes that ‘... the use of /ʔ/ for /t/ is widespread in all kinds of popular London speech ...’. He adds that,

...the glottal stop is widely regarded as a sound particularly characteristic of Cockney. Matthews (1938: 80) even goes so far as to assert that ‘the chief consonantal feature of the dialect is the prevalence of the glottal stop’. It is certainly plausible to suppose that one of the principal factors contributing to the apparently recent geographical spread of T Glottalling is the influence of London English, where it is indeed very common (Wells, 1986: 323).

Hughes and Trudgill (1996: 70), assert that ‘The glottal stop, [ʔ] is extremely common in cockney speech’.

Foulkes and Docherty (1999: 16), note what they call a ‘lack of interest in the phonetics and phonology of ethnic subcommunities, in particular those of immigrant origin ... the lack of published work on the phonetics and phonology of the *English* spoken in ethnic subcommunities remains conspicuous’. The first of the linguistic features to which I wish to draw attention in the speech of the Blackhill youth is, then, their pervasive T-glottalling. During the 30 individual conversational interviews I conducted with the 30 Blackhill youth I noticed that universally their speech was marked by its ‘Londonness’. Subsequently, careful listening to the audio tapes of these interviews, as part of the process of

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<sup>64</sup> In London speech it is common for the /t/ sound in words such as ‘butter’ and ‘not’ to be omitted so that they are articulated as /buʔer/ and /noʔ/.

transcribing them, showed that all of the young people T-glottalled extensively, as the following examples show,<sup>65</sup>

... yeah when parents are watching i[ʔ] and we're ea[ʔ]ing  
downstairs

(Narjot (m) Panjabi Sikh interview 20.6.97)

I can wri[ʔ]e like simple le[ʔ]ers bu[ʔ] not technical ones like  
my sister she carried on yeah and she's just done her  
G.C.S.E. Gujara[ʔ]i she could wri[ʔ]e a proper le[ʔ]er

(Vishnu (m) Gujarati Hindu interview 10.6.97)

she was very good a[ʔ] i[ʔ] she can wri[ʔ]e i[ʔ] read it it's  
just um my brother he doesn't know any of it he's never  
actually sat down and wri[ʔ]en it or read it

(Shariqah (f) Urdu Muslim interview 4.7.97)

Although T-glottalling was by far the most noticeable token of London phonology in the speech of the Blackhill youth, it was not the only one that was prevalent. Two phonological features, in particular, are worthy of attention. Wells states that,

Another of the very well known characteristics of Cockney is TH  
Fronting. It involves the replacement of the dental fricatives, [θ, ð]<sup>66</sup> by  
labiodentals, [f] and [v] respectively. This makes *thin* a homophone of  
*fin* ..., and *brother* rhyme with *lover* (Wells 1986: 328).

Again these symbolic tokens of Londonness were highly prevalent in the speech of the Blackhill youth. For instance,

I just rhyme I jus word think of a word what rhymes wi[v] it  
put it toge[v]er

(Karwan (m) Kurdish Muslim interview 23.5.97)

... they are so pa[f]e[ʔ]ic

(Gurshanti (f) Panjabi Sikh interview 2.7.97)

<sup>65</sup> During the transcription process I noted not all occurrences of T-glottalling, but simply those which sounded marked and markedly London in their quality. A numerical count of 20 of the interview tapes yielded 3,541 such occurrences.

<sup>66</sup> In other words θ is the linguistic symbol expressing the lightly voiced /th/ sound in speech as in a word like *three*, and ð expresses the heavily voiced /th/ sound as in a word like *mother*.



and then he speaks English himself so he speaks all the English at work and every[f]ing

(Dhrishaj (m) Panjabi Sikh interview 25.6.97)

Wells (ibid.) mentions in passing that a feature of London phonology is the pronunciation of a word like *something* as /*somethink*/. This is an observation confirmed by Hughes and Trudgill (1996), while McArthur (1992: 226), extends the example,

*Everything, nothing, something* are pronounced 'everyfink', 'nuffink', 'sumfink' (ibid.).

According to McArthur these are features contributing to 'core cockney speech' (ibid.). Matthews (1938) concurs, claiming that this phenomenon has been noticeable in London speech since the 18<sup>th</sup> century or perhaps even earlier. This kind of pronunciation pattern occurred quite often in Blackhill youth speech, and can be illustrated in the following examples,

you know and like my mum doesn't wear any religious um rings or anythin[k]

(Punamdeep (f) Panjabi Sikh interview 26.6.97)

it's hard to say someone's somethin[k] when they're not

(Premila (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 5.6.97)

no they're they're always saying tha[ʔ] oh 'whenever you speak Urdu it sounds like in a Southall accent' or somethin[k]

(Shariqah (f) Urdu Muslim interview 4.7.97)

So far we have seen that the London phonology, which is a prominent part of the speech of the Blackhill youth, also acts to anchor their ethnicities as ineradicably local. This perspective is strengthened by the presence of grammatical aspects of their speech which are also marked as distinctive elements of a specifically London form of English, and it is to this that we now turn in a little more detail.

### 5.1.2 London grammar: London through and through

Citing a number of sources Cheshire et al (1993), argue that the grammatical elements just mentioned, are often shared by the populations of other urban centres in Britain and as such are characteristic of the speech of people in the

lower socio-economic groups in these areas. I want here to concentrate on a small number of such features as ones which were particularly noticeable in the Blackhill speech. The first one to which I want to draw attention is the difference between Standard English and what Hughes and Trudgill (1996: 25) call non-standard dialects with respect to the past tense of irregular verbs, so that where Standard English grammar would produce */I did it/*, London English and some other urban grammars would have */I done it/*. As we have seen before, a London speech characteristic is readily present in Blackhill youth speech,

and um er we never [done] that my mum used to do it  
when she was young

(Sahima (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 18.6.97)

bu[ʔ] we only [done] that with the teachers ... I talked in  
Panjabi with my friends

(Sumandev (m) Panjabi Sikh interview 11.6.97 )

it's been quite a while now since I [done] Gujarati

(Amod (m) Gujarati Hindu interview 1.7.97)

Cheshire et al (1993:63) report that the use of */ain't/*, producing, for instance */that ain't working/* where standard English would have */that isn't working/* is a common feature of 'non-standard urban varieties of British English', particularly in southern Britain. It is also a feature which is easy to detect in the speech of the Blackhill youth,

I have tried it bu[ʔ] I [ain't] re- really goo[ʔ] a[ʔ] it

(Karwan (m) Kurdish Muslim interview 23.5.97)

it looks like she is doing it when she [ain[ʔ]]

(Premila (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 5.6.97)

I think they met here I [ain't] sure

(Vishnu (m) Gujarati Hindu interview 10.6.97)

Hughes and Trudgill (1996) describe multiple negation as a non-standard grammatical form which is typical of working-class British speech but which is not found in Standard English. The Blackhill youth reflect this in their specifically London speech in the following manner,



I don't speak Hindi to no one

(Diya (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 12.6.97)

I don't know nothin[k] about my religion

(Gurshanti (f) Panjabi Sikh interview 2.7.97)

this man tried to con my mum and she couldn't take no  
more

(Shanice (f) Jamaican Creole Christian interview 11.7.97)

Additionally, Cheshire et al (1993: 71-2) point out that the use of what they call 'non-standard *was*' is common 'throughout the urban centres of the country'. They suggest this means, for example, that in urban British Englishes a phrase such as */we was singing/* occurs where Standard English offers */we were singing/*. This is a marked feature of the grammar of London English speech and, as we would now expect, it appears readily in Blackhill youth speech,

they was like classes tha[?] wen[?] on during the actual  
lessons they was like compulsory in a way

(Bahiyaa (f) Panjabi Hindu interview 8.7.97)

I just spoke to him and we was making friends

(Patwant (m) Panjabi Sikh interview 9.7.97)

they was in my book

(Nashita (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 13.6.97)

The final grammatical speech token of Londonness to which I want to draw attention at this juncture is one that Cheshire et al (ibid.) report as being the most widely reported grammatical feature of urban British Englishes and one not found in Standard English. This is the grammatical feature which produces */look at them spiders/* (ibid: 64), by contrast with the Standard English */look at those spiders/*. In the speech of the Blackhill youth this characteristic was realised in phrases such as,

my mum and dad and them lot can speak it properly

(Manika (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 10.7.97)

my mum she worked in one of them jewellery shops

(Julie (f) Swahili Christian Catholic interview 8.7.97)

one of them telephone engineers

(Bahiyaa (f) Panjabi Hindu interview 8.7.97)

Although, as we have seen, the foregoing highlighted grammatical features are prominent in a wide variety of urban British vernaculars, their status as distinctive markers of working class London identity is confirmed by the research of Stenström et al (2002) into the nature of London teenage speech. According to them, all the grammatical features just exemplified co-occur in London teenage speech, ‘almost exclusively in conversations involving teenagers from the lower social classes, many of whom have an ethnic minority background’ (Stenström et al, 2002: 133). The empirical work of Stenström et al, based as it is on a language corpus, is particularly useful to the present study for a number of reasons. Firstly, as they point out, in linguistic circles there is a dearth of investigation into teenage language. Secondly, their investigations attempt to give ‘a comprehensive insight into the London teenage vernacular towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’ (ibid.: x). Thirdly, the nature of its computerised, tagged and transcribed corpus is impressive in its scope and quantity by comparison with other available evidence.<sup>67</sup> It is based on recordings made in 1993 and consists of ‘approximately half a million words of spontaneous conversations between 13 to 17 year-old boys and girls from different parts of London and with varying socioeconomic backgrounds’ (ibid.: 4). As well as confirming the grammatical evidence on London specific speech markers provided by other sociolinguistic sources, the work of Stenström and colleagues identifies other London speech characteristics which the other sociolinguistic literature tends not to have pinpointed so precisely. This is noticeable, for instance, with respect to London teenagers’ use of tags as we will later see. In this section evidence has been shown that in addition to the routine utterances of the Blackhill youth being saturated with a specific and consistent London phonology, they are also enclosed within a London specific grammatical framework. It must be emphasised once again that the examples provided are by no means intended to be exhaustive. However, they are intended to be sufficient to justify the argument that such everyday foundational aspects of ethnicity and culture mark the Blackhill youth ethnicities as London ethnicities.

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<sup>67</sup> COLT (the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language) as the corpus is called, is strong on the facts of the linguistic characteristics exhibited by London teenagers, but is much less surefooted in the ethnographic interpretation of the provenance of these usages particularly where ethnic minority teenagers are concerned. This may be because the scholars involved are Corpus Linguists operating from the Department of English at the University of Bergen in Norway.



Further, these are bodily inscribed in ways which any would-be analysis of ethnicities and cultures must take into account. However, the grammatical and phonological dimensions of their speech which identify the Blackhill youth as British and Londoners are not the only the linguistic phenomena which do so. There are also their lexical behaviours some of which they consciously label as ‘slang’ and which linguists would label as ‘tags’.

### 5.1.3. Slang, ‘innit’ and tags

One consistent representation offered by the Blackhill youth was their contention that a dominant feature of their speech in English with their peers was the use of what they universally termed ‘slang’. It was curious, though, that when pressed to give examples of what they meant by this they tended to flounder saying that they couldn’t think of any. There was, however, one overwhelming exception. Very many of the individuals stated that they used the term */innit/*, and that they identified its usage as synonymous with slang. The adding to a phrase of the question tag */isn’t it?/* in a phrase like */it’s cold isn’t it?/* is generally regarded as an unexceptional part of Standard English speech, although it is somewhat stigmatised when appearing in working class London speech as */it’s cold innit?/*. The Blackhill youth are definite and regular users of this linguistic form in its London inflection as can be seen in the following examples,

its like its like my home language innit=  
(Vishnu (m) Gujarati Hindu interview 10.6.97)

yeah bu[?] that’s all life’s abou[?] innit  
(Premila (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 5.6.97)

However, this is not the only way in which the Blackhill youth use the */innit/* tag. They also use it in a way that transcends the traditionally London (‘Cockney’) usage just illustrated above. Stenström et al (2002: 167-8), describe the use of */innit/* as an invariant tag, named as such because it ‘is used in London adolescent speech as a tag that can be appended to any statement, regardless of the grammatical features of the statement’. They add, variously, that this invariant tag occurs ‘typically in multilingual settings’ and ‘occurs typically in the speech of ethnic minority youth’ (ibid.: 168). Nevertheless, rather more precisely, Baumann (1996), McArthur (1992) and Nihalani et al (1979) link this usage with

specifically Indian forms of English perhaps derived from diasporic roots in India; and Hewitt (1986) with specifically London forms of Jamaican language.

According to Nihalani et al (1979), in a book on Indian English in India,

In [British Standard English] the question-tag 'isn't it?' only occurs when the sentence preceding the tag has a neuter subject and includes the verb 'to be': 'It's raining again, isn't it? ... Indian [Variants of English] speakers use this tag much more frequently and in contexts where [British Standard English] would demand a different tag, for example 'haven't you?' in the sentence quoted [i.e.] 'You've heard him make that claim isn't it?' (Nihalani et al 1979: 104).

In the London context this tendency is seen as representative of 'Indianisms - /innit/ for /isn't it/, /aren't you/, /aren't they/, etc.)' (Baumann 1996: 47). It is, though, on the other hand, possible that the processes by which this has occurred, parallel those described by Hewitt in his description of what he calls the 'London English of black [meaning Caribbean-descended] adolescents',

... 'innit' has become particularly well established over the past few years. Its distinctiveness from the common English usage, which is found in such phrases as 'it's a nice day, innit' resides in the fact that the 'it' morpheme does not refer back to a previous 'it' but to any general state, as in 'we had a lovely time, innit', and 'she's really nice that girl, innit'. Of all the items to penetrate white speech from the Caribbean, this is the most stable and most widely used among adolescents and amongst older people (Hewitt, 1986: 132).

In addition to naming their own use of /innit/ as being representational of their use of slang, the Blackhill youth regularly and unselfconsciously used it in their naturally occurring speech, as an invariant tag, as can be seen from the following examples drawn from their individual conversational interviews,

she speaks Gujara[?]i inni[?]  
(Diya (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 12.6.97)

they're my mum's youngest sisters inni[?]  
(Shariqah (f) Urdu Muslim interview 4.7.97)

you're always speaking Gujara[?]i at home as well enni[?]<sup>68</sup>  
(Vishnu (m) Gujarati Hindu interview 10.6.97)

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<sup>68</sup> It was noticeable that a number of the Blackhill youth articulated the tag as /ennit/ as opposed to /innit/. The origin of this usage is not clear but may well be Southall-specific.



The latter usage is an apt reminder of the overall argument that the Blackhill youth ethnicities are multiply constituted at the same instant, for example, of traditional London elements and Indian ones.

So far, though, the present chapter has shown that the Blackhill youth have as a fundamental and dominant element of their ethnicities and cultures an unerasable local 'Londonness' which is all the more powerful for being inscribed into their bodies through the low-key, unremarkable human actions of everyday speech utterances. However, as previously suggested, at the same time I want to argue in the next section that this 'Londonness', is interwoven synchronically in complex ways with the powerfully residual cultural markings inherited from their parents and grandparents. One of these cultural markings is, again, language in its everyday use.

## **5.2. The global in the local (i) : 'My Language'**

One of the occurrences in the research which at first seemed puzzling was the way in which Blackhill individuals made what appeared to be paradoxical statements concerning their relationships with their home/community languages other than English. On the one hand they tended to refer to these languages, using proprietary pronouns, as 'my language'. On the other hand they were on the whole emphatic about their lack of expertise in the use of these languages. Eventually, it became clear that these young people, whatever their linguistic mastery, inhabited a multilingual universe both inside and outside the home. Rampton (1990) has pointed out the limitations of linguistic concepts like 'native speaker' and 'mother tongue' and has suggested, instead, the heuristic utility of assessing the linguistic positioning of individuals in terms of 'expertise', 'affiliation' and 'inheritance'. Rampton considers that 'affiliation' and inheritance are constituent elements of 'language allegiance' or 'language loyalty'. The Blackhill youth depict themselves as having limited expertise in community languages in comparison with their strong expertise in English. Simultaneously, though, they declare a firm language loyalty or language allegiance to the community languages which, firstly, they have inherited, and for which, secondly, they have developed a strong emotional affiliation. The challenge is to understand more clearly how the community languages, with their synchronic and diachronic global reach, interact with the locally inscribed Englishes in Britain as the routine business of everyday life proceeds. This greater understanding contributes to our knowledge of how 'new ethnicities' and 'new cultures of hybridity' are

constructed and maintained. The Blackhill youth offer ample intricate representations as to how these linguistic relations are played out in their homes, and it is to an analysis of these that the discussion now turns.

### 5.2.1 The home

As has already become evident in Chapter Three, the question of patterns of language use at home is a complex one for the Blackhill youth, and cannot be answered simply and definitively in the way that the language survey questionnaire invited. In answer to the question on which languages they speak at home the Blackhill youth are forced to respond along the lines of ‘it all depends to whom I’m talking for what purposes at what moments.’ Language use at home can involve, at the very least, different patterns of language use with parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, siblings, cousins, and wider family friends. As the language survey data indicated, the early lives of most of the Blackhill youth were experienced through languages such as Panjabi, Gujarati, or an alternation between either of these and English. For them a decisive shift to English language dominance occurred only during their years at infant school.

The first pattern of interaction with parents presented by Blackhill youth was that of spoken exchanges characterised by considerable linguistic codeswitching which occurred for a variety of reasons. Sometimes this occurred because of what the Blackhill youth perceived as their own limited expertise in the community languages and consequent inability to sustain prolonged conversation with their parents without the assistance of English,

If I am talking to my father, I speak in both Gujarati and English which is usually mixed together. My Gujarati is muddled and so when I am speaking it, I always add in words in English if I do not know how to say them in Gujarati. **Sahima (f) (written account).**

sometimes I have difficul[?]y like speaking Panjabi there’s some words I can’t say in Panjabi and so it’ll be like English and Panjabi and when I speak to my dad it’ll be like I’ll be speaking English like and he won’t answer me (laughs).

(Punamdeep (f) Panjabi Sikh interview 26.6.97)

A number of the youth, however, did claim a sufficient level of expertise to communicate comfortably with their parents in a language other than English.



This seems to have been nearly always prompted by the limitations of one or both parents in the speaking of English,

Although I am in England now and I speak in English at school and outside my house all the time, I still speak in Punjabi with my mum and dad. I have to speak Punjabi with my mum because she doesn't understand English. My dad can understand English but he prefers if I speak in Punjabi to him. **Sumandev (m) (written account)**.

if I speak to my mum she she only speaks to me in Gujarati she doesn't speak English ... she knows how to speak i[?] but she's no[?] fluent ... she doesn't feel as though she can speak it properly

(Sahima (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 18.6.97)

The statement above by Sumandev hints that his father has a greater degree of English language expertise than his mother. This differential pattern was often repeated in the accounts offered by the Blackhill youth. Where it occurred it appears to be for two reasons. Firstly, their mothers tended to have come to live in Britain at a later stage in their lives than their fathers. Secondly, their mothers were less likely than their fathers to have spent time working in English-speaking environments outside the home. This points to the heterogeneity of their parents' ethnicities and is something that will be examined more closely in Chapter Six. Sometimes the Blackhill youth made it clear that their parents, while competent at speaking English, preferred to speak to their children in community languages at home as part of their efforts to secure the reproduction of diasporic languages and traditions,

In my house and family the main language spoken is Kurdish, both my parents, both brothers and all cousins and family originate from Kurdistan, and all believe that by speaking our language we remember our roots ... **Karwan (m) (written account)**

she [mum] doesn't like it when we speak English to her she's like, 'you speak your own language', she has a go at my dad you know for speaking English with us.

(Shariqah (f) Urdu Muslim interview 4.7.97)

The strongest and most consistent reason given by the young people for speaking community languages at home was in order to communicate with their grandparents. Here there were two principal motivations. Firstly, there were occasions where they wanted to assist one or more of their grandparents who did not understand English. The second reason was in order to show their grandparents respect. The presence in the family home of a grandparent who understood little or no English was common amongst the Blackhill group as indicated here,

my grandma does not speak English. My whole family can speak Gujarati, but my Grandma uses it the most because this is the only language she can speak which the whole family can understand.

**Amod (m) (written account)**

Punjabi had to be spoken at home because that was the only language my grandmother and grandfather could understand (fathers side) ... I will only speak Punjabi when I have to. For example if my grandmothers speak to me in Punjabi I would have to reply in Punjabi because that is the only language that they understand.

**Gurshanti (f) (written account)**

I don't really speak i[?] [Panjabi] apart from when my gran stays at my house cos she doesn't understand English so er when I um speak to her I try to communicate with her in er by using my language Panjabi.

(Sachdev (m) Panjabi Sikh interview 3.7.97)

Using community languages with grandparents as a mark of respect appeared to be one of the everyday practices which was almost universally shared by the Blackhill youth, and almost all of them, individually and spontaneously, volunteered this information,

The only time I don't speak english is when I am talking to my dad or grandmother ... Punjabi has to be spoken to my relatives because that shows that I have respect for them.

**Amar (m) (written account).**

I think when you're in a situation it naturally comes to you as to what language you use for example if you were in a situation talking to your elder relatives you would talk in your mother tongue language as it would mean respect to your elders.

**Neetaa (f) (written account).**

I speak to them [grandparents] in Punjabi because it is felt as being rude when or if someone were to talk to them in a language that they do not understand too well, bearing in mind that the person was younger, and related to them. Speaking to my elders in Punjabi also underlines my respect for them.

**Patwant (m) (written account).**



If I am talking to someone older whom which may be an aunt also my grandparents. I usually speak Urdu. The reason for this is because they sometimes do not understand what I am saying if it is spoken in English and it also shows a sign of respect.

**Shariqah (f) (written account)**

Sometimes the young people said that they used community languages with their grandparents as the result of a certain degree of pressure, from the grandparents themselves, for ethnic-ideological reasons. Here grandparents spoke community languages rather than English to their grandchildren on a point of principle based on their perception of their right to speak their own languages at home without constraint; and also by a motivation to encourage community language maintenance linked with wider community ethnic cultural practices (including religious ones) in their grandchildren's generation,

If I was to speak to them in English they would complain to my parents and say that I do not know how to speak my mother tongue.

**Shariqah (f) (written account)**

They believe that even if you know how to speak English and you speak it on a daily basis, you are supposed to speak in Gujarati to them.

**Sahima (f) (written account)**

I think it's because they [grandparents and other elders] origina[?]ed from India and they want you to speak Indian to them and I don't know I just think that it's like par[?] of our religion as well you have to respect everybody everybody older than your parents in the family and so you have to speak in Panjabi.

(Amrita (f) Panjabi Sikh interview 19.6.97)

Despite these pressures it was something that none of the Blackhill youth complained about. Indeed many of them drew attention to the fact that using community languages as a show of respect and good manners was something that they willingly did as a matter of course with all family elders and with most older visitors to the family home,

RH: why do you still speak Gujarati to your grandparents?

Keshav: ... it's like a show of respect to them that's why we just like and even to our uncles like olders we have to talk in Gujarati unless they're talking in English then you just talk back in English

(Keshav (m) Gujarati Hindu interview 15.7.97)

The readiness with which the Blackhill youth used the term ‘respect’ and offered tokens of respect through their speech behaviour seemed to be a distinctive aspect of their ethnicities. It is difficult to think of a similar symbolic routine practice among white British youth or black British youth of Caribbean descent.<sup>69</sup> It is more common for the youth of these groups to demand respect from others, including elders, than to willingly and unashamedly offer respect to them. The aspects of the interrelationship between the Blackhill youth and their grandparents described above offer an example of how symbolic emblems of residual aspects of South Asian cultures, represented in the continued use of languages like Gujarati and Panjabi, can be retained in the present, and retained without resistance or resentment, intermingled with newer emergent elements of culture.<sup>70</sup>

However, in stressing the role of community languages in the lives of the Blackhill youth in their homes, it would be a mistake to underplay the everyday importance of English there. We have already seen in Chapter Three that 8 of the 31 Blackhill youth who completed the language survey questionnaire said that the language they first used at home before going to school was English. In fact an important facet of their language use at home is the extent to which English is used, by whom, when, and for what purposes. The Blackhill youth were emphatic in representing their homes as spaces where English language use is certainly not marginal and is often central,

The language spoken mostly in my family is English.

**Amar (m) (written account).**

In my life there are three languages that I use, English I feel is my mother tongue because I speak it at school and a lot at home.

**Dhrishaj (m) (written account).**

My mother-tongue language is Punjabi, but at home I normally speak in English.

**Bahiyaa (f) (written account).**

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<sup>69</sup> For historical reasons too complex to pursue here, it has been more common for elders of Caribbean descent to regard Creole language speech addressed to them by youngsters as a mark of a lack of respect, even insolence. I am aware that in many black families of West African descent in Britain it is common for younger members to routinely address elders in linguistically respectful ways similar to those outlined by the Blackhill youth.

<sup>70</sup> It is probably highly significant that speakers of Panjabi, Hindi/Urdu and Gujarati routinely add the suffix /ji/ to utterances as a linguistic token emphasising respect or additional respect (Bhardwaj & Wells 1989: 13, Bhardwaj 1995: 23, Dave 1995: 50).



they (parents) still speak to me in English so I never really caught on to language in Panjabi.

(Narjot (m) Panjabi Sikh interview 20.6.97)

One strong feature of the presence of English language use in the homes of the Blackhill youth was its ubiquity in their habitual communications with their siblings. Most of the young people made it clear that in their interactions with their brothers and sisters they nearly always spoke English,

I rarely speak Gujarati with my brother because we both feel more comfortable by speaking to each other in English. We also understand each other better speaking English rather than Gujarati as my brother gets a few words mixed up speaking Gujarati.

**Amod (m) (written account)**

When I talk to my sisters or cousins of my age I will speak English because they all have been to school and speak English as their first language and if I started to speaking Punjabi then they would start laughing at me as it would be inappropriate.

**Dhrishaj (m) (written account)**

At home I only speak in English to my sister and my cousins.

**Sumandev (m) (written account)**

This is not to say that there are no occasions on which languages other than English are used with siblings. However, these usages appeared to be spasmodic and linked with the achievement of certain effects, for example for ludic purposes, rather than being utilised as part of lengthy passages of continuous conversation or discussion of serious topics,

I sometimes talk in Gujarati (sic) to get my sisters frustrated. I do this by going on and on and saying silly things in Gujarati.

**Nashita (f) (written account)**

One other characteristic of their linguistic exchanges at home mentioned by many Blackhill youth will be noted briefly here before being explored slightly more fully in the next chapter. I refer to their patterns of language use with members of their wider family, that is uncles, aunts and cousins. As was suggested by the language survey questionnaire data the presence of aunts and uncles was depicted by the Blackhill youth as occasioning the broadening of the range of languages used in the home, whether or not they themselves were able to be active participants in their use. Aunts and uncles appeared to open a window to the wider family and ethnic diaspora through their lives in other countries. They also

sometimes opened access to distinctive patterns of ethnic hybridisation, where they had entered out-group marriages,

Swahili is a language that my parents and relatives know how to speak as it is the language that they used to speak when they lived in Tanzania. I do not know how to speak in Swahili at all but I always come across it when my relatives come to visit. **Sahima (f) (written account).**

It could be argued that the relationships with their diasporic relatives and with their grandparents represent two perspectives on the global in the local in so far as the everyday, locally situated, patterns of language use are indicative of the practice, consolidation and development of ‘new ethnicities’ and ‘new cultures of hybridity’. There is evidence that the grandparental influence acts as a kind of active residual presence of global-traditional cultures, while many aunts and uncles represent an actively emergent presence of global-contemporary cultures. I want to look next at some examples of how the emergent in global contemporary culture has come to be bodily inscribed in the Blackhill youth through the medium of their commonplace speech.

### **5.2.2 The global in the local (ii): Global teenage language**

The term Global teenage language is being used here to suggest patterns of language use which while they are common in everyday local speech in London, appear to have originated outside Britain, to be relatively new, and to have currency in the verbal expressions of young people all over the world. As such the use of this kind of language by the Blackhill youth adds another strand to the weft of the developing tapestry of their ethnicities. Two such features, in particular, will be the focus of the current section. The first is what, in sociolinguistic circles, has been identified as the discourse marker */like/* used as a focus marker or as a ‘quotative’. The other is known as ‘upspeak’ or ‘Australian questioning intonation’.

#### **5.2.2.1. ‘Like’**

The primary attention here will be focused on the linguistic phenomenon labelled ‘quotative be + like’ (Ferrara & Bell, 1995). This refers to one of the variety of ways, in the English language verbal system, in which dialogues are conveyed during narrative accounts. The following examples illustrate the point,

She’s like, “Right, you know, we’re taking you out.”  
I was like, “Ah I don’t want to go out. Please no.”



And they're like, "Come on, go and get dressed." (cited in Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999: 147).

Of course the system for the use of like as a discourse marker as a whole is enormously complex in a way which is beyond the scope of the present thesis. However, it is treated exhaustively by Blyth et al (1990), Romaine & Lange (1991), Ferrara & Bell (1995), Tagliamonte & Hudson (1999), Dailey-O'Cain (2000), and Macaulay (2001). These researchers are agreed that this discourse feature is relatively new or at least did not receive serious academic attention until the early 1980s. They are also generally agreed that it originated in the U.S.A., before spreading to Canada and the UK and possibly elsewhere in the English-speaking world. There is also a consensus that it is characteristically used by young people and that females are more likely than males to use it. More importantly for the current discussion it is taken as symbolic of global cultural change involving youth,

... be like has diffused into the quotative system in a very short period of time among younger speakers in geographically separated locations in the English-speaking world according to remarkably similar pathways of development. Thus, the diffusion of be like may be a very good linguistic indicator of the types of developments and changes we might expect from the putative ongoing globalization of English ... further research on be like, in conjunction with other linguistic features rapidly innovating in urban areas throughout the English-speaking world, will be a good place to look for, and 'catch,' the burgeoning global 'mega trends' of language change (Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999: 168).

As the following examples show, the Blackhill youth are part of these global developments, which in turn add just one more of the intricate constitutive elements of their ethnicities,

she goes 'we went through it in class' and I'm like 'bu[?] I wanted to do a different one'.

(Gurshanti (f) Panjabi Sikh interview 2.7.97)

sometimes I'll be like 'yea::h' and she'll speaking Panjabi with me and ... I'm like erm 'yea::h<sup>71</sup> yeah yeah' you know I'll I'll be like 'ye-es'

(Punamdeep (f) Panjabi Sikh interview 26.6.97)

and they were just like very 'okay, whatever you say'

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<sup>71</sup> The use of the double colon (::) indicates significant elongation of the preceding vowel.

(Nashita (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 13.6.97)

she's like 'you should speak proper Panjabi' ... she's like  
'you should speak it this way'

(Amrita (f) Panjabi Sikh interview 19.6.97)

As this selection of illustrative examples implies, my data confirms the view in the sociolinguistic literature that this feature of globalised teenage English usage is gendered in that it appears to be more common in female than in male speech. There is also a hint in the literature that a similarly gendered pattern of usage is perceptible in the globalised teenage English speech phenomenon of up-speak.

#### 5.2.2.2 Up-speak or Australian questioning intonation

Another ingredient linking the Blackhill youth, through their everyday speech, with global cultural developments and change, is their evident use of what has been termed variously, 'Up-speak', 'up-talk', 'uptalk' or 'Australian questioning intonation'. The expression refers to a way of speaking in which statements are uttered with a rising intonation as though they are questions. The origins of this speech habit are contested. Some serious linguistic observers locate its genesis in the valleys of California on the US West Coast, while others claim that its source is Australia. Algeo & Algeo (1994: 185) describe it as 'An almost Irish, sort of Canadian, not quite Valley-girl intonation that makes declarative statements sound like questions?'. They add, referring to the work of American linguist Cynthia McLemore,

While doing research for a Ph.D. dissertation on intonation, she spent six months "hanging out with a tape recorder" in a University of Texas sorority house. ... It wasn't until she started lecturing about her findings that she realized that repeatedly rising intonation – or "uptalk" as it's been called – has spread all over the country (ibid.: 185).

On the other hand, Guy, Horvath et al (1986), dubbing the same phenomenon Australian Questioning Intonation (AQI), claim its earliest and certainly most extensive use for Australia,<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Journalistic and academic anecdote in the UK has attributed the spread of this speech feature to British youth to the influence of the popular Australian TV soap operas *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. It is interesting, then, to note that Gillespie (1995), in her research on Southall youth, describes them as avid watchers of *Neighbours* and devotes a whole chapter to the topic. In the Southall Youth Survey (1989-1990), which her research shared with Gerd Baumann, Gillespie (1995: 217) reports that 67% of her sample watched *Neighbours* every week and 20% watched *Home and Away*.



We do not wish to claim that “AQI” is a feature unique to the English of Australia. In fact, we would not be surprised if the verification-seeking meaning we discern in AQI were found to be possible in certain situations for most dialects of English, since it seems a modest and natural extension of the English intonational meaning system. Anecdotal reports from Canada, California, and the southern United States support this view. But we are suggesting that, to our knowledge, it is used with the characteristic meaning we have described more widely and more often in Australasia than in any other part of the English-speaking world (Guy, Horvath et al 1986: 27).

Nevertheless, there is general agreement that it is a relatively recent linguistic development from the point of view of academic research, since it has become apparent within approximately the last twenty five years. Once again it is possible to trace links between the everyday unselfconscious language use of the Blackhill youth and global cultural and linguistic innovations,

one thing I do remember is once my mum [forgot me ↑]<sup>73</sup>  
(Gurleeta (f) Panjabi Sikh interview 2.7.97)

you know just English cos you [live here ↑]  
(Shariqah (f) Urdu Muslim interview 4.7.97)

I didn't like [learning it ↑]  
(Sahima (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 18.6.97)

that means who [sent you ↑]  
(Diya (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 12.6.97)

We have just seen how the use of certain linguistic items by the Blackhill youth links them with practices shared by adolescents of other ethnicities in Britain and elsewhere in the world. In this respect my analysis contributes to a demonstration of the inadequacy of binary approaches to the analysis of ethnicity and culture through categories of traditional and modern, old and new. So far we have seen that the ethnicities of the Blackhill youth are partly constituted by at least three distinctive strands. The London, the Global-traditional and the Global-contemporary. The next and concluding section of the chapter will draw attention to a number of examples of ways in which for the Blackhill youth, what could be

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<sup>73</sup> ↑ this inserted symbol indicates that the preceding highlighted phrase was articulated with a rising tone as if accompanying a question rather than the statement which was in fact being made.

described as residual elements of the Global-traditional are embedded in expressions of both the London *and* the Global-contemporary in their cultural and ethnic articulations.

### 5.2.3 The global in the local (iii): Other ‘Indianisms’.

Earlier in the chapter, the discussion of the use by the Blackhill youth of the term */innit/*, characterised one of its usages as representative of what Baumann (1996), termed ‘Indianisms’ retained in English language use. I want to add two other examples found in the speech of the Blackhill youth. The first, for which independent verification is available, is the use of the terms ‘cousin-brother’ and ‘cousin-sister’. The second, whose status as an ‘Indianism’ I can only speculatively assert is a particular usage of the phrase ‘gives it’.

#### 5.2.3.1 ‘Cousin-brother’ and ‘Cousin-sister’

Nihalani, Tongue & Hosali (1979: 59), with reference to the terms ‘cousin-brother’ and ‘cousin-sister’, connect them directly with a specifically Indian usage of English linked directly with literal usages in languages of the Indian sub-continent,

Since the word ‘cousin’ does not contain a sex-denoting marker, where sex is important it has to be indicated (rather awkwardly) in British Standard English by a phrase like ‘female cousin’. Most languages in India indicate sex in the word itself and ‘cousin-brother’ is an attempt to do this in English.

McArthur concurs with this interpretation describing */cousin brother/* and */cousin sister/* as ‘calques<sup>74</sup> from local languages’ (McArthur, 1992: 506). The expressions */cousin brother/* and */cousin sister/* were extremely common in the conversations of the Blackhill youth as can be seen in these selected examples,

my cousin sisters and cousin brother ... actually they speak fluent English.

(Amar (m) Hindu interview 4.6.97)

my cousin sisters and um aunties and that they really sit down and watch they’ve got Sky

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<sup>74</sup> A calque is a loan-translation or borrowing in which a word or phrase from one language is translated literally word for word into another language to form a new word or phrase there.



(Narjot (m) Panjabi Sikh interview 20.6.97)

to my cousin sister I just speak English I don't speak  
Panjabi a[?] all

(Punamdeep (f) Panjabi Sikh interview 26.6.97)

I think it's unfair cos my cousin brother he got married to a  
Muslim and then they did nothing to him

(Premila (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 5.6.97)

What was particularly fascinating, and instructive, was that whenever I drew the attention of any of the Blackhill users of the terms */cousin brother/* and */cousin sister/* to these utterances, they were nonplussed and found it extremely difficult to apprehend that the usage was unknown to British English. In other words their usage formed an integral part of their ordinary, everyday, unselfconscious local London speech yet at the same time bore residual traces of their 'Indianness'. In this respect it provides a vivid exemplification of ways in which 'new ethnicities' and 'new cultures of hybridity' are constituted simultaneously of the residual and the emergent. However, as indicated above, I am less certain of the provenance of another expression, 'gives it', which was also prominent in the speech of the Blackhill youth, but I want to suggest that it operates in a similar way to */cousin brother/* and */cousin sister/*.

### 5.2.3.2 'Gives it'

Careful listening to the audio recordings of the conversational interviews with the Blackhill youth and reading of my subsequent transcriptions revealed that the Blackhill youth frequently used the expression 'gives it', when referring during a narrative recount to how a protagonist said something. This was something akin to the colloquial English conversational narrative device 'so she goes ...'.<sup>75</sup> Here are some examples,

and mum gives it 'oh it's a letter' and I get 'let me read it'  
and she [gives it] 'you can'.

(Rishab (m) Panjabi Hindu interview 8.7.97)

I was actually speaking to a girl in our class and give it 'you  
know what man' and she [gives it] 'I'm not a man'.

(Amar (m) Panjabi Hindu interview 4.6.97)

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<sup>75</sup> The colloquialism 'she goes ...' was also strongly visible in Blackhill youth speech.

I'm gonna phone up and ask him why he talked to me like tha[ʔ] and she [gives it] 'no you can't'.

(Gurleetaa (f) Panjabi Sikh interview 2.7.97)

So she wants us to be like that and she wants us to be able to write it as well. So she [gives it] 'because if everybody can do it you can do it as well'.

(Nashita (f) Gujarati Hindu interview 13.6.97)

I am by no means certain that this usage represents an 'Indianism', but I have never previously encountered it in British English usage and am prepared to speculate that it is an instance of an Indian language retention. Even with this caveat this concluding section of the present chapter has added another exemplifying strand to the substantial argument that the residual, emergent and dominant in culture are co-occurring rather than separate alternating elements or even old versus new elements.

### **Conclusion**

One of the contentions of the thesis is that an investigation into representations of patterns of language use is an important way of understanding how individuals and groups might construct and perform their own sense of their ethnicities. It is further argued that within the British Cultural Studies tradition, the question of the everyday language use by ordinary people has been virtually entirely neglected as an important element of culture and/or ethnicity. In this chapter I have shown that the overwhelming majority of the Blackhill youth are continuously engaged in the negotiation of what I would like to call everyday multilingualism which amounts to a kind of structured linguistic ecology. By this I mean that they live in multilingual environments both inside and outside the home, and on a low-key, routine basis negotiate their way through this world in complex but unspectacular ways which in themselves constitute constructions of important elements of their ethnic formation. I have argued that just one aspect of this, and one which is rarely noticed or commented on, is the local British marking which is apparent in virtually every utterance they make. I have drawn attention to the circumstance that while most British observers concentrate on visible markers (appearance, dress, religion, cultural practices and even foreign language use) of separateness and difference, a deeply routine vernacular marker of Britishness in visible ethnic minority youth such as the Blackhill youth – their everyday pronunciation pattern, is overlooked. I have demonstrated how the Blackhill youth mark their essential



'Londonness' every time they speak with their use of specific well known tokens of London speech. These tokens include elements of pronunciation such as t-glottalling, and elements of grammar such as the London-marked use of the verbal token 'done'<sup>76</sup>.

My contention in the chapter has been that a vital part of any construction of new ethnicities is the pronunciation patterns in the naturally occurring speech of the ethnic formations under analysis. Some authoritative psycholinguistic research has suggested that in naturally occurring speech the phonological, grammatical/syntactical tends to be relatively weakly susceptible to conscious control (Malmkjær 1995: 363-366). In other words, whatever declarations of allegiance ethnic minority youth make to the symbols of ethnic affiliation in the grandparental or parental generations, or in the ethnically marked wider community, an ineluctable fragment of their ethnic identity is their local Britishness, signalled in part in the ways shown in this chapter. If the young people concerned live in other areas of Britain, such as Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester, Leeds/Bradford, Birmingham and so on, as the cousins of many of my informants do, I would argue that their Britishness will also be marked in linguistically specific local ways. That is when they routinely speak, even in languages other than English, their pronunciation patterns will mark them as belonging to Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester, Leeds/Bradford and Birmingham. This is not all. I would argue that this tendency is augmented by language patterns which are also marked by specific local British identifications centred on grammar, idiomatic phrases and lexical choices. The difficulty of readily perceiving these phenomena in the case of young people of South Asian descent, as we saw in the case of the British Home Secretary David Blunkett and others in Chapter One, may be exacerbated by the habit of allowing the visual rather than the aural to dominate in considerations of ethnicity (see comments on page 33). At the same time I have shown that these localised inscriptions do not stand in isolation. They are interwoven in complex ways with the unspectacularly negotiated everyday multilingualism which the Blackhill youth articulate with globally extended languages like Panjabi and Gujarati, and with the globally

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<sup>76</sup> I have not focused on the markedly London nature of a significant amount of the lexical choices of the Blackhill youth 'bunk off' (play truant), 'leg it' (run away, run quickly), 'slag off' (insult, defame). The youth showed a sharp awareness that these and many other usages were ones they might consciously seek to control, especially, according to them, in the presence of teachers.

influential speech patterns of their worldwide adolescent generation. In the next chapter I want to concentrate on some different ways in which local and global cultural and ethnic forces are articulated together in the lives of the Blackhill youth.



## Chapter Six: 'My Culture', 'My Language', 'My Religion': Communities, Practices and Diasporas

### 6.0. Introduction

In Chapter Five it was noted that the Blackhill youth regularly used the proprietary pronoun 'my'<sup>77</sup> when they wanted to refer to Panjabi, Gujarati and other languages besides English, which were strongly associated with their families and communities. Comment was made on the apparent paradox between their proprietary claims and their simultaneous disavowal of a high level of expertise in the use of these languages. A similar pattern occurred when the young people referred, in conversation, to communities, both local and globally diasporic, of which they felt themselves to be a part; and also, more specifically, when they referred to the religious formations to which they were nominally attached. Consequently, at such points in conversation, phrases like 'my culture', 'my language' and 'my religion' regularly occurred alongside bashful and rueful acknowledgements, by the Blackhill youth, of their own deficient expertise in the tenets of idealised community emblematic practices,

I know it is important for me to stay um with my own  
culture as well as being you know British as well  
(Gurleetaa (f) Sikh interview 2.7.97)

RH: ... how did you feel about the [community language]  
classes when you were going  
Rishab: they were okay I I felt yeah tha[?] I was learning  
more abou[?] my culture  
(Rishab (m) Hindu interview 8.7.97)

On the face of it the question of how to reconcile what appear to be competing cultural forces seems to arise. However, I have already indicated in earlier chapters my dissatisfaction with, and rejection of, the notion that such young people are 'caught between two cultures'. How else, then, might these phenomena be better understood and interpreted? In this chapter I want to argue that the Blackhill youth inhabit a number of ethnic and cultural subcommunities which

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<sup>77</sup> Often the proprietary pronouns 'your' and 'our' were used to utter phrases like 'it's good to like be able to read and write in your own language' (Manika, interview 10.7.97), or to refer to 'our language'.

they articulate together in ways which draw both on residual traditional elements informed by diasporic influences and on emergent local elements, with different emphases dominant at contingent moments. It will be argued, further, that all this is accomplished in low key ways with little or no overt sign of crisis or serious discomfort. It is suggested that these manoeuvrings and negotiations are experienced through the everyday practices of subcommunities organised on the basis of community language use, interactions with adolescent peers, religious practices and diaspora connections and continuities. In all of these dimensions it will be shown that language use factors play an important constitutive part.

To put it more specifically, the Blackhill youth shared the experience of inhabiting distinctive ethnic and cultural subcommunities each operating within the same local London physical spaces, each mediated by a specific religious affiliation and linked to a worldwide family and religious diaspora. As we saw in Chapter Three, of the thirty one young people who completed the language survey questionnaire, thirteen claimed a Sikh religious affiliation, eleven said that they were Hindus, four declared themselves as Muslims and three claimed an attachment to Christianity, including one Catholic. The present chapter identifies some of the ways in which most of the Blackhill youth, and most markedly in the case of the overwhelming majority who were not Christians, found that their community, religious and diasporic experiences and practices were heavily influenced by factors relating to perceived linguistic expertise and consequent levels of relative detachment from purported ethnic and cultural ideals. The chapter will also show how the Blackhill youth principally sense their place within specific communities in terms of how well they feel they know community languages; how much they know about and how much they practise community religions; how they interact with their peers; and how they feel when visiting, or otherwise interacting with, parental and grandparental homelands. In all these dimensions they could be said to be inhabiting a series of intricate and interlocking communities of practice. The notion of communities of practice has been described in the following terms,

They are so informal and so pervasive that they rarely come into explicit focus, but for the same reasons they are also quite familiar ... Most communities of practice do not have a name and do not issue membership cards. Yet, if we care to consider our own life from that perspective for a moment, we can all construct a fairly good picture of the communities of practice we belong to now, those we belonged to in the past, and those we would like to belong to in the future. We also



have a fairly good idea of who belongs to our communities of practice and why, even though membership is rarely made explicit on a roster or a checklist of qualifying criteria. Furthermore, we can probably distinguish a few communities of practice in which we are core members from a larger number of communities in which we have a more peripheral kind of membership (Wenger, 1998: 7).

It is to the identification, description and analysis of a number of such communities of practice in the lives of the Blackhill youth that the discussion now turns.

### 6.1. Community languages as symbols of worthiness

A fascinating aspect of their discourse on community language use was the way in which the Blackhill youth were regularly apologetic about or lamented what they perceived as their lack of expertise in these languages, while taking no concrete actions to remedy these deficiencies. This was all the more striking since most of them had been sent by their parents, at one time or another, to community classes for the maintenance of community languages, religions and cultural traditions. All had discontinued their attendance by the time of my research. But what is most interesting is that when asked why they had stopped attending these classes they appeared to be struggling to supply answers. Not one was coherent on this matter.<sup>78</sup> The following exchanges were typical,

Gurshanti: ... it's just I don't know what to do because I can't speak i[?]

RH: does it worry you or

Gurshanti: yeah sometimes like erm one of my friends she takes lessons but I'm not I can't be bothered to do that I wouldn't want to do i[?]

RH: what why don't// you want to do it<sup>79</sup>

Gurshanti: //I mean I have I have taken lessons like um (.) my mum sent me to them sometimes bu[?] I didn't learn anything u- th- I'd practise the same thing over and over again and still not learn it

RH: so how long did you do it for

Gurshanti: I did it for a little while//

RH: //inaudible)

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<sup>78</sup> As we saw in Chapter Four, Karwan was a notable exception in that he had attended such classes for six years and had no serious complaint against having done so. There were also a very small number of the Blackhill youth who had never attended these classes.

<sup>79</sup> // indicates overlapping speech.

Gurshanti: when I was young

RH: when you were young I think I ha- s- made a note of it you so I mean when you say do you remember how long you actually went for

Gurshanti: not that long I mean the first time I went for a li[?]le while my mum sent me for a li[?]le while and then the second time I went for about two weeks

RH: mm

Gurshanti: and I just got bored and my mum jus- couldn't be bothered to take me either

RH: mm so I mean you- from your point of view you just didn't want to do it

Gurshanti: mm I jus- didn- (.) didn't want to

(Gurshanti (f) Sikh interview 2.7.97)

or again,

RH: mm bff bu[?] you also said that you did have a little bit of time going to classes to learn Panjabi

Sachdev: yeah I c- I went for a couple of months I think a couple of weeks a couple of months I'm not sure erm=

RH: =you were about seven

Sachdev: yeah seven or eight and I didn't enjoy it much I don't think I learnt much as well I learnt h- erm (.) I think basically I learnt the five letters of the alphabet which wasn't much so I just decided to leave it

RH: can you remember why you didn't like it so much

Sachdev: er (.) I th- I think it was just the way the teacher taught the the erm the class it wasn't really good enough for us lo[?] er to understand because I remember when er me and my sister went with our next-door neighbours and they understood i[?] um er Panjabi pretty well so I think the whole class really did understand it more than we did so it was just difficult for me and my sister to understand it I think that's why we left

RH: and and so what happened to you if you didn't understand it (inaudible)

Sachdev: erm no not really erm I just left it I I decided I didn't w- er wanna to learn i[?] so I just left i[?] I just ca- erm from then I just carry on speaking with my grandma

RH: yeah right and I mean you said earlier on that well you should know it bu[?] 'I think it's too late' what makes you think it's too late



Sachdev: er:m well I'm not sure it's just that I'm no[?] I don't think I can be bothered

RH: yeah huh (chuckles)

Sachdev: I know I should be bothered it's my language bu[?] English just seems a bit easier for me to understand and speak from but I I think I I would like to learn it more if I had the chance

RH: so I mean bu[?] um there are classes in it aren't there

Sachdev: yeah it's um the time and w- er I I'm normally busy and it just doesn't fi[?] in

RH: right and also in this school they don't have classes for Panjabi

Sachdev: um I'm not sure I didn't really ask anyone

(Sachdev (m) Sikh interview 3.7.97)

To re-iterate then, the question that arose was why the young people should, in relation to languages like Panjabi and Gujarati, claim ownership, go on to bemoan their inexpertise, but spurn opportunities for improvement of their capabilities. One explanation may lie in a phenomenon which is well known within Sociolinguistics and the Sociology of Language. This is what is known as language shift, which Fishman characterises in this way,

The basic datum of the study of language maintenance and language shift is that two linguistically distinguishable populations are in contact and that there are demonstrable consequences of this contact with respect to habitual language use (Fishman, 1964: 33).

According to Fishman, these forces mean that with regard to minority populations and minority languages '... intergenerational mother tongue continuity is very frequently not only endangered but actually not attained' (Fishman, 1989: 225). Fishman argues that these developments are often seen as undesirable, but suggests that they are in fact inevitable,

Language is both part of, indexical of, and symbolic of ethnocultural behaviour. As ethnicities meld, change or absorb and replace one another, it is inevitable that the languages of these ethnicities will be modified as well. Language change, *per se*, in the usual linguistic sense of alteration in lexicon, semantics, syntax and phonology, is, of course, always ongoing, particularly between languages in contact ... (Fishman, 1989: 673).

Looked at in this way the condition of the Blackhill youth, with respect to community language expertise, looks predictable and not requiring undue melancholia on the part of grandparents, parents or sympathetic observers. The young people are, here, clearly subject to larger social structural forces, which defy voluntarism. In other words there is something in their British ethnicity which constrains the utility of the community languages and reduces them gradually to the kind of symbolic status which accommodates the continued use of phrases like 'my language' and 'my culture'.<sup>80</sup> It should be emphasised that the Blackhill youth did not show any particular discomfort about these circumstances. Their attitudes towards taking steps to enhance their community language use reminded me of a British person resolving on New Year's Eve, that in the approaching year he/she really must join a gym, lose weight, learn a foreign language, give up smoking etc. In other words it is a general aspiration to take action but not just yet and certainly not if it involves specific effort. Often the young people said that the reason why they did not attend community language classes was that they couldn't fit them into their busy timetables citing homework and exams as the impediment. When I asked whether or not Blackhill school had offered the option of studying languages like Panjabi as a school subject, they appeared initially confused before admitting that they had been given this option in earlier years but had declined to take this up as we have learnt from Sachdev above.

It could be argued that the protestations by the Blackhill youth that they were seriously deficient in community languages might have been simply a reflection of the substantial amount of perceived expertise possessed by many others in their families and communities. However, the volume and persistence of their claims that they felt inadequate in their community language performance convinced me that this perspective had to be taken seriously. To do, otherwise I concluded, amounted to the practice of 'Romantic Bilingualism' which referred to,

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<sup>80</sup> Edwards (1986) found a similar phenomenon with Caribbean descended youth with respect to the retention of Jamaican Creole language use in the English Midlands in the 1980s. In her research boys were more likely to insert tokens of Jamaican Creole into their English language speech as symbolic markers while girls who did this less, were far more competent speakers of the language at the level of being able to sustain prolonged conversation in it. Sebba (1993), though not so gender specific, found something similar in his research.



the widespread practice, in British schools and other educational contexts, based on little or no analysis or enquiry, of attributing to pupils drawn from visible ethnic minority groups an expertise in and allegiance to any community languages with which they have some acquaintance (Harris, 1997:14).

At the same time, perhaps because they were trying to be helpful to me as an enquiring 'outsider' researcher, there were a considerable number of occasions in which they adopted the role of at least relative experts in supplying elements of linguistic information in didactic or instructional mode,

my mum she tells my li[ʔ]le sister off cos like she says [tu] which means like 'you' but it is meant to be [tuseen] it's like more respectful<sup>81</sup>

(Dhrishaj (m) Sikh interview 25.6.97)

Rishab: [namaste] means um sort of saying that 'hello how are you welcome come in

RH: yeah yeah

Rishab: yeah and [sat sri akal] is just 'hello' ... [namaste] yeah that's Hindi and [sat sri akal] is in Panjabi ... me and my friends we were walking across the pavement saw an old woman she was walking slowly and she looked up and actually smiled in a sort of friendly manner so me and my friend just sat sri akal and namaste and just to you know be friendly back

... mum and dad give it 'yeah we're going to Wembley do you want to come' and I said [nahī ma paRhna] <sup>82</sup> yeah that means 'no I wanna read'

(Rishab (m) Hindu interview 8.7.97)

Whatever conclusion is reached on these matters, it is clear that, as the present chapter argues, the primary significance lies in the collective perception of the Blackhill youth that in a number of different ways they share certain related communities of practice and experience. One of these, as has just been seen, is shaped by orientations to community languages and to attendance at community

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<sup>81</sup> In Panjabi, */tuseen/* the plural form of 'you' is used to show politeness and respect while */tu/*, the singular form of you, is used to indicate intimacy or even disrespect. Dhrishaj went on to draw a careful comparison with the distinction between */du/* the informal form of 'you' in German and */siezen/* the most formal and respectful version of 'you' in that language.

<sup>82</sup> Hindi language.

language classes. Another, which will now be sketched, and which is also distinctively shaped by language practices, emerges in adolescent peer to peer interactions.

## 6.2. A linguistic community of adolescent peers

Frequently in their discourse the Blackhill youth positioned themselves as part of a local community of adolescent friends in and out of school. This peer and friendship group appeared to be dominated by young people with a broadly similar ethnic profile; that is, of South Asian descent.<sup>83</sup> One of the factors binding them together was their identification of their group as a group of English-speaking peers. Just as was the case with their own siblings, the Blackhill youth claimed to almost always speak English with their friends. They were also insistent that the kind of English they spoke with their peers was heavily marked by the use of slang, although they were hard pressed, as was seen in Chapter Five, to be precise about what form this exactly took.

### 6.2.1. Swearing and Cussing

Alongside the use of slang they made remarkably frequent mention of the fact that they shared with their friends a propensity for swearing and cussing. These aspects of speech are what one might expect from any English-speaking adolescent in contemporary Britain (Stenström et al, 2002). In my research data both girls and boys referred to themselves and their peers as active and regular participants in swearing,

When I talk to my friends I do not really care about the sort of language I use because when you are with your friends you are not really bothered and I have noticed that you do tend to swear a lot when you are with your friends. **(Manika (f) written account).**

**Standard English:** "Satpal, can you pass the football!"

**How I'd say it casualy (sic):** "Oi Satz, pass the fucking ball!"

**Standard English:** "Do you know where the football is?" **How I'd say it casualy:** "Where's the fucking ball?"

**Standard English:** "Why is he doing those football skills for?" **How I'd say it casualy:** "What the fuck's he doing those shit skills for?"

**(Japdev (m) written account).**

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<sup>83</sup> Although the focus of the present study can be expressed in such terms, these young people needed to negotiate constantly in intricate and often overlapping ways with other local ethnicities with different inflections, such as London Jamaican, London white working class, Somalian and so on.



The Blackhill youth were also emphatic that in their patterns of casual swearing they were influenced by their consumption of American popular culture especially music and films,

‘Man I’m fucking going ... They’ve got the same shit over there that they’ve got here ... They wouldn’t know what the fuck a quarter pounder is ... Any of you fucking pricks move and I’ll execute every motherfucking last one of you’  
**(extracts from the film Pulp Fiction, (Gurleetaa (f)) self-made audio tape).**

Sachdev: ... there’s a main rapper Tupac<sup>84</sup>

RH: yeah

Sachdev: ... I pick up things he says like ‘f’ words swear words and same thing happens with my friend Amar me and him normally when we want each other to shu[?] up we ju– just say ‘shu[?] up bitch’

(Sachdev (m) interview 3.7.97)

The issue of popular cultural influences on the identities and tastes of the Blackhill youth will be explored more fully in Chapter Seven. However, the specific issue of the part played by cussing in the formation of Blackhill youth masculinities, as foreshadowed by Sachdev’s comments will be discussed below in the references to swearing as cussing. Before turning to that topic it is worth mentioning that the Blackhill boys were much more likely than the girls to refer to swearing in community languages as well as in English. On one occasion when it was Amaljeet’s birthday and I was walking with him across the school playground he was approached by a boy who handed him a card in a blue envelope and uttered what appeared to be friendly but disparaging remarks. Amaljeet confirmed to me that the utterances constituted swearing in Panjabi, adding that the boy was his cousin (**research fieldnotes 4.6.97**). Sumandev confirmed and extended the salience of this phenomenon,

Occasionally, I speak in Punjabi at school with my friends who know it. Most of the time it’s swearing in Punjabi. The Punjabi swearing is so common that even people from completely different ethnic groups know how to swear in Punjabi. At school, I have come across swearing words in Swahili, Gujarati, Punjabi, English, Arabic, Somali and even German.  
**(Sumandev (m) written account).**

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<sup>84</sup> Tupac Shakur a Brooklyn born rapper, extremely popular and influential with black British youth to this day despite his early violent death in 1996 at the age of 25.

In London and other British urban schools from at least the 1980s onwards, ‘cussing’ routines, as distinct from routine swearing were a commonplace in the day to day interactions of young males where they sometimes provoked jocular and sometimes serious conflict. Rampton (1995: 171-183) provides an extended discussion of multiethnic and multilingual contexts of this kind where Panjabi language use amongst young people plays a symbolic and mediating role. However, the more frequently occurring instances appear to be related to ‘cussing’ rituals led and dominated by black males of Caribbean descent (Sutcliffe, 1982: 56-57, Hewitt, 1986: 136-138, 179-182, 236-238.). In these cases the key point of reference seems to be highly developed ‘cussing’ and abuse rituals practised by African American, predominantly male youth.<sup>85</sup> As suggested these exchanges can be jocular or explicitly hostile, with the hostile dimension perhaps being provoked because the subject of the cussing, replicated from the African American tradition, frequently involved derogatory commentary about the mothers, sisters or girlfriends of male youths. Amaljeet, in a written representation of a typical interaction between him and his brother in Panjabi, which he offered me instead of a self-made audio tape, portrayed the following,

**Brother:** Kidha Prawa.  
 English: Alright brother  
**Me:** Tikhaye.  
 English: I’m alright.  
**Brother:** Teri tati wale mu wargi kuri kidha.  
 English: Hows your shit faced girlfriend.  
**Me:** Teri kangeri nalu changi ha  
 English: Better than your prostitute

Amaleet’s accompanying commentary added, ‘ ... I put in a bit more action to show my brother I am better than him in cussing’ (**written account**).

The foregoing discussion of swearing and cussing amongst the Blackhill youth shows one aspect of the kinds of practice which help to construct them as members of highly specific local adolescent communities of linguistic, ethnic and cultural peers. As Back has suggested cussing exchanges amongst youth,

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<sup>85</sup> The highly developed forms of these rituals is well attested in the sociolinguistic literature. See, for example, Labov (1972), Smitherman (1977), Morgan (1998). Hewitt (1986), though, is careful to state that he found in his research no evidence of cussing and abuse rituals having such highly developed and sophisticated systems and this accorded with the evidence emerging from my own research evidence from the Blackhill youth.



have greater significance than just play for play's sake. They not only mark the boundaries of tolerance within dyadic friendships but they also mark those who are included in the peer group (Back, 1996: 74-75).

However, as we will now continue to see this amounts to just one dimension in the complex constitution of such communities. For instance, as we saw at the beginning of the present section, the Blackhill youth made it clear that most of their communication with each other was in English of one kind or another, with their usages of other community languages with each other confined to particular circumstances.

### 6.2.2. Community language use with peers

Sometimes the young people alluded to the suggestion that there might be social moments when someone, for instance, from a Panjabi speaking family was with peers from Gujarati-speaking families who might communicate with each other in Gujarati. Generally speaking one of the reasons they gave for nearly always speaking English with their friends was to ensure that, in a potentially highly multilingual environment, no one was frozen out. They often remarked that there were occasions when they saw their community languages as providing a useful exclusionary device. When this was deployed among friends it seemed to have benign characteristics,

RH: ... you said that sometimes you might um Panjabi  
might be used to talk about something behind their back  
Dhrishaj: yeah i[?]’s like if there’s someone who is Hindu  
and they speak Gujarati then we might speak behind their  
back but the thing is they understand like Keshav he he like  
speaks Gujarati say if I want to s- um swear at him yeah  
he’ll understand wha[?] it means because he’s heard it  
before  
RH: yeah yeah  
Dhrishaj: like from his other Panjabi friend  
(Dhrishaj (m) interview 25.6.97)

On the other hand there were hints at more determinedly exclusionary practices reserved for ethnic (white British?) outsiders,

... I think all of us do know how to swear in Panjabi some  
diff- er some words so we either use it to cuss each other

or say there's um a different race around us and we don't want them to hear i[?]

(Sachdev (m) interview 3.7.97)

As well as this kind of highly circumscribed pattern of 'in-group' community language use, many of the Blackhill youth also recognised themselves as affiliative members of a community of 'out-group' language users of the language of black youth, particularly black youth of Caribbean descent.

### **6.2.3. Black Talk: Caribbean, Black London and African American**

The Blackhill youth were conscious of the influence, on their collective speech, of language associated with black people, both those of Caribbean descent and those in the USA. For the purposes of analysis it is useful to sketch out the dimensions of these usages in relation to phonology, lexis, and idiomatic style, as they emerged from the research data, and using Jamaican as the paradigm case of Caribbean language use. The most noticeable orientation to Caribbean language use by the Blackhill youth took the form of conscious declarations of affiliation as was seen in Chapter Four with respect to Amaljeet and Karwan who linked their interest to music and style and the use of a few symbolic phrases such as the Jamaican language greeting 'wha a gwaan'. There was some evidence that other young people in the peer group were significantly influenced in this respect by the example of Amaljeet, even when the connection was more weakly and hesitantly expressed,

yeah I hear him [Amaljeet] say like these days the main greeting is saying I'm not sure how to say it properly bu[?] it goes ... 'wha a gwan' something like that ... and that's how they greet each other

(Sumandev (m) interview 11.6.97)

Much more common, though, amongst the Blackhill youth, was their unconscious use of Jamaican language forms which had to some extent become absorbed into their routine speech, filed in their minds, when they were aware of it at all, under the heading of slang. This practice was observed by Hewitt (1986), and is exemplified in these exchanges with Rishab,

Rishab: ... when I'm with my friends I talk a lot of slang like 'innit' 'cos' 'chip' ... 'you seen' in things like that yeah



'seen' so if someone said says 'oh she's lookin old ennit'  
and I say 'seen', that means 'I understand what you're  
saying'

RH: yeah

Rishab: like slang words like tha[?] tha[?] have come in  
like//

... RH: tha- tha- that's Jamaican<sup>86</sup>

Rishab: is it?

(Rishab (m) interview 8.7.97)

Interestingly, and again unlike Amaljeet and Karwan, Rishab sources his own usage and that of others he knows, not to local contacts of Caribbean descent but to popular cultural influences and mentions specifically the film 'Cool Runnings'.<sup>87</sup> It will be observed that Rishab also mentioned his own usage of the word 'chip' which Hewitt (1986: 129) cited as an example of a Jamaican language usage among young white people in South London, whether or not they were conscious of its origins. As I have reiterated many times, the Blackhill youth seemed to have a sense that usages like this were slang in general rather than specifically Jamaican,

Suhir: ... the way the kids er speak in the playground is  
slang I've just always thought that

RH: yes

Suhir: because it's it's just different and like you use  
different things like er there's chip and everything

RH: yes

Suhir: talking about leaving ...

(Suhir (f) interview 15.7.97)

This question of unconscious usage of Caribbean speech tokens sometimes appeared too, unmarked, in passages of speech rather than in a referential way,

I don't like it a[?] all I just wish they'd stop it it's just stupid  
because there's no reason innocent people get killed and

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<sup>86</sup> The expression 'seen' as an affirmation of mutual understanding or being on the same wavelength as an interlocutor emerged from Jamaican Rastafarian speech in the 1970s to become a linguistic symbol of solidarity among many Caribbean-descended youth globally. For this and an extended discussion on the nature and influence of Rastafarian language in general, see Pollard (2000).

<sup>87</sup> A popular Hollywood film released in 1993 centred on the story of a Jamaican bobsled team competing in the 1988 US Olympics.

buildings get [mashed up] people lose their lives  
 businesses everything  
 (Sachdev (m) interview 3.7.97)

Again in Hewitt's work (ibid.) the term 'mash up' was identified, but as an example of the leakage of Caribbean usages into white youth speech. In my research data the most prominent examples of unselfconscious usage occurred in the pronunciation of the voiced th (ð) as /d/ which, as has been well noted by many sociolinguists (Roberts 1988 for example), is characteristic of Caribbean speech. As Roberts observes (ibid.: 54), the reason why this is especially noticeable is because they are continually highlighted in some of the most high frequency words in English so that words such as /*the*/, /*this*/, /*them*/, /*then*/ and so on, are rendered as /*de*/, /*dis*/, /*dem*/, /*den*/. This example is brief but typical,

[dat] was up to [dem] [den] really  
 (Narjot (m) interview 20.6.97).

One other area of influence of the language of black youth on the speech of the Blackhill youth, which I would like to illustrate with two examples, is in what could be called emergent black-led English usages in London. The first instance is the use of the phrase 'what are you saying?' as an opening greeting in a face to face meeting or in a phone conversation, instead of an expression like 'hello'.

Sumandev: ... there's, 'what are you saying?'  
 RH: 'what are you saying?'  
 Sumandev: oh er yeah it goes, 'wha[?] are you saying?',  
 bu[?] u- it's short for what are you saying  
 RH: yeah  
 Sumandev: and that's supposed to be another way of  
 greeting

(Sumandev (m) interview 11.6.97)

I first noticed this in the 1990s in black youth speech in London but have not been able to find it attested elsewhere in the sociolinguistic literature. The other example is much more pervasive in the speech of the Blackhill youth. This is the chronic use of the tag /*yeah*/. According to Stenström et al (2002: 172) this tag is common in London teenage speech but 'has not previously been described in the literature'. In their findings it was more frequent in working class than in middle class speech and was used equally by boys and girls. They depict it as serving the interactional function of checking 'the mutualness of the concepts referred to'



(ibid: 173), and they add that, spoken with a rising intonation, it invites ‘the hearer’s evaluation of some aspect of the utterance’ (ibid: 173),

... my grandfather sometimes gets let- gets letters from his relatives or brother or something yeah↑ he usually has to ask my dad to read it when sometimes yeah↑ because he can’t see properly inni[?] yeah↑ but they’re usually in Panjabi though yeah↑<sup>88</sup>

(Neetaa (f) interview 9.7.97)

my brother sister dad and mum they don’t exactly really religious yeah↑ bu[?] we do yeah↑ keep our long hair

(Narjot (m) interview 20.6.97)

I agree with Stenström et al (2002) above in stating that I have not found this speech characteristic described in the sociolinguistic literature, however I first noticed it in the speech of black London youth of Caribbean descent in the early 1980s and am prepared to speculate that these youth were the originators of this speech form. Like Hewitt (1986), referring to the use of Caribbean speech forms by white London youth, I do not want to exaggerate the extent of these usages in the speech of the Blackhill youth. Rather, I want to register that they are deeply embedded as emergent cultural elements in their routine everyday language use both as young people of mainly South Asian descent, and as unexceptional London teenagers of their social class positioning (see Appendix B). It seems that on the whole the Blackhill boys were more likely than the girls to claim a greater usage of Jamaican influenced speech beyond the expression of individual words, and a greater affiliation to them. This type of affiliation formed, for the most part, a vicarious attachment to forms of masculinity, associated with working class black young men of Caribbean and African American heritage, which are much admired on the London street and which constituted for boys in London as early as age 11 a ‘hegemonic’ masculinity (Frosh et al 2002). In this conceptualisation, South Asian masculinities were decidedly not sources of admiration or objects of desire. As DJ Ritu, a female DJ of South Asian descent put it,

we could see that it was cool for Asians, Cypriots and white kids to be down with the black, be down with Afro-Caribbean culture in terms of music, language, dress, style, everything, and one of the things I said ...

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<sup>88</sup> ↑ indicates that the preceding word is spoken with a rising intonation.

was 'wouldn't it be nice to see a day where it'd be cool to be down with the Asian?' (Huq, 1996: 76)

It is probably most satisfactory to interpret the Caribbean/Jamaican language orientations of the Blackhill youth, especially the boys, within this frame. Their speech habits in this respect are for the most part playful. As such they may well be speech allegiances representing merely a transient phase of adolescence, and therefore unlikely to last into adulthood. Nevertheless, for the time being they appear to be an important marker of identity which a significant number of Blackhill males seemed eager to assume. However, it is important to note that none of them claimed to me that they had current close friends who were of Caribbean descent, although they were influenced by the speech and other style behaviours of such youth in the locality.<sup>89</sup> At the head of this section of the present chapter I mentioned African American language as an influence on the language of the Blackhill youth. However, unlike the Caribbean language influence which was at least partly influenced by direct interpersonal contact on an everyday basis, whenever the young people referred to their attraction to African American language, this was always an attraction mediated and developed through popular cultural sources. The nature of these influences will be merely noted here and commented on a little more fully in Chapter Seven.

Most of the Blackhill youth described their linguistic interactions with their friends and peers in ways which could be described as a kind of fragmentary multilingualism. A bedrock of English language use founded on a London English, underpins the interplay of interjections from South Asian languages like Panjabi, Gujarati, Hindi or Urdu, sprinkled with dashes of London Jamaican and African American vernacular.<sup>90</sup> It should also not be forgotten that the Blackhill youth also shared the everyday school experience of listening to, speaking, reading and writing German, which they were all studying as a school subject to GCSE level. A significant number said that they used it outside the classroom, usually for a combination of playful and social exclusionary purposes.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> One exception was Karwan who, as indicated in Chapter Four, said he had acquired significant proficiency in speaking Jamaican Creole from close involvement with a Creole speaking Jamaican family in South London during his childhood. Another was Shanice who described her regular encounters with her grandfather's Jamaican Creole speech.

<sup>90</sup> Reminiscent again of Hewitt's 1992 formulations 'local multi-ethnic vernacular' or 'community English'.

<sup>91</sup> The out of class use of German was also noted by Rampton (1999, 2002) in research also conducted at Blackhill School.



Yet amongst this potentially dazzling array, it is important not to lose sight of the fundamentally British and specifically London community identities which are dominant. It is, therefore, worth considering whether a similar trajectory can be traced with respect to another of the communities which help to frame the ethnicities and cultures of each of the Blackhill youth; the everyday transactions and discourses of the religious communities to which they claim nominal allegiance.

### 6.3. A community of religion

For each of the Blackhill youth another significant marker of community belonging was their religious affiliation. As was evidenced in Chapter Three, thirteen of the young people claimed a Sikh affiliation, eleven a Hindu one, four Muslim and three Christian. In this section of the present chapter there will be a glimpse of some of the ways in which religion was, for them, another community, cultural and ethnic identifier which again prompted the articulation of the proprietary pronoun ‘my’. The Blackhill youth often referred to ‘my culture’ or ‘my religion’ just as, as has already been established, they referred to ‘my language’. Just as with community language, this claim of ownership by the Blackhill youth in relation to their nominal religion, was accompanied by numerous statements about their limitations in knowledge and understanding of its procedures and practices, ‘... I don’t think ea[?]ing meat’s against my religion I dunno ..’ (**Bahiyaa, interview**). This went together with extremely modest levels of participation in its regular, locally available, rituals in the gurdwaras, temples and mosques.

One of the reasons why the Blackhill youth appeared to have limited knowledge and understanding with respect to their family religions, was related to the fact that some of the key religious texts were written in languages like Panjabi or Hindi which they could not read.<sup>92</sup> As Shariqah, a Muslim, put it,

the prayers I do know how to read but no[?] (.) no[?]  
properly I usually need my mum reading out aloud so then I  
can just follow what she is saying<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Occasional mention was made of some texts being available in English translation.

<sup>93</sup> (.) indicates a significant pause.

(Shariqah (f) Muslim interview 4.7.97)

Shariqah's comments were echoed by Amaljeet, speaking of his encounters with Sikh religious observances,

you get tapes yeah† translate the book cos you can't read it  
... it's more or less like that's really standard sort of Panjabi  
it's hard to take in but um it's just hard to read the Book  
it's really hard to read it.

(Amaljeet (m) Sikh interview 22.5.97).

There was also the suggestion that the sung and spoken utterances of their religious leaders in the places of worship were delivered in versions of the languages which were perhaps heightened, poetic and somewhat antiquated; in other words the antithesis of everyday contemporary speech in these languages. A possible point of comparison might be between the ordinary spoken vernacular Englishes used in Britain today and the language of the Old and New Testaments in the King James version of the Christian Bible or the language of the Psalms. Consequently the Blackhill youth often said that they could not understand the proceedings in the places of worship and therefore felt detached from them,

when you're praying yeah† I can understand parts of i[?]  
bu[?] erm the way they speak is they speak like in Hindi  
which originated from many many years back like hundreds  
of years back cos that that's been wri[?]en a hundred years  
ago ...

(Rishab (m) Hindu interview 8.7.97)

... with Panjabi they use in the Gurdwara I think it's slightly  
more complicated cos I don't really understand it you know  
sit there and and then they tell you stories and then they  
sing and then you go into the langar which is um a place  
where you eat

(Jasjoti (f) Sikh interview 6.6.97)

These observations with respect to the experiences of the Blackhill youth have been endorsed from outside their ranks by Jeevan Singh Deol, a Cambridge University Research Fellow who has stated,



Most people in Britain conduct their religious life and moral thinking entirely in English. I suspect that they would find the real issue here somewhat unfamiliar: it can be tough for those born in Britain to engage with their beliefs in a language they don't fully understand. Those of us in the Sikh community who have been born in Western countries can sympathise more readily. The language of worship, teaching and discussion in our Gurdwaras the world over is usually Punjabi. Many of us have a rather basic command of the language which doesn't extend very far beyond the world of home and family. It's difficult for many of us to really understand and discuss complex issues and ideas in any depth in Punjabi, especially matters of religion and morality. The same often holds for British-born Hindus and Muslims, whose command of their parents' languages may be equally shaky (Deol, 2003).

Another factor contributing to the relative religious detachment of most of the Blackhill youth, was their perception that it was possible to feel attachment to a religion while being relaxed about following its practices rigorously. This was an outlook which they sometimes attributed to the attitude of one or both of their parents. In most cases the parent concerned was the father,

my grandmother says how I shouldn't ea[?] mea[?] and all tha[?] but I do anyway cos ... my dad thinks it's dippy my dad makes me ea[?] i[?]

(Bahiyaa (f) Hindu interview 8.7.97)

it was an early age that ... I had my hair cut and my dad used to cut my hair an er now he's saying 'if you want to grow a turban grow it I don't mind you do what you want to do' ... my dad he used to have a turban but he cut ... his hair

(Patwant (m) Sikh interview 9.7.97)

Conversely, usually when a parent was depicted as being a strong adherent to the following of religious observances, it was represented as being more likely to be the mother or often older female family members in general. For instance, Vishnu, a Hindu, says, 'my mum prays every day' (interview); and Dhrishaj, a Sikh, observes, 'most of the time now my mum goes [to the temple] in the morning about five o'clock I'm asleep then' (interview); and Julie, a Catholic, comments, 'my aunty asks me like oh about something in the Bible and I don't get it she says you should read it she gets angry with me' (interview).

Even where the Blackhill youth professed a comparatively strong attachment to their family religion they still seemed to regard themselves as seriously deficient in their knowledge and understanding of it. As Gurshanti confesses,

... with a lo[?] of my friends I I don't think any of them know about their religion and I know like the things that have happened in the past and stuff I've bough[?] books abou[?] i[?] but seriously if I had to come down to i[?] I don't know nothin[k] about my religion

(Gurshanti (f) Sikh interview 2.7.97)

A number of the youth said that their families had small prayer rooms or shrines at home, but the most convincingly described types of religious participation which they reported were their own slightly naive personal prayers for good fortune at challenging moments or for the fulfilment of pressing wishes and dreams. However, perhaps the most heartfelt expressions made in relation to religious identities and self-positionings came from a number of individuals who described themselves as universalist rather than sectarian on religious questions. For example, Punamdeep, a Sikh, explains,

my dad always taugh[?] us you know everyone's equal there's no difference and um he goes 'treat others how you wanna be treated in return' and that's how you know I am.

(Punamdeep (f) Sikh interview 26.6.97)

Although there were known to be open religious conflicts in the area, none of the Blackhill youth expressed partisan positions on these matters.<sup>94</sup> On the contrary, some girls expressed disapproval of the provocative coat-trailing activities of their own young male relatives in courting confrontation with young men from other faiths by trying to disrupt their key community religious celebrations. One Blackhill boy, Sachdev, says that he went to elaborate lengths to avoid religiously inspired conflict by wearing one of his favourite t-shirts, which bore Sikh religious symbols, under his shirt to avoid causing offence to, or attracting aggression from, other groups. Referring to gang fights between local Muslims and Sikhs, he says 'I don't like it ... so I wouldn't try and do any[f]ing which would cause any trouble between Sikhs and Muslims' (**interview**). In addition to the foregoing descriptions of the relative detachment of the Blackhill youth from idealised versions of community religious practices, a significant number of them

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<sup>94</sup> It should also be remembered that a number of the Blackhill youth stated that their parents belonged to different faiths.



made passing mention of open and outright transgressive acts by older male relatives.

### 6.3.1. Acts of transgression

Much is made, in essentialised British discourses about South Asian people, of their supposed fervent observance of religious principles across a variety of faiths other than Christianity. This sentiment has flared with particular emphasis on Muslims ever since the fatwah against Salman Rushdie over his book *The Satanic Verses* in the late 1980s (Khan 2000, Runnymede Trust 1997). However, many of the Blackhill boys identified their fathers or grandfathers as significant transgressors of some key religious community mores, and admired them for it. Examples of this were seen in the representations by Amaljeet, a Sikh, and Karwan, a Muslim, in Chapter Four. These transgressions included the flouting of dietary rituals, heavy drinking and profuse swearing.

The idea of strict and unbending religious community rules affecting young people of South Asian descent encompasses the notion that there is a severe taboo on out-group marriages. Certainly, it is a favourite trope of media stories in Britain as well as of broadcast drama, and political discourses. The phrase which acts in these contexts as a triggering signifier is ‘arranged marriages’ or ‘forced marriages’ as they are sometimes indiscriminately referred to, and are often said to trigger so-called ‘honour killings’ (Dalrymple 1998). It might therefore be reasonably assumed that anyone marrying outside their religious group is committing a serious act of transgression with harsh consequences. Such marriages would be described in familiar British parlance as ‘mixed marriages’, a type of social arrangement which has been heavily stigmatised and portentously characterised in the post-1945 era as being inevitably doomed.<sup>95</sup> Yet a number of the Blackhill youth mentioned in passing that their parents came from different religious communities. Rishab, for example, explains that his mother is from a Hindu family while his father is from a Sikh one,

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<sup>95</sup> The two most regular examples of ‘mixed marriages’ in British social discourses have been with reference to marital unions between black and white people, especially black men and white women, and between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Most of the ‘mixed marriages’ between black and white have taken place routinely between ordinary people, but for a high society high profile example see Dutfield (1990), on the public and political scandal caused by the marriage of Seretse Khama a black political leader from Botswana and Ruth, an upper middle class white British woman.

my grandma and grandad they're strong believers of the Sikh religion they follow Sikh but my mum's dad and mum they're strong believers of the Hindu ... they [his parents] go to each other's things they respect each other and both they also like both each others.

(Rishab (m) Hindu interview 8.7.97)

Consequently, despite his claimed Hindu affiliation Rishab cheerfully points out that he has attended both Hindu temples and Sikh gurdwaras with his parents.

Additionally, one or two of the youth recounted vignettes of individual family members like aunts or uncles who had transgressed religious and ethnic community conventions in their choice of marriage partner, but had suffered no onerous penalty. Premila, who claims a Hindu affiliation, points out, 'my cousin brother he got married to a Muslim and then they did nothing to him' (**interview**). It must be emphasised that such comments by the young people were made in a matter of fact, low key way. This apparent complexifying of their ethnicity and culture caused them no particular concern.

As mentioned earlier in the thesis British politicians and social commentators have been fond of holding up what they call 'Asian families' for approbation on the grounds that they are models of family cohesion (see footnote 27, page 84 for an example). This, of course, when they were not contradictorily being said to be stereotypes of dire family friction concerning arranged and 'forced' marriages. This favoured discursive representation of families of South Asian descent is disrupted by a number of the Blackhill youth who mentioned in passing that their parents were divorced or separated.<sup>96</sup>

Again the comments on this subject were unprompted and matter of fact. This was decidedly not crisis talk, nor offered by the youth as representations of remarkable phenomena. However, it would be a mistake to give the impression that on matters related to the notion of communities of religion what is being discussed is an arena entirely free of constraints and pressures.

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<sup>96</sup> Seven out of the thirty Blackhill youth mentioned in conversation that their parents were separated or divorced. There may have been more but all these revelations emerged unprompted and I chose not to explore them further nor to enquire on this issue with those who did not spontaneously mention it.



### 6.3.2. Not all *laissez-faire*

There were a number of ways in which the Blackhill youth said that they sensed and experienced community pressures to conform with religious and ethnic ideals. Girls, in particular, often had a strong awareness that there were expected religious and ethnic norms which might enter their futures; for instance in terms of what a suitable wife should be like in the eyes of prospective in-laws, as was seen in Chapter Four in the case of Gurleetaa. None of the girls intimated that such pressures were of the potentially dangerous order of the forced marriage scare stories just commented on. Nevertheless, the existence of these community-derived constraints were an inescapable part of the ethnic universes of the Blackhill youth as a whole, and the girls in particular. According to some of the Blackhill girls, another requirement for a suitable wife in the view of some influential community elders was a very good proficiency in the relevant community language. This was also something that Gurleetaa illustrated in Chapter Four (see page 131).

An additional community pressure with quasi-religious overtones was the continuing background existence and influence of conceptions of caste. A few of the Blackhill youth mentioned this, usually naming the caste to which they thought they belonged. Examples of this were seen in comments made by Amaljeet and Diya in Chapter Four. On the whole though, none of the youth displayed anything more than an extremely vague notion of what caste meant and what its consequences might be, beyond the certainty that some castes were higher than others. As Manika put it, when discussing the topic, 'there's loads of them but I don't even know half of them' (*interview*). However, the important point for the present discussion is that, in any imagining of 'new ethnicities', the residual and traditional elements form an important integral strand. No matter how peripheral these elements might be in the lives of young people like the Blackhill youth, they are still salient constituent parts of their putative cultures of hybridity, however conventionally British they might otherwise be.

Still, in the final analysis, with the Blackhill youth, whatever community forces might attempt to pull them in other more austere and purportedly authentic directions with respect to religion, what was most apparent was their typically contemporary British responses in this domain. By this I mean that while claiming a nominal affiliation to a religion, they rarely attended the relevant places of

worship, but did participate in religious rituals connected with births, initiations, marriages and deaths. Their most enthusiastic participation was in the big community festivals like Divali, Vaisakhi and Eid,<sup>97</sup> which involved the whole family and community in enjoyable celebrations often accompanied by the exchange of gifts.

In these respects it is difficult to see any vital difference between the behaviour of the Blackhill youth and the behaviour of a white British person, who claims allegiance to the Church of England, rarely attends church except for christenings, weddings and funerals, but who enthusiastically celebrates the Christian festivals like Christmas and Easter which involve public and private family and community celebration and gift giving.<sup>98</sup>

Once again it is possible to discern clearly among the plethora of influences, the strongly British inflections to the ethnicities of the Blackhill youth. Yet this is not the only dimension in their lives where the obligations, practices and experiences linked with a strong residual sense of traditional community are negotiated in articulation with a strongly dominant foundation of Britishness. The wider transactions surrounding the reconciling of diasporic and British ethnicities and cultures constitute another such dimension.

#### **6.4. Diasporas and Britishness**

A potential disruption to the just cited Britishness of the Blackhill youth is their continuing membership of, and involvement with, global diasporic communities through their families. At first sight these connections would seem likely to emphasise the 'otherness' of the Blackhill youth when set next to what might be considered to be quintessentially British. It could be argued that diaspora is a useful conceptual mechanism, in the present chapter, for understanding how the residual and emergent in culture are inextricably linked in the various communities of practice in which the Blackhill youth are involved in their everyday lives. Diaspora might, for the most part, be seen as constituting a pull towards, or at least a reminder of, the residual and traditional. Clifford draws

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<sup>97</sup> Associated with the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim religions respectively.

<sup>98</sup> While the 2001 UK national census (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>) showed that 36 million people (nearly 70%) described themselves as White and Christian, other research (Matheson & Summerfield 2000), has shown that active Church membership in the main Christian churches declined by almost a third between 1970 and 1990 from 9.3 million to 6.6 million.



attention to a formulation that characterises the main features of diaspora in this way,

a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined this relationship (Clifford, 1994: 305).

All but the desire for eventual return might be seen as figuring in the active experiences and cultural and ethnic imaginaries of the Blackhill youth. Writers in the British Cultural Studies tradition have played their part in the recasting of the concept of diaspora for purposes of analysis in relation to Britain's black and brown minorities (for instance, Hall 1990, Gilroy 1993a, Mercer 1994). However, these authors have concentrated on the African diaspora of Africa, the Caribbean, North America and Europe, and tend to mention, only rarely and in passing, the global South Asian diaspora. There has, however, been a steady development in the utilisation of diaspora as a theoretical tool by scholars who are themselves members of the South Asian diaspora (Brah 1996, Sharma et al 1996, Raj 1997, Banerjea 1998, 2000, Qureshi & Moores 1999, Dudrah 2002(a), 2002(b), Puwar & Raghuram (eds.) 2003. Brah in an extended discussion of how a South Asian Britishness might be theorised, states that,

the identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given. It is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life, in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively. All diasporic journeys are composite in another sense too. They are embarked upon, lived and re-lived through multiple modalities: modalities, for example, of gender, 'race', class, religion, language and generation. As such, all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even as they are implicated in the construction of a common 'we'. (Brah, 1996: 183-184).

Cohen (1997), has added to this a positioning of diaspora within wider theorisations of contemporary globalisation. It is with all this mind that an examination of some of the more explicit ways in which diaspora was visible in the lives of the Blackhill youth, will next be undertaken. One dimension concerned the origins of their parents and grandparents. The other, their own journeys to the homelands of these close relatives.

#### **6.4.1. Parental and grandparental origins**

Having stated that a key source linking Blackhill youth with diaspora communities was the birthplaces of their parents and grandparents, it is worth

reiterating that the overwhelming majority of the Blackhill youth's diaspora roots were located in the broadly Indian ethnicities of East Africa and India. Here, two factors stand out. Firstly, their parents rarely had precisely homogeneous ethnic backgrounds. Often, one parent was born in East Africa and the other in India. Frequently one parent arrived in Britain for the first time in childhood while the other arrived in adulthood. These differences suggest potentially substantial variations in ethnic formation between such parents. Nevertheless, virtually all the parents of the Blackhill youth appear to have been born in either East Africa or Asia, as had their grandparents and most of their aunts and uncles. Members of their wider families, with whom they were in active contact, continued to live in these locations as well as in Canada and the USA amongst other places. The second thing to stand out was the extent to which the Blackhill youth struggled to piece together precisely where their parents were born, and how, why and when they came to Britain. This might well be important to the extent that it might serve to distance the youth to some degree from engaging in a fuller attachment to the cultural meanings and practices of their diasporas. I was surprised by the apparent gaps in their knowledge of their closest family histories, since, in many other respects their parents took steps to try to ensure that cultural continuities were understood and secured in their children's generation. In some cases the ethnic differentiation between parents meant that the Blackhill youth's diasporic global communities were even more widely spread. Narjot, for instance, says, 'my dad was born in India and my mum was born in England' (**interview**). He adds the further information that his father did not come to England until at least the age of 24. Punamdeep describes how her father spent his childhood and adolescence on an enfolding migratory journey from Kenya to India to the UK to Canada before arriving in the UK to settle in Coventry, whereas her mother having been born in Uganda moved to Leeds, Yorkshire as a child. She states that after her parents met and married in the UK they moved to Canada, where she was born, before finally returning to the UK when she was about one year old. She makes it clear that her global diasporic family, in the form of aunts, uncles and cousins, remains distributed between these locations.

These family members also brought to the young people's families, on visits to Britain, a range of other languages besides English, for instance Swahili, which



the Blackhill youth involved said that they could not understand.<sup>99</sup> The diaspora communities were not always located outside Britain. A number of the Blackhill youth mentioned relatives who they considered as subtly different in their ethnicity because they were living out their lives in other parts of Britain. A prime marker of this difference, which was often cited, was perceived differences in patterns of language use. Dhrishaj, for example, speaking of his aunt, uncle and cousins who had moved first to North Shields and then South Shields in the Newcastle region, commented,

Dhrishaj: they used to live in Southall and I used to see them about every day now I see them what about once a year probably and so when I see them they look a bit different the oldest one's like she was about 11 when they went to Newcastle and now she is about 19 and the boy he was just born and now he's old and he speaks proper like Geordie and the others speak Geordie as well and when I went there they've got a shop there I was standing in the shop listening to the people and it sounds funny they'll come down here we'll laugh at them and when I go up there they laugh at me

RH: so what do they say about your language

Dhrishaj: they say I am posh and everything

RH: posh!

Dhrishaj: it's like they think I speak weird and they don't really say much though because I just start taking the mickey out of them

RH: so but they actually say you're posh do they they don't say you're London they say you're posh

Dhrishaj: em they say I'm speaking cockney and I say 'how am I speaking cockney?' and so it's just like I'd not fit in there the way I speak and they wouldn't fit in here

RH: um for them what happened to their Panjabi?

Dhrishaj: I don't know if they speak Panjabi they speak Panjabi with their parents and they're pretty strict but that comes out with their accent as well It's like I don't know what it is with the accents

RH: do you mean they speak Panjabi with a Newcastle accent?

Dhrishaj: yes if that's possible

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<sup>99</sup> One informant also talked about young cousins from Austria who were German speakers and consequent constraints on communication between them.

The existence of these intra-Britain diasporic communities might be taken as an indication of the need for an even more fine-grained level of investigation in the analysis of ethnicities. However, the principal focus in the present discussion is the diasporic influence generated outside Britain, and for the Blackhill youth this became most visible when they travelled to East Africa but more especially to India to visit relatives there.

#### **6.4.2. Trips to parental and grandparental homelands**

The most vivid way in which the Blackhill youth encountered their global diaspora communities was through visits to the countries where their parents were born or brought up. Typically this entailed visits to countries like Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania in East Africa or visits to specific parts of India such as the Punjab or the Gujarat. The visits tended to be for periods of a month or two at a time. Although in some ways these visits served to bind the Blackhill youth into their said global diaspora communities, they also acted powerfully, particularly the visits to India, as instruments for accentuating not the Indianness of their ethnicities but their Britishness. This occurred for a number of reasons. In the first place most of the youth said that they found that their linguistic skills in Panjabi, Gujarati and other languages were inadequate for the maintenance of extended conversation with their relatives, even the younger ones. Sometimes the youth attributed these difficulties to their diaspora relatives speaking more ‘proper’ or ‘standard’ versions of the languages or speaking very quickly or using unfamiliar lexical items. In short, they were speaking versions of the languages which were sharply different from those spoken in Britain.

The second, and most telling, type of experience which the Blackhill youth had during these visits was their encounters, which they found extremely distasteful, with the somewhat ‘third world’ material living conditions. These involved illnesses picked up from the water, rudimentary toilet facilities and flying, biting insects. Their alienated endurance of these hardships appeared to be decisive in confirming for them that Britain unambiguously counted as home. This was seen previously in the vivid description from Amod in Chapter Four of a trip to India. His view of India was endorsed by Bahiyaa in the following extended exchange,

RH: yeah have you have you ever been to India

Bahiyaa: yeah

RH: how many times



Bahiyaa: three four times  
 RH: when was the last time you went  
 Bahiyaa: about two (.) three years ago I think  
 RH: what do you think of it  
 Bahiyaa: don't like i[ʔ]  
 RH: why not  
 Bahiyaa: it's really differen[ʔ] and er I didn't just didn't fi[ʔ]  
 in I don't think anyone could at my age if they're really  
 young then I suppose they don't really know much  
 RH: mm  
 Bahiyaa: well I'd never be able to go there again  
 RH: so wh- what are the things that made you not fit in  
 Bahiyaa: it's just they're all different their way of living and  
 they really know what I did there and all this - jus- I just  
 didn't fi[ʔ] in and it was horrible I didn't like it some places  
 were alright but some places I didn't like um (.) like we  
 went t- sick to the  
 RH: huh huh (chuckles)  
 Bahiyaa: water there so we really fel[ʔ] ill  
 RH: oh  
 Bahiyaa: it was a horrible// holiday so I wouldn't go back<sup>100</sup>  
 RH: //so which part did your// (family)  
 Bahiyaa: //um we went to the p- to the Punjab we went to  
 Bombay and tha?  
 RH: and there's family there  
 Bahiyaa: (.) yeah m- my mum's family some of them and  
 where my dad used to live when he was young the village  
 we've got um farms there  
 RH: yeah  
 Bahiyaa: lots and lots of farms so we'd stayed there for a  
 li[ʔ]le while  
 RH: mm and and um  
 Bahiyaa: tha[ʔ]'s it  
 RH: the bits that you didn't like you said that apart from  
 being ill  
 Bahiyaa: yeah  
 RH: what other bits of the way of life  
 Bahiyaa: the weather it's too hot for me  
 RH: yeah  
 Bahiyaa: all those mosqui[ʔ]oes  
 RH: oh yeah  
 Bahiyaa: (tuts) terrible and it's too (.) I dunno it's too noisy  
 especially where we stayed like we wen[ʔ] ou[ʔ] on the

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<sup>100</sup> // indicates overlapping speech.

stree[ʔ] too noisy and I dunno it's like they had no medical  
brig- I thought I was going to die

RH: huh huh (chuckles)

Bahiyaa: they've got no proper doctors or nothing and it's  
not really a secure country I don't think

RH:(inaudible)

Bahiyaa: I dunno oh I think the police or anything is  
dependent enough people die there (..) and I dunno I don't  
think they're really capable still developing<sup>101</sup>

RH: mm mm mm and and the the things about the illness  
what do you know what it was called that you had

Bahiyaa: no I think it was to do with the water so they we  
used to buy in the water all but they used to buy all these  
bo[ʔ]les of mineral water i- it was exactly the same as the  
tap wa[ʔ]er so I dunno it pu[ʔ] me to the wa[ʔ]er it affected  
what do I dunno all my sisters fell ill so two of my sisters  
and myself and it was just horrible

(Bahiyaa (f) Hindu interview 8.7.97)

This lengthy representative example might be viewed as superfluous were it not for conventional dominant British discourses about people of South Asian descent positioning them as prime symbols of 'otherness'. My argument is that responses like Bahiyaa's are reminiscent of nothing so much as caricatures of the stereotypical ordinary British tourist abroad of recent decades, and provide an aptly pertinent summary of how the proprietary pronoun 'my' which the Blackhill youth deploy to claim 'my culture', 'my language' or 'my religion' is at virtually all times saturated with fundamental kinds of Britishness; but a kind of Britishness which relates to and certainly does not disavow affective diaspora connections and identities redolent of traditional cultures and practices.

### **Conclusion**

The present chapter opened by drawing attention to the way in which the Blackhill youth appeared to contradictorily talk of 'my culture', 'my language' or 'my religion', while apparently in the same breath distancing themselves somewhat from these constructs. It is perhaps worth pondering why the youth do not also at other times explicitly refer symbolically to 'my Britishness'. It may be that what is being observed here is a Britishness which is being lived in a relatively new kind of social formation which has not fully matured into a

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<sup>101</sup> (..) indicates a lengthy pause.



structure which can be lucidly named. Here it is worth repeating Raymond Williams' comments which have already been noted in the introduction to part two of the thesis,

Again and again what we have to observe is in effect a pre-emergence, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named (Williams 1977: 126).

Perhaps what has been traced in the current chapter is the outline of a series of emergent communities of practice in which the Blackhill youth are active participants. Earlier, Wenger's notion of communities of practice was introduced as a conceptual device which might assist in capturing something of what I have been trying to accomplish here. As Wenger says, in relation to communities of practice,

Being alive as human means that we are constantly engaged in the pursuit of enterprises of all kinds, from ensuring our physical survival to seeking the most lofty pleasures. As we define these enterprises and engage in their pursuit together, we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words we learn.

Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of communities *communities of practice* (Wenger 1998: 45).

For the Blackhill youth, these shared enterprises have been shown to constitute communities of practice involving at least orientations to community language use, language use with peers, communities of practice related to religion and diasporic communities of practice. It is in the operations of these and other communities of practices that the 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' can be glimpsed. The Blackhill youth ethnicities develop through their fluid, continuous and nuanced participation in the practices of a series of highly specific and interwoven social, cultural and ethnic communities both local and globally diasporic.

One can see throughout the chapter evidence of how diaspora influences might be seen to act as a link to practices related, for instance, to religion and language, which seek to consolidate communities, cultures and ethnicities around notions of

traditional continuities. At the same time emergent practices can be seen to constitute another organising principle for other identifiable communities of practice with which the Blackhill youth associate themselves. These two cultural forces, the traditional and the emergent, are constantly co-present in their lives, with one or the other perhaps dominant at any given moment. I am suggesting this perspective as more productive than the binary either/or which seeks to configure the old versus the new. On the whole, though, in this intricate mosaic, what is dominant and what is emergent is at most times heavily marked by cultural behaviour typical of contemporary British customs, practices and sensibilities among young people in general. Once again, however, it must be emphasised that these developments are the product not of spectacular incidents, moments or behaviour, but of countless exchanges, experiences and observations accumulated in the routine ordinary intercourse of everyday life. In this, as throughout the thesis, issues of language have been shown to play a significant role. The next chapter makes some relatively brief comments on territory which is more familiar in the study of youth cultures, and often *does* potentially reveal the spectacular. I refer, here, to the orientations of the Blackhill youth towards popular culture.



## Chapter Seven: Popular Culture, ethnicities and tastes

### 7.0. Introduction

The Blackhill youth made frequent references to popular culture. This in itself is unexceptional for any group of adolescents. What is of particular interest is that these young people introduced comments and observations on popular culture into their written accounts, interviews and self-made audio tapes whose purpose was the outlining of the patterns of language use in their lives. In other words, it was clear that they regarded popular culture as a major source of influence on the formation not only of their patterns of language use but also of their overall ethnicities and cultures. However, during the research process I became aware of a certain feeling of disappointment at the nature of their popular cultural references. I came to realise that the sources of my initial irritation were certain deep-seated essentialist expectations that I harboured. I had anticipated that when discussing music there would be ample and rich references to Bhangra music and Hindi film music to which I expected the youth to claim strong affiliation. Perhaps my opening sensibilities constituted an instance of positioning the tastes of the Blackhill youth as a kind of 'exotica', an approach so trenchantly critiqued by Hutnyk (2000). In the same way, when the youth discussed films the expectation was that they would have much to say about Hindi language films to which they would be strongly attached. In the event the Blackhill youth expressed relative detachment when mentioning what might be characterised as 'Asian' music like Bhangra and Hindi film music, or 'Asian' film in the form of Hindi (or Bollywood) films.<sup>102</sup> Instead their most enthusiastically evaluative comments were reserved for a wide variety of Anglo-American popular music and for *Hollywood* films. This is in no way to argue that there were not individuals who did express a relatively stronger attachment to South Asian popular cultural aesthetics, nor to deny that there were gendered variations in these attachments. What this chapter will demonstrate, as did Chapter Six, is that a fixation with essentialist conceptualisations of ethnicity and culture can obscure clear eyed perception of the representations of research informants. In the present example,

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<sup>102</sup> At the time that the research was being conducted the term 'Bollywood' was not as popular in common parlance as a label for Hindi language films as it was to subsequently become, particularly for outsiders. The Blackhill youth called them Hindi films, presumably because they were in Hindi language.

the representations of the Blackhill youth indicated popular cultural tastes which were fundamentally typical of a large number of other British teenagers. However, the dominance of these emergent British inflected tastes was at all times tempered and interrelated with the constantly present contemporary versions of traditional South Asian cultural expression. This chapter traces briefly these different strands of influence in the domains of music, films, and, in a minor way, television and radio. In doing so a constant eye is kept on the role questions of language are said to be playing.

## **7.1. Music**

### **7.1.1. Inheritances**

Although, as will be seen later in the chapter, a number of the Blackhill boys expressed relative disdain for Hindi films and their generic music, these same boys showed considerable interest in what they called Hindi remixes. These were musical tracks drawn from Hindi films and remixed with sampled styles and/or beats drawn from Anglo-American popular music.<sup>103</sup> My impression was that the boys found the remixes congenial because they represented some kind of symbol of the emergent and modern in culture as opposed to the residual and traditional culture suggested by the music in its original form and from which they wished to partly distance themselves. I say partly, because an engagement with a type of music, in this case Hindi film music, albeit in a modified form, is nonetheless an engagement and not a complete rupture or alienation. In this sense it is typical of how the Blackhill youth ethnicities are formed. As suggested in the Preface to Part II of the thesis with reference to some of Raymond Williams's propositions about the nature of culture, it is a mistake to look for total ruptures and the discarding of the traditional and the customary. At any given moment the residual, dominant and emergent in culture exist in a complex and intricate web of interaction and discourse. It is also important on this point to make it clear that while it is being

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<sup>103</sup> A number of the Blackhill boys mentioned Bally Sagoo as a musical artist whose work exemplified this approach and whom they particularly admired. Sagoo grew up in Birmingham with mainly black friends and an intense engagement with reggae and a variety of black Anglo-American musical styles which he subsequently integrated with Hindi film music and other Indian musics. The evolution of this kind of innovation has now reached a kind of reverse synthesis at the time of writing, with highly popular contemporary Anglo-American music stars like Madonna, Britney Spears and Craig David explicitly commissioning Bhangra and other Indian-influenced remixes of their work. One producer who has produced this kind of remix for all three is Rishi Rich a West Londoner of South Asian descent.



argued that for Blackhill youth Hindi film music is emblematic of the traditional, this is not intended to imply a tradition which is either static or which claims any kind of homogeneous purity. The tradition referred to has two aspects to which I want to draw attention. On the one hand as Booth (2000) points out, the Hindi films themselves have established their own musical traditions over more than 70 years and have also always drawn on longstanding narrative traditions drawn from Indian, mainly Hindu, civilisation,

A huge body of over 40,000 film songs (*filmī gīt*, as they are known in Hindi) has grown along with the thousands of Hindi sound films produced since 1931 (Booth 2000: 125).

On the other hand, as Booth also comments, Hindi music has been renowned for its mixing and matching of any and every music style from east or west that it finds useful for its purposes. Indeed this tendency has received severe criticism, not least from western critics. Booth cites the complaints of two such critics Marre and Charlton about certain Hindi film music directors who ‘plagiarise all sorts of music from classics to pop ... what emerges is the hotchpotch that is Indian film music’ (Marre and Charlton 1985, p. 141 cited in Booth 2000: 126). Banerji confirms the habitual eclecticism of the music of Hindi films, calling the films ‘notorious for their voracious appetite for songs from any and every cultural and stylistic source’ (Banerji 1988: 207). All of this shows, again, the limitations of the old versus new dichotomy in relation to ethnicities. Clearly, when the Blackhill youth express a liking for Bally Sagoo’s remixes of Hindi film music they are indicating an aesthetic preference for one kind of contemporary musical bricolage over another rather than for the new over the old and static.

It has been implied so far that the Blackhill girls were more attached to Hindi film music than the boys. However, this difference should not be exaggerated. The girls were more likely to admit to a certain liking for some Hindi film music whether or not it was remixed with the most fashionable Anglo-American or bhangra beats. Both boys and girls, though, preferred the latter. The boys were more likely to claim a difference in taste between themselves and their sisters and other female relatives. Drishaj, for instance, claims in relation to Hindi film music,

some of it is good yeah but I don[?] understand i[?] I just like the tune or some[f]ing and the way it sounds it's like

my sister likes the old stuff she doesn't like the new songs and every[f]ing because they are too poppy and she likes the older ones because they are like more slower and sadder

(Drishaj (m) Sikh interview 25.6.97)

It will be noticed that language limitations play some part in Dhrishaj's aesthetic choice. Amar concurs, both in relation to his representation of his sister's tastes and with respect to the role that language plays in both of their practices,

... I like the English songs she likes the Hindi songs I'm English and she can listen to Hindi songs and actually understand it but I can only under- well listen to the background music but not the words

(Amar (m) Hindu interview 4.6.97)

Amar also, in a way which is representative of many of the Blackhill youth especially the boys, appreciates the Hindi remixes as symbols of advance and progress in his aesthetic universe,

if you go down Southall nowadays and you go to one and a couple of shops they do actually i- it's called like remixes Hindi remixes and that and that's like done proper and you won't see tha[?] in the film because it's like too advanced (light laugh) and it's done by people here<sup>104</sup>

This perception is also linked with a view that purely generational factors are also salient,

... normally Indian films have a song every five minutes righ[?] and um throughout the film there'll be about ten songs in which two would be good remixes the rest would be just for old people and that so you go and buy a tape from the marke[?] it'll be here you ge[?] a Hindi song for a pound it'll be a pound because you'll only like two songs for the younger ones and that you know the rest will go on to the adults

(Amar (m) Hindu interview 4.6.97)

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<sup>104</sup> When Amar says 'done by people here' I take him to be referring to people in Britain as opposed to people in India.



So far it has been seen that there are Blackhill boys who distance themselves from Hindi film music unless it is in the form of remixes and girls who quite like it in its original form, and that there are both boys and girls who are slightly scornful of its aesthetics. As Punamdeep put it commenting on songs in Hindi movies,

some are pathe[?]ic it's like they do um an Indian version of an English song and it doesn't always go i- it sounds stupid most of the time and why do that

(Punamdeep (f) Sikh interview 26.6.97)

Whatever the particular positioning of any Blackhill individual on these matters perhaps the most apt way of characterising their relationships to the inheritance of Hindi film music is that it is *just there*; an ever present routine backdrop integral to their lives; something that cannot be avoided but is not necessarily wholly rejected nor necessarily warmly and enthusiastically embraced. This kind of interpretation becomes possible when a research approach is adopted which pays close empirical attention to the unspectacular and the everyday. Manika states that she hears Hindi film music 'when my mum listens to the radio' (**interview**). Punamdeep describes how she and her mother squabble over which music should be played on cassette when they go out in the car, with her mum wanting to play Hindi films songs, 'she'll say you are not going to listen to English music we'll put an Indian cassette' (**interview**). Both Sachdev and Jasjoti, for instance, included on the their self-made audio tapes representing language use in their lives, examples of Hindi film songs.

Not researching the spectacular in popular music does not mean that the opportunities to do so were not there. One example was Amaljeet who was portrayed at some length in Chapter Four. I could have learned much more about the importance of Bhangra music in the locality and amongst Amaljeet's peers if I had followed the option in this thesis of investigating the spectacular. Amaljeet would have provided ideal material for these purposes, with his dhol band and its prolific public performances, together with his relatives who were well known and sought after DJ's in the West London area. Yet, for the reasons I gave in the early chapters of the thesis I chose to place prime emphasis on the ordinary and the everyday. In practice Amaljeet's musical tastes were wide, embracing reggae and

other black music styles.<sup>105</sup> Another opportunity to build the thesis around an exploration of spectacular youth culture which I declined to pursue came with Karwan who was also portrayed in Chapter Four. Here was a Jamaican-Creole speaking young man from a Kurdish refugee family from Northern Iraq, who was trying to develop himself into a recognised MC in his locality with his peers, and who had a number of relatives who were prominent local DJ's with their own sound systems.<sup>106</sup>

Although the principal focus above has been on Hindi film music, this music and its derivations was not the only kind of music to which the Blackhill youth referred. They also referred to Bhangra music. However, as indicated at the beginning of the chapter these references were relatively limited. When the Blackhill youth mentioned bhangra, and many did not, it was for the most part without the animated enthusiasm or attention to the specific detail of favourite artists and styles which they employed when referring to their favourite Anglo-American music. To sum up, notwithstanding the fact that bhangra music has received a certain amount of academic attention, (Baumann 1990, Dudrah 2001, 2002(b), Huq 1999, Kalra 2000, Sharma, Hutnyk & Sharma 1996, Maira 1998, Back 1996, Gillespie 1995, Hall 2002, Bennett 1997) some of it related to the very locality in which the Blackhill youth lived, few of the youth themselves spontaneously mentioned Bhangra as being amongst their favourite music. Of course these authors treat bhangra with varying degrees of intensity and from radically different positions ranging from the orthodox and seminal influential (Baumann 1990), to the polemically revisionist (Sharma, Hutnyk & Sharma 1996). However, what these writers tend to share is a view that the development of bhangra in Britain occupies a centrally important position in the construction of new and unifying South Asian youth ethnicities and identities. For them bhangra tends to be seen as symbolic of some sort of transition from the old to the new, from the traditional to the modern or even postmodern. According to Baumann (1990: 81) bhangra is traditional urban and rural 'Punjabi folk dance and music' of the Punjab region of India, which has been transformed by South Asian youth

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<sup>105</sup> During the research Amaljeet compiled a tape of a range of music that he said he listened to and presented it to me.

<sup>106</sup> It should nevertheless be noted that in his self-made audio tape representing language use in his life Karwan included a new Kurdish language song which he described as 'mainly political with slight romantic'.



in urban British contexts. This transformation is said to have led to the emergence of a distinctively 'British bhangra' which Dudrah describes as the,

fusion of traditional folk bhangra lyrics and beats with urban black British and pop sounds into a new and distinctive genre of British bhangra dance and music [which produces] an urban anthem and commentary about the lives of its British South Asian audiences (Dudrah 2002: 363).

How then might one account for the relatively marginal position accorded to bhangra in the popular cultural lives of the Blackhill youth as represented to me in their own narratives? Here two speculative interpretations are offered. Firstly, it may be that my research evidence was simply reporting the beginnings of another generational change in music cultural practice and consumption. I feel quite confident in suggesting this judgement since I have observed something similar in the transformation of the musical tastes of black youth of Caribbean descent in London. Research conducted into this group in the 1980s, for example Hewitt (1986), Back (1996), Jones (1988) emphasised the importance of Reggae to these young people. Yet to my certain knowledge for young people of Caribbean descent born in the late 1970s and early 1980s in London, reggae has become of marginal interest, respectfully acknowledged as a pioneering form which had always been there as a background soundscape to their lives, but no longer a cause for the great excitement which innovation generates. A second speculative interpretation might be that other academic commentators have directed attention and emphasis to spectacular aspects of the engagement of South Asian youth with popular culture of which British bhangra forms a part. My attention, by contrast, has focused determinedly on the unspectacular and everyday in the lives of the Blackhill youth as they themselves represented it.

Again the preference for playing close attention to what was more prosaic, allowed me to see that when the Blackhill youth described their musical tastes they appeared to fall into three broad groups. The first group of youth, nearly always male, declared themselves to be relatively demanding followers of a variety of musical styles such as Jungle, Hip-Hop, Rap, Swing, House and Garage which were popular amongst black Caribbean descended, urban-based youth in Britain. This group of male Blackhill youth also declared an allegiance to an associated linguistic style. The second group, nearly always female seemed to be casual but rather dutiful consumers of traditional Hindi film music but located their favourite music of choice in the products of a variety of Anglo-American

musical performers ranging from pop, to soul, to r&b, to rock, to indie music genres. The third, and highly significant group, and again the least spectacular, was composed of both boys and girls who were reluctant to identify themselves with any one style of music and tended to say that they listened to all kinds of music and were simply drawn to any tunes they heard that they liked whatever their musical genre. They also often described their favourite music as being pop or whatever was in the charts. Importantly, all three groups, including the latter were discussing the nature of their musical enthusiasms.

### 7.1.2. Enthusiasms

The first group mentioned above who identified with music associated with the hard edged masculinities of both black youth of Caribbean descent and of urban African American youth tended to want to distance themselves from what they saw as the soft, romantic and ‘feminine’ characteristics of Hindi film music and the old fashioned and uncool aesthetics of traditional bhangra. They were however, more well disposed and sympathetic to, but relatively detached from both the Hindi music remixes and the contemporary urban stylings linked with the development of bhangra in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s. It seemed to me that their declared tastes in music were linked with ‘hard’, prestigious black-led masculinities which they vicariously desired.<sup>107</sup> Some empirical glimpses of this have already been seen, including the exchanges between Sachdev and Amar in the ‘swearing and cussing’ section of Chapter Six. These inclinations can also be readily encountered in the realm of music. Two particular favourites with Amar, Sachdev and a number of other Blackhill youth were Tupac Shakur (already referred to and footnoted in Chapter Six) and Coolio,<sup>108</sup> who projected a view of ‘hard’, ‘street’, African American masculinities linked with gang conflict, brushes with the law and often early violent death. Something of the flavour of what is being described can be sampled in the following comments from Amar describing the fantasies of one of his classmates alongside his own,

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<sup>107</sup> I am aware that a section of South Asian descended youth in Britain *have* developed these kinds of masculinities in practice and not only vicariously, as Alexander (2000), and Desai (2000), amongst others have begun to show.

<sup>108</sup> Coolio is a rapper and hip hop artist originally from the Compton area of Los Angeles notorious for the prevalence of violent gangs. He had an enormous international hit in 1995 with the track *Gangsta's Paradise*.



my next friend he thinks he's Tupac yeah actually like the way he talks bu[?] I just tell them all that I'm Coolio because you know he's kind of cool in his music and tha[?]  
(Amar (m) Hindu interview 4.6.97)

In his self-made audio tape of language use in his life Amar presented, amongst other things, one of Coolio's album tracks whose contents he described excitedly in terms illustrated by the following extract,

Amar: he walks into a record thing he wants a seat and the person who manages it and he gives it the manager gives it 'I I heard you's [d]is' and he just says all these swear words and he gives it 'where's my money' the manager gives it 'what money' and he shoots him

RH: mm

Amar: and the other one starts like shou[?]in and that and shoots him again

RH: mm

Amar: and gives it you know swears again and er a woman walks in and she starts shou[?]in and blabberin

RH: mm

Amar: he shoots her and he gives it 'shut up bitch'

RH: yeah who was this

Amar: this one was Coolio

RH: yeah Coolio

Amar: this was Coolio's lyrics and we just actually hooked onto that song

(Amar (m) Hindu interview 4.6.97)

Apart from Amar and Sachdev quite a number of other Blackhill boys like Drishaj and Vishnu mention Tupac by name as an admired figure. Apart from the obvious links between musical tastes and configurations of masculinity what was striking about these boys was the degree of enthusiasm and engagement evident whenever they discussed these particular musical allegiances which for them rendered music styles other than those associated with tough black urban male youth as of limited interest or irrelevant.

The second group who expressed music enthusiasms were, as already indicated, Blackhill girls who, sometimes alongside a moderate degree of interest in Hindi film music, reserved their strongest and most precise musical preferences for a

wide and eclectic range of Anglo-American popular music styles.<sup>109</sup> These girls were more likely than any other group of Blackhill youth to name not only their preferred style of music, but also to name specific artists as favourites. Gurshanti states, 'I just like English music you know soul, hip hop stuff like that ... my friends like they all like rock and indie' (interview). Punamdeep confirms the range,

I love my English music ... I like a number of things you know I don't like I just don't stick to one music like I love jungle I really like tha[?] whereas some of my friends would be like nah and then I like erm hip hop or soul and then I can like rock on the same time and my friends can't stand i[?] and you know like most of my friends are just like on one thing like hip hop and r&b and stuff

(Punamdeep (f) Sikh interview 26.6.97)

Turning to the question of named favourite artists, an analysis of comments made by nine Blackhill girls Gurshanti, Gurleetaa, Jasjoti, Nashita, Shariqah, Neetaa, Julie, Suhir and Shanice, showed them claiming allegiance to artists as varied as the following: Nirvana, Bush, Everclear, Garbage [grunge]; Bon Jovi [rock]; Kula Shaker [psychedelic rock]; Guns and Roses [rock/heavy metal]; No Doubt [new wave ska]; Brand New Heavies [acid jazz/r&b]; LL Cool J, The Fugees, Coolio, Warren G [rap/hip hop]; Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Peter Andre [pop]; Damage [r&b]. This listing is not exhaustive of the Blackhill youth's specific music interests, but is sufficient to support the argument that the contributors to Sharma, Hutnyk & Sharma (1996) make in their book long assault on essentialist attempts to consign people of South Asian descent to a metaphorical box marked 'asian music' containing only items like bhangra and Hindi film music. Particularly powerful and illuminating, is the account by Banerjea & Banerjea (1996), of the systematic way in which young Asians in Britain have been excised from depictions of the histories of fanatical followers of soul music in favour of a preferred binary of black and white youth,

Asians were 'understood' through their perceived 'penchant' for spicy food, illegal immigration and small businesses. Similar attachments to Horizon, JFM, Robbie Vincent and Greg Edwards unsurprisingly failed to make it onto this list (Banerjea & Banerjea 1996: 116).

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<sup>109</sup> Apart from popular music Shanice said that she liked listening to classical music, especially when she was doing yoga.



Another example of the nuanced approach needed to develop this sort of analysis can be found in the spectacular music-related event which was mentioned in passing earlier in the thesis. This was the visit to Blackhill School by the British R&B group called Damage during my research fieldwork.<sup>110</sup> This singing group of young black men were visiting the school because one of the girls in the school had won a competition in the teenage girls' magazine *Smash Hits*, and this was the prize, along with the prize of a personal 'makeover'. What is pertinent to the present discussion on the nature of 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity', is the profoundly typical response to the visit in terms of historical female teenage behaviour in Britain. Damage did a P.A. performance in the school hall and signed autographs.<sup>111</sup> The Blackhill girls' full and excited participation in the event included the obligatory screaming,

... it was really good and everyone was screaming throughout the whole concert and they [Damage] were just laughing at us and they stopped and they give it time and they said 'if you want to listen to us you want to come on our roadshow' I was really excited everyone was screaming  
(Nashita (f) Hindu interview 13.6.97)

Importantly, the same girls who watched Hindi films, visited India regularly or were strongly aware of community and religious ideal norms concerning what made for a suitable Hindu, Sikh or Muslim wife were now screaming at a group of working class black London boys of Caribbean descent. Equally typically, in British teenage terms, this behaviour was gendered so that the Blackhill boys said they were not interested in the visit or were not impressed, seeing bands like Damage as being for the girls. As one remarked in touchingly honest terms,

I don't really like Damage though but their songs are okay but them as a whole I don't really like em cos they're a bit too popular ennit to the girls  
(Rishab (m) Hindu interview 8.7.97)

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<sup>110</sup> Damage were a r&b group of five black British boys who had success in the British pop charts in the mid-1990s.

<sup>111</sup> A P.A. performance refers to an appearance in which artists sing with live microphones to a backing track of their tunes. The absence of accompanying musicians allows record companies to mount extensive promotional tours relatively inexpensively. Using school tours as a niche promotional device with guaranteed captive audiences became popular in the British music industry during the early 1990s; boy bands designed to excite teenage girls were typically involved.

It seems to me that the group of Blackhill girls whose music enthusiasms have just been explored are a good exemplification of the ordinary in terms of the range of British teenage music tastes.

I would argue that even more typical of ordinary unexceptional British popular music tastes are the third group mentioned above. This was the group of Blackhill youth who were interested in popular music without being committed to any particular style or artist. Vishnu, for instance, is representative of this group in saying,

... I don't really listen to a strict certain style if I like the songs then I listen to it like in the top ten there's some rock 'n' roll songs tha[?] I don't really like so I don't listen to em but if the sounds good I I i listen to em once [it] sounds good then I kinda listen to it or maybe I'll buy it bu[?] if I don't like it I'll always listen to it first before I buy it for yeah we buy these big albums with all these different songs on it which is be[?]er<sup>112</sup>

(Vishnu (m) Hindu interview 10.6.97)

It is reasonable to argue that any randomly chosen group of young and not so young Britons, asked about what kind of music they liked would have yielded a core responding in a similar way. It is instructive to note that recent British reality TV pop music talent shows like Pop Idol and Fame Academy attract millions of viewers who vote in their millions for their chosen contestant, then propel the winner's first few singles and maybe even first album to the top of the charts; then equally suddenly lose interest completely, virtually ending the artist's career. It is also a commonplace for well established and even famous artists to express bemusement about the limited scope of their reliable fan base and their astonishment as to why the public ignores one release then catapults another to massive success. In sum, the Blackhill youth share tastes in music which are just like those of other British teenagers except that their cultural universes also integrate a continuous background soundscape, to which they may or may not pay heightened attention at any given moment or to which they may or may not choose to affiliate but which is also part of a global, diasporically informed

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<sup>112</sup> Vishnu is referring to compilation albums on which all the tracks are recent pop chart hits.



aesthetic experience. In the research a somewhat similar configuration could be perceived in relation to film, to which the Blackhill youth made regular and spontaneous reference; and in relation to TV and radio to which they referred far less frequently.

### 7.1.3. Films, TV and Radio

The comments by the Blackhill youth about the presence and influence in their lives of Hindi films, for the most part confirmed Gillespie's research findings on the same topic in Southall (Gillespie 1995), in a number of respects. Gillespie reported that girls were far more attached to these films than boys, used them as an opportunity to improve their understanding of Hindi language, and were interested in the romance driven by the song, dance and stars of the films which the boys rejected in favour of action. She found that the boys were more likely than the girls to be intolerant of the lack of complex plots and detailed cinematography in Hindi movies. According to Gillespie, the boys were far more committed to the 'heightened realism' of western film conventions which they contrast unfavourably with the 'ludicrously unrealistic action and fight sequences in Hindi films' (Gillespie 1995: 86).

Most of the Blackhill youth said that they had seen these films on a fairly regular basis either as avid consumers or in passing because someone else in their household was watching. For the latter group the films formed merely a routine backdrop to their everyday lives. Only one or two of the youth mentioned going out of the home to cinemas to watch the films. In my research data there is some evidence to suggest a gender differentiation with regard to consumption of Hindi films. Blackhill girls appeared much more likely to declare themselves unambiguously as fans who wholeheartedly enjoyed the films. Manika confirms that she and her female school friends 'watch a lot of Hindi films' (**interview**). Diya concurs, 'I always watch Hindi films' and adds the importance of language in this choice, drawing a gendered contrast,

in my house yeah it's like it's usually all the girls that watch all the Hindi films and the boys it's no[?] like they rather prefer watching English films it's just that they don't watch it that much I know it might be because they don't understand it that much or they're not interested in i[?]

(Diya (f) Hindu interview 12.6.97)

Even when they acknowledged the shortcomings and naiveties of the genre, Blackhill girls were far more willing to enthusiastically accept them for what they were. Punamdeep, for instance, first criticises Hindi films because of their failure to cope with realism and modernity then backtracks on her initial judgement,

I think that is what makes some films a flop in Indian because no[?] a lo[?] of films have done that well ...

do you know right I think modernising isn't always the answer ... bu[?] I I don't like it when they modernise it too much ... it's really nice to have a really classical film

(Punamdeep (f) Sikh interview 26.6.97)

By contrast a significant number of Blackhill boys not only said that they did not watch Hindi films or that if they did it was not by enthusiastic choice, but were often contemptuous of them; particularly their production values.<sup>113</sup> It sometimes seemed as if the films symbolically stood as the feminine 'other' to the kinds of masculinity which they imagined for themselves, at least in fantasy. Hindi films were depicted as what sisters, mothers, aunties, grandmothers and female cousins paid attention to. Indeed, Nashita said she believed many boys were frightened to watch for fear of being ridiculed as girly or gay, 'I think they probably feel too scared to watch films their mates would probably take the piss' (**interview**). These boys compared the films unfavourably to what they called 'English' films. By 'English' they were clearly referring to Hollywood films.<sup>114</sup> Their complaints against the Hindi films seemed to be centred on their failure to be convincingly 'realistic' within a strictly naturalistic narrative frame,

some things like people crash into walls and they break the brick things down I I think jus- that's i- too much i- looks

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<sup>113</sup> It is important to emphasise, as always in this thesis, that these tendencies and dispositions are not intended to be taken as universal. A number of girls, like Shanice and others were equally scathing about the production values of Hindi movies.

<sup>114</sup> It was noticeable that the Blackhill youth nearly always referred to Hollywood films as English films and Anglo-American popular music as English music. They seemed to use terms like Indian as a contrasting signifier. One would have expected them to talk about American or Hollywood films and American music or British music. So the term 'English' may be an emphatic reference to English language films and music. This may well be a necessary clarifying discourse strategy for the Blackhill youth in the highly complex multilingual environment which they inhabit. It could also be an indication of the ambivalence felt by many black and brown people who identify with the term British but distance themselves from the label English which carries connotations of white exclusivity.



i[?] looks silly or cars go- going into brick massive thick walls and they break the wall down and all tha[?] ... they punch one person and he flies abou[?] one hundred metres

(Amod (m) Hindu interview 1.7.97)

Of particular interest to them were the action sequences whose execution they especially admired in Hollywood films,

... I've got interests like my uncle has in English films action and that ... we think that Indian films comparing to English films are not good because it's just their way of like special effects is kind of fake and that and then my sister she don't really care it's just like she likes the actresses

(Amar (m) Hindu interview 4.6.97)

In their eager consumption of Hollywood films, Blackhill boys showed themselves to be ready recruits to the preferred kinds of masculinity shaped by Hollywood and exported to willing male youth globally. Additionally, the Blackhill boys appeared to be particularly attracted by the kinds of masculinity projected by young black American, mainly working class, males. They made regular reference to the language used by such black males and said that they had integrated expressions used by them as a valued element of their own everyday speech with each other. Examples of this were shown in Chapter Six.

Meanwhile, those of the Blackhill youth, whether girls or boys, who did watch Hindi films, saw them not only as sources of pleasure, but also as a means of consolidating or even developing their understanding of Hindi language which could be utilised in other areas of their lives. For them the films were also instructional in another sense. Their formulaic depiction of boy-girl relationships as a major and legitimate source of conflict between feuding families, kept alive for the Blackhill youth the notion of certain residual traditional patterns of ethnic and cultural practice. Unsurprisingly, the Blackhill youth as a whole, like other British teenagers, were attracted to and actively consumed Hollywood films often referring by name to influences like *The Terminator*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Reservoir Dogs* and *Titanic*. What it is important to note, as was the case with music, is that, unlike other British teenagers, the backdrop to their routine everyday lives, unavoidably also included Hindi films, regardless of a given individual's allegiance to these films. Consequently, an integral part of the ethnic and cultural experience of the Blackhill youth embraced the shared global diaspora

sensibilities involved in their consumption. Such sensibilities were also shaped by their shared consumption of TV and Radio, though references to these cultural media were far less prevalent in my research data.

It is my speculation that a reason why the Blackhill youth made relatively infrequent reference to TV and radio is that the research fieldwork predated the main explosion in digital media which occurred in the later 1990s and after the turn of the millenium. This expansion has generated a major increase in the numbers of cable and satellite TV channels and specialist radio stations and with it the greater availability of broadcasting in languages other than English together with the generation of a greater intensity of diasporic ethnically specific contact, information and consumption. At the time of my research fieldwork this phenomenon had not matured and on the whole references to TV consumption followed the part of Gillespie's findings (Gillespie 1995), which focused on programmes like the Soaps which were popular with the generality of the British population. Consequently, Blackhill youth, especially the girls, referred to their dedicated consumption of mainstream soap operas on British TV, like *Neighbours*, *Home and Away*, *Eastenders*, *Coronation Street* and *Brookside*, as well as popular American TV drama series like *ER* and *The X-Files*.

In addition, in my data, the references that the Blackhill youth made to their interactions with popular culture where these concerned music, films, TV and radio sometimes made explicit links between the language they themselves use and the language they have encountered through TV programmes. They provided examples of the symbiotic relationship involved, identifying London English, African American vernacular and South Asian as linguistic elements absorbed through TV programmes as particularly prominent in their lives. Finally, a significant number of the Blackhill youth referred to the presence in their lives of Zee TV.<sup>115</sup> Their awareness of Zee TV took a variety of forms. One seemed to be their perception that their parents and older relatives regularly watched programmes broadcast in South Asian languages which brought, for instance, news from the Indian subcontinent directly into their homes. Thus this TV station played an important role for some Blackhill youth in the consolidation and

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<sup>115</sup> 'Zee TV is the most successful and popular Hindi and South Asian languages subscription television channel across South Asia, Europe, Africa and North America as well as parts of the Middle East and East Asia' (Dudrah 2001: 269).



naturalisation of the kinds of diasporic link, involving language and culture, discussed in Chapter Six.<sup>116</sup> The youth tended to discuss their own specific relationship with Zee TV as being based on the viewing of popular music programmes. Several mentioned that they kept a regular eye on a Hindi Top Ten music chart programme on the channel. As elsewhere in their experience language limitations were a factor in mediating their degree of interest and participation in these outlets. Thus, as we have seen before, for those whose families possessed Zee TV it constituted a familiar background presence rather than an exciting resource, especially where the broadcasts in South Asian languages were concerned. A somewhat parallel situation also seemed to exist with respect to radio stations aiming specifically at Britain's South Asian populations.

The Blackhill youth made very few references to any influence of radio in their lives. There is evidence that those who made a point of emphasising their taste for pop chart music may well have listened regularly to mass popular music stations like Radio 1 and Capital Radio. Surprisingly, none of the youth said that they listened regularly to pirate radio music stations which at the time were extremely prominent in London and certainly were strongly supported by working class black youth of Caribbean descent. Few of the Blackhill youth seemed even to be aware of the existence of these radio stations. On the other hand many of the young people did mention the routine background daily presence in their lives of Sunrise Radio broadcasts.<sup>117</sup> They generally claimed that it was their parents or other older relatives who were the principal consumers of Sunrise radio, and thought that they were interested mainly in current affairs and news programmes broadcast in South Asian languages. For the family elders these broadcasts seemed to be an instrument for the maintenance of real and imagined local and diaspora communities. For the Blackhill youth the broadcasts were an unremarkable subtextual backdrop to their everyday lives but at the same time a constant low key reminder of their own connection with the suggested real and

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<sup>116</sup> Dudrah (2001, 2002a), is particularly informative on the growing opportunities for the development of global South Asian diaspora identities and ethnicities provided by Zee TV.

<sup>117</sup> Sunrise Radio was described by Gillespie as claiming to be 'the eleventh largest commercial radio station in the UK and the most popular radio station in West London. It caters for a wide range of regional, linguistic and religious differences whilst attempting to maintain a broad-based appeal. News bulletins and current affairs programmes are transmitted in English, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Gujarati. The primary emphasis is on news from the Indian subcontinent, local news stories and stories concerning 'Asians' in Britain' (Gillespie 1995: 99).

imagined local and diaspora communities, and a source for the keeping alive of the residual and traditional in their ethnic and cultural environment.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has briefly outlined some of the ways in which popular culture in the form of music, films, TV and radio plays a part in the formation of the ethnicities and cultures of the Blackhill youth through the choices, allegiances and disavowals involved in the development of their tastes. Following a continuing thread running through the thesis, an attempt has been made to trace the conspicuous presence of questions of language in the shaping and positioning of these tastes. The chapter has also emphasised the synthesis of the typically British adolescent nature of these tastes with the markedly South Asian, judging that for the most part in each case the British inflection is dominant, and this is a judgment which has been clear at every stage of the thesis. The argument is not that the youth live this experience in terms of a struggle between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. Rather it has been argued that all these elements are potentially available at all times to the youth in their routine consumption of popular culture. More precisely, the Blackhill youth are very similar to other British youth in their popular cultural tastes, except that they have available to them at most times sonic and visual backdrops not normally readily available to other formations of British youth. As has been seen, these sonic and visual backdrops are provided by those elements of music, film, TV and radio which connect with the circulating migrations and cultural flows of the global South Asian diaspora. Care has been taken to pay particularly close analytical attention to how the Blackhill youth themselves represent their popular cultural tastes even when these responses might at first sight appear to be unromantic or commonplace rather than spectacular. This chapter has also added to the general argument of the thesis by demonstrating how important it is, with regard to popular cultural tastes as elsewhere, to keep an anti-essentialist perspective. Without it the possibility of seeing the distinctions between the eclecticism of some Blackhill youth, the enthusiasms of others and the relative indifference of others still, would have been far more difficult.



## Chapter Eight: Conclusions

### 8.0. Introduction

Drawing on cultural studies, sociolinguistic and sociological perspectives, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the study of ethnicity in a number of ways. In the first place it meets challenges posed by Stuart Hall's influential, and linked, theoretical propositions, 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity'. In particular the thesis demonstrates what these theoretical constructs might mean and look like at the level of empirical realisation. Secondly, the thesis shows what the ethnicities of a group of visible minority youth might be like when the research emphasis focuses on the routine, the ordinary and the everyday. Another important and original aspect of the thesis is its illustration of how the understanding of ethnicity might be enriched and clarified by paying careful and close attention to how ethnic configurations might be structured when reliance on the visual is complemented or partially displaced by a concentration on the aural; in other words when ethnicity is coded through sound as well as through the visual. It is for this reason amongst others that I have placed so much emphasis on listening so closely to the voices of the Blackhill youth. Additionally, the reference to auditory codes has been developed in the thesis in two important ways. Firstly, listening closely to the informants' voices has enabled me to reveal that the Blackhill youth's ethnic positioning is decisively founded on a bedrock of London Britishness marked by the specifically London English phonological, grammatical, lexical and idiomatic contours of their speech. Secondly, close 'listening' has made it possible for the thesis to present analytic observations rigorously grounded on the representations offered by the Blackhill youth themselves in rich empirical detail; this, rather than the perhaps more customary practice of using informants' voices and self-representations as no more than an occasional interjection in the analyst's strong and previously established unequivocal categorisations. A further achievement of the thesis is that it has found a way of demonstrating the need for a refinement of the implication of dichotomy inherent in the term 'new' in 'new ethnicities', and the stated dichotomy in Hall's concept of 'translation' (Hall, 1992a), which generated his notion of 'cultures of hybridity', and in one of his heavily cited articles 'Old and new identities, old and new ethnicities' (Hall, 1991). More precisely, the sense of binary opposites in the new versus old dichotomy, and the sense of separate and clearly bounded cultures in the notion of 'translation' are limitations which the thesis attempts to address. It has done this, principally, by utilising Raymond

Williams' indicative theoretical formulations referring to the constant co-presence in culture of residual, emergent and dominant elements. Having briefly outlined the main claims of the thesis, I would like to add some points of clarification and expansion.

### **8.1. New ethnicities and language use**

In taking Hall's 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' as points of departure, I deliberately treated them as givens; sources of stimulation and inspiration. For this reason I eschewed the opportunity to enter into an extended discussion of the nature of ethnicity and hybridity as general concepts. What interested me more was the discovery in my research data of a picture far more complex than the notion of new ethnicities as opposed to old ethnicities or of new cultures of hybridity as opposed to traditional, supposedly static and homogeneous cultures. The density of the empirical complexity I encountered was amply demonstrated in Chapter Four, and extended and furthered deepened in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. These chapters were able to establish the link between new ethnicities and cultures of hybridity and dimensions involving language, communities of practice, and the development of popular cultural tastes. Taking the language dimension first, I have demonstrated that while in every area of their lives the Blackhill youth evidenced their fundamental Britishness, this Britishness was anchored and embodied in a local specificity as represented in the Londonness of their patterns of language use. As Gunew, has commented, 'language remains the most portable of accessories one which has carved out a corporeal space' (Gunew 2003: 41). In the case of the Blackhill youth one accessory which they carry with them at all times, particularly in their embodied phonology is their Londonness. And yet this embodiment of the local is also at all times deeply intertwined with a routine interaction with the globally diasporic in language in two forms. One form, suggestive of inherited tradition (for instance Panjabi, Gujarati and Hindi), the other indicating the recently emergent (for instance Upspeak and other global teenage language forms), or the gradually appropriated (for instance Jamaican Creole or African American Vernacular).

Overall, the linguistic dimension of the 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' described in this thesis, is constituted in varying intricate combinations of these very different linguistic elements in ways which were illustrated particularly sharply in Chapter Five. However, the thesis has argued that these 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' are not constituted in and through



patterns of language use alone. Chapter Six shows how these patterns of language use are subtly linked with interlocking communities of practice which can be both lived and imagined; which can be both peer (same-age) related or cross-generational; which can be both profoundly local in a London British sense and at the same time inescapably connected with diasporically inscribed global formations. Such diasporic communities of practice are not necessarily primarily constituted in and around language practices as such, although these may, as we have seen, play a significant part. They are also, for instance, constructed around widely shared experiences of identification with, and participation in, religious observance, rituals, festivals, and trips to parental and grandparental homelands. Also involved, there may well be, too, participation in voluntary community education efforts intended to secure the maintenance of traditional patterns of language use, historical knowledge and cultural practices. The nature of these communities of practice has been clearly laid out in Chapter Six. It is particularly to be noted that they are prime sites in which the workings of the residual/traditional, the emergent and the dominant in cultural practices can be observed in routine co-occurrence. It is also important to emphasise that in refusing the old versus new dichotomy in relation to ethnicities, I am arguing that the Blackhill youth, whether or not they were enthusiastic or lukewarm participants in communities of practice which are marked by traces of the old or the traditional in culture, showed no overt or strong signs of rejection or complete disavowal of these practices. It is argued that the Blackhill youth are active participants in, and co-constructors of, communities of practice which are dominated by their British inflections *at the same time as*, and incorporating elements drawn from, cultural practices symbolically associated with the residual/traditional. Such practices, for example religious ones, may in turn be relatively dominant and prominent, or relatively backgrounded at any given moment or in any given context. Cross-cutting the dimensions of language and communities of cultural practices, the thesis has brought out a third dimension, that is a dimension concerned with the formation of popular cultural tastes.

Again, here, the Blackhill youth representations conflict with perhaps more conventional accounts in which the formation of popular cultural tastes is heavily associated with patterns of cultural consumption somewhat stereotypically linked to what are regarded as traditional 'Asian' forms like bhangra music or Hindi films. By contrast, the Blackhill youth represent themselves as inhabiting an environment in which the dominant patterns of popular cultural taste and practice

to which they feel strongly affiliated are very similar to other British teenagers of their age, locality and social positioning, while at all times they have available to them, either in heightened prominent form, or in low-key background ways, the popular cultural products of the South Asian diaspora. Some of the intricacies of this relationship are outlined in Chapter Seven.

In sum, the ‘new ethnicities’ of the Blackhill youth can be characterised as follows. As far as language is concerned, English language is dominant in most circumstances and this can be seen most clearly in Chapters Three, Four and Five; and as we have already seen the London English variant is the most commanding. However, languages like Panjabi, Gujarati and Hindi are ever-present, either as part of the background soundscape as they are routinely used by close relatives, or other individuals in the community, or foregrounded at specific moments in their own speech exchanges, particularly in communication with their grandparents, parents, older relatives or other community elders. On the other hand, although a variety of inherited languages other than English suffuse their everyday environment, the Blackhill youth’s engagement with them in the dimension of literacy is particularly weak. Their declared severe deficiencies in reading and writing the languages, first indicated in Chapter Three, are more marked than their admitted uncertainties in understanding and speaking them, and may be influenced by the difficulties they have encountered in coping with the additional scripts integral to Panjabi, Gujarati and Hindi/Urdu literacies. As British children, their everyday experience from the age of 5 to the age of 16 is dominated by the compulsory acquisition of Standard English literacy throughout every aspect of their school lives, and utilising for this purpose the Roman alphabet. Contrastingly, focused encounters with the radically different scripts associated with Panjabi (Gurmukhi script), Gujarati (Devanagari script), Hindi (Sanskrit-influenced Devanagari script), Urdu (Arabic-Persian script), apart from brief spells at community language classes, have for the Blackhill youth, been fleeting and intermittent. The nature of their orientation to languages like Panjabi, Gujarati, Hindi and Urdu, plays a significant role in the kinds of ethnicities and cultures of hybridity which they construct in a number of different domains. This applies whether these pertain to religion (Chapter Six), travels to global diaspora locations (Chapter Six), interaction with popular culture in the form of Hindi films, Hindi film song lyrics or Bhangra music lyrics (Chapter Seven), or radio and TV broadcasts directed at ‘Asian’ populations (Chapter Seven). Additionally,



there is in the mix, the language of black youth, African American or London Caribbean, whether or not this is assumed or experienced vicariously.

In highlighting, as the thesis has done, the salience of everyday language use in the formation and enactment of ‘new ethnicities’ and ‘cultures of hybridity’, an important intervention is being made in debates on the nature of ethnicity in contemporary British contexts. One linguist, Edgar Schneider has drawn attention to three related research propositions amongst variationist sociolinguists. (i) “Show me how you speak, and I’ll tell you where you’re from!” (ii) “Show me how you speak, and I’ll tell you who you are, and which group you belong to!” (iii) “Show me how you speak, and I’ll tell you who you want to be!” (Schneider, 2000: 359-361). All of these propositions in differing ways are pertinent to the importance of questions of language in understanding the composition of new ethnicities. However, my own formulation might better approximate to the more cautious, “Show me how you speak, and share with me your representations of language use in your life, and I’ll show you how your ethnicities are partially but significantly constituted!”. For my argument is not that the Blackhill youth’s new ethnicities are wholly constituted around their orientations to language, but rather in the densely entangled interrelationship between their positionings on language and the intersecting communities of practice they inhabit, and the popular cultural tastes and practices with which they are involved.

## **8.2. The importance of the everyday**

Apart from adding to the descriptive literature on the nature of ‘new ethnicities’ and ‘cultures of hybridity’ per se, this thesis claims a certain degree of innovation of approach in its relentless empirical attention to the routine, everyday and unspectacular markings of ethnicity and culture. This contrasts it with studies of youth, including visible minority youth, which concentrate on the practices of spectacular minorities. This means that I have not taken up opportunities to skew the research in the direction of any minorities who may have been members of transgressive groups like gangs or vivid representatives through their families of relatively essentialised and homogenised traditional conservative cultural formations; or again individuals like Amaljeet or Karwan who may have been prominent members of the tiny minority of cultural innovators and leaders within the popular cultural arena in their generation (Chapter Four). The present thesis offers a glimpse of what ‘new ethnicities’ and ‘cultures of hybridity’ might look like from the perspective of a putative ‘silent majority’ of a section of visible

minority youth of South Asian descent who are ordinary. The importance of attending to the ‘voices’ of this group was emphasised in Chapter One, where we saw that even the radical British Cultural Studies tradition has had a record of ‘ignoring’ or ‘belittling’ such voices.

However, trying to empirically realise these ambitions presents a number of challenges. First of all, if, as Stuart Hall suggests, in relation to ‘cultures of hybridity’, ‘there are more and more examples of them to be discovered’ (Hall, 1992a: 310), and at the same time they are to be perceived with a rigorously anti-essentialist eye, how is the resulting empirical complexity and density to be conveyed to the reader? The problem becomes even more difficult when one considers that any genuine attempt at an anti-essentialist approach necessarily involves deferring definitive theoretical formulations and interpretive judgements on ethnicity until careful, elaborate and respectful attention has been paid to a dense description of the informants’ representational accounts of their own ethnic and cultural worlds from *their own* points of view. As Geertz has stated in an extended discussion on the notion of ‘thick description’ in ethnography within anthropological traditions, one task is, ‘setting down the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are ...’ (Geertz, 1993: 27). Geertz argues that anthropologists attempt to achieve this using data which ‘are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to’ (ibid.: 9). Further, he usefully adds, the researcher’s data collection yields,

a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render (ibid.: 10).

I claim some originality in my efforts to address these difficult problems by means of the bold methodological experiment presented in Chapter Four. There the reader is invited to become immersed in extended and thickly described informants’ accounts of their own patterns of language use and how these interact with other everyday elements in the rich tapestry of their culturally and ethnically positioned lives. These descriptive accounts, drawn from a variety of data sources, are intended to be relatively unmediated by analytic and interpretive interventions. They are meant to offer the reader a deep ‘feel’ for the nature of the kinds of social formation under investigation, prior to making strong and neat interpretive judgements, which perhaps constitute a more customary, and, I would argue,



premature procedure. In presenting Chapter Four in this way I have also exercised caution with respect to the ontological status of the chapter. On the one hand I am clear that what is offered in Chapter Four are informants' representations, not accounts of a would-be transparent social reality. On the other hand I *do* claim that the repetition of regularities in independent individual representations of the same social context is a way of uncovering some form of structured social reality. As Geertz suggests in relation to some of his own research informants, 'setting them in the frame of their own banalities ... dissolves their opacity' (Geertz, 1993: 14). In my work, inviting the reader to 'feel' a structured reality, also expressed in a different way in Chapter Three, is justified in Chapter Two by reference to Williams' notion of 'structures of feeling' in the description and analysis of cultural formations (Williams, 1977, 1992); and also to Schutz's delineations of the 'life-world' and 'the stock of knowledge' (Schutz, 1970, Ritzer 1992). At the same time my claim to have depicted a structured social formation in Chapter Four is at all times held in check by a strong sense of the agency of the individual social actors portrayed, acknowledging the value of Thompson's challenging requirements (Thompson, 1968, 1978). As Geertz has again helpfully pointed out,

Understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity ... The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics (Geertz, 1993: 15 & 28).

I argue that when the experimental presentation of Chapter Four, inspired by Perce's ideas about the value of 'formally unanalyzed detail' (Becker, 2001), is taken together with the analyses and interpretive commentaries offered in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, these objectives have been achieved. In the final analysis what is being confidently claimed is the identification of a particular kind of cultural formation marked by a fundamental Britishness, but inflected in a variety of complex ways ranging across a number of customs, practices and

dispositions drawn from the global South Asian diaspora, and related to specific communities, religions, linguistic groups and popular cultural forms.<sup>118</sup>

### 8.3. Thinking with the ears as well as the eyes

The research approach just described, which, for example, makes Chapter Four possible, rests on a procedure which relies on paying close and detailed attention to informants' 'voices', whether directly through interviews and their self-made audio tapes or figuratively through their written accounts and completed survey questionnaires. This opens the way to the identification of another novel contribution which the thesis makes to the study and understanding of ethnicity. Typically, the study of ethnicity within British Cultural Studies or Sociology has concentrated on the understandings to be gained through the deployment of visual codes which inevitably lead to an unwavering focus on the fixities associated with racial phenotypes, notwithstanding anti-essentialist claims to constant fluidity and change. In my thesis, by contrast, the possibilities for expanded understandings of ethnicity have been demonstrated by suggesting what can be achieved by, as it were, 'thinking with the ears' (Bull & Back, 2003), rather than the more customary 'thinking with the eyes'. As Bull and Back have powerfully commented,

In the hierarchy of the senses, the epistemological status of hearing has come a poor second to that of vision ... The reduction of knowledge to the visual has placed serious limitations on our ability to grasp the meanings attached to much social behaviour ... Thinking with our ears offers an opportunity to augment our critical imaginations, to comprehend our world and our encounters with it according to multiple registers of feeling (Bull & Back, 2003: 1-2).

In my research the consequence of taking up such perspectives has been the paying of explicit attention not only to *what* informants say, but also to *how* they

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<sup>118</sup> This declaration has some importance given the long tradition in British political discourses of positioning people of South Asian descent as permanent outsiders, often using questions of language as a key signifier. Following fighting in northern English towns in 2001 between youths of South Asian descent and the police and white racists, the British Home Secretary David Blunkett made the following slippery statement: 'I have never said, or implied, that lack of fluency in English was in any way directly responsible for the disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the summer of 2001. However, speaking English enables parents to converse with their children in English, as well as in their historic mother tongue, at home and to participate in wider modern culture. It helps overcome the schizophrenia which bedevils generational relationships. In as many as 30% of Asian British households, according to the recent citizenship survey, English is not spoken at home. But let us be clear that lack of English fluency did not cause the riots' (Blunkett 2002: 77).



say it. This clearly has some ontological implications. *What* they say operates as representation not reality; *how* they say it has strong claims to the real. All of this assists the generation of some novel claims. Firstly, I claim that following the approach I have suggested means that studies of ethnicity and culture in British contexts can no longer be considered adequate without explicit acknowledgement of the importance of both the actual as well as the claimed patterns of language use of ordinary social actors in everyday contexts. As I suggested in the Introduction, this implication has been startlingly ignored within the British Cultural Studies, and, I should add, Sociological traditions. I further noted, in Chapter Five, that talking and/or listening to the talk of others, occupies most of the waking hours of most ordinary human beings worldwide. This compounds the question which asks, ‘how can any adequate account of the ethnicities or cultures of any social group reasonably ignore how they use or claim to use language?’. Giving even modest attention to how the Blackhill youth talk allows one to see beyond the distractions of racial phenotypes, and religious or cultural labels, to perceive their fundamental Britishness; more specifically their Londonness. The embodiment of their Londonness through the phonology, but also the grammar, idiom and lexis of London English is particularly emphasised in Chapter Five. It is also further underlined elsewhere in the thesis whenever the speech of individual members of the Blackhill youth is directly quoted, by the device of marking the most commonly occurring signifiers of their London speech – their extensive T-glottalling. At the same time a linked innovatory insight is that they are simultaneously linked through their routine, everyday speech to general manifestations of pan-ethnic globalised teenage identities, by markers of speech such as ‘Upspeak’ or ‘Australian Questioning Intonation’ and the use of ‘like’ with the verb to be as a quotative marker. As ever, alongside all of these contemporary features of language are retentions of the inherited South Asian and other languages.

#### **8.4. The Past and the Present in the Present**

As all these noted speech characteristics become what is most marked about the Blackhill youth’s speech, they might be said to be representative of new emergent elements in their ethnicities and cultures of hybridity, following Raymond Williams’ theoretical suggestions, as I intimated in the Preface to Part II of the thesis. I argue, though, that this view is complicated by the question of what might be regarded as dominant at any given moment. For the Blackhill youth, while their London English and global teenage language use is virtually ever-present, at

any given moment other varieties of language may appear dominant. For instance, Panjabi, Gujarati or Hindi, as representatives of the residual/traditional might appear to achieve dominance at given moments in family or community settings, just as Standard English might do continuously in the domain of schooling.

In fact Williams' suggestion that cultural formations might best be understood in terms of the synchronic and syncretic occurrence of the residual, the emergent and the dominant, enables me to add another contributory element to the study of ethnicity in Britain. I offer a way of moving beyond the implied dichotomy of old versus new in the study of ethnicity or even ethnicities. I argue that the 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' of the Blackhill youth are best described not in terms of what is old in opposition to what is new, but in terms of the synchronic and syncretic occurrence of the emergent, residual and dominant. Thus, following the title the anthropologist Maurice Bloch gave to one of his papers, I argue that what can be seen is, 'The Past and the Present in The Present' (Bloch, 1977). I have demonstrated this, for example, whether the object of study is language specifically (Chapters Three and Five), family, religious or general community cultural practices (Chapter Six), or popular cultural tastes (Chapter Seven). In each case the balance of forces favours general underlying British derived practices.

### **8.5. The emergence of *Brasian* identity**

Finally, I recognise the existence of significant specificities related to Sikh, Hindu and Muslim ethnicities and cultural spaces, both within and outside British geographical spaces. I also recognise particularities related, for instance, to East African, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Singaporean and Mauritian experiences, or to Panjabi, Gujarati, Hindi and Urdu linguistic environments. Nevertheless, I claim, in this thesis, to have identified and traced the contours of a definite and distinct instance of an emergent cultural formation within a 'new ethnicities' and 'cultures of hybridity' frame. This formation relates to young people of South Asian descent born or brought up in Britain. I would like to propose that such a formation as represented in the Blackhill youth research be referred to broadly as an emergent *Brasian* identity, comprised of collections of *Brasian* ethnicities and cultures of hybridity.



I first encountered the label *Brasian* in the hyphenated form 'Br-Asian' in the work of Kalra & Kalra (1996). These authors claimed ownership of what they said they were proposing as a new term referring to the,

complex subject positions of migrants and their offspring settled in Britain with links both imagined and material to South Asia. It is intended to be an open term, beginning the exploration of shifting identifications and representations (Kalra & Kalra, 1996: 219).

They go on to critique the more familiar term 'British Asian' since it, 'essentializes both terms, as well as hierarchizing the former against the latter'(ibid.: 219). I concur with this judgement but suggest that perhaps the hyphenation of the term as Br-Asian achieves a similar effect. I therefore propose the term *Brasian* as a way of partly overcoming the implied essentialised dichotomy with its hint of 'hierarchization'. Kalra & Kalra's main focus is popular music, yet they see the term Br-Asian as having a wider utility as it,

is intended both to be disruptive of the centre-margin relationship and to destabilize fixed notions of Asian identities, stressing their contingency on historical and spacial moments (ibid.: 221).

This characterisation coincides quite closely with what I envisage as useful about *Brasian*, although my research with the Blackhill youth, as the thesis has shown, demonstrates a greater certainty that, across a range of practices, Britishness is primary. It must be reiterated with special emphasis that the proposition that there are emergent *Brasian* identities in urban locations like London is in no way to be read as merely a new homogenising, essentialist or even crypto-assimilationist label. What is being suggested, as this thesis has extensively shown, is a dense and complexly interwoven enactment of ethnicities in the interstitial textures of everyday life. This thesis has amply demonstrated the openness, variability and unpredictability of the *Brasian* formulation, and does so with a particular intensity in Chapter Four. Having said this, whatever the specificities of particular South Asian ethnicities, and however densely configured these might be with patterns of Britishness, I nevertheless argue that *Brasian* holds good. This is because it captures the way that Britishness is always there, deeply rooted, especially in its embodied and therefore inescapable form as everyday language use. One small example might serve to illustrate the tenacity of these effects. In 2002 a number of British newspapers reported on the case of Shafiq Rasul, a 24 year old of Pakistani descent from the West Midlands town of Tipton who had been accused of fighting with the Taliban in Afghanistan and was now detained by the

Americans in Camp X-Ray in Cuba. Two reporters from the Sunday Mirror were invited into his family home in order to speak to his mother and brothers and build up a portrait of him. The following are some salient extracts from their report:<sup>119</sup>

‘Shafiq was born in West Bromwich in 1977 ... attended the Roman Catholic Sacred Heart Primary School ... has a broad Brummie accent ... interested in girls and nightclubs ... had several white girlfriends ... [often] talking on his mobile phone to women [once went ] camping in Wales ... too scared to spend even one night in a tent he wanted to go to a bed and breakfast ... listening to gangsta rap ... following the fortunes of his favourite football team Liverpool<sup>120</sup> and showing off his designer clothes ... a small bookcase in his home containing books written in Punjabi and English ... [played in the] Tipton Muslim Community Centre football team ... the furthest he’d travelled before was on a Club 18-30 holiday to Benidorm the year before ... Shafiq Rasul was wearing his favourite top - A Ralph Lauren American stars and stripes jumper when he flew to Pakistan last October ... off to do a computer programming course at university in Lahore’.

Here, then, is a young man at a moment of perhaps ultimate disavowal of Britishness, who has Britishness inscribed in his body through his Brummie accent. He has strong British affiliations represented through his attachments to, and experiences of, everyday cultural practices. Yet at the same time he retains very real diaspora connections and possibilities as well as continuing local muslim and Panjabi language connections. This is a *Brasian* identity. As argued above, it is a concept retaining openness, variability and unpredictability, but its contours can be both clearly discerned and imagined.

The soundness of the idea of *Brasian* identities would also appear to be strengthened by one other expression of the formulation that I have been able to find. This is a London-based British organisation, led by individuals of South Asian descent, which is known as Br-Asian Media Consultancy, and describes itself as, ‘a Public Relations (PR) & Marketing consultancy that focuses on

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<sup>119</sup> Sunday Mirror 3.2.02 story headlined ‘The West at War: Club 18-30 to Camp Hell’ by Annabelle Steggles and Dominic Turnbull.

<sup>120</sup> And indeed a report in the Observer newspaper (3.11.02) claiming to quoting directly from a letter which he’d written to his family from the prison camp in Cuba says that his letter included the phrase ‘Let me know the football scores ...’



communicating with the British Asian audience, in particular the youth sector' ([www.Brasian.com](http://www.Brasian.com), 2003). One significant section of the Frequently Asked Questions area of this company's website, reads as follows,

'Aren't young Asians mainly into Bhangra and Bollywood?'

'British Asian youth and middle youth are into the same predominantly urban music and pastimes as the rest of the population'.

Both the cited proponents of the label Br-Asian, reference popular cultural production, especially music, TV and film as arenas in which ready evidence of the emergence of this cultural formation is apparent. Neither is as emphatic as I am about the weighting in favour of the British dimension. Nevertheless, it is plausibly arguable that films such as *East is East*, *Bhaji on the Beach*, or *Bend it Like Beckham*, and TV series like *Goodness Gracious Me* and *The Kumars at No.42*, are highly suggestive markers from within expressive culture of a *Brasian* identity embracing *Brasian* ethnicities. There is also evidence that elements of the print media are, in their own way, attempting to grapple with the idea. One newspaper, published by Ashoka Publishing Ltd. from London in 2001, was called 'BRITAsian'. A glossy magazine, publishing from London in 2003 and aimed at prosperous young professionals with Indian diaspora sensibilities and links, calls itself 'indobrit'.

The emergent *Brasian* identity represented by the Blackhill youth is also linked to an apparently emergent *Desi* identity in North America which is beginning to attract academic interest (Maira 1998, 1999, Dawson 2002). According to Maira,

*Desi* literally means native of a *desh* ("country") and in the context of South Asian diasporic communities in the United States is used as a colloquial term to refer to those of South Asian descent, invoking a pan-ethnic rather than nationally bounded category. In India, it is sometimes used more pejoratively to index a "country-bumpkin" sensibility (Maira, 1999: 55).

I suggest that the emergence of *Desi* identity and ethnicities is somewhat analagous to the *Brasian* identity and ethnicities I have sought to identify. Their co-existence supports my contention in Chapter Six that the Blackhill youth are connected in both material and imagined ways to certain global diasporic communities of practice. Indeed both Maira and Dawson indicate that a significant element of *Desi* culture is a selection of musical styles generated by young people of South Asian descent in Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Before closing, I would like to comment on two other aspects of the concept *Brasian*. Firstly, how representative are the Blackhill youth of *Brasian* identity as a whole? Secondly, to what extent is the *Brasian* identity paralleled in a more general way by similarly structured emergent cultural formations in other ethnic sub-groups elsewhere in Britain? On the first issue, I want to emphasise that the Blackhill youth are presented as just one tightly researched cultural formation; one particularly related to contemporary global diasporic and inherited historic links tied in one way or another to India. I would expect to find, under the broad canvas of *Brasian* identity, cultural formations of youth with similar contours to those of the Blackhill youth, except with contemporary connections and inheritances linked with, for example, Pakistan (Qureshi & Moores 1999, Saeed et al 1999) or Bangladesh (Alexander 2000, Desai 2000). I would also expect to find other cultural formations of *Brasian* youth who are not so strongly marked by Britishness, who *do* proficiently understand, speak, read and write their inherited community languages, who have a strong religious allegiance accompanied by informed practice. These youth also retain an active and enjoyed identification and physical contact with parental and grandparental homelands, and strongly support the conservative maintenance of traditional South Asian norms and ideals of cultural practice in their communities in Britain. It would seem to me that there is ample scope here for further research, particularly, I would suggest, research conducted by people who are relative ethnic and community insiders, with competence in community languages and lifelong experience of the cultural practices and experiences of their own British-born youthful generation. The other speculation I would like to put forward in passing, is that social formations resembling the *Brasian* ones are likely amongst other visible minority youth in Britain who are members of migrant families. Pang (1999) with reference to youth of Chinese descent in London provides an illustrative research example, but I would expect to find similar with, for example, youth of say Somali or Kurdish descent.

To close I would like to refer to some inviting but challenging comments by Bulmer & Solomos (1998). Referring first to Gilroy's reminder about the urgent need to transcend the analytic category of race and thereby to think afresh about anti-racist ideas and policies, they state the need to, 'provoke reflection about how to reconceptualize the phenomena of ethnicity and race' (ibid.: 835). I believe that this thesis has amply met these requirements. Hanif Kureishi laments about the



experience of visible minority young people in Britain in his youth, 'I mean the thing about race is what it does to you is that when you when somebody sees you they have ideas about you they have a lot of ideas about you that you probably don't have about them and that was really shocking' (Kureishi, 2003). It is to be hoped that this thesis, in its portrayal of the Blackhill youth, has made a small contribution to the slowing down, unsettling and disruption of such assumptions.

## Appendix A: Profile of the Blackhill Youth

Name	Sex	Main family language besides English	Family religious affiliation
Amaljeet	m	Panjabi	Sikh
Amar	m	Panjabi	Hindu
Amod	m	Gujarati	Hindu
Amrita	f	Panjabi	Sikh
Bahiyaa	f	Panjabi	Hindu
Dhrishaj	m	Panjabi	Sikh
Diya	f	Gujarati	Hindu
Gurleetaa	f	Panjabi	Sikh
Gurshanti	f	Panjabi	Sikh
Japdev	m	Panjabi	Sikh
Jasjoti	f	Panjabi	Sikh
Julie	f	Swahili	Christian/Catholic
Karwan	m	Kurdish	Muslim
Keshav	m	Gujarati	Hindu
Manika	f	Gujarati	Hindu
Narjot	m	Panjabi	Sikh
Nashita	f	Gujarati	Hindu
Neetaa	f	Panjabi	Sikh
Patwant	m	Panjabi	Sikh
Premila	f	Gujarati	Hindu
Punamdeep	f	Panjabi	Sikh
Rishab	m	Panjabi	Hindu
Sachdev	m	Panjabi	Sikh
Sahima	f	Gujarati	Hindu
Sarah	f	Panjabi	Christian
Shanice	f	Jamaican Creole	Christian
Shariqah	f	Urdu	Muslim
Suhir	f	French Creole	Muslim
Sumandev	m	Panjabi	Sikh
Vishnu	m	Gujarati	Hindu



## Appendix B: Blackhill youth – Parents' jobs

Name	Sex	Mother's Job	Father's Job
Amaljeet	m	chef	builder
Amar	m	office worker	post office parcels & letters delivery
Amod	m	credit control manager	sales director electrical retailer
Amrita	f	housewife/ unemployed	factory supervisor
Bahiyaa	f	housewife	BT telephone engineer
Dhrishaj	m	factory worker	warehouse operative
Diya	f	housewife	post office worker
Gurleetaa	f		disabled
Gurshanti	f	building society clerk	airline ground crew worker
Japdev	m	catering worker	bakery worker
Jasjoti	f	hospital secretary	airline ground crew worker
Julie	f	unemployed	motor mechanic
Karwan	m		
Keshav	m	primary school teacher	mechanical engineer
Manika	f	housewife	computer engineer
Narjot	m	nurse	psychiatric nurse
Nashita	f	factory worker	office accounts clerk
Neetaa	f	school dinner lady	construction engineer
Patwant	m	admin/secretary	worker with homeless
Premila	f	housewife	motor mechanic
Punamdeep	f	housewife (former factory worker)	quality controller
Rishab	m	information not available	bus driver
Sachdev	m	information not available	information not available
Sahima	f	biscuit packer	credit controller
Sarah	f	nurse	driving instructor
Shanice	f	factory worker	car exhaust fitter
Shariqah	f	care assistant	airline fork lift driver
Suhir	f	information not available	information not available
Sumandev	m	package labeller	printer
Vishnu	m	unemployed factory worker	unemployed factory worker

## Appendix C: Blackhill School Ethnic and Linguistic Monitoring Data

### Pupil Number by Ethnic Origin\*

Ethnic Origin	Total Number	%
Any other group	58	4.4
Bangladeshi	6	0.5
Black-African	37	2.8
Black-Caribbean	43	3.2
Black-Other	24	1.8
Chinese	3	0.2
Indian	902	67.9
Pakistani	107	8.0
Unclassified	14	1
White	134	10

### Pupil Number by Mother Tongue

Mother Tongue	Total Number	%
Bengali	12	0.9
Cantonese	2	0.5
English	264	19.9
Gujarati	149	11.2
Hindi	49	3.7
Italian	8	0.6
Other	86	6.5
Panjabi	653	49.2
Turkish	2	0.15
Unclassified	23	1.7
Urdu	80	6

\*The figures in this appendix are for the academic year in which the Blackhill youth entered Blackhill School.



## Appendix D: Language Survey Questionnaire Data

### A. Talking about languages

This is NOT a test or an exam. There are NO right or wrong answers.

	Language	Language	Language	Language
1. Thinking back to the time before you ever went to school, which language or languages did you first use with your family?	Punjabi = 12 Panjabi = 1 Gujrati = 4 Gujarati = 2 Gujerati = 1 English = 8 Kurdish = 1 Urdu = 1 Swahili = 1	English = 17 Some English = 1 little bit of English = 1 Punjabi = 3 Hindi = 2 Gujerati = 1 Gujarati = 1 French Creole = 1 Persian = 1 Nothing:English only = 2 Nothing:Gujerati only = 1	German = 1 English = 1 Malay = 1	Blank = 31
2. Write in the name of the country the language or languages came from	Punjabi-India = 10 Punjabi-India-Punjab = 3 Gujrati-India = 3 Gujrati-India-Gujrat = 1 Gujarati-India-Gujarat = 1 Gujerati-India = 1 Gujarati-India = 1 Urdu-Pakistan = 1 Kurdish-Kurdistan = 1 English-England = 7 Swahili-Kenya = 1 English-India = 1	English-England = 15 English-Britain = 2 Little bit of English-Britain = 1 Some English-England = 1 Hindi-India = 1 Hindi-India-Punjab = 1 Punjabi-India = 2 Punjabi-England = 1 Gujarati-India = 1 Gujerati-India = 1 French-Creole-Mauritius = 1 Persian-Iran = 1 Blank = 3	Malay-Malaysia = 1 German-Germany = 1 English-England = 1 Blank = 28	

## B. Speaking, reading and writing

Think back to the language or languages you used before you ever went to school

	Language	Language	Language	Language
4. Can you understand this language now?				
yes, quite well	Punjabi=10 Gujrati=2, Gujarati=2 Gujerati=2, English=7, Kurdish=1, Urdu=1	English=20, Hindi=1, French- Creole=1, Punjabi=1, Gujerati=1, Gujarati=1	Gujrati=1	
only a little	Punjabi=4 Swahili=1, Hindi=1	English=1, Persian=1, Punjabi=1	German=1 Malay=1	
no, not now	0	0	0	
	Language	Language	Language	Language
5. Can you speak this language now?		Blank=3		
yes, quite well	Hindi=1, Gujrati=3 Gujerati=1 Gujarati=2 Punjabi=10 English=7, Urdu =1, Kurdish=1	English=21 Hindi=1 Gujerati=1 Gujarati=1 Punjabi=2	Gujrati=1 German=1	
only a little	Punjabi=3	Persian= 1, French- Creole=1	Malay=1	French=1
no, not now	Punjabi=1 Swahili=1			
	Language	Language	Language	Language
7. Can you write this language now?				
yes, quite well	English=7, Gujrati=1, Kurdish=1, Hindi=1, Punjabi=3	English=20	English=1	
only a little	Gujrati=1, Gujarati=2 Punjabi=2		German=1	French=1
no, not now	Gujrati=1, Gujerati=1, Swahili=1, Urdu=1, Punjabi=9	Hindi=1, Gujarati=1(never), Gujerati=1, Gujrati=1, Persian=1, French- Creole=1, Punjabi=2	Malay=1	
8. Do you understand only English now?	Yes 1 (Swahili?)	No 30		



### C. Talking to your family and friends

	Language	Language	Language	Language
9. Which languages do you mainly use now with your family and friends?	English = 20, Hindi=1, Kurdish=1, Urdu=1, Punjabi=1, Gujrati=1, Gujarati=1, Gujerati=1	Gujarati=2, Gujerati=1, Gujrati=1, Punjabi=7, English=8, Sometimes English=1, English friends.family=1, Nothing this box=10	German=1, English=1	

#### *When I'm talking ...*

	Language	Language	Language	Doesn't apply
10. When I'm talking to my father I usually speak ...	English=18, Punjabi=4, Punjabi- sometimes English=1, Gujrati=2, Gujerati=2, Gujrati & English=1, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1, Marathi=1, No father=1	English=4, Sometimes English=1, Gujarati=1, Gujerati=1, Gujrati(very few times)=1, Punjabi=3, Hindi=1, Blank=20		
11. When I'm talking to my mother I usually speak ...	English=17, English&Gujrati=1, Gujarati=2, Gujerati=2, Gujrati=2, Punjabi=4, Mostly Punjabi + English=1, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1	English=4, Sometimes English=1, Punjabi=3, Gujarati=1, Gujrati=1, Hindi=1, Blank=20		
12. When I'm talking to my brother(s) I usually speak ...	English=18, English+Gujerati=1, Punjabi=1, Kurdish=1, No brother=10			
13. When I'm talking to my sisters I usually speak ...	English=23, Punjabi=1, Gujrati=1, No sisters=6			
14. When I'm talking to my grandfather(s) I usually speak ...	Gujerati=1, Gujarati=2, Gujrati=2, Punjabi=11, English/Punjabi mixed=1, English=3, Kurdish=1, Urdu=1, No grandfather=9	English=1, English(very few times)=1, Punjabi=1, Sometimes Hindi=1		
15. When I'm talking to my grandmother(s) I usually speak ...	Punjabi=14, English/Punjabi mixed=1, English=3, Gujrati=3, Gujerati=2, Gujarati=1, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1, No grandmother=5	Sometimes Hindi=1, English=1, Punjabi=1		

*When I'm spoken to ...*

16. my father usually speaks to me in ...	English=16, English/Punjabi=1, Punjabi&English mixed=1, Punjabi=6, Gujrati=3, Gujarati=2, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1	English=6, Punjabi=4, Gujarati=1, Gujerati=1, Gujrati=1, Urdu=1	Hindi=1	
17. my mother usually speaks to me in ...	English=14, Punjabi=8, Gujrati=3, Gujarati=2, Gujerati=2, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1			
18. my grandfather(s) usually speak(s) to me in ...	Punjabi=10, Gujarati=2, Gujrati=2, Gujerati=1, English=4, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1	Punjabi=2, English=1, Sometimes Hindi=1, Jamaican Creole=1		
19. my grandmother(s) usually speak(s) to me in ...	Punjabi=14, Gujrati=3, Gujerati=2, Gujarati=1, English=3, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1	Jamaican Creole=1, Sometimes Hindi=1, Punjabi=1		

	Language	Language	Language	Language
20(a) my brother(s) and sister(s) usually speak(s) to me in ...	English=27, Punjabi=2, Kurdish=1, Hindi=1	English=3, Punjabi=1, Sometimes Punjabi=1, Gujrati=1	English=1	

	Language	Language	Language	Language
20 (b) In school breaks, my friends and I usually speak in ...	English=30, Punjabi=1	English=1, Punjabi=1, German=3, English& our own lang words e.g. Rasta Talk=1, Sometimes Gujrati=1	Punjabi=2, a bit of Punjabi=1, German=1, And our own words e.g. Rasta Talk=1	

	Language	Language	Language	Language
21. Please write in the names of any other languages spoken in your family	Swahili=4, Hindi=5, Punjabi=2, English=2, Spanish=1, French Creole=1, Malay=1, Arabic=1, Chinese=1, Jamaican Creole=1	Hindi=2, Hindu=1, Punjabi=1, Panjabi=1, French=1, Englis=1, Gujrati=1	French=1, German=1, Spanish=1, Panjabi=1, Hindi=1, English=1	Portuguese=1, Sometimes Urdu=1



## D. Learning languages

	Language	Language	Language	Language
22. Apart from the languages you mainly use, write the names of any other languages you can understand at all.	German=21, Hindi=1, Arabic=1, Urdu=1, French Creole=1, Malay=1, French about 30% of it=1, Only understand a little Gujrati=1, None=3	Hindi=5, French=4, German=2, Gujrati=1, Punjabi=1, Swahili=1	Hindi=3, German=2, Urdu=1	Sign Language=1, a bit of Gujrati=1

	Yes	No	
23. Do you go to any language classes besides English, French, Spanish or German (inside or outside school)	1	29	<i>This question may have been misunderstood by the respondents and therefore may have affected the answers to questions 24-28.</i>

	Language	Language	Language	Language
24. Which language or languages are you learning at these classes?	German, French			

	hours	hours	hours	hours
25. About how many hours a week do you spend at these classes?	German =3-4 hours, French=3 hours			

	in school lesson time	in lunch hours or breaks	after school or in weekday evenings	at weekends
26. When do you go to these classes?	French			

	in your own school	in another school	in a mosque, gurdwara, temple or church	somewhere else (say where)
27. Where do you go to these classes	French			

	minutes	minutes	minutes	minutes
28. How long does it take to get to these classes?	French=5-10 minutes			

	Yes	No	
29. When you were younger, did you ever go to classes, inside or outside school, to learn any languages besides English, French, German and Spanish?	20 (21)	11 (10)	<i>One entry was confusing with the no box being ticked followed by added details of class attendance</i>

	Language	Language	Language	Language
30. Which language or languages did you learn at these classes?	Punjabi=10, Gujarati=3 (+1) Gujrati=2, Gujerati=2, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1, Arabic=1			

	Age	Age	Age	Age
31. How old were you when you <b>started</b> going to these classes?	aged 5=1, 6=3, 7=4, 8=5, 9=3, 10=3, 12=1, 14=1	5-7(1), 6-6(1), 6-11(1), 6-13 (1), 7-7 (2), 7-9(1), 7-10 (1), 8-10(3)		
32. How old were you when you <b>stopped</b> going to these classes?	6=1, 7=3, 9=2, 10=5, 11=2, 12=4, 13=3, 14=1	8-11(1), 8-12(1), 9-1 (1), 9-12(1), 9-13(1), 10-10(1), 10-12(2), 12-13(1), 14(1)		

	religion	dance	history	music	culture and traditions	only language	Anything else (say what)
33. In your language classes did you learn any of these things at the same time	11	3	7	3	13	10	writing=1

### E. Languages in your family

	Yes	No
34. Is there anyone in your family who grew up speaking a language besides English?	31	



35.	Language	Language	Language	Language	36. Do they still speak this language? Yes or No?
My father grew up speaking ...	Punjabi=13, Gujarati=3, Gujarati=2, Gujrati=1, Swahili=3, Pashtow=1, Hindi=1, Malay=1, English=1, French Creole=1, Kurdish=1, No father listed =1	English=9, Hindi=4, Gujrati=3, Swahili=2, Urdu=1, Punjabi=1, Chinese=1, Arabic=1	English=6, Hindi=2, Swahili=1	Punjabi=1, Marathi=1	
My mother grew up speaking ...	Punjabi=14, Gujarati=3, English=3, Gujarati=2, Gujrati=2, Swahili=2, Urdu=1, Hindi=1, French Creole=1, Kurdish=1,	English=8, Hindi=5, Punjabi=4, Gujrati=2, Swahili=2, Arabic=1, Malay=1	English=5, Hindi=2, Swahili=1	French=1	
My Grandfather(s) grew up speaking ...	Punjabi=14, Not sure could be Punjabi=1, Gujarati=3, Gujarati=2, Gujrati=1, English=2, Swahili=2, Swahili not sure=1, Jamaican Creole=1, Kurdish=1, Urdu=1, Hindi=1	Punjabi=3, Gujrati=2, Gujarati=1, Arabic=2, Hindi=2, English=1, Swahili=1	Hindi=1, Turkish=1, English=1, Swahili=1, Pashtau (Dads Dad)=1	Urdu=1	
My Grandmother(s) grew up speaking ...	Punjabi=13, Gujrati=2, Gujarati=2, Gujarati=1, Swahili=1, Swahili not sure=1, English=1, Chinese=1, Hindi=1, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1, Jamaican Creole=1, Not sure could be Seychelles French Creole=1	Hindi=3, Punjabi=3, Gujrati=2, Gujarati=1, English=1, Arabic=1, Malay=1, Swahili=1	Turkish=1, Punjabi=1, Swahili=1, Urdu=1		
My Sister(s) grew up speaking ...	Punjabi=9, English=7, Gujrati=2, Gujarati=2, Urdu=1, Hindi=1	English=9, Punjabi=5, Gujrati=1	English=1		
My Brother(s) grew up speaking ...	English=8, Punjabi=3, Gujarati=2, Gujarati=1, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1	English=4, Punjabi=3, Hindi=1, Arabic=1, Gujarati=1, Gujrati=1	French=1, English=1		

My Uncle(s) grew up speaking ...	Punjabi=16, Gujerati=3, Gujarati=2, Gujrati=2, English=3, Hindi=1, Italien=1, French Creole=1, Kurdish=1, Punjabi/Swahili= 1(Mum's & Dad's Bros=2)	English=8, Swahili=3, Hindi=2, Gujrati=2, Punjabi=2, Urdu=1, Arabic=1	English=3, Hindi=2, Swahili=1, Kiswahili= 1, Turkish=1, Malay=1	English=1, Urdu=1	
My Aunt(s) grew up speaking ...	Punjabi=15, Gujarati=3, Gujrati=2, Gujerati=1, English=4, Hindi=1, Swahili=1, Kurdish=1, French Creole=1, A South African lang don't know name=1, Punjabi/Swahili (Mum's & Dad's sister's=2)	English=9, Gujrati=2, Gujarati=1, Hindi=3, Punjabi=2, Malay=1, Swahili=1, Urdu=1, Italien=1, Arabic=1	English=4, Hindi=3, Malay=1, Swahili=1, Kiswahili= 1, Turkish=1	English=1	
My Cousin(s) grew up speaking ...	Punjabi=10, English=10, Gujerati=2, Gujarati=2, Gujrati=1, Hindi=1, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1, French Creole=1, Swahili/Punjabi= 2 cousins, No cousins=1	English=9, Punjabi=5, Gujrati=2, Gujarati=1, Hindi=2, Punjabi/Engl ish=2 cousins, French=1	English=3, Hindi=1		

	Language	Language	Language	Language
37. How well can you understand this language when this relative speaks it now?				
(a)	I understand most of what he/she/they say(s)	I understand most of what he/she/they say(s)	I understand most of what he/she/they say(s)	I understand most of what he/she/they say(s)
(b)	I understand some of what he/she/they say(s)	I understand some of what he/she they say(s)	I understand some of what he/she they say(s)	I understand some of what he/she/ they say(s)
(c)	I understand a few words	I understand a few words	I understand a few words	I understand a few words
(d)	I understand nothing at all	I understand nothing at all	I understand nothing at all	I understand nothing at all
when my father speaks ...	Punjabi=(a)=14, Punjabi=(b)=1, Gujarati=(a)=6, English=(a)=4, Swahili=(c)=1, Hindi=(a)=1, Arabic=(c)=1, French Creole=(a)=1, Urdu=(a)=1	English=(a)=12, Hindi=(a)=2, Hindi=(b)=1, Punjabi=(a)=1, Punjabi=(b)=1, Gujarati=(a)=3, Malay=(b)=1, Kurdish=(a)=1, Swahili=(d)=1	English=(a)=3, Hindi=(a)=2, Hindi=(b)=1, Swahili=(a)=1, Swahili=(d)=1, Chinese=(d)=1, Punjabi=(b)=1, Turkish=(d)=1	Swahili=(c)=1



when my mother speaks ...	Punjabi=(a)=13, Punjabi=(b)=1, Gujarati=(a)=6, English=(a)=5, Arabic=(c)=1, Hindi=(a)=1, Urdu=(a)=1, Swahili=(c)=1, French Creole=(a)=1	English=(a)=12, Gujarati=(a)=3, Punjabi=(a)=1, Punjabi=(b)=1, Hindi=(a)=2, Hindi=(b)=1, Hindi=(d)=1, Swahili=(d)=1, French=(c)=1, Kurdish=(a)=1, Malay=(d)=1	Hindi=(a)=2, Hindi=(b)=1, Swahili=(a)=1, Swahili=(d)=1, English=(a)=2, Punjabi=(b)=1, Turkish=(d)=1	Swahili=(c)=1
when my grandfather speaks ...	Punjabi=(a)=11, Punjabi=(b)=1, Punjabi=(d)=1, English=(a)=1, English & Punjabi=(a)=1, Gujarati=(a)=3, Gujarati=(b)=1, Jamaican=(a)=1, Urdu=(a)=1, Arabic=(c)=1	English=(a)=1, English=(b)=1, English=(c)=1, Hindi=(a)=1, Hindi=(b)=1, Gujarati=(a)=1, Punjabi=(d)=1, Kurdish=(a)=1	Punjabi=(b)=1, Swahili=(a)=1, Swahili=(d)=1, Turkish=(d)=1	
when my grandmother speaks ...	Punjabi=(a)=12, Punjabi=(b)=3, Gujarati=(a)=6, Gujarati=(b)=1, Urdu=(a)=1, Arabic=(c)=1, French Creole=(d)=1, Jamaican=(a)=1, English=(a)=1	Hindi=(a)=2, Hindi=(b)=3, English=(a)=3, English=(b)=1, Malay=(c)=1, Gujarati=(a)=1, Punjabi=(a)=1, Kurdish=(a)=1	Swahili=(c)=1, Swahili=(d)=2, Turkish=(d)=1, Chinese=(d)=1	
when my brother speaks ...	Punjabi=(a)=5, Gujerati=(a)=2, Gujerati=(b)=1, Gujerati=(c)=1, English=(a)=4, English=(c)=1=(1 year old), Urdu=(a)=1, Arabic=(c)=1, French Creole=(c)=1	English=(a)=6, Hindi=(a)=1, Hindi=(b)=1, Punjabi=(b)=1, Punjabi=(c)=1, Kurdish=(a)=1, French=(c)=1, Gujerati=(a)=1,	Swahili=(d)=1	
when my sister speaks ...	Punjabi=(a)=10, Gujarati=(a)=3, Gujarati=(c)=1, Urdu=(a)=1, Kurdish=(a)=1, Hindi=(a)=1, English=(a)=2	English=(a)=12, Punjabi=(b)=2, Gujarati=(a)=1, Hindi=(a)=1	English=(a)=1	
when my cousin speaks ...	Punjabi=(a)=11, Punjabi+English=(a)=1, English=(a)=8, Gujarati=(a)=5, French Creole=(b)=1, Kurdish=(a)=1, Urdu=(a)=1	English=(a)=13, Gujarati=(a)=2, Punjabi=(a)=1, Punjabi=(b)=1, French Creole=(b)=1, Hindi=(a)=1, Hindi=(b)=2	English=(a)=2	

when my uncle speaks ...	Punjabi=(a)=13, Punjabi=(b)=1, Punjabi+English=(a)=1, Gujarati=(a)=4, Gujarati=(b)=1, English=(a)=5, Arabic=(c)=1, Urdu=(a)=1, Italian=(d)=1, French Creole=(b)=1	English=(a)=14, Gujrati=(a)=2, Punjabi=(a)=1, Punjabi=(b)=1, Hindi=(a)=2, Hindi=(b)=1, Italien=(d)=1, French=(c)=1, Kiswahili=(d)=1, Kurdish=(a)=1	Hindi=(a)=2, Hindi=(b)=1, Hindi=(c)=1, Hindi=(d)=1, Punjabi=(b)=1, Malay=(c)=1, Turkish=(d)=1, English=(a)=1	Swahili=(d)=1, Urdu=(b)=1
when my aunt speaks ...	Punjabi=(a)=13, Punjabi+English=(a)=1, English=(a)=6, Gujarati=(a)=6, Urdu=(a)=1, Swahili=(c)=1, Arabic=(c)=1, French Creole=(b)=1	English=(a)=12, English=(b)=2, Punjabi=(a)=1, Punjabi=(b)=1, Hindi=(a)=2, Hindi=(b)=1, Gujarati=(a)=2, Kiswahili=(d)=1, Italien=(d)=1, French=(c)=1, Kurdish=(a)=1	Hindi=(a)=3, Hindi=(b)=1, Swahili=(d)=1, Malay=(c)=1, Turkish=(d)=1, English=(a)=1, Punjabi=(b)=1	Swahili=(d)=1

## F. Languages out of school

				Yes	No
38. Out of school have you ever learned to speak any language apart from English?				24	7
	Language	Language	Language	Language	
39. Which language(s) did you learn?	Punjabi=13, Gujerati=5, Hindi=1, Kurdish=1, French=1, Urdu=1, Swahili=1, Arabic=1, Japanese=1	Arabic=1, Malay=1			
40. Can you <b>speak</b> this language now?					
yes, quite well	Gujarati=5, Punjabi=9, Urdu=1, Kurdish=1				
only a little	Punjabi=4, Japanese=1, Hindi=1, French=1	Malay=1			
not now	Arabic=1, Swahili=1	Arabic=1			
41. Can you <b>write</b> this language now?					
yes, quite well	Punjabi=2, Gujarati=1, Kurdish=1				
only a little	Punjabi=2, Gujarati=1, Hindi=1, French=1	Arabic=1			
not now	Punjabi=9, Gujarati=2, Gujarati=no never=1, Arabic=1, Urdu=1, Japanese=1, Swahili=1	Malay=1			



41(a) Can you <b>read</b> this language now?				
yes, quite well	Punjabi=2,	Arabic=1		
only a little	Punjabi=3, Gujarati=2, Kurdish=1, French=1, Hindi=1,			
not now	Punjabi=8, Gujarati=2, no never Gujarati=1, Arabic=1, Japanese=1, Urdu=1, Swahili=1			
42. Where did you learn this language?				
from someone in the family here in England	Punjabi=7, Gujarati=3, Urdu=1, Hindi=1, Japanese=1, Arabic=1, Swahili=1	Malay=1		
during a visit to another country	Punjabi=1	Malay=1		
when your family lived in another country				
at classes out of school	Punjabi=7, Gujarati=4, Kurdish=1			
somewhere else (say where)	Punjabi=on my own=1, French=at school=1	Arabic=religious classes=1		

## G. Languages at school

	Yes	No
43. are there people in your class who speak languages other than English?	31	

	Language	Language	Language	Language
44. what languages can they speak?	Punjabi=21, Gujarati=23, Hindi=22, Urdu=13, Arabic=13, Kurdish=13, Persian=11, Swahili=8, Turkish=3, Creole=1	French Creole=1, French=3, German=4		

	Yes	No		
45. Have you studied any languages at school?	31			
	Language	Language	Language	Language
46. what languages have you studied at school?	German=28, French=3			
47. How well do you think you <b>speak</b> these languages?				
very well	German=5	Punjabi=1		
fairly well	German=22, French=1	German=1		
not very well	German=1	French=1, Punjabi=1		
not at all	French=2	French=6	French=1	
47(a). How well do you think you <b>read</b> these languages?				
very well	German=6	Punjabi=1		
fairly well	German=21, French=1	German=1		
not very well	German=1			
not at all	French=2	Punjabi=1	French=1	
48. How well do you think you <b>write</b> these languages				
very well	German=6			
fairly well	German=20, French=1	German=1, Punjabi=1		
not very well	German=2	French=1		
not at all	French=2	French=6, Punjabi=1	French=1	

## H. Languages in your district

	Yes	No	Don't know
49. Near where you live does anyone speak any language(s) besides English?	25		6



	Yes	No	Don't know	
50. Are there any signs and notices in languages apart from English near where you live?	10	12	9	
	Language	Language	Language	Language
51. If you answered Yes to questions 50 & 51 write in the names of the languages involved				
PEOPLE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD	Punjabi=8, Hindi=4(incl. 1 neighbours), Somalien=1, Gujearti=1, Urdu=1, Urdu(friend across the road)=1, Am aware but don't know what they are=1, Am aware but not sure which ones=1	Urdu=1=(neighbours), Punjabi=4, Hindi=5, Gujarati=1, Gujarati=1=(my sisters friends live on road)	Urdu=3, Arabic=2, French=1, Hindi=1, Punjabi=1, Gujarati=1	Gujarati=1, Hindi=1, Urdu=1, Rasta(Krio)=1, Jamaican Creole=1
NOTICES & SIGNS	Punjabi=4, Sikh symbols=1, Urdu=1, Hindi=2, Am aware but not sure which ones=1	Urdu=2, Hindi=3, Hindu symbols=1	Arabic=2, Urdu=2, Punjabi=1, Gujarati=1, Muslim symbols=1	Gujarati=1, Hindi=1(incl. symbols all three=1)

## I. ALMOST FINISHED!

	Language	Language	Language	Language
52. Apart from the languages you already studying at school are there any others you would like to learn? If so, name them.	French=3, Spanish=9, Italian=5, Punjabi=4, Sign Language=1, Arabic properly=1, Blank=6, No=1, None=1	Spanish=2, Sign Language=2, Italian=3, Chinese=1, Swahili so I can speak fluently=1	Chinese=1, Italian=1	Malay=1
	Boy	Girl		
53. Are you a boy or a girl?	14	17		
54. Which year were you born in?	1981=8	mistake(1997)=1 1982=22		

	Years	Years		
55. How long have you lived in Britain?	7½=1, 14=18, 15=10, 11=1, 8 months=1			
	Religion	Religion		
56 What religion are you?	Sikh=13, Hindu=9, Hindu-Gujarati=1, Hindi=1, Muslim=4, Christian=2, Catholic=1			
	Country	Country		
57 Which country were you born in?	England=25, Britain=2, Great Britain=1, Kurdistan=1, India=1, Canada=1			
58. What is the name of your school?	Blackhill High School=31			
59. Which class are you in?	10M2=8, 10G2=8, 10T2=8, 10W2=4, year 10=1, Blank=2			
	Day	Month	Year	
60. What is today's date?	Thursday 20 <sup>th</sup>	March	1997	



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