Ethnographic encounters and literary fictions: crossover and synergy between the social sciences and humanities. Statement in support of application for Doctor of Philosophy by published works (1998-2012)

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Blurred lines: from fiction to ethnography and back again

Over the past 14 years, working independently and with other original thinkers, I have produced works that have on two fronts contributed to the evolving understanding of ethnic relations in contemporary Britain. The first is around social/community cohesion, media and representation as well as counter-terrorism policy as explored through the social sciences. The second domain covering the same themes is couched within the humanities, in particular, the production of literary fiction.

At the heart of the discussion that follows is a desire to demonstrate the capacity for crossover, synergy and cross fertilisation between the social sciences and the humanities. Despite an increasing sense of appreciation for the subjective within social science theory and method, thus enabling valid explanations of our actions and behaviours (see for example, Chamberlayne, et al, 2000), there remain fundamental, though arguably irrelevant questions about how scientific some especially qualitative methods are. There is, for example, the oft cited textbook reference to forms of interviewing being categorised as more 'art' than science and led by interviewer 'instinct', experience and insight.

Beyond this frame of reference, I explore the notional disciplinary divisions between art and science, and argue that they can be coalesced through drawing lines of commonality between the practice of ethnography and the writing of literary fiction, with particular focus on the forces and conditions of their production. The discussion, built on these foundational aspects of my academic interests, research, and writings, also relies heavily on established as well as more innovative understandings of disciplinary tropes and their idiosyncrasies.

The mechanics of crossover between literature and social science exist due to a commonality of competencies held by those who operate in both fields. In order to produce rounded and coherent texts, ethnographers have to be able to write well. As a matter of course, they describe, explain and translate the social processes they capture during fieldwork. Once the phases of fieldwork are settled, through thoughtfulness and reflection, the data become coloured with meaning and insight and thus they are presented as texts founded on a degree of holism that is peculiar to this way of doing social research. Similarly, in order to produce rounded works of literature, the novelist or other producer of fiction has to be immersed within the real world so it can be observed, experienced and then written about, albeit with the aid of imagination and the craft of literary authorship. In either case, the significance of the subjective eye is central but tempered with disciplinary norms, conventions and, of course, innovations. Despite this commonality, it is almost as if writers of fiction and those who do ethnography share part of each other's toolkits without even knowing it, such is the lack of affirmation of this synergy between science and art.

As the accompanying evidence demonstrates, I have written and co-written[1] research reports, articles and books which are firmly situated within the social sciences, in particular matters relating to social policy, ethnic relations and multiculturalism. This area of activity, often facilitated through ethnographic research, has fed into another disciplinary interest with its own disciplinary aesthetic and form. Such works of fiction are also included as evidence of my practice and similarly deal in part with ethnic relations, place, as well as the politics (and salience) of identity more generally[2].

The broad framework holding together this discussion, therefore, is a premise which asserts that the humanities and social sciences can, and indeed do, have a close intellectual relationship, especially in terms of how data are generated, interpreted and subsequently presented. This premise is perhaps best symbolised by a number of texts, each of which are themselves products of disciplinary crossover. *Made in Bradford* (2006) and *The Invisible Village* (2011), for example were explicit consequences of academic/social policy research and yet, both were exceptions rather than norms in terms of style, purpose and reach. More often than not, traditional social policy research outputs are aimed at reaching policy makers, academics and students. Traditionally, there is an expectation and perhaps a need for authors of such texts to interpret, analyse and explain their data, even if it is rich and meaningful to begin with. Though this is in itself not necessarily problematic, it could be argued that such practice, perhaps inadvertently, distances the researcher from the researched and, furthermore, disenfranchises the participants as originators and 'owners' of the data, whether data take the form of interview responses, narratives, biographies and oral histories (Alam, 2006, 2011; Letherby, 2003; and see also, for example, Gomm, 2004: 74-75 on value led and partisan research).

Made in Bradford and *The Invisible Village* were constructed around the 'direct' voices of research participants and contain limited/minimal explicit interpretation and analysis. In order to maximise potential audiences, both texts were aimed at a broad readership, including those interested in academic and policy discourse surrounding race, place and social cohesion. In short, both texts are examples of how qualitative social science data can be presented through modes that have more in common with norms associated with the production of literature/literary fiction: both texts depend on voice and narrative rather than academic analysis and argument; both contain the insights and experiences of ordinary people whose voices are often absent from mainstream discourse.

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[1] I continue to enjoy a strong working relationship with Professor Charles Husband, with whom I have co-authored several texts and conducted a number of different research projects. In the main, my contribution to the co-authored texts has been fifty per cent, although with our 2011 book, *Social Cohesion and Counter-terrorism: A Policy Contradiction*, my contribution was thirty per cent.

[2] By this I am referring to a range of connected civic and political rights and aspirations, including respect, equality and acceptance; human rights which continue to be sought by groups that identify themselves as being different to host/mainstream/dominant groups and also through identifying with each other by virtue of common and shared values and concerns. See also Parekh, 2000.

At the same time, these texts and their close cousins in traditional academic ethnographic research are both fundamentally dependent upon the author's 'ear' as a means of hearing the voice of the subject. As such, they are dependent on an editorial selection of material from a much larger set of data. While they contain minimal analysis, it remains the case that data (voices/interviews) were filtered through an editorial eye. However, this is no different to usual ethnographic practice in which interviews and especially observations are interpreted and edited according to the researcher's subjectivity. In traditional and innovative ethnographic practice, the authorial self is central when generating and representing data. Indeed, as Denscombe notes:

> There is some acknowledgement that the ethnographer's final account of the culture or group being studied is more than just a description – it is a *construction*… a crafted construction which employs particular writing skills (rhetoric) and which inevitably owes something to the ethnographer's own experiences. (Denscombe, 2003: 85)

Meanwhile, a number of my literary endeavours can also be framed as connected with social policy grounded research data. The novels *Kilo* (2002) and *Red Laal* (at the time of writing, a forthcoming publication) as well as some short stories (*Taxi Driver*, 2006a; *Junk Food*, 2007; and *Smokes and Dust*, 2010) contain explicit linkages with 'data' that were unearthed during ethnographic research, including interviews as well as observations. Although there could be discussion on or around the ethics of 'plagiarising' even the words of others, it should be noted that for many writers, (self) plagiarism and the theft of ideas, experiences and events belonging to others is the lifeblood of fiction. Indeed, as John Updike states: 'My purpose in reading, has ever secretly been not to come and judge but to come and steal.' (Updike, in Graham, 2007: 32). Commenting on Updike's confession, Graham notes how: 'This, frankly, is what artists do.' Of course, this reference to one aspect of the writer's craft can also be defined as a form of co-opting or appropriating real life for the purpose of creating effective and hopefully interesting works of literature.

Kilo (2002), a novel in which the central character becomes a drug dealer, was built on a combination of imagination and experience. Speaking to people usually informs us of something. It may not be important or especially useful but it is data nonetheless. We also learn about the world without talking to or engaging with people but rather, through observing it and trying to make meaningful that which interests, stimulates or otherwise provokes us. When it comes to creating literature, this perhaps taken-for-granted approach to learning about the world, needs to become a much larger aspect of the writer's craft and practice:

> One of the writer's disciplines is paying close attention to the world you live in… It's watchfulness. It's being aware of your surroundings, of your fellow travellers on the journey we're all on. It's noticing what goes on, what people look like and sound like. It's paying attention to the ways in which they interact. You're part anthropologist and part spy. (Graham, 2007: 14)

Granted, this is an obvious, and in some ways celebrated marker of authorial identity, but it also remains a key facet of ethnographic identity. What follows, therefore, is a discussion around a range of interconnected ideas and themes, all of which are carried by the premise as set out above.

Being ethnographic

Iceberg Slim (born Robert Lee Maupin, also known as Robert Beck), a Black Chicago pimp turned 'street' writer (Pepper, 2000: 80), began his literary career in earnest as a 'pulp' (Perkins, 1996: 42) novelist in the late 1960s. It's probably the case that Iceberg Slim never thought of himself as an ethnographer but he did write 'ethnographic-type' fiction (Cassuto, 2009: 214). Whether he knew it or not, the social scene in which he took part can be considered an ethnographic field. Field selection and definition is largely dependent on the imagination and creativity of the ethnographer in as much as 'Ethnographic fields *do not exist* beyond the imaginings of the ethnographer' (Madden, 2010: 38). Of course, this is an interpretation, retrospectively superimposed on Slim's mode of operation; how and the extent to which he drew on his well of life experience in his writings is not at question here, but the existentially founded assertion that he wrote 'what he knew' can be made with some confidence. All writers, regardless of their preferred genre or discipline, produce texts in tandem with aspects of their selves. Even writers of science-fiction form characters, conflicts and resolutions through the lens of their own lived experience while their powers of imagination, creativity and craft do the work of further artistic refinement. As such, the writings of Iceberg Slim, or any other writer for that matter, can be used as primary source evidence about the writers themselves or their world (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001: 162). Fictional worlds, therefore, remain always connected to the domain of reality (Daley, 2003; Denscombe, 2003; Graham, 2007; King, 2000; Mills, 2006; Wandor, 2008).

In the preface of Slim's novel *Mama Black Widow* (1969), Otis Tilson, the subject upon whom the novel is based, informs the author:

> my real reason for telling my story is… for my poor dead Papa and myself and the thousands of black men like him in the ghetto torture chambers who have been and will be niggerized and deballed by the white power structure and its thrill-kill police.

After extending the explanation with the same passion and hurt, Otis asks Slim if the recording device is switched on:

> I nodded.
> He said, 'I guess you'll have to erase what I said. I got carried away. I'll be careful and watch my language.'
> I said, 'The hell you will. Any book I have any connection with has to tell it like it is. You were beautiful. The gutsy language is you, the street and life, and it's real. (Iceberg Slim, 1969: vi)

Throughout his writing career, Slim's fictions – often based on real people with whom he interacted[3] – had clear connections with his own social milieu.

[3] In some cases, Slim adopted the practice of interviewing individuals as a means of generating their stories and subsequently presenting them as 'characters', often protagonists of their own, real but recalled and fictionalised narratives.

Unsurprisingly, Slim's biography – including the aspects of his identity (ethnicity, class, upbringing, etc.) which to whatever extent shaped his life chances and directions – is evident in his writing.

Through Slim's fiction it's also clear that the world he inhabited was partly characterised by racial discrimination, social deprivation and crime. However, his novels reveal stoicism, resilience and strength, often borne of necessity rather than choice. His characters, invariably *lumpen* in terms of their economic position and means of earning income (crime, prostitution, etc.), were also invariably political and outspoken. Unlike Marx's notion of a *lumpenproletariat* being unlikely to achieve class consciousness (Manning, 1998: 98), Slim's characters were all too aware of their social position and the ideological significance formed by the crosscurrents of gender, race and class. For example, when Soldier, a peripheral character in *Mama Black Widow*, takes it upon himself to educate the novel's central character and his family about the roles and function of the police, corruption at the individual level relatively quickly becomes linked with wider, more structural and systemic discrimination and oppression:

> Sometimes fairly decent human beings join the [police] force. They don't stay long after they find out they're a part of a vicious system that has a license to maim and murder black people in the street. But too many white cops in the ghetto are just thugs. They try to kill hope in black people so that the black man especially is niggerized and becomes a drunken bum in the ghetto. (Iceberg Slim, 1969: 55-56)

The eyes of Iceberg Slim were clearly not bound by the constraints of life in the ghetto, nor were they blinkered by his erstwhile role as pimp, player or hustler. Rather, through observation and participation, he generated data which in turn created stories, themselves repositories of insight grounded in realities that readers – distant and close by – could perhaps understand, but not necessarily recognise as part of their own world. Nevertheless, it is valuable to consider such writings as having relatively loose ethnographic roots and, as such, illustrate the power and scope of ethnography.

One of the problems with even traditionally accepted forms of ethnography is that they appear not to possess the clear and rigid boundaries that other methodological approaches and styles seem to have. Indeed,

> the humans that do ethnography and the humans that are the subject of ethnographic research are too complicated and 'messy' to allow ethnography to be understood in neat and simple terms. (Madden, 2010: 15)

Alongside positing us all as being 'messy' and complex beings, Madden is also referring to the cloud of attributes, competencies and skills that ethnographers learn, develop and exploit including the desire to recognise and attend to human processes. Arguably, ethnography chooses its researcher, not the other way around. To be an ethnographer an ethnographic disposition has to already be a part of the researcher's identity and interpersonal style. As such, it may even be possible to be doing ethnography without fully realising it. Similarly, it's not uncommon to 'feel' as if

nothing ethnographic is happening during what is only later considered an ethnographic encounter:

> My initial experiences were nothing if not familiar and, in a strange way, comfortable. The first meeting went so well as to be somewhat disappointing – it struck me as being un-ethnographic. Instead of stumbling along trying desperately to fit in I was sitting back in a comfortable office with a cup of tea, having a nice chat. (Madden, 2010: 46-47).

Ethnography has well rehearsed connections with the anthropological tradition (Alasuutari, 1998; Denscombe, 2003; Madden, 2010; Sarantakos, 1998). However, there exist further, deeper sociological roots, also. Max Weber[4], for example, paid a great deal of attention to the notions of 'value freedom' and 'value neutrality' as means to ensure outcomes and explanations were not overly influenced by biases held by the researcher. In addition, he adopted

> a verstehen approach, which means the attempt to see the world from the point of view of the person or the group being studied, as their outlook is an essential element in understanding why they do the things they do… (David and Sutton, 2004: 39)

An important aspect of most qualitative research is for the researcher to gain meaningful access to and engagement with their research sample. Doing so establishes a greater likelihood of eliciting rich and 'honest' data, and thus yielding a high level of validity. With ethnography, there is a realisation the research is also likely to produce acquaintanceships, and even friendships that last beyond the scope of formal research. The pretext for such research requires the researcher not to be 'neutral, distant or emotionally uninvolved…. The researcher's empathy, sensitivity, humor, and sincerity are important tools for the research.' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 12). The relationship between the researcher and the researched therefore has a capacity to become close but blurred and adaptive; research subjects become more than mere carriers of data. This is especially so when there is a further commonality between both parties, be they natural lines of empathy linked with gender, class, ethnicity or even if connections are subcultural in nature. The relationship can become tighter still if the researcher happens to be, or have the credentials of, an insider. Devine and Heath (1999) offer some insights regarding this aspect of research through discussing Sasha Roseneil's *Disarming Patriarchy* (1995),

> a fascinating chronicle of the experiences which she and thousands of others shared as 'Greenham women' during the early 1980s… *Disarming Patriarchy* is as much about Roseneil's own memories of the social setting she is researching… her research provides an intriguing example of a form of 'insider research' and highlights the impact that a researcher's own beliefs and experiences will have

[4] Similarly, Patterson, in his 2009 text *Karl Marx, Anthropologist*, sets out a convincing argument reappraising the empirical aspect of Marx's ideas and work. While Marx and Engels are not explicitly defined as ethnographers first and foremost, they nevertheless relied upon aspects of ethnography in order to develop their ideas in conjunction with their experiences, interpretations and analyses of the social world. Inherent to this is the notion that social research has to be concerned with human variety, contradiction and frailty, all of which requires emotional and intellectual contact.

> on the conduct of their own work. (Devine and Heath, 1999: 175)

The researcher's personal baggage is often an aspect that is either overcome through remedies which enable a greater deal of 'objectivity', or embraced so that the research itself is unconditionally value-led, partisan and perhaps even emancipatory. In acknowledging their own identity, researchers

> specifically select topics for research on the basis of their moral or political values, do the researching in such a way as to maximise the chances of the findings which promote those values and use the findings in ways that will have the moral or political consequences they desire. (Gomm, 2004: 275)

Arguably this is true for all 'good' research: research that the researcher has faith in and is carried out with rigour and passion so that the end results are credible, interesting and to whatever constituencies, relevant and important. Even for undergraduate students, doing their small research projects or dissertations, it is important to identify topics and themes with which there is personal interest and investment.

Making connections through forms of verbal and nonverbal interaction are huge aspects of the ethnographer's personal and professional portfolio as is the capacity to listen. In Les Back's *The Art of Listening* (2007), the author walks his reader through an array of topics and moments – ranging from the injustice, dehumanisation and zealous bureaucracy that accompanies immigration control and border policy, to the social, physical and spiritual aftermath of the 7/7 bombings in London. In each case, the movement of people through time, space and culture is captured. There is little explicit mention of ethnography but the book is personal and relies on the symbiosis of autobiography, observation, analytic thought and craft. Throughout, there remains the celebration of a living sociological imagination:

> We speak a lot about society but all too often listen to the world within limited frequencies. I am proposing an approach to listening that goes beyond this, where listening is not assumed to be a self-evident faculty that needs no training…. The lacklustre prose of methodological textbooks often turns the life in the research encounter into a corpse fit only for an autopsy. (Back, 2007: 163)

In ethnography, there has also been an expectation that the intrepid researcher has to form links to gain access which will then result in a gradual growth in the richness of data. The truth is, however, that ethnography has within it both rigidity and looseness; there has to be some degree of concreteness and routinisation – especially in the analysis of data, for example – but this is tempered by the need for the ethnographer to be reflective; to set a scene and describe a field, its actors and processes when representing the range of data encountered or otherwise generated. As such, ethnographic texts are shaped by human hands in the same way that all research products are constructions. Indeed, 'As a form of writing, ethnography can be called fiction in the sense of something 'made or fashioned' (Alasuutari, 1998: 75).

Unlike most literary fiction, ethnographic products are usually an explicit combination of social science acumen, including the dovetailing of theory with empirical data, and the capacity to communicate to the reader the subjective, personal and reflective interpretations the ethnographer makes. Indeed, the ethnographer embodies a collection of methodological instruments which in turn yield data as interview, observation and reflection. However, this embodiment goes beyond professional identity and skill-set and reaches deeper, into the emotional, political and personal aspects of the self. Literary fiction, meanwhile – in particular that which explores issues linked with identity/identity politics – can also depend on similar ideas around aspects of the creative, professional and especially political self. To produce realistic representations of the world, all writers have to engage with it. However, when ethnographers reveal the lives of their sites and subjects, they often need to politically and professionally invoke social science theory in order to 'tell' the reader how any data should be interpreted. The literary author, however, having revealed elements of their characters, invites readers to come to their own conclusions. This can become a source of tension for those with a foot in each disciplinary camp, but the position allows for a greater capacity to see, hear and represent data in different ways.

Why write

Before proceeding to discuss the relevance of writing that occurs at, or somehow represents (by design or by unintended outcome) the 'margins', it's useful to offer some context explaining why writer's write. In broad terms, a number of contexts and motivations seek to explain such elements of the authorial self. On the one hand, there is the notion that writers write because they are talented and therefore destined, perhaps compelled to write; a position which suggests a 'writerly' identity is at play (Hunt and Sampson, 1998). George Orwell in his essay, *Why I Write* (1946), however, offered four reasons or motives: 'sheer egoism', 'historical impulse', 'aesthetic enthusiasm' and finally, 'political purpose' (Orwell, 1984: 4-6). The first and the last motives appear to be driven by ego. The second and third motives focus on sharing or recording interpretations, and facts, about the world; and are also connected to ego in as much as they further reflect the author's desire to take up the zeitgeist. As Orwell stated in relation to the first motive, however, all writers he considered to be essentially egotistic and driven by a

> Desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death, to get your own back on the grown-ups who snubbed you in childhood, etc., etc. It is humbug to pretend this is not a motive, and a strong one. (Orwell, 1984: 4)

In relation to 'political purpose', however, Orwell used the term in the 'widest possible sense' but maintained this motive was based on a need to 'push the world in a certain direction, to alter other peoples' idea of the kind of society that they should strive after.' Orwell went to on to press the notion that all books are political in essence and therefore the view that 'art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude' (ibid.: 5). Either way, it is the writer's desire to be heard that is key. It is reasonable to assert, therefore, that writers write because they have something to write about. However, when dealing with the interpretation of literature, specifically poetry, Wimsatt and

Beardsley (1946) assert that it is the word on the page, not the forces that put it there, that is worthy of scrutiny. The intentions of authors are therefore irrelevant when trying to understand their texts: 'the design or the intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art' (Lodge, in Pope, 2002: 84).

Similarly, the arguments put forward by Barthes privilege the reader's insight over the author's intentions and desires. For Barthes, how a work is interpreted depends on the reader's eye as opposed to the aims of the author. In effect, 'a text's meaning lies not in its origins but in its destination' (Barthes, 1977: 148; see also, Allen, 2003). As such, the text's life course is infinitely varied, each interpretation as individual as each reading. While upholding that texts only have life and meaning at the moment they are read, there arises a paradox as such positions also deny readers, critics or analysts the scope to look outside of the texts in order to gain different insights and explanations that reveal further meaning[5]. By denying the capacity for readers to generate interpretations outside of their own subjectivity, channels of possible meaning become closed. Therefore, the essence of the position is undermined as interpretation becomes wholly subjective, isolated from the constraints of writers' intentions and their identities. This position considers literature as artefacts devoid of context once they are ready to be received (Habib, 2008: 27-28). As such, this genre of 'new criticism' has been in large part at odds with later literary theory which explores writing that seems to be a result of the author's place in the world, whether it is reflective of marginality or not. Here, there is a link to be made with the notion of 'committed', or politically grounded social scientists writing within a hegemonic set of (to be contested) 'definitions of the situation' which frame consensually agreed upon 'problems': 'Islamic' radicalisation, youth crime, teenage mothers, etc. In such contexts the author and the reader will have at least a minimally shared perspective in producing and receiving the text[6].

Representation and the postcolonial critique

To some extent, and as implied above, writers take on the challenge of 'representation', an 'essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture' (Hall, 1997: 15). There are two important facets of representation: to 'describe or depict it [a thing/idea], to call it up in mind by description or portrayal or imagination; to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses,' and that of 'symbolism', when one thing stands for, or is a symbol for the thing being represented (Hall, 1997: 16). In the context of postcolonial literatures, part of what is being represented is the unwieldy assemblage that constitutes race and its adjuncts: exotic, 'Other-ly' ways of seeing, being and believing – culture, values, attitudes are all somehow woven into the fabric of the texts in

[5] This also raises the paradox that in the academic world, and within literature, authors may be criticised for their politics as read/interpreted through their works.

[6] Of course, paradoxically, it also follows that they may both be operating within a 'dominant' political paradigm (anti-racism, multiculturalism, neo-liberalism) which, at a later date, may well be critiqued as being fundamentally flawed.

question. For writers and artists that are categorised as being or belonging to the category *Other*[7], this has political significance:

> The desire to 'correct' the omissions of the past within the western avant-garde… has led to a one-sided fixation with ethnicity as something that 'belongs' to the Other alone, thus white ethnicity is not under question and retains its 'centred' position; more to the point, the white subject remains the central reference point in the power ploys of multicultural policy. The burden of representation thus falls on the Other, because as Fusco argues, 'to ignore white ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony by naturalising it.' (Julien and Mercer, 1996: 457)

Because the *Other* is a projection of racialised discourse and racialisation (Evans and Hall, 1999), then it follows that the *burden of representation* has to be an inherently political idea and practice that spans across art forms within which the artist's text, somehow, stands for or represents group identity and reality. Representation is also a powerful aspect of broader forms of mass media, in particular cinema (Procter, 2004; Branston, 2000) wherein the power of symbolic representation can with ease adopt, develop and perpetuate racial stereotypes and discourse[8]. In addition, yet conversely, representation remains a beacon through which black and minority artists are able to channel their personal and community politics, giving voice to experiences and insights that would otherwise remain obscured.

At the same time, representation has at its heart an inbuilt, automatic and seemingly natural disposition toward the exotic; that which is (racially/culturally) different to that which is (racially/culturally) neutral (or white). To some extent, the marginality of postcolonial literatures parallels the modality of social science research, especially that which is ethnographic in nature. 'The Tearoom Trade' (Humphreys, 1970), 'A Glasgow Gang Observed' (Patrick, 1973), 'The Pakistanis' (Saifullah Khan, 1977), 'Inside the British Police' (Holdaway, 1983) and others contain either exotic, deviant, unusual or risky themes which are more attractive and 'meaty' than ethnographies of the banal and everyday.

Postcolonial writing

[7] See Guillaumin (1995: 49-56) for a discussion on the workings of the auto (self) and altero (Other) referential system which continues to help perpetuate the validity of race as well processes of racialisation.

[8] One site in which a particularly interesting representation is framed can be seen in Shakespeare's Othello and ensuing literary/academic analyses: 'For years critics refused to acknowledge that Othello is meant to be black – they argued endlessly that he was actually some shade of brown, not really 'Negroid', or was 'white' inside' (Loomba, 1998: 84). If Othello was white, then the play was a metaphor about masculine traits, the prevalence of patriarchy as well as the capacity for women to stir jealousies in men. However, if Othello was read as a black man, then the story itself and Othello's jealousy was just as easily, perhaps more conveniently, framed by his blackness: lower order intelligence, base morality and the irrationality inherent to racially inferior peoples explained everything important about the narrative and Othello's identity as a force in shaping it. In either reading, the significance of race and racism is central.

Postcolonial forms of literature (novels, plays, poems, etc.) and the accompanying critical and theoretical approach 'is rooted in the history of imperialism' (Habib, 2011: 270). There has been synergy between postcolonial literature and its study, especially 'the period of theoretical activism in the 1970s and early 1980s' (Ayers, 2008: 192). In the 1980s, however, the body of theoretical writing around postcoloniality and literature became a more rigorous area of academic interest[9]. From the outset the academic footings were political and emancipatory in nature:

> Postcolonial criticism has embraced a number of aims: most fundamentally, to re-examine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of decolonization; and, above all, to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination and the articulation of political and cultural identities. (Habib, 2011: 272)

Inherent to postcolonial literatures are the considerations given to the authorial identity which produces 'migrant' and 'diasporic' literatures that appear relevant to whole communities, nations or peoples that are further defined by historical and 'psychic' memories of marginality. For example, when exploring the earlier work of V. S. Naipaul, Susheila Nasta notes:

> Naipaul's project can be seen to be one which is firmly located in the need to comes to terms with the effects of the 'passing away' of Empire, but, more significantly, in the writing and the rewriting of the self within the trauma of that history, which he has viewed as the psychic losses created by being both a participant and victim of imperial process. (Nasta, 2002: 94)

Here, Wimsatt and Beardsley's (1946) 'intentional fallacy' thesis can be exploited to apply one critique of postcolonial theory but Sarte's more existential musings offer another angle. For Sartre, writing remains incomplete until reading, a position shared with Barthes. At the heart of this position, however, is the assertion that literary form and function is tied to broader ideological forces; but at the same time, ideology itself and the writer's politics should somehow be consciously detached from the text. Although this appears to hold a contradiction, perhaps symbolised by Sartre's own writings, there results an attractive, though not entirely convincing, premise in which the writer channels the text; informed by a context, but unable to give an absolute truth to it:

> It is not true that a writer transmits his sufferings and his faults to the absolute when he writes about them; it is not true that he saves them… it is with words and not with his troubles that the writer makes his books… One no more *puts* one's misfortunes into a book than one puts a model on the canvass; one is inspired by them, and they remain what they are. (Sartre [1950] in Burke, 1995: 224)

Sartre's existentially loaded premise also exemplifies the value and power of individual agency, choice and freedom and also appears to be a position

[9] In the 1960s, however, there was a struggle to actually give a meaningful name for this emerging branch of study which resulted in a range of temporary terms, including 'Commonwealth', 'Third world' and even 'colonial' literature/s (Ashcroft et al, 2002: 22).

suggesting the authorial role and function is, largely, to create art for art's sake. Writers, therefore, would write even if they had nothing 'important' or meaningful to write about. However, Sartre's acknowledgement of how 'the conditions of its [writing's] production' (Mills, 2006: 7) colour the writer's palette also positions writing as a cathartic and therapeutic tool[10]. Postcolonial writing, however, has been a vehicle through which the experience of oppression, struggle and forms of pain has been transmitted and thus is a medium of resistance and liberation.

Being 'ethnic-graphic'

The relationship between author and text underwent a fundamental shift with the fall out of *The Satanic Verses* (Rushdie, 1989). For some, as noted above, a text becomes separate from the author once it is ready to be received, but Rushdie's text became an example in which the premise of the intentional fallacy was rendered redundant. One aspect of the intentional fallacy is that everything that occurs within a narrative ought to be attributed to its world and its characters, whether they are central or on the periphery. The world of the text has its own laws, internal consistencies, dynamics and systems; it may well echo or even mirror our real world, but it is a false world, a world that can only be made real at the moment of reading at which point the reader 'suspends disbelief'. Consequently, the hand, intention and voice of the author remain absent. However, the discourse around *The Satanic Verses* clearly demonstrated that the author was not dead after all, with Akhtar (1989) and especially Ruthven (1991) arguing that Rushdie's own identity was linked with the point, and purpose, of his book.

If authors can be further associated with those about whom they write, then their worldly authority becomes all the more present. For Khan, such 'ethnic informers' have the capacity to relocate the hegemonic struggle (of representation, colonialism, etc.) from 'the frontier' to the internal realm of the group in question (2006: 186). While Khan explores this idea through analysing *The Rushdie Affair*, the same argument holds with Hanif Kureishi, Monica Ali and others who appear to have:

> internalised the racist and orientalist readings of Islam that colour the dominant discourse. The authority of the ethnic informer, typified by figures such as Rushdie or Hanif Kureishi, derives from the ostensible claim to access both worlds; however, as the 'insider' echoing the hegemonic constructions of the 'outsider', such an individual reinforces the allied processes of pathologisation and of depoliticisation by providing an authentic note of endorsement to prevailing relations of power. (Khan, 2006: 186)

By virtue of having a particular visible ethnic identity which yields access to the worlds of 'us' and 'them', claims of authenticity are all the more convincing. 'Ethnic' credentials operate in conjunction with an artistic frame within which

[10] See, for example, Hunt, 2000; Bolton, 1999; Lodge: 1996. Indeed, as Graham Greene noted: 'Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human situation.' (Greene, 1980: 9).

the ‘ethnic experience’ can be held, reproduced and represented. The resulting authenticity is tantamount to a form of endorsement in which real and fictional worlds coalesce. This melding became a core aspect of *The Rushdie Affair*; that his work, albeit a subversion of an existing worldly narrative around ‘early’ Islam, implied a reality through the cover of art. Once published, and after Ayatollah Khomenei had issued a fatwa against Rushdie calling for his death (a real death, not one linked with literary criticism), the author found himself:

> in the worst possible situation: his stated intentions are not considered relevant to a reading of his work, but the text is used to ascribe intentions, desires and crimes to its author. By an ironic reversal of the intentional fallacy, the author becomes the creation of the text. In the aftermath of the novel’s publication a major concern for many participants in this affair has been the construction of an author to fit a particular reading of the book. (Fhlathuin, 1994: 277)

There were several aspects to *The Rushdie Affair*, literary criticism being low in terms of significance. However, the book itself was ‘political not merely because it claims to speak of political matters, but because it intervenes in political confrontations already in place’ (Asad, 1990: 242). Authors whose works ‘represent’ concerns and experiences of those deemed marginal often aim to construct narratives from their usually sympathetic vantage point. Rushdie’s novel did something quite different as it appeared to perpetuate, rather than challenge orientalist representations (see Akhtar, 1989; Mukherjee, 1990; Pipes, 1990). Whether or not Rushdie’s ‘intentions’ were relevant or apparent, the controversy was emblematic of a growing ‘Muslim’ community, and consciousness[11] in Britain, and symbolised the extent to which literature, even if it was defined by the author as essentially fiction, could indeed impact the real world and real lives.

Politics and postcolonial literature

It may appear that writers whose work is classified or represented as ‘postcolonial’ suffer the bind, or burden, of representation. For good or ill, imperialisms and their corollaries often come to define the work in question, or become contextual prisms through which texts are refracted, interpreted and understood. The same applies to the broader definition of writing to which postcolonial literature belongs. As Connor puts it:

> Other work, particularly in the area of cultural politics, aims to extend the project of articulating the margins… This work is concerned with such things as the analysis and promotion of working-class culture, women’s and popular culture, colonial, post-colonial and ‘Third World’ writing… Though it continues to gnaw at the edges of literature, it is a fact that such work remains, or continues to be seen as, self-evidently marginal. (Connor, 1990: 746)

[11] This Muslim ‘consciousness’ was often represented as generally ‘fundamentalist’ and worked usually in stark opposition to a ‘liberal West’. In many senses, supporters of Rushdie (including, perhaps most notably, the proto feminist writer Fay Weldon) were themselves just as ideologically, and fundamentally wedded to a liberal worldview in which the new thought police (Islam), and its code (the ‘Koran’ [sic]) were at odds with the West (see, for example, Weldon, 1989).

Admittedly, the marginality in question is somewhat valorised, and to an extent perpetuated, by a self referential cadre of scholars (most notably Homi K. Bhaba, Gayatri C. Spivak, and Stuart Hall) who define its essential moral virtue and political, arguably radical, essence. Within the scope and curiosity of such literary criticism and analysis, attention is often paid to the experience and voice of the Other. That postcolonial writing is especially about voice, being heard or somehow emoting the decreasingly monolithic 'postcolonial': marginality, discrimination and, indeed, the aftershocks of empires past and ongoing are all somehow (more) relevant to non-White writers, no matter where they are 'from', how old they are or the genres in which they write. For many non-White writers, these are indeed salient aspects of their authorial-personal-political identity; in some cases, heritage and historical memory is a strong motivator for literature to be created in the first place. Indeed, this reinforces the study of postcolonial literatures as being firmly established on solid intellectual and political foundations (see Loomba, 1998; Mcleod, 2000; Nasta, 2002; Lane, 2006).

Postcolonial literature, then, also has the capacity to liberate otherwise unheard voices precisely because it is a form partly defined by marginality. Of course, postcolonial writing is not universally about correcting, or even voicing, previous wrongs; but without a colonial reference point, there is no postcolonial present to be anchored to. Within postcolonial fictions, however, there are examples in which authors rebalance and resituate the colonial subject whereby 'race', class and gender are markers that complement the broader, yet more acutely oppressive, social relations afforded by imperialisms. Postcolonial writers, therefore, by definition, overtly or covertly, intentionally and unintentionally, commit political acts in their work. This is true for all writers, but in the context of postcolonialism, the political impetus appears to be more explicit, intense and formative.

During the 19th century, White colonial writers were similarly infusing their literature with political consciousness, often brought into relief through exploring issues to do with the maintenance of colonial control, critiques of 'natives' and their cultures as well as nostalgia for Europe. Writers who were colonial subjects of Empire, however, dealt with the experience of rule and brought to the fore the reality of racial and economic oppression as well as the changes in nature, culture and tradition afforded by colonialism and modernity. Literature produced by both oppressor and the oppressed is unified through the exploitation of dramatic opposition and contrast wherein, for example, race (blackness) is juxtaposed against non-race (whiteness), justice against injustice, power against oppression. Menace, instability, corruption, and resistance are relayed from different vantage points. Even today, postcolonial literature is as political as it is literary in as much as it continues to explore issues of (in)equality, (in)justice and oppression. Within contemporary writing that is both produced in Britain and in its former colonies, questions about independence/autonomy, poverty, corruption and political change abound[12]

[12] See, for example, C. L. R. James' *Minty Alley* (1936); George Lamming's *The Castle of my Skin* (1953) and *The Emigrants* (1954); Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* (1956); Mumtaz Shahnawaz's *The Heart Divided* (1959); Zulfikar Ghose's *The Murder of Aziz Khan* (1967);

but remain located to a heritage in which the colonial past continues to reach into and touch the postcolonial present.

Postcolonial literature offers insights into the struggles of people and places before, during or after gaining independence but it also continues to develop in range and scope. It is an expanding area of work in which the former colonial subject is not as closely connected to empire and its oppressions, but still remains a product of it. In the main, such literature has embedded within it a politics of identity, a literature of belonging and discovery[13]. Arguably, aspects of mainstream writing craft and skill (plot, structure and even story) are vehicles servicing the postcolonial author's intentions, ideas and identity. Such literature, unlike conventional 'genre based' writing, goes beyond plot, story and character. Rather, this kind of mimetic fiction is more likely to be read as a way of allowing especially uninitiated readers glimpses into worlds usually removed and absent. Postcolonial literature, therefore, is expanding at the same rate as the people it 'represents'. As a body of work, it continues to reflect, bring into focus and give voice to a range of experiences that would remain obscured. For some, this may be problematic, while for others it rightfully burdens art with social and political power.

The capacity and desire to resist even subtle, but none the less disempowering and flattening forces of colonialism is significant in the theoretical work of Frantz Fanon (*Black skin, white masks*, 1967) and Edward Said[14] (*Orientalism,* 1978). Indeed, resistance and discontinuity are both key in understanding the debates feeding into the postcolonial experience itself. However, within the work of both writers is a refutation of a world comprised of simplistic binary oppositions; be they places, people, their histories and their presents. In their respective ways, both challenge the assertion that identity is fixed, natural or devoid of manipulation and fluidity. Indeed, the postcolonial theory that such writers developed 'suggests that there are other narratives, other histories which have been subsumed and which need to be recovered' (Ahluwahlia, 2001: 71).

One criticism of Said's focus was its limitations, Orientalism concerning the representation of those peoples with direct experience of 'Western' imperialism. True, Said's argument was geared acutely around the Middle East and although he did not explore the extent to which indigenous peoples of Asia, South America, North America or Australasia are subject to the same ideological apparatus, it is the concept's framework generally that can be applied at any time and any place[15]. That is, the details may be different, but

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Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) (see Brander [1968] for an in depth discussion on two of Ahmed Ali's novels.

[13] In parallel to this development within postcolonial literature and theory, there has been a development in political philosophy, and political culture, as the politics and recognition are challenged by the politics of identity. See, for example Taylor (2004, 1992).

[14] See Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 1999; Ahluwalia, 2001; Loomba, 1998 for discussions on both Fanon and Said.

[15] An interesting, and arguably overlooked example, of earlier orientalism can be found in some of Shakespeare's works, including *The Merchant of Venice*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* and, of course, *Othello*. For an in depth exposition of race and Shakespeare, and more generally race in the Elizabethan period, see Alexander and Wells (2000) and also

the mechanics and processes are often identical; a ruling or powerful actor has the means and capacity to represent a less powerful actor for a given end or vested interest. Orientalism, therefore, is neither normative, neutral nor natural but rather is based on bias, prejudice and power[16].

There is a further problem with the term Orientalism as there are a diversity of nations and peoples that are all classified as belonging to the same 'orient'. However, the ideological function of Orientalism rests with Western definitions of non-Westerners. Disparate and diverse, perhaps, but *they* may as well belong to the same homogenous block: they're not like *us* (White/European heritage) so they are something else; *their* difference defines them in relation to us and us in relation to *them*. A particular and idealised image of neutral and normative humanity is thus realised in tandem with its non-White non-European binary. As such, Said's *Orientalism* especially is a political treatise aimed at propagating a theoretical paradigm in which inequality and deficiencies in justice can be rendered visible, critiqued and challenged. Said's critique[17] is a response to imperialism but also aims to ensure we are not bound by identity in such ways that constrain our intellectual capacities, and perhaps more dangerously impose our cultures on others.

The Black author and hybridity

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the British Empire's racial Others found space to undertake the task of self representation through literature. Prior to this, there are a small number of examples whereby Black writing was formally published and even had political impact. In the late 18th century, *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, An African* was published in 1782 after the author's death. A few years later, Olaudah Equiano (also known as Gustavus Vassa), aged 44, published his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African.*

Habib (1999). See also Kabbani, 1994; Weir, 2011; Tromans, 2008; MacKenzie, 1995; for a specifically feminist reading of orientalism, see Yegenoglu, 1998; and for representations of the East in cinema, see Bernstein and Studlar, 1997.

[16] For Foucault, knowledge, power and language are situated within a fluid ideological matrix in which meanings are unstable and varied, thus undermining theoretical positions which claim to hold universal validity. In essence, meaning and knowledge are themselves hegemonic constructs and come to be by virtue of a myriad of infinite contexts all of which feed into and out of each other, forming a belief system that creates and maintains itself. As such, language, meaning and power are all dependent on each other. See Foucault (1989, 1972) and Rabinow (1991), for example).

[17] In turn, there has been a series of strong counter narratives to Said's position by writers such as Varisco (2008), Ibn Warraq (2007) and especially Lewis (1993) whose critiques, taken collectively, range from Said's lack of methodological validity, Said's capacity to blur the lines between political/polemical and scholarly writing, the notion that orientalism was not indeed an aspect of western imperialisms but existed as an earlier, more benign feature of European intellectualism. For Warraq, Said's writing contained outright misinterpretation and misrepresentation of historical 'fact'. At the same time, however, the work of Halliday in some ways develops and takes Said's points even further by insisting on the historicity of what he terms 'anti-Muslimism' (Halliday, 1996).

Both texts had some impact, with Equiano's[18] work feeding into the movement to end slavery (Mcleod, 2000: 206).

By the mid twentieth century, writers such as Sam Selvon and George Lamming had based themselves in Britain, but their literature took place in their homelands (pre- and post-independence) and was still concerned with freedom, justice as well as the aspiration for and later impact of independence. Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* (1957), however, was one of the first that followed the experiences of both recent and establishing immigrants from the Caribbean and can be read as an emblematic post migration but pre-settlement narrative. It was not until the 1980s that new voices in the British literary scene started to write from their 'British born' vantage points. For the first time, Black and South Asian writers were exploring 'dual' cultural heritage alongside newer, hybrid forms of Britishness. By now, second and third generation Black and South Asian heritage Britons, by virtue of birthplace and its attendant cultures, had the natural capacity and opportunity to be socialised as both British and Black/South Asian.

For second and third generation British born South Asians, there was tendency for them to be perceived as existing 'between' cultures[19], an issue later supplanted by more acute questions around citizenship, belonging and loyalty with specific reference to aspects of faith (Muslim) identity. For those born here, the idea of Britishness continues to be mediated through the usual secondary channels of socialisation including media and education, and also through our day to day, tactile lives where the influence of peer groups and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods remains salient.

The cultural identity of British born South Asians, in relation to their parents at least, evolved quickly and greatly over the last thirty years as has that of the indigenous British. Foreign words continue to enter the vocabulary while English words are occasionally appropriated, reinvented and given new meaning. Similarly, the realm of popular music has grown larger with the appropriation of new influences, techniques and instruments (see, for example, Hyder, 2004; Sharma et al, 1996; Huq, 2007, 2006; Jazeel, 2005). British culinary culture has also undergone innovations with the advent of various modifications of 'authentic' 'ethnic' foods; the chicken tikka masala being one of the most quoted examples of a dish invented in Britain for an apparently homogenous white British palate.

Although the process of cultural mixing, and the creation of hybrid identities continues to have salience even today, it's not a recent phenomena. Indeed, the notion of hybridity had been a cause for concern in the nineteenth century and described risks posed by 'ethnic' miscegenation (see Young, 1995). Inter-

[18] Equiano became an important figure in the abolitionist movement.

[19] This 'between cultures' paradigm was said to have elicited a confusion in the management of ethnic/national identity, thus explaining a range of shortcomings including educational and economic underachievement on the one hand, and difficulties with 'integration' on the other. In addition, the tensions borne of living two lives (one at home and one outside of home, in school, for example), also helped problematise whole generations in terms of the ethnic and, to a lesser extent, class positions. (See for example Anwar, 1998; Watson, 1977).

ethnic relationships are generally seen as less problematic today but hybridity remains tightly linked to 'visible' ethnicities wherein 'colour' continues to signify racial and cultural difference. By virtue of its openness and fluidity, hybridity allows us to account for instability, variance and further social and cultural evolutions. However, it can also lose value and meaning in the way that is common to much postmodern terminology and discourse; nothing has absolute, or any agreed upon meaning or definition, but everything is contingent on everything else.

Contemporary understandings of cultural hybridity rely on the assertion that it is a direct consequence of colonialism. Without the 'colonial contact' (Loomba, 1998: 72), the production and development of new cultures, their diasporas, creolisations and mixings would not have occurred (Gilroy; 1993). In addition, actual places wherein initial and subsequent colonial contacts took place continue to carry significance. Sites of colonisation remain important as do the homes of the colonial power in which the former colonial subject became later situated (Anderson, 2001). Postcolonial identity itself has been viewed as a multiplicity of identities – different aspects of a single but not necessarily unified whole; ethnicity, generation, gender, memory and state or place are all significant markers. Linked in with hybridity, of course, is the relevance of diaspora, a term referring to:

> particular kinds of migrant journeys, lives and political contexts. It developed from efforts to distinguish types of global migration, usually conflated in labour market models, which assume that people are mobile labour power in search of rational economic advantage… diasporas are a blend of roots and routes: adjacent maps of connection and disconnection. (Alexander and Knowles, 2005: 7-8)

Like diaspora, hybridity has the capacity to be an all encompassing term which, ironically enough, counters the sense of specificity it possesses. In other words, as far as literature and representation goes, hybridity can become a veneer which glosses over the particularities of individual writers, discounting the salience of their social and political conditions which elicit particular narratives, histories and trajectories.

Coupled with the themes within postcolonial literature, there are a number of existing 'constituencies' in which postcolonial writers can be situated or categorised according to the concerns they address through the voices they represent. For example, postcolonial writers may seek to somehow represent the role and experience of women, of indigenous peoples, of migrants and those with diasporic identity more generally (Boehmer, 2005: 214). As already touched upon, there has been over the last three decades or so, a new turn: a literature which is produced by those with (former) migrant heritage but with a sense of embedded Britishness. However, these writers continue to explore their 'ethnic' experience from a postcolonial vantage point, where Otherness (in terms of race, culture, language and ideology) is still an important element, whether or not it is consciously explored or, in some cases, subverted. Well known writers/artists with ingrained but 'hyphenated' identities include Monica Ali, Gurinder Chadha, Nazrin Choudhury, Lennie James, Hanif Kureishi, Zadie

Smith and Meera Syal[20]. The majority use characters who, to varying degrees, 'negotiate' their hybrid identities within plots that have embedded the 'experience' of ethnic minority Britishness. To reinforce this point further, that 'ethnic' writers have specific concerns in their works of literature, it is unusual to find Black and Asian British writers who, for example, work in the genre of espionage, thriller or science fiction[21].

On the strength of an unpublished manuscript, Monica Ali was selected as one of Granta's Best of British Young Novelists of 2003. According to Sinha, Ali was a 'new exciting voice of post-colonial Britain' and her novel, *Brick Lane,* revealed

> the experience of minority groups to a much wider readership. Depicting an 'outsider's quest to find her voice', Ali has extended the migrant voice in British fiction, particularly through her representation of gender and focus on history and dislocation. (Sinha, 2008: 230)

Sinha also goes on to compare Ali's entrance into the world of literature and literati to that of Zadie Smith's, whose debut novel *White Teeth* sold in excess of 10 million copies. Both writers had common aspects of identity inasmuch as they shared mixed heritage, were young, female and, despite both having 'intimate knowledge of what it feels like to be an outsider in Britain' (Sinha, 2008: 232) both had to endure the ordeal of Oxbridge educations. Ali in particular came under fire for writing of a culture that her critics claimed was not her own (Lea and Lewis, 2006). Central to this was Ali's depiction of the central character, Nazneen, a Bangladeshi immigrant locked in a loveless (arranged) marriage with an older man. Where some saw the skill and empathy of a writer who 'puts herself in Nazneen's shoes and through her eyes, she brings the reader to the world of the Bengali immigrant community in London's East End,' (Sinha, 2008: 235), for others, her representation of a Bangladeshi woman was built on a lack of knowledge and empathy. Indeed, Ali's narrative seemed to rely on prevalent racial stereotypes in which passivity and silence continue to define some ethnic minority women.

The difficulty, of course, with both positions is that both are justifiable but at the same time, irrelevant. Writing is a political act but the extent to which authors have responsibility, let alone control, over how their texts are interpreted is out of their hands. By the same token, writers engaged with *de facto* political writing[22] have very precise motivations and aims. The intentional fallacy is mitigated against by the very nature of the work; and the nature of the work is around the representation of identity, power, history and, perhaps

[20] The list could go on, of course, to include poets and academics as well as those working in cinema and other artistic forms in which 'cultural' and political representations can be discerned.

[21] In the main, such writers adopt 'literary' fiction as their genre of choice, with few, if any, titles belonging to horror, romance or new forms, such as 'chick-lit'. There is, however, one exception I am aware of in the genre of science fiction: *Black Star Rising*, by Pete Kalu (1997) is set in the future, on a spaceship populated with a black crew. Despite the usual constraints of the sci-fi genre, the novel is loaded with Black reference points and politics, such as the singer Bob Marley being elevated to the status of religious prophet.

[22] Although contestable, I use this term here to loosely situate writing that is somehow defined as marginal or subaltern; writing that does not emerge from mainstream authorial voices and explores issues linked with identity and power.

the element that frames all these markers, place. For the residents of the real Brick Lane, there was a disconnect between the world within Ali's text and the world they experienced.

Bradford as locus

Bradford is a site in which various forms of representation continue to take place. Often, there is an 'ethnic' aspect, whether it is to do with the problem of Pakistani men grooming young white girls for sex, young Pakistani women being forced into transnational marriages or, certainly over the last decade at least, the capacity for young *Muslim* men to fall victim to 'Islamist' radicalisation.

While Bradford's contemporary identity has been largely defined by relatively recent, and on occasion somewhat troubling events, its historic and social remarkableness is largely overlooked. In 1893, for example, it hosted the inaugural conference of the Independent Labour Party; some five decades previously, the town was a political hotbed of Chartist activity. Bradford became a site in which workers rights, elementary education and trade unionism were cultivated by working class heroes and middle class patrons alike, including the Reverend G. S. Bull, S. C. Lister, W. E. Forster and Margaret MacMillan (Fieldhouse, 1987).

From the 1960s onward, Bradford's population grew due to the availability of work in the textile industry. By the 1980s, however, the decline of the textile industry promoted worklessness on the one hand, and entrepreneurship on the other. Thatcherism fostered competition for profits in the private sector and competition for resources in the public sector. Against the backdrop of economic/industrial downturn, local authorities, public services and citizens were faced with cutbacks. With reference to 'ethnic minority' infrastructure, a whole range of cuts were introduced to save funds and, perhaps more importantly, to prove an ideologically conservative disposition toward equality and inequality. We were all equal under the law, rendering obsolete any separate/additional provision for those likely to suffer race discrimination.

It should be borne in mind that this was a period in which the representation of Islam and Muslims came to displace earlier constructions of cultural and racial identity. Although awareness of global events, including conflict zones such as Palestine, Kashmir, Bosnia and Afghanistan, fed into this construction of a new British identity, *The Rushdie Affair* had a great deal of impact, also. For the first time, British Muslims were represented as separate and as entirely distinct to other non-White communities.

Writers such as Kureishi (1986) and Murphy (1987) also explored the 'otherness' of Bradford's Pakistanis, in particular, those with agricultural Kashmiri/Mirpuri and North-West Pakistani heritage. The fulcrum upon which both these writers turned their analysis was what became known as *The Honeyford Affair*. And yet:

> for both Kureishi, the cosmopolitan Londoner and Karachi-ite, and for Murphy, a white, bourgeois, middle-aged, Irish woman, postcolonial Bradford proved just as much an encounter with 'difference' as these other, more far-flung destinations. Moreover they discovered that the white working classes of Thatcherite Britain, just as much as the Mirpuris of Manningham, inhabited worlds far away from their own. (McLoughlin, 126)

Despite Kureishi's 'ethnic' credentials, and track record on writing about 'the ethnic experience', his views and writing on Bradford are framed by an outsider's perspective. His essay, 'Bradford', was published in a special edition of the literary magazine Granta whose theme was, essentially, travel writing which, to an extent, shared some of the ideological underpinnings of nineteenth century, bourgeoisie writing of the same genre. Kureishi, of course, is not alone, and nor is it true that only writers of 'literature' have taken the time to pass commentary on places they encounter as somehow different, or exotic. Relatively recently, for example, the broadcaster George Alagiah (2006) expressed his fears, with specific reference to Bradford, about the reality and potential danger of racial/ethnic segregation, the propensity for Bradford's 'Mirpuris' to hold onto cultural values and mores deemed either out of date or simply incompatible with whatever it means to be British. In addition, he expressed anxiety over the likelihood of increasing religious (Muslim) intolerance, fanaticism and radicalisation.

There is, of course, an extensive range of fictional work which reflects aspects of Muslim life and experience apart from the novels of Hanif Kureishi (*My Beautiful Launderette*; *The Black Album*) and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. Having moved on from earlier categories of identity (Black, Asian, Black-British, etc.) there is now a greater likelihood for some writers to be defined by their faith heritage also. There is now a growth of novelists[23] often defined as 'Muslim'. In addition, British Muslim voices, visions, and identities are making forays into the world of film and television but invariably, it is the conflict and tension riddled facets of the British Muslim 'experience' and culture that gain screen time[24]. As Gilliat-Ray explains:

> These cinematographic works, despite their almost inevitable exaggerations and caricaturing of Muslims (and predominant concern with 'culture clash'), must be regarded as part of the overall production of knowledge about Islam and Muslims in Britain, especially since outside academic or educated circles they perhaps constitute a significance [sic] source of impressions or information about the lives and experiences of British Muslims. (Gilliat-Ray, 2010: 270-271)

[23] For example, Farhana Sheikh (*The Red Box, 1991*), Tariq Mehmood (*Hand on the Sun*; *While there is Light*), Zahid Hussain (*The Curry Mile*) and Nadeem Aslam (*Maps for Lost Lovers*[23]) as well as Moazzem Begg's *Enemy Combatant* (Begg, 2006), and Ed Husain's *The Islamist* (Hussain, 2007)

[24] For example, *Britz* (2007), *The Road to Guantanamo* (2006), *Love + Hate* (2005), *Yasmin* (2004), *Ae Fond Kiss* (2004), *East is East* (1999), *My Son The Fanatic* (1997) and the hugely successful *Four Lions* (2009).

Much of Bradford's identity has been unearthed through various excavations[25] undertaken by academics, writers and other commentators who seem to be focussed on the place as a site of ethnic unrest. In June 1995 the city experienced civil disturbances involving predominantly young South Asians. Although accounts vary, the disturbances were either triggered when police mistreated a woman (Anwar, 1998: 157) or 'when a policeman started questioning a few young Asians who claimed they were playing football' (Anwar, 1998: 91). Whatever the actual trigger, there ensued a protest which brought to the fore discriminatory policing, the discriminations young South Asians faced in the labour market, as well as a paucity of effective and equitable leadership (Anwar, 1998: 157).

During, and especially after the 1995 disturbances, the city became a site of living research, commentary and reportage. Writers from different arms of mass media and the academy hit the streets to get the real story and represented what they felt were key issues and, in some cases, solutions. Without exception, however, the events were packaged as being linked with race: because the largest constituents of the disturbances were Asian/Pakistani, there was something intrinsic to that population that led to riotousness. Structural inequalities, although mentioned, however, were sidelined as being of secondary importance and instead, some of the blame was attributed to lawlessness and anti social behaviour (Bradford Commission, 1996; see also Burlet and Reid, 1998). The problem of ethnic relations, already established as a thread of the city's narrative through *The Honeyford* and *Rushdie Affairs*, became a central marker of the city's broader identity.

Along with other cities and towns home to British Asian Muslims in the north, in 2001 Bradford once again experienced relatively large scale civil unrest. An even stronger, zero tolerance approach in public and policy discourse all but removed the significance of racism, both actual and symbolic, as valid aspects of the discourse. Indeed, reports generated before and after these events (Ouseley, 2001; Community Cohesion Independent Review Team, 2001; Burnley Task Force, 2001; Denham, 2002) pointed to explanations that pathologised the communities that were exhibiting *unreasonable* unrest. Perhaps most potent was the issue of *Muslim* self-segregation. The term itself, which gained remarkable cache, remains a sophisticated and neat form of new Orientalism. No longer was race, let alone class and income, an apparent factor in the creation of 'no go zones' and ethnic enclaves. Rather, the problem was of one faith identity in particular, the cultural life of which seemed to increase inward and insular bonding capital at the expense of outward bridging capital. The segregation thesis symbolised a lack of broader

[25] Earlier texts which to some extent helped situate ethnicity as a defining feature of the city include Sheila Allen's *New Minorities, Old Conflicts: Asian and West Indian migrants in Britain* (1971), Devla Murphy's *Tales from Two Cities: Travel of Another Sort* (1987) and Mawby and Batta's *Asians and Crime: the Bradford Experience* (1980).

social cohesion but here, the segregation was wilful, conscious and desired, all of which are claims that have been significantly undermined[26].

To this day, Bradford remains a site of research interest, invariably themed according to ethnic relations and the increasing salience of faith as identity and, to a lesser extent the impact and costs of poverty. In many ways, Bradford's appeal as a viable research site is no different to the

> old ethnographic cliché that there are pre-existing ethnographic fields out there awaiting discovery, all one has to do is walk into them… This myth of ethnographic site as some sort of virginal land ripe for discovery was and perhaps continues to be a powerful trope. (Madden, 2010: 38)

In twenty first century Bradford, where postcolonial memory may well fail to resonate among third, fourth and fifth generation Pakistanis, a greater degree of fluidity is perhaps present. While political consciousness akin to a more embedded notion of personal postcoloniality exists, what complements and adds nuance and texture to contemporary framings of 'ethnic' identity is that of Britishness: language, culture, voice and even attitudes amongst British born Pakistanis is more British than it is Pakistani, or even stereotypically 'Muslim' (Alam and Husband, 2006; Alam, 2006).

Ethnographic research and the production of literary fiction: not quite making it up

In 2001, Professor Charles Husband and myself, spurred by the lack of political and academic intervention or debate after the 'northern disturbances' constructed a research proposal in which we aimed to relocate the voice of 'the subject' as one that could speak without the filter of academic analysis. This ambition arose because a moral panic around young, British born and Bangladeshi/Pakistani/Muslim men was quickly and ferociously developing. However, instead of being spoken or listened to, this folk devil was invariably being spoken *about* by politicians, community leaders and even academics. This voicelessness, we agreed, needed addressing.

The ensuing project, 'Giving a Voice to the Hidden Research Subject', funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation built a methodology which aimed to capture and represent the voices of the sample. Consequently, alongside a formal policy report[27], *Made In Bradford* was produced. This contained edited interviews, presented as individual narratives. The process which produced this text relied on ethnography as a means of generating sociological data but literary insight and editorial experience assisted in presenting voices. This text gained some degree of cache and value. Indeed, on the basis of this text, we were invited by Bradford Council and The Association of West Yorkshire Authorities to once again repeat the process across West Yorkshire and with a much broader sample accounting for the diversity of the region. In addition

[26] For a variety of counter narratives to the 'self-segregation' thesis, see, for example, Alam, 2006; Alam and Husband, 2006; Alam, 2011; Husband and Alam, 2011; Kalra and Kapoor, 2008; Phillips, 2006; Simpson, 2004, 2007; Simpson et al, 2009.

[27] Husband, C. and Alam, M. Y. (2006) British-Pakistani Men from Bradford: Linking Narratives to Policy. York: JRF.

to this facet of our second research project, we also explored the impact of counter terrorism policy and practice. As a consequence, we produced a dual author critical text[28] and once again, I edited a mainstream anthology of voices[29] drawn from the interview data. The methodology for this larger project had to differ from the earlier form of ethnography but it remained couched within the ethnographic tradition as the interface between researcher and the researched was close, in depth and relatively long term. Furthermore, the aspiration to 'hear' the experiences, values and insights of our research participants remained a constant throughout.

The above examples aim to illustrate how one kind of data can be used for more than one purpose. In ethnographically couched practice, the aim is to represent faithfully and honestly the myriad of complexity that makes human beings individuals. At this juncture, however, it's necessary to turn to how sociologically grounded data can be converted to that which is literary and fictional.

From ethnography to literary production

Conducting ethnography and then subverting data for the purpose of fiction is, as I have argued above, precisely what both ethnographers and literary authors can do. Although the process may differ, and the broader practice is in a sense unnamed, both crafts depend upon observation, insight and the capacity to construct descriptions of a field[30]. Whether the represented field is 'real' or fictional is neither here nor there precisely because both types of text are constructions and dependent on the identity of the author. The difference is that the aim of ethnographic writing is to represent actual situations, sites and their peoples. Literary works, despite their worldly inspirations and even realist aims, are acknowledged, tacitly or otherwise, as fictional.

While in the process of conducting fieldwork, it is not uncommon for ethnographers to use 'story-telling', either as a device to elicit data or as a means through which the researched reveal it. It does not take a huge amount of imagination to assume that some of these stories can be retold, embellished and made all the more dramatic if a writer of fiction wishes. At the same time, it's also possible to assume that ethnographic data itself, when in the process of being presented as an ethnographic account, has to be manipulated. Ensuring data integrity is not corrupted, of course, is always a concern with ethnographic research but the same does not apply with the writing of fiction. Fiction, literary or otherwise, has an explicit capacity to be just that. In my own practice, there are examples which demonstrate how ethnographic data can be transformed into elements of literary fiction. For example, during fieldwork for one project, one participant informed me of his work as a cab driver, saying:

> I wouldn't call it enjoyable; it's summat you have to do. Piss-heads come into it on the evening work, after ten

[28] Husband, C. and Alam, M. Y. (2011) *Social Cohesion and Counter-terrorism: A Policy contradiction?* Bristol: Policy Press.
[29] Alam, M. Y. (2011) *The Invisible Village: Small World, Big Society*. Pontefract: Route.
[30] See for example, Alasuutari, 1998; Denscombe, 2003, above.

> o'clock. You get used to it. It happens that many times, you accept it as being normal. They can't help it: they're pissed, and they talk shit. It's the same person you pick up during the day and they're sound as a pound. It's not just *gorays* that get funny when they're pissed, *aapnay* when they're pissed, they're worse. They *brother* this and *brother* that, but they're full of shit. When I first used to do it and somebody got funny, it used to make my blood boil. You wanted to fight every job. But you understand they're a different person during the day. (Alam, 2006: 114)

The interview, abridged to form a narrative, revealed aspects of the speaker's identity and personality. The interview data holds a moment in time in which ideas were being exchanged, interpreted and further developed. As a consequence of the encounter, however, I also found myself producing fiction:

> When I first hit these roads, I was itching to scrap with every other fare. If it wasn't one thing, it was another. Didn't like the turn of my wheel, the bounce to my ride, the clothes on my back or the bass in my voice. Nothing but a piece of shit cabbie with only money on my mind: charge too much, drive too fast but still manage to take too long in getting them where they want to be. Every fare stepping into your ride can take one kind of liberty or another: chat some shit, damage the trim, piss on the floor or chip without coughing for the miles. (Alam, 2006a: 79)

It's worth pointing out that this practice does not echo the aesthetic of postmodern 'appropriation art' in which 'the artist forgoes the claim to original creation by appropriating already-existing images and objects (Crimp and Holston, 1990: 442), but it depends on the capacity and willingness to use the everyday and extraordinary data for the purpose of art. Ultimately, this capacity and willingness to retrieve, exploit and perhaps reinvent 'data' is couched within a professional identity that is shaped by politics and praxis. Both forms of data representation have their own distinct sense of voice and it could be argued they express similar concerns. Any appropriation builds on, rather than reinvents voice, identity and theme.

Conclusion

Contemporary British ethnic minorities are not entirely divorced from the colonial past. Indeed, for many, the present receives echoes from a history of oppression, be it slavery, racism or even economic exploitation. Clearly in a different social and economic position to their forebears, Britain's ethnic minorities, in particular Muslims, continue to be counted as racial and cultural Others.

While there is an obvious and valuable role for literature and its authors, the overlap with formal modes of social research is perhaps less easy to recognise, let alone appreciate. It is reasonable to suggest that fiction liberates in ways that academic writing cannot. Writers of fiction, of poetry or even song for that matter continue to use their art for political ends, be they personal or communitarian. It's worth reminding ourselves that Orientalism allowed art to be used by colonial and imperial powers in a way that projected and reinforced power laden generalisations and stereotypes about the

East/Orient/non-White-European world and the *Others* who occupied it. Orientalism remains a political project as it defines how cultures are represented; any counter is therefore also political. Ethnographers and writers of literature meet at the same existential crossroads. Monica Ali, like Iceberg Slim and every other writer, established or merely 'beginning' (King, 2000), has to take part in the world in order to write about a version of it. All writers, to one degree or another, commit acts of ethnography, some in more explicit and sophisticated ways than others. However, because ethnography remains a field detached from the world of the literary, its rationale, process and aims have failed to feed into discourses around representation and the conveyance of identity.

This discussion has aimed to illustrate why and how two seemingly disparate fields of endeavour can, and perhaps ought to be related. Ethnography is a richly insightful approach through which those of us interested in human experience, relationships and meanings can become educated and informed. Furthermore, it is an inherently human and humanising approach in which power imbalances between the researcher and researched are acknowledged and attended to. Rather than viewing the world from a vantage point of comfortable detachment, ethnography calls on its practitioners to get in and stay in; getting out, for some, never actually happens, such is the vitality of the approach and the depth it affords. Depending on field selection, some of us, however, may already be insiders in which case, our ethnographic self is a natural, embedded element of our broader identity map. As such, our writing – one record of our ethnographic encounter – is naturally delivered; our insight, empathy and capacity to hear hopefully rendered visible between the lines of our text.

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