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**Multicultural country/side?  
Visible communities' perceptions and  
use of the English national parks**

Kye Askins

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**VOLUME 1 OF 2 VOLUMES**

Thesis submitted for PhD  
Department of Geography  
University of Durham  
2004

3 1 AUG 2005



## **Multicultural Country/side? Visible communities' use and perceptions of the English national parks.**

Kye Askins

### **ABSTRACT**

Despite the ever-growing debate regarding multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and hybrid and multiple ethnicities, this PhD contends that the Imaginary of England as a multi-ethnic nation is, explicitly and implicitly, tied to the urban sphere, while rural space and imagery are (re)iterated as a monocultural white. Moreover, the construction of a dominant national identity embedded in this rural 'idyll' space inherently racialises Englishness as white. These productions of rurality and nationality are then caught up in processes of social exclusion – physical and emotional - that impact non-white groups' access to the countryside.

In order to unpack the issues related to ethnicity, national identity, rurality and social in/exclusion, this thesis examines people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds' use and perceptions of the English national parks. It incorporates a range of theoretical standpoints, and draws extensively from quantitative and qualitative research undertaken in the North York Moors and Peak District national parks, and proximate cities of Middlesbrough and Sheffield respectively. In particular, the fieldwork engaged with Asian and African Caribbean communities, and explored understandings of ethnicity, nationality, and 'belonging' in English rural space.

Through the theoretical and empirical appraisals, I argue that there is a need to hold the structures of day-to-day life that affect 'visible communities', and the power differentials implicated in those structures, *in tension with* relativist understandings and performances of identity involved in people's everyday negotiations in society. I also call for a non-reductive gaze that does not routinely explain and expect visible communities to be marginalised 'rural others' (from a dominant white 'norm'). From such a perspective, I suggest an agonistic approach (after Mouffe) to policy-making, which recognises difference *alongside similarity* and acknowledges the ineradicability of adversarial belief systems. This approach demands adopting a 'radical openness' to social in/exclusion, enabling us to *work towards* a transformative 'sustainable multiculturalism'.

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**Declaration:**

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**visible** A. *adj.* 1. Capable of being seen; that by its nature is an object of sight; perceptible by the sense of sight. 2. That may be mentally perceived or observed; clearly or readily evident or perceptible; apparent, manifest, obvious. 3. *That can be seen under certain conditions, at a certain time, or by a particular person*; in sight; open or exposed to sight or view.

**community** II. A body of individuals. 7. A body of people organized into a political, municipal, or social unity: **a.** A state or commonwealth. **b.** A body of men living in the same locality. **c.** *Often applied to those members of a civil community, who have certain circumstances of nativity, religion, or pursuit, common to them, but not shared by those among whom they live.* **d. the community:** *the people of a country (or district) as a whole; the general body to which all alike belong, the public.*

(OED, 1989: *italic emphasis added*)

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The term '**visible communities**' (after Alibhai-Brown, 2001) is used throughout this thesis to describe people of Asian, African and Caribbean backgrounds.

'Visible communities' is an attempt to avoid the homogenising tendencies of the term 'black' (Modood, 1992) and the power-laden term 'minority'. Both these expressions are highly contested, particularly in terms of the assumption that majority/white society is 'normal' in attitude and behaviour with the implication that 'minority'/black beliefs and practices are somehow deficient rather than just different. Settling on another term is, however, fraught with problems: 'black and minority ethnic' is an attempted catch-all that retains 'black' and 'minority', and sits uncomfortably with many; the use of 'ethnic' alone singles out non-white people as having ethnicity and hides the multiple ethnicities of the white population (Ware & Back, 2002); and, while the term 'people of colour' is commonly used in other parts of the world, it gained very little support among research participants from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds in Sheffield and Middlesbrough. Since the research focus is on people from these backgrounds, 'visible communities' is employed to highlight how people are identified as different by the recognition of *visual markings*, in particular skin colour.

There is, of course, the danger that visible community/ies itself homogenises a diverse range of ethnicities, reifying and fetishising physicality/phenotype. The term is *not* intended to suggest that all people from non-white backgrounds are the same as each other, *nor* to deny the power inequalities endemic in English society. It is meant as a political identifier to highlight that these inequalities are commonly grounded in perceptions of inferiority/threat attached to *visible difference from a white 'norm'*, and to recognise that non-white individuals are likely to have experienced particular reactions and exclusions in society based on the colour of their skin. The term has a particular resonance in rural space, where people from non-white backgrounds are highly visible.

Unfortunately, the term 'white' is used throughout the thesis in a generalised way because of the research focus, despite great diversity within this category.

*For Zuni, Djembe, Conor, Niall, Galatea and Gibril –  
the next generation in my family.*

*In the hope that they may grow up negotiating  
their identities free from prejudice.*

## PLACING THE JOURNEY [for(e)ward]

Once upon a time, there was a PhD student. One of many across the world, perhaps, but we need to place this particular student in England, registered at Durham University and living in Kent, and latterly Newcastle. A woman. A mother of two young sons. A partner. White. A 'mature' student. A person with six siblings, of Anglo-Irish background. She can describe herself in many ways and does so according to situation. And in undertaking the PhD, this student embarked upon a journey. Not the first in her life, and not the last. No, it would be more accurate to say that she embarked upon many journeys, overlapping and intertwined journeys of the mind, of the heart, of the soul and of the will. Journeys of exasperation and frustration; journeys of hope; journeys of speed and clarity; slow journeys full of negativity; journeys of contemplation; and journeys of fulfilment. And any notion of *completing* these journeys must be laid aside – these particular journeys began, in fact, many years before the PhD was started, and will no doubt continue for some time to come.

Within the pages of this book you will find the stories of those journeys. Sometimes the narratives are explicit, spoken in her own words or reciting the words of others as she understands them. Sometimes the narratives are hidden, behind numerical data, behind theoretical posturing or behind academic structures of writing. But this student believes that the stories of those journeys need to be acknowledged, not just in a preface but throughout the presentation of the material that this book is concerned with. Thus the different textual styles incorporated in this book are intended to jolt and unsettle the reader into thinking about the stories behind the words. The embodied and emotional are interconnected in complex ways with that which is represented as 'fact'. She could namedrop 'positionality', but that is not enough. Positionality is more than stating one's identity or position or, recognising that neither of these things are static, one's background and 'starting point'. Positionality requires her to examine the ways in which she is positioned and positions herself in a variety of contexts (in the academy, in the 'field', meeting with 'practitioners', in the public and private sphere), and demands that she considers how these positions are tied up in power relationships. And, crucially, how power may be channelled in politically progressive ways. That is:

"Rather than simply adding new voices to pre-existing debates without altering their underlying terms, a politics of position has the potential to transform the nature of those debates."

(Jackson, 2000:605)

Writing this thesis, in part, as a story, her intention is to highlight the 'crisis of representation' and to foreground her (academic) gaze as situated. More than that, she wants to question the presumption of the gaze, and work through issues of intersubjectivity and performance, to emphasise 'learning' over 'knowing', and to explicate the relationship between academic position, power and knowledge. Because in travelling these journeys, she played her self alongside and interacting with fellow travellers, doing their journeys and performing themselves. Moreover, inter-subjectivity does not begin and end with the doing of the 'fieldwork'. It occurs when she reads, as she creates 'relationships with the texts' (Ahmed *et al.*, 2000), and also when she writes. As the reader, you are now beginning to weave yourself through this text, as she is woven when deciding what to say. Bennett (1999:120) explains:

"It is not just about you reading me, but being aware of yourself reading, feeling, and being touched by that feeling. Maybe now I am able to take you on my exploration of intersubjectivity. This way I might not have to tell you, tie myself up in knots telling you, what it is. It is not easily told, but far easier felt."

Rather than tie herself up in knots, she is choosing the theme of narration as a way of moving towards rendering intersubjectivity tangible beyond one or two pages of script. Why stories? Because a significant part of her journeys involved listening to personal and communal stories: stories about identity (relationships with self and others), and stories about place (different social relationships in different places):

"Stories reproduce the narrative flow of everyday life. They are important to the construction of identity, to understanding the ways in which individuals order the world and find a location within it ... the way individuals account for themselves, give order and meaning to their lives, and participate in the process by which we become situated in society."

(Revill & Seymour, 1999:138)

de Certeau (1984) writes that, by defining the limits and boundaries of individual experience, stories create the world we live in. He explores a spatiality of knowledge in which stories describe and explain activity in a spatial (and temporal) form, while spatial practices themselves (re)create stories: narratives map out landscapes, and the routines of everyday human activity construct a socialised, meaningful world. While de Certeau's focus is on human agency, the importance of the material itself, as a co-creator of stories should also be stressed. The crucial role of place within her own and other's narratives was spoken through her travels. Activity and place were interwoven in stories of identity, social relationships, belonging and exclusion. Furthermore,



(re)tellings of activity-in-place (activity-out-of-place) were the focal lens through which conflicting stories emerged, revealing the contested nature of 'knowledge' and competing interests grounded in the political: stories are inherently *politically situated*.

But there are drawbacks to story-telling as a textual strategy. Allegations of aestheticisation, of privileging the cultural by sidelining the economic/structural/political, draw attention to the potential of stories to inhibit the examination of power inequalities and political relationships. She, however, intends the act of emphasising the story *as political*, precisely *because* the story is employed to examine and question the assumptions of the dominant gaze and transform the nature of the debate regarding visible communities in the English countryside. Furthermore, a key tenet of the plot is an attempt to readdress 'the social' in light of 'the cultural turn', whose influence is clearly legible in writing/research that speaks to issues of 'difference' and 'otherness' as this thesis does.

Narratives can also be criticised for presenting a parochial form of localised knowledge, fragmented and irrelevant beyond limited spheres. Alternatively, stories are rejected as homogenising and totalistic, forcing a 'comprehensible order' (after Jameson, 1980) that not only controls but irons out the contradictions of everyday life. She would argue instead that stories can be used to respond to the difficulty (impossibility?) of translating qualitative or quantitative materials into instrumental knowledge (policy). If the resulting narrative is critiqued as too localised, surely the positive aspect of parochialism is that it respects the lived experiences of people's lives, enabling sites for specific political interventions (after Massey, 2004). The issue regarding 'comprehensible order' is trickier. She would agree that this book attempts to *make sense* of material that reflects the contradictions of everyday life and the heterogeneity of society. But *making sense* does not necessarily equate with the imposition of 'comprehensible order'. Research is messy, the 'fieldwork' was messy, the 'outcomes' were/are messy. The journeys were complicated and confusing (and mostly delayed and re-routed). Convention demands that she tidies it (the material) up for this Event (reporting) - especially when funded to produce policy recommendations beyond academia. In response, she has endeavoured to highlight the contradictions, the ebbs and flows of overlap, and the localised/heterogeneous within the generalised/homogenous.

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Once upon many times, and in many places, people helped her on her journeys. Helped her by offering their knowledge, their advice, their thoughts, their hospitality, their experiences, their friendship, their food and their floorspace: journeys/projects/ambitions are always reliant on others to enable self movement. She finds that tracing the links and connections made in travelling these journeys lead everywhere, intertwining and branching out in unexpected directions, doubling back and offering surprising rendezvous. Sometimes she stayed still while others moved and met, the outcomes of their meetings filtering (back?) to her in a variety of ways.

As such, this narrative begins with a list of people whom she wishes to thank.

First and foremost, her most sincere gratitude goes to the many individuals from visible communities in Middlesbrough, Sheffield and elsewhere who gave their time, energy and trust to participate formally - and informally - in the research. Thanks also go to the national park staff, volunteers and Authority Committee Members who took part in and/or made the fieldwork possible, and to those nameless residents in the parks who responded to the postal survey. Very special thanks go to all involved with the Mosaic project, in particular Jess and Juni, for their generosity of spirit and resources.

Thanks also to Rachel Flannery and the postgrads at Durham geography department for their friendship; Rachel Pain for her unfailing encouragement, and the wider academic community at Durham for their support; Clare Rishbeth at Sheffield for being an inspiration, sounding board and 'partner-in-crime'; Sarah Neal for coffee, integrity and enthusiasm; and ... countless others - friends, family and 'strangers' – whose words or actions have prompted thought and nudged the journey along.

She is deeply indebted to Ash, Mike and Mike for their supervision, patience and understanding.

And to BZDj, for being there - and enabling her to *not* be there on far too many occasions – love always.

# 1. MULTICULTURAL COUNTRY/SIDE?

“Who is the ‘we’ of the nation if ‘they’ are here to stay?”

Ahmed (2000:101)

## Introduction

The 2001 Census re-confirmed an already well-known fact, that England *is* a multi-ethnic and multicultural society: Census figures show that “minority ethnic groups in England made up 9.1% of the total population”, with 8.6% of the ‘minority ethnic groups’ coming from Asian, African Caribbean, Chinese or mixed backgrounds (ONS, 2003). Indeed, there has been much recent discussion about ethnicity, difference and citizenship within academia, among policy makers and across the wider public realm in the UK. The Runnymede Trust’s “The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain” report (Parekh, 2000a), in particular, addresses the complex political and social issues surrounding identity, citizenship, difference, cohesion and equality (see also Alibhai-Brown, 2000; Kundnani, 2001).

Indeed, debate regarding ethnicity and national identity in England has been established for some time, and continues to build. Gilroy (1987) clearly outlines the prejudices and racism caught up in the dominant identification with and construction of Englishness/Britishness. Brah *et al.* (1999) interrogate the production of singular and fixed identity, highlighting that multiple and contradictory claims to nationality are made by people across and within a diverse range of ‘ethnic minority’ backgrounds – claims complicated by diasporic movements, globalisation and syncretism. Hesse (2000) critically examines the complacency of a too-easily referenced ‘multiculturalism’ that can be ‘named, valued, celebrated and repudiated’ from diverse political perspectives, and, through an analysis of transnational processes and ‘cultural entanglements’, challenges the notion that national identity formations are ever logical, coherent, unitary or tidy. Within this debate, the heterogeneous nature of national identity construction processes are highlighted as entangled with England’s colonial history: for Said (1994), this suggests a need to consider ‘overlapping territories’ and ‘intertwined histories’ alongside difference. At the same time, emerging new ethnicities and the decentring of the ‘black subject’ problematises the concept of ‘having’ an identity at all (Hall, 1992).

What constitutes national identity for visible communities in contemporary England, then, involves complex negotiations between self, society and space. There is the added complication regarding the relevancy of national identity in an increasingly globalised world (see Sarup, 1998). However, many argue that national identity, in the main, prevails and that "hierarchical orders of identity will not quickly disappear" (Robins, 1991). Indeed, recent upsurges in anti-asylum rhetoric in the media, the rise of the British National Party, and the strong opposition voiced to closer ties with Europe, suggest that national identity is not yet the waning force that some post-structuralist theory would suggest. Furthermore, fluid and multiple understandings of nationality - *not* tied to static spatial and cultural signposts - can themselves produce discursive and affective foci for 'reclaiming a sense of situatedness' (Edensor, 2002), and national identity invoked as a 'changing same' (Gilroy, 1994).

Debate surrounding national belonging, ethnicity and cultural diversity, though, is invariably connected to the urban sphere. What concerns this thesis is that the dominant representation of the English countryside continues to portray a racialised (white) country scene as a symbol of idyllic innocence and, crucially, as repository of a 'true', originary Englishness (Matless, 1998; Short, 1991). That is, the English countryside has been and continues to be represented and interpreted as the 'real' England for 'real' English people, in a construction that appropriates 'real' as 'white'. The perceived absence of visible communities in rural spaces - as visitors, residents or in its symbolism - continues to belie the description of English society as multi-ethnic (Agyeman & Spooner, 1997; Sharma, 1993; Malik, 1992). As a result, the English countryside currently appears to play no significant role in advancing the understanding of England as a multicultural country. Rather, the national imagery of rural space would seem to exclude a range of groups from accessing the countryside, both physically and emotionally (Clope & Little, 1997; Milbourne, 1997). This situation has, to date, generally been considered due to a variety of reasons, not least institutional neglect regarding any need to target minority groups, the strong association of a particular construction of the rural idyll within the national identity, and the reticence of 'ethnic minorities' to engage with rural space (MacFarlane *et al.*, 2000).

There is, then, a substantial gap between the burgeoning discourses of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and hybrid, multiple and shifting identities, and the 'traditional' institutional representation and social understanding of and practices in rural public space. The urban is where multiculturalism is found/understood, while the rural remains monocultural (namely 'white') within academic, popular and policy

discourses. Moreover, the connection between the rural as the genuine England *and not* multicultural is replayed and reiterated throughout representations of Englishness:

“the assumption prevails that rural England was the essential England, and urban England, by contrast, an accident, a concession to progress or even a spiritual sham.”

(Scruton, 2001:234)

This has serious implications for the analysis of the processes, peoples and places involved in the construction of the national cultural imaginary, and the practical measures that may be taken to open up rural public spaces to excluded groups. Neal (2002) highlights the policy impotence and arrogance in rural areas, regarding the relevancy of ethnicity as a rural concern.

Theory relating the racialisation of the countryside to the absence of visible communities in rural areas has been important in opening up debates about racism and social exclusion in the countryside. However, there has been a lack of empirical work to examine these issues further: visible communities are perhaps too easily theorised and written as excluded others. Indeed, Little (1999:438) critiques the use of the term ‘rural others’ in general, concerned about “the lack of theoretical discussion around ‘the other’ and ‘the same’”, the paucity of recognition of the power relations complicit in such a categorisation, and the “static treatment of both individual and group identity”. When used with regards to visible communities specifically, the term is intended to recognise the structural inequalities and cultural prejudices that non-white people face in English society - inequalities and prejudices that both constitute and are reinforced by a dominant racialised version of the countryside.

But academic work in the area of ethnicity and rurality in England has tended to build on itself<sup>1</sup>. Discussion primarily reiterates the ways in which the countryside is racialised (relying heavily on the work of Agyeman, Sharma and Malik, *op. cit.*); (re)discusses Ingrid Pollard's ground-breaking photography of ‘black people in the countryside’ (1989); or (re)examines the work of the Black Environment Network (BEN)<sup>2</sup>. Meanwhile, national parks (and countryside organisations more widely) state that visible communities do not visit rural areas, but do not include questions regarding ethnic background in their visitor surveys. Furthermore, conceptualisation of ‘the rural’,

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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Neal (2002), and Agyeman & Neal (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Established in 1988, BEN works towards “full ethnic participation in the built and natural environment” (BEN, 2003).

both within academia and common parlance, continues to set up a dualism between countryside and city. Debates on the relationality of space and place, and notions of interconnections between different regions/localities, have yet to influence theorisation or policy related to Englishness, ethnicity and rurality. For example, the ways in which national parks, country parks and urban parks - as well as less formal urban fringe nature areas and city centre green spaces - impact on and are incorporated into people's ideas of identity, senses of belonging and day-to-day practices should be explored as parts of a whole, rather than as separate influences/places. That is, the countryside is one part of a broader national whole, within which other natural (and also non-natural) spaces figure, and, as such, thinking about rurality as country/side enables a more holistic examination of what it may mean for visible communities to identify as English, and whether or not they feel excluded from rural areas.

This PhD begins to address both the theoretical and empirical gaps, by engaging with people from visible community backgrounds to explore perceptions of the countryside and constructions of ethnic and national identity, and how these identities correlate with the presiding stereotypes of rural identities and visible community absence from the English national parks.

As such, the PhD study focused on the perceptions and use of the North York Moors and Peak District national parks by visible communities resident in the proximate cities of Middlesbrough and Sheffield respectively<sup>3</sup>. In order to place the issues explored throughout the thesis in context, it is important to first introduce the national parks in general terms, and the North York Moors and Peak District more specifically.

### **The national parks**

The national parks of England and Wales were originally designated under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. This Act followed a growth in pressure groups from the 1920s onwards, concerned with rural recreation, access and landscape protection (eg. the Ramblers Association, the Youth Hostel Association), and led to the Addison Committee Report (1931) on the feasibility of national parks in England and Wales. In 1932, a mass trespass on Kinder Scout (an area in the Peak District) was staged by activists demanding free access to privately owned rural areas for the general public, in particular the urban-bound working classes. In 1945, delayed because of war, the Dower Report finally recommended the designation of national

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<sup>3</sup> Methodological choices are discussed in chapter 4.

parks, which should be “extensive tracts of beautiful and wild countryside which would provide scope for open air recreation”. Seven parks in England were provided for in the 1949 Act, to be under the administrative control of the County Council having the largest area in each park, except the Peak District and Lake District, which were independent Authorities from their designation.

After review, the 1995 Environment Act re-created all national parks as free standing public authority bodies, and amended the statutory responsibilities they must adhere to. National parks currently work to ‘twin purposes’:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the national parks; and
- to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the parks by the public.

In addition, national parks have a duty, in pursuing the twin purposes, to “seek to foster the economic and social well being of local communities” (section 62 under the Act). Conflict can arise between the parks’ twin purposes, and between purposes and duty. In such situations, the Sandford Committee (1974) recommended that “where irreconcilable conflicts exist between conservation and public enjoyment, then conservation interests should take priority”.

There are currently nine national parks in England, in total covering 13,877 square kilometres (5,360 square miles) – almost 10% of the country (ANPA, 2004: see Figure 1). They incorporate moorland, mountains, lakes, woodland, farmland, coastline, scenic villages and small market towns. Importantly – and unlike national parks in many other countries - they are working landscapes in which people live. They remain predominantly privately owned but *publicly funded*, receiving an annual Secretary of State approved grant, of which 75% comes from central government and 25% from the relevant local authorities. However, national parks must also raise funds to the amount of approximately 80% of their approved grant to operate effectively (NYM, 2004). This is commonly through applications to bodies such as the European Union, and from authority revenues such as planning application fees, car parking charges, etc.

The national parks are their own local authorities, responsible for the governance and strategic planning in their areas. Each National Park Authority has a two-tier structure. The *National Park Authority Committee* is made up of both locally elected and central government-appointed Members, (roughly in a ratio of 2:1 respectively). The Authority

Committee Members are responsible for policy-making and budget allocation. The *National Park Authorities* are the staffed organisations responsible to the Authority Committees, who undertake the day-to-day decision-making and policy implementation. Throughout the thesis, I use the term 'national parks' generally to incorporate both the Committee and employee-run body, and phrases such as 'Committee Members' or 'members of staff' specifically when distinguishing between separate parts of the National Park Authorities.

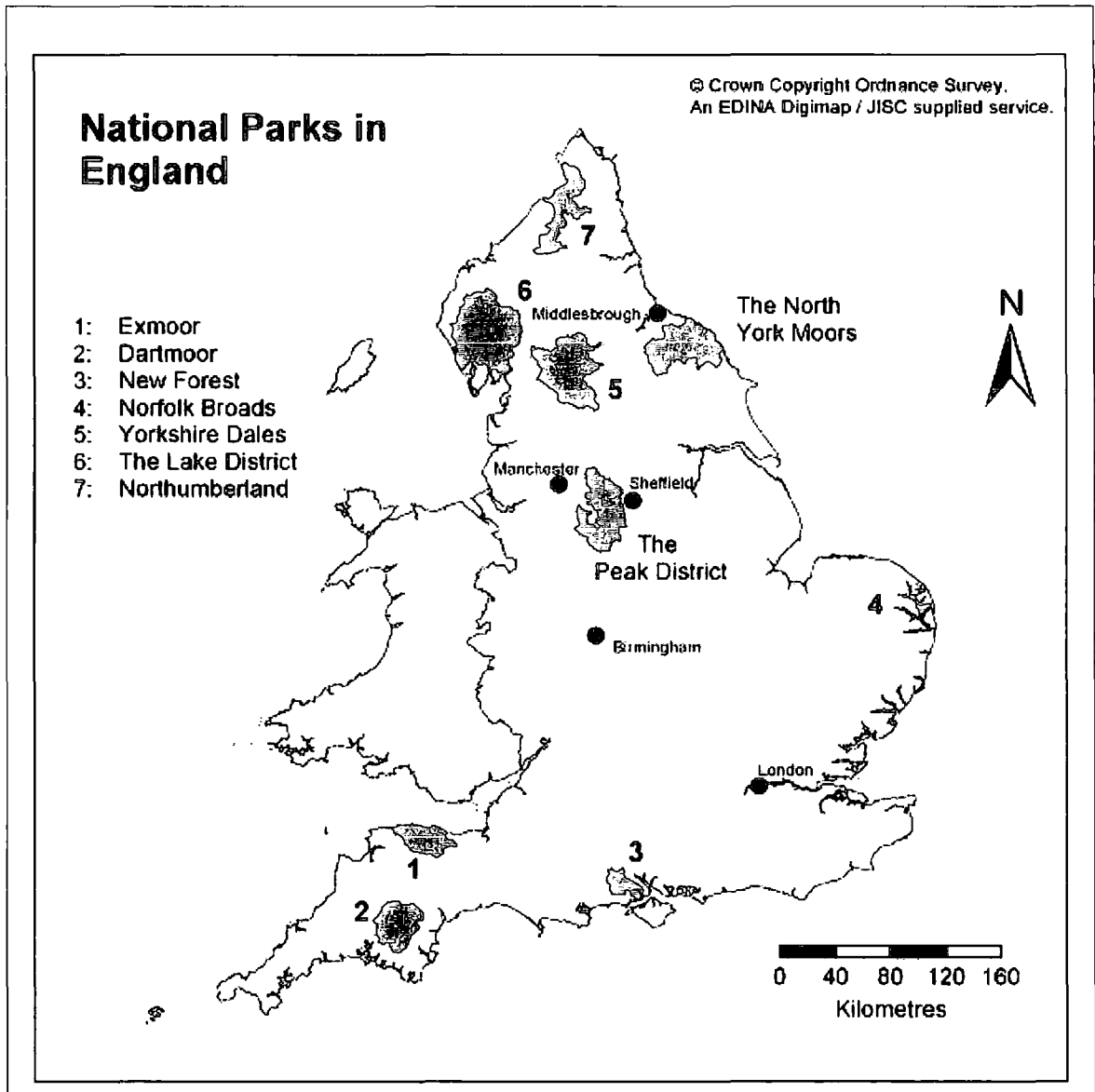


Figure 1: Map of the national parks in England.

### The Peak District national park (PD)

The PD was the first national park to be designated, in 1951. It has a population of around 38,000 people living in 1,435 square kilometres (555 square miles), of which



72.3% is privately owned, 13% owned by water companies and 9.6% by the National Trust. It is located at the southern end of the Pennines in close proximity to several large conurbations: roughly a third of the English population lives within an hour's travel of the PD (ANPA, 2004). Due to its accessibility and position at the heart of England, it is conservatively estimated to receive 22 million visitors per year, making it the second most visited national park in the world<sup>4</sup>. See Figure 2.

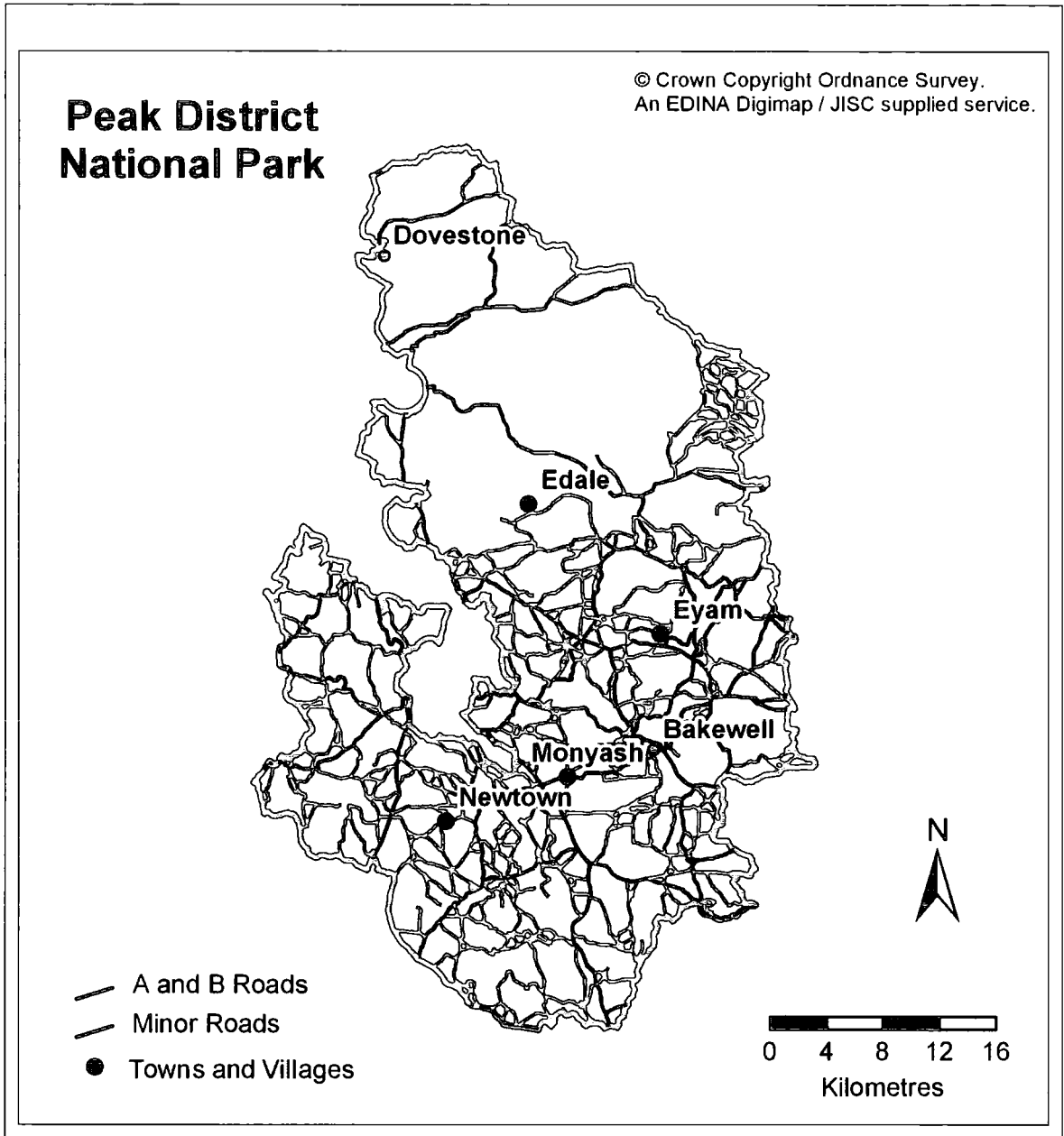


Figure 2: Map of the Peak District national park.

<sup>4</sup> After Mount Fuji in Japan.

"In landscape terms there are two distinct Peak districts: the White Peak, which takes its name from the underlying limestone rocks, is characterised by broad, rolling plateau, river valleys and dramatic craggy dales; the Dark Peak, named after the millstone grit rocks, covers the highest and wildest parts of the Park, which are fringed with steep edges and weathered tors. In between these two distinct landscapes are the broad, tree lined valleys of the rivers Derwent and Wye, home to some of the largest settlements in the Park including the market town of Bakewell – home to the National Park Authority – and the stately homes of Chatsworth and Haddon. There are over 1,600 miles of public rights of way and the Park has some of the most popular climbing areas in the UK. The highest peak in the Park is Kinder Scout, at 636m. Major industries range from farming and mineral extraction to tourism."

(Association of National Park Authorities, 2004)

The city of Sheffield is one of the urban areas neighbouring the PD – indeed, part of the PD falls within the public authority of Sheffield City Council. Sheffield has a total population of just over 610,000, of whom 8.8% identify as from non-white backgrounds: the largest visible community groups in Sheffield are 'Asian – Pakistani' (3.1% of the total population) and 'Black Caribbean' (1% of total) (ONS, 2003).

#### The North York Moors national park (NYM)

The NYM was designated a national park in 1952. It covers an area of 1,432 square kilometres (554 square miles), and has a population of approximately 25,500. 79.9% is privately owned, while 16.6% belongs to the Forestry Commission. It is located in the north east of England, and received 9.5 million visitors in 2003 (NYM, 2004). See Figure 3 above.

"The North York Moors is famed for the most extensive tract of unenclosed heather moorland in England. This patchwork of upland heath, blanket bog and mire is an internationally important home for merlin and golden plover [bird species]. The high moorland is dissected by an amazing variety of dales. Some are wide and grassy, a unique landscape of drystone walls and hedges - created by generations of farmers. Others are narrow and secluded, with woodland clinging to steep sides. From the bluebell speckled ancient woods and farmed dales crisscrossed with drystone wall to tumbling fishing villages and curved-billed curlews, the area deserves all the care we can bestow upon it."

(Association of National Park Authorities, 2004)

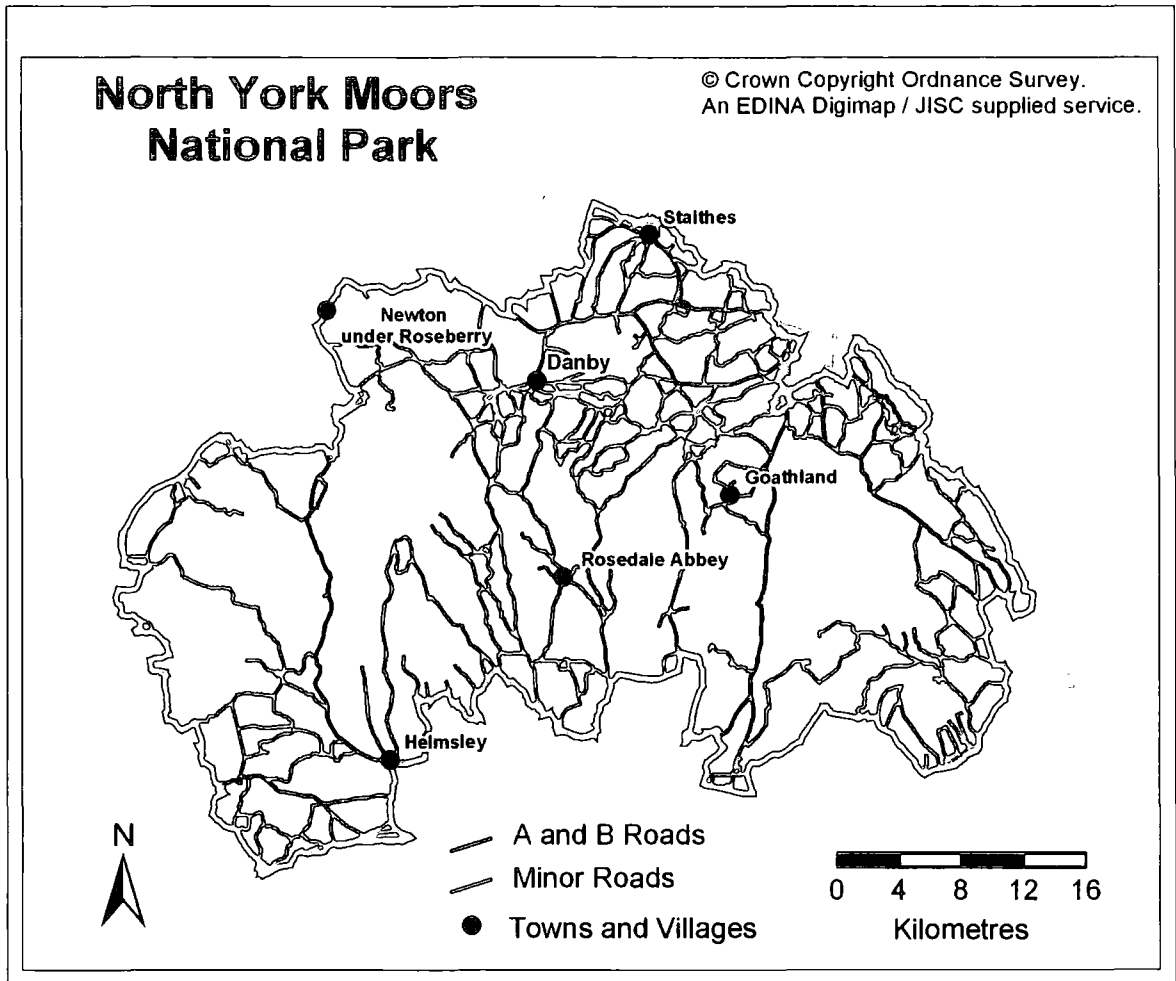


Figure 3: Map of the North York Moors national park.

The city of Middlesbrough borders the NYM to the north, with the park boundary just eight miles from the centre of the city. Middlesbrough has a total population of 200,000, with 6.3% of these coming from non-white backgrounds. The largest visible community group in the city is 'Asian – Pakistani' (3.6% of total).

With the PD/Sheffield and NYM/Middlesbrough as study sites, the research set out to engage with people from visible community backgrounds to explore perceptions of the countryside and constructions of ethnic and national identities – to address the empirical gap outlined previously. This thesis addresses several principal aims and objectives that emanated from the relevant academic literature, as well as national park comment, and were refined through both the process of fieldwork and the analysis of materials generated 'in the field'; inevitably, the research aims and objectives shifted over time and with experience (see chapter 4). Likewise, the many questions raised throughout the course of the PhD were constantly developed, and continue to evolve even through the writing of the thesis. It is necessary at this point, though, to outline the

key concerns that were/are drivers of the PhD research, and list the primary aspirations of the thesis itself.

### **Key thesis aims**

- to explore the use of the English national parks by people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds;
- to investigate how access to the parks may/may not be restricted for visible communities – in physical, perceptual and cultural terms;
- to unpack the ways in which practices of rural recreation impact upon processes of ethnic and national identity construction;
- to consider whether/how visible community identity formations impact upon those of the dominant white cultural psyche; and
- to examine the ways in which the social and political experiences of visible communities may be implicated in cultural productions of identity and practices of rural recreation.

### **Key thesis objectives**

- to contribute to current academic discourse on 'multiculturalism', by focusing on the contested cultural symbolism of English rurality and its significance within the production of national identity among visible communities;
- to develop an epistemological framework from which to inform national park policy regarding visible community involvement with and access to the parks;
- to likewise inform the wider policy debate regarding equality of opportunity, cultural interaction and the inclusive use of public space in England.

### **Research questions**

The questions presented here are the principal questions to which *this thesis* is addressed. However, it should be appreciated that the research questions have, as will particularly be emphasised when discussing methodological issues (see chapter 4), evolved through the course of the study: changing, merging, separating and dis/appearing in response to ongoing engagement with theoretical perspectives, empirical experiences and data analysis.

### Visible communities in the national parks

- what evidence is available regarding visible community use of the national parks?
- are there similarities/differences in perceptions and use of the English countryside between and/or across Asian and African Caribbean groups?
- do perceptions and use among visible communities correlate with factors other than ethnicity (eg. gender, class, age)?
- is frequency and pattern of use of the national parks comparable across the North York Moors and Peak District, and/or specific localities within them?

### The construction of nature

- How is nature imagined by those visible communities participating in the research?
- do such productions differ from the dominant constructions of nature within national park narratives?
- do visible community constructions of nature and the countryside correlate with visible community perceptions of the English national parks?
- how are understandings of nature implicated in processes of ethnic and national identity formation and belonging?

### Identity and space

- how does being in/experiencing the countryside impact on ethnic and cultural values, practices and identities?
- can a wide range of cultural practices be negotiated within national park ideology?
- what are the connections between national and ethnic senses of belonging and attachment to rural space?
- what role does rural space play in social relations between people from different ethnic backgrounds in England?

The thesis speaks to the principal aims and objectives and research questions, through an engagement with the relevant academic literature and a close reading of the materials generated by the empirical research. The thesis broadly consists of four sections: an interrogation of the theoretical takes on ethnicity, national identity and the English countryside; an exploration of the methodological issues raised by and encountered in the fieldwork; detailed discussion of the data generated by the empirical research; and a normative reflection that draws upon the previous three segments of the thesis. These sections are introduced in more depth below.

### **Thesis overview and outline**

There is one overarching issue that emerges consistently through the thesis – speaking through the literature review, the fieldwork experiences and the themes arising from the empirical materials. Namely, that there is a need to hold the structures of day-to-day

life that affect visible communities - and the power differentials implicated in those structures – in tension with relational understandings and performances of identity involved in people's everyday negotiations in society. Arguments for the importance of only 'the political' or 'the social' in understanding issues of social and spatial exclusion fall short, since they cannot encapsulate the complex interconnections between cultural constructions/performances of identity and structural impositions on those constructions. This thesis argues that focusing solely on structure and social positioning denies heterogeneity intra- and across visible community groups as well as individual agency; being only concerned with cultural relativity hides and excuses the social inequalities rooted in England's colonial past. *Either of these approaches alone, then, risks complicity in reiterating and maintaining visible communities' position as marginal, peripheral, minority, in England and in the English countryside.*

As such, the thesis presents essentialist readings of both identity and place, but as woven through with plurality, hybridity and movement. I will argue, both explicitly and implicitly, for the need to hold both the social and cultural aspects of visible community access to English national parks alongside and as inter-active with each other: to hold the structural inequalities experienced in the everyday by people from non-white backgrounds in tension with a non-reductive gaze that does not routinely explain and expect visible communities to be marginalised others (from a dominant white 'norm').

**The opening part of the thesis explores the claims made in academic literature about visible communities' (non)presence in the English countryside.** There are two broadly opposing approaches to the subject of ethnicity in rural England, which I have chosen to address in turn, in order to explicate each approach and its implications for this research in detail. The first is concerned with the ways in which visible communities are constructed *as marginalized* in the rural: in the dominant social Imaginary, throughout national/natural heritage promotion, and within academic theorising and writing. The second focuses on resistance to the dominant perception of a racialised (white) rural idyll, and provides a more hybrid and fluid account of visible communities in English society.

Chapter 2 offers an overview of the first approach, emphasising the reductive conceptualisations and unproblematised productions that enable and underline a racialised rurality as inherent within Englishness, and vice versa. Starting with an examination of the 'rural idyll' as central within a particular, dominant discourse of Englishness, chapter 2 highlights the ways in which a racialised rural has retained its

dominance in ideas of national identity. It explores, in particular, the spatial and temporal aspects of a mythical rural idyll as a key point of reference within national identity, asserting that this rural idyll as Englishness has played a major role in defining the 'other' as different, as minority and as marginal. At this point, the thesis argues that issues regarding multi-ethnicity and the English countryside cannot be examined without considering how stereotypes are produced and reiterated regarding who does and does not 'belong' in a specific space, and I outline psychoanalytical concepts that offer useful insights into the construction of 'self' identity and the production of the 'other'. These concepts are related to the boundary drawing processes involved in the production of the rural as essential within Englishness, and visible communities as an 'othered' group in rural space. Furthermore, chapter 2 contends that there are power imbalances inherent in social relations, which serve to instigate and perpetuate processes of emotional and physical exclusion, and position visible communities as 'other' in white rural symbolism.

The practical implications of such thinking are examined through a consideration of the images and language used to promote natural heritage (by national parks and other organisations), and the implicit understandings regarding who is/can be English underlying their use. This discussion is extended to explore ideas of belonging in and attachment to the countryside from visible community perspectives, via exploration of the construction of nature across ethnic groups. I highlight a tendency within relevant policy arenas to assume that perceptions of nature among visible communities differ from those of white communities, because of an understood absolute ethnic difference, and argue that such reductive elisions limit visible community ownership of natural heritage and access to national parks, by always and only reproducing otherness.

Chapter 3 centres on the resistance and challenges to the political and structural representations of ethnicity, rurality and nationality examined in chapter 2. In order to deconstruct the 'white rural idyll', chapter 3 begins with an interrogation of alternative ways of reading identity, belonging and rural space, in particular through a refusal of the ontological given of the category of 'other' (or 'stranger') that writes visible communities as always already excluded. I explore the ways in which emphasis on the *role of social relations*, rather than on the visible differences of bodies, allows a shift to more mobile conceptualisations of identities and identifications. This involves a re-reading of theories that consider 'othering' in terms of the visualisation of skin, and the act of 'looking', together with thinking about de-visualising difference itself. It also

challenges static thinking rooted in absolute notions of difference, and foregrounds the transgressive practices that disrupt ways of 'knowing' visible difference.

Mindful of the power entangled in productions of the rural, though, chapter 3 warns that transgressive practices, when represented as *always and only* resistance, may be reincorporated by the hegemonic group, in order to reinforce notions of 'us' and 'them'. Notions of hybrid and multiple identities are discussed in terms of visible community constructions of nationality and cultural (non)attachment to rural space, and resistance to being 'named'/marginalised is reconsidered through the notion of 'transruptions' (Hesse, 2000). The concept of 'transruptions' is useful as it describes unsettling and *irrepressible* challenges to dominant discourse, which enable a fluid understanding of visible community non/presence in the national parks, *and* highlights the constant re-activity between exclusionary spatial representations, ethnicity and Englishness. However, it is also limited, in that transruptions – as resistance – remain caught up in the idea of centre and margin.

But transgressive practices *also* have the *potential* to move beyond such dualistic agendas, and I move on to think through the implications of reconsidering identity relationally for disrupting the category 'rural others'. Through an exploration of identity as *always becoming*, I argue for a conceptualisation of visible communities' non/presence in the English countryside beyond the presumption of presence as an attempt to contest a 'norm', and open to visible community claims to ownership of and identity through space on their own terms. Such claims raise two key theoretical concerns. First, there is a need to rethink visible communities in the national parks as reflexively embodied, to acknowledge the multiple connectivities between identity, belonging, culture and place that, crucially, restore subjectivity and agency and can incorporate change. Secondly, I contend that, since places and the embodied experiences occurring in them are mutually constitutive, rural spaces are continually (re)interpreted, and shifting experiences over time allow for changes in cultural practice among visible communities.

Alongside (re)thinking identity relationally, to further deconstruct the dominant understanding that ties a white Englishness with rurality there is also a need to (re)think space relationally. Chapter 3 explores the implications of such theorising for understanding visible communities' attachment to and belonging in space. I suggest that meaning is attached to space (as a generalised entity) as well as place (locality), and that such meaning may be transferred across a range of spatial and temporal



scales. This way of thinking enables a recognition of visible community attachment to the English countryside as fluid, hybrid and plural.

I want to stress here that the division between the structural interpretations in chapter 2 and the relational approaches in chapter 3 is simplistic, and it is in chapter 3 that the thesis first highlights the complex entanglements between essentialist and post-structural readings of ethnicity, national identity and presence in the national parks: where I first outline the need to theorise the power differentials endemic in English society and the role they play in social exclusion processes, *together with* thinking about resistance, agency and desire – and the ways in which the social and cultural intertwine.

The **second part of the thesis outlines the methodological approaches** adopted for the research. Chapter 4 recounts the quantitative and qualitative methods employed to address the research aims, objectives and questions. It describes the questionnaire surveys, interviews and participant observation techniques used in the fieldwork, the reasons behind each choice of method, and the obstacles and opportunities encountered during the course of the research.

The methods adopted for research, though, are also caught up with the theoretical issues implicated in them, as well as the wider theoretical concerns of the study. As such, chapter 4 follows Whatmore's (2003) conceptualisation of 'generating materials', which challenges the notion of 'doing research' (whereby the 'researched' are objectified) and suggests that fieldwork data are co-produced by both researcher and researched, *and the interactions between them* - understanding research not as an investigation of the world, but rather as an 'intervention in the world'. Such an approach was suggested through the literature review, in particular the need to avoid objectifying/fixing visible communities as always already known/knowable in the national parks (chapter 3). Moreover, chapter 4 highlights the ways in which experiences throughout the fieldwork itself pointed to such a co-generation of materials, continually feeding back into ongoing empirical and theoretical work. I argue that such an understanding of data as co-produced allows more inclusive interpretations of participants' positions, in particular as it suggests/enables investigation into *non-participation* (the reasons behind non-participation) within the research: participation in research is rarely free of wider societal power relations, and it is therefore important to consider non-responses as part of the material generated.

Furthermore, Whatmore's concept of generating materials incorporates the presence of non-human (as well as human) entities in research situations. Chapter 4 considers the impact of physical space on the fieldwork methodology, and argues that considering physicality as a co-generator of data allows the thesis to explore the embodied nature of research positions, dismantle the assumed distinctions between social subject and material objects reiterated through 'scientific divisions of labour', and challenge the dualism of the 'word – world settlement'. This both echoes the theoretical challenges to the dualistic construction of white rurality versus multi-ethnic urban space outlined in chapter 3, and enables a less essentialised approach to research methodology. It also suggests that the spatio-temporal imaginary of the 'field' itself is unpacked, thus chapter 4 briefly discusses the ways in which data 'analysis' and the 'writing up' of research are also implicated in the co-generation of research materials. In part as response to the latter issue, and partly as reflection on the 'politics of position' discussed in the foreward to this thesis, chapter 4 adopts the textual strategy of telling the research process as a narrative – to both foreground the subjectivity of the researcher and blur the positioning of researcher/researched.

The **third section of the thesis concentrates on the themes raised through the empirical research**. Chapter 5 starts with an examination into how visible communities are constructed by national park staff, Authority Committee Members, visitors and residents, detailing the ways in which visible communities are invariably constructed as *different* from a majority white society. Understandings of ethnicity were consistently tied to visible markers that incorporated difference as essentialised, and static cultural practices/religious beliefs attached to ethnic groups via stereotypical constructions of visible communities as an *unchanging other*. Chapter 5 outlines the boundary drawing processes involved in relating such essentialised difference to non-presence in national parks, through discourses that displace visible communities from the countryside because of assumed different cultural values from a white 'norm'. Among national park respondents, the countryside was also imagined as unchanging, and chapter 5 investigates the role that a pre-determined rural – especially as the repository of English heritage and identity - plays in reiterating visible communities as rural others. However, some national park staff and Members, in particular, displayed an awareness that the fixing of identities *is problematic*, and struggled to negotiate how they understand and approach difference.

Chapter 5 then explores the ways in which *visible communities themselves construct ethnicity in fixed and essentialised ways*, their explanations for and motivations behind

such productions, and how these identities are utilised and mobilised when thinking/accessing the rural. Central to this discussion is the research finding that **two-thirds** of visible community respondents to the urban questionnaire<sup>5</sup> in Sheffield, and **three-quarters** of those in Middlesbrough, **had never been to the English countryside**: constructions of rurality, therefore, were in the main based *only* on socialised Imaginaries. Two key issues are explored. First, that many understandings of essentialised ethnic identity were grounded in notions of *absolute difference*, in which visible communities constructed 'their' culture as always already tied to 'their' ethnicity, reinforcing stereotypical productions among visible communities regarding 'their' absence from the countryside. Secondly, that 'strategic essentialism' employs static presentations of ethnic identity *as different* within an everyday 'identity politics', aimed at resisting being positioned as marginalised but, in effect, also reiterating the 'rural other' stereotype. Chapter 5 moves on to consider how the countryside was also essentialised, and, in particular, constructed in opposition to the city, and emerged as fundamental to understandings of *spatial boundaries as fixed borders*, within both strategic and 'non-strategic' productions of essentialised ethnicity.

However, national identity formations across visible community respondents involved claims to an Englishness constructed through visible communities' *own identifications and meanings*, and suggest a far more fluid and relational reading of identity-in-place than implied through the static constructions of ethnicity and rural space. Chapter 5 argues that constructions of national identity, drawn from a diverse range of practical factors, cultural productions and ephemeral values, blunt the 'English countryside as cornerstone of Englishness' narrative and refuse any presumption connecting ethnic identity with specific conceptions of nationality. The overall tone in chapter 5, then, is that essentialised understandings of self, society and space are deeply embedded in individuals across white and visible communities, but that such static positions and positioning are, at times and in specific contexts, negotiated in somewhat less reductive ways with more open and porous outcomes.

Chapter 6 begins by highlighting that visible communities *are* visiting national parks, refuting the presiding stereotype of visible community absence from the countryside. In addition, the research uncovered homogeneity across visible community and white participants in terms of the values attributed to being in the countryside, unsettling the stereotypical reasons given for this absence. A closer examination of visible community

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<sup>5</sup> See chapter 4 regarding quantitative methods employed in the research.

visitor patterns and values, however, points to entanglements between ethnicity and gender, socio-economic and generational positions, and the chapter argues that visible community presence in the countryside was, for some respondents, limited by complicated interconnections between their visibility, class, gender and age. Chapter 6 outlines that for others, though, presence in the national parks actively deconstructed the notion of the rural as the repository of a particular frozen image of Englishness, or even of Englishness itself. I show how the qualitative research and, in particular, participant observation suggest that visible community access to the rural is tied to *cultural practices grounded in everyday experiences* - and *places* of experience - rather than in any absolute ethnic difference. In addition, I argue that the *habitual places of cultural practice* are bound up with issues of visibility and exclusion for the majority of visible community respondents, rather than any specific essentialised space.

Chapter 6 next considers visible community constructions of Englishness, and how rurality is implicated in/extricated from national identity formation – picking up the discussion regarding claims to national identity made through visible communities' own imaginaries and meanings from chapter 5. Chapter 6 contends that ethnicity and nationality are highly contested and resisted productions, and visible community identities claimed and reclaimed across space and time. The research also revealed a flexibility of identity that disrupts any 'easy' reading of attachment and belonging in the English countryside, and the chapter highlights the impossibility of correlating attachment to the countryside with feelings of 'belonging', and vice versa. Furthermore, chapter 6 maintains that a sense of being comfortable in the countryside is *not* synonymous with either attachment or belonging, and that a negative reception in the countryside does not *necessarily* prohibit the ability to feel a sense of attachment or belonging there. These factors deny the construction of visible communities as marginalised in the national parks *because* they perceive themselves as unwelcome due to their ethnic difference from the majority.

Chapter 6 also explores the notion of the countryside as a dynamic place. There was some evidence that national parks are conceived as changing and multiple ruralities, suggesting relational connections between national parks and other places. The pivotal role played by *social relations* between 'different' social groups *across different environments* is emphasised, and the chapter discusses how interactions between visible communities and 'others' in the national parks offer the potential to deconstruct stereotypes built upon static notions of certain people (only) in certain places. However, it also warns that encounters do not automatically shift entrenched, socialised relations,

and that always already assumptions may be reiterated and further ingrained on both sides.

Chapters 5 and 6, then, divide the themes that emerged into roughly two camps: those that are founded on/reflect essentialist opinions and ontologies; and more progressive, anti-structural views and beliefs. As emphasised regarding chapters 2 and 3, the split in thematic outline is somewhat superficial, and the themes work with, against and through each other across the chapters. The thesis argues that there is a need to ensure both 'real' and 'perceived' barriers are addressed in ways that respond to fixed as well as shifting positions.

**The final part of the thesis deals with the normative work emerging from the thesis**, and takes its key arguments from across the preceding chapters. Chapter 7, contending the need to move away from time-bounded, essentialist projects that 'victimise' visible communities to open and fluid policy that (necessarily) target specific groups but in non-reductive ways, explores how negotiating between and across the 'social' and 'cultural' may move us towards a transformative politics of place and identity. I draw on the theoretical and empirical work detailed in the thesis to argue for a paradigm shift in how Englishness, ethnicity and rural space are understood and managed, to a perspective that eschews a central, fixed and unquestioned version of national identity and belonging rooted in a white rural idyll. However, as the materials generated through this research testify, any 'final pronouncements' are likely to be highly contested, fragile arrangements, which should be employed as temporary jumping off points in current debates and practices. As such, the content of this chapter surrounds the evolution of an inclusive, progressive version of visible communities in the English national parks, while the tone is one of ongoing revision rather than conclusion.

Chapter 7 follows two over-arching strands of argument. The first strand of reasoning is identity-based, and the chapter opens by examining an engagement with otherness that refuses a dominant gaze while/through acknowledging the *impossibility and possibility* of sameness between self and other. Highlighting the **impossibility** of similarity foregrounds the political reality of inequality between people from different ethnic backgrounds in English society, and I outline the need for national parks to embrace 'positive action' programmes that proactively reach out to visible communities in order to redress the imbalances within countryside visitor and employee profiles. At the same time, in recognition of the **possibility** of overlap across ethnicity, I explore

how national parks may develop such 'positive action' projects without essentialising or fetishising visible communities through the concept of 'monsters'. In particular, Ruddick's (2004) conceptualisation of monsters *in and out of place* is employed to exemplify the ways in which we may approach, both theoretically and in policy/practice, visible communities as *excluded from and present in* the English countryside.

Through this discussion, the chapter moves on to describe the necessity of adopting an agonistic approach to policy. Agonistic politics acknowledge the aim of consensus within democratic debate but without the expectation of ultimate agreement or of a universal value system. Such agonism, I argue, must draw on theories that work with a model of community as a rights-based political community (after Parekh, 2000a) while also recognising that ethnic/cultural/religious or even locality-based communities, who adopt a range of territory restricting and restrictive discourses, play a strong role in individual identity construction.

The second over-arching strand is space- and place-centred. Focusing on the relationality of the countryside - viewing the rural as within a web of spaces on different scales - the chapter argues that a serious commitment to conceiving space relationally is needed to shift exclusive constructions of national belonging and ethnic difference in contemporary England. However, since the perceived existence of a rural/urban divide was strongly felt among research participants, I suggest that an agonistic approach to thinking national parks needs to also acknowledge understandings of essentialised and different spaces as irreconcilable to each other, as well as *interdependent with* ideas of space as porous, mobile, and plural.

As part of this project, chapter 7 revisits the potential of encounters to facilitate the disruption of stereotypes, and accentuates the importance of the *places of encounter* in such a transformative process. I tackle two specific issues in the context of this research. The first involves the implications of conceiving the rural as a *relational space* for national park policy and practice that works to enable positive encounters. In particular, I call for the national parks to work *outside* as well as inside their boundaries: to undertake 'outreach' work and facilitate two-way encounters between rural and urban residents in both the countryside and the city.

The second surrounds envisioning national parks as *spaces of encounter*, as sites of potential *and* habitual inter-ethnic and inter-cultural negotiation, which entails holding onto the specificity of 'the rural' while de-privileging the urban as the site of multi-

ethnicity and multiculturalism in England. I discuss the usefulness of thinking about 'prosaic sites of negotiation' (Amin, 2002), which offer the potentiality for new connections and meanings through encounter, to re-envisage national parks as places open to transformative encounters. I address the mentality and measures that need to be adopted by national parks, in order to move towards parks as sites of negotiation, if not prosaically at least habitually - or in ways that enable habituality. For this to happen, chapter 7 argues that thinking the rural must engage with notions of multi-ethnic and multicultural citizenship and nationality. Moreover, the thesis suggests that work regarding ethnicity, citizenship and national identity must engage with the rural, in order to avoid the tendency to always already (re)site issues of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism only in the city: I call for the English countryside to be rescued as a potential site of multi-ethnicity, and citizenship conceived *across* boundaries of rural and urban space. Integral to such a project, I argue that Englishness itself must be recognised as *not only* white, if the 'racialised rural idyll' stereotype is to lose its relevance.

### **Addenda**

The term 'rural others' is used throughout the thesis, to identify individuals and groups who are commonly socially excluded from rural space, both physically and emotionally. This phrase is well established in rural geography literature, and is often employed as a general 'umbrella term' that incorporates a range of people who may be marginalised in/from rural areas for a range of reasons. There are two key points I wish to make here. The first is that there are other 'others' in relation to rural space – among and as well as visible communities. The rural poor, homeless, travellers, the elderly, the young, people with disabilities, etc. are also othered/stereotyped via the same, similar and separate processes as those described in this thesis. Such complexities should be kept in mind when considering the focus of this research on 'one' excluded group from the countryside.

In addition, as highlighted at the start of the thesis, the homogenisation of a wide variety of visible community groups into a single category is problematic at the very least, and potentially does violence to those the thesis would wish to enable. Such telescoping also affects the diverse range of non-visible communities grouped into the 'white majority'. These issues are recurrent throughout the thesis, whether or not explicitly stated at every step, and it is *not* my intention to fetishise or reify visible difference from the dominant white majority.

Furthermore, due to the complexity of the issues encapsulated within notions of ethnicity, national identity and rural space in England, the research, from its outset, specifically did not attempt to address issues regarding Welsh, Scottish or Irish identity as well as Englishness. The thesis does not, therefore, engage with these latter identities. This is not meant to either subsume or parochialise national parks in Wales or Scotland, or the countryside in Ireland, in any comparison with English rurality. These countries have their own particular issues to work through regarding national identity and visible community access. On occasion, the terms 'British' or 'Britishness' are used: this is where they have been employed within academic work referenced or identified by research participants themselves.



## 2. WHITE RURALITY

“At a national level, I have become satisfied that there is some evidence for a series of circulated meanings associated with the rural idyll drawing on the settlements and landscapes of a mythically timeless and natural England. These meanings, though very difficult to pin down, point to rurality as an ‘other’ world – bucolic, problem-free, natural, happy, healthy. ... a nostalgic return to the natural roots of the nation ...”

(Cloke, 1994:177)

There is an ever-growing body of work concerned with identity, belonging and rural space. Much of this literature focuses on the notion of a ‘rural idyll’, its enduring place at the heart of constructions of Englishness, and its role in (natural) national heritage representations. More recently, there has been an emphasis on deconstructing the rural idyll through examinations of a range of groups/people who are marginalised in the countryside (Cloke & Little, 1997; Milbourne, 1997; Little, 1999), via thinking about ‘difference’ and the construction of the ‘other’ in relation to the ‘self’. In particular, productions of the rural idyll as a central essence of a racialised Englishness in the majority social psyche have been linked with the exclusion of visible communities from the countryside (Agyeman, 1995; Kinsman, 1995; Agyeman & Spooner, 1997; Neal, 2002). This chapter sets out to explore in detail the construction of the English countryside via the concept of the rural idyll, its place in national identity building and its durability as a key signifier of Englishness, with a focus on the ways in which these processes serve to racialise rural England as white (only) and impact upon visible communities’ perceptions and use of the countryside.

Examining the role of ‘white rurality’ in conceptions of Englishness, the chapter prioritises national identity as a central social construction. In a globalised world, it can be argued that the nation and national identity are decreasingly relevant (Waters, 1995). However, this chapter contends that national identity is an important influence on the construction of self-identity, through formative phases of personal development and the ongoing social reaffirmation of identity: national identity is formed and reformed in relation to social understandings and representations of it by others (Jackson & Penrose, 1993). Hall *et al.* (1992) theorise the nation as something that produces meanings, a system of cultural representation, within which the identity of social groups is dependent on the establishment of other social groups relationally to themselves (Brah *et al.*, 1999). Moreover, national identity may stem from the sharing of a *symbolic* repertoire, but:

“people ... *believe* in it – in the sense of organising their lives in reference to it – it is not only socially ‘real’, it is *consequential*. And sometimes very powerfully consequential.”

(Jenkins, 2004:111, emphasis added)

The notion that national identity has ‘real’ consequences resonates throughout this chapter, especially with regard to the exclusion of some groups and inclusion of others in rural landscapes. While the chapter focuses on construction and perceptions, then, the potential *consequences* must also be born in mind.

The chapter opens with an examination of the rural idyll as central within a dominant racialised discourse of Englishness. It then explores how this rural has retained its dominance in ideas of national identity, in order to unpack the processes of exclusion attached to/enabled by these constructions. The chapter argues that the spatial and temporal aspects of a mythologised rural idyll are integral to the countryside’s definitive role within nostalgic national heritage promotion - reiterating the rural as England, Englishness as inherently tied to the rural, and both place and identity as implicitly white. The idea of the rural idyll is then discussed in terms of concepts of ‘difference’, ‘otherness’ and the boundary drawing involved in identity construction, since stereotypes regarding who does and does not ‘belong’ in a specific space stem from the construction of self identity and the relative production of the ‘other’. Furthermore, the chapter contends that it is crucial to consider the power imbalances caught up in such social relations, as they underlie emotional and physical exclusion and are therefore implicated in visible communities’ perceptions and use of the English national parks.

The chapter then employs a psychoanalytical model to explore issues of visible community difference and rural ‘otherness’, since concepts such as ‘objects relations theory’, ‘abjection’ and ‘projection’ are specifically concerned with identity construction and boundary forming processes, and thus useful in understanding how stereotypes constructing visible communities as marginalised in rural space are produced and maintained. In particular, the chapter examines the ways in which the conception of ‘natural/national heritage’ within national park ideology, and representations of nature in its literature, are tied to implicit understandings regarding who is/can be English, and therefore implicated in exclusionary relationships between rurality, nationality and ethnicity. In addition, the literature reveals a tendency to assume that perceptions of nature among visible communities differ from those of white communities because of

an *understood absolute ethnic difference*. Such an essentialised elision of cultural values with ethnicity, the chapter suggests, further limit visible community ownership of natural heritage and access to national parks by reproducing otherness.

In overview, this chapter is concerned with the ways in which visible communities are constructed in various strands of thought as marginalized in the rural: in the dominant social Imaginary; throughout national/natural heritage promotion; and also within academic theorising and writing. Across these strands there is an essentialist emphasis on the production of a racialised rurality as inherent in Englishness, and vice versa, with such social imaginations translated into geographical reality by the structural inequalities in English society. The chapter is not intended to imply that these white rural images go unquestioned or uncontested, by visible communities themselves or national park/countryside practitioners - resistance and challenge are central themes in the following chapter. The purpose here is to engage with the very historicity of the construction of the white rural idyll that the chapter outlines.

### **Englishness and the rural idyll: a place for visible communities?**

#### The rural idyll and national identity

It is often argued that rural landscapes are commonly read as 'selective shorthand' for a nation, as "synecdoches through which they are recognised globally" (Edensor, 2002:40) *because* they are understood as such within the nation. Rural landscapes are charged with symbolic meaning, powerful signifiers of and for the nation. Attitudes towards the English countryside have historically been shaped by a pastoral response, with the 'rural idyll' portraying an idealised picture of a country scene. This rural idyll scene, as a symbol of innocence recaptured through memory/imagination, has become mythologized within the national psyche as shorthand for England itself (Short, 1991; Matless, 1998). Various reasons are given for the emergence and endurance of this myth. A central argument is that the rural idyll has been *spatially conceived*: images of contented 'swains' living in harmony with nature (from Milton and Constable through to Merchant Ivory films), in contrast to the degradation of city life, have been consistent over several centuries. Indeed, Williams' (1973) central theme is that 'The Country' has always been conceived as a counterpoint to 'The City', suggesting that these terms are dialectically constructed in direct opposition to each other. Moreover, he contends that, throughout history, the construction of the countryside idyll has been as superior to its

contemporary urban society – the tranquillity, naturalness and civility of the rural as physically and morally above the noise, pollution and degradation of the city.

The treatment of the countryside as an undifferentiated landscape is misleading, however. Rutherford (1997) discusses a dualism between different countrysides in the south and north of England. The south's rolling green hills, thatched cottage villages, hedgerows, patchwork fields and winding lanes are portrayed as the chocolate box-friendly version of rurality that is Englishness personified, while the north is often represented and understood as harsh, desolate and windswept, tied to an alternative version of Englishness. The latter – a masculine, outdoor-loving, hardy, hiking-over-the-moors Englishness – is inherently connected with the initial designation of the first national parks in the north of England, in which class issues are also implicit: the national parks were originally a response to working class demands for the right to access the countryside (see chapter 1). Meanwhile, the chocolate box countryside of the south conjures up a more genteel national identity attached to middle class-ness (Palmer 2002).

Rurality can be further differentiated if the more localised rural characteristics that feature in social constructions of identity and place, and relations between communities in different regions, are considered – in particular through notions of 'belonging' (Cohen, 1982). Cloke (1994) argues that regional productions of rurality are relevant as 'foci for political and cultural struggle', as well as through the mechanisms 'by which regions are marketed as a commodity'<sup>6</sup> – supported not least by reflexive re-presentations by in-migrant groups. These differentiated Imaginaries of the rural force the recognition of discontinuities and tensions between regionally circulated and nationally circulated constructs. Little (1999:440) writes that:

"The 'rural idyll' has become dangerously credited with causal powers ... It has also served to detract from the recognition of variety and, indeed, alongside the concept of 'otherness' to simplify our understanding of power relations within rural society."

There are two key issues involving such differentiated ruralities, though, which support rather than deconstruct the exclusivity of the countryside. The first is that nation building entails the absorption (or even assimilation for certain purposes) of internal diversity, with regional differences becoming subservient to (while part of) the greater national entity. That is, local distinctiveness is incorporated into a 'code of larger

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<sup>6</sup> For example: Herriot Country, Bronte Country, Hardy's Wessex, etc.

significance' (Sopher, 1979). Differences between geographically distinct parts of rural England, then, are argued to become less relevant when national identity is brought to mind. Instead, a homogenised rurality is imagined within a homogenised Englishness, largely drawn from the chocolate box/southern version. This is evident within promotional materials generated by the British Tourist Authority, for example, whose 'Visit England' campaign (BTA, 2003) prioritised rolling hills and hedgerows as emblematic of the countryside and country as a whole. Similarly, the Countryside Agency's push to encourage people back to rural areas in 2002, after the Foot and Mouth crisis, heavily featured an unthreatening thatched roof and patchwork fields version of the rural (back) under the control of man (sic). This is not to deny challenges to this chocolate box idyll as a hegemonic countryside<sup>7</sup>, but highlights how power may be exerted through images to reincorporate difference within a dominant 'norm'. A specific countryside image is continually re-circulated, enabling and reinforcing a dominant cultural construction of a specific 'rural' England and 'one true' Englishness, to the exclusion of other, competing versions.

The second issue is that productions of differentiated/regional rurals do nothing to disrupt the countryside/city binary, in that these constructions remain spatially conceived *in opposition to urban areas*. In terms of who belongs in rural space, then, and who are considered 'outsiders', differentiated ruralities perform a similar role to the rural idyll, by being produced as white spaces in opposition to multi-ethnic cities.

There are counter arguments to the idea of the rural idyll as the desired/dominant Englishness (or 'anti-myths'). Marx's ideas of 'rural idiocy' portrayed rural residents as incompetent and uncivilised, and not 'proper' examples of national character or culture. Such an anti-myth regarding rural folk and rural life as backwards also circulates in contemporary England: in 'Cool Britannia' of the 1990s<sup>8</sup>, it was the 'hip and happening' cities that were actively promoted as sites of a dynamic Englishness. Thus the rural may be portrayed as backward and bestial, and the city as cultured, civilised and central within the construction of an alternative national identity. London in particular is undoubtedly an alternative 'selective shorthand' for England and, through it, English identity. This is an 'other' Englishness, that at times incorporates and even rejoices in multi-ethnicity and cultural pluralism – but in doing so further reinforces the idea that

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<sup>7</sup> See the 'Common Ground' campaign for the preservation of local distinctiveness (Common Ground, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> An idea put forward by the incoming New Labour government, re-imaging British urban areas as positive places of economic growth and vibrant cultural exchange.

the English countryside plays no significant role in multiculturalism in this country. The difference between urban and rural space, then, is coded into different national identities, with the romanticised *gemeinschaft* of the rural idyll spatially contrasted with the *gesellschaft* of the city (Kasinitz, 1995). It is the former that is argued to remain dominant in majority lay constructions of Englishness (Agyeman & Spooner, 1997; Scruton, 2001).

The rural idyll myth has also endured thanks to its temporality: "it has become the perfect past to the imperfect present and uncertain future" (Short, 1991:31) This idea of countryside as a last remnant of some past golden age has become a cornerstone of Englishness. Daniels (1993:5) writes:

"National identities are coordinated, often largely defined, by legends and landscapes, by stories of golden ages ... located in ancient or promised homelands."

Moreover, the linear distinction between a 'now' and a 'then' shifts with time. In the 19th century people looked back with romantic notions at the 18th century, in the 20th they fondly reminisced about the 19th, and currently the early 20th can be viewed from enough distance to render it as the 'perfect past' - although at another stage it was 'imperfect present' and, indeed, 'uncertain future'. For example, Tudor and Elizabethan eras as 'the best of times' have been connected to a wider debate about the importance of these periods in the construction of national identity via the production of countryside in 19th and 20th century writing and art (Brace, 1999). Meanwhile, Cosgrove & Daniels (1988) are able to consider the importance of the mobilisation of rural imagery in English identity formation in the period between world wars. Over time, the English countryside of a previous era is held as being the golden age and crucial to nation building. Each one of these images fades into a deeper background of Englishness as the next becomes prominent - not replaced *per se*, but enfolded into an ever-receding halcyon past.

This notion of a sliding time lag in people's imaginations of national identity, rather than one particular era in which Englishness was defined, is important, as it has enabled the idealised rural myth to remain a stable point of reference in shifting constructions of national identity. That is, the temporal aspect of the rural idyll (necessarily in 'a' past) allows the myth to be consistent *and* adaptable: the countryside has been represented within national identity constructions over time as a 'place of play', as an 'organic' community, and also as the heartland of England during times of war (Matless, 1998).

Crucially, national identity remains dominant precisely because of the power of layered past constructions. The idea of national attachment may be increasingly critiqued as losing relevance due to the 'powerful forces of globalisation', with the homogenising tendencies and trans-border activities of international organisations rupturing links between place and identity. In addition, the global movement of people, whether for economic or political reasons, may lead to the formation of diasporic identities across countries and continents (Gilroy, 1993), and multicultural/cosmopolitan attachments open up new ideas of belonging in and beyond the nation-state. But it can still be argued that "the nation continues to be the pre-eminent spatial construct in a world in which space is divided up into national portions" (Edensor, 2002:37) A post-nation world may resonate more strongly for visible communities resident in England<sup>9</sup>, but within *hegemonic* constructions of Englishness, the position of the rural idyll as a stable point of national reference over time enables the 'rural as true England' myth to remain powerful in the dominant national psyche.

### The rural idyll as narrative

In order to unpack the rural idyll's role within Englishness, it is necessary to examine the ways in which particular stories are told, who is telling them and why. This is perhaps best undertaken through an example. Lowe *et al.* (1995) contend that landscapes can tell, and *be used to tell*, different stories, and explore the popular production of the rural as embodying a sense of community, authenticity and security, and the corresponding incorporation of these values within national identity. A similar narrative was evident in the "Liberty and Livelihood" march through central London in Sept. 2002, organised by the Countryside Alliance (CA) in response to perceived threats to the 'the rural way of life'. Dominant within the CA's argument was that political and economic decisions, detrimental to rural livelihoods, were being taken in the cities by an urban population that lacked understanding of the countryside. Paradoxically, while bemoaning a lack of awareness among city dwellers that rural living is not a romanticised ideal, the CA promoted just such a nostalgic stereotype of the rural as a place of community, authenticity and security - a place to be protected and its 'way of life' preserved. The underlying theme was that threats to the rural endangered 'the' English way of life, and were a challenge to Englishness itself.

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed, these issues are taken up in chapter 3.

Central to the CA's defence of the rural, then, was its claim on national identity. The narrative told drew heavily on past and familiar narratives of the authentic, community-spirited, safe countryside inextricable from (real) English identity, now under siege. It is exactly this understanding of threat (to way of life, to place, to identity) that is theorised as inducing recourse to nostalgic (and exclusionary) constructions as part of the boundary drawing processes of identity preservation. Lowenthal (1991) argues that the proliferating heritage industry in England is precisely a response to the perceived loss of an 'originary' Englishness, with the countryside being a major anchor that people hold on to. The narrative of the rural idyll is told to assuage fear via consolidating identity, by those for whom the retention of that identity enables continued hegemonic status. Massey (1994:169) states that when discourses are promoted to celebrate a 'true' (homogeneous) national identity, those groups behind the ceremonies:

"are laying claim to the freezing of that identity at a particular moment and in a particular form – a moment and a form where they had a power which they can thereby justify themselves in retaking."

This suggests that the rural idyll narrative is employed for political gain by specific groups. Cutting through this narrative, though, the small, lived practices that also contribute to understandings of identity and place should also be considered, since the *everydayness of habitual repetition* is a vital part of the reaffirming of culture and identity. Franklin (2002:185) writes that:

"localised natures are part of the materials used to produce a sense of home, belonging, attachment and familiarity. It is in our day-to-day embodied experience of our local environment that these sentiments are produced and adhere to our self-identity."

The day-to-day situations, interactions, environments and practices, then, that occur on a local level are important in defining 'who we are' – these are the 'activity spaces' (Massey, 1995) that become cemented in the habit-body. The question is, do these everyday markers disturb the over-arching rural idyll narrative?

Edensor (2002) discusses how a 'plethora of mundane everyday signifiers' are part of national identity, specific to a country and not recognised abroad. These include, for example, service provision signs, 'roadscape' and a certain style of housing/shop fronts/fencing, etc. The point is that such signs are embedded locally but occur *nationally*, suggesting that there will be sufficient similarities across rural and urban environments to enable all English residents to feel a sense of attachment in the



countryside, through familiar environmental/material signifiers. This is where the spatial and temporal aspects of 'rural idyll as genuine England' reassert themselves, physically limiting the common everyday signifiers Edensor mentions. National parks' purpose is to *conserve the natural beauty and cultural heritage* of the national parks, with the practical result that older, more 'traditional' markers are in greater evidence in the parks than the 'mundane signifiers' found in the cities. Red telephone boxes, 'old fashioned' street furniture and roadscares (with their abundance of brown signs denoting heritage destinations and handmade signs giving directions to very local attractions) will be unfamiliar to those who do not habitually experience them. The day-to-day situations, practices and – not least – physical environments that occur in national parks *are different* to those in urban areas, and *kept different* through the legislative protection afforded the cultural and natural heritage of a past golden rural. Crucially, these signs are read (and demanded) by national park residents and visitors as performing a *specific national identity* informed by the 'rural idyll' myth.

This chapter will return to issues surrounding countryside as national/natural heritage, but first considers the processes involved in the production of difference, otherness and stereotypes caught up in the rural idyll narrative in greater detail.

### **Stereotypes, difference and 'rural others'**

"I've known numerous black friends who simply refuse to leave their cities. For them, it's too much like travelling back in time, to that sorry England where a racist joke served up in the pub along with your pewter tankard is just a bit of fun ..."

(Elms, 2001:43)

The chapter has so far considered a spatially and temporally constructed rural 'idyll', promoted as the dominant definition of English rurality and as occupying a central role in a dominant version of Englishness. But, who counts as English? Sibley (1995) argues that the dominant understanding of which groups belong or do not belong "contributes in an important way to the shaping of social space". The chapter now examines how constructions of both rurality and Englishness are complicit in understandings of the countryside as a white space. Psychoanalytical concepts are explored, as they are specifically concerned with identity construction and boundary forming processes, and thus useful in understanding how stereotypes reifying the rural within Englishness, and constructing visible communities as marginalised in rural space, are produced and maintained.

### The construction of 'us' and 'them'

A common starting point for understanding the construction of self image within psychoanalytical thought<sup>10</sup> is Freud's object relations theory – the way in which an individual relates to the other objects (people) in their world. Klein (summarised in Wright, 1992) theorises object relations theory via the two related processes of introjection and projection. Introjection involves the incorporation of those qualities conceived as 'good' within self identity; projection is the associated process of transferring qualities perceived as 'bad' onto 'other' identities. It is this *boundary construction* that informs stereotypical representations of others – qualities transferred outside the boundary are translated into easily readable images of the other. Furthermore, stereotypes of the other are not only personally constructed, but socially and culturally produced and reinforced. Through the ongoing circulation of (mis)representations, specific groups introject and project communally understood 'good' and 'bad' qualities onto own group and other group, the latter sharing an essentialised "quality of otherness, of being not-me" that is socially recognised as 'not being us' within constructions of group identity and boundary drawing (Hoggett, 1992). In this way, the formation of a unified national identity depends on the socialised production of 'good' and 'bad' aspects of nationality.

However, such a national identity is dependent upon a myth of cultural homogeneity: heterogeneity has to be denied if a singular characterisation is to symbolise an imagined national community. Moreover, the dominant group in society are likely to deny, through narrative, alternative claims to nationality constructed by groups other than their own. The entrenched understanding of the countryside as integral to Englishness among hegemonic and majority society in England, alongside an equally deep-rooted version of 'true' Englishness as white, can thus allow dominant productions of rural-as-white.

Psychoanalysis has more to offer an examination of visible communities in England and the English countryside. In particular, Kristeva's (1991) work centres on the need to *defend* the boundaries constructed between self and other, in order to maintain the purity of self against the impurities connected to the 'bad' other. This work focuses on abjection, the 'expulsion of the impure' and the exclusion of the other – perhaps most

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<sup>10</sup> Psychoanalysis is useful in uncovering processes of identity construction and practices of exclusion. However, as Sarup (1998) warns, we should be wary of ignoring cultural difference within ideas of identity construction, and of generalising too far.

clearly observed currently in anti-asylum rhetoric. Kristeva's theorising is most useful in its emphasis on *abjection as an ambiguous process*. She contends that the threat (dirt, disease, not-me) can never be entirely removed because it originates in self identity construction processes (projection). Therefore, this threat is constant and the self is always in danger. Thus the desire to expel/distance the self from the abjected other is an *implicit condition of existence*. The urge to make separations, between clean and dirty, ordered and disordered, 'us' and 'them', always creates feelings of anxiety because such separations can never be finally achieved. Kristeva suggests that the recognition of self as an image is ultimately alienating – in recognising ourselves, we must recognise, and constantly endeavour to separate ourselves from, the other. Again, this process occurs at a community/social group level, where the recognition of own group inherently involves recognising, and attempting to separate our own group from, the other group.

Importantly, feelings of abjection are also projected onto place: cultural representations of people and materialities frequently elide, allowing place itself to provide a basis for self-identity construction and thus become a site for exclusionary processes (Sibley, 1999). Such thinking helps to extricate the ways in which visible communities are constructed as others by a dominant white society, which constantly attempts to distance itself from the 'threat' of cultural heterogeneity by tying national identity with a specific place (the rural) and excluding (expelling) visible communities from that place. For example, the title of the Jay Report (1992), "Keep Them in Birmingham", illustrates the report's findings regarding the racist attitudes in rural areas of England. In support, Robins (1991) relates the social exclusion of visible communities in the countryside to an endemic understand of the rural as a 'purified space'. Agyeman & Spooner (1997:198) write that place is often conflated with notions of ethnicity, and that 'distorted cultural representations' of place have been enabled by the reiteration of an ethnic 'other', marginalised from a dominant white 'norm', allowing majority discourse to imagine visible communities only in the urban.

Not only does the theory of abjection outline how people may be stereotyped in place, but it is also helpful in thinking about the *homogenising of difference* by the hegemonic group. The projection of 'bad' aspects onto others, and the drive to distance the self from this impure other, lead to an understanding of non-self objects as a series of samenesses, in that they are all non-self. In this way, these identities are relevant to each other. Rather than deal with a vast range of different 'others', non-selves are homogenised into a generalised stereotype. Thus different visible communities, as

'non-white' and thereby abjected from dominant white national identity, can be homogenised and understood as a generalised group all of whom are automatically and recognisably not English from a dominant white perspective.

### Identity, stereotypes and social exclusion

Bhabha (1994)'s work is useful here. He draws on Lacan (1977)'s 'schema of the Imaginary', in which a discrete image of self is only adopted once there is recognition of self as a unified subject in relation to the outside world (other) during the 'mirror stage'. That is, there is no sense of self identity without the subject 'seeing itself in a mirror' – or rather, seeing itself mirrored in the way that it is looked upon by another<sup>11</sup>. Bhabha theorises that there are two forms of identity complicit with this schema of the Imaginary - narcissism and aggressiveness. He argues that both forms are exercised in the identity construction process of the mirror stage and that, therefore, knowledge of self is both *given and denied*. This causes a fundamental split in the identity of self: seeing any/every 'other' not only causes anxiety because abjection is never achieved (as discussed above), but is doubly traumatic because self *can never be whole*. A strategy is therefore required to imagine self as a whole entity. It is the recognition of this ambivalence that leads Bhabha to discuss the concept of the stereotype as a 'suture', to draw back together the gap or wound caused by recognising the split within the self. To this way of thinking, stereotypes are more than reductive identities projected onto others, they are also necessary for the construction of a unified self identity. Furthermore, the suture can be a means to ignore/deny that any such split in self has even occurred.

The notion of suture may be extended to national identity formation. While Englishness is understood as rooted in the rural within the dominant national psyche, the majority of white society lives day-to-day *in* the urban 'other', where the 'black other' also reside<sup>12</sup>. According to Bhabha, anxiety will be caused by the constant facing of this urban otherness *because* it is, at the same time, definitive of the (rejected) self and a reminder that self is not unified – urban otherness threatens a homogeneous English identity. The stereotypical representations of the rural, then, can be thought of as the suture that enables English identity to remain secure. Moreover, such sutures are in greater demand as threat is perceived to increase. Kumar (2000) describes a 'moment

<sup>11</sup> Lacan writes about 'the look from the place of the other'.

<sup>12</sup> Although not necessarily living among the 'black other'.

of crisis' for English national identity, outlining how the post-colonial, post-industrial contemporary situation, together with increasing decentralisation of government and national assemblies in Scotland and Wales, have resulted in the destabilising of Britishness without an Englishness of any substance to fall back on (see also Hall, 2001). Scruton (2001:242, emphasis added) considers the problem to be caused by the rural-urban divide itself, claiming that the English have lost any sense of being English precisely *because*:

*"they have become an urban people, extolling their countryside as the symbol of what they no longer are ... and sensing that they no longer truly belong in the land which made them, they have lost their self-confidence as a people."*

Given this destabilising of national identity, the resonance of the stereotypical 'true' Englishness as tied to the rural idyll increases.

The 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) is also complicit in the suturing process, reflecting the influence of majority anxiety on the production of pure (or rather purged) images of a privileged past and exclusionary present: the countryside has 'traditionally' and consistently been represented within discourses as the 'true' England, in particular in contrast to the city, with rural recreation and rural living every 'true' Englishman's (sic) right and heritage. Contemporary white middle class commuter settlement into rural areas, for example, can be attributed to a 'retreat' to places where everyone is the same as self (boundary drawing), but, once arrived, these groups mould the social and material shape of villages to fit in with their own preconceptions of rural space and society (*re-invention of tradition*). This suggests a double exclusion – visible communities may be culturally barred from accessing invented traditions because these inventions are based on ideas of identity that already exclude them.

Sutures and invented traditions are, furthermore, caught up in the legacy of England's colonial past, with white as the English self and visible communities as other. The anxiety/fear regarding threats to a unitary Englishness is often traced to loss of empire and the migration to England of people from the ex-colonies<sup>13</sup> (eg. Wright, 2001). That is, the loss of power on the world stage and the arrival of the 'black other' in England combined are perceived, from the dominant perspective, to threaten English identity. Said (1994) details the continuance of imperial attitudes in 'the West' that, he writes,

<sup>13</sup> While visible communities were present in England centuries before the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948, this latter event is commonly misunderstood as heralding the first non-white residents in England.

always involve the deployment of power and interests. These attitudes are held over from the past, and based on the belief that "lesser powers are also lesser peoples, with lesser rights, morals, claims" (Said, 1994:41). This perceived inferiority of 'non Western' groups is ultimately written through media, fiction and myriad cultural representations, where non-Western is elided with non-white. Said clearly highlights the relationship between cultural and political Imaginations, both of which can be thought through the psychoanalytical theories of identity construction this chapter has outlined.

Spatial exclusions based on boundary drawing, abjection and ambivalence must, then, be connected to the structured power imbalances involved in processes of exclusion, in order to explore how cultural productions are implicated in practices of social control. Sibley (1995) extends Foucault's work on discipline to call for a recognition of the 'reciprocal conditioning' between individuals/families and social institutions. He argues that institutional controls via organisational systems, such as land-use planning, reinforce the socialised individual/family tendency to reject difference and value sameness and order, in line with object relations theory:

"Because many of these controls are taken for granted or register negatively only in the world-views of others (minority groups) ... who have little power to influence the design of the spaces which they have to negotiate, we, that is, the dominant majority, are implicated in the perpetuation of the carceral control system."

(Sibley, 1999:85)

While arguments for 'agency' undoubtedly challenge such thinking, it does resonate when related to national park ideology and management. National parks are responsible for – and charged with - conserving and protecting the natural and cultural landscape. In particular, planning controls restrict development, maintaining a countryside representative of a past, dominant cultural landscape. National park promotion and visitor access/behaviour are also highly managed by the park authorities, serving to reinforce particular hegemonic understandings of the national rural.

Strategies of social control, then, underpin who can be in, or feel that they belong in, the countryside. Early constructions of national identity were shaped in the image of the ruling elite, through countryside that reflected the class distinctions of the time (see Helsing, 1997; Brace, 1999; Gould, 1999). More recently, the 'white flight'

phenomenon (white urban to rural migration) can be seen in terms of class: the middle classes 'escaping' the problem-ridden cities to rural areas (Murdoch & Day, 1996). Indeed, implicit in the 'white flight' phenomenon is that these groups are *economically able* to move. Paxman (1999:174) writes:

"As a nation, we simply don't affirm urban life at all. The idea is just to extract the maximum amount of wealth from industry and commerce in order to enjoy the delights of the countryside."

What is pertinent here are the interconnections between class and ethnicity. McClintock (1995) states that visible communities historically and in contemporary times reside in the cities for economic reasons, stressing that their economic position is reinforced by the power relationships developed and reiterated by colonial attitudes. She links economic privilege directly to 'race' issues, and the racism that enabled/enables whites to distance themselves spatially from non-whites through culturally defined superiority. This raises two important, and intertwined, issues for the thesis. First, visible communities are disproportionately represented in lower class positions because of structural inequalities grounded in hegemonic ethnic prejudice, and are therefore economically *physically* less able to 'escape the city'. The second is that visible communities are *emotionally* excluded from 'white space' through processes of projection and abjection: 'black flight' is less well documented, but it appears that visible community middle classes do move away from the deprived inner cities, though - crucially - to the suburbs rather than rural areas. The *colouring* of the countryside, over and above class distinction, continues to reinforce the rural-as-white stereotype and act as a suture for majority trauma regarding heterogeneous national identity.

Wilton (2002:304), in a study looking at NIMBY conflicts related to environmental issues, concludes that:

"the material and symbolic privileges of contemporary whiteness are grounded in, and reproduced through, the racialization of place."

But, these privileges are coded: constructions of race and place are often naturalised, producing a 'common sense' view in which groups unquestioningly belong in specific places/localities. Agyeman (1995) highlights how the exploitation of visible communities to build and sustain the British Empire and its class structure, which enabled an elite to gain the power and money to retreat to the rural, "has been quietly and

unceremoniously swept under the carpet" (see also Wong, 1999). Moreover, he contends that this exclusionary version of the history of the countryside - the lack of acknowledgement of the role of colonialism within dominant understandings of the rural - impacts on the perceptions and feelings towards the rural among visible communities. Thus the 'common sense' view of a white rural England, in ignoring much of what imperialism did/was/stood for, reinforces the strategies of exclusion that imperialism itself began. As Smith (1999:17) puts it:

"socially divisive spatial arrangements ... feed back into the web of power relationships which influence how people are categorized by others, and how they identify themselves."

This 'web of power relations' suggests a more complex reading of ethnicity and English rurality. Indeed, the elision of femininity, ethnicity and class within positions of powerlessness - and the ways in which analogies *between* race and gender, as well as race and class, facilitate social stereotypes - are extensively debated in feminist literature (see Mirza *et al.*, 1997). Loomba (1998), for example, describes colonial discourses as complicit in the initial connections made between 'race', gender and class. In Victorian society, blackness was feminised, thus removing potential power or status from the black person since women had no standing within society at that time, while, with similar intention and outcome, lower social classes were often considered as belonging to a different 'race'. In contemporary England, these stereotypes may have shifted somewhat, but remain intertwined: visible communities are commonly imagined as only in working class positions by dominant society, while femininity and visible community-ness are both constructed as lacking power. The important point to raise here, however, is that within such constructions 'race' is ultimately the factor given most 'otherness'. Gilroy (1987:56) argues that:

"discussions of nation and people are saturated with racial connotations. Attempts to constitute the poor or the working class as a class across racial lines are thus disrupted."

One effect, as hooks (1992) suggests, is that 'internal racism' can prevent minority groups identifying themselves within places that dominant representations exclude them from. It may be that visible communities do not identify themselves (other) with/in the countryside (national-self-place) *precisely because* they are/have been excluded from mainstream ideas of Englishness (national self) itself.



Whether visible communities, too, can claim the rural idyll, given that the countryside is defined as white English, will depend not only on to what degree they identify themselves as English, but also on whether *they identify* the English rural idyll as central to notions of Englishness. The concept of natural heritage is implicit in these issues, situated both within ideas of national belonging (heritage) as well as intertwined with constructions of the countryside (the natural). The next section explores conceptions of nature and natural heritage, and the ways in which they are implicated in constructions of national identity and rural space among visible communities.

### **Ethnicity, the perception of nature and natural heritage: whose country/side?**

As the last section discussed, the more at risk identity – self and national – is perceived to be, the more it is cherished and protected. Crucially, it seems the rural's prevalence increases whenever social tensions increase, urbanisation intensifies and/or social changes are perceived to be imminent (Short, 1991), and nostalgic stereotypes are employed to calm anxieties. Indeed, the countryside is elided so closely with English identity that perceived threats to the rural environment may be linked back to Englishness itself: Young (1995:100) states that "the degradation of the English countryside is seen as analogous to the alleged deterioration of the nation itself." Natural heritage and countryside conservation issues are thus also implicated in the 'nostalgic stereotype' suturing process. Since national parks are central within the natural heritage of England<sup>14</sup>, promoted as places of *national natural heritage*, the perceptions and use of national parks by visible communities will be caught up not only with their construction of national identity and the English countryside, but also with the *values they place on natural heritage, and on nature itself*.

While nature cannot be conflated with the rural, the countryside does represent one commonly identified spatialisation of nature (Cloke *et al.*, 1996). It is necessary, then, to explore perceptions of nature alongside, and as they may be interconnected with, conceptualisations of natural heritage and ethnic identity – keeping in mind the issues surrounding stereotypes, difference and otherness that have just been discussed. This section first focuses on the prevalent (re)presentations of natural heritage utilised in the promotion of national parks, to examine the ways in which exclusion may occur. It then moves on to explore the ways in which visible communities are understood to perceive nature. In particular, the simplistic representations of different ethnic groups

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<sup>14</sup> As outlined in chapter 1.

constructing nature differently *because* of conceived ethnic and (thus) cultural differences are discussed.

### The promotion/interpretation of natural heritage

National parks are government-funded and -appointed bodies, whose Authority Committee Members, staff and volunteers are predominantly white, male and middle class<sup>15</sup>. Their organisational make-up is mirrored by the majority of other rural conservation and heritage bodies and agencies. In addition, much of the land within the park boundaries is privately owned, by individuals often possessing large areas, who also fall into this category. This undiverse rural stewardship presents a particular image of the countryside (and by implication national parks), an image of white, male, middle class dominance and propriety that reflects implicitly on imaginations of natural heritage itself.

Furthermore, and bound up with stewardship issues, the images promoted across/by a range of countryside and natural heritage organisations are almost totally white. Kinsman (1995) argues that the absence of non-white bodies in countryside imagery means that the heritage portrayed does not resonate with 'black' groups. Malik (1992) concludes that the promotion of natural heritage is, while supposedly available to all, in reality "structurally, socially and racially selective", often existing in such an inaccessible and irrelevant form that it is utilised by an exclusive few. Furthermore, Wright (2001) highlights active resistance among the 'elite' against an inclusive rural heritage incorporating non-white histories, citing the campaign by Bernie Grant MP for a national heritage site commemorating the landing in North Devon of a ship of released slaves from the US in 1796, which was refused. National park interpretive material, by their own admission<sup>16</sup>, has generally been devoid of visible community faces, as have representations of the English countryside across the media: from magazines such as *Country Life* and *This England*; to *The Archers* radio programme<sup>17</sup> and *Emmerdale Farm* on television.

In addition, heritage representation more widely parallels the racialisation of space vis-à-vis the urban/rural dichotomy discussed earlier in the chapter. Not only are visible

<sup>15</sup> According to national parks' own statistics at time of writing.

<sup>16</sup> Personal comment throughout the fieldwork.

<sup>17</sup> With one notable exception: an Asian lawyer who was herself subjected to racist abuse.

communities omitted from rural imagery, but they are placed specifically in urban contexts. The British Tourism Authority's recent 'Visit England' campaign (BTA 2003) included images and text highlighting the presence of visible communities in England, and exhorted people to "make the connection between cultures", but represented visible communities *only* in the cities. While specifically featuring non-white people at the Birmingham Carnival and the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir temple in North London, rural imagery remained white. Such racialisation of space can be further argued to *compel* heritage representation: if expectations of spatial experiences are built up over time, and reinforced through the (re)invention of tradition, then countryside promotion *including* visible communities in rural imagery *against stereotype*, may potentially deter 'core audiences' who expect/value a certain visitor experience. In a 'post-productive' countryside, tourism is an increasingly important economic player, and it may be that fear of alienating 'traditional' heritage consumers underlies and further perpetuates natural heritage promotion as white.

To return more specifically to national parks, it is important to consider the language employed in interpretation, as well as the imagery, in order to explore more closely the relationship between natural heritage promotion and visible communities' understanding of the parks. There are two principal issues here. First, a *lack of translation* of interpretive leaflets, boards, information of website, etc. is often discussed as being a barrier to visible community access to the national parks (MacFarlane *et al.*, 2000), in that it automatically exempts those who do not understand the language used. If language is an 'organising place', where action is enabled (de Certeau, 1997), then the language belonging to the dominant group within a society is, consequently, the language used for the construction of national identity as well as the representation of heritage (Barthes, 1989). It should be noted that many visible communities speak English as a first language, in particular people from African Caribbean backgrounds and second/third generation Asian communities. At issue here, though, is that the language involved in rural interpretation *is never that of visible communities' backgrounds*. For example, key phrases in national park literature are often translated into French, German, and Dutch, but not any of the minority languages spoken in England. Foreign others (but assumed white) receive a welcome in their own language, while English (but not white) others do not.

Secondly, countryside-as-natural-heritage may be exclusionary for visible communities due to the *terminology* commonplace in conservation circles. Nature conservation habitually speaks of eradicating 'alien' and 'non-native' species, with such species

always described as 'invasive' or destructive to 'native' wildlife in some way. 'Native' species themselves are implicitly portrayed as benign: within ecological discourse, native is elided with 'good' and non-native with 'bad'. As Wolschke-Bulmahn (1996:65) writes:

“the doctrinaire plea for “native” plants is often accompanied by the condemnation of “foreign” or “exotic” plants as alien invaders or aggressive intruders, thus suggesting that native plants would be peaceful and non-invasive.”

Crucially, if a 'native' plant *is* considered invasive, the descriptive 'native' is dropped and the plant known by its species name alone, removing the signifier and thereby continuing the promotion of only 'non-native' plants as invasive. However, what is deemed 'native' or not involves value judgements: all current plant life has colonised England at some stage since the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago. Lines are drawn at different times to denote 'native' and 'non-native', amid debate between conservationists. Moreover, the Black Environment Network (BEN) highlight that environmental/scientific terminology can be emotively projected onto the human population of England because of its similarity with much negative immigration terminology (Wong, 1999). BEN cite the term 'rhodi-bashing', used by conservation groups to describe the eradication of invasive, 'non-native' rhododendron bushes, as echoing the racist 'Paki-bashing' term in its insinuation that specific 'incomers' should be removed. The construction of 'immigrant' plant species as damaging and unwanted, rather than valuable residents, echoes anti-asylum rhetoric regarding human communities (see also Barker, 2003).

Both the imagery and language of natural heritage promotion/interpretation, within national park literature and more widely, are argued to present barriers to visible communities achieving a 'sense of belonging' in rural England, through the denial of rural heritage that is anything other than white and 'original'. Such a privileging of a static, singular version of English nature and natural heritage raises two important questions: what is the role of the perception of nature in attachment to place? And, is nature perceived differently by visible communities to the dominant conception across national park authorities and majority white society?

### Ethnicity, nature and attachment to place

That different cultures have different perceptions of nature has long been supported in certain strands of academic thought, enabled by the established understanding within social science that nature is socially constructed. Whatmore (1999:7) offers a useful summary of this conception, arguing that 'ways of seeing' the natural world share three common principles. The first is that the representation of nature is not a neutral process, but instrumental in constructing our sense of and values regarding the natural world. Secondly, representations are, therefore, established repertoires of cultural reference points which "repeat and ricochet off one another down the ages", and shift from being understood as depictions of *what nature is* to blueprints of what nature *should be like*. Third, it follows that there are many incompatible "ways of seeing the same natural phenomenon, event or environment". This chapter has already discussed the bias of the 'rural idyll narrative', and the idea that such a narrative is an established – and exclusionary - cultural reference point that is reincorporated into blueprints for how the rural should be (the re-invention of tradition). Here, however, the emphasis is on the construction of *nature*, rather than English rurality, and the ways in which ethnicity is implicated in the 'incompatible' ways of seeing nature.

Harrison & Burgess (1994:298) write that the construction of nature takes place within social groups, resulting in a nature 'myth'. Such myths function:

"as a cultural filter so that adherents are predisposed to learn different things about the environment and to construct different knowledges of it. In this way, beliefs about nature and society's relationship with it, are linked with particular rationalities that support the modes of action appropriate for sustaining these myths."

The idea of a cultural filter suggests that within 'same' cultural groups perceptions of nature are accordant. What concerns this chapter, specifically, is that there appears to be an elision between 'culture' and 'ethnicity' regarding the construction of nature, with many narratives telescoping the two: different ethnic groups may be constructed as 'having' different perspectives of nature, precisely through structured understandings of essential differences between cultures that are tied to reductive versions of ethnicity. For example, Altman & Chemers (1984) suggest that perceptions of nature are based on a variety of factors, including climate, stability of environment, technological development and religious and social values – and that, since the combination of

factors remains unique to each 'separate' ethnic society, constructions of nature are different across ethnic groups (see also Ewert *et al.*, 1993).

Such absolute difference between ethnic groups' construction of nature is more often hidden, however, rather than explicitly detailed – further suggesting that it is presumed a 'truism'. This is especially evident within environmental and land use discourses. For example, determinist versions of indigenous or 'developing world' ethnic groups as conceiving nature to be integral to 'their' society/culture - as opposed to ethnic communities in industrialised or 'developed' countries who are masters of nature – litter many anthropological accounts (O'Riordan, 1989). Braun (2002) describes the ways in which discursive, social, technological and institutional relations shape how landscapes are experienced and reproduced, finding 'traces of colonial pasts' in the imaginaries of the 'postcolonial present'. Writing about north-west Canada, he outlines how the social construction of others (First Nation peoples) by the dominant group (white Canadians) is intertwined with the dominant construction of how these others understand nature. In the majority imagination, indigenous Indians are *always* constructed in an essentialised relationship with the rural environment, in which all Indian groups are understood to share the same, sympathetic, *static* perception of nature. The fixing of the other and 'their' culture enables the fixing of how 'they' understand and relate to nature:

"native peoples are conflated with nature, and areas are seen to remain 'natural' only if the cultures that live there remain 'traditional'"

(Braun, *ibid.*:84)

Lowenthal (1997:234) cites such "regressive environmental and racial determinisms" as enabling a "mystique of the indigene as ecologist", in which viewing indigenous ethnic communities as incapable of harming the environment is "dehumanising".

An opposite discourse, though equally 'dehumanising', also exists. Katz (1998:50) identifies a "whole new regime of imperial exploitation camouflaged as environmentalism", in which industrialised governments and non-governmental organisations cajole developing countries to preserve areas deemed to have particular ecological value – eg. via 'debt for nature' swaps. Katz's focus is on 'corporate environmentalism' and its detrimental effects on local communities with lower mobility and fewer economic options, while multinationals continue to consume land elsewhere, regardless of the environmental or social impacts. However, implicit within this 'imperial environmentalism' is an underlying assumption that developing nations will not protect

ecologically 'important' areas themselves. This supposition is tied to the presumption that developing nations will always choose economic growth (jobs/income) over the environment, but also insinuated is that 'they' do not value/perceive nature in the same way as the 'west'. In this discourse, developing world societies are not 'at one' with nature but have a damaging disregard for it. A prevalent illustration is the portrayal of poachers of endangered species as uncaring profiteers, able to be so because their ethnic values allow it.

The understanding that different cultural groups produce nature differently to each other is not being critiqued here - at issue, rather, is the unproblematised projection of such difference onto ethnicity, without any interrogation of the myriad localities, circumstances, shifts in ethnicity, or overlap between ethnic groups and cultural practices, which also affect the social construction of nature. In a rural English context, the tendency to connect a particular construction of nature to a particular ethnicity suggests that visible communities are presumed as always and only perceiving nature differently from white communities, because visible community culture is understood to be different from a homogenised white culture. Once again, the very visibility of the non-white body in a racialised (white) space focuses attention on ethnic difference, and acts as a signifier of otherness that is used to return cultural practices within ethnicity and ethnic identity. This serves to write visible community absence from the countryside as an *ethnic issue*: "'black' people do not go to the countryside because it is not part of 'their' culture" is an easy step to make from "'black' people think about nature differently because 'their' culture is different". Eder (1996:30) writes that alternative rules for the consumptive appropriation of nature are defined through alternative constructions of nature, based on "historically recognised and transmitted cultural patterns ... seen in national traditions". Treating visible communities' perception of nature as *different* from that of majority society, then, can tie ethnic difference to national difference too (see also Nakashima, 2003).

Perceptions of the natural world are further implicated in the role of nature in attachment to place. Attachment to place is commonly described as an emotional bond between an individual or groups and specific environments (Altman & Low, 1992), developed when these places gain symbolic meanings and cultural importance beyond that of their physical appearance or function (Riley, 1992). This attachment is shaped by life experiences - with places related to the personal histories of childhood gaining particularly profound importance (Brierley-Newell, 1997). Such attachment speaks to the idea of an embodied sense of identity through place, and to specific *constructions*

*of nature as enabled through personal experience*, as well as through the socialised circulation of ideas (Rishbeth, 2001). Alongside the 'cultural filters' that mould an individual's construction of nature, then, understandings of the natural world can be influenced through an experiential production of space.

The latter would appear to open up the limited conflation of ethnic difference with different views of nature, since embodied interactions offer the potential to break through or cut across established but second hand reference points. However, the overlaps between culture, ethnicity, class and the spatial and social exclusions informed by the boundary drawing processes discussed earlier in the chapter must be remembered here. With visible communities concentrated in the urban areas of England<sup>18</sup>, and perceived as not visiting the countryside, the habit-forming activities of visible communities are highly likely to take place *in the city*. The possibility of visible communities developing an embodied sense of identity through the English national parks reincorporated in the cycle of exclusion that is begun with their visible difference from majority society. The (psychological) construction of 'us' and 'them', on both personal and national levels, and the stereotypical representations of rurality/nationality as white that emanate from and collude with such productions of self and other, are reiterated in a self-fulfilling narrative.

Of course, such a cycle further suggests that visible communities in England can only draw upon communal memory of the natural world, which returns the notion of nature as a socialised production. Indeed, the tension between these two arguments - the complex connections and overlaps between nature as socially constructed and/or grounded in habitual contact - is one of the key issues that point to the complexities involved in visible communities' use and perceptions of the English national parks. And, accordingly, this tension is one of the topics that cannot be resolved between this chapter and the next, but hover across both, as will be further highlighted in chapter 3. The point here is that social and spatial exclusion of visible communities from the English countryside is, in part, a recursive process.

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<sup>18</sup> Almost half of the visible communities in England reside in London, and a further 15% in the conurbations of the West Midlands (ONS, 2003).



**Conclusion: visible communities AS rural others**

"We ... believe that representations of rurality and rural life are replete with such devices of exclusion and marginalisation by which mainstream 'self' serves to 'other' the positioning of all kinds of people in the socio-spatial relations of different countrysides."

(Cloke & Little, 1997:1, original emphasis)

This chapter has argued that 'the rural' is dominantly constructed and represented as a singular, fixed 'rural idyll' within a dominant social Imaginary<sup>19</sup>, and that this rural idyll remains central within productions of English national identity. The rural idyll has been discussed as retaining its power specifically via dualistic constructions of space (countryside versus city) and time (past versus present), in which the nostalgic stereotype of a bucolic rural past is central to notions of an 'originary' Englishness. The flexibility of the idyll narrative was highlighted as enabling the stereotype to be employed within a variety of national identity promotions (defence of the countryside; stability during times of social change) drawing upon the need for security. The idea of 'tradition' that the rural idyll promotes (is used to promote) was shown to incorporate a reified collection of endlessly repeated practices passed on to in-group members as cultural behaviour/thinking: cultural practices as fixed and frozen.

In order to examine more closely the connections between rurality, nationality and ethnicity, the chapter then explored the insights offered by psychoanalytical perspectives regarding the construction of difference. In particular, processes of introjection and projection, of 'good' and 'bad' personal qualities onto 'self' and 'other' identities respectively, were discussed. While these processes are common across cultural groups – drawing boundaries to make sense of personal/group identity – the chapter argued that social exclusion becomes an issue where differential power relationships exist: the dominant group in society is then able to exclude, physically and psychologically, the minority 'other'. These issues were examined with regard to the ways in which visible communities are stereotyped as 'rural others' because of their visible difference from a white majority 'norm'. Furthermore, the process of abjection (the expulsion of the other), and the anxiety caused because abjection can never be fully achieved (since the other is inherently split from, *but part of*, the self), were related to the construction of stereotypes via Bhabha's notion of the suture – the stereotype as suture which acts to 'heal' the trauma caused by the failure of abjection. The chapter

<sup>19</sup> The term 'Imaginary' is generally given the upper case 'I' within academic literature relating to national identity and rurality (and often also within work surrounding multiculturalism) to denote an essentialised and solitary construction among the dominant majority.

suggested that the rural idyll acts as the suture holding an 'originary' white Englishness national identity together.

Next, the role of natural heritage promotion within processes of identity formation, boundary drawing and social exclusion was addressed, focusing on the imagery and language used within national park literature and wider countryside conservation circles, and drawing on the ideas of difference and otherness previously considered. The predominance of white bodies and the use of xenophobic ecological terminology was outlined as continuing to exclude visible communities through marginalizing their (potential) presence in the rural, and denying their histories within English heritage. Arguing that natural heritage interpretation is caught up in cultural perceptions of nature and the development of a 'sense of belonging' in nature spaces, the chapter moved on to examine the ways in which visible community perceptions of nature have been theorised as being different from perceptions among the white majority, grounded in an essentialised construction of ethnic difference as tied to cultural difference. The suggestion that the natural world may also be constructed via embodied experience was returned to the gap between white and visible community experiences in the English national parks *caused by* spatial exclusion, and the processes feeding into such exclusion.

The emphasis in this chapter has been *that dominant society understands rural space, natural heritage, and national identity as fixed* - that the countryside is produced and perceived as a bounded, protected space to be preserved as part of a white English construction within the majority psyche. As such, visible communities are consistently produced as 'rural others'.

I argued at the start of the chapter that 'rural otherness' has been receiving increasing attention within the research agenda in recent years, highlighting the extent to which a variety of groups are excluded from rural areas. This has been crucial to begin deconstructing the rural idyll myth, and – if the exclusion of 'othered' groups is to be redressed - the stereotypes of countryside 'folk' and lifestyles, and their dominance within ideas of Englishness and natural heritage representations, must continue to be interrogated. However, Cloke & Little (1997) warn of the danger of such subjects becoming 'intellectually trendy', with the potential for research practice to become 'mere tourism or voyeurism', and for theory and writing to (re)construct visible communities as *only/always* marginalized in the rural. This chapter itself, only partly intentionally, succumbs to the same pattern. It is imperative, therefore, that unpacking

ethnic exclusion in the countryside is undertaken in ways that *contribute to the disruptions*, rather than examining difference while holding stereotypes in place. The next chapter, then, moves on to explore theoretical frameworks that offer ways of thinking about the processes involved in producing 'others', *without necessarily fixing* groups affected by these exclusionary processes as 'others'.

### 3. ALTERNATIVE RURALITIES

The previous chapter examined the ways in which visible communities are presented and understood as excluded from rural spaces in England, particularly national parks, via the dominant production of Englishness tied up with a racialised rural idyll, and examined the structures through which the construction of self and other identities serve to marginalise visible communities in national parks. However, as chapter 2 highlighted, there is a danger that visible communities become trapped in a self-fulfilling cycle of exclusion - exclusion from rural space leaves the countryside white, further reiterating its representation as a white space and thus exclusive to non-white communities. While investigating the constraints (physical and emotional) to visible community access to national parks, it is also necessary to acknowledge and consider the agency and self-determination of visible community actors. As such, this chapter follows the feminist and post-colonial calls to eschew the given, objectified pigeon-holing of specific groups as *only marginalised*. What I want to explore in this chapter, then, is how we can move beyond/through the idea of visible communities as rural others to open up the possibility of alternative ruralities, and enable thinking towards inclusive ruralities.

This is not to sweep aside the issues of social exclusion presented in chapter 2. Visible communities face real inequalities perpetuated through structured power imbalances endemic in English society (eg. see Race & Class special issue, 2001)<sup>20</sup>. More pertinently, several reports have uncovered racist violence, harassment, prejudice and bigotry in the English countryside, underpinned by an ignorance of 'others' and caught up with an unquestioning reiteration of stereotypes embedded in a 'resistance' to the arrival of 'newcomers' in rural England (Jay, 1992; Bolton College, 1993; Derbyshire, 1994; Henderson & Kaur, 1999). Such racism, it is argued, is pervasive throughout rural society, with inequalities occurring in public spaces and within state and non-governmental institutions (Neal, 2002). In particular, Agyeman & Spooner (1997:212) write that "paradoxically, blackness, although highly visible, remains invisible in terms of rural service provision". If state institutions are the vehicles through which the state works to inculcate national culture and identity (Anderson, 1983), this thesis cannot

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<sup>20</sup> See also the Institute of Race Relations (IRR, 2004), which addresses topics such as the disproportionate number of African Caribbean people within the English prison population, the incommensurate numbers of unemployed visible communities, and the disconcertingly high school expulsion rates of children from non-white backgrounds.

escape the notion that national parks are implicated in exclusionary practices as instruments of an exclusive national identity construction.

This chapter, though, seeks to explore the implications of a (new) reading of identity as relationally and pragmatically constituted, for understanding rural ethnicisation. That is, I want to examine concepts of relative identities and relational space, in order to unpack notions of stereotype, unsettle thoughts on bounded space, and consider resistance to essentialised identity and place. This will involve considering the possibilities of alternative productions of nationality, ethnicity and countryside, and a critical openness to the complex interconnections between them. Moreover, it means probing alternative Imaginaries and hybrid belongings together with the ways in which they are entangled with structured inequalities. Gordon (2001) theorises such entanglements through thinking about how the past continues to live on, both in the social geography of the places people inhabit as well as in the authority afforded collective (dominant and minority) knowledge. She argues that 'haunting' is a better concept than either 'history' or 'historicism' to capture the myriad connections implicated in any 'time of the now' with 'the debts of the past and expense of the present', because haunting refuses to reduce moments or occurrences to cause and effect. This enables her to discuss 'endings that are not over' but continually open and fluid. Although my emphasis here is on 'other' claims and desires to identity, the ghosts of *past and present* social exclusions will be woven through such alternative understandings of identity and space.

In order to start deconstructing the 'white rural idyll', the chapter begins with an interrogation of alternative ways of reading ethnicity, nationality and rurality, in particular through questioning the category 'other' as 'stranger' and problematising the ontology that situates visible communities as strangers in the countryside. Through this, I explore the ways in which a focus on the role of *social relations*, rather than on the visible differences of bodies, allows a more mobile conceptualisation of identities and identifications. Such a focus disturbs absolute notions of difference, while recognising that social relations may be based on absolutist ideas. This leads me to consider transgressive practices that disrupt ways of 'knowing' visible difference, and challenge the stereotype of visible communities as rural others – but also to warn that these practices, when represented as *always and only* resistance, may be reincorporated by the hegemony to reinforce the dichotomy of both a national and ethnic 'us' and 'them'. In particular, I examine how thinking in terms of 'transruptions' (Hesse, 2000) - unsettling and irrepressible challenges to dominant discourse that

incorporate multiple and shifting identities - highlights the reactivity between exclusionary spatial representations, ethnicity and Englishness. While the concept of transruptions allows for more open approaches to visible community non/presence in the national parks, I argue that even these irrepressible challenges, as an attempt to contest a 'norm', remain entangled in a dominant/minority power binary.

Theorising identities as hybrid, multiple and ever-changing, though, also goes past notions of resistance. Through an exploration of identity as *always becoming* and an understanding of *desire for* identity, I suggest that visible communities' non/presence in the English countryside may be conceived *beyond* the presumption of presence as resistance, and appreciate visible community claims to ownership of and identity through space on their own terms. I outline two key arguments. First, that an understanding of *embodied practices as reflexive* demands a rethinking of visible community access to national parks, since this exposes the performance of multiple connectivities between identity, belonging and culture that, crucially, restore subjectivity and agency and are able to incorporate changing identities. Secondly, the *spatiality* of embodied practices is also *not fixed* – places and the embodied experiences occurring in them are mutually constitutive, and, as such, the rural can be re-interpreted by visible communities as understandings of rurality shift over time and *with experience*.

Relationality also applies to space and place, and challenges the territorial understanding of cities versus countryside. This chapter explores what thinking space relationally may mean for visible community attachment to and belonging in rural space, through an attempt to rethink the national parks as *localities* in a continuum of spaces within the nation, and the national Imaginary. In doing so, I argue for a recognition of visible community attachment to the English countryside as fluid, hybrid and plural, making connections across a range of spatial and temporal scales.

### **(dis)placing strangers<sup>21</sup>**

In this section I want to unpick the essentialist reading of the 'white rural idyll' through a critique of the ontological 'other', and challenge the concept of the other as always a preconceived and *preknown* 'stranger', of visible communities as 'strangers' in the

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<sup>21</sup> Sub-headings throughout this chapter, as well as in chapters 6 and 7, start with lower case letters, while those in the rest of the thesis begin with the more conventional upper case. This writing strategy is employed to differentiate between those theoretical/empirical sections that deal with constructivist material (use of upper case), and those concerned with a more deconstructivist approach (lower case).

countryside. Ahmed (2000) writes that 'we' recognize 'the stranger' (the other) not as someone unknown to us, but as already constructed as different. That is, people truly unknown but identified as the same go unnoticed, but someone recognized as unknown *but different* is always identified as a stranger. This resonates with the identity building and boundary drawing processes discussed in the last chapter. What Ahmed stresses, though, is that such identifications are tied up with the historicity of previous encounters/experiences attached to this moment of recognition – moreover, with socialised understandings of the previous encounters between 'our' own group and the stranger's. Ahmed goes on to question the assumption that we can have an ontology of strangers: that it is possible for anyone to be a stranger (unknown), because strangers are *presumed known via stereotypes*. Strangers are 'always already' recognized as such, often with attached notions of potential threat. She argues that differences can be understood through:

"thinking about the role of everyday encounters in the forming of social space .... Such differences are not then to be found *on the bodies of others*, but are determined through encounters between others; they are impossible to grasp in the present."

(Ahmed 2000:9, original emphasis)

To accept the figure of the stranger as simply present, then, conceals:

"the very relationships of social antagonism that produce the stranger as a figure in the first place .... how 'the stranger' comes into being through the marking out of inhabitable spaces, bodies and terrains of knowledge."

(ibid:79)

This allows us to think about how, when walking in a national park, the majority white visitors ('we') may pass other people, perhaps saying a vague "hello" with a glance in their direction but never really giving them a second thought. Strangers in one sense of the word. However, on passing someone visibly different, 'we' recognize the other as a stranger – as someone 'always already' constructed as different and a possible threat. Such recognition cannot be based on the very present encounter, but on a knowledge socialised over time as to who can be in a particular public (rural) space. Theorising that regards visible communities as rural others (outlined in chapter 2) attempts to take into account these relationships of social antagonism, and the historicity of encounters between white and non-white people in the countryside, and challenge the inequalities and exclusions that take place. But it still involves a focus on difference that enforces and reproduces boundaries through an emphasis on minority identity and difference,

while normalising a homogenised majority. Naming visible communities as rural others still assumes an ontology of the stranger, by the very act of naming as 'different' via a visibly recognised otherness to a normalised set of stereotypes. This in itself can disallow 'rural others' from *not* identifying themselves as included, and can act to keep 'them' in 'place' – or rather out of place.

An obvious example of 'visible trait' stereotyping is found in the existence of this research itself: the NYM identified the need for the study based on their belief that they did not 'see' 'ethnic minorities' as visitors in the parks. It is the *act of looking* that privileges visibility as the signifier of difference, which may be described as a non-reflexive strategy that resists "difference that might otherwise put the identity of one's own position in danger" (Garber, 1992:130). Ahmed points to the need to move beyond an ontology of singular, visual difference, in order to challenge such an exclusionary strategy. By foregrounding the *history of social relations* embedded in the stereotype, she is able to unsettle fixed ideas of identity construction.

To deconstruct the 'always already' othering of visible communities in the English countryside, then, involves emphasising the social relations inherent in the construction of the rural other, and also rethinking the recognition of 'others' in ways that shift emphasis from the visible: we need to de-visualise difference. This is where an examination of whiteness is particularly important to an understanding of ethnicity beyond white/non-white, to disrupt the reiterated power inequalities set up by the normalisation of the majority (eg. see hooks, 1992; Bonnett, 1998; Ware & Back 2002), precisely because ethnic difference comes with a wide repertoire of meanings and signifiers beyond skin colour. Highlighting differences within the homogenised 'white' ethnic category can work towards more equal recognitions, and by making those invisible in rural space (white) more visible, the position of visible communities as rural others is destabilised - indeed, only then may the term visible communities become defunct. While it is beyond the scope of this study to research 'whiteness' and attached perceptions of rurality/nature, these are important issues to raise when questioning the ontology of difference in rural space. A far broader perspective, incorporating the heterogeneity between and among ethnicities, cultures and identities, is needed to deconstruct essentialised stereotypes and displace the category of stranger.

More pertinently for this research, recognising the instabilities within identity and heterogeneity across visible communities is crucial to such a project. I will move on later in the chapter to explore how shifting, hybrid and multiple understandings of ethnic



identity offer the potential to undo the rural idyll/rural other paradigm. But, as outlined in the psychoanalytical theory discussed in chapter 2, the ontology of the other is deeply rooted in processes of personal and social identity construction. I want to first, then, consider how these entrenched objectifications are *entangled with* hybrid/fluid identities. To do this I examine transgressive and resisting practices, specifically the ways in which, while attempting to disrupt exclusionary processes, such acts are also implicated in the innate ontological production of the 'stranger', and ultimately remain trapped within hegemonic discourse.

### rural others as resistance

The presence of visible communities in the countryside is predominantly understood as resistance to the hegemonic construction of a racialised countryside, and as contesting the idea that non-white people are 'out of place' in the rural (Kinsman, 1995). Visible communities who visit the national parks are thus conceived as transgressors, as directly challenging the status quo. I want to interrogate such notions of resistance more closely, because talking in terms of resistance does not necessarily move past essentialised difference: thinking visible communities in national parks as (only and always) contesting their position as rural others can reinstate the power binary between majority/minority, precisely through descriptions of 'resistance' *against* dominance. Furthermore, Ahmed (1999:89, original emphasis) warns that recognising challenges to a dominant 'system' does not go far enough:

"there is a failure to theorize, not the potential for any system to become destabilized, but the means by which relations of power are secured, paradoxically, *through this very process of destabilization.*"

Here she reminds us, importantly, that threats to the system are often recuperated by the hegemonic group to retain their position in society, and this is possible precisely because they have the power to do so. The hegemon's power allows it to understand, reconstruct and promote resistance *as displacement from social 'norms'*, reclaiming the tactics of resistance within a structured ontology and, often, designating these tactics as negative outcomes of social change. Merely emphasising strategies of resistance omits any consideration of the "complex social and psychic mechanisms for dealing with such tactics" (Ahmed: *ibid.*). We have already encountered the rural idyll narrative as a strategy to maintain the countryside as a racialised space (chapter 2), but it is also important to revisit the issues from a resistance/recuperation perspective in order to examine the mechanisms employed to reincorporate contesting tactics.

The ongoing denial of visible community presence in the rural, by countryside agencies and in the mainstream Imaginary, is one mechanism through which resistance is recovered: media representations, for example, continue to reiterate 'ethnic minorities' as missing from the rural environment (*The Guardian*, 2004; *Radio 4*, 2004). The physical presence of people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds in the English national parks is ignored, albeit under the auspices of perceiving 'ethnic minority' absence as a 'problem' about which something should be done. The social exclusion experienced by visible communities is certainly a situation that needs to be addressed, but such a narrow presentation enables dominant discourse to label 'ethnic minorities' as 'non-visitors', as essentially different from 'normal' (white) society, and serves to recuperate the resistance of those who do visit the countryside.

When/if recognition *is* given to visible community presence in the countryside, visiting individuals are conceived as *not* 'normal' within their 'own' ethnic group. Perceived as going against majority visible community practice, as 'exceptions to the rule', their challenge can be brushed aside. Thus a visible community 'norm' reassuringly still exists in the dominant Imaginary – and can be read and reproduced – as different to the white majority and as not 'really' English. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on the *actions* of visible communities as different from social 'norms', to imply different behaviour as absolute ethnic difference. Thus the stereotype of visible community absence from the countryside shifts to a new stereotype, which describes non-whites as *behaving differently* from a white 'norm': only visiting national parks in large extended family groups, not wearing 'appropriate' (read 'normal') clothing for walking, and so on. This production recoups visible communities, again, as essentially 'other', through contrasting the behaviours of white and non-white groups. This both maintains the power-laden binary and, in eliding *action* with *the body*, re-inscribes difference as ontological fact.

Moreover, such recuperation may be socially reproduced by both majority and 'minority' groups. For example, the construction of visible communities as 'having' different perceptions of nature to majority white culture, (and 'behaving' differently in the countryside), may not only be circulated in a dominant white Imaginary, but also promoted within visible community constructions of themselves. Solomos & Back (2000:150) warn that:

“we should not lose sight of the continuing, and in some sense growing, influence of essentialist and absolutist definitions of ‘ethnic and cultural’ difference. Whether one looks at the political language used by racist movements, or certain political movements within racialized minority communities, there is a clear tendency to rely on fixed and unchanging notions of community, culture and identity.”

In particular, they highlight emerging discourses of political and religious fundamentalism within Muslim and Hindu communities in England<sup>22</sup>, and suggest that, while promoting resistance to dominant society, static (re)constructions of visible community selves as absolutely different to a singular white majority can only add to ethnic tension in society, denying movement beyond the ‘us’ and ‘them’ stereotyping. Such resistance re-replaces the ‘stranger’, even celebrating a fact of ‘strangerhood’, in that it returns to and re-emphasises the idea of having a centre with attendant margins. Hegemonic recuperation of resistance, then, also works through visible community Imaginations of identity: if visible communities construct themselves as not participating in the English countryside because countryside recreation is not what ‘they’ as a cultural group ‘do’, an essential otherness is produced and preserved.

I would argue that the above mechanisms through which transgression is reincorporated by dominant society are both embedded in notions of essential identity and employed to deny/hide/ignore heterogeneity across visible community identities. However, seeing identity as visibly different but *always shifting and multiple* threatens the dominant Imaginary through offering resistance that is difficult to contain: Hesse (2000:17), for example, uses the term ‘transruptions’ to describe:

“interrogative phenomena that, although related to what is represented as marginal or incidental or insignificant ... nevertheless refuse to be repressed. They resist all attempts to ignore or eliminate them by simply recurring at another time or in another place.”

Transruptions unsettle because even the acknowledgement of their existence or their significance within a discourse poses a threat to “the coherence or validity of that discourse, its concepts or social practices” (ibid.). Transruptions are more than both transgressions and interruptions because of their *irrepressibility*. Moreover, they are irrepressible because, not only do they continually recur, but they are able to do so because they draw upon constantly evolving and multiple identities and positions. Visible community presence in the countryside can be understood as transruption, in that non-white presence continually challenges the racialised construction of the rural:

<sup>22</sup> Drawing on the work of Bhatt, 1997.

the 'rural idyll as white English space' discourse may be destabilised, on both rural-as-white and English-as-white levels.

We can think of transruptions as counter-measures to Bhabha's notion of stereotypes as sutures. The last chapter discussed the use of nostalgic racialised representations of natural heritage as sutures for the wound caused by an awareness of a 'crisis in Englishness'. In this sense, the presence of visible communities in the countryside act to re-open the wound and re-instigate majority society's uncertainty regarding national identity. Such presence understood as transruption rather than resistance suggests an ongoing re-opening and re-suturing process in which English identity can never be resolved: Englishness as continually contested between majority and minority society. It is exactly this push-and-pull, between visible community presence in rural space and the reiteration of rurality as white, that implicates/is implicated by the historicity of social relations between white and non-white communities in England. Transruptions, by implying the existence of centre and margin positions, encapsulate the hauntings Gordon (2001) discusses as endemic within social geographies. Hybrid and plural identities here are contesting but not transformative – fighting against yet reflective of structural inequalities in society, but ultimately unable to change the status quo.

Such resistance and struggle must be acknowledged and theorised if those structural imbalances are to be foregrounded. But do visible communities in the English countryside always and only construct themselves as occupying marginal positions, as contesting the 'norm'? Do visible communities claim ownership of and identity through space *not* in defiance, or even with recognition, of a 'norm', but on their *own terms*? There is a need to explore whether visible community presence in the English countryside may go beyond the centre/periphery dualism, and extricate how such presence may contribute to the *destabilisation* of the historical and habitual social relations caught up in the racialisation of rural space, thus I now turn to a reading of ethnicity, nationality and access to national parks that offers the potential to unsettle dominant/minority or centre/periphery schema.

### **hybridity, relationality and rural belongings**

I stated earlier that shifting, hybrid and multiple understandings of self offer the potential to undo the rural idyll/rural other paradigm. I suggest here that conceptualising visible community identity as *relational*, rather than minority or peripheral, is necessary if visible community presence in rural landscapes is not to be presumptuously

recognised as either 'strange' or as a 'challenge'. This section attempts to rethink access to the English national parks as *not only* the privilege of the hegemonic ethnic and cultural group, *nor only* as 'minority' resistance to or transruption of the dominant Imaginary, through consideration of identities as hybrid, multiple and constantly evolving.

Bhabha (1994) discusses hybridity not as the idea of two distinct entities merging, with a resultant struggle between polar identities or a new emergent combination that must draw upon these two 'original' starting points, but as a concept denying the very notion that any such two original points can be distinguishable in time and space. That is, hybridity as the instantaneousness of passing through, around and in between identity itself without any possibility of origin or arrival. This definition echoes the idea of 'inbetweenness' described in feminist literature (Katz, 1992) as *not* an anchored position between two or more fixed positions, but an unmoored shifting identification colliding with other different yet equally fluid identifications. Thinking of identity in this way sidesteps the binary of static white/visible community constructions: without a fixed stereotype to 'know', it is not possible to identify a 'stranger', in Ahmed's conception of the term.

However, Bhabha does not refute that ideas of difference are central in self identification. Rather, he works with fluid differences that destabilise the power positions necessary to name and fix people as strangers/threat. Brah *et al.* (1999) similarly interrogate and critique 'orthodox' theorisation of the processes that underpin the production of static and absolute identity, and argue for an understanding of identity(ies) as always multiple, shifting and *contextually negotiated*. Indeed, there is a well-established body of literature addressing issues of plurality and hybridity, which highlights the irreductibility of both self and other, and undermines the production of a visible 'stranger', while working with and through notions of difference as inherent within identity construction processes (eg. Donald & Rattansi, 1992; Butler, 1993; Bennett, 1998; Chambers & Curti, 1998).

Influential within this literature is the work of Derrida (1972), whose conceptualisation of *difference* is precisely NOT as a binary form between what is absolutely the same and absolutely other, but a 'weave' of differences and similarities that refuse any separation into fixed categories or oppositions. *Difference* describes a model in which every 'concept' (identity included) is:

"inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts [identities], by means of the systematic play of differences"  
(Derrida, 1972: cited in Hall, 2000:216)

As such, difference prevents any system/society from instituting itself as complete, "from stabilizing itself as a fully sutured totality" (Hall, *ibid.*) Parekh (1991) observes this play of differences within visible communities in England, describing the 'great changes afoot' in family life:

"In every family, husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters are having to re-negotiate and re-define their patterns of relationship in a manner that takes account both of their traditional values and those characteristic of their adopted country. Different families reach their own inherently tentative conclusions."

Gilroy (1998:23) also contends that the concept of 'in between', in the sense outlined above, terminates any safe assumption of either "effortless sameness" or "absolute differentiation". He employs the notion of 'the changing same' to extricate the "complex, dynamic potency of living memory" and diasporic identities, defining 'the changing same' as:

"not some invariant essence that gets enclosed in a shape-shifting exterior [...] The same is retained but not reified. It is recombinant, ceaselessly reprocessed in the glow of its own dying embers. [...] Invariably promiscuous and unsystematically profane, this is a mutable hetero-culture orchestrated by the historic injunction to keep on moving."

The question is, how may theories regarding hybrid, syncretic, relational identities help us to rethink visible community non/presence in the English national parks, beyond resistance?

### desire and becoming

I want to explore the above question through the work of Probyn (1996). Drawing on Foucault, she expounds a project that she calls 'outside belongings', whose aim is to envision identities and their variously constructed belongings beyond a binary system of identification. Her central argument regarding how we think about space, belonging and identities is:

"that the outside ... is a more adequate figure for thinking about social relations and the social than either an interior/exterior or a center/marginal model. The notion of outside supposes that we think in terms of "relations of proximity," or the surface, "a network in which each point is distinct ... and has a position in relation to every other point in a space that simultaneously holds and separates them all" (Foucault, 1987:12)."

(Probyn, 1996:11)

Probyn's understanding of 'outside' is crucially not as a construct in opposition to any 'inside', rather she employs the term 'outside belongings' specifically *against* categorising tendencies, as an alternative to the placing of differences as absolute. 'Outside belongings' is intended to incorporate the movement that the wish or *desire to belong* carries, "to consider more closely the movement of and between categories" (ibid.:9). Working at the level of desire is particularly useful here: thinking about the desire to belong offers a way to sidestep the 'actualities' of belonging or not, or *being seen to belong* or not, thus denying an ontology of a fixed visual given. In addition, the acceptance of no desire to belong (in a certain space) can also be incorporated in this outside. Moreover, by proposing an individual's desire to belong as the focal point in identity, emphasis is shifted from *being* to *becoming*.

If a woman, then, who identifies as African Caribbean, imagines her identity intertwined with rural space, her desire to belong can shift how she sees herself in the countryside. Furthermore, through experiences in rural areas her conception of self and national identity may develop. An Asian man who feels strongly connected to the city he lives in may or may not construct an Englishness linked with the urban – he may not desire English as part of his identity at all, or may choose it for reasons beyond place. His desire and production of identity, though, are also likely to evolve over time, through different life stages and experiences. The point is that thinking identities relationally supports the idea of plural and hybrid identities and facilitates recognition of the subjectivity of actors, while remaining open to the becomingness of identity accommodates agency and reflexivity among/within individuals – critically 'outside' the possibility of reincorporation by the hegemon. The concept of belonging outside/beyond an exclusive system reinterprets visible communities as potentially having a wide variety of connections with the rural, and with the English national parks. Some of these identifications may well be a sense of non-attachment through understandings of the countryside as a racialised and exclusive space. Some may be an attachment to English rurality through memories or links with other rurals. Some may be a sense of belonging through a particular construction of nationality and/or cultural experience.

However, we need to be careful when thinking about becoming and 'outside belongings', since these concepts cannot/do not *automatically* engender plurality and hybridity, or move beyond the centre/margin dualism. Sarup (1998:11), in an exploration of identity, culture and migration, also writes that "identity is not to do with being but with becoming", but believes that it is *because of this continual becoming* that boundaries are drawn:

"I want to suggest that identity is ... a consequence of a process of interaction between people, institutions and practices and that, because the range of human behaviour is so wide, groups maintain boundaries to limit the type of behaviour within a defined cultural territory."

For Sarup, becoming and the desire to belong can be returned to boundary drawing processes through an inability to deal with the vastness of possibilities these concepts suggest. He argues that identity, even and especially when fluid, is denied as such, and ultimately returned as exclusionary.

In addition to this overwhelming potentiality of identity, power issues are also at play: the desire to identity and belonging of one person/group may, to further their own aspirations, ignore the possibility of other(s)' desire to become/belong. This is illustrated through some of the literature regarding 'passing', which deals with issues relating to identity, visibility, transgression and movement. Ahmed (1999) recounts a situation in a novel<sup>23</sup>, where a black woman, passing as white in a cafe, is worried by the stare of another (white) woman that she has been 'detected'. The first woman then decides that no, the white woman could not possibly have recognised her own blackness because "white people were so stupid at such things" (Larsen, 1994<sup>24</sup>). The irony is that the second (white) woman is actually an old friend of the first and herself black, but as she is also 'passing' she is unrecognised by the first due to the assumption of whiteness ascribed her. Ahmed (1999:88) concludes:

"that passing dislocates the relation between self and other through the movement of desires which are crucially instituted by differences that both command and resist the scopic regime."

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<sup>23</sup> "Passing" by Nella Larsen, whom Ahmed describes as 'one of the few women writers of the Harlem renaissance in 1929'.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Ahmed, 1999: 88.



Larsen's story highlights how readings of identity based on visible signifiers are interlinked with desire for identity through centre/periphery power imbalances. In desiring to be at the centre, a person may transfer specific expectations onto others (onto their visual recognition of others), and construct the other as their own desire imagines the other to be. In this example, the first woman is trapped within the 'scopic regime' in *desiring to be* at 'the centre', and her identification of herself and others thus informed by an essentialised understanding of difference. Thinking identity through desire to belong and a becoming-ness (rather than the actuality) of the self does not necessarily escape beyond the transruptive.

The relativism inherent in Probyn's notion of 'outside' raises doubts as to its critical potential. Theorising the social as a surface leads to a relational model, and relational thinking critiqued as unable to allow for any consideration of power struggles, any recognition of the structural inequalities that do violence, or acknowledgement of the oppression that constantly threatens agency. As explained in the opening to this chapter, the intention is to work through the structures that inculcate exclusion, rather than sweep them aside. My aim here, following Probyn, is to argue that the inequalities must be held in tension with a way of thinking/looking that avoids reiterating the power imbalances that enable the inequalities. That is, in considering visible community identities and the ways in which they may be entangled with constructions of the English countryside, there is a need to both foreground the racisms involved in the production of a white rural idyll *and* interrogate how such racisms can be disrupted. This can be done if relational identities, the 'outside' or 'the surface', are understood not as an object, but as a *process*:

"as a way of configuring the lines of force that compose the social, lines of force that are by their very nature *deeply* material and historical."

(Probyn, 1996:12, original emphasis)

Conceptualising both identity *and* the power inequalities *affecting identity construction* on such a processual surface offers us a chance to displace the 'stranger' stereotype by moving away from bodily recognition, while at the same time allowing the central role of visual recognition in identification and identity processes, (and the exclusionary processes it is implicated in), to be held in this surface too. This is vital to a more holistic appreciation of the entanglements between presence, social exclusion, transruptions, and beyond the transruptive.

belonging and embodiment

To examine whether such a relational model can contribute to understanding visible community perceptions of and access to national parks, the concept of relational identities needs to be extended to the interconnections between identity and place. In particular, theorising needs to consider notions of becoming *alongside* the ways in which people feel attachment to and belonging in space: how people are embodied in and move through the countryside may reveal how they identify with the rural, and with themselves through the rural. Game (1991:167) writes that:

“Place’, however, can mean differently, and a distinction [can] be drawn between a pinning down of place in representation, and a way of being in place that is meaning embodied in movement, in deferral.”

This quote suggests that there are ways of being in (or not being in) place that refuse an objectifying gaze and inscribe different desires. This section, therefore, now moves on to explore becoming and belonging in terms of embodiment in natural spaces/national parks, to unpack meanings of the rural that are distinct from understandings of representation, and how these meanings may be implicated in visible community cultural practices.

Chapter 2 spoke of the everyday practices that inform cultural habits and are integral to conceptions of self, group and national identity. It outlined how visible community experiences are predominantly based in the cities, for economic and political reasons, and that, because of this situation, everyday practices serve to inculcate and reinforce visible communities as belonging in urban space. Moreover, the *continuity of everyday experiences* is often considered to render regular/habitual embodied experiences *non-reflexive* (see MacNaughton & Urry, 2000), and continually repeated bodily practices are accepted as cultural practices. In this description, visible communities who experience all their everyday activities in the cities understand these practices as ‘their cultural practices’ in ‘their place’. Such unreflexive embodiment suggests belonging as constrained by physical environment – the ‘body-in-being’ – and does not allow for a more critical comprehension of deliberation within embodied practices – the ‘body-in-becoming’. It is the latter, unsurprisingly, that speaks to hybridity, multiple identities and concepts of relationality. Theorising embodiment as reflexive opens thinking to the ways in which particular physical experiences are used to *express* identity and *claim* status, and to signify and convey cultural and personal values. Edensor (2000:82), writing about the practice of walking in the British countryside, says that it reveals:

"distinctive ways in which we express ourselves physically, simultaneously performing and transmitting meaning while sensually apprehending 'nature' and sustaining wider ideologies about nature, and the role of the body in nature."

There are three key arguments that I wish to follow here. The first is that the idea of a reflexive embodiment demands a rethinking of visible community access to the national parks in England, as it alters the focus of enquiry debated earlier in this chapter. Rather than outlining visible community presence in the countryside as transruption or challenge, we must now ask what meanings are performed and transmitted by visible communities in the countryside? What do the activities practiced in rural areas reveal about visible community understandings and values of nature? And what do these practices say about visible community perceptions of their ethnic and national identity? It is possible that visible community performances and presence in the rural may be exactly a challenge to a nationality and rurality understood as racialised and exclusive. But acknowledging reflexive experience opens up the possibility that the actions of people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds in the countryside embody a sense of attachment to the rural through personal and/or cultural memories of other rurals, and disclose nature as central to identity. It is also possible that visible communities undertake activities in the countryside because they value rurality as central to national identity, feel a sense of belonging there and explain themselves, in part, as English. Multiple potentialities are enabled by thinking embodied practices as moments of subjectivity in particular spaces, rather than as socialised automated responses. Moreover, these possibilities are each open-ended and in flux – echoing the notion of 'becoming' and of 'desire to identity' discussed previously.

The second argument is that the *spatiality* of embodied practices, in the reflexive scenario, is also *becoming* rather than fixed. That is, places and the embodied experiences occurring in them are mutually constitutive: the practice of walking in the countryside not only expresses an identity and the values of an individual, but the practice remakes the place in line with that individual's experience of it. If that individual's identity and values are open to change, then so is her/his perception of the place in which identity/values are transmitted through presence/activity. This implies that the rural can be (re)produced and (re)interpreted by visible communities, its meaning/construction shifting over time and with reflection. For example, people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds may not experience the rural growing up at all, if countryside recreation is not part of their habitual or cultural practice. However, whatever decision/situation leads someone to visit the countryside later in life, their

embodied experiences in that place can potentially rewrite rurality for them, which in turn impacts back upon their experiences and so on. In this way, thinking about a reflexive embodiment facilitates the conceptualisation of an evolving rural, interlinked with shifting cultural practices and becoming identities.

The third issue is the need to work at other levels alongside the visual. The visual sense remains important in countryside experiences – landscape views are commonly quoted as key reasons for going to national parks, and the ‘eye/I’ privileged in perceptions of the natural world (Anderson, 1995). But other senses are involved too, especially the aural, olfactory, and tactile (MacNaughton & Urry, 2000). In particular, experiences in the rural involve these senses’ interactions with nature and ‘the natural world’. De-privileging sight through a focus on bodily interactions with the environment helps us to move away from the ontological given of visual identification, by incorporating the understandings/ performances of self in the English countryside that draw upon memories and connections made through smell, hearing, taste and touch - by allowing for transferable concepts of nature across space and time. Thus we can incorporate the links, comparisons and contrasts of embodied practices in and of nature as contributing to ‘becoming’ identities. While it is possible that these comparisons may facilitate static identities, through unchanging experiences of nature and rurality that reproduce rural space as always the same, thinking nature as reflexively understood and performed through a range of sense *also* enables an awareness of flexible and multiple identities and belonging. Visible community identities, experiences and senses of attachment to and belonging in the English countryside, then, may be constructed through a range of sensual connections to other rurals/nature spaces.

Furthermore, a focus on embodiment beyond the visual lets us re-theorise visible community *non-presence* in the countryside more critically, opening up to what belonging in spaces other than the rural may mean, and how such belonging impacts on perceptions of the rural. Franklin (2002:190) outlines a need to:

“invoke nature less as a discursively constructed site or region, with its creators, managers and its visitor-consumers ... and understand nature also as a spatially disembeddable, fragmentable notion (in time and space).”

Visible communities may predominantly express identity and claim status through/in the cities, but in a reflexive relationship with nature/environment, such claims are open to a nature that crosses spatialised boundaries such as rural/urban. Physical

experiences that tie (national) identity to the urban thus do not necessarily forbid identifications and becomings in other spaces, but can allow for interconnections across space, through visual, aural, tactile and olfactory experiences of the natural world. Put another way, a de-spatialised nature can be part of an additive model of belonging (with attachments felt in rural and urban space as well as in England and the West Indies, for example), replacing the dualistic either/or of being tied to the countryside or city, England or country of (grand/parental) origin. Reflexive embodiment, then, leads us to re-conceptualise space itself within understandings of nationality and ethnicity, and it is to these issues that I now turn.

### **(dis)placing the rural**

“To accept the rural as a social and cultural construct allows the rural to be rescued as an important research category, as the way in which the meanings of rurality are constructed, negotiated and experienced will interconnect with the agencies and structures being played out in the space concerned.”

(Cloe & Thrift, 1994:3)

As examined in chapter 2, much of the academic research focusing on rurality has been concerned with the social construction of a rural ‘idyll’, and the ways in which its dominance has served to exclude or marginalise certain groups from the countryside. However, Little (1999) calls for research that breaks down the idea of rural as idyll, and pays attention to non-idyllic (anti-myth) situations and experiences in the countryside, while Boyle & Halfacree (1998) similarly argue against the idyll myth in considering migration to and within rural areas. There are also important new moves to examine whiteness in the rural (see Agyeman & Neal, forthcoming). Unpacking the ‘rural idyll’ is crucial to disrupt the stereotypes that are so easily folded into the constructions of Englishness, heritage and cultural ‘norms’, and challenge the ways in which these stereotypes are reincorporated within dominant representations of a homogeneous, racialised countryside.

As part of this unpacking, this chapter has so far excavated the role of social relations between people in processes of social and spatial exclusion, critiquing the ontological presumption of the category ‘stranger’, and explored how conceiving identity as relational offers the potential to rethink stereotypes, and move beyond prejudgements based on those stereotypes. In this section, though, I want to shift the emphasis onto *space itself* as *directly constitutive* of identities and social relations, since key research questions are addressed to visible communities’ perceptions of their reception *in*

*national parks*. To this end, and drawing particularly on the work of Massey, I first argue the need to think space relationally, in order to incorporate new/different readings of the English countryside among people from visible community backgrounds, and to focus on rurality as a relational space within (and outside) ideas of national identity. I then move to foreground the social construction of space as *impacting on* social interactions, through an investigation of the ways in which relationally constituted spatial meanings affect how people relate to each other in particular sites. This section, then, works to think beyond demystifying the rural – the English countryside as non-idyll, as an exclusionary space, is still the English countryside, bounded and intact. Instead, my intention is to interrogate the dualism between countryside and city, in terms of their construction within imaginings of self and national identity.

Deconstructing the rural, however, must carefully consider physicality. Hetherington (1997) writes that both subjects and objects (referring to people and places) are folded into each other, and that agency is less the exclusive privilege of the subject but rather the effect of the entanglements between subject and object. This echoes the arguments previously made regarding embodiment, reflexivity and the mutually constitutive relationships between place and identity, further suggesting that the countryside's very materiality is intertwined with people's understandings of rural space. Moreover, its *perceived* materiality, or the *remembered* materiality of another rural, is entangled in these understandings. How can 'the rural' construct be displaced as long as its materiality remains intact? I am not inferring that 'the rural', as relationally conceived, loses its potency as a research category: its analytical status must be retained precisely *because* people act and think of the countryside as if 'it' exists in its singularity, and because specific ideas of the countryside have specific social consequences (as the opening quote to this section attests). Rather, I want to work with both the materiality *and* relationality of the English countryside, to examine the ways in which they interconnect, and the implications of these interconnections on visible community perceptions of and access to national parks.

relational space, place, identity and 'meaning'

Hudson (2001:263) states that:

"There will always be multiple coexisting characterizations of particular spaces or places. Different social groups within a place may have different – even highly contested – readings of its character and different stakes or interests in the place."

We can extend this to incorporate the idea that different social groups *beyond/outside* a particular place likewise may have different and highly contested understandings of that place. Massey (1994:120) argues that place can be conceived in terms of 'the articulation of social relations', and she continues:

"(s)ome of these relations will be, as it were, contained within the place; others will stretch beyond it, tying any particular locality into wider relations and processes in which other places are implicated too."

Following this, we can think about place as 'particular moments' in these intersecting social relations, relations that will have changed, disappeared and re-emerged over time in response to their interconnectedness - we can consider place as 'moments of arbitrary closure'. The character of a place itself (incorporating its local culture, social structure and even dominant political ideologies) is thus the outcome of internal and external social interactions, and place identities are constructed through the "*specificity of their interaction with other places* rather than by counterposition to them" (Massey, 1994:121, emphasis added). Places are relationally constituted, imbued with hauntings and memories of other places, and the interactions that occur in and across them. Furthermore, places are also necessarily hybrid, never reducible to one 'true' character. Theorising the countryside, then, should neither be in isolation from, nor merely in opposition to, non-rural place, but should incorporate the social relations played out across them. The national parks, therefore, must be conceptualised via their specific, inter-connecting and complex associations with a multitude of other places, each being constructed through similar processes but with different specificities of interactions.

Put another way, if place is relationally constituted, then meanings of place are equally relationally constructed, and social relations between groups in specific places affected by complex, interacting, constantly re-negotiated values and understandings of place. One obvious realm of interaction is that between national parks and other natural

heritage/nature conservation sites, managed/affected by organisations such as the Countryside Agency, Council for the Protection of Rural England, English Heritage, English Nature and the National Trust, among others. Relations with these organisations and these sites will impact upon the (perceived) character of national parks themselves. A restrictive reading highlights these organisations as tied up with the nostalgic and preservationist approaches to notions of Englishness, countryside and heritage outlined in chapter 2, (re)placing the national parks as exclusive via their relationships with these (same) organisations. From this perspective, national parks - even with policies and projects aimed at changing their image and genuinely welcoming a diverse range of visitors - may be hindered in improving social inclusion by their relations with other places, and the organisations involved with them. However, the organisations listed above operate at different levels and with a wide range of responsibilities: while the first two on the list are specifically rural-only focused, the remainder engage in both rural and urban areas. As such, national parks have links across the countryside, towns and cities. A more progressive reading of place as relational recognises the interconnectivity of social relations that occur between a range of different places (and the organisations involved in/with them), and remains open to the mutuality of impacts between them, constantly re-producing each place.

In addition, people's perceptions of national parks may be explicitly or implicitly linked with other 'natural' places via productions of nature, for example country parks and larger urban parks. They may also be associated with other options for recreation: national parks remembered/constructed as 'a day out' can be comparable with, perhaps, a day at the beach, at an adventure park, or even shopping in a town centre or an out-of-town retail park - indeed, the term park covers an increasingly wide range of places! That cultural inflections help to shape choices regarding where to go for a day trip is itself further evidence of the relationality of place, since such decisions will, at least in part, be predicated on social relations in specific places with own and other groups.

Furthermore, we can extend such thinking about **place** as relationally constructed, to consider how relationality is caught up with the more broadly constructed entity of **space**, through an emphasis on meaning. Massey (2004) critiques the 'universalisation of the meaningfulness of place', which she describes as a mechanism that, within academic and political discourses, determines locality or 'place' as the level of environment able to hold meaning - or rather as the repository for 'much more' personal and cultural meaning - rather than more generalised 'space'. This



'universalisation' thus posits 'place' as a key entity through which identity is rooted, developed and maintained, resulting in the social and political claiming of territory. As Massey (2004:7) points out:

"Such struggles over place, and the meaningfulness in and of place, return us to the argument ... that in any even minimal recognition of the relational construction of space and of identity, 'place' must be a site of negotiation, and that often this will be conflictual negotiation."

That is, emphasis on struggles over 'place' serve to privilege 'place' as hierarchical over 'space' in terms of identity construction, through the former's perceived capacity for having/holding meaning. Massey's principle concern is that this characterisation of space and place as oppositional in a globalised contemporary world denies the fact that the "lived reality of our daily lives" is "dispersed in its sources and its repercussions". She argues that, *alongside* place as grounded and real, space *also* has the capacity to be meaningful. Such a reading of space and place *as themselves relational* is particularly important in the context of this research, given the issues regarding diasporic identity and international connections caught up in visible community histories, experiences and day-to-day lives.

A relational understanding the English national parks, then, necessitates thinking in terms of *webs of social relations*, across a range of places and spaces. This interrupts the dualistic thinking underlying the construction of a racialised countryside examined in chapter 2 and, importantly, enables us to reposition national parks. National parks can thus be re-imagined within a network of 'national places'<sup>25</sup>, for example, in reciprocal relationships with national art galleries, museums and other urban places promoted as sites of national culture; with places of national government institutions and other formal locations associated with claims to Englishness; but also with more everyday, personal, fleeting places that offer a 'moment of closure' around a person's understanding of their national identity. Such re-imagining must incorporate relations with a range of different groups across these different spaces, and how they impact on identity formation.

Furthermore, inter-national places may be influential within people's national identity formation - across a range of life stages and time periods, across lifestyles and socio-economic positions, across gender, etc. The possibility of the rural as self and urban as

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<sup>25</sup> I use the term 'national places' to indicate places important within the construction of national identity – from any person's perspective.

other within English identity becomes irrelevant, since the constructions of place emanating from complex webs of social relations over time and across space cannot be either fixed or whole - they are always in flux, always in the process of being re-negotiated, always becoming.

There are three key scenarios that I wish to examine more closely here, from this wider 'relationality of meaning' perspective. First, if/once visible communities visit national parks, reflexive and embodied experiences may not only change *understandings* of the national parks and wider English countryside, but influence the *meanings* of and for identity *produced through* English rurality. National parks, as having meaning, may then be re-positioned in the Imaginary with regard to a range of other (perhaps more familiar) places that also have meaning in self and national identity. Not only does this demand a re-interpretation of the ways in which English rurality may connect with visible communities' lives, it also points to the great complexity involved in relationships between visible communities and other groups in rural areas in England. This goes beyond the 'us'/'them' or 'self'/'stranger' oppositions that facilitate and reiterate stereotyping. Instead, social relations impact upon an array of meanings constituted within a mosaic of landscapes/places in visible community Imaginaries – and within the white psyche.

So, the relationship between a white resident in Bakewell and an African Caribbean visitor to the Peak District, for example, cannot be reduced to the 'prejudiced reception and defensive/challenging presence' polarity inscribed through chapter 2<sup>26</sup>. It may be that the white resident is originally from an urban area, or has lived overseas, and the meaning of the English countryside in their identity formation is entangled with a diversity of experiences and relationships with other people in other places. It may be that the African Caribbean individual brings meanings of other ruralities and experiences in urban England to the national parks, which influence how s/he performs and understands rural England. All of these factors will be incorporated into the way the two individuals relate to one another – their relationship will be *contextually negotiated*. Reviewing the meaning of place as relationally constructed, then, affords an alternative reading of social relations between visible and white communities in the English national parks.

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<sup>26</sup> Though such social relations remain one possibility.

Secondly, even *without* experience in the English national parks, visible community familiarity with other rurals (outside England) will impact on understandings of the English countryside in complex ways, depending on a range of personal positions (age, gender, socio-economic position, ability, sexuality, etc). This is implicated in the first point above, but addressed separately here to stress that lack of embodied experience in the English national parks does not preclude relational understandings of place, and that such relationality will impact on the meaning of the English countryside (and social relations enacted there) in a similar process to that outlined previously.

Third, where visible communities' engagement with rurality (in England or elsewhere) is *only via socialised representation* (embodied experiences in any countryside are lacking), we still cannot presume that the English countryside is only perceived in one specific, unchanging way (as exclusive). The meanings attached to the English national parks, even through community narratives – retain the potential to be relationally constituted. Therefore, the social relations that visible communities *imagine* will occur in the English countryside are also affected by myriad interconnecting place and space meanings and, again, cannot be reduced to only perceptions of exclusion. Indeed, the latter, narrow definition suggests an impossibility of visible communities thinking beyond the lived realities of the everyday, which eschews imagination and agency, as well as personal and cultural differentiation.

The concept that both space and place are relationally constituted, and that meanings attached to and performed through space and place are likewise entangled in networks of embodied experiences and cultural constructions, facilitates/demands a recognition of the roles played by other rurals (outside England) and other spaces (cities, towns, urban fringe) both in and beyond England, in visible community constructions of ethnic and national identity and belonging. The English countryside, then may be central within national identity formation for some people, while being absent from constructions of Englishness for others, crucially in a model that does not allow the possibility of a dominant 'norm'. That is, acknowledging the spatial and temporal connections between different spaces and places, and allowing for meanings to be attached in different ways, at different scales and at different times, the English countryside can no longer be territorialized or racialised. It thus becomes 'a mobile, circulating and ubiquitous space' (Amin, 2004), disrupting the very possibility of 'rural others', and enabling a more inclusive reading of visible communities' use, perceptions and engagement with the English countryside.

**conclusion: relationality, structure and tension**

This chapter has been concerned with unsettling the essentialist views and exclusionary stereotypes outlined in chapter 2, which serve to position visible communities as rural others. I began by critiquing the ontological existence of a truly unrecognisable 'other', and unpacking the possibility of ever 'knowing' visible difference – and there ever 'being' singular, originary difference. I next examined how visible community resistance to being marginalised, even while drawing upon hybrid, multiple and fluid identities may ultimately remain trapped in the dominant/minority paradigm that it aims to undo: how even irrepressible transruptions, through their very emphasis on the existence of centre/marginal positions, reiterate an 'us'/'them' model, even while positing identity as hybrid and flexible.

However, I moved on to argue that understanding identities as relationally and pragmatically constituted, *also* has the potential to *work through* essentialisms and dualisms. In particular, I focused on 'desire to' identity and notions of self as always becoming, within a relational model that encapsulates 'outside belongings' – a model that crucially incorporates the exclusionary structures and processes that attempt to deny minority/disempowered desires and identities. Through a consideration of embodied practices as reflexive, I suggested that evolving, relational understandings of identity (self and national) offer alternative readings of visible communities in the English countryside. Furthermore, I examined the relationality of space and place: the construction of place via the specificity of its interactions with a range of similarly/differently interconnected places; the simultaneously cross-penetrating meanings of space and place; and the mutual reactivity between spatial meaning and social relations in/across space. I argued for an understanding of the rural always in construction, fluid and negotiable, and thereby impossible to pin down as any 'essence of Englishness', and for recognition that visible community understandings of and performances of identity in national parks are contextually negotiated and, likewise, always becoming.

The first part of this thesis, then, has engaged with a wide range of academic literature and thought regarding identity construction, ethnicity and rurality in contemporary England. While chapter 2 explored issues surrounding the singularity and dominance of the 'rural idyll' narrative, and the power inequalities behind the production and reiteration of exclusive, racialised representations of English rurality and nationality, chapter 3 has investigated identity, place and social in/exclusion through desire,

agency and becoming. I stressed at the start of this chapter that the hauntings of past social relations continually weave through the social geography of the places people inhabit, as well as in the authority afforded collective (dominant and minority) knowledge. Chapters 2 and 3, then, are intended to be thought through each other. That is, any conceptualisation of non-reductive visible community Imaginaries and hybrid belongings *must also* probe the ways in which they are entangled with structured inequalities. I reiterate here the need to hold the structural power imbalances endemic in society *in tension with* being open to visible communities claiming identities (hybrid, shifting, syncretic as well as stable), and perceiving the English countryside, in ways that do not always already exclude them from rural space.

Retaining and working with this tension, this irrepressible and constantly interpenetrating friction between issues of structure and desire, resistance and recuperation, relationality and social relations, and place and self identity, emerged as a core theme through the literature – not always explicitly, but certainly in reading the two broadly opposing epistemologies regarding ethnic identity, nationality and the English countryside alongside one another. As such, the continual interplay between the structural/exclusive and relational/inclusive models significantly influenced the key research questions outlined in the introduction (chapter 1), which morphed, merged, separated and dis/appeared throughout the process of the ongoing literature review. As we shall see, this tension was also evident throughout the empirical fieldwork, analysis of research materials and the writing of the thesis itself (all of which also fed back into a continual review of the research questions).

But I am getting ahead of the narrative. What I want to specifically emphasise here is that the tension outlined above directly shaped the research methodology itself. This struggle between structural and relational, then, played a role in deciding to employ a range of methodological techniques, the adoption of flexible approaches to the fieldwork, the continual refining of research questions and directions, and the design of questionnaires and interviews. This tension also demanded a constant reflexivity regarding the researcher's position and positionality, and a careful negotiation of the complex and interacting 'web of power relations' caught up in the research process. The next part of the thesis investigates these issues in detail, and, through contemplation of a selection of specific experiences and situations, narrates the obstacles and opportunities encountered during the course of the research.

#### 4. DOING THE JOURNEY [methodology]

The student (woman, mother, partner, etc.) introduced at the start of this book is trying to make sense of the journey. The journey (not over) is, unsurprisingly, resisting this. But the structures of academia require a travel narrative. This chapter, then, charts her journey. It is (re)told in a roughly linear fashion, from the 'beginning' through to the 'end' - though this is misleading because the journey was *not* straight forward. She would highlight here that the methodologies were overlapping as well as consecutive, intermittent as well as continuous, cyclical as well as start-to-finish, and unfinished too. The research questions<sup>27</sup> acted as guides throughout the journey, albeit flexible guides who altered course in response to thought and situation. This chapter outlines the range of 'techniques' chosen to negotiate the breadth and depth of terrain covered, and highlights how experiences along the way fed back into reconsideration of the research questions and theory.

The chapter also narrates the issues involved in the decision-making processes. Doing any journey is rarely solely under the traveller's control - sometimes it was not possible to go where she wanted or travel the way that she intended. The politics involved in moments such as this are discussed, and, in particular, ethical considerations are implicitly woven through her account, though not always drawn out. The constantly varying contexts a researcher finds themselves in demands ever-evolving contemplation and *responsible reaction*: feeling for a way forward that is not violent to those involved in the research encounters, and imagining and creating – aware of the power structures and positions within them inhabited by research participants – open and honest 'spaces of engagement' (Thrift, 2003)<sup>28</sup>.

Tied to such notions of ethics, she works with the idea of 'generating materials', which Whatmore (2003:90) describes as:

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<sup>27</sup> See page 11, chapter 1.

<sup>28</sup> Specific ethical guidelines were abided by under university regulations, but, while such regulations are necessary and useful, her point here is that any 'list' will never be sufficient within social science research.

"unsettl(ing) this stance towards the activity of doing research and its implicit distribution of energies, in which the researcher does all the acting while the researched are merely acted upon. This alternative formulation suggests that data, like questions, are produced, not found, and that the activity of producing them is not all vested in the researcher."

Reflexivity in theory and positionality in practice have become important concerns in the social sciences with, for example, Pile & Thrift (1995)'s discussion of 'mapping the subject' (theorising the self), moves within feminist and post-colonial writing to acknowledge the position and impact of the self-subject relationship in research (Kobayashi, 1994; Rose, 1997), and the ways in which structured identities may be differently positioned in 'webs of power relations' (Staeheli & Lawson, 1994). However, Whatmore's project goes further than this. Understanding that research is not an investigation *of* the world, but rather an 'intervention *in* the world':

"demands a more rigorous sense of, and commitment to, research as a **co-fabrication** or 'working together' with those whom we are researching."

(Whatmore, 2003:90, original emphasis)

This concept of co-fabrication questions the belief that respondents are passive or inert bodies that information can be extracted from or passed to, importantly re-animating 'positionality' in a dynamic way. This chapter highlights the ways in which relationships developed throughout the research, and how these relationships altered her direction, and (perhaps) also the directions of those she interacted with.



Figure 4: Who observes whom?

With a range of people and for various periods of time, then, a degree of *co-travelling* occurred. Additionally, the notion of co-fabrication facilitates a more holistic interpretation of what constitutes 'generating materials'. This chapter argues that *non-participation* in research is rarely free of wider societal power relations and, as such, *gaps and silences* should also be conceptualised as data to be worked through.

Furthermore, Whatmore, drawing on the work of Stengers (1997), contends that the non-human (as well as human) entities present in research situations are also involved in the data generation process. This dismantles the assumed distinctions between social subject and material objects reiterated through 'scientific divisions of labour', and challenges the dualistic entrenchment of the 'word – world settlement': that is, the philosophical imperative of 'working together' complicates any easy distinction between the epistemological 'how can we know the world?' and the ontological 'how does the world make itself known?' Co-fabrication and co-travelling, then, incorporate non-human actors alongside human actors as generators of research material. Thinking in this way foregrounds the *role of place* itself in the research process, and how rural and urban environments were involved in shaping the research, both as social constructs *and* as physical entities. Writing these physicalities as co-travellers enables her to consider the embodied nature of positions in which the journey was implicated, beyond the discursively constructed 'politics of identity'. Consequently, the chapter pays attention to her physical destinations, as well as working through the methodologies employed, the decision-making processes behind their choice, and exploring the intersubjectivities involved in the journey.

In the same vein, she believes that the temporal aspect of fieldwork should also be considered as part of the production of research materials. The chapter argues that the timing of the research transpired as an important co-traveller in the study – especially with regard to the political and social climate in England at the time the fieldwork was undertaken. In addition, the spatio-temporal imaginary of the 'field' itself is briefly unpacked, through discussion relating the ways in which the processes of 'data analysis' and 'writing up' of research are also implicated in co-fabrication and co-travelling processes.



## Quantitative methods

The study sites were given to the student at the outset of the study. The NYM and Middlesbrough were obvious choices, given the NYM's position as CASE funder of the research. Having a second park/corresponding urban area widened the research potential, enabling a more rigorous exploration of issues via consideration of a greater range of factors: for example, Middlesbrough has a smaller and less diverse visible community population than Sheffield, while the NYM and PD each offer different ranges of visitor experiences and have their own distinct policies and infrastructure in place. At no point did she contemplate *not* studying these given areas. There are issues here regarding taking on a journey already partially mapped out by others, and surrounding the student position in relation to both the academic hierarchy and the policy world. It is important to be sensitive to the power-laden nature of research encounters in terms of shaping the 'outcomes' of a study, and necessary to be aware of the range of differential positions of authority exerted (whether intentionally or not) over the research process.

### Urban survey<sup>29</sup>

The research questions surrounding use and perceptions of the national parks by visible communities necessitated going into the cities to directly engage with these groups. She decided on a questionnaire survey to gain an overview of opinions. The urban questionnaire was designed alongside the visitor questionnaire (see later, this chapter), with similar questions to allow for comparison between visible communities living in the cities and visitors in national parks. Initially, she thought of the urban survey as the 'non-visitor survey'. However, this automatically (re)wrote visible communities as non-visitors to national parks, succumbing to the stereotype of visible community absence - an assumption dismantled by the pilot urban survey. The questionnaire was re-conceived, altered and re-piloted, to examine the perceptions of visible communities who *are generally perceived* to not access the English countryside, without presuming them as rural others. The final version can be found in Appendix I.

However, in approaching people *visibly identifiable* as coming from Asian and/or African Caribbean backgrounds, the research was caught once more in the

<sup>29</sup> The specific remit of the PhD was to explore visible community *visitors* to the national parks. However, people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds who are resident in the parks, and rural areas more generally, are also integral to research on these issues.

'categorising' dilemma. But the ongoing engagement with, in particular, post-colonial and feminist theoretical work (explored in chapter 3) *as well as* the research experiences, continually challenged the naming of visible communities as 'always already' marginalised in the English national parks. She spent much of the journey attempting to incorporate thinking and doing that disrupts any easy essentialising of people from visible community backgrounds, yet focusing specifically on them. This paradox remains a central concern, and she wants to pin down for a moment some sense of how 'researching the other' both affected and was affected by the approaches she employed.

Sheldon & Parker (1992:105) write that:

"if [researchers] continue to use the term 'race' because people act as though race exists, they are guilty of conferring analytical status on what is nothing more than an ideological construction."

The danger Sheldon and Parker are concerned with is that foregrounding ethnicity *rather than* structural factors and power inequalities can lead to the recapture of ethnicity itself as the cause of social exclusion. However, it is precisely because people *do* act as though 'race' exists that 'race' or ethnic status (visibly recognised) have social consequences, eg. social exclusion from specific places (Smaje, 1995). The latter position does not suggest the givenness of 'race' or ethnicity itself, but emphasises that stereotyping is projected onto ethnic others *and bound up with* unequal social positions, which serve to reiterate ethnicity as a given. Navigating research that categorises in order to investigate exclusion, while wanting to *avoid classifying* people as 'always already' the other, is difficult because, "while (self) identity is a positive process of group formation, categorisation a negative consequence of cultural power" (Smaje, *ibid.*:16).

The adoption of the term 'visible communities' was one attempt to focus on the politics and power involved in presuming people based on visual 'recognition'. Theoretical work also pointed to the need to discover the opinions/values/perceptions of visible communities as narrated themselves, and it was important to avoid setting up certain values as 'the norm' against which 'other' (minority) opinions would inevitably be contrasted. Hence the decision to resist setting up a direct comparison between visible communities and 'control' groups, ie. white groups, in the qualitative research (see later). This lack of 'control' groups in the study has been questioned many times, by national park professionals and academics, but removing any sense of a 'norm' was

intended to destabilise the centre/periphery dualism perpetuated through understanding visible communities as absent from the English rural landscape, and to address, rather than deny, the politics involved in structuring unequal positions in an inside/outside model.

She set out, then, to undertake 300 questionnaires in each city, by random sampling people from visible community backgrounds. The figure was based on practicality - the largest number she felt to be accomplishable. She originally planned to complete the survey in visible community organisation centres/cafes – an idea suggested by a key contact in one such organisation. The pilot survey took place in a community centre café in Burngreave, Sheffield (a predominantly African Caribbean and Bangladeshi area), but produced unexpected and unintended effects. An hour into asking individuals from visible community backgrounds to answer the questionnaire, one of the two white customers present in the café aggressively demanded to know why he was not being invited to take part in the study. She invited him to complete a questionnaire, reasoning that he would not know whether it was included in the sample or not, but also feeling uncomfortable about this dishonesty. However, he had already realised that the study was about/for people from visible communities, and proceeded to loudly voice his opinion that he was less than happy with “blacks always getting the money and the attention” while, as he saw it, he and his white community were “left to rot”: in his eyes, this was blatant discrimination. His outburst clearly made everyone in the café uneasy - some left and some started to argue with him.

The situation was pacified with the help of a member staff in the café who had been informed about the research beforehand<sup>30</sup>. She was distressed that her presence and actions had directly precipitated this incident, where the micro-politics of everyday living had bubbled over. Contemplating these events, non-visible communities’ potential reactions to exclusion from the research needed to be addressed. Approaching white individuals throughout any data gathering session was one possible strategy, but this would have been both time-consuming and contradictory to the open approach she felt ethically obliged to adopt. Instead, she decided to move the methodology to a different space, where the intentions of the research were less transparent: where individuals from visible communities could be approached without this being explicitly obvious.

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<sup>30</sup> She had several years’ experience dealing with conflict resolution in the social work field. The outcome of this situation could have been very different without such experience. This raises questions as to researchers’ training and awareness of the potential impacts of their research, and reinforces the importance of ethically thinking through a study.

The next attempt involved going house-to-house with the questionnaire, targeting areas with high percentages of visible community populations. She began in Middlesbrough, where the electoral role provided addresses for people from Asian backgrounds. This method was also problematic in that it excluded people from Asian backgrounds without 'Asian sounding' names, and that people from African Caribbean backgrounds would not be identifiable in this way. These issues did not need to be resolved, however, as this approach was also abandoned - after a week of attempting this mode of research at every conceivable time of day, and every day of the week, there was zero positive response. The majority of people listened to her brief explanation of the survey, but declined to participate in the research stating that they "knew nothing about" national parks or the countryside generally. This 'non-response error' is, nevertheless, part of the co-fabrication of research materials: these silences explicitly presented lack of direct knowledge/experience of the national parks as the reason for not answering the questionnaire. It is important that these voices are considered alongside those who engaged with the study, and their stated lack of awareness of national parks is taken up in chapter 5. In addition, though, factors regarding intrusion into private space, as well as her 'strangeness' as a white woman in predominantly Asian streets were also involved in the reluctance to participate.

She then decided to focus on larger areas of public space. Choosing two residential areas in each city with high percentages of visible community residents<sup>31</sup>, she carried out the survey (pilot and actual) at different times across the summer of 2002, by 'hanging out' around the streets. The street survey was augmented by taking the questionnaires to local community festivals, where again it was less obvious (among large numbers of people present) that only visible communities were being approached. Three festivals were identified: two community-organised events in Sheffield (one each in Burngreave and Sharrow), and the council-run Middlesbrough Mela, the annual Asian event held in the centre of the city.

#### Visitor survey

Both the NYM and PD undertake visitor surveys of varying size and detail every summer, but at the time of her fieldwork neither included questions about ethnicity. Therefore, a questionnaire survey of visitors to the parks was needed to address the

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<sup>31</sup> As indicated by the 1991 Census, general personal observation and advice from key 'gatekeepers' in community organisations: the areas were Burngreave and Sharrow in Sheffield, and across Park ward in Middlesbrough.

research questions regarding visible communities' use of the national parks, to give a 'base figure' to indicate visitor levels of visible communities. To avoid data bias, she selected (in consultation with national park staff) five questionnaire sites in each park that represented different landscapes and visitor uses<sup>32</sup>. The survey was completed on two days at each site (one week day and one weekend/bank holiday), during the school summer holiday period to maximise the number of respondents<sup>33</sup>, aiming for approximately 300 respondents in each park to correspond with the urban survey.

Looking back, she would have preferred to adopt participatory techniques from the outset, involving visible communities in the research journey at the earliest opportunity - certainly in the writing of the survey questions themselves (see Whyte, 1991; R. Chambers, 1998). But she was unaware of 'participatory action research' until halfway through the fieldwork: not having a background in social science research, much of her journey was into new territory. Instead, the questionnaires were designed after careful reading of standard methodology texts (eg. Gilbert, 1993; Flowerdew & Martin, 1997), and reviewed with supervisors. To test for problems in the wording and tone of the questionnaire, it was piloted for one day in each park, and changes made where necessary. (The final version can be found in Appendix II.) However, to a degree in the quantitative but more so in the qualitative fieldwork, her research methods became increasingly participatory as the journey progressed. That is to say, as will become evident through this chapter, the methodology was ever more influenced and guided by visible community participants' input, critique and recommendations.

She originally intended to undertake the visitor survey throughout the summer of 2001. However, it was apparent while piloting the questionnaire at this time that visitor levels were significantly affected by the Foot-and-Mouth outbreak earlier in the year<sup>34</sup>. Rather than risk skewing the figures towards only those most committed visitors who ventured out to the countryside in 2001, the survey was postponed until summer 2002. Visitors were randomly sampled, since she was attempting to examine what the visitor profile was. She did not include children who appeared to be under thirteen, an arbitrary age limit she set without really being able to justify why, and dependant on personal

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<sup>32</sup> For example, honey pot villages, reservoirs, sites of specific interest/activity, upland paths popular with walkers, etc. – listed in Appendix III.

<sup>33</sup> National park rangers suggested that visitor numbers are far greater at that time of year than any other. This is supported by previous national park-run surveys.

<sup>34</sup> National park statistics have since shown this to be the case (NYM, 2003).

judgement. Otherwise, respondents self-selected in that they *chose whether or not to take part*.

This self-selection raises issues regarding respondent profiles and their direct impact on research 'outcomes'. In particular, the non-representativeness of the sample emerged to query the methodology. For example, on the first day in Robin Hood's Bay (NYM), 4 of the 40 people (10%) participating in the survey identified as visible communities, but she does not believe that this reflects the proportion of visible community visitors present that day<sup>35</sup>. Despite the random sampling techniques attempted, she may have been drawn to visible communities due to the focus of the research - the conscious recognition of certain individuals *as different* enabling the subconscious researcher to act. A principle factor, though, is that virtually all visible community visitors approached agreed to take part in the survey, whereas a far higher proportion of white visitors declined. This problem questions the reliability of the statistics, and the overall survey number of visible community visitors to the NYM and PD - 8% of the total - must be carefully considered (see chapter 6 for discussion on this issue).

### Resident survey

A questionnaire survey of national park residents was undertaken to contextualise the role of rural space in social relations between people from different ethnic backgrounds: to gain an understanding of how visible communities may be perceived in the national parks alongside asking visible communities how they thought they would be received in the countryside. Due to the logistics of sampling across the geographical areas encompassed by the NYM and the PD, she decided to survey by post. Postal questionnaires garner notoriously low response rates (Parfitt, 1997), and in order to achieve sufficient responses from each park to equate with the urban and visitor surveys, the resident survey needed to be large. The Data Protection Act meant that she had to approach the national parks for collaboration. After a long process of negotiation and clarification, it was agreed that the parks would supply pre-printed name/address labels, randomly selected by computer software from national park databases<sup>36</sup>. As a condition to doing this, both parks wanted to 'vet' the questionnaire

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<sup>35</sup> An 'educated guess' would put the figure at under half the 10% statistic.

<sup>36</sup> No breach of the law occurs as long as information gathered using released data is reported back to the body holding the data, and no separate record made of the information supplied.

before addresses were generated: relationships between national parks and their residents can be precarious, and the parks were sensitive to the language used in the questionnaires, prompting a further period of negotiation (see Appendix IV for the final version). Given the lengthy response times for postal surveys, she abandoned piloting this questionnaire, but made every effort to maximise participation<sup>37</sup>.

In the event, 62% of households surveyed responded, with many people writing comments in the margins and 43 questionnaires including additional comments on separate sheets of paper – outlining issues/feelings in detail. If the research listens to gaps and silences as co-generators of material, then it must also address deluges and verbosity: the size and intensity of the response to the postal questionnaire speak to the study in various ways. One factor to consider is that national park residents had the confidence to reply, suggesting that they believe their opinions matter and will be listened to. Inherent in this belief are understandings of themselves in positions of social power (dominance). In addition, the rural itself emerged as a key player in the generation of materials through the postal survey: the strength of the rural idyll myth was evident through the high response rate and motivation to go beyond 'box ticking', and the physicality of the rural was clearly instrumental in producing participants' emotive responses to that rural.

### **Qualitative methods**

The research questions focusing on understandings of ethnic identity, nationality and perceptions of nature demanded qualitative methods to explore ideas of self, other and social inclusion/exclusion more expansively.

#### Visible community focus groups

The central part of the research, given the research questions and theoretical review, involved engaging with people from visible community backgrounds. A mail shot was sent to community organisations in both cities that identified themselves as organising around Asian or African Caribbean ethnicities<sup>38</sup>, outlining the research focus and describing the planned qualitative methodology. This was followed by second letters,

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<sup>37</sup> Questionnaires were sent out twice each to 800 households in each park (introductory letters with the first mail out, explanatory letters with the second), all with enclosed SAEs.

<sup>38</sup> Lists of community organisations were obtained via the internet and from the relevant city council departments.

phone calls, meetings with key personnel within organisations ('gatekeepers') and 'networking'. In total, **six groups from an original list of ninety-two** over the two cities agreed to take part in focus group interviews<sup>39</sup>.

She had expected a small response, but this was lower than she had hoped for, and another silence that warrants closer investigation. One key factor in the lack of response was the timing of the research - the study cannot be detached from its contemporary political and social contexts, and their mutual interaction. The fieldwork took place between July 2001 and November 2002, in the immediate shadow of the 'ethnic disturbances' in the northern English towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. Many visible community individuals (participants and non-participants) described experiencing a 'backlash' of racist abuse following these events, which increased throughout the fieldwork - post Sep. 11th and during the 'conflict' in Afghanistan. Rising incidences of racism were commonly cited, 'off-the-record', as the reason for not participating in the research: many individuals preferred to remain silent rather than risk misrepresentation, due to the heightened sensitivity around issues involving 'black and minority ethnic groups'.

Secondly, many groups reported feeling 'over researched' as they are constantly approached to take part in a wide variety of studies. This speaks to the danger that 'researching the other' can slide into no more than a form of academic voyeurism (Cloeke & Little, 1997; Valentine, 1997), but also highlights visible communities' recognition of themselves as objects of research - and their refusal to be complicit. Third, other groups stated a lack of experience or knowledge of the English countryside to be the reason why they declined to be interviewed.

Acknowledging the power-laden nature of researching marginalised groups, many methodology textbooks discuss 'minorities' as powerless to 'resist intrusion'. On the other hand, 'minorities' are often discussed as 'hard to reach' groups, alongside 'respondent lethargy' among marginalised groups. The experience of this study suggests that it is important to acknowledge refusal to respond as *itself a marker of agency* rather than passive disinterest:

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<sup>39</sup> Profiles of visible community focus groups can be found in Appendix V.



"but sometimes we fail to hear and merely register a silence. For our loss of authority is not usually the result of our benevolence ... it is invariably the outcome of struggle, contestation and a refusal on the part of another being to register our presence."

(I. Chambers, 1998:51)

The refusal to speak can be understood as disrupting the positioning of power between researcher and researched - absence itself as marking a presence. 'Respondent lethargy' may not be lethargy at all, rather a political statement that screams in its silence. Without an interrogation of gaps in research, then, the desire to 'know' risks reproducing the hegemony that subjects the 'other' to academic/political categories. Listening to silences recognises that others exist, irreducible to a common language, discourse, way of thinking or participating (Cheung, 1993). It is crucial, therefore, to include silences in the narrative of the journey, and to attempt to think through what these gaps may mean. As such, omissions must also be incorporated into the normative work and policy recommendations that evolve from the research (see chapter 7).

Linked to the concept of silence as a marker of agency, is the relative unimportance of research to organisations/individuals busy with everyday living. Community organisations had other priorities which over-ruled her plans for the journey: many meetings were cancelled at the last minute for various reasons; key contacts left organisations, having told no other members of staff about the research; phone messages were rarely returned; and dates of focus group interviews regularly changed. Moreover, those initial meetings held with community group 'leaders' or organisation 'gatekeepers' often served as interviews – she had to answer queries and show commitment to following the research through. This is *not* to say that she was made to feel unwelcome, and many people volunteered their time and effort to move the research forward. In addition, trust building activities<sup>40</sup> were complicated by her own everyday position, which prevented her from moving temporarily to Sheffield or Middlesbrough to undertake the fieldwork.

Furthermore, she had intended to engage with a cross-section of people from visible community backgrounds, across gender, age, class, etc., but the sample was relatively homogeneous: focus group participants were almost exclusively in working class

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<sup>40</sup> She spent as much time on as many occasions as possible 'getting to know' the focus group participants, by spending time and participating in activities in their organisations.

positions, and disproportionately made up of women and young people. This bias reflected the fact that the community groups approached in the mail out worked with those visible communities most 'disadvantaged', and many organised specifically around women or youth. Ultimately she spoke with those willing to speak. Self-selection of participants, rather than researcher intention, should be considered alongside silence, in recognition of the importance of ascriptive characteristics in limiting research possibilities (Hornsby-Smith, 1993).

Much is written regarding translation in the research process, and the difficulties surrounding the unquestioned movement of ideas and statements across different language and cultural divides (eg. see Valentine, 1997). This narrative explores these issues here, but they are inherent throughout the study<sup>41</sup>. Given her lack of finance and time, it was not possible to translate letters/questionnaires, or recruit multilingual canvassers, thereby excluding a specific swathe of individuals from having the option to participate. However, when approaching groups for interview, she committed to arranging translation for interviews where necessary, and ultimately there were two focus groups in which the majority of participants spoke little English. Arber (1993) suggests that bringing in translators unknown to a group can be detrimental rather than beneficial to the interview, as trust cannot be presumed, and the translator may also speak a different local dialect from the group. With this in mind, she asked individuals who spoke English and had close connections to each focus group to translate in the interviews, and they agreed<sup>42</sup>.

However, having a translator familiar to the group was not without its own problems, in particular that the translators tended to answer *for* the group, sometimes after translating the question and getting an answer, but sometimes without even asking the question. Questions had to be re-worded and re-asked several times, and the person translating gently prompted to *translate* rather than interpret their own perception of the group's views. While this potentially compromises the validity of the statements recorded, these instances can more productively be considered through the concept of co-fabrication. One important reason for using focus groups in research, as opposed to individual interviews, is to explore how social discourse and dominant representations

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<sup>41</sup> Certainly regarding the quantitative research previously described.

<sup>42</sup> There is an ethical issue here: while she felt comfortable accepting help from national park staff (paid employees), both translators were unemployed members of voluntary organisations. Therefore, she offered payment to the individuals undertaking this role, at an equivalent rate/hour as paid by the local City Council for translation.

are constructed *in group fora*. The sidelining of non-English speaking voices, the 'talking for' rather than translating, in the interviews parallels that in mainstream society, where fluency in the English language equates to a greater degree of legitimacy and a more powerful voice. While the translators' intentions were well meaning, the act of representation almost always involves making assumptions. In every case where a question was re-asked to go beyond non-translation, ensuing group discussions (as translated) were more nuanced and at times even contradicted the translator's first answers.

Translation across cultural practices was also instructive. Participants throughout the visible community focus groups appeared unfamiliar with the group interview situation itself: people were unsure when to speak, or all spoke at once, and there was a reticence to using physical materials such as flipcharts. She had presumed that group work techniques, common within voluntary sector organisations' training for *staff*, would also be usual to community organisation *members* – a presumption based on her own previous voluntary sector experiences of being in group sessions alongside people from visible community backgrounds. This unfamiliarity, then, did not stem from cultural difference due to visible community-ness, but differential organisational positions. The majority of the visible community focus group interviewees were self-employed or unemployed, and were unlikely to have been involved in the training/team building/problem solving group sessions endemic in many workplaces. Rather than presume lack of group work experience and change the interview design, she adjusted its implementation as and when seemed necessary in each interview. Furthermore, there was a certain amount of discomfort regarding being tape recorded<sup>43</sup>, although after discussion only one focus group requested their interview not be recorded.

#### Individual interviews with visible communities

Twenty focus group interviews were originally planned for the fieldwork (ten in each city), but only six occurred, and individual in-depth interviews were undertaken later in the fieldwork journey to augment the qualitative survey. While the ways in which social groups communally construct ideas and understandings are not as transparent in this type of interview, she felt that she needed to consult more widely to address the research questions.

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<sup>43</sup> Every participant throughout the qualitative research was first asked if they were prepared to be recorded in interview – if they were not, then notes were taken by hand.

Individual interviewees were recruited from contacts gathered through networking, in particular the 'gatekeepers' of organisations where focus groups did not happen but the key contacts were willing to participate individually. Others were questionnaire respondents interested in the study (the qualitative and quantitative research moving forwards simultaneously), invited to speak in more detail about their opinions. As it transpired, the individual interviews gave the research greater diversity within the qualitative sample: individual interviewees were generally middle class, came from a wider cross-section of age groups and more men were involved<sup>44</sup>. Interview questions were adapted from the focus group interview design. While most interviewees were happy to be tape recorded, though, on four occasions the interview environment was not as she would have ideally chosen, and she opted to take notes instead.

#### Focus groups with national park staff and Authority Committee Members

National park staff and Authority Committee Members were interviewed to uncover the issues that national parks perceive to be influential in restricting visible community access to the parks. Although the study was funded by the NYM, institutions are traditionally fearful of change (Flowerdew & Martin, 1997), and time had to be spent building links with staff and Committee Members from both parks. Her access was aided by her background in environmental management, enabling her to embody a position of sameness and achieve a level of authenticity among national park staff<sup>45</sup>, again raising issues regarding the impact of subjectivity on the production of data. As the journey transpired, both the NYM and PD were keen to be involved, inviting her to attend relevant meetings and events, facilitating venues and dates for the interviews, and encouraging members of staff to participate.

Six focus groups were conducted, each consisting of people in similar positions within their organisation<sup>46</sup>. This was to encourage a sense of ease among respondents and enable conversation free from organisational hierarchy pressures. Interviewees randomly selected from among 'similar position' groups. The interviews were all tape-recorded, and it was evident that respondents were familiar with focus group situations:

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<sup>44</sup> See Appendix VI for a profile of individual interview participants.

<sup>45</sup> An introductory letter, describing the research and her background, was circulated to national park staff/Committee Members at the start of the fieldwork.

<sup>46</sup> Profiles of these focus groups can be found in Appendix VII.

for example, the use of flip charts and stickers to draw out key issues/perceptions (part of the research design), were treated as unexceptional.

In addition, one focus group at each park was organised with Authority Committee Members (policy makers). However, these were held much later in the journey, and the Members presented with early 'outcomes' of the quantitative work with visible communities to specifically discuss. This was partly due to the length of time required to set up these interviews<sup>47</sup>, and partly because of the decision to focus explicitly on policy matters with Members. An open invitation was sent to all Committee Members. While this ran the risk of large numbers in the focus groups, the likelihood that many members would already have prior engagements meant that random sampling ran the risk of very low numbers. In the event, seven members participated in the NYM focus group, and eight in the PD interview: factors regarding self-selection of participants are relevant here too.

### Stakeholder interviews

In recognition that the national parks do not operate in a vacuum, individual interviews were conducted with relevant members of staff from six other countryside/heritage organisations.

### **Participant observation**

This part of the research was designed to test perceptions of the national parks in context, to offer greater insight into issues raised by the research questions, literature review and fieldwork itself. Day trips to the parks were part of the original methodology, while involvement with the Mosaic Project<sup>48</sup> developed through the research journey (see page 94).

### Day trips to the national parks

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<sup>47</sup> Most Authority Committee Members have other full time commitments and only meet quarterly, with agendas set many months in advance.

<sup>48</sup> The Mosaic mission statement reads: "The Mosaic Project is a partnership project jointly managed by the Black Environment Network and the Council for National Parks. It is dedicated to introducing ethnic minorities to National Parks and National Parks to local ethnic minorities. The project aims to develop lasting links that will eventually promote direct access to parks and groups, acting as advocates for both."

From the outset, visible communities who participated in focus groups were invited on day visits to the national parks, in order to engage with their reactions/opinions of the countryside *in situ*. In addition, this provided an opportunity to 'give something back' to the focus group participants, and such visits were outlined in the initial letters sent out to community organisations. She liaised with the national parks to elicit their support for this part of the fieldwork, including promises of staff time and transport for these trips. Once contact was established with a community group, and the trust building process on-going, dates were arranged for the day trips via negotiation with the group and relevant national park. However, agreeing suitable dates and finding rangers, transport and drivers turned into a logistical nightmare, and only she knows how close some trips came to cancellation. The potential to do damage to the long-term relationship between visible communities and national parks, should a visit fail to take place, was very real. Indeed, this part of the journey raised several ethical and theoretical issues regarding 'doing fieldwork', and is worth telling in more detail.

Six day trips occurred, but not with the same six groups who were focus group interviewees. In Middlesbrough, the three focus groups all visited the NYM on separate day trips, but there was also a visit by an *additional* group. This group had been approached via their community organisation 'director', who agreed to a preliminary meeting to discuss the research. When she arrived at his house<sup>49</sup>, he proceeded to tell her "the history of how my community have been treated in Middlesbrough", and that local government consultation in the past had never resulted in any tangible benefits for 'his community'. Therefore, no-one from the community organisation would be interviewed. He then went on to outline that the researcher would arrange a day visit for a group from the community centre to the NYM, or he would go to the local press to complain publicly that, once again, the [specific ethnicity] community had been offered something that did not materialise.

This meeting was difficult. As 'community leader', the director claimed a position of power and appeared to dismiss the 'student' as lacking authority, with patronising comments as to her student identity and gender. At the same time, his position had been repeatedly undermined by dominant authority bodies, and he had experienced exclusion and racism. He made demands on the national park authority. She explained

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<sup>49</sup> Meetings were often conducted in respondents' houses, at their suggestion, due to lack of formal premises. There are safety issues to be considered here, but in most cases she was welcomed with great warmth.

that her role was to undertake research, that she was *not* a representative of the national park and could offer no guarantees on their behalf. After careful negotiation, she agreed to arrange a visit, without a focus group interview, as long as she could accompany the group on the visit as part of her research.

The responses from her supervisors when she told them of this meeting were also instructive of the differential positionalities at play in the research process. The CASE supervisor was quick to point out that the NYM had never offered then withdrawn assistance to the visible community group in question, but had been supportive of the (other) visible community groups it had worked with. He offered to contact the director to explain the NYM's reasons for undertaking the research (something that she had already done in the meeting). Keen to distance the NYM from the local authority criticised, he did not appreciate that visible community groups may perceive all authority organisations as 'the same' due to negative historical experiences of 'them'. Meanwhile, her academic supervisor appeared affronted that a student should be treated in such a manner, and offered to phone the community group leader to inform him that this was not acceptable.

Both supervisors, that is, proposed action to remedy what they perceived to be 'a problem'. However, she did not consider the incident to require 'fixing', rather she understood it as a situation that raised issues to be worked through. Furthermore, there was an assumption that they, as men in positions of authority, could 'sort out' what she could not. She declined both offers. The community group visited the NYM, together with the researcher, and the experience was mutually productive. The director did not join the group, but met with her at the community centre prior to the day trip - an informal meeting that also inherently weaved itself into and quietly affected the course of the journey.

Non-events speak to the study too. In Sheffield, three groups took part in focus group interviews, but one of these groups did *not* visit the PD. On the morning of the arranged trip, while phoning the community group to double check the time for pick up, she discovered that the key contact (an employed project officer) had left the organisation suddenly two weeks previously. It appeared that the ex-project officer had not informed other staff members about the research. Due to health and safety regulations, no group

visit could take place without a member of staff from the organisation present<sup>50</sup>, and no-one was available to go that day. She made several attempts over the following weeks to reorganise the visit, but the centre was understaffed and nobody able to take on the liaison role. Individuals had taken part in an interview, but she had been unable to follow up on her promise of a day out. The loss of a key contact was not exceptional: there were two other groups about to take part in the study, when the liaison staff at both organisations moved on to other jobs. The relationships built up at those places were lost and it was not possible to resurrect them in the time allotted for fieldwork.

Other non-events included two incidences where contacts advised that, having built up trust with their groups, it was still unlikely that people would attend a focus group, and that the best strategy would be to interview immediately prior to the arranged day trip. On both occasions, no-one appeared at the time set for interview, nor did they arrive later to go on the visit. The 'no shows' were described by the contacts as indicative of apathy among their members to new initiatives because of 'day-to-day priorities', but, moreover, symptomatic of a general mistrust amongst visible communities regarding offers from white 'bodies' (the national parks), due to past experiences of disappointment. The visits that did not happen are not 'failures', though - all the non-events speak as silences. They reiterate the unequally structured details of everyday life for many people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds, and the social relations history behind the gaps considered as responsible for generating materials (gaps).

### The Mosaic Project

She encountered the Mosaic Project just before the fieldwork began. Talking to the director of the Council for National Parks (CNP) at the Black Environment Network (BEN) annual conference, it became apparent that her research was written into the funding bid for the Mosaic Project. The CASE supervisor from the NYM was involved in the management committee for Mosaic, and had suggested that the academic study should feed into the project. However, she had not been informed of this decision, and neither were the academic supervisors aware of this situation. Miscommunication and misunderstandings between academics and the policy world are well-acknowledged,

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<sup>50</sup>The researcher could not take groups to the national parks without a named responsible member of staff for each group: she had no public liability insurance, and the national parks were clear in early negotiations that they could not accept responsibility for groups entering the parks.



and, for a while, she was placed in an uncertain (and uncomfortable) position, unsure of her responsibilities – if any – to Mosaic.

However, she developed a relationship with Mosaic, which was ultimately mutually beneficial. She was invited onto the Mosaic management committee as an 'external advisor', a position which enabled her to develop good links with members of staff at both BEN and CNP. This was helpful in progressing the fieldwork, and facilitated ongoing feedback of the research experiences to the direction and implementation of the Mosaic Project. Rather than a solid divide between academia and the 'real' world, the journey encapsulated an interflow between them, in which ideas, practice, policy and empirical 'findings' passed back and forth, communicating with each other.

In particular, a close working relationship was built up with the Mosaic Project officer, based on information sharing, regular contact and listening to each other's frustrations! As a result, she was invited to accompany visible community residential trips to national parks, organised as the key focus of Mosaic's work, and she joined two visits to the PD and one to the NYM that took place in summer 2002. Trips were for three days/two nights, staying in Youth Hostel accommodation, and involved meeting up with visible community organisations at their urban centres<sup>51</sup>, and being with them for the duration of the trips. All three groups identified as coming from Asian backgrounds, each followed a different religion, and consisted of young people aged between 13 and 20, community group 'leaders' and parents<sup>52</sup>.

The role played as participant observer (observing participant?) on both the Mosaic residential visits and focus group day trips makes it impossible to conceive of the research as being an objective investigation of the world, and further supports the idea that research materials are co-generated. The interactions with visible community participants were complex, multi-faceted and mutually influential, opening up debate and new understandings and positions across all concerned with the visits<sup>53</sup>. In particular, 'feedback' sessions with the Mosaic Project officer, sharing visit anecdotes and insights, telling and listening and re-thinking things through together in a constantly evolving debate, in turn fed back into the re-shaping of research questions and

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<sup>51</sup> Groups from Nottingham and Birmingham went to the PD, and a group from Middlesbrough visited the NYM.

<sup>52</sup> The groups varied in size from 20 to 38, with differing proportions of adults to young people.

<sup>53</sup> This included national park staff and volunteers, and youth hostel staff as well as the researcher, Mosaic team and visible community organisations.

alterations/additions to the methodology. As Thrift (2003:114, original emphasis) predicts:

“exchanges come from [research] encounters in which the participants have to exercise their imagination, thereby producing something hybrid that very likely did not exist before; new hybrid ‘interface cultures’ can blossom, however briefly, bringing insight to *both* parties.”

Furthermore, accompanying the various visits to national parks broadened the research perspective, allowing contemplation of visible communities’ embodied experiences in the countryside, their reactions (through a variety of senses) to being in rural England, and their performances (through a variety of constructions) of identity in place. In this sense, the national parks themselves were also key in generating materials. The physicality of the rural was central to the activities undertaken and experiences gained by everyone on the visits – *being in the countryside* was the reason for the visits. The actual rural environment, rather than a socialised imagination of it, was implicit within every aspect of participant observation: its sounds, its smell, its edges and angles, its opportunities and its limits. All the non-human entities present in the rural were involved in generating situations and exchanges too. Moreover, the bodily repertoire of senses and practices involved in negotiating the national park environments intermingled with the dialogic representations of those places in complicated ways. This echoes Whatmore’s (2003:103) conceptualisation of co-fabrication, outlined earlier in the chapter, which discusses knowledge production that is:

“not antithetical to taking language and cognition seriously as human competences that afford a vital site or mode of engagement with the world ... neither does it privilege them over the bodily repertoire of senses and practices that make us human.”

### **Contemplating the materials**

Massey (2003:76) argues that “the spatio-temporal imaginary within which ‘the field’ is placed is an important part of doing research.” Any sense that the ‘work’ is finished once materials have been generated ‘in the field’ gives the false idea that the field is a bounded place (or places) ‘out there’, and that the researcher ‘back here’ (away from the world) can unproblematically prod and probe the materials as stuff of ‘truth’. This re-instigates the researcher as objective expert, and contravenes the theoretical

underpinnings of the ways in which she has approached the methodology so far. Instead, the contention that the field is open and porous, connected via chains of practices and actors to the entirety of the research process (Massey, 2003, after Latour, 1999), resonates more sympathetically with her notion of *doing the journey*. As such, while this chapter has concentrated on 'fieldwork', it should be recognised that the journey begins before materials are generated and continues through the contemplation of these materials. In particular, it should highlight that doing the journey also incorporates *making sense* of the materials generated - and gaps encountered.

Following Massey's argument further, the contemplation and ordering of materials generated through research are engulfed in issues regarding social relations and power, because they remain part of the field and because the field is always shifting: the 'world' continues to talk back and reshape the materials. It is also important to deliberate issues regarding ethics and responsibility *to the field*. 'Analysis' inevitably places power in the hands of the researcher. Inevitably, the phrases and debates within interviews were dissected, herded into categories and (re)considered under general themes, and the questionnaire respondents were put into boxes and parcelled up in percentages. She cannot displace herself from this power, but must acknowledge it *and* "work on its nature and distribution and ... recognise the inequalities which will almost inevitably remain" (Massey 2003:87). As has previously been noted, contemplating the materials reveals not only what is told, but also the silences inherent in research - acknowledging and working through these silences is an important part of this recognition of the inequalities that almost inevitably remain. Thinking the field as open and porous, and thinking the space of the field as relational, then, runs through the process of making sense of materials. Indeed, the politics of research reach beyond the borders of any temporally-bound, spatially-bound 'fieldwork'.

### **Writing the journey**

Such theorising is as relevant to the practice of writing as it is to 'analysis' of the materials generated. Writing cannot be removed from the field and continues to be a space constituted through power relations: in writing she continues to generate materials, appropriating others' voices in the process. Simple acknowledgement of this appropriation is not enough, however. Writing the journey requires ethical imagination to produce an *encounter* that opens up a '*space of thoughtfulness*' (after Thrift, 2003), rather than a script that claims to know. Using narrative as a writing strategy is an

attempt to emphasise her particular, partial 'situated knowledge' (after Haraway, 1991), and foreground the power relations involved in the (re)presentation of materials.

Writing should also be mindful of its situated audiences<sup>54</sup> and the social contexts in which it will be interpreted. It must remember the researcher-audience relationship and the politics involved in academic claims to authority, in order to destabilise the power relations caught up in 'writing the other'. Conceding the divide between author and reader is necessary to move towards producing the text as encounter, a *shared space* of thoughtfulness, and inviting, as Spivak (1989) suggests, the audience to become co-investigators. Much more could be explored here, but the textual strategies employed through the book, alluded to in its opening pages, are her attempt to 'do' rather than 'say'. Instead, it is time to move the narrative on to consider the responses to the research questions, the themes that emerged and the interactions and positions involved.

It is important, though, to first clarify the way in which people's voices and words are represented in the thesis, since the naming of visible communities goes to the core of the research. Issues surrounding confidentiality and anonymity were constantly reviewed throughout the fieldwork, and concerns regarding the ethical representation of people's words and actions continue (especially) throughout the writing up process. Many visible community participants had distinctive names based on their ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, and she felt unqualified to substitute other names: names that she considered to come from similar backgrounds (eg. Ahmed for a Muslim man) could be insensitive or even offensive, and at the very least essentialist<sup>55</sup>; while renaming people 'Bob' and 'Clare' seemed totally inappropriate. Unfortunately, she did not ask participants to choose names for themselves. She eventually decided to identify quotes using people's descriptions of themselves, eg. 'woman, 25-34, African Caribbean', in order to contextualise what was being said. However, she remains uncomfortable with the potential emphasis this places on ethnicity as *different* rather than as *politically situated*.

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<sup>54</sup> This thesis is for you, while a separate document is written for the policy makers and practitioners (see Appendix VIII): the need for both highlights writing's own positionality.

<sup>55</sup> The issue here is *not* that people with 'traditional' cultural names, identifying them with a specific ethnic group, are essentialised - motives behind naming are hidden, eg. (grand)parental names given for sentimental or familial reasons. Rather, that *for a researcher to name people using perceived stereotypical 'cultural' names*, would be to essentialise the research participants.

Within **focus groups**, 'F' indicates a woman speaking and 'M' is a man, with speakers identified by numbers within group as far as their separate voices could be distinguished through the transcription process. In the **individual interviews**, respondents identified by 'B' are in Middlesbrough, those by 'S' are in Sheffield, numbered according to the order in which the interviews were conducted. The numbering system was not intended to depersonalise accounts, but employed due to the problem surrounding naming. It has been retained in the narrative to make transparent the process of 'analysis' in which it was first adopted. 'Fac' (facilitator) is the researcher. All direct quotes are presented as transcribed from the recorded interviews.

## 5. NEGOTIATING THE STATIC: ESSENTIALISED UNDERSTANDINGS OF SELF, SOCIETY AND SPACE

“Nation’ as a term is radically connected with ‘native’. We are born into relationships which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and ‘placeable’ bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance. Yet the jump from that to anything like the modern nation-state is entirely artificial.”

(Williams, 1983:180)

The thesis now considers the issues regarding access to the English national parks that have emerged through the fieldwork. The issues have been split into two thematic chapters, which broadly mirror the earlier theoretical chapters. This is partly because it allows the research to speak to the theory more coherently, but also because the emergent themes *suggest*, as well as support, thinking in this way: there was a basic division between essentialised versions of ethnicity/rurality/nationality and fluid, relational and dynamic constructions of identity and place among research participants.

This chapter addresses the more fixed notions of identity, in which emphasis is placed on difference as different, on stereotypes and their elision with both particular constructions of cultural practices and attendant attitudes towards nature, and on understandings of space as bounded, unchanging and restrictive. The following chapter deals with claims to identity and space that transrupt and contest the dominant gaze regarding visible communities in the rural, and, furthermore, the validity of any essentialist/essentialising approach. Such strict organisation offers a simplistic interpretation of the research materials, though, and it should be emphasised here that issues talk to each other across chapters 5 and 6. The intention is not to set up the two thematic chapters in direct opposition to one another, despite their contents, but rather to ***look and work across the division between inflexible and progressive productions of self, society and space.***

The decision to organise the materials generated through the study into essentialist and non-essentialist camps is also based on the need to re-approach the research questions and explore what the ‘data’ is saying to them. At this point it may be useful to remind ourselves of the questions driving the thesis, previously outlined in chapter 1:

### Visible communities in the national parks

- what evidence is available regarding visible community use of the national parks?
- are there similarities/differences in perceptions and use of the English countryside between and/or across Asian and African Caribbean groups?
- do perceptions and use among visible communities correlate with factors other than ethnicity (eg. gender, class, age)?
- is frequency and pattern of use of the national parks comparable across the North York Moors and Peak District, and/or specific localities within them?

### The construction of nature

- How is nature imagined by those visible communities participating in the research?
- do such productions differ from the dominant constructions of nature within national park narratives?
- do visible community constructions of nature and the countryside correlate with visible community perceptions of the English national parks?
- how are understandings of nature implicated in processes of ethnic and national identity formation and belonging?

### Identity and space

- how does being in/experiencing the countryside impact on ethnic and cultural values, practices and identities?
- can a wide range of cultural practices be negotiated within national park ideology?
- what are the connections between national and ethnic senses of belonging and attachment to rural space?
- what role does rural space play in social relations between people from different ethnic backgrounds in England?

Thinking about the materials generated as essentialist/non-essentialist allows the thesis to show that the issues raised by the above questions are political as well as personal – with strategic representations of identity incorporating unitary positions (to support political aims) alongside reflective and expansive identity productions open to negotiation. Splitting the themes in this way, then, enables a careful consideration of policy responses to *specific* concerns/research questions, while situating the resulting recommendations within a more *holistic* framework. The research reveals that there is a need to ensure that both ‘real’ and ‘perceived’ barriers are addressed in ways that react to fixed as well as shifting positions (policy issues are followed up in chapter 7).

However, something must be said regarding the relative weight/presence of the two opposing (though interacting) discourses within the research. Issues dealt with in this chapter – matters concerned with the fixed and fixing of identity and place – were prevalent over those connected with fluid, hybrid identities (considered in chapter 6). It



is important to stress here that the exclusion/'rural other' narrative was dominant throughout the fieldwork, especially when the gaps and silences discussed in the previous chapter are taken into consideration, in order to attempt an honest representation of the research encounters. In part, this is reflected in the thesis through chapter size, with chapter 5 incorporating more discussion than chapter 6. Otherwise, the statistics and quotes tell the story.

It is also necessary to explain the lack of distinction between Asian and African Caribbean voices through this and the following chapter, except on only two occasions. This is because it was not possible to definitively distinguish between the two general groups in the analysis process. In the urban questionnaire survey, there were no 'statistical differences' found using chi-squared tests or other quantitative analysis techniques. In part this was due to the relatively small sample size. However, as will be shown across the qualitative material, there was much *agreement across* different ethnic groups and *disagreement within* them, as well as intra-group concord and inter-community divergence. As such, this thesis works with the more generalised visible community category – though it is reiterated here that the intention in doing so is *not* to reify physicality/phenotype, or suggest that all people from non-white backgrounds are the same as each other. More research is certainly required in this area.

This chapter starts with an examination into how visible communities are constructed by those involved in national parks in various capacities, and by visitors to and residents in the parks (predominantly from white backgrounds). The first section details how visible communities are invariably produced *as different* from a majority white society, with essentialised understandings of ethnicity tied to visible markers. Furthermore, static cultural practices and inflexible religious beliefs are attached to ethnic groups via stereotypical constructions of visible communities as an unchanging other. The boundary drawing processes involved are highlighted, through discourses that assume different cultural values among visible communities regarding nature, and different cultural practices regarding rural recreation. This section then considers how pre-determined understandings of rural space – especially as the repository of English heritage and identity – serve to reiterate visible communities as rural others. Within such deterministic views, however, white respondents display an awareness that the fixing of identities is itself problematic, and their struggle to negotiate how they understand and approach difference is also explored.



The chapter moves on to explore the ways in which visible communities construct ethnicity in fixed and essentialised ways, their explanations for and motivations behind this, and how such identities are utilised and mobilised when thinking/accessing the rural. Central to these discussions is the research finding that **two-thirds** of visible community respondents to the urban questionnaire in Sheffield, and **three-quarters** of those in Middlesbrough<sup>56</sup>, **had never been to the English countryside**. Perceptions of rurality were mostly based *only* on socialised Imaginaries, and two key positions emerged. First, essentialised understandings of identity, grounded in notions of absolute difference, allow visible communities to construct specific cultures as tied to specific ethnicities. This position results in and is used to justify *not visiting the countryside on 'cultural' grounds*. Secondly, singular and fixed presentations of ethnic identity are also involved within a 'strategic essentialism', which employs difference within an everyday 'identity politics'. Across both positions, the role of place within identity construction is caught up in complex entanglements with ideas of belonging and emotive attachments to space. The construction of the rural in opposition to the city, in particular, emerges as fundamental to the production of spatial boundaries as fixed borders.

The chapter finally examines the role of essentialised ethnicities and essentialised place in visible community constructions of national identity, and what cultural resonance the idea of an Englishness rooted in rurality holds for people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds. Contradictory understandings of nationality across respondents, as explained from similarly essentialised positions, suggest a more fluid and relational reading of identity-in-place than their rooted bases imply, which blurs the division between the essentialist/non-essentialist camps and leads into the following chapter.

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<sup>56</sup> 296 questionnaires were completed in Sheffield and 310 in Middlesbrough.

### The construction of visible communities by others

This section focuses on how visible communities are seen, by those (predominantly white) involved with national parks and/or countryside conservation, drawing on **the focus group interviews with park staff and Authority Committee Members, the interviews with individuals from 'stakeholder' organisations, and the material generated by the visitor and resident questionnaires<sup>57</sup>**. This is important for three reasons. First, in order to understand the ways in which people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds are approached in national park policy and practice, it is crucial to examine the ways in which park staff and Authority Committee Members may think about visible communities as 'others'. Secondly, to place visible communities' perceptions of their reception in the rural in context, attitudes towards visible communities from other visitors and residents in the national parks must be explored: as previously outlined in chapter 2, ethnic exclusion in rural areas is a serious concern (Henderson & Kaur, 1999). Third, to gain insight into where or how the misunderstandings and non-connections *between* national parks and visible communities occur necessitates a focus on both visible communities and non-visible communities.

#### Essentialised ethnicity

The research reveals a strong tendency among white respondents to perceive visible communities as specific groups who have specific cultural practices *tied to an originary ethnicity*, albeit alongside some awareness that there are a range of groups within the overall 'visible community' category. National park staff and Member interviewees and questionnaire respondents portrayed people from visible communities as having different cultures *because they are of different ethnic background*. While difference to what or whom was rarely specified, most discussions implicitly assumed the difference to be from the majority 'white' culture. This view was consistent across the two national parks, but not across distinct levels within the park authorities – Committee Members, senior management, middle management and face-to-face staff<sup>58</sup> groups can be compared between the parks, but contrasted with one another.

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<sup>57</sup> Visitor questionnaire dates/sites are listed in Appendix III; interview respondent profiles can be found in Appendix VII.

<sup>58</sup> As described in chapter 4.

The most immutable version of ethnicity was found amongst the face-to-face staff, who understood 'ethnic minority' as being indistinguishable from distinct cultural practices. Individuals in these focus groups supported each other's statements, and group discourse served to reiterate and reinforce stereotypes once they were mentioned. For example, the comments below are typical:

*[discussing what may prevent 'ethnic minorities' coming to the national park]*

M1 *their own culture*

Fac *in what way?*

M1 *well they have a cultural thing that they have big family gatherings where they live rather than coming out into the national parks or or coming out into the countryside*

F1 *I I ...*

M2 *well I think that's a generational thing so/*

M3 */yes*

M1 *the older generation have got this cultural thing*

...

M4 *also it's to do with sex um I run a little campsite for the national park authority and we get a lot of Sheffield schools using us ... the parents won't let the girls stay overnight and the reason why we're used is it's close enough for the girls to go back home ... for the boys it's a bit different the boys can stay overnight*

...

F1 *I mean I don't know a lot about these cultural groups I should think a lot of them the women don't socialise I mean it's the men socialise at the mosque or whatever ... but the women don't tend to socialise so much so how are you going to to ... [engage them]*

*(Focus group with face-to-face staff in the PD)*

The above remarks show that visible communities are defined by (visible) ethnic difference, which is connected to specific cultural practices, which are in turn linked with certain uses of space. The important distinction is not that 'they' have big family gatherings, rather that these get-togethers are held 'where they live' (the city) and not in the national parks. In addition, there was a clear understanding of gender essentialism within visible community cultural practices. While M4 based his statements on experience, he went on to elide all visible communities with those from Asian Muslim backgrounds. F1 demonstrated a similar understanding based on stereotype alone, presuming that 'ethnic minority' women are restricted (from socialising, from the world outside the home) despite admitting that she had no experience with women from visible community backgrounds. Furthermore, fixed connections between ethnicity and socio-economic status and employment were also assumed, as shown in the discussion below, again grounded in visible difference:

M3 *if you get somebody who's coloured who comes here or a different race they get stared at an' frowned on don't they you ... they're [majority white visitors and residents] all the time looking at 'em aren't they*

Fac *does that happen here?*

M3 *aye aye I think so meself*

F *because they're different*

M3 *yeah because somebody's different*

- ...
- F I know a lot of them have businesses don't they ... the typical street corner shop and er they have no sort of Sundays off like we do and/
- M1 /it's recreation lack of recreational time perhaps
- F mm yeah
- ...
- F one other thing I hesitate but it's much more of a practical issue I mean ummm most people sort of walk in the national park or a lot of them do and with all their ... clothing on it's just totally impractical
- ...
- M1 I mean there'll be lots that won't have experienced being out there in a national park you know that sort of environment that it could be seen as/
- F /alien
- M1 /as a threatening environment
- M? yeah
- F mmm alien territory they'd feel safer in the towns and the ... cities
- M? what they're used to
- [several agree]
- M3 they spend a lot of time in groups don't they
- F yeah ... familiarity ...extended families sort of thing they're into in't it
- (Focus group with face-to-face staff in the NYM)

Essentialising ethnicity is here extended to assumptions regarding work type and pattern, places inhabited and even clothes worn, and of which are considered to inhibit visible communities from visiting the countryside.

Religion too can be folded into the stereotype. One woman retold a story about a group of people from Asian backgrounds who had been spotted 'wandering around' Ladybower reservoir. There had been uncertainty in the nearby visitor centre when this was reported to them, regarding whether or not they should act on this information, because it was shortly after September 11th and security issues were high on everyone's agenda - the inference being that these people may be terrorists. The story was recounted as a joke, because it had later been discovered that the group were looking for a place to picnic after a religious feast day, when it was customary within their religion to celebrate somewhere outdoors near water<sup>59</sup>. That it was understood as a joke in the focus group, however, highlights the dominance of the discourse that connects visible signifiers, via perceptions of religion, with specific negative constructions of the stranger. Indeed, across the qualitative research with national park staff/Members, people from Asian backgrounds were implicitly identified as Muslim (or named as Hindu or Sikh but with an understanding of these religions as Islamic), at a time when media representations were full of the 'threat of (fundamentalist) Islam'<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> Later that day, the Asian group approached a ranger to ask for information, and conversation developed.

<sup>60</sup> Post-Sept. 11th and during the conflict in Afghanistan: a heightening of sensitivity surrounding ethnic issues has previously been discussed in chapter 4.

This is perhaps a perfect example of what Ahmed (2000) talks about when she discusses the stranger as always already known and stereotyped. Ironically, this is the one issue that saw distinctions made between African Caribbean and Asian groups, as the former all but disappeared from discussions involving religious beliefs and practices – despite the fact that they may also be Muslim.

Middle and senior management views also emphasised visible communities as marginalised 'ethnic minorities', traceable to originary cultures. While some opinion suggested more open understandings of visible community identities, such constructions were always talked around to the dominant notion of ethnicity as fixed and ahistorical in focus group discussion:

- F1 *maybe they'd rather do something else with their spare time*  
 M4 *I was gonna say aren't we being rather arrogant in assuming they'd want that ... have would have an interest in the countryside/*  
 M2 */they haven't got the information to start with though the the information's purveyed erm I sense erm particularly through the wrong places and in the wrong language and at the wrong time so they don't have the information to make a sound decision ... so I don't think we can ... assess whether they want to come or don't want to come/*  
 M4 */no I'm not saying that/*  
 F1 */no no no*  
 M4 */I'm not saying that I I'm saying that um an' and you're right we should be the information ... but we should also be well aware that they may just simply not have an interest/*  
 F1 */that even if they knew we were here they might not want to come/*  
 M4 */not want to come*  
 M3 *culturally it's not something they coming to the countryside isn't ... what those groups want ... might not be what they do*  
 (Focus group with senior management in the NYM)

In this quote, despite M2's comments regarding absence as potentially due to lack of information, the discourse quickly moves on to elide visible communities' difference with distinct cultural practices that do not include visiting the countryside. The underlying premise remains that visible communities are different from the dominant white 'norm'. In addition, the research revealed that national park staff/Members linked absence from the rural to a presumed different appreciation of nature amongst visible communities. Many comments surrounded the notion that nature and wildlife lack positive cultural significance for visible communities – rather that rural areas have negative connotations as places of work and poverty.

Behind such essentialised reactions/perspectives are easy slippages between ethnicity, visibility, 'race' and place. Ethnicity has variously been described as a classification based on traits which are hereditary (Benedict, 2000); an assemblage of specific and commonly held cultural, religious, and social beliefs found within 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983); and as emerging in particular circumstances through

individuals' social practice, in particular in relation to others' social practices (after Bourdieu, 1977). Throughout the research with national park staff/Members, residents and visitors, however, ethnicity was understood, with rare exceptions, in line with Geertz's (1963) 'primordial' reading of ethnicity:

"By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the 'givens' of existence, or more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed givens of existence."

(Geertz, 1963, quoted in Rex, 1991:10)

This primordial conception of ethnicity is based on the premise that ethnicity lies at the heart of identity and identity formation, and that, importantly, ethnic identity cannot be shed by social mobility, or altered as a result of ties made with other ethnies through a congruence of interests or political perspectives. The interpretation of ethnicity by white respondents in this study supports such an imagination of 'visible community-ness' as inflexible, and suggests the understanding that "ethnic group formation begins already prior to any situational involvement" (Rex, *ibid.*:11). The research found that ethnic identities were not only believed to inform all later experiences, but understood to incorporate fixed attendant cultural practices and religious beliefs.

In Geertz's version, primordial ethnicity does not preclude the possibility of change, but only allows it to be possible over generational time spans. Likewise in the research, generational differences were often acknowledged, with older people from visible communities constructed as 'more traditional' (adhering to originary beliefs and behaviours), and younger people as 'more modern'. However, there were two prominent assumptions underlying discussions regarding heterogeneity and change: that there was an original fixed position from which people may move; and that the majority of visible communities remained in this original position. Any departure from the visible community 'norm' was linked with second and third generations acquiring 'British culture', notably through changes in socio-economic status. A working class position was perceived as the 'normal' situation from which visible communities must 'escape' before they could adopt majority society culture. Crucially, it is the understanding of a visible community primordial 'norm' that feeds back into problematic constructions of non-white groups as **always** different. One interviewee touched on this when acknowledging that he responds to visible difference *above* other qualities:

M4 *there's a black climber stays at the campsite ... fairly regular visitor ... and whenever he comes I make sure he has a trouble free trip ... he's black ... but he's not he's just a person ... he's middle class too but for some unknown reason my white middle class background makes me overcompensate*

(Focus group with face-to-face staff in the PD)

It is sometimes suggested that ethnicity is a substitute for 'race' that has any sense of prior encounters between different groups removed from its construction, and simplistic conceptions of ethnicity (based on the marker of skin colour) argued to subsume the political and historical factors by which these markers gain concrete social meaning (Gilroy, 1987) – “*for some unknown reason*” skin colour dictates social relations. But, as Smaje (1995:15) argues, the circumstances in which these markers are used are not arbitrary, and “typically, ethnic distinctions are most forcefully made when political or economic power is at stake.” Indeed, at the policy level, Authority Committee Members framed their views heavily around the need to encourage and enable access to the parks by visible communities precisely *because* they have historically been excluded. Such empathy too is grounded in a 'primordial' belief that visible communities have ALL been excluded because of their ethnic difference. Thus people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds are returned to a position of homogenised difference even when (and perhaps especially when) national parks are attempting to be socially inclusive.

However, the view that *equality should be the aim* signalled some movement among those involved in the national parks, and countryside management more widely, towards a negotiation with difference. The next section will explore the struggles surrounding how to deal with difference in more detail.

### Negotiating difference

Within the essentialism examined above, there were also shades of grey. This section explores the ways in which fixed versions of ethnicity also incorporated the probing of boundaries. Every national park focus group recognised that assumptions based on visual difference may constitute 'being prejudiced', and many interviewees wished to avoid 'labelling' people. But it was particularly through the interviews with middle and senior management that the recognition that cultures and practices change and shift emerged, and the need for a more open and broad approach to social inclusion issues was identified. On occasion, discourse moved towards an appreciation of ethnic identities as complex and dynamic, with class, generation and gender issues considered as potentially cross-cutting ethnic positions.

How to 'deal with difference', without being 'patronising' or 'inflammatory', especially troubled senior management and Authority Committee Members, and debate surrounded three main issues. First, there were worries that 'targeting' specific groups not only further essentialises those groups, but also alienates other groups not being engaged. After the Bradford, Burnley and Oldham disturbances in the summer of 2001, and sensitive to the resulting reports highlighting tension between white and Asian communities, national park management and Members were averse to being (or being seen to be) discriminatory against non-visible groups (explicitly park residents and inner city whites). There was genuine concern that their work should reach across all 'marginalised groups' without prioritising between them, and that 'positive discrimination'<sup>61</sup> could be counter-productive.

This raises the thorny issue of resources: national parks have tight budgets to work with, and much funding goes to the 'core' work of conservation, necessitating the prioritisation of tasks/policies. Although the majority of management felt that they *should* be working to encourage visible communities to participate in the parks, conflict arose regarding where money should be spent. The paradox of needing to prioritise, whilst not wanting to categorise different groups as marginalised by targeting, was central to many discussions. Linked to this, national park management (and stakeholder interviewees) were suspicious of 'monitoring', with its attendant focus on difference - visible communities were constructed as under-represented as visitors to national parks, but national park staff/Members were anxious that being 'too politically correct' was patronising.

The second issue involved the potential dangers of 'social engineering', and the need to let things change 'naturally'. The assumption inherent in this discourse (beyond that of originary ethnicity), was that such 'natural' change is only ever one way: that visible communities will, over time, incorporate white English culture, and 'discover' the allure of the countryside gradually as they are introduced 'organically' (without targeted projects by national parks). It is worth quoting one individual at length, as his statements are indicative of the views expressed against positive action:

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<sup>61</sup> It is revealing that many national park staff interviewees used the term 'positive discrimination' as opposed to the 'positive action' prescribed in multicultural policy-making and utilised across 'ethnic minority' organisations and throughout this thesis. This is reflective of the point being made above, that national parks viewed 'targeting' as a potentially negative action to take, hence the pejorative terminology of discrimination.



M5 *I think there there's a time phenomenon as well that needs to be taken into account ... groups coming in into a country and beginning initially to erm cluster ... one of the terms is ghettoization ... is for people because they are amongst their own if you like they can generate their own culture that they're familiar with ... wherever they've come whether they're white black or whatever um ... and it's only when you get into 3rd or 4th generation people when they begin to get divided in their cultural loyalties er ... because they are still retaining some of their ethnic background through their parents and grandparents but they're adopting through exposure the cultural chattels of the country the host country ... and you begin to get people picking up on interests that are initially alien to their own*

(Focus group with middle management in the PD)

M5 goes on to describe a project run by Nottingham County Council to encourage 'ethnic minorities' to visit Sherwood Forest, which he says has had "enormous difficulty in attracting ... imposing if you like white Anglo-Saxon protestant values on young Asians". In M5's narrative, the visible community elders, when consulted as to why their community is not visiting Sherwood Forest, state that such behaviour is not part of their culture. He believes that the "acculturation process is a long term one", and warns against imposing 'our' (white Anglo-Saxon) values and timetables upon this process. This opinion not only precludes the possibility that visible communities may currently wish to visit the national parks, or that countryside recreation may be practiced among visible communities, but assumes that people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds *will*, given time, all come to appreciate the rural. In addition, it problematically implies that all 'Anglo-Saxons' culturally value the rural. Such a position, while acknowledging temporal change, remains deterministic, excluding the possibility of multiple and shifting identities and cultural practices across all groups in society.

The third issue was that encouraging visible communities may set up unrealistic expectations:

M3 *the images shown on publications ... could include people from ethnic minorities*

M2 *we did last year/*

M3 */I'm sure you do*

M2 */last last year's front cover/*

M3 */I'm not saying you don't*

M2 */no but it is very much an issue ... but they definitely were criticised for showing an image that was Asian people in a national park*

*[non-verbal look from M3 saying 'that's ridiculous', responded to with an 'I know' from M2]*

M5 *I have to say I do have problems with the ... if you like almost the um the er ...*

F1 *tokenism?*

M5 *gesture yeah tokenism*

F1 *yeah ... [ ] but I think it may well mislead people from ethnic communities if we did put publications out with you now ... I don't know ... an Asian family walking along the Cleveland Way because they're NOT going to come out and see Asian families out walking along the Cleveland Way*

(Focus group with senior management in the NYM)

Despite the fact that the photograph being discussed was not 'set up', the presence of Asian people in the national park was considered to be *against* stereotype, both in that such an image was resisted as appropriate in national park literature, and that it was a tokenistic gesture that would mislead visible communities.

Debate regarding the matters outlined above highlighted a reticence to focus on ethnicity alone, and generally concluded that a wider social inclusion approach was necessary. However, there was a willingness and enthusiasm to focus on class, gender and age as being legitimate ways in which to categorise groups: targeting lower income, socially deprived inner-city groups *across* ethnicities was discussed as an acceptable approach to social inclusion, as was attempting to engage specifically with youth groups and women. Issues regarding positive discrimination, social engineering, 'being patronising', or setting up unrealistic expectations were never linked with class, gender or age – no one worried that men/older people may be affronted that women/youth groups were being positively targeted, for example. This reluctance to **specifically target visible communities** was clearly an issue for countryside organisations more generally:

Z2 *one of the other the the volunteering project ... that we will be starting shortly ... has a specific amount of funding attached to give to our [local groups] to help in engaging under represented groups ... so younger people and ethnic minorities ... people with special needs ... so there's specifically a target to engage with people from ethnic minorities to volunteer with [organisation name]*

Fac *when is this due to run?*

Z2 *we should have the people in post by autumn and it should run for three years ... I think it's also fair to say that out of those underrepresented groups ... the ones [members of organisation] are nervous of engaging are people from ethnic minorities and people with special needs ... they feel tremendously happy about younger people ... um but when we we wrote off to the [local groups] and said send us some ideas the majority went for younger people*  
(Stakeholder interview: woman, 25-34, white English)

There emerged an acceptance among national parks and stakeholder organisations that underrepresented groups need to be targeted, but a sensitivity and even fear attached to engaging with visible communities. This reveals inequality within 'positive action' policy itself. Since positive action is "designed to favour disadvantaged groups within society, in order to reduce if not eliminate inequalities" (Johnston, 2000:605), removing visible communities from the list of potential candidates for targeted action further disadvantages them. However, Authority Committee Members in both national parks were more supportive of taking proactive measures to engage with visible communities. Contributing factors to Members' attitudes towards positive action were their sole focus on policy, and, moreover, the extensive experience in urban voluntary

and local government sectors shared by most Members who participated in the research. In these arenas, targeting 'ethnic minority' groups has been common policy *and* practice for over a decade, and issues regarding visible communities everyday rather than unusual.

White respondents to the questionnaire surveys also supported positive action, many citing the original reasons behind the designation of the national parks for this support. It is interesting to note how visitor and resident perspectives differ somewhat, though, regarding this issue:

<i>"Groups within society who do not visit national parks should be actively encouraged to do so"</i>	<b>residents<sup>62</sup></b> % (n=988)	<b>visitors<sup>63</sup></b> % (n=595)
strongly agree	<b>10</b> 99	<b>31</b> 184
agree	<b>37</b> 365	<b>46</b> 274
no opinion	<b>29</b> 287	<b>11</b> 65
disagree	<b>18</b> 177	<b>8</b> 48
strongly disagree	<b>6</b> 59	<b>4</b> 24

Table 1: questionnaire responses to the statement "Groups within society who do not visit national parks should be actively encouraged to do so."

Residents' less enthusiastic support of positive action did not appear to stem from concerns about categorising people, but rather from fears related to environmental degradation and community comfort. These fears were embedded in specific constructions of oppositional place rather than different identities - two points to make here are that residents understood national parks and the rural rigidly as *essentialised places*, and that national park staff/Members and visitors predominantly imagined that the majority of *residents would reject positive action*. Both issues will be explored in the following sections.

What this section has been emphasising is that negotiation is taking place within the national parks regarding how to address difference, in practical and policy terms, based on constructions of visible communities that touch on fluid and multiple identity formation. While chapter 6 explores how ethnicity and identity are approached in non-reductive ways, however, the focus here is that *understandings of changing and plural visible communities are also produced through essentialised identity that is, nevertheless, retained as absolute*. Furthermore, the difficulties interviewees

<sup>62</sup> The postal questionnaire survey to residents in the NYM and PD generated 988 completed responses across the two parks, of which 99% identified as white.

<sup>63</sup> 595 visitors responded to the survey across the two parks, of which 92% identified as white.

experienced in their attempts to discuss ethnicity, identity, belonging and the countryside points to the emerging nature of such negotiations. The faltering character of national park focus group debate, particularly among face-to-face staff, revealed both uncertainty as to what *should* be said (political correctness was present as well as critiqued) and a lack of awareness/experience of people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds. In one interview, a particular individual was delayed and arrived halfway through the session, at the start of which the group had agreed that this was unfortunate because he was *"the only one who knows anything about this stuff"*, having previously been a country park ranger in a large urban area. When he arrived there were audible sighs of relief, and the comment: *"we've got stuck [newcomer's name], we're needing your help"*. While individuals at times attempted to avoid labeling visible communities, then, their inexperience with the issues meant that stereotypes remained just beneath the surface, as the next section illustrates.

#### Transferred constructions of difference

While essentialised identity and cultural practices were intertwined with a degree of flexibility, absolute ethnic difference re-emerged when the reception of visible communities in the countryside was discussed. First or second hand examples of direct racism in national parks were recounted in every focus group interview, together with a perceived likelihood that some national park residents would not welcome non-white visitors. Although park staff/Members agreed that many residents would welcome everyone, this was invariably tied to economic issues – that residents running businesses (especially tourism providers) could *not afford* to be unwelcoming. More commonly, residents were portrayed as being wary of 'outsiders' generally, perceiving all non-locals as out-of-place and even as potential threats (to livestock and farm crops, to the wider environment, to peace and quiet, and to their cultural way of life). As the following quote shows, in this construction of residents the 'white countryside/black cities' discourse outlining a racialised rural prevailed, with residents described as holding attitudes towards visible communities that are, at the least, parochial:

- M1 *I've never known discrimination about TYPE of visitors just visitors generally [laughs]*  
 F2 *oh there IS*  
 M1 *well it may be there it may be there*  
 F2 *I think it's there I mean ... I think there's a lot of racism in our villages and in in our schools... and um it's a thing we all have to really start addressing but we only do it by by ... doing things together*  
 M2 *it would be remarkable if it wasn't because it's everywhere else/*  
 F2 */well you know*  
*[all start to talk at once]*

M2 /why should the park be any different

F2 /I remember my son coming home from school saying that he wasn't ever going to go back there again because they were all ... all racist ...and I've ... knocking on the door canvassing for elections ... I know where all the people in Pickering live ... who have actually been blatant enough to say to me we moved here to get away from the coloured people what are your views?

M1 or there will be people who would say we moved here to get away from PEOPLE  
[lots of agreement]

(NYM Authority Committee Members focus group)

The key point here is that there is a dominant popular understanding that rural folk (including national park residents) are intolerant of 'outsiders' in the main, and visible communities in particular. F2 retells her particular experiences of racist attitudes among rural residents, which resonate with the group, but are also challenged by the idea that visibility is not the crucial issue, but rather that non-rural people *in general* are perceived by rural residents to be strangers. Discussion in all national park focus groups ran along similar lines, and in every case the rural-urban divide was ultimately spoken as the framework within which visibility stood out. That is, rural residents were perceived to exclude all 'incomers' as different, but visible difference marks non-white groups as being *more different*.

In this discourse, people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds are absolutely fixed through *transferred constructions of difference* and otherness: a dominant conceptualisation of rural residents as parochial enables an uncomplicated and unquestioned (re)presentation of essentialised ethnicity by those eschewing such a discourse from their own perspective. National park staff/Member discussions involved the 'telling of the already said' drawn from rhetorical formations within the socio-cultural and political structures of which they are a part (after Hall, 1997), reiterating visible communities as excluded from the countryside.

Residents overtly contested such a construction of themselves as parochial, while visitors were reticent to comment on the accuracy of this statement:

"National park residents do not want non-white visitors in their neighbourhoods"	residents		visitors	
	%	(n=988)	%	(n=595)
strongly agree	3	30	2	12
agree	5	49	13	79
no opinion	20	198	42	255
disagree	41	405	28	170
strongly disagree	31	306	15	90

Table 2: questionnaire responses to the statement "National park residents do not want non-white visitors in their neighbourhoods."

The high number of 'no opinion' responses from visitors to national parks in Table 3 is a gap to be interpreted, though: a substantial number of the 255 'no opinion's were accompanied by comments along the lines of "well, I think residents probably don't want them [visible communities] but I think they should". Even amongst the fifth of residents who ticked the 'no opinion' box, many added that, while they personally disagreed with the statement, they were less sure of their neighbours:

*"As for question 27 [residents do not want non-white visitors in their neighbourhoods] I would like to disagree but on thinking about it, I am sad to agree. I can think of a few neighbours who would be suspicious and unwelcoming. I can't really think of a solution."*

(Postal questionnaire – additional comments: woman, 55-64, white British)

In addition, although a majority of residents opted for the 'strongly disagree/disagree' categories, responses may have been influenced by residents' perceptions of how ethnicity (and 'race') issues are embedded in the wider body politic, locally and/or nationally. Respondents to surveys are liable to answer in the way that they consider they *should* answer in line with societal norms (Flowerdew & Martin, 1997) - not necessarily airing their personal opinions if they perceive these to be politically or socially insensitive. Comparison with later responses in the questionnaire suggests that direct reference to ethnicity did indeed elicit more 'politically correct' opinions than may be the case: Table 3 below shows that almost a third of residents thought that it would *not* be beneficial for more urban dwellers to visit national parks, and less than a half thought that it would; but only 8% of residents stated that 'non-white' visitors were unwanted, while 72% indicated that they were (see Table 2 above).

<i>"It would be good if more people living in towns visited national parks"</i>	<b>residents</b>	
	<b>%</b>	<b>(n=988)</b>
strongly agree	<b>8</b>	79
agree	<b>38</b>	375
no opinion	<b>26</b>	257
disagree	<b>22</b>	217
strongly disagree	<b>6</b>	59

Table 3: resident responses to the statement "It would be good if more people living in towns visited national parks."

Furthermore, residents were reticent to be drawn on their opinion regarding visible community use of national parks:

<i>National parks lack ethnic minority visitors</i>	<b>residents</b> % (n=988)	<b>visitors</b> % (n=595)
strongly agree	<b>7</b> 69	<b>18</b> 109
agree	<b>30</b> 296	<b>45</b> 273
no opinion	<b>39</b> 385	<b>18</b> 109
disagree	<b>19</b> 188	<b>16</b> 97
strongly disagree	<b>5</b> 49	<b>3</b> 18

*Table 4: questionnaire responses to the statement "National parks lack ethnic minority visitors."*

Here we see that visitors understood the countryside as lacking visible communities, while the majority of residents voiced no opinion on the matter. Consider also resident responses across ethnicity and socio-economic position of visitors to national parks:

	<i>"National parks lack ethnic minority visitors"</i> % (n=988)	<i>"Visitors to national parks tend to be middle class"</i> % (n=988)
strongly agree	<b>7</b> 69	<b>5</b> 49
agree	<b>30</b> 296	<b>30</b> 296
no opinion	<b>39</b> 385	<b>28</b> 277
disagree	<b>19</b> 188	<b>34</b> 336
strongly disagree	<b>5</b> 49	<b>3</b> 30

*Table 5: resident responses to the statements "National parks lack ethnic minority visitors" and "Visitors to national parks tend to be middle class."*

Virtually the same percentages in the resident survey support (agree or strongly agree) the statement that national parks lack working class visitors, suggesting that residents link lower socio-economic status, as well as visible communities, with city residence. However, the high percentage of residents registering 'no opinion' on the ethnicity statement is another silence that speaks - additional comments were related to unease regarding generalising about ethnicity, despite having generalised throughout the rest of the questionnaire. These statistics indicate both uncertainty *and sensitivity* to questions of an 'ethnic' nature.

The data regarding the reception of visible communities by national park residents is somewhat contradictory, then, as far as residents themselves are concerned – the majority of the latter state that they want 'non-white' visitors in the national parks, yet at the same time less than half believe it would be positive for more people living in towns

to access the countryside<sup>64</sup>. If “social life is both space-forming and space-contingent” (Soja, 1996, emphasis added), then the chapter also needs to examine the ways in which *the rural as space* is thought. The next section, then, considers how reductive versions of the rural (and urban) are involved in both structuring and maintaining the dominant Imaginary explored above.

### Essentialised places

The majority of respondents in the national parks explicitly described the countryside *as different from* the city, both in ‘real’ physical environment terms and in that the rural is laden with a specific set of values. Such a dominant reading of the countryside raised two principle issues that are interrogated here: namely an unquestioned understanding that a rural-urban divide exists, and a conviction that national rural space embodies national identity.

The research highlights the construction of a **rural-urban divide** via complicated connections between people and place, in which people’s presence is important, but in which the *underlying constant* is the physical and essential difference between city and countryside. National park residents, for example, constructed visitors as a homogeneous group with particular behaviours and attitudes: visitors were welcome in the parks, but *only as long as* they did not cause damage to the environment, respected the ‘country way of life’ and did not disturb rural residents. Tension surrounded balancing the number of visitors for community comfort, for the local economy and for nature conservation. Thus *all* city-living people (rather than certain groups) were perceived to not understand ‘the country way of life’ or respect its rules, and residents felt that this ignorance should be addressed:

<i>“It’s important that people living in towns know more about the national parks.”</i>	<b>residents</b>	
	<b>%</b>	<b>(n=988)</b>
strongly agree	<b>43</b>	<b>425</b>
agree	<b>48</b>	<b>474</b>
no opinion	<b>6</b>	<b>59</b>
disagree	<b>2</b>	<b>20</b>
strongly disagree	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>

Table 6: resident questionnaire responses to the statement “It’s important that people living in towns know more about the national parks.”

<sup>64</sup> It is possible that residents perceived ‘people living in towns’ as majority white, but given the focus of the questionnaire, outlined in an introductory letter, it seems acceptable to assume that they understood town residents as including visible communities.



However, urbanites learning more about the rural was not necessarily equated with them spending time in national parks, and in a three-page soliloquy from a retired male farmer, there was clear resentment towards people coming into the rural from elsewhere:

*"I paid rent [for the farm] and was expected to provide townies with the privilege of walking around free of charge ..."*

(Postal questionnaire – additional comments: male, 65+, white British)

Resident understanding that city people are out-of-place in the rural clearly stemmed from their belief that urban dwellers *inhabit different space* in their everyday lives (the countryside and city being essentially *different places*) – and then attached to urbanites having different values and codes of behaviour in the countryside (than countryside folk). A 'lay discourse' was employed by research participants, in which the rural as a fixed and singular spatial construct was a "concept understood and used by people in everyday talk" (Halfacree, 1993).

The **physical differences** between rural and urban were listed in a straightforward dualistic manner by the vast majority of the resident and visitor survey respondents: clean/dirty; fresh air/pollution; wide-open spaces/confined areas; much wildlife/lack of animals and plants; fields and streams/concrete and tarmac; etc. Furthermore, a specific set of values was attached to physical countryside attributes, for example the 'sense of peace and calm' experienced in the rural, in opposition to 'stressful' city lives, and national parks were idealised as 'the best' countryside environments, precisely because they have been designated as places where nature is to be conserved and protected. Descriptions of both *environments and values* involved static, pre-determined concepts of space that were clearly based on the physicality of place. Such narratives were also prevalent in national park staff/Member discourse.

However, for some (most notably residents), the parks were not essentialised so simply and heterogeneity across rural space was acknowledged. In particular, deterioration in 'environmental quality' was commonly recognised, and loss of habitat/species decline highlighted as negative outcomes of increased use (both agricultural and recreational) of the parks. However, rhetoric regarding such processes was employed to emphasise that there had already been too much change, the underlying perception being that the rural *should remain static*, in line with the idealised imaginations of the countryside. Thus heterogeneity was re-incorporated within the dominant essentialised 'rural idyll'.

Likewise, geographical variations within English rurality were rarely noted, and when discussed, rural differentiation was subsumed within physical comparisons between urban and rural environments that emphasised all rural localities as the same in not-being-city.

A **temporal aspect** too was important within the rural-urban binary construction. While not often explicit, the idea that the national parks represented the past was inherent within discourse regarding the conservation and preservation of habitats and species. More than the physical environment, though, the *values* associated with the countryside were couched in terms of being 'old fashioned' in juxtaposition with the modernity of the city. Nostalgia for a more simple, less hurried, 'natural' way of life (than the complexity and hectic pace in the urban of *today*) coursed through much of the research material, and the rural was specifically constructed in fixed, originary (temporal) opposition to the urban. In addition, the perception of a countryside not only steeped in tradition but *continuing to consolidate* a specific *national heritage* was strong among national park staff/Member interviewees and questionnaire respondents. The parks were conceptualised as places of special national value, and this socio-cultural factor was as significant in identifying a need to protect and conserve the parks as environmental factors:

<i>"The English countryside plays an important part in the sense of national identity"</i>	<b>residents</b> % (n=988)	<b>visitors</b> % (n=595)
strongly agree	<b>58</b> 573	<b>68</b> 412
agree	<b>36</b> 355	<b>25</b> 152
no opinion	<b>4</b> 40	<b>3</b> 18
disagree	<b>2</b> 20	<b>3</b> 18
strongly disagree		<b>1</b> 6

Table 7: questionnaire responses to the statement *"The English countryside plays an important part in the sense of national identity"*.

The overwhelming belief in the rural as central to national identity construction, together with essentialised understandings of ethnicity and the perception of visible community absence from the national parks, constructs the rural as a 'space of the nation' implicitly not inclusive of visible communities. This sentiment was reiterated by countryside managers beyond the national parks: stakeholder interviews understood visible communities to be out-of-place in the rural, via assumptions of an essentialised rural as a national (white) English domain:

Z2 *[talking about English heritage] whenever I go out to the countryside or specifically to stately homes ... if I see people from ethnic minority backgrounds I think oh good ... and also I'm making I'm making ... there's a presumption that they don't come that I have too ...*  
(Stakeholder interview: woman, 25-34, white English)

This woman wanted to believe that 'ethnic minorities' are beginning to 'feel more English', but part of this involved starting to access the countryside and value 'English traditions'. Here space (physical and value-laden) is again central to ideas of belonging, with visible communities conceptualised as gaining access to Englishness itself via gaining access to the 'nation space'. Furthermore, the high level of interest among national park residents for the research can be interpreted as underlining the central role that the countryside plays in dominant ideas of Englishness: the 62% response rate for the postal questionnaire was far higher than expected, indicating that issues surrounding ethnicity, nationality and rurality resonate strongly, and reinforcing the idea that national parks are understood as having cultural heritage significance and value (for a specific (majority) cultural group).

Across the qualitative and quantitative material, then, national park staff/Members, residents and visitors constructed space as bounded and determined, the rural as opposite to the urban, and the countryside as the epitome of Englishness itself. This production of the rural was, furthermore, entangled with perceptions of essentialised ethnicity and nationality, which combine to position visible communities' as out-of-place in the countryside. The chapter now moves on to explore the ways in which visible communities themselves understood and imagined identity and place.

### **Visible communities on ethnicity, nationality and the rural**

The chapter has so far considered the ways in which visible community identities and the countryside are understood and described by the non-visible majority who reside in, are employed by and visit national parks. The focus here is on the ways in which visible communities identify themselves, and what role the English countryside may play in these identifications, drawing on the **urban questionnaire survey, and the focus group and individual interviews conducted with people from visible community backgrounds**<sup>65</sup>. In particular, this section explores how visible community respondents consider themselves as 'ethnic minorities' and/or as marginalised in rural space. This is not to suggest that essentialised constructions and fixed identities went unchallenged

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<sup>65</sup> 606 questionnaires, 6 focus groups and 20 individual interviews were completed with people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds across the two cities. Interview respondent profiles can be found in Appendices V and VI.

in the research, (such 'transruptions' are examined in the next chapter), but that visible communities *did* (re)present themselves in essentialist terms with regard to wider society and, specifically, to English rurality.

The most obvious evidence of this was that **two thirds** of questionnaire respondents in Sheffield and **three quarters** of those in Middlesbrough indicated that they had **never been to the countryside in England**. There was a reticence to use the term 'national park', and the majority of answers spoke of 'the countryside', a more familiar concept. Roughly half of the individuals interviewed at length were also unfamiliar with national parks. The lack of knowledge and experience of rural space, as will be shown throughout the rest of the chapter, were explained and even justified via discourses of essentialised ethnic identity, extended to bounded and unchanging cultural practices that incorporated the rural as a static and singular entity.

This section opens by examining the pre-determined ethnic identities constructed by visible communities, and how they were explicitly linked to attendant and unchanging cultures with specific spatial practices. In particular, an emphasis on *visible difference* was key in many participants' notions of their reception in and absence from rural spaces – attached to fundamental notions of absolute *ethnic difference* that were critical within many visible community perceptions of spatial belonging. The emphasis here is that deterministic understandings of ethnicity played the central role in boundary drawing that served to self-exclude via constructions of inflexible cultural practices.

The everyday factors and experiences structuring visible community identifications are then examined, in order to investigate the explanations given for and implicit within such static identity formation. Issues surrounding strategic essentialism and identity politics are explored through consideration of the mobilisation of specific identities within ethnic groups. However, *intra-visible community differences* regarding the deployment of fixed identity are flagged up here, highlighting the complexities within reductive identity production, and suggesting some point of contact between this chapter and the next. The section moves on to discuss the role of spatial determinism in perceptions of belonging in the English countryside, focusing on the ways in which static imaginations of the physical rural environment and attached values enable and maintain the idea that the countryside is a 'white space'. Finally, the connections between essentialised constructions of place *and* ethnicity are discussed in terms of national identity, and the chapter examines how the range of constructions of Englishness/national identity among visible community respondents point to overlaps between

those participants with essentialised understandings of self, society and space, and those with more flexible and multiple constructions of identity and space.

### Mirror images? The essentialised self identities of visible communities

Among the focus group interviews, the perceived existence of specific 'ethnic minority' identity as separate and discernable from white identity emerged strongly, grounded in a combination of factors including religion, 'traditional' practices and dress, country of (ancestral) origin and language/dialect of (ancestral) origin. These identities were described as *having* (fixed) attendant cultural practices, built around inherited values that inform everyday experiences, as well as acting as the structure through which an ethnic community knew and were known by each other. In such discourses, Asian-ness/blackness/Indian-ness/West Indian-ness was positively held as an unchanging and *knowable* identity, and approaches to life, work and social living embedded in a strong sense of what this identity constitutes and represents. "My community ...", "Our people ...", "We just aren't like that ...", "We don't do that ..." were statements repeated throughout the interviews and questionnaire survey. In addition, these notions of self-identity were often portrayed specifically as *marginalised*, and the need to retain one's identity crucial precisely because of an understanding of being minority in relation to dominant society.

The research shows that, for many respondents, the production of essentialised ethnicity reiterated the dualism between visible community and non-visible community, and this dualism, *with the perception of white as dominant*, emerged as the critical factor in understandings of exclusion. In addition, everyday places of experience were caught up in essentialised ethnicity. Thus the urban was 'home' territory, the rural the space of the other (non-visible community), and the countryside conceived as a place 'not for visible communities'. Respondents believed that they were not expected to be in the national parks and, therefore, they did not imagine themselves there. The chapter will return to notions of essentialised space later – here the emphasis is on the ways in which ethnic (visible) difference *understood as pre-given* has impacts upon socially understood and fixed practices *in relation to space*.

This construction of visible communities as out-of-place in the countryside is embedded deeply within the visible community social Imaginary. The research revealed that even visible communities who, as visitors to national parks, actively contest the 'white countryside' discourse, perceived themselves and their actions as different from the

'norm' of their ethnic group. While placing themselves in the rural, Asian and African Caribbean background visitors generally still held that visible community cultural practices, attached to fixed ethnic identities, do not incorporate rural recreation:

S4 *no nah it certainly black families and that type of thing ... over here ... it's unheard of ... in the Caribbean people do go to and and live in the countryside and it's part of the way of life ... but black families don't go there here ... [later] but it's national park stuff and all that type of stuff potholing and all that type ... it's not generally what black people do ... but obviously things will change I mean I do some things which generally black people don't do*  
(Individual interview in Sheffield: female, 35-44, Black British<sup>66</sup>)

S8 *in fact you know I'll be honest with you seeing ... in my experience I've seen a black guy or a black woman with a rucksack rigged up for walking me I just looked twice ... it's something I see so rarely ... and then I've got to be honest my next thoughts are well that person hasn't got no black friends I bet they've got lots of white friends ... you know so I guess that obviously seeing them like that ... actually brings out some bias in me because you know black folks and rucksacks aren't ... and a sleeping bag and all the rest of it AIN'T what we DO [laughs] ... but in fact I've done it*  
(Individual interview in Sheffield: male, 35-44, Black British)

B2 *Asian families all tend to keep together and visit each other ... I've been mentioning the North York Moors to friends but they're not interested ... they'd rather go shopping to Bradford but I think they shouldn't knock something they haven't tried.*  
(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: male, 25-34, British Asian)

These quotes highlight the self-presentation of visible communities as outsiders in the rural landscape. S4 and S8 interpret their own behaviour as at times contesting 'black' practices, with the former identifying the potential for change over time. B2 shifts the emphasis from himself as the non-conformer, highlighting instead what he considers his community's complacency and parochialism. Despite such instances of resistance, however, these respondents employ the dominant stereotype when discussing visible communities as a whole, never suggesting that other people from same/similar backgrounds may also be accessing national parks or the wider countryside. In this manner, essentialist versions of 'ethnic minority-hood' are reiterated by visible communities, which affect understandings of the rural and mirror the issues regarding 'primordial ethnicity' discussed in the previous section: again, the focus is on absolute ethnic difference, of which visual difference is conceptualised as a key marker.

The quantitative data revealed that only 36% of visible community respondents believed that national park residents would want them in the area, indicating that visual difference is linked with negative reception. Throughout the qualitative material, the

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<sup>66</sup> Interviewees were asked to 'tick boxes' regarding gender and age, but to describe their ethnic and national identity as they chose.

idea that visible communities 'stand out' in, and are excluded by non-visible communities from rural space, was clearly evident among many research participants:

B1 *I have I've visited er the Moors with a friend of mine doing the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and ... we went round she showed me a few places with a number of other people from work colleagues and then we went in for a drink in this pub ... and it was ... OOF ... you know as if NO WAY you know what are YOU guys doing here and and that was I've never actually wanted to go back ... 'cos it's not ... it's not very me and it's completely new ... I s'pose within the city you feel safer etc ... is is you take black and Asian groups to to countryside and there's people walking etc and it's a ... a complete alien feel that you have ... well you shouldn't really be here or you shouldn't really be visiting that's the sort of ... tension that you feel er and that that can be very a complete barrier basically*

(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: male, 25-34, Pakistani)

The above quote highlights the 'racialised countryside' discourse encountered in chapter 2, in this case employed by B1 as he constructs himself, from his *experience*, as marginalised in a countryside where 'whites' are dominant. In the group discussion cited below, the young men reveal the same conception of themselves as different ('odd'), through their *perceptions* of the rural as a white space, with the group's sense of difference quickly linked with exclusion, as 'white' people were automatically presumed to be antagonistic towards their presence:

*[talking about racism in the city]*

Fac *what about out in the countryside?*

M4 *we'd get a hard time yeah*

...

M2 *there's less people there ... so we'd be more like odd the odd ones*

M3 *those people don't want us there*

Fac *what do you mean by those people?*

M3 *those the people what are living there*

M2 *the whites ... they're all white there*

M? *yeah*

Fac *OK so that's why you feel you'd be odd because you're not white?*

M2 *yeah*

M5 *that's why we ... they don't want us there*

M? *yeah*

(Middlesbrough visible community focus group: 6 young men, 13-16, 4 identified as Pakistani, 2 as British Asian)

In the previous two excerpts, the construction of essentially different ethnicities was fundamental in understandings of spatial exclusion. Furthermore, national identity was also closely connected to ethnicity and culture in specific and static ways: 'English' was synonymous throughout the urban interviews with 'white'. For many research participants, the understanding of English identity as inherently tied to whiteness mirrored the production of visible community ethnicities always tied to other (than English) nationalities - often irrespective of whether respondents identified as English/

British themselves. Ethnicity was elided with national identity, and the terms used interchangeably. The implicit connections drawn between whiteness and Englishness were then extended to the countryside precisely because the rural was perceived as a white space:

F2 *it's really English people that don't like um ... our type of culture/*

F3 */clothes and stuff*

*[all talk together, about rejection of their 'way of life' in England by the English/white majority]*

F2 *they want us out of England really*

*[some laughter, some disagreement]*

F2 *no they DO though*

F7 *I don't think you [to Fac] want us to come out to the countryside*

F? *no*

(Middlesbrough visible community focus group: 8 women, 13-16, all identified as Pakistani)

This presumption of exclusion is enabled by essentialist notions of 'primordial ethnicity', but goes deeper. Fanon (1999:220), writing about "The Fact of Blackness", argues that:

"Ontology ... does not permit us to understand the being of the black man; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some critics will take it on themselves to remind us that this proposition has a converse. I say that this is false. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man."

Fanon's statement appears to contradict psychoanalytical theories regarding construction of (any) 'self' via 'other' explored in chapter 2, but what he is emphasising is the socialised understanding of the position of *white as majority* and *as dominant*. He goes on to connect the sense of being 'fixed' as a black man (constructed as powerless by others) to experiencing 'crushing objecthood'. Similarly, Pajaczkowska & Young (1999:199), while acknowledging that "the capacity for racism is based on innate human characteristics ... not necessarily activated by society in a destructive way", stress that racism exists not only as a subjective structure, but also as an '*objective reality*', produced by and experienced through the "history of imperialism, colonialism and exploitation". This chapter, then, must also consider the ways in which the historicity of visible communities' experiences in England are caught up in representations of ethnic identity, with particular reference to social and spatial exclusion.



Strategic essentialism and identity politics

The preceding discussion has explored the essentialist versions of ethnicity presented by visible communities. For some respondents, the production of static identities was grounded in an ethnic determinism that was absolute, following the 'primordial ethnicity' model: an understanding that people possess different and inflexible cultural practices, attached to separate and unchanging ethnic identities. Indeed, the processes involved in constructing these 'non-strategic' identities appear to mirror the ways in which white participants' understandings of fixed 'ethnic minorities' are produced.

Rather than retread points already made, however, the focus here is on exploring other presentations of determinist discourse that are not as static as they may appear. Essentialised ethnicity also emerged as not *necessarily or always* stemming from an innate belief in authentic originality, but was often a response to direct or indirect experiences of racism. Two key beliefs emerged among interviewees regarding 'race relations' in contemporary England: first, that discrimination often stems from *ignorance* among majority society regarding visible community groups; and secondly, that there remains a *lack of acknowledgement* of racism that serves to perpetuate racist attitudes. Comments about hardship and exclusion based on the colour of people's skin varied, from statements of blatant and omni-present racism to descriptions of an undercurrent of prejudice, again continuous but not always explicit:

B9 *but racism is something that people day-to-day live with that's the reality of things ... I could face it in my work where everybody's very sophisticated but yet you do see ... once in a while it comes to the surface ... if it doesn't come to the surface and you are intelligent and you know your own you know confidence and then you will be able to say well it doesn't exist for me ... but it doesn't mean ... it's all the time in all places ... really ... it's like a question is Britain a racist society? ... it's a very racist society ...*

(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: male, 25-35, British Asian)

S6 *I've got to be honest I've not experienced much for a long time ... and I sometimes wonder what would happen when I do experience it I mean in your face ... I don't know I know a lot of it goes on but what I do think really helps us is attitude if you've got the right attitude about it ... I'm not saying that that covers all I think the most dangerous form of racism is that which goes on subtly and you're not sure where it's coming from ... it goes on but you're not too sure what games are being played ...*

(Individual interview in Sheffield: male, 35-44, Ghanaian)

In the opinions of the above respondents, prejudice against visible communities is all-pervasive, but can be resisted if you have the personal confidence or correct 'attitude'. Moreover, both individuals went on to outline how this confidence stemmed from

having strong identities rooted in both knowledge of 'their' culture, and support from 'their' community. Statements outlining the strength gained from belonging to a distinctive community are ambiguous as to whether or not the essentialised identities described are understood as absolute. However, the strategic employment of 'visible community-ness' was explicit within some interviews and focus groups:

*B7 my friend who is from east Africa ... she has only seen Pakistan on the tele she has never been there ... how does she still see it as a strong sense of identity? ... I don't know she cannot explain to me how she feels this ... [goes on to talk about young visible communities born in England and identifying as Pakistani] but if you have gone to a school in Britain ... school has a major influence on your life yes? ... so how come these children who have gone to school here are not influenced by what is happening around them? ... I talk to a lot of young people and ... if you go somewhere and you are different or if you are made to feel different ... you have problems then within school because children are honest and they can be very cruel ... you know if you are disabled or ethnic ... so I don't know but maybe through their growing up years they had this and so they take on that identity you know the Pakistani identity ... they hold on to that thing and also it can keep them together from protect them from this experience*  
(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: female, 45-54, Indian)

This woman outlines how people mobilise their ethnic identity as a defensive strategy in response to experiences of discrimination and racism. Initially, B7 states that she cannot understand how her friend can strongly associate with a Pakistani identity, having never been to the country itself, but goes on to suggest, via an explanation regarding young people at school, that claims to ethnic identity are produced as reaction to rejection by majority (implicitly white) society, and that a Pakistani identity offers safety. Nayak (1999), writing about the importance of performances of identity through 'choreographed rituals', states that 'intense labour' is involved in cultivating particular ethnic identities. Furthermore, he suggests that, while *actively producing* their identity, people nevertheless claim to *understand that identity as ahistorical* and universal – they claim their identity as 'natural'. Retreat into visible community identities, into what Nayak terms 'a retentive posture', provides the security of a coherent community identity. The universality and fixity of the protective identity also enables B7's friend and the 'young Pakistanis' to *make sense* of their experiences, who they 'are' and their 'place' in society – essentialised ethnicity offers an explanatory narrative as well as support. As outlined earlier in this chapter, visible communities often perceived that they would be negatively received in the countryside. The essentialised versions of ethnic identities encountered in the research may have been deployed as a reaction to the 'crushing objecthood' Fanon describes, specifically because of the idea of a pervasive *rural* racism.

The strategic essentialism outlined here feeds into what Hall (2003:148) describes as 'Identity Politics One', regarding the "constitution of some defensive collective identity against the practices of racist society". Hall specifically ties identity with place, arguing that the post-war wave of immigrants from ex-British colonies found identification with England refused via racial prejudice and exclusionary practices, and were forced to "find some other roots on which to stand". This search for roots led to a 'rediscovery' of identity and 'recovery of lost histories' embedded in their countries of origin, resulting in:

"an enormous act of what I want to call imaginary political re-identification and re-territorialization, without which a counter-politics could not have been constructed. [...] That is how and where the margins begin to speak. The margins begin to contest, the locals begin to come to representation."

(Hall, *ibid.*:149)

Hall explains such identity politics as a process in which fixed representations of the categories 'black' or 'Asian' are employed as cultural categories, to 'strike back' against being positioned as minority, following Spivak's (1990) contention that "you pick up the universal that will give you the power to fight against the other side". If strategic essentialism may be understood as a defensive mechanism, then, identity politics go further, aiming to *challenge* 'minority status' - reifying alterity to move beyond it.

Such strategic employment of originary ethnicity was evident through the research, highlighted particularly by the ways in which gender, class and age, while at times constructed as contesting dominant visible community 'norms', were re-subsumed within an essentialised ethnicity when discussion turned to visible community positions in wider society. Crucially, membership of the ethnic group was claimed and valued in opposition to a majority white ethnicity, often *despite* situated positions within the ethnics that challenged homogeneity and fixity. Boundaries were blurred intra-community, but inter-community barriers were upheld. The key issue here is that *multiplicity exists within essentialised ethnicity*, but identities are *prioritised* politically.

This dominance of ethnicity over gender, age and class positions can be explored through the qualitative study. In the first example below, connections to England and Englishness were both made and denied by a group of young women, via gender and ethnic identity constructions, which emphasise the political deployment of ethnicity. All of the group were born in England, but they initially disagreed as to whether they felt connected to this country. On discussing the material, educational and career

opportunities available to them in England, though, they all shifted position to having a sense of attachment:

Fac do any of you then ... feel any connection to England?

F7 no

F6 no

F3 /no

F4 /no

F2 /yes

F1 /yes

Fac so those who said yes ... what why do you feel a connection?

F1 because we've got like lots of things here and in Pakistan like ... they don't have the things we've got

Fac what things do you mean?

F1 good houses ... and and clothes

F2 TVs and that

F1 and schools so you can get get ... like an education

F2 yeah

F7 better jobs

[several yeahs]

Fac what about those who said no?

F7 I say yeah now

Fac so you've changed your mind?

F7 yeah

F6 me too

(Middlesbrough visible community focus group: 8 women, 13-16, all identified as Pakistani)

They went on to discuss female lifestyles in Pakistan as highly restrictive, and their intentions to contest such a 'backward' position by gaining an education and making careers for themselves in England. However, when debate later turned to national and ethnic identifications, the women were vociferous about their Asianness, articulating their nationality and ethnicity as Pakistani. Furthermore, they felt that there was a need to stress their identity as Pakistani post Sept. 11th, in reaction to anti-Muslim responses to the attack. Discussion was passionate, and it was clear that negative representations of Asians as a fixed, essentialised group in the media and wider society did *not* prompt the women to argue heterogeneity within such a totality. Rather, such constructions were understood as a threat to their community's identity, to be defended. Their response was to reiterate the unity and homogeneity with their ethnic community, which involved narratives describing unbroken links to ancestral homes, and identification with ethnic identity *over and above any other*. Towards the end of the interview, the young women had moved to a position where they perceived themselves as not belonging (because they are seen not to belong) in England, relegating their production of female identities that challenge the 'traditional norm', in order to re-align themselves with the over-arching ethnic identity:

F2 even if you're born here you're still not from this country like ... we're still not part of this country ... we're still part of our country and ...  
[several start to talk over F2]  
Fac can we listen for a moment please ... go on  
F2 even if you're born here there's still part of that country that's still ours ... so even if we do live here like ... it's really Pakistani our country  
Fac you all think of yourselves as Pakistani?  
[loud chorus of yes]  
(Middlesbrough visible community focus group: 8 women, 13-16, all identified as Pakistani)

Such a hierarchical positioning of ethnicity over gender was replayed across female interviewees, from non-Muslim and African Caribbean backgrounds as well as Muslim Asians.

Age also clearly had an influence over the political employment of ethnicity, as evidenced in a focus group with young men. The younger members of the group (13–15) identified as English, whereas the older ones (16–18) emphatically described themselves as Pakistani. The group organiser, interviewed separately<sup>67</sup>, stated that in his experience, as young men grew older their identities shifted from English to Pakistani and became fixed, in direct opposition to a dominant society they felt excluded from. He linked this change in identification to the young men leaving school, and finding themselves having to negotiate 'real life' and prejudice that the schools, to some extent, protected them from<sup>68</sup>.

Furthermore, for these young men, gender *added to* rather than detracted from their productions of ethnicity. While gender was not explicitly mentioned in any focus group interviews, the young men clearly positioned themselves as *Asian and male* throughout their day visit to the NYM – including those younger individuals who identified as English. Behaviour such as playing Bhangra tapes on the minibus stereo at full volume, and specifically winding down the minibus windows while passing through countryside villages, revealed the group's desire to perform their ethnicity in an ostentatious way. 'Macho' behaviour and commentary accompanied their involvement throughout their day trip's organised activities (kayaking and raft building), despite - or perhaps *precisely because* - members of this group perceived themselves to be marginalised in

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<sup>67</sup> Male, 25–34, Pakistani.

<sup>68</sup> Middlesbrough remains a fairly ethnically segregated city in terms of housing and education: schools in those areas where the research was conducted have majority Asian intakes.

the rural due to their ethnicity, and they responded with displays of a universal male Asianness<sup>69</sup>.

Socio-economic position also played a role in how essentialised ethnicity was understood and represented. All the focus group participants identified as working class, while most (but not all) individual interviewees were middle class. Although a majority of respondents in the qualitative study described 'primordial' ethnicities, it was those from working class backgrounds who most strongly adhered to reductive versions of ethnicity as a *strategy* to resist dominant, exclusive society. Those from middle class positions were more likely to describe ethnicity in fluid and plural terms (see chapter 6).

Identity politics, in reiterating visible community-ness as *different*, impacts on the ways in which people identify their nationality as well as their ethnicity. This is one issue where the research uncovered a split between Asian and African Caribbean communities. People from Asian backgrounds tended to identify as Asian/Pakistani/Indian with no mention of Englishness, irrespective of entanglements with gender, age or class positions. In the focus groups with people from African Caribbean backgrounds, though, 'black' was also politically utilised, but national identifications virtually always incorporated 'British' as a second term. Importantly, while black respondents generally did not believe that they would be accepted or feel comfortable in national parks, they perceived themselves to have the *right to belong* in the rural *because they were Black British*. These assertions articulated an identity politics that incorporated a social (in)justice discourse with regards to access to the English countryside, specifically because of ideas of nationality and national space.

Paradoxically, however, the research shows that people who definitely understood essentialised ethnicities in absolute/'non-strategic' terms (rather than as a mechanism of support or tactic of resistance) were able to incorporate an English/British nationality, at least in part, alongside their 'difference' from a white majority. For example, a group of older women from the Asian community in Middlesbrough clearly understood their ethnic identity in 'primordial' terms, not adopting it as political strategy, but while none of this group were born in England, most included British or English as part of their national identity:

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<sup>69</sup> When interviewed and in general in their youth club, these young men rarely shouted or incorporated 'patois' speech to the extent that they did in the rural environment.

- F1 they've mostly all come from Pakistan and I was born in Pakistan  
 [F1 is translator for the group]  
 F? [translated below]  
 F1 Karachi ... oh and India one person  
 Fac and do you [to group] still go back to visit regularly?  
 [translation and various answers]  
 F1 oh yeah they all they all go back ... I know that they all go back a lot  
 Fac do you [to group] feel any connections with England?  
 F1 [no translation of this question] I think we do I ... most of us think do think we belong  
 'cos like most of us have been here so long we're so used to it ... we go back to our ... you  
 know our homeland but you know you have to come back [to England] ... and I think everyone  
 feels the same 'cos most of them have lived here all their lives nearly  
 Fac could you ask the group what they think?  
 [translation and 3 women's voices answer]  
 F1 they think that this is their country now ... they are Eng British now  
 Fac so is the English countryside part of people's people in the group's identity?  
 F1 yeah  
 Fac would you ask if they feel as though the English countryside is important to their/  
 F1 /[starts translating]  
 [brief discussion]  
 F1 yeah they think that as well  
 (Middlesbrough visible community focus group: 9 women, 2 aged 25-34 and the rest 45  
 and above, variously identified as British Asian, Pakistani, Pakistani English)

At no point, including when discussing racism or the situation post-Sept. 11th, did the group present their Asian/Pakistani-ness as *in opposition* to any dominant identity. Instead, while they described an originary and static ethnicity in terms of 'traditional' dress, cultural practices, values and behaviour, such perceived *actual* difference did *not preclude* incorporation of dual nationality, or the sense of belonging in England or the English countryside. This contrasts with the predominance of ethnicity within national identity construction where strategic essentialism and/or identity politics are invoked, notwithstanding the complex and overlapping entanglements of gender, age and class. The chapter now moves on to examine the role of English rural space itself in such identity formation.

#### The English countryside and visible community nationality/ies

Visible community respondents constructed the countryside as a given, unchanging landscape in much the same way as national park residents, visitors and staff/Members: that is, the rural was understood as the antithesis of the city, and as a rural 'idyll' via production of the urban as non-idyllic. Descriptions of the rural were often directly in comparison with the urban: 'Less pollution and less cars *than in the city*', 'little roads and lanes, not like *in the city*', 'where people go on trips to get away *from the city*'.

B1 *sometimes possibly just a place to I would probably go for a place to go and and get away from the ... the everyday city environments you have ... and have nice time to yourself*  
(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: male, 25-34, Pakistani)

The rural as not-urban was central to the values a visit to national parks was perceived to offer, again echoing the beliefs of national park visitors and residents. Within the 'getting away from the city' idea, there were two main strands to discussions. First, that the physical environment of a national park is the opposite of a city environment, with positive attributes that mirror city negatives, eg. fresh air, plenty of space, lack of pollution and lack of traffic. Clean air was most commonly highlighted:

F1 *yeah fresh air you know ... clean air for their health and the kids ... yeah clean fresh air [another women emphasises this point in the background] ... all the pollution in the town here and in the countryside it's fresh air*

F2 *yeah the fresh air*

F3 *mmm*

(Sheffield visible community focus group: 3 women and 5 men, 45-64, identified as Black British, Afro Caribbean or both)

The second was the therapeutic value associated with being away from the city, often explicitly linked to the difference between urban and rural landscapes. For many respondents, city living was equated with stress, and not being in the city with relieving stress: the 'peace and quiet' of the countryside was mentioned in every interview. However, such construction of the rural as 'good' and urban as 'bad' was evidenced among visible communities when talking about the countryside *in general terms*, or as a particular space. When discussing themselves *in the national parks*, and/or *their reception* by rural communities, the 'exclusive, white countryside' narrative re-emerged. The research, then, suggests that there are two Imaginaries of English rurality – *precisely because of its essentialised production in opposition to urban space.*

Key to the understanding of the positive, anti-urban idyll was the lack of knowledge and experience of national parks/the wider countryside among visible communities, perhaps best evidenced by the fact that the majority of visible community respondents spoke about 'the countryside', rather than 'national parks'. The latter term was clearly unfamiliar: as stated earlier, two thirds of questionnaire respondents in Sheffield and three quarters of those in Middlesbrough had never been to the countryside. In addition, roughly half of the individual interviewees were unfamiliar with the concept of national parks, and across the focus groups only a third of participants had heard of them:



Fac so have you ever heard of national parks?

[blank looks and shrugs]

Fac has anyone ever heard the words national park?

F1 I don't know where is it?

F2 no

F5 none ... no one of us know where it is

F4 what it is?

(Sheffield visible community focus group: 9 women, 22-65, all identified as British)

Fac have either of you ever heard of national parks before?

B4 not really no

B42 no no

B4 is it that big park in London? Is that a national park?

Fac there are large parks in London but they're not national parks ...

B4 no I haven't then

(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: 2 women, 15-24, British Pakistani)

S2 I have never heard ... you know at all um ... as I say I'm not familiar with them ... maybe I've been there but I don't know that it was national park so ... I don't think they're marked anywhere either are they?

(Individual interview in Sheffield: female, 45-54, British Asian)

Furthermore, in the urban questionnaire survey, **not knowing about national parks** was identified as a barrier to visiting the national parks by 52% of respondents, with 58%<sup>70</sup> citing **not knowing how to get to national parks** as preventative – these two knowledge based factors were the **two most commonly classified obstructions** to going to the countryside. In addition, lack of knowledge fed into an underlying perception among visible community participants that the images they were discussing were how *everyone* thinks of the countryside - that while they may have no/limited knowledge, their understanding was the 'correct' one:

S4 me er [long pause] ... extravagant hills ...

Fac yeah?

S4 long walkways rocky walkways um that's the sort of the obvious sort of things that I think of ... because I don't really have much experience of of national parks myself so I go with the norm what most people would think of

(Individual interview in Sheffield: female, 35-44, Black British)

In this quote, S4 makes reference to a 'norm' or dominant image that she believes to be common across society, specifically because she has little knowledge of national parks. She went on to construct an essentialised version of the English countryside in direct dialectical opposition to the city.

<sup>70</sup> Note: this column adds up to more than 100% as each respondent could list more than one reason preventing them visiting national parks.

It is worth reiterating here that many people from visible community backgrounds declined to take part in the research, explicitly because they knew 'nothing about the countryside' or that they had never been there<sup>71</sup>. Considering this silence is important because it speaks directly to the research issues, in particular those regarding real and/or perceived barriers to visiting national parks. Thus the statistics and qualitative material should be viewed carefully, and lack of knowledge of the countryside kept in mind, particularly throughout chapter 6 when visible community attachment to the English countryside will be foregrounded.

Lack of knowledge/experience of national parks, then, enabled the construction of a fixed anti-urban idyll among visible community respondents, predominantly described in positive terms when discussing the countryside in general terms. At the same time, when debating their 'place' in national parks, this opposition between rural and urban space allowed visible communities to attach negative meaning to the rural, as a racialised landscape. While this is closely interlinked with visible community perception of themselves as unwelcome in the countryside, through productions of essentialised identity and the dualism constructed between white and non-white ethnicities previously examined, the focus here is on the role of *essentialised place* in the production of the countryside as a space 'not for us', specifically via the ways in which national identity is caught up with notions of the rural.

Visible community questionnaire respondents considered a coherent, different-from-city rural idyll to be central within constructions of Englishness, and whether someone had experienced the countryside or not, they were equally likely to endorse the importance of countryside to Englishness:

<i>"The English countryside plays an important part in the sense of national identity"</i>	respondents who <b>had</b> visited a national park % (n=187)	respondents who <b>had not</b> visited a national park % (n=419)
strongly agree	<b>19</b> 36	<b>18</b> 75
agree	<b>40</b> 75	<b>40</b> 168
no opinion	<b>21</b> 39	<b>20</b> 84
disagree	<b>10</b> 18	<b>21</b> 88
strongly disagree	<b>10</b> 18	<b>1</b> 4

Table 8: visible community responses to the statement "The English countryside plays an important part in the sense of national identity."

<sup>71</sup> Numbers of non-participants citing this reason for not taking part were not recorded, but the figure would be at least ten times that of the final number of respondents and interviewees.

While just under 60% of the visible community respondents equated the English countryside with Englishness, this was far lower than among the national park residents (94% of whom agreed/strongly agreed with the same statement) and visitors (93% of whom agreed/strongly agreed). This suggests that the rural is less influential within notions of English identity among visible communities. The qualitative material offers greater insight into the complex negotiations that occurred between and, indeed, within individuals responding to the same statement in interviews, as it uncovered a range of senses of (non) attachment to and (not) belonging in the English countryside, dependent on how nationality itself was perceived vis-à-vis a cultural grounding of identity. Several main positions emerged from understandings of an essentialised English rural as central to Englishness.

One was the notion that visible communities are not *from* England, regardless of whether they were born in the country or not. In this construction, Englishness was unimportant beyond being the country of birth and the title of a passport. Links to countries of ethnic origin were central, and the English countryside held no cultural significance:

- Fac *do you think the countryside is important in English identity?*  
 M2 *yes*  
 ...  
 Fac *why yes?*  
 M2 *'cos it's their country ... they were born here*  
 ...  
 Fac *does everyone agree with that?*  
 [general yes]  
 Fac *but you were born here and it's not important to you?*  
 ...  
 M3 *but we're not from here*  
 Fac *even though 4 of you said that this was your home country?*  
 M1 *yeah ... it's our home but we're still not FROM here ... it's different*  
 [general agreement]

(Focus group held in Middlesbrough: 6 young men, 13-16, all identified as Pakistani)

For this group, Englishness was equated with being white, and the country (and countryside) perceived to belong only to people from white (presumably Anglo-Saxon) backgrounds. The fact of being born in England held little sway over self-identifications: ethnicity was dominant and equated with a 'true' nationality tied to ancestral country of origin. Respondents across all age groups reiterated this understanding of England as 'home' but *not necessarily* 'our country'. From this position, an essentialised countryside was important in constructions of Englishness, but a white Englishness that visible communities did not identify with.

A second point of view among participants was that birth or settlement in England involved claiming, at least in part, English (or British) as national identity. However, 'having' the nationality did not engender feeling a sense of belonging in the country (and by default, countryside) itself. Such a perspective involved an ambivalence towards national identity, complicated by personal attachments to family and visible community also resident in England. Participants expressed intentions and desires to remain in England, since it was where they lived, worked, and had their own families, but did not consider it 'home'. This position identified with a specific idea of Englishness, then, but one in which the rural had little resonance:

*[talking about the countryside as central to English identity]*

S3 *I think maybe generally it ... yeah but not for me no ... I don't know I mean ... to tell you the honest truth is I ... yeah I was born here and everything but ... to be totally connected to here I don't think I feel like that really ... and I've been to Jamaica and it's like ... ah I'm HOME ... and I I spend most of my time in the countryside part of Jamaica and it's so nice ... I've never thought of going to the countryside over here because ... it just hasn't ... I'd have to be really thinking right I I was BORN here you know and I have a right to go up there as well ... but there's not that same connection*

(Individual interview in Sheffield: female, 25-34, Black British)

This woman identified herself as Black British, which she described later in the interview as incorporating certain aspects of nationality (particularly the rights that being a British citizen affords) and rejecting others ('traditional', namely 'white' cultural practices). She saw her future in England, particularly through the future of her own children. There was a sense of attachment to the country, but the only connection to the countryside was via the notion of having the right to go there. She could never be 'totally connected' to England because she would always have her 'roots', her 'home', somewhere else. Importantly, visiting the countryside was one of the 'traditional, white' practices that did not resonate with S3.

Yet another outlook was one in which respondents identified a dual belonging. There was a sense of attachment to England *and* a country of (ancestral) origin. Participants who described this situation did not speak of any schism or conflict, rather the duality was viewed to be positive, with being 'at home' in England *and* 'at home' elsewhere. Furthermore, this attitude was evident across first and second generation visible communities who variously identified as English/British hyphenated with ethnic background (eg. Black British, English Asian) or solely as their country of (ancestral) origin (eg. Indian, Ghanian, Pakistani). The dual belonging allowed for links to be made between the English rural and other-country rurals, enabling greater attachment to the

former *through* attachment to the latter. For those who themselves or whose families had been resident in rural areas of countries of origin, being in countryside was *inherently part of their cultural background*. In contradiction to the stereotype that writes visible communities as wishing to escape the rural as a place of hardship, the research revealed that such a background commonly created the desire to access the English countryside via processes of nostalgic memory-making. Those who expressed dual belonging but who (whose family) came from urban areas, generally articulated *visiting the rural* in countries of origin as cultural practice among their families and communities, which resulted in their own desire to go to the English countryside.

Indeed, the participants from both rural and urban backgrounds who outlined a 'dual belonging' narrative constructed a rigidly essentialised version of the rural as *antithesis to the urban*, equating the countrysides of, for example, northern India/Pakistan/a range of localities in the Caribbean with the countryside in England - precisely because they are *all not-city*. For some participants holding this opinion, attachment to the English countryside was *also* precipitated through an understanding of its centrality to an Englishness that they felt comfortable with. Adversely, a minority of respondents described a similar sense of belonging in the England and the English countryside through identification with an Englishness intertwined with rurality, but *without the cultural attachments to other-country rurals* outlined above. These latter claims to English identity and countryside are followed up in chapter 6.

In opposition to such a dual belonging, other respondents experienced feeling like 'outsiders' wherever they were. They described being caught between a country of family/community origin where they felt some attachment but little belonging, and England where they experienced prejudice and construction as the other:

*[discussing whether the countryside is important to English identity]*

S8 *yeah that's hmmm ... that's an interesting question because obviously I was born here but my mother was born in Jamaica ... um I've been to Jamaica and I couldn't class it as home ... one I don't know the country and secondly... they look at me and know I'm a foreigner ... you know I remember being on a bus and I didn't say nothing and the bus conductor said to me you're from England aren't you? ... and I said how do you know? ... and he said I just look at you and know ... yeah yeah and then you know and here you stand out because you're black*  
(Individual interview in Sheffield: male, 35-44, Black British)

For S8, identifying as British was only because he was born in England, and he did not identify strongly with Jamaica or the West Indies beyond connection through his mother. In both places he understood himself as being seen as different, as a

'foreigner' or outsider. The English countryside held no significance for him culturally either via attachment to England or Jamaica. Making sense of his identity, as he later discussed, involved his work, where he lived and the people he encountered through his day-to-day activities.

The range of connections made between nationality, ethnicity, culture and the English countryside outlined here suggests that the significance of the English countryside as central to notions of English identity are *read differently* by people from visible community backgrounds, even when essentialised understandings of place (and ethnicity) are common among them. Feeling attachment to and a sense of belonging in the English national parks, then, is dependent on a variety of factors, caught up with an essentialised rural idyll entangled in both imaginations of the countryside as a 'positive anti-urban' and 'negative racialised' space. Moreover, these constructions are interlinked but drawn upon in complex ways and through situated positions.

### **The static unpacked: negotiating identity and place**

This chapter has explored essentialised constructions of visible communities, (both as self and other), singular, fixed versions of the countryside, and the belief inherent among many research participants (visible community and white) that people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds are out-of-place in the English national parks. Moreover, it has examined the ways in which these reductive ideas are interconnected in fixed ways, reinforcing cycles of real and perceived exclusion. Within these cycles of exclusion, the chapter has specifically highlighted the ways in which essentialised ethnicities are tied to static and originary cultural and religious practices, and that such notions of inflexible cultural practices, in particular, determine the production of spatial boundaries regarding where people from different ethnicities may or may not be.

In discussing visible communities in the countryside, then, a range of stereotypes are brought into play, each entangled with the others: think about the countryside, and the difference between rural and urban England is implicit; talk about visible communities, and their difference from a white 'norm' is inevitably foregrounded; consider people in place, and the image of the rural as 'white' and the urban as ethnically mixed easily springs to mind.

However, this is not to say that these characterisations are always constructed easily, or in straightforward ways. The chapter has shown how national park staff/Members struggle with difference and how to 'deal' with difference. It also outlined the contradictions within national park resident and visitor understandings of ethnic identity – including the transference of the stereotypical version of visible communities on to rural residents by other rural users. In addition, the diversity of identity claimed and experienced within visible communities have been interrogated, especially along lines of gender, generation and socio-economic position. Such differentiation within ethnicity constantly bubbled through debate on ethnic and national belongings. The chapter has also revealed the contradictions evident among visible communities regarding the incorporation of rurality within Englishness – and the interconnections and complexities entangled within senses of belonging in and attachment to the English national parks. A central theme of the chapter, then, is that the research uncovered **multiplicity woven through static representations, and negotiation within essentialised identity productions.**

Ultimately, however, the emphasis here has been that **attempts to negotiate the static often remain within - or are reincorporated into - a coherent inflexible narrative** of the totality of visible community-ness. Importantly, though, there was a key difference between the essentialised ethnicity produced by visible communities (of themselves), and that constructed by non-visible communities (of visible communities). While both white and visible community Imaginaries prioritised the marginality of visible communities in rural space, coupled to an unshifting essence of ethnicity and attached cultural practices, the stereotypes (re)presented by national park staff/Members, residents and visitors were drawn *negatively*. *Minoritised* visible communities were portrayed/understood *only* as absent from the countryside through their difference. Amid visible community narratives, productions of self and community were also characterised in such a manner, but *not exclusively so* - people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds also, often through/because of notions of exclusion, resist and contest their positioning as minority/as marginal in society and space. This was evidenced particularly through the adoption of 'strategic essentialism' and 'identity politics' discourses, calling on ordinary identities but for specific political purposes.

Thus even within a 'static framework', and notwithstanding constructions of absolute ethnicity and unchanging place, visible communities cannot be simplistically aligned with a dominant version that *only and always* writes visible communities as rural others. This points to a more transformative understanding of the processes involved in being

English and being present in the English national parks. That is, negotiating the static involves starting to think about the kinds of transgressions and claims that will be explored in detail in the following chapter. Even within reincorporated reductive accounts, then, 'difference' remains slippery.



## 6. DISPELLING THE MYTHS: OUTSIDERS IN PLACE

“The question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilled prophecy – it is always the production of an ‘image’ of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image ... identity is never an *a priori*, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an ‘image’ of totality.”

(Bhabha, 1990: xvi-xvii)

We have just explored the production of structured notions of ethnicity, countryside and national identity that involved negotiation and political positioning, but crucially within a static framework in which stereotypes predominate and visible communities remain marginalised in the rural. These essentialised readings of identity and belonging resonate with the concern among national parks, in common with other countryside organisations, that visible communities are not visiting rural areas – or, at least, are highly under-represented as visitors – which prompted the initial proposal for the research. As shown in chapter 2, this thinking is supported in academic theorising and the wider social Imaginary. However, the materials generated *also* reveal the need to re-examine such readings of ethnicity as fixed and singular, since some respondents from visible community backgrounds repeatedly contested the idea that they are absent from or marginalised in the rural. This chapter tells the story of visible communities *in* the English national parks, their motivations and experiences, and what rurality, Englishness and ethnicity mean within self identity constructed on their own terms.

In particular, visible community presence in the English countryside is narrated here in terms of resistance and/or claim-making, and the chapter explores how such processes relate to theoretical concerns, and what the implications are for the research questions. The aim is not to set this chapter up in opposition to the previous one, rather to facilitate dialogue between the essentialist and progressive voices encountered in the research. Issues and echoes from the previous chapter, therefore, will be re-visited where relevant. In particular, we shall see the ways in which socio-economic status, as entwined through power inequalities with ethnic positions in society, is an important factor in ability to resist/make claims denying the dominant stereotype of visible communities as rural others.

The relative weight/presence of the two opposing (though interacting) discourses within the research should be reiterated here. Matters concerned with the fixed and fixing of

identity and place (previously addressed in chapter 5), were prevalent over those connected with fluid, hybrid identities (considered here), and the exclusion/'rural other' narrative was dominant throughout the fieldwork, especially when gaps and silences are taken into consideration. However, I also want to stress the importance of foregrounding the 'presence in the rural' discourse, as it has previously remained largely hidden/ignored within debate regarding ethnicity, rurality, Englishness and social in/exclusion.

The chapter begins by highlighting that visible communities *are* visiting the national parks in the study, refuting the dominant construction of their absence, and that there is homogeneity across visible community and white participants regarding the benefits attributed to being in the countryside, disputing the stereotype that visible communities perceive nature differently from a white 'norm'. However, a closer examination of visible community visitor patterns and values points to entanglements between ethnicity and other social positions, and two key themes are explored. First, that visible community resistance to a mythologised absence in the countryside was, for some, limited by complicated interconnections between ethnicity, class, gender and age. Secondly, that non-white presence in the national parks often actively deconstructed the notion of the rural as the repository of a particular frozen image of Englishness, or even of Englishness itself. In light of discussion surrounding these themes, I suggest that visible community access to the rural is tied to cultural practices grounded in everyday experiences - and places of experience - rather than in absolute ethnic difference. Moreover, the *habitual places of cultural practice* are bound up with issues of visibility and exclusion for the majority of visible community respondents, rather than the idea of essentialised space as bounded and bordered.

The chapter moves on to consider visible community constructions of Englishness, focusing on how rurality is implicated in, or extricated from, national identity formation. The challenges made to the idea of English national identity as inherently tied to the rural are explored first through a reconsideration of the static productions of Englishness discussed at the end of chapter 5, specifically where claims to belonging in the countryside run parallel with claims to an English identity constructed through visible communities' own identifications and meanings. Beyond essentialised ethnicity, though, the research finds ethnicity and nationality to be highly contested and resisted terms. I move on to examine fluid and multiple identities, and the ways in which identities are claimed and reclaimed across space and time, disrupting any 'easy' reading of attachment and belonging in the English countryside. Instead, the chapter

argues the impossibility of correlating attachment to the countryside with feelings of 'belonging', and vice versa, while any sense of being comfortable in the countryside is not automatically synonymous with either attachment or belonging. This denies the characterisation of visible communities as emotionally barred from accessing national parks *because* they perceive themselves as unwelcome, and that negative reception *necessarily* prohibits the ability to feel any sense of attachment or belonging in the countryside.

As well as unpicking the myth of visible community absence in the countryside, I also explore the notion of 'the rural' as a dynamic rather than stereotypic/essentialised space. While in the minority, there were dissenting voices that rejected the idea of an unchanging (whether idyllic or not) rural, or the existence of a single rurality. These challenges came mainly from national park staff/Members and residents, for whom the key issue is that preservation and conservation benefits some groups but not others. In particular, these respondents focused on the need to view national parks as evolving spaces, for predominantly *economic reasons*. The concept of a changing countryside did not emerge through visible community narratives, though, even among respondents familiar with rural areas. I argue that the deployment of the rural idyll myth by visible communities themselves, in the context of presence in the national parks, is part of the transformative process that enables visible communities to lay claim to the countryside and Englishness itself.

The chapter, finally, turns to focus on encounters between visible communities and (other) white visitors, residents and park staff, and the pivotal role played by social relations between 'different' social groups and across 'different' environments is investigated, via Asian and African Caribbean testimonies and situations observed in context. Further to the emphasis in this chapter on dispelling myths, I explore the ways in which interactions between visible communities and 'others' in national parks offers the potential for a deconstruction of stereotypes. However, we shall also see that meetings do not automatically shift entrenched, socialised relations, and that there remains the possibility that 'always already' assumptions are reiterated and further ingrained on both sides.

### visible communities in the English national parks

Central to the discussion throughout this chapter is that the study reveals visible communities to be present as visitors to the NYM and PD national parks: 8% of visitor questionnaire respondents in both the NYM and PD described themselves as having visible community backgrounds<sup>72</sup>. To put these figures into perspective, the 2001 Census shows that 6.3% of the population of Middlesbrough and 8.8% of people in Sheffield identify with non-white ethnicities (ONS, 2003)<sup>73</sup>. The proportion of visible community visitors to national parks, then, appears to correspond to visible community presence in the proximate urban areas. These visitor figures were far higher than expected by the national parks. The urban questionnaire data also supports visible community presence in the parks. A quarter of respondents in Middlesbrough and over a third of those in Sheffield<sup>74</sup> stated that they had visited the NYM and PD respectively. Furthermore, 54% in Middlesbrough and 56% in Sheffield said that they were aware of national parks, contradicting the assertion that visible communities do not know about national parks. These figures make reassuring reading for national park management.



Figure 5: Mosaic group walking/resting in the Peak District.

<sup>72</sup> 292 visitors in the NYM and 303 in the PD participated in the research.

<sup>73</sup> In England as a whole, 9.1% of the population identify as being from non-white ethnicities.

<sup>74</sup> 310 in Middlesbrough, 296 in Sheffield.

However, methodological issues regarding the visitor survey have already been raised, in particular surrounding the (im)possibility of objectively using random sampling techniques in a study centred on visible difference, and the influence self-selection of participants can have on statistics<sup>75</sup>. There is also a caveat to outline with respect to the figures on knowledge of national parks stated above: in the course of completing questionnaires, it became obvious that people responded positively to being aware of national parks, while discussing them in terms of urban fringe parks (eg. Millhouses in Sheffield, Stewart's Park in Middlesbrough). Such confusion was also evident within the interviews, for example:

Fac so have you ever heard of national parks?

S8 yes I have yes

Fac and where were you first aware of them?

S8 er ... well I lived in Leicester and there was Bradgate Park which was a national park but I didn't know for a long time that it was a national park ... [Bradgate Park is not a national park]

(Individual interview in Sheffield: male, 35-44, Black British)

This quote clearly shows a lack of knowledge about the national park system, and serves to question (alongside field observation) the levels of awareness among visible communities regarding national parks. Similarly, closer interrogation of the urban respondents who stated that they *had visited* their nearest national park shows that two thirds of this group were infrequent visitors:

	Sheffield visible communities to the PD % (n=111)		Middlesbrough visible communities to the NYM % (n=76)	
have only ever been once	<b>34</b>	38	<b>32</b>	24
visit once a year	<b>27</b>	30	<b>26</b>	20
visit 2-5 times a year	<b>32</b>	35	<b>32</b>	24
6 or more times a year	<b>7</b>	8	<b>10</b>	8

Table 9: frequency of visible community visits to the NYM/PD national parks in the urban questionnaire survey.

Interestingly, the statistics are almost identical between the two cities, and, importantly, over 90% of those who have only ever visited once described going on a school trip, often several years previously – there was no engagement with the parks beyond this organised event. In addition, among the six visible community focus groups, all members of one had previously been to the NYM once, on a trip organised by the community centre they attended. A number of participants in two other focus groups had also visited national parks. In the individual interviews, six of the ten respondents in Middlesbrough and seven of the ten in Sheffield had been to the NYM/PD. Again,

<sup>75</sup> See chapter 4.

these figures, of course, are highly simplistic: consider, for example, the 25-34 year old Pakistani man in Middlesbrough who had been taken to the NYM by a friend and vowed never to return. We must also bear in mind the issues regarding gaps/silences in terms of non-response to the research, examined previously in the thesis. Ultimately, though, the research materials point to the situation that visible communities *are* visiting the NYM and PD: visible communities *are present* in the English countryside.



Figure 6: Checking out a national park Visitor Centre.

In order to investigate this presence more closely – especially what it says to/about the essentialised stereotype that displaces non-whites from the countryside - we need to focus on *the ways in which* visible communities access and experience the rural. The research uncovers two broad types of processes occurring. The first involves visible communities contesting their (mythologised) absence from the countryside, but limited by overlapping and intertwined positions of class, age, gender and ethnicity. That is, some respondents actively rejected their objectification as marginalised rural others (because of their ethnicity/visibility), while simultaneously pointing to their exclusion from the countryside in socio-economic, gender or generational terms. I examine how visible difference is implicated in such limitations, through these other factors. The second process involves a stronger challenge, deconstructing the notion of the rural as the repository of a specific, unchanging Englishness, or even Englishness itself. Research participants vocalising and performing these challenges denied their marginality in the rural, through constructions of ethnicity/nationality/rurality claimed on

and in their own terms - displacing any perceived 'norm' altogether. As we shall see, such claims to the countryside and to Englishness were predominantly influenced through class positions.

limited/ing resistance

"Essentialised notions of 'blackness' or 'Asianness' ... are imploded through the intervention of alternative or transruptive discourses – the potential for more than a transitory transformation remains, however, uncertain."

Alexander (2000:145-6)

Visible community visitor patterns and behaviour throughout the research suggest that gender, age, class and ethnicity are interconnected in complex and contradictory processes. Socio-economic position emerged as the dominant issue with regard to accessing the national parks. For example, almost half of visible community respondents to the urban questionnaire perceived national parks to be middle class spaces:

<i>"Visitors to the national parks tend to be middle class"</i>	<b>visible community respondents</b>	
	<b>%</b>	<b>(n=606)</b>
strongly agree	<b>11</b>	<b>67</b>
agree	<b>37</b>	<b>224</b>
no opinion	<b>29</b>	<b>176</b>
disagree	<b>17</b>	<b>103</b>
strongly disagree	<b>6</b>	<b>36</b>

Table 10: visible community responses to the statement "Visitors to the national parks tend to be middle class."

These figures reflect statements made throughout the qualitative research, in which the dominant understanding was that higher socio-economic positions enable access to the parks. Moreover, the *interplay between ethnicity and class* was clearly evidenced through visitor patterns, in particular *how* people accessed the parks. Many Mosaic Project<sup>76</sup> participants believed that they would never have been to a national park without the intervention of the project. Groups who took part in Mosaic were already members of Black Environment Network, as such organised specifically around ethnicity, and attitudes grounded in the 'primordial' ethnicity and 'identity politics' paradigms explored in chapter 5 were common. However, when discussing barriers to visiting national parks, discourses concerning lack of opportunity *because of class*

<sup>76</sup> See chapter 4: participant observation - "The Mosaic Project is a partnership project jointly managed by the Black Environment Network and the Council for National Parks."

*position* were prevalent. For example, a women's group visiting the NYM for three days clearly desired to visit the countryside "at least three or four times a year would be good", but identified lack of community group funding as the key barrier. This was reinforced by individuals' low income and lack of private transport. Across the quantitative and qualitative research, a lack of financial means was emphasised when debating factors preventing access to the countryside, but only rarely did participants link marginal economic position to ethnicity.

In addition to affecting *how* people visit the parks (targeted projects, large community groups), *where* people choose to go, (or are limited to visiting), was also framed in part by economic position. This was most clearly described by a ranger in one of the national park staff focus groups, ironically in opposition to the majority discourse in the interview. He identified that people from a diverse range of backgrounds visit the park, but that they are not recognised as visitors because they frequent the periphery rather than venture deeper into the countryside:

*M1 if you go to somewhere like Dovestones for example you get proportionally quite a number of young Asian lads coming up you get Asian families you get all sorts of things ... and you look at the visitor profile of that you'll probably find that the thing about Dovestones is that it's quite close to um a centre of urban population ... it's profile tends to be mainly blue collar profile OK we're talking about mostly working class groups going out ... if you then look at Bakewell lots of people who come to Bakewell tend to be a little bit middle class you know ... so if you were to do a proportion of how many working class people are coming to Bakewell ... you would find a difference between how many working class people are coming to Dovestones ... [ ] the question we're debating [why visible communities do not visit national parks] is wrong because they ARE visiting ... what is shaping HOW they visit should be the question*  
(Focus group with middle management in the PD)

In the above quote, M1 emphasises socio-economic issues, describing how Dovestones, on the fringe of the PD close to Oldham, sees mostly working class visitors including Asian families and 'young lads', while Bakewell, a honeypot market town near the centre of the PD, receives mostly middle class visitors. He makes the point that the focus group has presumed visible communities do not visit national parks when, in his experience, they do. Although he appears to tie visible community-ness with a working class position here, in later discussion he acknowledges that "not all Asians are working class", but that people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds are disproportionately represented in lower socio-economic classes. M1 draws on the *proximity* of Dovestones to the place of residence of substantial Asian communities as explanatory of their presence in that area, because of lower income and lack of access to private transport. Indeed, these economic factors were identified



as preventative to visiting the countryside across the research<sup>77</sup>, often within discourses suggesting that inner city white groups were excluded from national parks in the same way (ie. economic) as visible communities.

I want to highlight two relevant issues within the idea that class influences access to the countryside. The first, pointed out by M1, is that visible communities are over-represented in lower classes. 77% of 'ethnic minorities' live in the 88 most deprived wards in the country (CRE, 2004) - a situation based on structural power inequalities in England, grounded in historical colonial attitudes towards visible (racialised) difference/inferiority (Donald & Rattansi, 1999), and reiterated by the ongoing failure of policies and strategies aimed at improving 'race' equality and relations (Bourne, 2001). Economic barriers to visiting the countryside, therefore, unequally affect people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds. Secondly, the impact of socio-economic issues on access to national parks *does not preclude* the possibility that ethnicity, visibility and a sense of otherness may *also* be involved in visible communities' choice of destination or the way in which they visit the countryside. That is, alongside not having the time/money/knowledge to go (further), perception of the rural as unwelcoming may *also* influence staying closer to 'home' (or spaces of everyday experience) and being among people from the same background. Moreover, both these issues combine, and the restraints on physical freedom due to lower socio-economic position are entangled with seeing the ethnic (minority) self as excluded.

The links between ethnicity and class suggest that *resistance against* ethnic stereotyping may, at the same time, be limited by the same power imbalances involved in producing those stereotypes in the first place. Perhaps the most obvious example of such reincorporation of resistance through hegemonic dominance is that visible communities across the study often visited national parks in large community groups<sup>78</sup>, reinforcing the stereotype that non-white groups only go to the countryside in extended family groups. The Mosaic residential trips and the focus group day visits organised as part of the research inherently lent themselves to this conceptualisation, and many visible community respondents who challenged essentialised objectification nevertheless recognised or were affected by barriers that commonly - if not explicitly - stem from structured power inequalities embedded in attitudes to visible difference.

<sup>77</sup> This opinion was prevalent across visible community and non-visible community participants.

<sup>78</sup> This, however, was by no means *always* the case - the chapter returns to issues regarding group size later.



Figure 7: Visible community youth group on Mosaic residential trip.

It is useful here to revisit the concept of transruptions (Hesse, 2000:17), outlined in chapter 3, “interrogative phenomena ... [that] refuse to be repressed”. It is the uncontainability of resistance that marks it as more than a transgression or interruption to a dominant ‘norm’. Through the research, visible communities’ refusal to *remain* absent from the rural can be argued to constitute just such a transruption against the dominant understanding of the countryside as a white (racialised) space. In addition, despite limiting factors, the *desire* to be in the national parks – to be in place – also clearly emerged, and this desire involves visiting the countryside on visible communities’ own terms. Larger community groups were discussed as central to visible community cultural practices. Whether ethnic identities were grounded in (strategic) essentialist ideologies or not, respondents articulated their aspirations and intentions to go to the national parks in ways that felt comfortable and familiar to them. Resistance, at this level of desire particularly, constitutes a transruption because it refutes the dominant social placing of non-whites in the city, and threatens hegemonic concepts.

However, chapter 3 also addressed the need to be wary of the ways in which resistance is recuperated (after Ahmed, 1999). Threaded through visible community discourse in the interviews and during visits to the national parks, there was a tension between the ‘large group’ phenomenon as cultural practice and feelings of needing group support and reinforcement to venture into the space of the other. Caught up in such debates were lack of access to private transport to visit the countryside in smaller

family units, and lack of confidence to do so, stemming from lower class sensibilities preoccupied with struggling to escape a marginalised economic position.

Transruptions, then, remain trapped in the dominant/minority binary, and the push-and-pull between visible community presence in rural space and the reiteration of rurality as white were further evidenced through gender and generational issues. One focus group consisted of women from Asian backgrounds, all of whom were above 45 years old, and few spoke fluent English. Despite agreeing that public transport to the countryside was affordable, none of the women said that they would use it. They were concerned about safety, in terms of their lack of experience of the rural bus network (or indeed any bus network), and lack of knowledge of the rural areas themselves. In addition, the women did not believe that they would feel comfortable in the countryside without a representative from the national park to act as their guide. This lack of confidence stemmed not only from lack of knowledge of the area, but was linked to gender identities too – the women believed that men from their community would not require the same level of support. The women's perception of vulnerability was exacerbated by their lack of English. As first generation female immigrants their lives had rarely connected with wider society, and they described their inability to communicate in English as further eroding their confidence to be in unfamiliar/unknown places and situations. In this example, *gender and age* were complicit in the women stating that, despite their desire to do so, they would only visit the national park again as a group, using private transport (minibus) and accompanied by a member of national park staff.

Certainly, differentiated gender perspectives resonate across the research. Women participants, generally, showed less confidence in their ability to access the rural independent of wider community organisation and national park input, and, even those for whom English was their first language, attached a certain degree of fear to being in the countryside. Importantly, this fear significantly decreased with increased regularity of visits, and was less pivotal among women from middle class backgrounds – reminding us to carefully consider the *interconnections of factors* that serve to limit resistance. Male respondents, though, *across socio-economic positions*, clearly defined lack of finance as the predominant barrier to accessing the countryside, while lack of confidence and safety issues were more muted. These masculine narratives surrounded the belief that visible communities would visit national parks more often if they could access funding to take organised group trips. Again there was a focus on being together within familiar groups, but emphasis placed on doing what they wanted because *they chose to*. Perceptions of being the other (or the stranger) existed but

were subsumed, and the key message one of claiming identity through self-determination. Within such discourses, singular importance was placed on visiting the rural as a way of reiterating and strengthening (ethnic) group bonds, particularly through bringing youth groups of young men (never young women<sup>79</sup>) to the national parks for 'team building' activities such as kayaking and climbing.

The difference between gender positions described here supports feminist theorising that reads women as less socially mobile than men, constrained by a patriarchal society that constructs women as belonging in certain (domestic) spaces. Domosh & Seager (2001:113) write about socially structured factors that:

"determine differences in mobility. To answer the question of why some groups of people are more able to 'overcome the friction of distance' than others requires a curiosity about systems of control, privilege, and hierarchy – and of gender, class and race."

Domosh & Seager interrogate the interdependence between the three latter categories regarding access to and movement through social space. While they stress that the difference between 'groups of people' can be by-products of 'other social relations', they conclude that variances to social movement "are also more often than not fashioned as intentionally engendered" (ibid.:139). This research, though, reveals gender imbalances to be closely linked to class position: among middle class visible communities visiting national parks, differences between women and men were far less perceptible, as we shall see later in the chapter.

Instead, the research material points to a range of positionalities and identities that had a variety of impacts upon visible community use and perceptions of the English countryside. As we have seen above, combinations of gender, class and age can serve to limit visible community resistance to being ethnically pigeon-holed. However, in other cases different combinations of these factors enabled visible communities to challenge their positioning as rural others in ways that did not incorporate a return to any sense of marginality. It is these latter challenges that I wish to examine next.

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<sup>79</sup> Women, however, talked about taking young women on similar 'community building' trips.

claiming the countryside

This chapter has, so far, explored the ways in which visible community presence in the national parks resists dominant stereotypes, while also being limited by social exclusions based on ethnicity itself, in combination with other social positions. However, challenges to the perceived 'norm' of visible community positions were not always restricted, and we now turn to the ways in which perceived absolute differences were destabilised by visible communities' constructions of nature, by values attached to the countryside, and by specific respondents' behaviour in and attitudes towards national parks. As Brah et al. (1999:2) state:

"In contrast to many materialistic accounts, poststructuralist theorists have emphasised that the actuality of these ethnic and sexual categories and divisions is more contradictory, fragmented, shifting and ambivalent than that suggested by the dominant public definitions of these categories."

We have already seen that visible communities construct the rural through the same dualistic processes (involving essentialised understandings of space) as non-visible communities (see chapter 5). Here, though, I am concerned with the importance of the countryside, and by extension nature, *to people's conceptions of self identity*. While national park staff discussed people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds as absent from the countryside because the rural/nature is not valued in visible community cultures, a majority of the respondents to the urban questionnaire survey refuted this stereotype:

<i>"Nature plays an important part in your sense of self identity"</i>	<b>visible community respondents</b>	
	<b>%</b>	<b>(n=606)</b>
strongly agree	<b>19</b>	<b>115</b>
agree	<b>43</b>	<b>261</b>
no opinion	<b>24</b>	<b>145</b>
disagree	<b>10</b>	<b>61</b>
strongly disagree	<b>4</b>	<b>24</b>

Table 11: visible community responses to the statement *"Nature plays an important part in your sense of self identity."*

The 62% who agreed/strongly agreed that nature was important to their self identity came from a cross-section of age, gender and class positions. This sentiment was also supported by the majority of interview participants, many of whom spoke of the importance of nature in their lives, sometimes directly linked to feeling emotional attachments to the rural generally and the English countryside specifically:

S4 *I find it therapeutic to walk in greenery I just love greenery ... trees and you know I'm a very outsidey kind of person ... um I think it [the countryside]'s a place where you feel at peace at one with yourself [laughs] I'm getting deep now [laughs] um ... like my garden*

Fac *do you enjoy your garden?*

S4 *yes yes I sit out in my garden and hear the natural noises the nature you know ... and see the plants and ... feel the wind you know*

(Individual interview in Sheffield: female, 35-44, Black British)

For S4, nature was an important part of her life, and she went on to talk about walking frequently in the parks on the edge of Sheffield, in particular enjoying watching the seasons change. Moreover, it was clear on several focus group day trips to the NYM/PD, and during the Mosaic residential visits, that nature is central to many visible communities' ethnic identity, inherent within cultural practices and also religious beliefs. One group structured their Mosaic visit around linking wildlife and nature in the national park to their personal and communal spiritual identity and growth. The idea that people from visible communities attach importance to being in natural environments suggests that they share these cultural values and practices with the majority culture<sup>80</sup>. That is, there are commonalities across visible community and non-visible community cultures. Furthermore, in claiming the natural as integral to identity, visible communities also claim their stake in the countryside of England.



Figure 8: Visiting a plant nursery in the NYM.

<sup>80</sup> This is not to suggest that all people from the 'majority culture' in England attach such importance to nature or the countryside – such an assumption requires research itself. Rather that the dominant representation encountered in the study involved such an assumption.

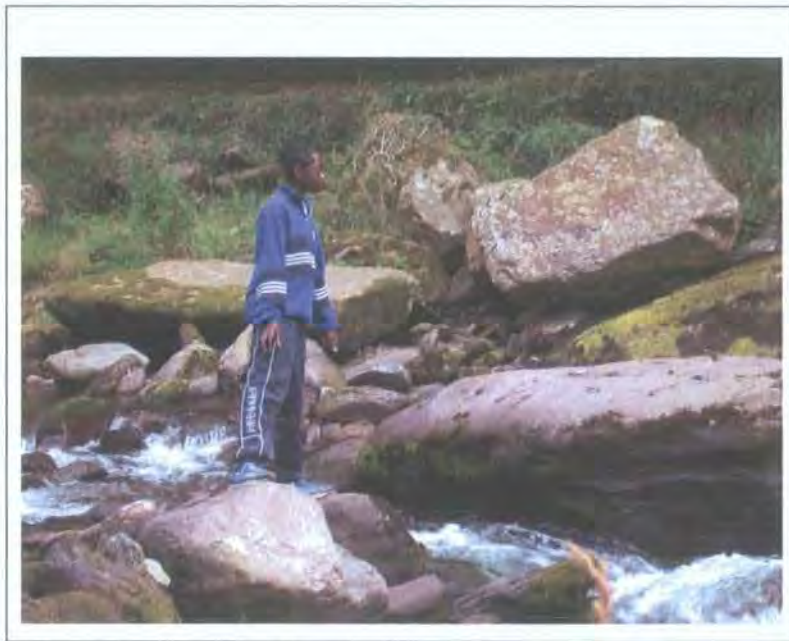


Figure 9: Messing about in the water ...

Claiming a *stake* in the rural, though, is not the same as being there, and we have seen that gender, class and generational issues are involved in limiting and preventing access. The point here, though, is that the *importance of nature within identity is not itself limited*: the values accorded nature were independent of whether people visited the rural or not, and evident across the range of socialised positions that combined to constrict physical access to the countryside. Since the research is concerned with perceptual barriers to visiting national parks, then it should also recognise perceptual resistance to being culturally othered. Linked to the desire to go to the countryside, many visible community respondents claimed the countryside *emotionally* via identification with all things natural, if not physically contesting the 'rural other' myth – deconstructing the idea that visible communities always and only 'have' different cultural values in their own ways:

B7 they a lot of Asians love Britain because of this countryside ... and even when our families come like my brother and sister-in-law come then they go to America and other countries in Europe so you ask them what do they like about each country ... and they always say the British countryside

Fac really?

B7 yes ... for them OK they've all been to Lake District and Lake District is more Windermere for them ... they've been there and stayed there nights and they've been for a walk in Ambleside and all that ... and the same for us those of us who live here ... we love nature and the countryside and those all those things ... and so yes people do appreciate it a lot  
(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: female, 45-54, Indian)

In this quote, 'Britain' is known for its countryside to the extent that relatives of coming to visit England are taken to, in the example given here, the Lake District. This reveals a specific value placed on the rural and nature. B7's statement that "*a lot of Asians love Britain because of this countryside*" speaks to emotional attachments to the country specifically *because of its countryside*. B7 intimates a general love and appreciation of nature and the rural among visible communities, claiming cultural values in direct opposition to the essentialised ethnicity/practices evidenced in chapter 5 ("*going to the countryside – that's just not something we do*").



Figure 10: Pony trekking in the hills.

Indeed, the research uncovers several issues on which visible community and white respondents generally agree, further unsettling notions of 'absolute' or 'essential' ethnic difference, and it is instructive to examine such commonality closely. For example, considering the importance of nature to identity across urban, visitor and resident surveys, it appears that urban visible communities are less definite about this issue:

"Nature plays an important part in your sense of self identity"	residents		visitors		visible community respondents	
	%	(n=988)	%	(n=595)	%	(n=606)
strongly agree	50	494	44	262	19	115
agree	38	375	37	220	43	261
no opinion	10	99	12	71	24	145
disagree	2	20	7	42	10	61
strongly disagree					4	24

Table 12: questionnaire responses to the statement "Nature plays an important part in your sense of self identity."



However, the resident and visitor surveys had significantly higher proportions of older (55+) respondents than the urban survey, in which 58% of participants were aged 15-34. This age difference in survey profiles is enlightening, when we also consider the generational differences revealed by the research regarding the statement "national parks can be enjoyed by people of all ages" – under 25s, in particular, across the questionnaire surveys, strongly agreed that the parks are for older generations. Indeed, lack of interest in visiting national parks was clearly evident amongst 15-24 year olds in the urban survey<sup>81</sup>, and this age group was least represented across the visitor and resident respondents. Young people involved in Mosaic visits and focus group day trips commented that they would return to the parks to take part in specific activities such as kayaking, archery, canoeing (ie. physical and 'exciting' activities), but doubted that they would go back 'just' for a walk or 'to look around the towns'. Participants from older age groups articulated their enthusiasm to return irrespective of any planned agenda. This echoes national park experience that the late teens and early twenties are 'the missing years' in terms of engagement with rural places. It is reasonable to argue, therefore, that nature features less centrally in young people's constructions of identity, which may explain the less positive urban survey response in Table 12 above.

There was further similarity of opinion regarding the statement that "only quiet activities are allowed in the parks". Moreover, there was additionally a shared belief across visitors, residents and urban respondents that only quiet pastimes *should* be allowed, with recognition that, in reality, noisy activities occur. In addition, the kinds of activities considered acceptable (eg. walking/hiking, picnicking, enjoying the scenery, going to cafes, visiting villages) were also similar across surveys. The only notable divergence was that residents and visitors had greater awareness of the practice of pastimes such as mountain biking and rock climbing, whereas visible communities appeared to have little awareness that these activities take place in national parks.

A greater degree of commonality than suggested by understandings of essentialised ethnicity was evident, too, across visible community and white participants' behaviour. We saw in the previous section that issues of self confidence and safety impact on visible community visitor group size, in terms of limited/ing resistance. However, the 'extended family/community gatherings' stereotype was not upheld by individual interviewees, most of whom accessed the NYM/PD either with immediate family (2 or 3

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<sup>81</sup> 52% of the urban respondents in this age bracket stated that lack of interest was the key reason that they did not visit national parks.

other people), a partner, or one or two friends. Urban questionnaire responses also challenge this stereotype:

<i>number in group</i>	<b>visible community respondents</b>	
	<b>%</b>	<b>(n=606)</b>
1 person alone	<b>1</b>	7
2-4	<b>58</b>	351
5-10	<b>17</b>	103
11+	<b>24</b>	145

*Table 13: visible community group sizes visiting national parks, indicated in the urban survey.*

The figures in the 11+ category show that a quarter of all visible community visitors did visit national parks in larger groups, but this was contingent upon number of visits: the majority of those in the 11+ category had only been to a national park once, invariably on a school trip, and only 13% accessed the countryside more than once a year. Frequent visible community visitors to national parks went in groups of 2-4 people. While the large group/school visit only category reflects the limited/ing resistance discussed earlier, *visiting in small groups was most common*. This closely echoes white visitors in the research, who were found to predominantly access national parks in groups of 2-4.



*Figure 11: Sunday stroll in the national park.*

We can see, then, some overlap of cultural values and practices across ethnic groups regarding nature and the countryside, which inherently challenge the essentialised

*difference* of visible communities broadly imagined throughout English society. By accessing national parks in similar ways and having an appreciation of the natural in common with the majority of park visitors, visible communities are not only contesting but *claiming* the centre ground. Visible community presence in the countryside challenges the concept of a white-only countryside - presence in couples and small family groups doubly unsettles social 'norms' through behaving in the *same way* as whites, rather than differently *as expected*. Such overlaps offer more than a threat to the dominant discourse, as these practices potentially move beyond the transruptive and towards the transformative – involving a constant claim to self identity, national belonging, non-marginal position in society, and ownership of (rural) space. For many of the visible community participants destabilising the white rural myth in the ways described above, claiming the countryside involved claiming the country, and identifications with Englishness that were implicitly connected to being in and being comfortable in rural space. (This is *not* to say that the rural was automatically, therefore, considered central to national identity, or nationality personified through the rural: the complex and shifting connections between nation, identity and rurality are the focus of the next section.)

A key question at this point is, if some visible communities are able to/actively defy stereotypes *beyond* recuperation of resistance, why not others? The emphasis here is on which factors/histories/positions enabled certain people from visible community backgrounds to claim the countryside and not others. The research clearly shows socio-economic position to be the key factor underlying people's ability/aptitude to visit national parks (regularly) without help from external organisations: research participants who visit the national parks regularly came from middle class positions, and throughout the interviews, 'professional' employment, higher income, spare time and greater social awareness increased levels of self-confidence. Moreover, middle class identities were generally open and fluid, recourse to identity politics less common, and cultural practices detailed as hybrid and plural. These practices included 'traditional' activities associated with particular essentialised ethnicities, as well as incorporating not-connected-with-ethnicity behaviour - and the latter ostensibly framed around knowledge issues, the privilege of having time for leisure, access to private transport and disposable income. We are returned, then, to the idea that **national parks are middle class spaces**. In the quote below, S7 describes the practice of rural recreation as prevalent among her professional work colleagues:

S7 [talking about being non-white in the countryside] so I feel comfortable yeah but it's something that I'm very aware of ... and what I notice is that you know a hell of a lot of social workers in the countryside [laughs] ... you know it seems to be a really specific group of people ...and like on Sunday in Grindleford you go there and you just meet so many people that you know [laughs] ... so I think sort of it is it can be very one dimensional you know the people that go out into the countryside ... very middle class

(Individual interview in Sheffield: female, 25-34, mixed race (white and African Caribbean) English<sup>82</sup>)

In S7's view, the rural is perceived as a place for specific groups, "very one dimensional", but the key frame of reference is class rather than ethnicity. For this woman, ethnicity was part but not predominant in her identity, and she described how she 'used' her ethnicity or thought about it at different times and for different purposes, always in combination with other aspects of self identity. Her position as middle class had more influence on her day-to-day life, and her claim to belonging in the PD was centred on feeling part of English society through her work, her engagement in the local community where she lived and a "diverse social life".



Figure 12: Regular rural visitors.

One crucial theme emerging through the research is that participants who claim the English countryside *did not* consider their socio-economic position as *being against the 'norm'* for visible communities. Instead, there was an understanding that visible communities are represented across all classes. Furthermore, respondents making claims to rural space did not recognise themselves as struggling to move from a marginalised position to a dominant centre – they believed themselves to be part of the

<sup>82</sup> Interviewees were asked to 'tick boxes' regarding gender and age, but to describe their ethnic and national identity as they chose.

mainstream, reflected in their practices and confidence. A closer examination of research materials, though, especially the qualitative data, presents a more complex picture and warns against naïve optimism regarding shifting visible community positions. As has previously been discussed regarding limits to resistance, lack of access to a middle class position can be linked to ethnicity, and the structured inequalities endemic within English society in general. Moreover, claims to the countryside not only involved class position, but were also enacted through *class history and community position*.

For those visible communities who came from middle class *backgrounds*, the combination of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' ethnic practices was endemic within their cultural upbringing, and the self-confidence and sense of belonging in rural space addressed above were common. For participants who saw themselves as having *become* middle class ('moving up' from working class backgrounds), claims to the countryside were more tentative and contradictory. These latter claims were caught between the rights-based approach inherent within positions of resistance, and assertions of feeling comfortable/belonging in the rural: class and ethnic identities were still generally flexible, but at times static and reductive. Ambiguity stemmed from memories of (and connections with) a perceived definitive minority visible community, in conjunction with material and social positions no longer marginal.

Attachment to an underprivileged visible community 'norm' was also influenced by community position. Individuals who described themselves as 'community leaders', despite their own middle class positions and claims to belonging in the English countryside, often reverted to an identity politics rhetoric on behalf of the rest of 'their' community. For example, a founder and director of a visible community organisation in Middlesbrough described walking in the NYM as "second nature". He denied ever feeling excluded or uncomfortable in the countryside and imagined the rural as part of his everyday life and culture, as a 'British Hindu', claiming multiple identities. But, at the same time, he was adamant that visible communities in Middlesbrough do not go to the national parks, because they do not have the financial resources or spare time, and because they would not be welcomed. He employed strategic essentialism as community leader in his struggle against the "racism that holds my community back." Such ambivalence at once claims the rural for himself personally, but not for visible communities more widely. While other 'community leaders' recognised more diverse positions and practices across 'their' visible community group, they emphasised the majority as excluded from national parks by racism and economic position.

Interestingly, the middle class women interviewed and encountered on the Mosaic visits claimed their place in the countryside with less doubt or recourse to the visible-communities-as-underclass narrative than their male counterparts. This perhaps reflects their general exclusion from positions of authority within visible communities, suggesting that they perceive their own position without being drawn into the politics of 'the rest of my community'. This was the case for both women from middle class backgrounds and those who had moved to middle class positions – the latter did not appear to struggle with the same ambivalence as men in similar positions. Unfortunately, the research was not comprehensive enough to pick up on these issues in any greater depth.



*Figure 13: A gentle walk by a countryside canal.*

So far, we have dealt with the ways in which visible communities in the countryside contest their construction as rural others, both via processes involving a range of interconnecting social, and socialised, positions that limit resistance to being marginalised, and through confident claims to the countryside that incorporate flexible and multiple identities enabled by middle class positions. I have outlined that visible community construction of nature, across resistance and claim-making, overlaps with - rather than differs from - white respondents. We have also seen that people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds share cultural values and practices with majority white visitors, regarding the benefits of visiting the countryside, the ways in which they access the parks, and their perceptions of how the parks are used.

Throughout, the chapter has argued that gender, class and generational factors are interconnected in shifting and complicated ways with ethnicity, both through limited/ing resistance and claim-making processes. It is now time to consider these issues more specifically in terms of how they implicate and/or are implicated in national identity formation.

#### **a new country: nationality and the rural**

Few connections were made by visible communities between rural space and nationality in the way that the dominant rural idyll myth (discussed in chapter 2) produces country and countryside as intrinsically linked. The thesis has already suggested that some visible community participants described their national identity as English, tied to statements regarding the right to be in the countryside (chapter 5). However, this is not the same as conceiving the rural to be inherent within that national identity. This chapter has considered claims made to countryside based on identification with Englishness alongside confidence in a self identity incorporating, but not prioritising, ethnicity. Again, these positions do not automatically perceive the rural *as central to that Englishness*. This section specifically considers the intersections between the English countryside and nationality, described by visible communities who access the national parks. It also speaks to those national identities depicted at the end of chapter 5, who were not (regular) visitors to the countryside, highlighting again the connectivity across these thematic chapters.

#### rurality as inherent in national identity

Z5 *[regarding the importance of the countryside to English identity] the whole point about it is that first of all it shouldn't be seen as something that's not in common with other cultures ... why should the English go on as if it was THEIR thought ... you know the Chinese think the countryside is very important and there are traditional you know paintings of landscape and so on and it's a great great tradition ... there are lots of people who think nature and the countryside are ... are part of their spiritual identity and national identity ... [later] I think that there's that side of the pushing of it where so that when people want to or actually feel that you know the countryside as part of their identity ... is as if they are made to feel that actually that is wrong it's only the English and YOU shouldn't be feeling like that ... and lots of groups do ... and the the whole thing is an absolute myth ...*

(Stakeholder interview: woman, 35-44, Chinese British)

Z5 describes the importance of rural landscapes within national identity as cross-national and cross-cultural. Giving the example of the 'great tradition' of the rural in imaginations of Chinese nationality, she queries the production of the countryside as *only* inherent to Englishness, highlighting a commonality between constructions of

English and other national identities. Indeed, the importance of countryside to many participants was discussed through ideas of Indianness, West Indianness, Pakistani and Ghanaian identities. This connection between rurality and nationhood allowed for individuals to develop attachment to the English countryside via links between one rural landscape and another, as touched on in the previous chapter:

Z1 *um it came as a surprise to me how much people [from visible communities] identify with the countryside of England and Wales and were quite well informed and knew had ideas about where they would go if they were able to do it ... very fixed ideas you know for whatever reasons the hill the hills of the Brecon Beacons remind people from Kosovo of home because they're the same kind of ... geological formations and that's where they wanted to go*  
(Stakeholder interview: female, 35-44, white British)

While such links highlight identifications with countries of origin, they do not help us understand visible communities' engagement with Englishness. The latter can perhaps be best explored through the attitudes and emotions of regular visitors to the countryside and national parks. One woman taking part in a Mosaic trip explained that she did not consider herself as marginalised in the countryside in any way. She described herself as English and was a regular visitor to national parks with her husband and children *because* the rural was a central component of their English identity and cultural practice: countryside recreation was part of her family's usual experience. At the same time, her Indian ethnicity and Sikh religion were also important to her constructions of self. Except for this woman's ethnicity and religion, she typified the majority profile, behaviour and opinions found among respondents to the visitor questionnaire. Her sense of being in place was attached to a secure identity that was nevertheless plural and fluid - secure *because* her identity's flexibility stemmed from a middle class position that distanced her from constructions of self as marginalised by a dominant other. The research suggests that it is this combination of **security, pluralism and fluidity** that enables constructions of an Englishness tied up with the dominant Imaginary of English rurality as central within national identity. Another interviewee exemplifies the point further:

B5 *I was born in east Africa ... my mother was born in Africa but my dad is from India ... and I came to this country when I was about five ... so I'm British I've got a British passport but all that ethnic background ... but I've got British attitudes 'cos I've lived here all my life ... I'm proud of who I am but I feel more English than anything else*  
(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: female, 35-44, British Asian)



The fact that B5 “feels more English than anything else” does not deny that she also identifies with her ethnicity and multiple heritage – she is proud of who she is. Later in the interview, B5 describes how important the English countryside is to her, both in terms of the pleasure she derives from visiting and the its role in how she thinks of her nationality. She conceptualises the rural as an important part of Englishness and sees herself as part of that Englishness too. As a middle class woman, B5 is able to understand her self within the centre of society rather than at the periphery, and socially include herself in the countryside.

A situation observed on a group visit to the PD offers another example of claims to Englishness that incorporate an understanding of the English countryside as important within English nationality. A group of six young men from Asian backgrounds, aged between 15 and 19, were crossing a road, when a passing car slowed down and the three young white male occupants shouted “Pakis go home!” in a threatening way. The young men, whose parents had moved to England from India, responded by smiling and shouting back “Yes we are!” and “We are home!” in an affirmative, non-aggressive manner. In doing so, the group were making their claim to the space they were in, both countryside and country. In addition, they were subverting the very act of naming: they identified themselves as Indian, British, English and various configurations of the three depending on context, and by not challenging the term ‘Paki’ they claimed their *visible difference as positive* identity, and as part of their Englishness, refusing to be marginalised. For these young men, their ethnicity was folded through their nationality, and the rural incorporated into both.

In later discussion, the group articulated their sense of belonging in the countryside via a rights-based discourse (‘we are English therefore we have the right to be in all English space’), but combined with attachment to, and a sense of being comfortable in, the rural, fostered through regular trips to the national parks as part of family life. Constructions of national identity, moreover, were rarely singular and highly ambivalent, with country of birth and ethnic background key factors in *ongoing negotiations* with nationality.



Figure 14: *This land is our land.*

#### Englishness without the English countryside

Such examples of visible community construction of the rural (idyll) as inherent within Englishness point to the evolving nature of visible community identity in England, but were not common through the study. The research reveals that the majority of visible communities who visited the countryside understood and related to their English identity via a different set of values. The most often quoted 'factor' of being English was that of being born and growing up in England. Secondly, national identity was commonly stated as 'British because I have a British passport'. Interviewees often expressed both these opinions:

S8 *people who are not ... originally from Britain ... tend to ... especially African Caribbean people they'll often say I I'm going on holiday I'm going home ... yeah? ... um and I think that's pretty normal ... they're not going on holiday they're going home ... um but for me I was actually born here ... now my home is here and it's all I know ... I'm not sure how to answer that ... no it's being ... born here really it's on my passport that's it [laughs]*

(Individual interview in Sheffield: male, 35-44, Black British)

The above quote highlights how Englishness is defined through place of birth. For S8, his English identity means little else beyond the passport he holds. As a consistent visitor to the countryside, S8 valued nature highly, and identified closely with what he described as the 'spirituality' of rural environments. While believing that most white English people held the countryside to be important as part of their national identity, he

did not “engage with it in that way”, nor did he perceive his cultural practices to have anything in common with “your average English culture”. However, he also did not refuse the possibility that his opinions might change over time as he reassesses his identity:

*S8 um and I think even me calling myself Black British you know that that's only happened in the last 5 years really ... I mean it's been a transition really from um ... West Indian ... to Afro Caribbean to now I feel quite comfortable with Black British ... but it's not happened overnight it's been a 20 year journey 23 year journey ... and it it isn't over*  
(Individual interview in Sheffield: male, 35-44, Black British)

Constructions of English identity, then, drew heavily on discourses that featured birth and experiences of growing up in England within both essentialised versions of ethnicity *and* hybrid ethnicities in flux. When people discussed their versions of Englishness, the rural rarely featured. Instead, specific *values* were key to how visible communities envisaged English nationality, and these values were embedded in the political and human rights realm rather than in any physical place - the urban was not simply substituted for the rural as emblematic of Englishness. Most notably, ideas surrounding freedom of speech and movement were discussed as central, and general notions of liberty and choice were key to what English identity represented. In addition, safety (from crime and health risks) and security (in terms of a stable future) were listed as valuable components of Englishness, together with access to a state education system and health services, and diverse employment sector.

Within these perceptions of what constitutes being English, though, there were clear generational differences. Those over thirty, and especially over fifty, emphasised the ‘liberty’ factors, while the under thirties and in particular teenagers (all born in England) stressed the opportunities for a good education, employment prospects and security for the future. Furthermore, women of all ages highlighted freedom of choice over their future as central to how they identify with Englishness. Crucially, though, within these constructions the idea of the countryside as symbolic of Englishness was described as *not* preventative to visible communities accessing national parks, since their own understandings of Englishness did not incorporate the rural. Moreover, some respondents questioned the importance of the countryside within dominant perceptions of English national identity itself:

B7 *I think the English don't have any sense value for the countryside ... they only talk of it if ... they talk of lots of things like Americans talk about apple pies and family but they have no family or apple pies all they have is Macdonald's ... similarly I think the English use ... countryside ... queen these things when they are in when it suits them ... but most of the time I've never seen half the English I've met who live in the town never have been to the country ... but it's a nice myth of the past ... you know how you hang on to something and all the time you think of it ... how many of them value their countryside? ... it's handy you know like I would say Taj Mahal or something but I'm not bothered about the Taj Mahal ... you know I think it's more a nostalgic thing the countryside ... it's always there in the back you pick it up to show you're English*

(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: female, 45-54, Indian)

B7 challenges the notion that the rural is anything other than a symbol that has lost its relevance in modern day England, being wheeled out only when nationality needs to be explained. She compares the 'shorthand' use of such symbols across countries, making the point that most nationalities are precipitated down to a nostalgic representation (the countryside/apple pie/the Taj Mahal), but which have little or no resonance in everyday life. National stereotypes, in B7's opinion, are tactical devices to denote a national identity that is easier (less threatening) to leave unexamined. Similarly, Z1 (below) acknowledges the role the rural *used to play* within Englishness, but argues that we now live in a different England that the rural idyll myth fails to take account of:

Z1 *well again historically ... national parks came about as as a part of the post war renaissance [later] and the English countryside was seen as sort of iconic in terms of defending the nation ... because that was what the important thing that you were defending ... so it was seen as being terribly important to our our idea of being British English you know whatever ... so going back a really long way it's sort of stitched into our national identity ... but because people in urban areas are now different and much more diverse ... er I'm not sure we can take it for granted that that is the case now*

(Stakeholder interview: female, 35-44, white British)

In 21st century England, Z1 recognises that the diversity of society, especially in urban areas, uncouples the dominance of the countryside from what it means to be English. Z1 went on to describe present society as having a range of understandings of national identity, drawing upon different heritages, experiences, cultural values and social positions from each other. Both B7 and Z1's accounts destabilise the centrality of the rural to understandings of Englishness in contemporary England, crucially moving beyond the notion that visible communities alone do not connect rurality with national identity: these accounts present a fundamental challenge to the possibility that the countryside can retain its relevance within the wider social Imaginary of nationhood.



Figure 15: Surfing on a national park coastline.

As this thesis has so far shown, there are various visible communities readings of the ways in which the rural is (not) imagined in constructions of Englishness. Chapter 5 investigated visible community ideas of English identity from perspectives of absolute ethnic difference (strategic and 'real'). Such readings involved Englishness understood as nation of birth, through a 'rights' based discourse, within a dual belonging ('here' and 'there'), and disclaimed via a non-belonging (neither 'here' nor 'there'). This section has explored perceptions of national identity from more open and relational positions, from which Englishness that fully incorporates the rural as inherent in national identity, meanings of Englishness tied to ideals of liberty, self-determination and access to state-supported services that disregard countryside altogether, and disbelief that the rural as a quintessential English space remains dominant or relevant. **Englishness is not a singular concept among visible communities, but a multiple and evolving construct**, impacting on *and* being produced through people's identification with and access to national parks in myriad ways. The next section considers what role the construction of rurality itself plays within such plural and shifting identity formations.

### changing countryside

The majority of respondents across the quantitative and qualitative studies articulated the rural as an essentialised, static place. However, a minority voiced an alternative view of the countryside as differentiated and evolving, unsettling the dominant image. As touched on in the previous chapter, but from within a static framework, national park

residents were the main proponents of a changing countryside, together with some national park Members. Central to the constructions of a dynamic rural were economic concerns, and the belief that local communities needed investment into the national parks. Residents were particularly concerned about what they perceived to be an enforced paralysis of the parks:

*"Both the Park Authority and retiring residents coming to live in the park wish it to maintain the Park as some kind of museum to a past age of farming and landscape. You will find the main stumbling blocks [to encouraging different groups to visit national parks] are misguided visionaries and retiring folks who buy their bit of the countryside and don't want any of the surrounding to change."*

(Postal questionnaire – additional comments: male, 35-44, white English)

The National Park Authorities are familiar with the conflicts between, for example, planning restrictions aimed at conserving 'the special qualities' of the parks and local communities' needs for affordable housing. Moreover, there is an acknowledged tension between long-standing rural residents and 'incomers' on the issue of development versus preservation: the former on the whole understand and experience the rural as a working countryside replete with the complexities of the 21st century and attendant social concerns, while the latter imagine the countryside as an arrested, static idyll circa the 18th century (or 19th or early 20th), to be conserved as such. The quote above highlights the opposing viewpoints, with the Park Authority and 'retirees' described as preserving the countryside as a museum, in which (other) locals are prevented from moving with the times. The predominance of the rural idyll image itself, as experienced by the respondent, excludes the possibility of a changing countryside, and he believes that enabling new visitors is not on the agenda of those with the power to do so, because change is not in their interest.

National park Committee Members tentatively echoed some residents' call for inward investment, principally through tourism, to aid local economies, though continually returned to the dilemma between a developing rural that enables economic prosperity and the threat of environmental degradation. The emphasis in national park staff discourse, however, remained firmly on management of the countryside aimed at the conservation of habitats and landscape. The different perspectives of staff and Members appeared to stem from political position. Two thirds of Members are elected by residents in national park constituencies, and therefore have voters' concerns in mind. These Members' position on the Park Authority Committee is dependent on their re-election, and, moreover, their role as local councillors make them accountable to their constituencies, thus placing a greater emphasis on social and economic issues

alongside environmental concerns. Furthermore, some residents highlighted the irony of preserving a rural environment that has been shaped specifically *through* the agency of human activity. Several visitors commented on this factor too, although, in their interest *as visitors*, overwhelmingly felt that conservation was necessary to *prevent the countryside changing any further*. Indeed, discourses of an essentialised rural often acknowledged potential change, and the resistance against even such a possibility was inherent within fixed constructions of English rurality.

Visible communities invariably conceived an unchanging, unitary countryside. As we have already explored in chapter 5, the essentialised construction of 'the English countryside' allows for two interdependent versions of the rural depending on context: the 'positive anti-urban idyll' and 'negative racialised rural'. The lack of knowledge/experience of rural environments involved in such productions has also already been discussed. It is important to underline here, however, that claims to the countryside (and country) were founded on a *similarly* essentialised notion of an undifferentiated and unchanging countryside. The 'rural idyll myth', therefore, is also central to visible community ownership of rural England. This emphasises, again, that the rural idyll narrative can be utilised in a variety of ways and for a range of (personal and social) motives/purposes – **crucially by visible communities** as well as by the hegemony<sup>83</sup>. Such deployment (ownership) of the dominant myth by visible communities is indeed vital within the transformative process that enables visible community claims to the country/Englishness itself.

### **social relations in place: encounters in the countryside**

Keeping in mind the various challenges to exclusionary stereotypes and essentialised ethnicity made through visible community resistance and claim-making, notions of national belonging (un)connected to rural space, and how a static version of the countryside is implicated throughout these issues, I want to now explore social relations between different groups in place. Several key research questions concern perceptual and real barriers to visiting national parks, and it is necessary to return to the reception of visible communities in the countryside from a new perspective, namely through the interactions between visible community and white individuals. In particular, this section examines the ways in which the universalisms discussed in chapter 5 were destabilised through social encounters between different groups in the national parks –

<sup>83</sup> Chapter 2 addressed the diverse ways in which the idyll image is used by dominant society.

and how social encounters offer the transformative potential for barriers and stereotypes to be broken down.

*B5 I once got my car stuck in the mud in the countryside once and I had my little baby with me ... and I was getting really worried and I flagged this car down and it they were these really posh people ... they were lovely they were all dressed up you know like they were going out for a meal with a tie and she had a shawl on ... and I said I'm really sorry but I'm stuck could you maybe tell the next garage that you pass or something you know I've got me baby and that ... and he said [affects very 'posh' accent] I'll tell you what I'll push it out for you ... and he had all these clothes on and they got covered in mud and we still couldn't get it out ... [accent again] not to worry not to worry he said I'll go down to the garage and tell them ... and he was lovely [laughs] ... I felt awful*

(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: female, 35-44, British Asian)

As someone from “an ethnic minority background”, B5 said that when she first started visiting the countryside she had expected to be ignored or made unwelcome. However, several direct experiences, including the one quoted above, had “shattered that image”, and she described the countryside as always friendly. Indeed, in the incident with the car, B5 was left feeling apologetic because the national park resident had tried so hard to help her. As a consistent countryside visitor, B5 also spoke of occasions when initial reactions to her difference in the rural were suspicious, but in each case went on to narrate some form of engagement between herself and rural residents/other white visitors through which positions shifted and understanding occurred. In B5's account, these direct encounters facilitated experiences in which both she and the people she interacted with were able to appreciate similarities as well as differences, making cultural exchange possible.

Indeed, actual physical encounters observed between people from different ethnic groups through the participant observation, point to a deconstruction (to some degree) of the ‘stranger’ on both sides, raising the possibility for new understandings of the other. If, following the psychoanalytical thought discussed earlier in the thesis, self-identity is produced in relation to what it is not, then a shift in understanding of what constitutes the other must reverberate within understanding of the self. Encounters, then, are not only potential conduits for changing one group's perceptions of people from different groups, but they also open up the possibility for *shifting social relations between a new ‘us’ as well as a new ‘them’*.





*Figure 16: Swapping 'cooking with herbs' tips.*

A specific encounter experienced on one of the Mosaic residential offers further insight into the issues encounters in the countryside. The incident involved identity, belonging and cricket – a combination that has historically been employed politically to reiterate boundary erection regarding who is/is not or who can/cannot be English<sup>84</sup>. A visible community group, (24 people ranging from 11 to 44 in age), were staying at Edale youth hostel in the PD. In some spare time between organized activities, the group took a cricket bat, stumps and a tennis ball onto a small patch of grass in front of the hostel. The ensuing game was played with much enthusiasm and enjoyment, and with a lack of self-consciousness. Playing this particular game in the English countryside, the group, who variably identified as Asian British, Indian, Indian British, and British Asian, were claiming that space, that activity and articulating their own syncretic identities through their performances.

The incident became more than a moment of transruption, however, as staff working in the youth hostel (all white) appeared to watch the game, and were immediately included in it (on occasion against their initial protestations). Everyone, across ethnicity,

<sup>84</sup> Enoch Powell's statements in the 1950s are well known, though often paraphrased. This issue has also been discussed by Hall (1995).

age and ability, took their turn at batting and fielding in a noisy and good-natured atmosphere. Differences were highlighted through verbal 'teasing' both within the visible community group (those good at cricket and those not; different families; male and female), and between the visitors and youth hostel staff. The most common joke came from the young men in the visible community group aimed at the male staff: "You can't bowl, you're English!" was meant to imply/refer to a lack of skill among white English cricketers in that aspect of the game. The youth hostel staff countered with their own faux-derogatory comments based on stereotypes of Indian and Pakistani cricketers. In this encounter, a common enjoyment and 'love of the game' allowed for movement beyond the reductive productions used in the teasing, to a position of exchange. After the physical activity ended, there was general chat about the upcoming cricket Test Series, between India and England, followed by wider conversation about sports then outdoor activities. During these conversations, the visible community group and white youth hostel staff asked searching questions of each other, and responses challenged expectations. For example, roughly half of the visible community group – across age and gender – supported the English cricket team, because "This is our country, we are English". The result was a dismantling of dominant images on both sides, and the development of new understandings.



*Figure 17: Getting to know you.*

The work of Yuval-Davis (1997:130) may be useful here. Drawing from an agenda developed by Italian feminists, she discusses the concept of transversalism, which highlights the groundedness of identity as well as the potential for flexibility:

“Each participant brings with her the rooting in her own membership and identity but at the same time tries to shift in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have different membership and identity. They call it ‘transversalism’ – to differentiate from ‘universalism’ which by assuming a homogeneous point of departure ends up being exclusive instead of inclusive.”

Transversal politics are based on initial acknowledgements of difference between individuals/groups, with an agenda to work through these differences to a situation where common positions and values are recognised from those positions of difference. Transversalism aims to *move towards* shared values. The idea of transversal encounters resonates with the research. Across the participant observation, many encounters between people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds and white national park staff, residents and other visitors were typified by initial (presentations of) rooted self identities which, through dialogue and physical engagement with the other, moved towards varying degrees of exchange. This incorporated a shifting of self positions to accommodate new versions of otherness experienced directly in the encounter, and a reinterpretation of the relations between the social groups involved.

However, it would be too simple to say that encounters always have impacts upon both/all involved, automatically changing identifications as well as perceptions of the other, and breaking down stereotypes. The research also evidenced occasions where encounters served to reiterate difference and rigidity. On another Mosaic residential, an Asian women's group were staying in a youth hostel in the NYM for three days<sup>85</sup>. There were religious issues concerning food, and after negotiation between the group and hostel staff, facilitated by Mosaic Project staff prior to the visit, the group had brought supplies of halal meat from a trusted halal butcher in Middlesbrough with them. The hostel cook proceeded to use the meat in recipes that she regularly prepared in the hostel – what can be described as ‘traditional’ English fare. However, on the second day of the trip, the group leaders approached the cook because the majority of the group had not eaten the meals the previous day, stating that the food was ‘not what we eat’. The leaders gave detailed instructions as to how to make the curry dishes that the women were familiar with. The cook was happy to prepare meals as specified, saying that she always enjoyed learning new recipes and loved to experience food from ‘different cultures’. Despite her efforts, though, most of the group (in particular the younger members) did not eat the dishes offered during the rest of the trip, saying that

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<sup>85</sup> The youth hostel was run by two members of staff, both white, and the women's group were the first visible community group the members of staff had experienced staying at the hostel.

they were 'not the same as we're used to'. Food became a key issue and was identified as a drawback to the visit.

In this instance, a one-way encounter occurred. The youth hostel staff believed that they had learned something about visible community – more specifically Asian – culture, and they considered the engagement to have been positive. But such learning, even while opening up the staff to contact with the women's group first hand, reinforced visible communities as attached to static habits and practices that were essentially different from the majority of society (certainly the majority of youth hostel visitors). While leaving with an overall positive experience of being in the countryside, most of the group did not try the food, or engage with other park residents or visitors. The transversalism Yuval-Davis describes did not take place.

I am not suggesting that transversal politics are necessary or must be adopted to address social exclusion in rural areas - we will return to transversalism and its limitations in the following chapter regarding the policy implications of the research. The point here is that encounters must not be *assumed* to *always* result in shifting identities and altered social relations. Moreover, where contact is between groups occupying positions grounded in a differential power structure, mutual acceptance of each other's difference as a starting point for reciprocal efforts to understand the other, and movement towards a new relationship, cannot be presumed. Although direct contact with the other, then, can work to dismantle and rewrite constructions of 'the stranger' – at least that specific 'stranger' being encountered – we should look carefully at the rewriting that takes place:

Z6 *we had an AGM at the Barbican in London and this year we were invited to do ... an hour and a half presentation in the afternoon about who we were connected with and [representatives from a visible community group] were centre stage ... and it was such fun and it's really changing the paradigm ... and these two lads were speaking with such passion about Snowdonia ... and it was quite funny [name of visible community representative] was saying you know [Z6's organisation] really don't know how to handle people ... because these are second or third generation Asians and they've been here all their lives ... and these wardens had been out with them and said that flower over there ... that grows that came from the Himalayas ... and these lads were saying oh for crying out loud do I care about the Himalayas? [laughs] and you know there's a real steep learning curve there*  
(Stakeholder interview: woman, 45-54, white British)

In the above narrative, Z6 explains how her organisation is being challenged by working with a visible community group who defy the organisation's expectations of them. The young men from Asian backgrounds mentioned by Z6 reject being connected to Asia though links with the Himalayas via plants that originate from that

region. Identifying as second and third generation British Asians, they are more concerned with contemporary everyday experiences and influences. Z6 states that “there’s a real steep learning curve there”. The danger derives from what exactly Z6 and her organisation believe they have ‘learnt’. If there is a continuing openness to seeing an other as unfixable, then movement beyond stereotyping can occur. But if the learning involves readjusting the visible community stereotype by replacing one static image with another, then the encounter does not challenge or change social relations across space in any meaningful or enduring way.

Furthermore, the idea that a dominant organisation or community can learn about a perceived marginalised group, *without* incorporating a reflexive shift in their own identifications and positions, leans towards voyeurism. This is a ‘learning’ where ultimately it is considered possible to ‘know’ the other, from a fixed (and often superior) vantage point. Conversely, Brah *et al.* (1999:4, emphasis added) argue for subjectivity as dynamically constituted and that:

“At a social level this perspective suggests that having a singular, coherent and rational subjectivity is inadequate because the interplay between different institutional regimes of power continually reproduces a variety of subjectivities. [...] rather than social collectivities authoring self identity through their intrinsic authentic claims, *social collectivities are dependent upon the establishment of other social groups in relation to themselves.*”

The relational understanding put forward by Brah *et al.* speaks clearly to the first two encounters considered in this section, where constructions of identity were mobile and able to react to the other as experienced via direct personal interaction – where reciprocal and on-going processes of exchange occurred between individuals open to difference, commonality *and* change. Yet the latter two examples described above, where contact with the ‘stranger’ did not produce a re-orientation of positions on both sides, do not point to such dynamic subjectivities. In the case of the women’s group in the NYM, (and potentially Z6’s narrative), because subjectivity was grounded in a more essentialised version of difference, identities were not fluid and social relationships between different ethnic groups in the countryside remained unaltered. Encounters may offer the potential for destabilising myths and dismantling stereotypes, but the research reveals that these processes are dependent upon many factors, including environment and, not least, those involved in the encounter, more specifically, the ways in which they understand their selves. Where chapter 5 emphasised negotiation of identity within a static framework, here I am presenting the potential for determinism within perspectives open to relativism, hybridity and pluralism.

### myths dispelled?

This chapter has been about seeing visible community presence in the English national parks and (re)thinking what this presence means with regard to understandings of ethnic and national identity, and senses of belonging in and attachment to the countryside. We have interrogated visible community access and, moreover, *desire* to visit the national parks as resistance to a dominant Imaginary that names/places visible communities as marginalised 'rural others', and discussed such irrepressible resistance as entangled in a constant battle with hegemonic forces that (attempt to) recuperate such challenge. I have argued that these 'transruptions' ultimately remain trapped in a binary construction controlled through structural power inequalities, because visible community rural presence is limited through, especially, socio-economic position – a position caught up with (to varying degrees, explicitly and implicitly) ethnicity. I have also explored the complex roles other social/socialised positions (age, gender) play in limiting resistance.

The chapter then examined the alternative ways in which some visible communities in the national parks saw themselves beyond such a dualistic framework, claiming the English countryside and English identity through a variety of means and on their own terms. Predominantly, not surprisingly given the limits posed to resistance, such claim-making was by people in middle class positions, which allowed for perceptions of identity (ethnic/national/self) generally unrestricted by the struggle against being marginalised. Central to these claims were understandings of Englishness that deconstructed the rural idyll as only important to *English* nationality (landscape as traditional to other-nation identity formation); that claimed the rural as important to Englishness in the *same way* as majority white society; or that unsettled the idea that the countryside remains relevant as a signifier of national identity in contemporary times. Within all these constructions of Englishness, the countryside is perceived as an unchanging environment, very much the rural idyll discussed back at the start of the thesis. I argued that it is precisely this visible community ownership of that idyll - so often/easily theorised and blamed as exclusionary white space - which is important to the claim staking encountered through the research.

I stated at the start of this chapter that its concern with resistance against the dominant 'rural idyll as central to Englishness' narrative, and the more transformative claims made to other versions of Englishness, does not reflect the majority opinion across visible community respondents. I want to stress again, though, the importance of

foregrounding the 'presence in the rural' discourse, as it has previously remained largely hidden/ignored within debate regarding ethnicity, rurality, Englishness and social in/exclusion. This emphasis is important, to enable those voices challenging the white countryside paradigm to be heard, and - following on from this - vital in terms of policy input. Continuing only to consider visible communities *as marginalised* further inculcates notions of essentialised ethnic difference **and** the social exclusion that feeds from and into such notions. The research suggests that policy attempting to produce any kind of 'How to' guide regarding engaging with people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds is already doomed to failure, through its reduction of visible communities as always already different. The diversity of opinions, perceptions and beliefs emerging from the study demand open and flexible approaches to addressing social exclusion in national parks. But such approaches must also recognise and tackle the structural imbalances of power if they are to be successful and sustainable. The final part of the thesis now turns to consider the theoretical and policy implications of seeing visible communities *as present in **and** excluded from* the English national parks.

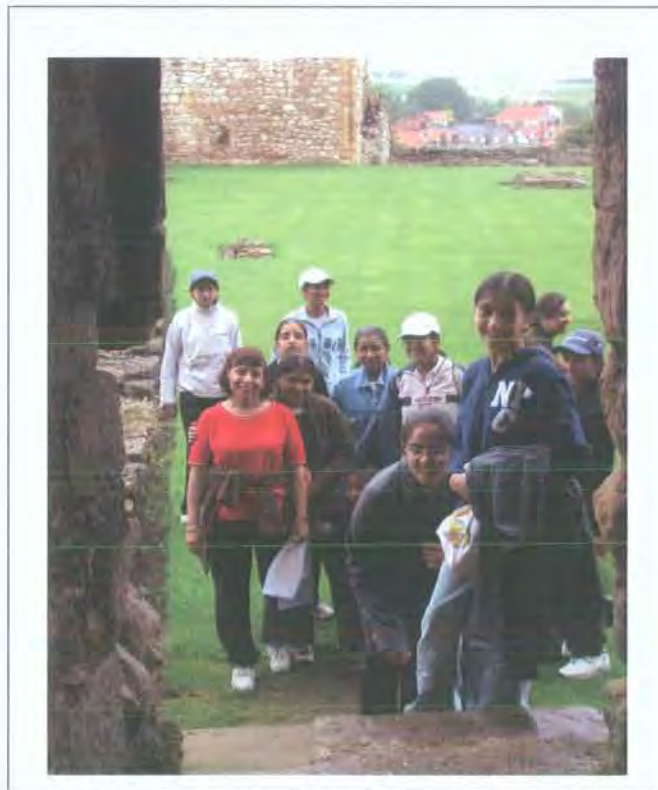


Figure 18: Outsiders in place - myths dispelled?

## 7. TOWARDS NEW NEGOTIATIONS: RETHINKING NATIONALITY, ETHNICITY AND THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE

“While I do want to underscore that I do embrace colour-blindness as a legitimate hope for the future, I worry that we tend to enshrine the notion with a kind of utopianism whose naivety will assure its elusiveness.”

(Williams, 1997:2)

...

“and while no one can argue that black self-help is not a fine thing, I wonder about its meaning when it is used as an injunction that black concerns be severed from the ethical question of how we as a society operate.”

(Williams, 1997:66)

So it is time to draw together the theories, issues, research responses and co-fabricated material in order to plot a path for future theorising and national park policy. It is time because we are at that point in the story/journey where academic and funding protocols require a set of ‘final’ pronouncements regarding the research. Moreover, it is time because, as this thesis has shown, people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds have consistently been collapsed and contained in a position of rural otherness, stemming from and resulting in the racialisation of national parks.

This chapter explores the ways in which negotiating between and across the social and cultural may move us towards a transformative politics of place and identity. I draw on the theoretical and empirical work detailed in the thesis to argue for a paradigm shift in how Englishness, ethnicity and rural space are understood and managed, to a perspective that eschews a central, fixed and unquestioned version of national identity and belonging rooted in a white rural idyll. However, as the materials generated through this research testify, any ‘final pronouncements’ are likely to be highly contested, fragile arrangements, which should be employed as temporary jumping off points in current debates and practices regarding ethnicity and social exclusion in the countryside. That is, the content of this chapter surrounds the evolution of an inclusive, progressive version of visible communities in the English national parks, while the tone is one of ongoing revision rather than conclusion. Furthermore, specific policy change



or implementation is not detailed here<sup>86</sup>, rather an overarching ideology for policy direction is suggested.

I follow two over-arching strands of argument, noting at the outset that both strands are complex in themselves, and interrelated in complicated ways. The first strand of reasoning is identity-based. Given the ways in which visible difference *is* recognised and reacted to in the English countryside, the chapter opens by examining an engagement with otherness that refuses a dominant gaze while/through acknowledging the *impossibility and possibility* of sameness between self and other. Highlighting the **impossibility** of similarity foregrounds the political reality of inequality between people from different ethnic backgrounds in English society, and I outline the need for national parks to embrace 'positive action' programmes that proactively reach out to visible communities in order to redress the imbalances within countryside visitor and employee profiles. At the same time, in recognition of the **possibility** of overlap across ethnicity, I explore how national parks may develop such 'positive action' projects without essentialising or fetishising visible communities through the concept of 'monsters'. In particular, Ruddick's (2004) conceptualisation of monsters *in and out of place* is employed to exemplify the ways in which we may approach, both theoretically and in policy/practice, visible communities as excluded from and present in the English countryside.

Through this discussion of the monstrous and the im/possibilities of understanding sameness, the chapter moves on to describe the necessity of adopting an agonistic approach to policy. Agonistic politics acknowledge the aim of consensus within democratic debate but without the expectation of ultimate agreement or of a universal value system - they place an emphasis on always *working towards* accord/compromise while recognising that discord and disagreement will also always remain. Such agonism, I argue, must draw on theories that work with a model of community as a rights-based political community (after Parekh, 2000a) while also recognising that ethnic/cultural/religious or even locality-based communities, who adopt a range of territory restricting and restrictive discourses, play a strong role in individual identity construction.

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<sup>86</sup> As stated in chapter 4, writing has its own positionality: a 'Policy Guidelines Report' has been produced specifically for the national parks and wider countryside management field (Askins, 2004 – see Appendix VIII)

The second over-arching strand is space- and place-centred. I focus on the countryside as a relational national space, viewing the rural as within a web of spaces on different scales. I argue that a serious commitment to conceiving space relationally is needed to shift exclusive constructions of national belonging and ethnic difference in contemporary England. However, the perceived existence of a rural/urban divide was strongly felt among research participants, thus I suggest that an agonistic approach to thinking national parks needs to acknowledge understandings of essentialised and different spaces as irreconcilable to each other, as well as *interdependent with* ideas of space as porous, mobile, and plural.

As part of this project, I revisit the potential of encounters to facilitate the disruption of stereotypes, and accentuate the importance of the *places of encounter* in such a transformative process. Nuanced identities were performed in the national parks, by both visible communities and majority white staff, visitors and residents, which were informed by their physical environment as well as a history of social relations. I tackle two specific issues in the context of this research. The first involves the implications of conceiving the rural as a *relational space* for national park policy and practice that works to enable positive encounters. In particular, I call for the national parks to work outside as well as inside their boundaries: to undertake 'outreach' work and facilitate two-way encounters between rural and urban residents in both the countryside and the city.

The second surrounds envisioning national parks as *spaces of encounter*, as sites of potential *and* habitual inter-ethnic and inter-cultural negotiation, which entails holding onto the specificity of 'the rural' while de-privileging the urban as the site of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism in England. I discuss the usefulness of thinking about 'prosaic sites of negotiation' (Amin, 2002), which offer the potentiality for new connections and meanings through encounter, to re-envisage national parks as places open to transformative encounters. What I am concerned with is the mentality and measures that may be adopted by national parks, in order to move towards parks as sites of negotiation, if not prosaically at least habitually - or in ways that enable habituality. For this to happen, thinking the rural must engage with notions of multi-ethnic and multicultural citizenship and nationality. Moreover, it demands that work regarding ethnicity, citizenship and national identity must engage with the rural, in order to avoid the tendency to always already (re)site issues of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism only in the city. I suggest that the English countryside should be

rescued as a potential site of multi-ethnicity, and citizenship conceived *across* boundaries of rural and urban space.

### **(re)viewing rural others – a new gaze**

This first section examines how national parks and academic theory may work towards addressing social exclusion in the countryside through new ways of thinking identity, ethnicity and the English countryside. Two core themes are addressed: the need for 'positive action' and how it relate to issues of equality; and that engagement with ethnic difference requires a politics of agonism. Key within these considerations is the paradox, outlined in chapter 3, regarding how difference can be treated as difference without being boxed off as *only* difference. I highlight the need to re-engage with notions of self and other from a fresh perspective, in order to work through the implications of identity-based policy and initiatives.

#### positive action: multiculturalism, difference and equality

Throughout the research, visible community discourse reiterated a need and desire to 'be together', to sustain mutual support and enable feelings of comfort, most obviously reflected in the existence of community organisations, social centres and activity groups in Middlesbrough and Sheffield (and throughout English urban areas) organised around ethnicity. Furthermore, visible communities clearly felt that they should be encouraged and actively enabled to visit national parks, and the implementation of specific programmes targeting visible communities was strongly supported across the quantitative survey. Visible community interviewees also outlined the belief that positive action and targeted programmes are required to redress the imbalances they believe to be endemic in English society, drawing on the strategic essentialism and identity politics explored earlier in the thesis. Such calls for specific attention to be focused on visible communities can be argued to stem from an 'affirmative politics of recognition' (Fraser, 1995), developed through visible communities' lived experiences of marginalised but coherent and stable identities, and can be linked to the 'additive' model of representation described by Rattansi (1999) as central to the multiculturalism of **liberal cultural pluralism**. This allows for "an oppositional, minority-driven demand for 'recognition' and social advancement for racialised groups" – with each 'minority' group 'added on'.

The Mosaic Project typifies the kind of positive action based on the multiculturalism Rattansi describes: affirmative politics of recognition are central to its core aims, as they are to the endeavours of one of Mosaic's parent organisations, the Black Environment Network (BEN). Both Mosaic and BEN consistently foreground the marginalised and excluded status of people from 'ethnic minority' backgrounds<sup>87</sup>, campaigning for positive action to enable 'ethnic minority' participation in the mainstream environmental field.



Figure 19: *Safety in numbers/affirmative politics of recognition*'.

The intention of such projects is to achieve equality of opportunity for visible community groups, in line with the multicultural policies pursued in England over the last two decades, through emphasising ethnic and cultural rights based on difference, and promoting the celebration of cultural pluralism. As Parekh (2000b: 240) states:

"Equal rights do not mean identical rights, for individuals with different cultural backgrounds and needs might require different rights to enjoy equality in respect of whatever happens to be the content of their rights. Equality involves ... full recognition of legitimate and relevant [differences]."

A 'social (in)justice' agenda has been gaining momentum over the past few years, concerned with environmental justice, social equality and sustainable development (see Agyeman & (200 )'s writing on 'just sustainability'; see also .....). Such an

<sup>87</sup> BEN "uses the word 'black' symbolically" and states that it works "with black, white and other ethnic communities" (BEN, 2004). In real terms, BEN engages with ethnic *minority communities*, who come from Asian, African Caribbean, Middle Eastern and Eastern European backgrounds.

approach is in line with Parekh's notion of the need for different rights (positive action) to achieve equality of opportunity in society, and argues for an acknowledgement of cultural specificity and the histories of exclusion caught up within visible communities' everyday experiences to be brought to bear in environmental decision-making. While there is not the space to pursue this discussion in depth here, a social (in)justice framework has great validity as a framework for further research into multiculturalism and the English countryside.

Certainly, much has been achieved by BEN and others in terms of raising awareness of ethnic and cultural difference among countryside managers, and the responsibilities of public bodies to be inclusive of diverse communities. Despite the positive aspects of this 'additive model' approach, real change within the countryside conservation /heritage sphere has yet to transpire - because such a version of equal opportunities *remains embedded in a colonial gaze*, and visible communities remain racialised. Stranger fetishism is either reiterated or replaced by stranger exoticism, with a failure to encapsulate the *simultaneous existence of intercultural similarity*, or the possibility of cross-cultural and cross-ethnic connections. Theory and policy incorporating/advocating 'positive action' to facilitate access to national parks must be wary of emphasising visible community cultures as only different and fixed, as this runs the risk of further inculcating rural otherness. Any celebration of 'other' cultural practices that refuses the possibility of fluidity, pluralism or intercultural similarity - that deny the existence of 'intertwined histories' and 'overlapping territories' (Said, 1994) - marginalise groups through emphasis on difference as spectacle. Bennett (1998:4, original emphasis) writes that:

"state-managed multiculturalisms reify and exoticise alterity; addressing ethnic and racial difference as a question of 'identity' rather than of history and politics, they translate alterity as cultural diversity, treating difference (a relation) as an intrinsic property of 'cultures' and as a *value* (a socially 'enriching' one), to be presented as such."

An event held by Mosaic at Loosehill Hall in the Peak District, to celebrate its one-year anniversary is a good example. Attended by national park staff/Committee Members, visible community groups who had participated in residential visits, and other interested individuals from countryside management, the itinerary involved a morning of speeches, lunch prepared by the visible community groups (each group contributed 'traditional' dishes to a buffet), followed by an afternoon devoted to 'ethnic minority activities'. There was a tai chi workshop on the lawn led by the Chinese group, henna

tattooing by Indian women in one room, Asian silk screen painting in another, a display of 'urban black street dancing', etc. While it was an enjoyable and 'successful' day, and the first of its kind in a national park, it was an invitation-only event - out of sight of visitors and residents, in which stereotypes were largely left intact. Moreover, people performed to specific stereotypes, and although intercultural exchange occurred between the visible community groups present, for the national park staff/countryside managers it was a one-way 'see and learn' experience.

We must remember here that many people from visible community backgrounds expect, demand and applaud such a cultural pluralist positive action, as enthusiasm for African Caribbean carnivals, Asian Melas and the popularity of the Mosaic Project attest. Indeed, BEN has been functioning under such a mandate for over 15 years, perhaps one sign that a cultural pluralism approach is not transformative - BEN's work is not sustainable without BEN behind it. Visible communities are still seen as different from the majority white 'norm', stereotypes are maintained on all sides and, as such, the potential for processes of racialisation and racism remain. In addition, there has been an increase in recent years of a 'politics of resentment' (Watson, forthcoming) among white, predominantly working class, groups to such 'affirmative politics of recognition', fuelling ethnic tension.

Bhattacharyya (1998:259) points out that the 'feel-good multiculturalism' of cultural relativity is increasingly at odds with contemporary British society in which, especially given the widespread vilification of Muslims, pluralism seems a "concept out of time", and sees the possibility of a multiculturalism based on "getting by in cheerful diversity" decreasing. Post-Sept. 11th and the Bradford/Oldham disturbances, her analysis rings even more acute. The political climate has indeed shifted away from pluralism, and political ideology and rhetoric most recently moved to that of '**community cohesion**'. The other is no longer allowed free reign to be different - they may be different only as long as they adhere to a set of shared ideals and values (eg. The Cattle Report, 2001). These ideals and values, though, are non-negotiable and inevitably decided by the dominant (white) society that already holds them. From commitment to an 'English' sense of 'fair play', to oaths of allegiance, there appears an inherent understanding of this 'community cohesion' model of multiculturalism that closely echoes the common (lay) understanding of 'integration' as a process in which minorities gradually adopt majority values and practices: community cohesion as a one-way process.

This 'cohesive' type of multiculturalism is evident in projects and events that target visible communities to 'bring them' into the countryside, and then proceed to 'introduce them' to 'our' wildlife, 'our' traditions and 'our' values and practices, with the expectation that all people should adopt/conform to these traditions, values and practices. One example is that of 'acceptable behaviour' in the national parks. Alongside the Countryside Code outlining 'dos and don'ts' regarding wildlife and habitat conservation, there are also unwritten rules or codes of expected behaviour in national parks, which are culturally circulated and understood by residents, staff and (arguably) many visitors. These include being quiet, undertaking passive activities<sup>88</sup>, and overall maintaining a sense of 'decorum', and were described throughout the research in general yet vague terms: 'being unobtrusive and respectful' and 'keeping standards up'. Among national park residents, staff and visitors there was an (often implicit) understanding that large group visits, parties or other celebrations, or playing (loud or indeed any) music, are not appropriate activities/behaviour in national parks.

There are two points to raise here. The first is that values/practices not in line with the dominant ideals are considered 'wrong', and everyone expected to adhere to the prevailing values. National park rhetoric commonly intoned the need to educate people as to how they should respect and behave in the countryside – how they must conform to a certain set of values. Secondly, examined more closely, these dominant values are context-dependent: large group visits often take place, and coach loads of OAPs from York coming to Helmsley market are welcome; open air concerts are acceptable on occasion and when 'properly' organised; and scenic rural settings remain popular with wedding parties. Such behaviour is deemed acceptable if undertaken by majority society, but, as shown in chapter 5, similar activities considered inappropriate among visible community groups.

What is lacking throughout both the cultural pluralism and 'community cohesion' approaches to positive action described above, is an awareness of the need for tactics that, *alongside* differential treatment, combat continuing essentialism and ethnic stereotyping. The research clearly suggests that positive action is needed as a catalyst to including visible communities in countryside recreation, and that cultural sensitivity is an important part of social equality. What is needed is a new approach incorporating the positive aspects of both cultural relativity and universal values. Crucially, people are at the same time:

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<sup>88</sup> The controversy surrounding mountain biking in national parks, for example, highlights precisely this 'dominant code' argument.

"both natural and cultural beings, sharing a common human identity but in a culturally mediated manner. They are *similar and different*, their similarities and difference do not passively coexist but interpenetrate, and neither is ontologically prior or morally more important."

(Parekh, 2000b:239, emphasis added)

His emphasis on difference *interpenetrating similarity* requires a fundamental shift in outlook such that visible communities are not automatically construed as 'having' fixed cultural values based on their (visible) ethnic background, while the need to address cultural specificity in terms of exclusion from the countryside is acknowledged. An understanding of universal *rights*, then, rather than values is necessary, and Parekh (2000a) suggests a looser social collectivity consisting of a 'community of communities' in place of community cohesion. In a similar vein, I am arguing for an open version of multiculturalism that incorporates the interdependence of difference and similarity, in order to enable a progressive kind of positive action. Such a 'sustainable multiculturalism' that moves beyond the 'difference versus sameness' dualism. At this point, then, I want to consider a more provocative engagement with otherness that does not succumb to binaristic or reductive tendencies.



Figure 20: 'how are we to handle what is other without robbing it of its otherness?'

monsters not strangers: visible communities and the English national parks

Pajaczkowska & Young (1999:199) write that:



“The capacity for othering is an innate human characteristic ... not necessarily activated by society in a destructive way.”

This quote suggests that we are not able to get past seeing difference. If this capacity is indeed innate, albeit potentially benign, how can we conceive the interconnectivities between difference and similarity? Can we envisage visible communities as more than others in the English national parks?

The concept of ‘monsters’ and ‘the monstrous’, I believe, offers a way through the limitations of cultural pluralism and community cohesion, and towards a sustainable version of multiculturalism. Chapter 3 explored the ontological impossibility of the notion of visible communities as ‘strangers’ in the countryside, highlighting that visible communities are predominantly known and identified *as other* in rural areas. The idea of monsters is useful because, unlike strangers, the monstrous directly engages with issues of recognised difference, and as such offers a more open basis for dialogue. Monsters have been imagined and produced in response to anxiety about difference across human societies and throughout histories (Ruddick, 2004): the monster is different from ‘us’ and we acknowledge ‘it’ already as such. Moreover, the concept allows us to – demands that we - capture the *ambivalence* accorded difference: monsters are held *in fear* but also *in awe*. What makes working with this ambivalence valuable in the context of (re)viewing rural others is that it forces us to engage with difference that *simultaneously* evokes awe/interest (fetish) even as it threatens, which facilitates the potential for a radical openness – an alternative engagement with an ‘in/appropriated other’ that we can only struggle to understand (and can never know), (see Haraway (1992)’s ‘promise of monsters’). This alternative engagement:

“requires that we be able to hold onto that uncomfortable and disquieting moment before we collapse the other into someone ‘just like us’ (the pitfalls of certain forms of class and gender politics) or damn them into an irreconcilable ‘them’. It begs the question: ‘how are we to handle what is other without robbing it of its otherness?’”

(Mason, 1990; cited in Ruddick, 2004:26)

What I am arguing here is that conceptualising visible communities in the English countryside as monsters is not only a far more honest approach to recognising difference (than the denial of strangers), but enables consideration of that split second, that instant of ‘what am I to think of this person’ before our socialised programming kicks in. And if we can hold onto this moment - what it means and how it feels - in our thinking, reflection and reviewing, therein lies the potential for transformativity. Such

radical openness requires labour, requires us to work at seeing outside our stereotypical boxes. However, as Haraway (1992) and Derrida (1995) both argue, without such work the world/social life becomes stagnant and dies, precisely because:

“A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow. All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous arrivant ... This is the movement of culture.”

(Derrida, 1995:387)

Here Derrida appears to argue that an evolving society (albeit perhaps unconsciously) is constantly preparing for the monster to appear. He goes on to explain that majority response is to attempt to domesticate the monster, “have it assume the habits”, of dominant society. This response, made in **fear**, is precisely what the national parks and rural population may be described as doing, *at best* – welcoming the other yet always trying to domesticate ‘them’ into the English countryside, and the English (traditional) ‘way of doing things’.

Ruddick’s project is to invoke the radical openness of “that uncomfortable and disquieting moment” to suggest that monsters are also capable of ‘domesticating’ majority society – because of our **awe response**. The popularity of chicken tikka masala or the influence of ‘black’ music in the mainstream are two oft cited examples of shifts in English culture: instances where monsters have domesticated the majority and influenced a change in social practices/attitudes. Recognising this reverse influence importantly allows for the agency and subjectivity of the monster that is denied the stranger. Ruddick is writing about the ‘emancipatory city’, but such theorising has wide ranging implications, most relevantly here that majority society should be prepared to accept difference in all its spaces, especially those “beyond the putative boundaries of the city”.

We have come to designate the urban as a site for multicultural and multi-ethnic performances, but, as the research has shown, visible communities not only resist such positioning, but claim the countryside and country as multicultural and multi-ethnic (as detailed in chapter 6). Viewing visible communities provocatively as monsters in the national parks entails holding onto the fear whilst also acknowledging the awe of the other, *and* how both aspects play with and against each other. The threat to ‘traditional white’ English identity occurs *as the fact of multi-ethnic England*, and a *new/different Englishness* is made clear in the nation’s revered ‘traditional white’ space. The

transformative potential of the concept of the monstrous lies in the possibility that visible communities may domesticate English identity – with reverberations across the mindset of the dominant majority and, accordingly, the ideological framework of the national parks.

But, the monstrous as feared and fetishised is still and only caught up with *difference*, and thus falls short of Parekh's contention that people's similarity and difference interpenetrate. What I believe the conceptualisation of the monstrous offers is the *technique* of thinking radically, of thinking inclusively beyond notions of a singular way of being, or singular reactions to an other being. This technique can be extended to retaining that disquieting/uncomfortable moment of *unknowingness* where and when difference and similarity are ambiguous. Radical openness, then, enables an engagement with the im/possibility of the other, a way to grapple with the interconnectivity of difference and similarity.



Figure 21: How different, how similar?

Such a reformulation requires national parks to think carefully about how they approach the positive action and targeted outreach programs suggested through the research. If proactive projects are to be successful *and* sustainable, they need to emanate from an ideology based on radical openness. At the very least, positive action must be open to the range of possibilities of ethnic difference: celebrating cultural difference must be accompanied by *also* accepting other values and traditions regarding countryside practices, and being prepared for national park traditions to shift accordingly. More progressively, national parks need to adopt an openness to holding the interconnect-

ivities between difference and sameness at the core of positive action. Uncomfortable, disquieting and difficult, definitely – but vital if parks are to grasp the reality of a multiethnic England, and engage with and reflect contemporary English society. The issue then becomes: how can national parks attempt to implement such an ideology?

reviewing national park policy: the need for agonism

As touched on in chapter 6, the concept of transversalism has been gaining support as an approach to theorising and working with ethnic difference, multiculturalism and community tension/dynamics (see Tooke, 2001). Certainly, an initial reading suggests that transversalism offers a way forward in the negotiation of sustainable multiculturalism, as transversal politics recognise both commonality *and* difference. The transformative encounters outlined in the previous chapter incorporated movement to new positions by both parties/sides to the encounter, and new understandings of the self and other. However, transversalism still emphasises identity as an object rather than a process, and is less adept at dealing with notions of pluralism, hybridity and change: any achievement of commonality is undermined by foregrounding shared values as reached from essentialised positions of difference, *and not grasping these differences as fluid, nor as **interwoven through** the agreed values.*

Furthermore, as a limited form of 'dialogism', transversalism risks being restricted to an invited and/or elite collection of individuals/groups who already share some common attitudes and positions. Most crucially, though, this approach can only work with differences that are negotiable – there is a presumption and inherent expectation that common values *are always to be found/reached* - it is unclear how transversal politics would cope with non-negotiable differences. Transversalism's limitations would soon surface should, to offer an obviously problematic example, enough Muslims move to or regularly visit Bakewell/Helmsley, and planning application be submitted to build a mosque.

I want to be very clear here: I am not arguing against the *possibilities* of transversalism, and I believe that attempts to appreciate sameness are a key aspect within sustainable multiculturalism. But this research uncovers deeper ontologies of difference that make reaching such consensus unrealistic. Instead, I want to argue for an approach to national park policy that draws on agonism, or 'agonistic pluralism' (Mouffe, 2000). Agonism rejects all attempts to negate what it considers the inherently conflictual nature of democratic society, acknowledging instead the ineradicability of adversarial

belief systems and the impossibility of reaching concurrence regarding social problems. Mouffe (ibid.:93) explains that, within the currently dominant forms of liberal democracy practiced in the west, "what is misguided is the search for a final rational resolution." This quest for resolution is mistaken because it denies the fundamental tension between the logic of liberalism and the logic of democracy, refusing the possibility of a value-pluralistic society<sup>89</sup>.

This does not signal an end to liberal democracy – rather a process of constant negotiation, and a project open to combative opposition and non-resolution. However, Mouffe stresses that such agonism should not be equated with the acceptance of a 'total pluralism', as certain limits remain necessary for legitimate confrontation in the public sphere (eg. respect for another's claim to values), but that the *political* nature of such limits must be recognised rather than "being presented as requirements of morality or rationality". An agonistic political culture emphasises participatory and ongoing engagement between empowered citizens, enabling the radical openness outlined previously.

Amin (2002) calls for an agonistic approach to living with ethnic diversity in Britain's multicultural cities. Describing inter-ethnic and inter-cultural relations as always temporary, context-driven and fragile settlements, he argues that, therefore, a politics of agonistic pluralism is necessary to negotiate ethnic and cultural difference - *against* tendencies to assume fixed ethnic identities and implement policy initiatives aimed at cohesion and shared values. Likewise, introducing a sense of agonism to the debates regarding the social exclusion of visible communities from the English countryside offers us the chance to move beyond essentialised, static versions of ethnicity and nostalgic, bounded notions of rurality. There are two key aspects to this agonistic politics. The first is that its grasp of the ineradicability of difference enables it to incorporate shifting and multiple values, and work with fluid, unfinished and patchwork identities and belief systems. The second is that such understanding of difference *does not preclude the possibility* of finding common ground, but throws it up as a potentiality amid pluralism.

A new national park policy direction drawing on such an agonistic model must be based on negotiation that aims, not to achieve consensus between visible communities and established white English values (though consensus is not precluded), but to face

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<sup>89</sup> Pluralism of value being, instead, restricted to the private sphere.

up to disagreement regarding how national parks are perceived. Agonistic arbitration can then examine confrontation/difference between and across the productions of national identity of individuals and communities (visible and white), and the ways in which they may or may not be tied up with rurality. Vitaly, such an approach eschews any attempt to persuade movement to one common set of shared values/practices regarding national parks, or one common/shared construction of Englishness constructed through rurality.

Importantly, this new policy approach can no longer substantiate the fantasy of white supremacy that, even at its most 'benign', patronisingly speaks of 'tolerance' and 'welcome' while mistakenly believing that such tolerance or welcome is majority white society's to give (after Hage, 1998). The adoption of agonistic ideology also unsettles white presumption regarding heritage representation and environmental interpretation, and demands a decentring of the central position held by 'native' species and Anglo-Saxon history in national park narratives. Of course, such disruption to the dominant Imaginary will be highly contested, but agonistic policies should ensure that voices the hegemon attempt to marginalise are argued equally with dominant opinion, without expectation of permanent resolution ('integration'). Encouragingly, there is already some evidence of alternative versions of heritage, although unusual, within the countryside sphere:

Z4 *looking at the sites and asking what are the cultural connections looking at something which is traditionally English and saying ah but that that's actually Islamic architecture ... and that bit is Norman and that's French did you know and ... and the 'did you know' stuff is not something we regularly tease out it's not something we acknowledge ... and with citizenship on the the national curriculum our education staff can work on things like that ... looking at the ... multicultural er nature of these lands which we live in is you know it's a truism that but it's a little known truism ... and it's a not liked truism*

(Stakeholder interview: woman, 35-44, white British)

The agonistic approach I am describing thus involves adopting a strategy that incorporates a great deal of flexibility to respond as situation/need arises from engagement with visible community groups. Far from being an unrealistic policy recommendation, I believe such adaptability fits well with contemporary political and funding regimes. National parks (and other countryside organisations) work on time-limited funded projects/programmes (commonly three years), which must be carefully audited and monitored. Meanwhile, it is rare for the same work to be funded twice, and managers talk of 'having to reinvent' projects to continue them long term. An agonistic approach enables national parks to undertake outreach, training or any of a number of

positive action projects, review the outcomes – specifically through debate with project participants – and shift their emphasis for a new, evolved project.

Furthermore, such policies allow the national parks to recognise the *silence* of the most powerless in society who remain excluded from negotiation: groups may be identified as *still not* engaged with the countryside through positive action project review. Thus gaps may begin to be addressed through adopting the imperative of *moving towards social inclusion* rather than finding ‘the solution’ to social exclusion, as national parks remain constantly vigilant to new, different and emergent others.

### **(re)placing national parks: engagement across rural-urban Englishness**

If, as this chapter so far contends, a sustainable multiculturalism drawing on agonistic pluralism offers transformative strategies for working towards the inclusion of visible communities in national parks, how do ideas of space and place play out within these concepts and strategies? I argue here that a serious commitment to conceiving space relationally is needed to shift exclusive constructions of national belonging and ethnic difference in contemporary England. However, as the thesis has shown, the perceived existence of two essentially different environments – the rural and the urban – ran deep among all research participants. Thus I suggest that an agonistic approach to thinking national parks needs to acknowledge the notion of a rural/urban divide as *interdependent with* ideas of space as porous, mobile, and plural. This section focuses on the need to hold the rural/urban division *in tension with* a relational version of the countryside, in terms of the impact of space and place on social relations and encounters between people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Chapter 6 examined the potential of encounters to mediate relationships between different groups, through emphasis on the ways in which people relate face-to-face as playing a vital role in identifications (of self and other), highlighting that encounters have a central part to play in tackling social exclusion in the English countryside. However, I also warned that encounters retain the potential for engagement to result in an experience that reiterates and further inculcates stereotypes: different groups do not necessarily encounter each other in any meaningful, positive manner when occupying the same physical space. Rather, there is a tendency for groups to inhabit subspaces, silently negotiating ‘turf’ boundaries and establishing ‘micropublics’ within, for example,

public parks or youth centres (Back, 2002). In addition, when micropublics do overlap and interaction occurs, some level of openness is necessary for attitude movement<sup>90</sup>.



Figure 22: Visiting a 'honey-pot' town in the national park.

The point here is that a transformative politics aiming to shift entrenched stereotypes involves *labour*. National parks need to look not only to engaging with visible communities and facilitating/encouraging visits to the countryside, but must also look to their staff and, vitally, the wider resident communities in the park areas, and consider what work is necessary to enable positive encounters between people from such a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds.

I want to discuss encounters in this section<sup>91</sup> because it is the importance of the **places of encounter** that I wish to accentuate: *the role of place in de-stereotyping 'the other'*. Nuanced identities were performed in the national parks, by both visible communities and majority white visitors/staff/residents, which were informed by their physical environment and the history of social relations across different spaces. There are two broad issues that I wish to tackle here. The first is the implication of conceiving the rural as a *relational space* for national park policy and practice that works to enable positive encounters. The second surrounds envisioning national parks as *spaces of encounter*,

<sup>90</sup> It is important to note that attitudinal change does not have to happen during the encounter for a shift in position: it may well be later, on reflection, that someone's constructions of an other alter.

<sup>91</sup> Rather than when talking about difference, monsters and agonism in the previous section.



as sites of potential *and* habitual inter-ethnic and inter-cultural negotiation, which entails holding onto the specificity of 'the rural' while de-privileging the urban as the site of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism in England. I argue that national parks and the wider social Imaginary need to move away from the dominant understanding that 'real' Englishness is tied up with a 'rural idyll', and that both are white – and that this demands rethinking Englishness itself.

national parks as *and* beyond English rurality

Chapter 3 argued that the *meaning of place* can affect relations between different individuals/groups *in that place*, and that national parks should be conceptualised via their specific, inter-connecting and complex associations with a multitude of other places. Moreover, it was suggested that a reading of space and place as *themselves relational* is important given the issues regarding diasporic identity and international connections caught up in visible community histories, experiences and day-to-day lives. Through the fieldwork, perceptions of social exclusion were attributed to the territoriality of the (racialised) countryside, but constructions of national identity were also claimed in complex and contradictory ways across and between different, international ruralities as well as within England itself (chapter 6). The research shows that social relations between groups in specific places, then, are affected by complicated, interacting, and constantly re-negotiated values and understandings of place.

If national parks are able to cast themselves within a continuum of representative spaces of (national) belonging, they may be better able to appreciate and work with the idea that the countryside is not necessarily central to a sense of Englishness. That is, national parks need to re-imagine and re-present themselves as public spaces in a continuum of other public spaces, and rural spaces in a continuum of global rural spaces. Policy may be socially inclusive through highlighting spatially multiple and shifting constitutive relations in the web of different spaces in which the English countryside is implicated. Globally, they are part of a large family of national parks, and, indeed, they already recognise this by their involvement with the International Union for Nature Conservation. Moreover, rural space and rural living is influenced and affected by people, places, things and systems beyond rural England. National parks are implicated in a wide mesh of social, economic, political and cultural connectivities and flows that tease at their designated boundaries: access to the internet via home computers; food grown in all corners of the world and imported to supermarket shelves;

foreign travel; European directives (agricultural and social); national legislation (the recent ban on fox hunting and Access to the Countryside Act (2000) spring to mind); television and other popular media; rural business interaction with regional development agencies; the ubiquitous Chinese takeaways and curry houses found in even the smaller rural hamlets; and, not least, the increase in people living in national parks and commuting to urban areas for work, or residing in the cities but retaining holiday homes in the countryside.

While many of these issues directly impact on national parks and are already addressed within policy (eg. second homes, traffic congestion), the parks mostly fail to see themselves in a-territorial terms. The impact of the range of spatialities on identity and social relations, however, is difficult to over-estimate, in particular the more subtle shades to identity that are influenced by movement (physical and emotional) across, through and between many spaces. I am arguing for an understanding of a dynamic rural that acknowledges national parks as places of permeability and flux. Critically, such connections must be woven through positive action approaches and the work of facilitating encounters between different groups, and brought to bear on the ways in which they work locally: emphasising the diversity of national park work in a wide range of countries and cultures could open up inter-ethnic and inter-cultural links as a focus for encounters, as could imaginative and innovative interpretation and education work that forefronts the connectivities across rural/urban England as well as different global ruralities.

But we must not forget that national parks are designated specifically to 'conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and heritage of the national parks'. They must, in part, consider their boundedness. While I have suggested that 'promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the parks by the public' may be more inclusively achieved through emphasising their situatedness in global, national and regional networks, national parks must also preserve their uniqueness. For many people, it is an essentialised, singular version of the English countryside that plays an important part in their sense of national identity. Relationally speaking, it is important for national parks to move from the idea of an originary/static uniqueness, to one that embraces the special qualities of their areas as *changing and diverse*. This is where an agonistic approach to ideology and policy again proves vital. Agonism enables the parks to work with the *impossibility* of English rurality ever being/being perceived as the same, *and* work at engagements between groups aware that there will (probably) be irreducibly different understandings of the same spaces/places.

Moreover, this thesis' reading of agonism *also* holds onto the possibility of spatial experiences changing opinions, and that encounters with others in specific places offer the potential for shifts in social relations.

I believe that to develop and foster a sustainable multiculturalism, we need to be aware of the spatial nature of social relations *and* the relationality of identity - *and the interconnections between them*. The research suggests that it is important to work with both these concepts in order to disrupt the social relations emanating from spatialised stereotypes (visible communities as 'outsiders' in the countryside), through recognition of the composite and multiple cultural belongings that morph across time and space. What is important, and mostly lacking in initiatives aiming to introduce visible communities to the countryside, is that encounters need to be *two-way exchanges*. Work needs to be done, in particular, across the rural/urban divide commonly invoked in social imaginaries, to highlight links and explore differences at the same time. The onus cannot always be on urban/visible communities to visit and engage in the countryside - the rural/white group must experience an encounter in the city if cultural exchange rather than voyeurism is to occur. Such a double-sided endeavour is equally vital for national park staff, who need to meet visible communities in the neighbourhoods where they live or places where they work, rather than merely meeting them in the national park and 'showing them' around.

One rare example is that of the 'twinning' of a Birmingham primary with a village school in the PD<sup>92</sup>, which was transformative because of its reciprocity. The urban (majority) visible community children experienced the rural environment/community for the first time, but rather than being (only) the 'outsiders' in this exchange, roles were reversed when the village children visited the city in return. Presumptions of space and identity were destabilised, and if a degree of voyeurism occurred, at least it was on both sides!

#### towards an emancipatory countryside?

The above focus on the importance of two-way encounters for cultural exchange, brings me to the second issue involved in the role of space and place in social relations. In particular, multi-ethnic encounters in places of work/school - 'spaces of everydayness' - are discussed as sites where people contest fixed identities, traverse cultures and negotiate difference, and this very local level, the 'micropublic', is

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<sup>92</sup> A one-off project initiated by a teacher at the Birmingham school, with help from BEN.

described as being crucial in reconciling ethnic and cultural differences (Back, 2002). Moreover, they are spaces where 'prosaic negotiations' are mandatory, and as such best enable ongoing yet often imperceptible cultural investigations and transruptions (Amin, 2002). These prosaic sites, then, offer the potential for cultural displacement and shift – they are spaces of 'emergence', where identities, values and practices can meet, dis/agree, merge and disentangle in an ongoing process of negotiation. If we consider these sites closely, however, we are returned to the *everyday urban* as equated with such daily negotiation of social contact, encounter and ethnic difference. Cities as the spaces of inter-cultural and inter-ethnic potential (where monsters may be domesticated). A new Englishness may be struggling into existence, but it appears to be restricted to a 'cosmopolitan urbanity' and isolated from a 'rural idyll', enabling the latter to retain much of its resonance regarding 'real/original' Englishness.

I cannot suggest that national parks be considered as everyday spaces for people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds living in England (nor for the majority of English society, for that matter). National parks need to work at placing themselves in the banal urban spaces mentioned above, engaging in outreach work in the cities. They also need to undertake positive action to facilitate, support and encourage visible communities to visit the national parks, not as a one-off, but routinely. They need to not only organise cultural exchanges in rural settings between park residents/staff and visible community groups, but look to reciprocal engagements. More than the actions listed here, but increasingly stemming from them, is the need to re-envisage the countryside as *potential sites for prosaic inter-ethnic and inter-cultural negotiation* – or at least **habitual sites of negotiation**. Such a re-envisaging demands that *the rural sees itself and is seen as a multi-ethnic and multicultural space, and engages with notions of multi-ethnic citizenship and claims to nationality*. Importantly, national parks cannot be viewed as places that 'accommodate' or 'welcome' other (than white) ethnic groups, but that are *composed of multiple, hybrid, shifting and agonistic ethnic identifications*.

This can be achieved through inclusive and, importantly, evolving interpretation, but will require a long term, fully committed approach to making social inclusion issues core within national park policy and action, not just peripheral projects that can 'fix' the 'problem'. Such central and fundamental commitment in turn requires a paradigm shift in the way that national parks perceive themselves and their role in society: they must see themselves as multicultural, multi-ethnic spaces.



Figure 23: National parks as sites of negotiation.

The obvious flip-side to this is that thinking regarding ethnicity, citizenship and national identity *must engage with the rural*, in order to avoid the tendency to always already re-site multi-ethnicity and issues surrounding multiculturalism only in the city. A 'politics of propinquity and flow' (Amin & Thrift, 2002) need to be brought to bear in the countryside as much as in the urban. Reconstructing the rural as mobile or incorporating mobility, as a space of multi-ethnicity, and acknowledging and being open to plural values and claims to national identity and belonging, will demand "negotiating across and among difference the implacable spatial fact of shared turf" (Massey, 2004:6). Academics, too, need to open up to the relativity of space and place within the debate on identity, ethnicity, national belonging and multiculturalism.

Key to re-visioning rurality as a habitual site of negotiation is a re-conception of Englishness – and a recognition of multiple, flexible English identity/ies. Thinking identity and belonging as *becoming* (as *desire to become*) – crucially *together with* the processes of dominance that impact on these identifications and desires - involves thinking identity relationally but also rethinking the spaces of social relations at the same time. As the Parekh Report (2000:8) clearly states, a genuinely multi-ethnic England needs to re-imagine itself:

"The key issue ... is one of English identity and how previous conceptions of English identity have excluded so many people who live in and richly contribute to English society."

Exclusion from national identity has for too long implicitly and explicitly been equated with exclusion from rural space, and vice versa, through an entrenched dominant Imaginary that constructs Englishness as implicit in a racialised rurality. Breaking through this tautological circle of exclusion requires English society to rethink and redefine its *identity as a nation* in inclusive ways, allowing for multi-ethnic and multicultural belongings that incorporate diverse visible communities alongside diverse white communities, *in the cities and in the countryside*. This thesis has highlighted the multiple, hybrid and fluid ways in which visible communities recognise themselves as English, and the variety of connections through which they construct a sense of belonging in and attachment to the English countryside. Englishness must be recognised as *not only* white, if the entrenched Imaginary is to lose its relevance:

"As the writer Andrea Levy says: 'If Englishness doesn't define me, redefine Englishness'."

(Alibhai-Brown, 2001:258)

To engage with such a project, national parks need to adopt ideology based on principles of radical openness, implement continually evolving policies as situations change and debate/opinions shift, and recognise that social and cultural agreement on the value of the national parks may be reached - but fleetingly and/or partially. This will be, I am sure, an emotionally charged endeavour for all.



Figure 23: 'If Englishness doesn't define me, redefine Englishness'.

## CONTINUING THE JOURNEY [onward/afterward]

**Extract from fieldnotes - 4/8/02**

### Context:

Written after accompanying a Mosaic residential trip to the NYM for four days. The visit was arranged for a group of 18 young Muslim women (aged between 13 and 19), two group leaders (aged 35-44) and two group helpers (aged mid 20s, both with one young child (ages 4 and 5) from an Asian Women's centre in Middlesbrough. All of the group except the two leaders had been born and grown up in Middlesbrough. The group stayed in Helmsley youth hostel, visited Robin Hood's Bay, Whitby, the Ryedale folk museum and Helmsley walled gardens, and various outdoor activities were arranged for the young women, including archery, team building activities and hiking.

Two rangers accompanied the group throughout the visit. Transport was provided for the group, in the form of two minibuses. One of the minibuses was driven by G, a retired NYM resident who was a volunteer ranger (male, 65+, white British). G accompanied the group throughout their visit, picking them up in Middlesbrough at the start and dropping them back at their centre at the end. Moreover, he joined in with the hiking and visits to Robin Hood's Bay and Whitby, at the young women's request.

### Extract:

*Drove back to the [name] Centre this afternoon, where the girls' parents were waiting to pick them up. Some very tired young women! Very positive on the journey back about their trip ... all want to go back, partly for activities, partly for scenery/ landscape (most common discourse re this, again, = different from M'bro or 'good break from the city'), and partly to 'escape' their parents again!*

*G has been great throughout the trip – really engaged with the young women, wanted to hear all about their lives and opinions and what they do in M'bro and what they like - and what they thought about the moors. Also very keen to get across how wonderful (he thinks) the moors are. Made effort to chat to group from the start (see notes from 1/8/02), and seemed to get on well with [names – group leaders and helpers] as well as young women. Even learnt to count to twenty in Urdu and Punjabi. As we pulled up outside the Centre, [name – 5 year old daughter of helper] gave G a Thank You card, which all the group had signed – he was very touched.*

G and I waited 'til everyone had gone before driving the minibuses back to depot in NYM. Chatting with G as we dropped off the keys ... he was talking about how great an experience he'd had, how much he felt he'd learned from the group about their cultural practices and life experiences in M'bro, and how the young women reminded him of his grandchildren (also teenagers). He talked about how good he thought it was that England was increasing in ethnic diversity, about the many values and attributes that 'blacks and ethnic minorities' have brought to the country. He said that he wished the national park incorporated a more diverse cultural perspective on its heritage, and that it was important for rural people to learn more about the different groups of people living in England.

Then, after all this, he said "You know, I think those young girls enjoyed their visit as much as a group of young English girls would."

I said "Those young women are English, G. They were born and brought up here – they have British passports. And they consider themselves British Asians."

G: "Oh, yes, of course. I didn't think of it like that."

#### **Time of writing – 1/11/04**

This particular incident is one of many moments that have stayed with her throughout the journey. Sometimes she looks back at the changes she has noticed even over the last three years, in the attitudes of the national parks, in the presence of visible communities in the parks and wider countryside, in positive rhetoric across the policy field regarding social cohesion and recognition of a need to shift from 'old style' divide-and-keep-separated multiculturalism<sup>93</sup>. At times, she feels hopeful for the future, optimistic that a new 'community of communities'<sup>94</sup> can be forged, in which non-white is not implicitly considered non-English in the dominant Imaginary; in which the construction of Englishness is severed from the nostalgia of 'the rural idyll'; in which diversity is respected and understood but not reified and rigid; and in which the country/side is multicultural, without thought or effort.

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<sup>93</sup> See, for example, Runnymede Trust, 2004.

<sup>94</sup> Parekh (2000a).



Sometimes she feels swamped by the racism peddled (by the media and government) through anti-asylum rants; by the very existence of the British Nationalist Party, let alone its success at the polls; by ignorant or unthoughtful everyday comments that inherently elide Englishness with white skin – especially when they come from people who generally appear to be more broad-minded. The personal is political. This journey has not been restricted to 'work' or 'study', but threads through her life and those she comes into contact with – co-fabrication does not only exist in the academic sphere. Moreover, this journey does not end here ...

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## APPENDIX I: URBAN QUESTIONNAIRE

**Please tick the boxes to answer the following questions:-**

1. Are you

male	
female	

2. What is your age?

u15	
15-24	
25-34	
35-44	
45-54	
55-64	
65+	

3. Which of the following best describes the job of the main wage-earner in your household?

unemployed	
retired	
manual worker	
office worker	
shop worker	
manager/director	
public sector	
professional	
student	
self-employed	
Armed Forces	
other	

4. How many children do you have?

none	
1-2	
3-4	
5+	

5. How long have you lived in England?

less than 1 year	
1-5 years	
6-10 years	
11+ years	

**Please circle the answers to the following questions:**

6. Were you born in the UK? yes/no
7. Were both your parents born in the UK? yes/no/don't know
8. Were all your grandparents born in the UK? yes/no/don't know

9. What is your nationality? \_\_\_\_\_

10. What is your ethnic group?

- White
- Mixed
  - African and white
  - Caribbean and white
  - Asian and white
  - any other mixed background
- Asian - Indian
  - Pakistani
  - Bangladeshi
  - any other Asian background
- Black - Caribbean
  - African
  - any other black background
- Chinese
- Any other ethnic group (please say what)

11. Do you live in/are you visiting Middlesbrough? \_\_\_\_\_

12. Have you ever visited the North York Moors? yes/no **IF NO GO TO Q.19**

**IF YES: please tick one box for each of the following questions**

13. How many times, on average, do you visit the North York Moors?

have only ever been once	
once a year	
2-5 times a year	
6 or more times a year	

14. When you go to the North York Moors, how do you usually get there?

bicycle	
car	
train	
bus	
minibus/coach	
motorbike	
combination of the above	

15. How did you first hear about the North York Moors?

\_\_\_\_\_

16. How many people, including you, do you usually go to the North York Moors with?

1	
2-4	
5-10	
11+	

17. What activities do you enjoy there?

**Please tick ALL the answers that you enjoy**

looking at the view/scenery	
hiking	
going for short walks	
shopping	
picnicking	
eating out (in cafes/restaurants/pubs)	
rock climbing	
horse riding	
mountain biking	
other (please say what)	

18. What are the features/qualities of the North York Moors that you most value?

**Please tick ALL the answers that you most value**

being outdoors	
the history/archaeology	
good facilities, eg. cafes, restaurants, pubs	
the variety of things to see and do	
getting away from it all	
the attractive villages	
wildlife conservation	
walking/hiking	
peace and quiet	
clean air	
looking at the scenery/landscape	
other (please say what below)	

**ALL RESPONDENTS**

19. Have you ever heard of National Parks?                      yes/no

20 **If yes:** Where/how have you heard about them?

**If no, BRIEF EXPLANATION:**

National Parks are areas of the countryside where the natural habitat, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area are protected, although people can still live and work in them. National Parks must also promote chances for all people to enjoy and learn about the parks.



**ALL RESPONDENTS**

**Please tick ALL the answers you agree with for the following questions**

21. What do you think you can do in a National Park?

enjoy the view/scenery	
go hiking (long, difficult walks)	
go for short walks	
go shopping	
have a picnic	
eat out (in cafes/restaurants/pubs)	
go rock climbing	
go horse riding	
go mountain biking	
other (please say what below)	

22. What are the reasons stopping you from visiting a National Park (or visiting them more often)?

don't know about them	
don't know how to get there	
don't have transport to get there	
not interested in them	
no spare time	
spend spare time doing other leisure activities	
won't feel comfortable there	
other (please say what below)	

23. Which one of the above reasons is the MAIN reason you don't go to National Parks in England (more often)?

---

24. What would encourage you to visit a National Park (more often)?

knowing more about them	
having your own transport to get there	
better public transport to get there	
members of your family and/or community also visiting national parks	
having more spare time	
special events held there that interest you	
other (please say below)	

25. Which one of these reasons is the MAIN reason that would encourage you to visit a National Park (more often)?

---

26. Do you visit the parks in Middlesbrough itself?                      yes/no

27. **If yes:** What do you do in these parks? **Please tick ALL the things that you do.**

walk through them to other places	
picnic	
go for a walk	
walk a dog	
take children to play	
meet friends	
play sports	
other (please say what below)	

28. Do you ever visit the countryside in other countries?    yes/no

**Please tick whether you strongly agree, slightly agree, have no opinion on, slightly disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements:-**

	strongly agree	agree	no opinion	disagree	strongly disagree
29 The English countryside plays an important part in the sense of national identity.					
30 Nature plays an important part in your sense of self-identity.					
31 Visitors to the national parks tend to be middle class.					
32 National parks offer more for the young and fit.					
33 National park residents do not want non-white visitors in their neighbourhoods.					
34 People of all ages can enjoy national parks.					
35 National parks cater for all cultures.					
36 Only quiet activities are allowed in national parks.					
37 National parks lack ethnic minority visitors.					
38 Groups within society who do not visit national parks should be actively encouraged to do so.					

Are there any further comments you would like to make?

## APPENDIX II: VISITOR QUESTIONNAIRE

**Please tick the boxes to answer the following questions:-**

1. Are you

male	<input type="checkbox"/>
female	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. What is your age?

u15	<input type="checkbox"/>
15-24	<input type="checkbox"/>
25-34	<input type="checkbox"/>
35-44	<input type="checkbox"/>
45-54	<input type="checkbox"/>
55-64	<input type="checkbox"/>
65+	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Which of the following best describes the job of the main wage-earner in your household?

unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/>
retired	<input type="checkbox"/>
manual worker	<input type="checkbox"/>
office worker	<input type="checkbox"/>
shop worker	<input type="checkbox"/>
manager/director	<input type="checkbox"/>
public sector	<input type="checkbox"/>
professional	<input type="checkbox"/>
student	<input type="checkbox"/>
self-employed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Armed Forces	<input type="checkbox"/>
other	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. How many children do you have?

none	<input type="checkbox"/>
1-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
3-4	<input type="checkbox"/>
5+	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Do you live in or are you visiting England?

***If visiting, politely end questionnaire at this point***

6. Which village/town/city do you live in? \_\_\_\_\_

***Please circle the answers to the following questions:***

7. Were you born in the UK? yes/no
8. Were both your parents born in the UK? yes/no/don't know
9. Were all your grandparents born in the UK? yes/no/don't know

10. What is your nationality? \_\_\_\_\_

11. What is your ethnic group?

- White
- Mixed
  - African and white
  - Caribbean and white
  - Asian and white
  - any other mixed background
- Asian - Indian
  - Pakistani
  - Bangladeshi
  - any other Asian background
- Black - Caribbean
  - African
  - any other black background
- Chinese
- Any other ethnic group (please say what)

12. How many times, on average, do you visit a national park in England per year?

first ever visit	
once	
2-5 times	
6 or more times	

13. How do you usually travel to a national park?

walk	
cycle	
car	
train	
bus	
minibus/coach	

14. What activity or activities do you enjoy in *this* national park?

**Please tick ALL the answers that you enjoy**

looking at the view/scenery	
hiking	
going for short walks	
shopping	
picnicking	
eating out (in cafes/restaurants/pubs)	
rock climbing	
horse riding	
mountain biking	
other (please say what)	

15. How many people, including you, are in your group today?

1	
2-4	
5-10	
11+	

16. How did you originally come to know about the Peak District/North York Moors?

17. What are the features and/or qualities of the national parks that you most value?

**Please tick ALL the answers that you most value**

being outdoors	
the history/archaeology	
good facilities, eg. cafes, restaurants, pubs	
the variety of things to see and do	
getting away from it all	
the attractive villages	
wildlife conservation	
walking/hiking	
peace and quiet	
clean air	
looking at the scenery/landscape	
other (please say what below)	

18. What would encourage you to visit national parks more often?

**Please tick ALL the relevant boxes**

knowing more about them	
having your own transport to get there	
better public transport to get there	
members of your family and/or community also visiting national parks	
having more spare time	
special events held there that interest you	
other (please say below)	

(continues over)

**Please say whether you strongly agree, slightly agree, don't have an opinion, slightly disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements:**

	strongly agree	slightly agree	no opinion	slightly disagree	strongly disagree
19. The English countryside plays an important part in the sense of national identity.					
20. Nature plays an important part in your sense of self-identity.					
21. Visitors to the NPs tend to be middle class.					
22. NPs offer more for the young and fit.					
23. NP residents do not want non-white visitors in their neighbourhoods.					
24. People of all ages can enjoy NPs.					
25. NPs cater for all cultures.					
26. Only quiet activities are allowed in NPs.					
27. NPs lack ethnic minority visitors.					
28. Groups within society who do not visit national parks should be <i>actively</i> encouraged to do so.					

Are there any further comments you would like to make?

## APPENDIX III: VISITOR QUESTIONNAIRE SITES/DATES

### NYM national park

Goathland: Sat. 25/8/01 and Wed. 29/8/01

Robin Hood's Bay: Bank Hol. Mon. 27/8/01 and Thu. 30/8/01

Roseberry Topping: Sun. 4/8/02 and Tue. 6/8/02

Danby: Fri. 16/8/02 and Sat. 17/8/02

Helmsley: Wed. 21/8/02 and Sat. 24/8/02

### PD national park

Bakewell: Wed. 1/8/01 and Sat. 4/8/01

Derwent Water reservoir: Thu. 2/8/01 and Sat. 18/8/01

Edale: Fri. 3/8/01 and Sat. 11/8/01

Dovestones reservoir: Thur. 8/8/02 and Bank Hol. Mon. 26/8/02

Stanage Edge: Fri. 9/8/02 and Sat. 10/8/02

70<sup>th</sup> anniversary event of the mass trespass on Kinderscout: Sat. 27/4/02

## APPENDIX IV: RESIDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

### ABOUT YOU

*Please tick the boxes to answer the following questions wherever possible:-*

1. Are you

male	
female	

2. What is your age?

under15	
15-24	
25-34	
35-44	
45-54	
55-64	
65+	

3. Which of the following best describes the occupation of the main wage-earner in your household?

unemployed	
retired	
manual worker	
office worker	
shop worker	
manager/director	
public sector	
professional	
student	
self-employed	
Armed Forces	
other	

4. How many children do you have?

none	
1-2	
3-4	
5+	



**Please circle the answers to the following questions:**

5. Were you born in the UK? yes/no
6. Were both your parents born in the UK? yes/no/don't know
7. Were all your grandparents born in the UK? yes/no/don't know
8. Were you born in this National Park? yes/no
9. Do you visit National Parks other than the one you live in? yes/no
10. Please tick your ethnic group

White		
Mixed	African and white	
	Caribbean and white	
	Asian and white	
	any other mixed background	
Asian	Indian	
	Pakistani	
	Bangladeshi	
	any other Asian background	
Black	Caribbean	
	African	
	any other black background	
Chinese		

Any other ethnic group (please say what) .....

**ABOUT VISITORS**

**Please tick whether you strongly agree, slightly agree, have no opinion on, slightly disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements:-**

	strongly agree	agree	no opinion	disagree	strongly disagree
11. visitors are quiet					
12. visitors respect the environment					
13. visitors are friendly					
14. visitors respect local residents					
15. visitors reflect wider English society					
16. visitors drop litter					
17. visitors cause disturbances					

**Please tick to answer the following questions:**

18. What do you think of the number of visitors your area receives on average per year?

	not enough visitors	the right number	too many visitors
a) for community comfort?			
b) for the local economy?			
c) for nature conservation?			

19. It is preferable if visitors mostly come to the NP:

on their own	
in groups of 2-4 people	
in groups of 5-10 people	
in groups of 11+	
about equally in all of the above	

20. Please tick **each of the following activities** that you think are **ACCEPTABLE** on public land in the national park:

going for short walks	
hiking	
picnicking in designated areas	
picnicking at any spot	
going to visitor centres/museums	
visiting heritage sites	
open air concerts	
horse riding	
mountain biking	
rock climbing	
holding cultural events	
holding religious festivals	
holding sporting events	

**Please tick whether you strongly agree, slightly agree, have no opinion on, slightly disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements:-**

	strongly agree	agree	no opinion	disagree	strongly disagree
21. The English countryside plays an important part in the sense of national identity.					
22. Nature plays an important part in your sense of self-identity.					
23. Visitors to the national parks tend to be middle class.					
24. National Parks offer more for the young and fit.					
25. It would be good if more people living in towns visited National Parks.					
26. National Parks cater for all cultures.					
27. National Park residents do not want non-white visitors in their neighbourhoods.					
28. Only quiet activities are allowed in National Parks.					
29. People of all ages can enjoy National Parks.					
30. It's important that people living in towns know more about the countryside.					
31. National parks lack ethnic minority visitors.					
32. Groups within society who do not visit national parks should be actively encouraged to do so.					

**If you have any comments you would like to make, please write them below.  
THANK-YOU VERY MUCH!**

## APPENDIX V: VISIBLE COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP PROFILES

### Middlesbrough

FGp B1 comprised 9 women, 2 aged between 25-34 and the rest 45 and above. Most were from Pakistan, 1 from India. All had lived in England over 15 years. Various identified themselves as British Asian, Pakistani, Pakistani English.

Four languages other than English were spoken, and the two youngest members acted as translators. *Tape recorded.*

FGp B2 comprised 8 young women aged 13-16, all born in England with their parents from Pakistan. Identified themselves as Pakistani. *Tape recorded.*

FGp B3 comprised 6 young men 12-16, all born in England with their parents from Pakistan. 4 identified as Pakistani, 2 as British Asian. *Tape recorded.*

### Sheffield

FGp S1 comprised 9 women from a variety of African and Asian countries (this group was a class learning to speak English), who had lived in England between 6 months and 10 years, and their teacher who had lived here for 27 years. Half the group were asylum seekers. When asked how they identify, all said British. When asked their ethnicity, most said Muslim, with the teacher identifying herself as both Pakistani and British Asian. The teacher acted as translator where necessary. *Tape recorded.*

FGp S2 comprised 2 women and 6 men, aged 25-44. One man was born in Nigeria, and identified as Black British. Everyone else was born in England and identified as Black British or Afro Caribbean. *Notes taken.*

FGp S3 comprised 3 women and 5 men, aged 45-64. All were born in the Caribbean and identified as Black British, Afro Caribbean or both. *Tape recorded.*

## APPENDIX VI: VISIBLE COMMUNITY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROFILES

*(all tape recorded unless otherwise stated)*

### Middlesbrough

- B1 - male, 25-34, Pakistani
- B2 - male, 25-34, British Asian
- B3 - male, 65+, British Hindu, *notes taken*
- B4 - female, 15-24, British Pakistani
- B42 – female, 15-24, British Pakistani (friend of B4 who joined half of the interview)
- B5 - female, 35-44, British Asian
- B6 - male, 35-44, Pakistani
- B7 - female, 45-54, Indian
- B8 - male, 45-54, British Asian, *notes taken*
- B9 - male, 25-35, British Asian, *notes taken*
- B10 - female, 45-54, Pakistani

### Sheffield

- S1 - female, 35-44, Chinese English
- S2 - female, 45-54, British Asian
- S3 - female, 25-34, Black British
- S4 - female, 35-44, Black British
- S5 - male, 25-34, British Pakistani
- S6 - male, 35-44, Ghanaian
- S7 - female, 25-34, mixed race (white and African Caribbean) English
- S8 - male, 35-44, Black British
- S9 - male, 55-64, Black British, *notes taken*
- S10 – female, 25-34, Black British, *notes taken*

## APPENDIX VII: NATIONAL PARK FOCUS GROUP PROFILES

*(all tape recorded)*

### NYM national park

Park Authority Committee group comprised 5 men and 2 women, 1 person under 40 and the rest 45-64, all white.

Senior management group comprised 5 men and 2 women, aged 45-64, all white.

Middle management group comprised 5 men and 3 women, aged 25-44, all white.

Face-to-face<sup>95</sup> staff group comprised 5 men and 1 woman, aged 25-54, all white.

### PD national park

Park Authority Committee group comprised 5 men and 3 women, aged 45-64, 1 British Asian, the rest white.

Senior management group comprised 6 men and 2 women, aged 45-64, all white.

Middle management group comprised 7 men and 1 woman, aged 45-64, all white.

Face-to-face staff group comprised 5 men and 2 women, aged 25-64, all white.

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<sup>95</sup> Staff who routinely meet the public face-to-face on a daily basis, eg. rangers, visitor centre staff, education staff.

