

“GOOD”/”BAD” CITIZENS ON THE MARGINS?

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION IN TWO TOWNS IN THE
NORTH OF ENGLAND**

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Gesa Kather

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic study of political participation of people living “on the margins” of society in two northern English towns. It establishes a comprehensive notion of political participation by studying the local social practices of marginal social groups to inform an examination of informal and formal forms of political practices. These practices are contextualised by the social production and social construction of marginality and related critically to the normative and hegemonic notions of political participation established by the state. Marginalised individuals strategically alternate between formal and informal forms of political participation. The extent to which marginal groups can participate politically depends upon the nature of the public political culture. Where such participation is limited, these groups use strategic social practices to impact meaningfully on their social life-worlds which in turn become political strategies because they have a lasting impact on British society. Resistance is one such strategy. Moreover, individuals strategically connect and disconnect with formal politics in order to increase their social capital within their particular cultural contexts of action. This PhD draws on qualitative data collected in ethnographic fieldwork in two very different northern English towns, Burnley in Lancashire and Harrogate in Yorkshire. In both towns the study focused on social groups that are categorised as disadvantaged, targeted for social or punitive intervention and visible (often as “a problem”) in the public sphere: ethnic minorities and young people; and some young people belonging to ethnic minorities. At the same time these groups are targeted by social policy to increase their levels of social and political participation. Through triangulation of data collected on diverse groups from the two towns, the application of grounded theory, cultural analysis and analysis of

social life-worlds, the reciprocal relationship between marginalisation and participation is explored. The case studies include: young Asian men, Asian women, working-class youth gangs, middle-class “goth” and “mosher” gangs, disadvantaged youths, as well as middle class young people and young adults participating in youth councils, youth work and economic participation seen by the young people as acceptable replacement for political participation. Moreover, policy discourses on participation and integration are examined. By adopting the notion of an anthropology of policy, political participation is studied as a discursive formation in which normative and moral claims and their forms of representation are socially negotiated and represented in public notions of “good” and “bad” citizenship.

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GLOSSARY

ASBO	Anti-Social Behaviour Order, introduced as penal measure in Britain into the penal code in 1998 through the 1998 Youth Act.
BBB	Breaking Barriers for Burnley; a youth group run by Lancashire youth and community services that was established under the community cohesion agenda.
BME	Black Minority Ethnic, a standard term used by policy makers in community policies
chav	A derogative term for young working-class men that has recently been appropriated and used by them themselves.
CPO	Compulsive Purchasing Order; a housing policy tool for urban regeneration.
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government, a UK government existing since 2006; originating from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfES	Department for Education and Skills; this was a UK government department between 2001 and 2007. In 2007 it was split into The Department for Children, Schools and Families and The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.
DWP	UK government Department for Work and Pensions.
<i>Eid (al fitre)</i>	Islamic celebration at the end of the month of Ramadan.
<i>halal</i>	Arabic referring to “something that has been given to people by God”
<i>haram</i>	Arabic referring to “something forbidden by God”
hoodie	A young, usually working class person wearing tops with hoods which they use to cover their heads to conform to a uniform urban look.

<i>kabala</i>	An Islamic dress
mosher	A young, usually middle-class person who belongs to the youth cultural group of Moshers who are young people who listen to rock music and mosh/headbang to it, i.e. rhythmically move their head back and forth.
<i>niqab</i>	The Islamic face scarf
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
ONSUK	Government Office for National Statistics
WASP	This acronym stands for White Anglo Saxon Protestant and was used for the dominant population in New English states of Northern America.
YOB	The word 'boy' read backwards. Used in public discourses to refer to the unruly behaviour of young, usually working class men in public. YOB has got a negative connotation.

Introduction

This thesis is an ethnographic study of political participation “on the margins” of northern English towns. It investigates what politics and participation mean for marginal social groups, as well as the practices that the state expects from its citizens since a divide has become more and more apparent between the two of them. This particular divide is being observed in many western modern democratic states. The “place” of politics seems to have become very blurred (Beck, Hajer and Kesselring 1999) so that we have become very unsure about what the meaning of politics is today, what political participation looks like and where politics “happens”. What seems to be there, though, is frustration on both sides: on the state’s side about the falling levels of interest in politics by its citizenry, and on the side of the citizens who feel that their state has lost touch with them and does not represent them nor address their everyday concerns.

The American political scientist Robert Putnam has written extensively about such developments in his book *“Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community”* (2000). He argues that if the state capitalizes on the social capital of its citizenry, the social and political community in states such as the U.S. can be revived. For this, existing social capital needs to be concentrated and strengthened, and then utilized by the state. Concomitantly, non-existing or weak social capital needs to be induced or reinforced. Putnam (2000) pictures a dramatic decline in the individual’s motivation to participate in society, to show interest and participation in political issues and on people’s tendencies today to engage more and more in individualized activities. In his approach, Putnam (2000) extends very formal definitions of political participation to more civic participation, which are still visible to the state through their formal organisations (trade unions, neighbourhood organisations) or forms of

channelling (reading newspapers, watching political programmes on the TV). By using a statistical approach he demonstrates people's levels in formal political participation and formal civic participation, a category of activity in which he includes reading a newspaper, being organized in unions at work, attending clubs, and people's levels of social interaction in their local neighbourhood. In particular, Putnam wishes to draw attention to the usefulness of people's local participation in the community and in their locale. By drawing on Bourdieu's (1998) notion of social capital, Putnam argues that if people's social capital is augmented, community participation will increase simultaneously, as well as people's interest and participation in politics. Further, through an increase in social capital and social commitment, people will thus feel more connected to the overall community of the state.

In this ethnographic PhD, a range of local realities are presented that show that there is a contradiction in Putnam's (2000) approach which is based on ideals that cannot be found in the real world. His notion is functionalist and based on homogenous "ideal types" (Weber 1980) which do not reflect the heterogeneous everyday realities of real people. I will also demonstrate that Putnam's approach ignores the significance of power hierarchies and capitalist structures which deny equal opportunities in social and political participation for all citizens. Putnam (2000) assumes that there is something like a political community that exists in reality, something that has been challenged by anthropologists such as Abrams (2006) who argue that state politics and participation is a mental construction that is presented as something that really exists and can be researched by political scientists. Moreover, Putnam (2000) assumes that the conditions for civic and political participation are uniform across all social groups. Bourdieu (2000 [1984]), by contrast, elucidates that the operation of *habitus* and *distinction* determine that only the "right" people can access certain social and

political fields. Finally, Putnam (2000) is not clear about the fact that patterns of social individualisation are a direct result from neo-liberalist governance and not consciously controlled behaviour of selfish citizens. What Rose (1996) describes as “the death of the social” has been encouraged by the state through the withdrawal of welfare provision and inciting competition between and amongst citizens. The political and cultural shifts beg the question: why should people give anything to society if society does not give anything to them?

The undertaking of this PhD was in part motivated by the reported perplexity, helplessness and feeling of powerlessness of the political class about falling electoral turnouts and increasing levels of political and civic alienation amongst the citizenry. The democratic legitimacy of the government contract given by the electorate (with the electorate in turn being represented though the government) has become undermined through these developments and an unsettled political class is in search for new mechanisms to regain their legitimacy. We might not find this made explicit very often, but the extreme consequences of a continuation of processes like this are shown to us on a regular basis in many countries around the world; the current example are the riots in Bangkok where a radical opposition has been involved in armed struggle against the political elite that are seen to be presiding over a system of widespread inequality between rich and poor (BBC News, “Deadly clashes erupt in Bangkok”, 14.05.2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>). These are extreme examples of governments not only losing touch with the people but running an authoritarian regime where political leaders exploit the country and its resources to their advantage. However, modern democracies were founded in order to prevent the existence of unjust state leadership. They are based on democratic principles which are threatened if the electorate does not contribute to the provision of legitimacy of governments through voting.

By no means on the same scale as the uprising in Thailand, the northern English mill town riots in 2001 have unsettled local and national politicians. Violent clashes between the South Asian and white community and the police made the media headlines and conflicts flared up across several towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire during the summer months. The British public were dutifully shocked by these outbreaks and the longest ever prison sentences for rioting were imposed on individuals from the South Asian community in Bradford (Biswas 2006). A prominent white ring leader was also sentenced to prison for his participation in the riots in Burnley (Porter 2005). These riots followed a succession of decadal riots, starting in 1981 and continuing in 1991, between the Black and white working class communities and the police (Campbell 1993). It seemed that what dumbfounded the British public so much in 2001 was that it was the South Asian community that was rioting by adopting the angry working class manners of taking to the streets in a country that thought that it had dealt well with racism and had extinguished racial disturbances. What was going on in these northern English mill towns? While this was one of the specific questions that motivated the research for this PhD, the overall aim was to establish a pattern for mechanisms between the state and participation. For this, the research had to take a wider approach examining the more general nature of marginalisation across different social groups and the impact on political participation. Young people's experience of marginalisation and its impact on participation were also included. This was not only framed by academic debates on young people's political alienation (Electoral Commission 2002a) but also by discourses in the media public about the social alienation of young people – usually labelled as 'anti-social behaviour'. Gang and ASBO culture seemed to dominate the newspaper and television news headlines and to worry social policy makers in equal measure. An allegedly stipulated increase in these forms of

anti-social youth behaviour was seen as threatening social cohesion and widening the gap between the individual and society. But what was really going on amongst the young people in particular locales? Had they - as the media and politicians insisted - completely lost touch with society and respect for their community? Was this a new phenomenon? Were the behaviours and political aspirations of young people simply different from the norm expected in the formal political realm? If so, does this infer that we should study their practices simply as “another kind of politics” (Hitzler and Pfadenhauer 1999)?

The practices of groups on the fringes are contextualised by the social production and social construction of marginality and related critically to the normative and hegemonic notions of political participation established by the state. In order to avoid the trap of arguing in a circle that social and political alienation is a result of material deprivation - which it might indeed be to a large extent - two very distinct towns with markedly different social, economic and political make-ups were studied. The towns selected were Burnley in Lancashire and Harrogate in North Yorkshire. This comparative approach was based on the assumption that the extent to which marginal groups can participate politically depends upon the nature of the public political culture. Where such participation is limited, these groups use strategic social practices to impact meaningfully on their social life-worlds which in turn become political strategies because they have a lasting impact on society (Scott 1985). In each town, the researcher spent six months as a resident: July - December 2005 in Burnley and May - September 2006 in Harrogate. This PhD draws on qualitative data collected in ethnographic fieldwork in these two towns. In both towns the study focused on social groups that are categorised as disadvantaged, targeted for social or punitive intervention and visible (often as “a problem”) in the public sphere: young people and ethnic minorities. At the same time these

groups are targeted by social policy to increase their levels of social and political participation. Through triangulation of data collected on diverse groups from the two towns, the application of grounded theory, cultural analysis and analysis of social life-worlds, the reciprocal relationship between marginalisation and participation is explored.

At a theoretical level the study engages with multiple concepts and notions, including the “reinvention of politics” (Beck 1997), the “blurred place of politics” (Beck, Hajer and Kesselring 1999), “another kind of politics” (Hitzler and Pfadenhauer 1999) and the “delimitation of politics” (Hitzler and Pfadenhauer 1998). It examines the myriad forms of politics and participation that are available on the local and the state level and it concludes that changing notions about formal and informal forms of political participation are a significant sign of social and political change. Debates about the designation of only certain practices as ‘formal participation’, moreover, are an indication of the difficulties for the state in reaching its citizens, and its rigorous approach is a clue that the state does not necessarily always want to reach each and all of them. Citizens are expected to adopt the acceptable practices of “good” citizens and to contribute to a homogenous body of citizens. In circumstances in which this does not occur, problems of governance arise. This is where oversights in Putnam’s (2000) argument become visible. His work does not adequately acknowledge the conflicts between the citizens and their state regarding legitimate and illegitimate forms of political participation and he does not provide an account of the nature and impact of social and political marginalisation. Instead Putnam tends to exclude the impact of social and political hierarchies on the behaviour of marginalised people. It is the aim of this PhD to examine and analyse this under researched area of inquiry.

To describe the above process of the different levels of political participation and why and how it is important to analyse the lowest level of participation, in the following chapters this thesis will work its way from the level of the state down to the marginalised communities, and from there back up to the level of the state again up to compare the different ways of communicating political participation and the different levels at which political contests emerge.

The first chapter looks at different notions of political participation, both formal and informal. It establishes the preferred notions of the state and the alternative notions discussed through anthropological and sub-cultural literature. It establishes an alternative framework for researching political participation that stretches beyond the framework of political science and political sociology. This theoretical framework establishes the methodology for researching marginal political practices which are in visible in mainstream political science.

The second chapter gives a detailed description of the methodology deployed in the study. It gives a comprehensive account for the different steps of the research process and methodological justifications for the ethnographic approach. The researcher lived in marginalized areas in both towns and engaged with marginalized groups as well as being embedded in political arenas in order to study the levels of participation of marginalized groups. The data collected is in-depth and was gathered in face-to-face interaction with the research participants on an everyday basis.

Chapter 3 focuses on the “Asian gang” in Burnley and explains the difference between formal and informal political practices and who participates in which, how and why. It explores the strategies that marginalized groups adopt to make a political impact on their social life-

worlds. Whereas the state only focuses on formal forms of participation, marginal individuals draw on formal and informal strategies due to the limited scope they have in formal political arenas and because they can increase their visibility and multiply their political impact on their social life-worlds through combining formal and informal forms of political practice. Consequently, the image of the notorious “Asian gang” is shifted from being the “Asian folk devil” (Alexander 2000; 2004) to becoming a political institution within the political arena of Burnley and beyond. Only in his chapter on the “dark side” of cultural capital does Putnam (2000) acknowledge that certain groups are potentially excluded from the forms of formal politics which he examines. He does not make the connections though that this fact is deeply unjust and undemocratic and needs to be addressed urgently. The anger and distrust caused by political marginalization amongst groups deemed as ‘problematic’ is neglected in Putnam’s work and this itself opens up a space which this project seeks to occupy.

In Chapter 4 I draw attention to Asian women's civic participation in society and the political relevance of this. Here data is presented from participant observations of a group of British-Pakistani women in Burnley who meet regularly as the Lunch Club in a statutory context. Through examining the scale between formal and informal forms of political participation, it is shown how activities of grassroots groups have a large impact on society but tend to be overlooked by the state as they often use informal political practices. The chapter also shows that these formal practices are a mandatory condition for marginalized individuals to participate in the first place. Most of them feel that it is not acceptable for them to participate in predominantly male formal political arenas. Muslim women, thus, gain a powerful voice through taking a “loop way” via informal practices and contribute to social integration and community

cohesion. While Putnam (2000) assumes a homogenous WASP (which stands for White Anglo Saxon Protestant, cf. Allen 1990) culture for the forms of political participation he addresses, this chapter stresses the importance of accounting for diverse stocks of cultural and religious knowledge.

The subject of Chapter 5 is the practice of “resistance” as it is performed by “chav gangs”. These observations demonstrate some extreme examples of informal political participation. It explores their notions of the inside and the outside of places and uses examples of their attitude towards rubbish, the police and other gangs. It shows how today’s young working class people resist the state’s attempt to eliminate the existence of the class conflict. “Chav gangs” resist being de-politicized and through informal political practices, strongly engage with the wider society and make a political statement. These forms of participation are the ones that are the most unlikely to be connected to any of those described by Putnam (2000). Doubtless he would very much resist taking actions of crime and anti-social behaviour as a category of political participation, yet this means that the voices of a large proportion of citizens are muted in his perspective.

The important notion and government tool of “social capital” is analysed and discussed in more detail in chapter 6. The combination of the notions of post-feminism and anti-politics with social capital is explored and the consequences for forms of political participation discussed. This is the chapter that most strongly relies on Putnam’s (2000) established connection between social capital and political participation. But it shows that political and civic participation in his understanding can be very far from being of a quintessentially political nature. Being a “good” citizen often means being not political but participating in the mainstream through economic activity. This is where it becomes clear that the state’s attempts

to increase citizens' political participation is not so much about politicizing people but rather about governance and social control.

The conclusions drawn in chapter 7 summarize the key findings of the thesis. By adopting the notion of an anthropology of policy, political participation is studied here as a discursive formation in which normative and moral claims and their forms of representation are socially negotiated and represented in public notions of “good” and “bad” citizenship. Political participation is about “good” citizenship and not about being political. “Bad” citizens often are much more political than “good” citizens.

Chapter 1

WHAT, WHY AND WHO PARTAKES IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE FIRST PLACE? CONSIDERING THEORY AND PRACTICE

Debates on “political participation” and “political alienation” draw on vague definitions of politics, participation, political behaviour and the role of the state. In general public debates and academic discussions, common notions refer to predominantly formal forms of participation, such as: voting behaviour, party membership, community activism, citizen participation and forms of citizenship. These notions are particularly prevalent in the political science perspective (cf. Electoral Commission 2003, 2005, Dahl 1982, Birch 1993, Beetham 2003, Birchall and Simmons 2004). These formal forms of political participation are preferentially legitimised by the state awarding those who practice them with the label of “good citizens”. However, the state can only deal with ideal types (Weber 2001) - and reward ‘ideal’ types of citizen - and is, therefore, rather oblivious to everyday practices featuring in ethnographic work, unless these practices represent a standardised political behaviour. Therefore, this kind of debate offers only modest insight into what we have to look out for to identify behaviour representing “political participation” and “political alienation” in the real everyday lives of people.

Reviewing literature on governance and the state exposes the prevalent tendency to codify preferred forms as “correct” ways of political participation. Many other forms are disqualifying as social and political “alienation” or “anti-social” behaviour resulting in the characterisation of the state's opposite ideal type of the “good citizen”: the “bad citizen”. Literature taking a broader approach to political participation, extending to

civic and socio-economic participation (cf. DeFilippis 2004, Haworth and Manzi 1999, Hunter and Nixon 2001, Hasson and Ley 1997), as well as informal forms of participation (cf. notions of informal economies as coined by Hart 1973 and found in Latin American participation literature (Fernandez-Kelly and Shefner 2006, Lomnitz 1977)), allow a much deeper understanding of everyday power relations. We get a better understanding for the processes underlying individuals' choices to engage in either formal or informal forms of participation and to study “political alienation” as a phenomenon that is of similar importance to political participation.

To examine political participation effectively, the contextual study of the tensions between different marginalized social groups is enlightening. Hence, the comprehension of the power relations between different local groups with various ethnic and other social backgrounds and the circumstances that transform them into collectivities enlightens their impact on the local social and political community (Gregory 1993, Gupta 1995). These debates acknowledge the cultural diversity of “nations” that the state prefers to ignore being unable to produce flexible procedures in dealing with local realities (Nugent 1994). The contrast between the official discourse and policies on the one hand, and the local response to it on the other, emphasises the conflict between the demand of universal civic nationalism and the culturally defined needs of the specific identities within marginalised groups. The unattractiveness of universalism as propagated by the state prevents the re-integration of these “outcasts”. To consider so-called “political alienation” as an informal form of political and social participation attributes a new role to social conflict as alternative power and resistance to the establishment. In fact, the application of notions of social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital to everyday life explains the dynamics of the choices between formal politics and resistance; this application is considered to be crucial in this thesis.

1.1. The culture of formal political participation

The state and its statutory agencies define “political participation” in a standardised and exclusive way through holding the monopoly on the definition. They promote their vision through a discourse, which establishes the necessity of the citizenry in a democratic nation state to participate politically in order to legitimize the state and its government (Birch 1993). All other forms of political participation are not relevant to considerations of the state, because they do not legitimise the political system in place. A “cohesive” citizenry, thus, is a citizenry that participates in the political process in this standardized way as a whole. This notion of the formalisation of politics is also based on the separation of the social and the political which is a constituting element of the political sphere of the state. Abrams (2006: 113) talks about the prevalent separation of the political and the social which is assumed a priory by political scientists and political sociologists. Political debates are framed by the common sense that there is a hidden reality in the political life which is the state (2006: 114). Not only does this make it difficult to study the state; in addition, it poses a challenge simply because the state uses its political power for censoring the areas and contents relevant for its study, for example by controlling research projects through the way it distributes funding as well as by being rather protective and selective about giving access to researchers:

“And if one approaches the more serious levels of the functioning of political, judicial and administrative institutions the control or denial of knowledge becomes at once simpler and more absolute of course: one encounters the world of official secrets.” (Abrams 2006: 114)

This secretive behaviour, the control of knowledge and the division of the political and the social not only has an impact on any kind of research but

on the whole populous as such. The division means that formal politics is detached from the social and the local, from the real lives of people. Abrams (1988) also talks of the conception of the state as a “condition of ignorance”. These practices of “ignorance” are part of the key practice of the state: to govern. They have been studied in various other ways as well in order to detect their logic. What is important for us here is the assumed common sense amongst politicians and political scientists that there is this separation. It is questionable whether this separation actually **does** exist in the local reality and it is the task of this thesis to examine this.

Another helpful notion is presented by Gupta and Sharma (2006). These anthropologists use the concept of the state as a “cultural artefact” resulting from the production of meaning in everyday practices of bureaucracy and imaginary practices of symbolic representation of the state. Here, bureaucratic everyday practices are connected to the symbolic practices of representation. This means that bureaucratic rules and procedures symbolically fill the vacuum between the state and the individual by contributing to the mental means available to the individual to imagine the state. Gupta and Sharma's (2006) anthropological definition is used to explain how the state can be imagined from “below” in order to understand how it works “top-down”; i.e. in order to understand how individuals imagine the state and how the state is created through imagination and discourse. This notion is continued in the concept of the “spatialization of the state” also suggested by Gupta in collaboration with Fergusson (Gupta and Fergusson 2002: 981). This spatialization of states takes place through notions of verticality and encompassment. By taking Gupta and Fergusson's approach, I am able to analyze politics from the everyday life of marginal groups. “Spazializing” the state means not just to look at the formal political conceptualizations of political participation and the bureaucracies involved to administer the state. It means to study what

people are doing in the local in their everyday lives through which a social fabric is created that interacts with the state's notions of citizenship and political participation.

The objective for this thesis is to analyse notions of “good” and “bad” citizens from **both** points of view at stake in everyday life: the state's definition **and** the local one. Both ends of this spectrum deal with the same notions and concepts of “political participation” and “political alienation”; however, different meanings are provided through the divergent value systems that are applied. The analysis in this thesis allows for the comprehensive examining and broadening of the different means of political participation; consequently leading to a better understanding of the state's difficulty with homogenising the access to formal forms for all citizens. The way of how, when and what one can achieve to meet one's aims indicates the diversity of what politics means.

The wider aim of this thesis, thus, is to critique practices of the state in encouraging citizen's participation. This thesis aims to shed some light on how we can understand the strategies and policies of the state by drawing on anthropological notions for studying the state and its governmental practices. In so doing, I also interrogate participation policies based on the notion of social capital - *qua* Putnam (2000) - which have been integrated into community cohesion and integration policies and debates. By turning to ethnographic studies of local practices of people in their everyday interactions with the state I aim to show that there are formal and informal forms of political participation; that formal participation does not necessarily have to be political to the quintessence, and that political alienation can often be an informal form of outright political participation within the state and society.

1.2. Unattractive formal politics: Britain and Germany

Accepted forms of political participations are any activities that can be recognized by the state and that connect to its representative bureaucratic apparatus. These accepted forms of political participation are communicated by the government to its citizenry through a number of channels. Most of these channels are state agencies or agencies connected to the state such as the media or local government services. Another channel is the socialization through the official school system and the national curriculum. Laws and policies emphasise directly or indirectly the dominant system in place. The government of a welfare state, for example, has a greater level of influence on its citizenry than a liberal state; simply because by offering social or public services the state gives incentives to participate in its formal structures. Britain is a liberal democracy that provides limited welfare to its citizens compared to Germany, for example, which is still a welfare state even though the government has slowly been reducing welfare services since the re-unification in 1989.¹ Overall, Britain spends less money on supporting individuals who struggle in their lives. As a result, the state has less influence in social issues concerning its citizens. This, in turn, produces citizens that are consequently less supportive and interested in official politics and governmental policies. Low electoral turnout is one way how this is manifested. This can, however, also be explained with the negative effects of the majority voting system for the lower house, and the fact that the upper house is not even democratically elected.

¹ I take Germany as the state system of reference for two reasons. First, Germany is a state system that I am familiar with and have detailed knowledge of. Second, Germany has a much higher electoral turnout (in national and local elections) than Britain. Thus, it is an interesting comparative example for a western European country where citizens participate more in formal politics than in Britain.

Britain has historically had the lowest electoral turnouts for national elections in Western Europe, but it is also the only Western European democracy based on the majority vote (cf. Electoral Reform Society 2009). In addition, Britain is a centrally governed nation-state, unlike Germany, which is a federal state that shares power competences between the Länder governments and the federal government. In Britain, however, apart from rubbish collection, pub licensing, and a few other areas like school programs for example, most political powers are nationally defined. British citizens vote for national government and for their local council. There are different forms of local councils: Burnley is, for example, a two-tier council constituted by Burnley Borough Council and Lancashire County Council. A two-tier council means that local government is executed on a borough and a county level. Similarly, Harrogate is a two-tier council; made up, however, by Harrogate District Council (including Ripon, Boroughbridge and Knaresborough) and North Yorkshire County Council. The county councils are not elected by the electorate but delegates are sent by the borough or district councils (Wilks-Heeg and Clayton 2006).

Even though Germany has frequent elections (national, Länder and communal) there are fewer polling days than in Britain because the German state tries to combine any impending elections and local councils are not elected a third by third every year. Moreover, there are no by-elections but left offices are replaced within parties. In Britain, there are elections nearly every year because local councils are elected across the time of three years – one third of a council each year followed by a one year break; and it starts all over again after four years. There are by-elections which are called out when councillors or members of parliament leave office during the term of their reign. The nature of Britain's system of attributing the right to vote is unclear for migrants as well as for British citizens themselves. In the run up to elections there are many campaigns

informing citizens how to claim their right to vote. This depends intimately on the council tax: only individuals on the electoral role are entitled to vote, and the process of getting on it is closely connected to the council tax register. The result is that many people are excluded from voting, if they are not on the council tax register. Young people, who turn 18 but still live with their parents, are often not registered as voters because even their parents are not aware of the connection between the council tax register and the electoral role. Moreover, Britain has had problems with electoral fraud linked to uncontrolled postal vote and the lack of an efficient identity check of each voter. Identity cards have still not been introduced in Britain; the resistance amongst the population is also connected to the constitutionally guaranteed basic right of British citizens not to be obliged to provide ID. In Germany, citizens are legally obliged to provide official ID; i.e. they carry ID cards. These are issued by local authorities that transfer the data into the national data base. On the polling day, each voter has to provide ID together with the polling card, whereas in Britain one does not even have to bring the polling card. Postal voting is possible, but has to be requested individually for each election and must be duly justified. The British proxy vote - meaning that a third person votes for the person eligible to vote - does not exist in Germany. Postal and proxy voting were responsible for considerable electoral fraud in Burnley and Birmingham. During my fieldwork in 2004 two councillors from Burnley Borough Council had pending court procedures.

Voting, however, is only one form of political participation. Community activism, too, has become an acceptable form of political participation for the state. Traditionally, community activism were illegitimate forms of political participation established by the community who got together because it was largely excluded from the state's political processes run by the political elite. To include community activism into acceptable stately

forms of political participation is based on the following considerations: first, it helps the state to recreate a weakened imagined community (Anderson 1991 [1983]) of the nation-state through discursively emphasizing community activism as a state-activity or an intermediate medium of the state. Second, through the encouragement of community activism the state creates agencies that it can consult in matters of representation and to, thus, re-establish legitimization which is poor due to low electoral turnout. Third, community activism is used to replace the welfare-state: under the cloak of political participation, the state rather tackles economic and social alienation (Rose 1996). By encouraging community projects in socially deprived areas and areas of social and ethnic segregation, the state tries to reach the hard-to-reach population who are causing a problem for the social majority because of higher levels of crime and social unrest.²

Community projects and activism are based on similar cultural notions likewise to political participation. For individuals to be able to participate, they need to bring similar ideas of the norms and values that dominate the public social sphere of the community. Thus, the members of a successful community group need to bring as many similar modes of identification and as little conflicting norms and values as possible in order to guarantee the cohesiveness of the group. What is very important here is a common understanding of all members of the activists' group about the cultural practices of the group: the unifying aims and objects of the group and the shared norms and values that are needed to ensure cohesion; i.e. high membership rates and little fluctuation.

² This practice is also called "social engineering"; a colloquial term referring to state practices through which the state is trying to have an impact on the social or ethnic composition of a neighbourhood, usually regarding the ethnic and social mix. Neighbourhood regeneration is an extreme example of this because the state tends to use community projects or disguises its activity through community projects. A good example for this is Skelmersdale in Liverpool.

These cultural practices are similar to formal forms of political participation as adopted by the state. For example, the separation between the public and the private as well as the separation between the secular and the religious is understood as essential for public community activism and political participation in Britain. The separation of the private and the public is rooted in notions of the political society being neutral and detached from private relations between people which otherwise could threaten democracy as forms of corruption. The separation of religion from the secular state is rooted in the philosophies of the period of Enlightenment which suggested that modern society needs to be organised through logic rather than religious believe systems.

Both cultural practices, which are the basis for community activism and political participation, the separation of the public and the private, as well as of the secular and the religious, are practices understood to be shared by the majority of the British nation. However, they might not be shared by social groups which are for example not part of the political society due to their lack of cultural capital. The political society draws heavily on the separation of the private and the public with certain cultural practices attached. In order to participate in the political society, one needs to have the knowledges to engage in acceptable practices, for example, not to make the private a public issue. Another reason why certain social groups do not share common practices of the separation of the secular and religious might be due to their migration background from non-European societies. These could for example be Muslim societies where we do not find the separation of the secular and the religious power and a different separation of the public and the private. The dominant cultural logic of the separation of the secular and the religious in “western” states is rooted in the European period of Enlightenment and, consequently, is missing in states with no

European influence resulting in a different understanding and valuing of the public sphere and the link between secular and religious power. As a result, there are cultural conflicts arising when marginal groups are expected to engage in the dominant practices of the majority accepting the dominant norms and values thereby.

This is also the inherent cause of conflict in the governance of modern nation-states which are based on the production of cohesive imagined communities (Anderson 1991). These governance practices (i.e. strategies of a government to govern its people) were initially developed for a homogeneous population that identifies itself not only through the symbolic insignia of national membership (citizenship, passport) but also across a range of common cultural practices (norms and values such as language, traditions, everyday-life practices, forms of participation, understanding and acceptance of social hierarchies, etc.). Through certain governance practices individuals are made to feel that they belong, for example through emphasizing commonly accepted value systems and cultural practices. Part of these governance practices is, moreover, an emphasis that these norms and values differ to other nations which makes the own nation unique. This is especially important regarding neighbouring nation-states to reiterate border practices and other immediate alien “threats” to the national cohesion and to citizens’ unrestricted loyalty through, for example, immigration, which brings potentially differing norms and values into the imagined national community. In consequence, the emphasis on the exclusiveness of the dominant value system as enforced in the governance practice, excludes marginal groups with differing value systems (Cutler 2006). The connected practices of the “othering” of differing cultural practices make these groups also become alienated.

However, most contemporary nation-states are much more diverse as the governance practices were made for. Even though many of the members hold British citizenship, a wide range of groups of people do not share all cultural practices of the British social majority that are the dominant practices of formal political participation and community activism. In consequence, these groups become progressively marginalised through the same mechanisms which were originally intended to exclude the national other. With the social majority being the white middle-class economically-participating tax payer, anybody who does not fall into this category can potentially become excluded, if unable to identify sufficiently with the dominant practices. Resulting from this, alienation now becomes an issue for the state. Action has to be taken if these groups become too big and therefore begin to threaten the social or national cohesion through their development of a system inside the legitimate system.

1.3. More attractive politics? The culture of informal political participation

The northern English uprisings in the summer of 2001 and the anti-social behaviour of youth gangs that both have occupied the political and media public are examples for social practices that deviate from the dominant practices of British society. For the members of these groups, however, these are one of few means that are available to them in order to engage the public with the issues that affect and influence their lives, given that they are otherwise largely excluded from the dominant cultural practices of the social majority as explained above.

In the summer of 2001, civil riots broke out in several northern English mill towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire. They followed a decade-long series of riots across England with peaks in 1981 and 1991, and happened alongside tax strikes across the whole of the country, for example against

poll tax, and rent strikes in Liverpool, and industrial actions such as the miners' strikes across northern English and Midlands mining towns.³ As a result, violent confrontations between the working class and the state have become established as a "traditional" form of working-class civic protest which in 2001 were adopted by young South Asian men brought up in Britain (Amin 2003). The towns affected by the riots in the summer of 2001 included Burnley, Oldham and Bradford: for several days in each town, spread out across the region, for the duration of several months, white and South Asian communities engaged in violent confrontations with each other and the police. The affected neighbourhoods were some of the most deprived areas of Britain according to the social deprivation index: in Burnley these included Daneshouse-Stoneyholme, Duke Bar and Burnley Wood. In Burnley the riots were set off by the stabbing of an Asian taxi driver for which revenge was being sought, and it has been rumoured within the community that this conflict was due to a turf war between Asian and white drug dealers. In the end, hundreds of young white and South Asian men engaged in violent confrontations which in due course turned into a confrontation of the communities with the police. Riot police were brought in from Manchester and other districts; these 'outsider' officers were subsequently referred to by the South Asian community as being especially heavy-handed. Moreover, it has been rumoured that individual riot policemen swapped the ID numbers of their shoulder pads to disguise their identities whilst engaging in unnecessarily violent treatment of South Asian men, thus, fuelling the confrontations. Frequent police cars racing up and down the narrow main roads of the densely populated, compact area kept the population awake for nights, as well as the continuously flying helicopters using the fenced-off car park of the near-by ASDA store, located between the town centre and the local

³ In 1981 there were riots in Toxteth (Liverpool), Brixton (London) and Handsworth (Birmingham), and in 1991 in Meadow Well (Newcastle upon Tyne), Blackbird Leys (Oxford) and

neighbourhood of Stoneyholme, as a landing base. The atmosphere in the communities has been reported as having resembled an “open-war operation”. The confrontation between the South Asian communities and the police was high-jacked in due course by groups of white “professional” racist hooligans who roamed the streets and set fires to Asian corner shops in Burnley Wood.

Urgently, the British government had to show immediate action to calm down a shocked British media informed public. The analysis of these riots in the aftermath stated in summary that the communities were segregated and individuals disaffected (Cantle 2001). More sympathetic debates in academia suggested that the riots were the claims-making to British citizenship by young South Asian men that had been denied to them on an everyday basis (Amin 2003, Kundnani 2001a, 2001b). This denial took the form of structural unemployment and employment in low-skilled jobs, socio-economic exclusion from mainstream consumption patterns, everyday racism, institutional racism, being made a public enemy through Islamophobia and being faced with corrupt Asian community leaders.⁴ As a result, young South Asian men did not enjoy the same rights and privileges as British citizens like the social majority did. In fact, they felt disadvantaged and as second-class citizens. Due to generational conflicts, moreover, they felt misrepresented by the community leaders of their parents’ generation since this generation claims to fewer rights as full citizens than the younger generation; Bagguley and Hussain (2005), thus, have called the parents’ generation “denizens” instead of citizens. Resulting from their marginalised social position within the local South Asian community as well as wider society, they are, as a collective, rarely

Ely (Cardiff) (Campbell 1993).

⁴ During my fieldwork in 2005, two Asian councillors from Burnley had pending court proceedings for electoral fraud.

endowed with or involved in the dominant cultural practices of political participation. By consequence, they do not have the same channels of expressing their dissent. As a result, the young Asian men rioting in the summer of 2001 could legitimately be seen as engaging in informal forms of community activism and political participation; such as identity politics. Hence, it is the aim of this thesis to look at the informal practices of resisting the state and at the same time, participating politically of marginal groups, such as the “Asian gang” in Burnley.

Political marginalization is experienced in a similar way by the group of white young working class men represented in so-called “youth gangs”. Youth gangs engaging in practices of “anti-social” behaviour are engaging in forms of political participation and community activism, albeit considered as illegitimate by the dominant classes and the state. Historically, the public has always viewed working-class youth gangs as nuisances across any town or city. The public notion of the roots of the trouble, of unruly working class young males organised in groups roaming the city, is culturally and historically rooted in the Victorian age and its period of industrialization (Nayak 2003). An example of the earliest youth gangs in Britain are the ‘scuttlers’ in Manchester – ‘scuttles’ was the name given to gang fights (Davies 2008). In this period, cities developed with a high density of population and the division of labour and leisure time for young male industrial workers which were found in gin palaces and public houses and roaming the streets after work, causing trouble. Dominant images of unruly young working class males have been closely connected to those of the urban poor as a threat to the upper classes since Victorian times (Mayhew 1950). These connections are still noticeable in contemporary debates about working class young men (Nayak 2003).

Too young to work and without money in a post-compulsory education Britain, young working-class boys spent most of their time outside the small, overcrowded terraces of the working class, roaming the streets in friendship groups and in gangs where they would be mixing with the urban poor.⁵ For the young boys, these gangs were important social groups which would accompany their transition from childhood to adulthood. In these gangs they would learn how to have close relationships with people outside their families and to create networks that would help them to support themselves to make a living for as long as they were not in industrial employment. At the same time, these relationships in the gang which also impacted on the kinds of relationships the group would form to other gangs and agencies (such as the police for example) in the local neighbourhood, were their means of survival outside the family home in an often rough and dangerous neighbourhood in marginal areas of cities inhabited by the lower/working classes (Thrasher 1936). These neighbourhoods were absent of the influence of the state in the form of local authorities who neither provided sufficient social services for deprived groups nor protected them from crime. From these neighbourhoods, community activism developed as we know it today. It grew from when local communities got together to gain a political voice in order to claim rights and improve their living conditions.

Likewise, local youth gangs perform in exactly the same way as groups of community activists. Boys in youth gangs are too young to be able to get employment, and too young to be able to join adult community networks, yet are generally lacking in physical space and financial support in the home. Being bored with staying at home, they feel the need to venture out with their peers - boys at the same age from other families in the

⁵ Think for example of the story of *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, who is an orphan gang leader getting into trouble with criminal elements in Victorian London.

neighbourhood. Consequently, they get together in youth gangs; the latter understood as shared interest groups of individuals with the same cultural dispositions, needs and outlooks. Together as a group, they develop strategies in order to socially, politically and economically participate in their social life-worlds, which are deprived urban areas. The cultural practices of youth gangs are invariably adapted to their local areas and to the structural (social, economic and political) constraints of the social life-worlds excluding them from adult and/or upper-class practices. Thus, their practices are considered as illegitimate practices of political participation by the state. They reflect the different channels that youth gangs have to use in order to achieve an impact on the physical and socio-economic organization of their areas; indeed, they are forced to use a different “language” to be heard. The practices of youth gangs are, thus, simply a different version, an “urban vernacular” (O’Cadhla 2001) of the legitimate forms of political participation and community activism.⁶

Similarly, the high density of political and economic practices in cities allowed for alternative economic practices to evolve on the margins of a population that was not able to make a living within legitimate economic practices; with poverty and crime being the key problems of deprived urban places. Because of their excellent local knowledge and their informal ways of operating, youth gangs have always had a good knowledge of alternative economic practices in their areas such as organised crime. Over the course of their gang membership, gang members would either grow out of the gang by becoming employed, or they would enter organised crime (Thrasher 1936). To support the development of a young gang member into a socially acceptable life-style the community has traditionally

⁶ What needs to be added here is that the youth gang is a common social phenomenon and not particular to Britain; the circularity of social reconstruction through the young generation is to be found everywhere. In Germany, for example, we have the Baader-Meinhoff experience that started in the 1968 student movement and developed into a terrorist organization in the end.

provided spaces for organised activities for young men, for example in the form of boys' clubs provided by trade unions (i.e. the Burnley Boys Club). These clubs would help to socialise a young man into employment and have traditionally functioned as the organised and structured form of "learning to labour" (Willis 1981).

During deindustrialization, unemployment struck a whole class and eliminated the socio-economic position which a young working class man would have been socialised into in the past (Nayak 2003, Winlow 2001). Young men are still organised in youth gangs; for the time of their post-gang membership, however, there was a void opening up for the whole generation resulting from a lack of employment opportunities. Resulting from this lack of alternative careers, working-class youth gangs, thus, have become even more of a social problem because of the higher likelihood of the gang members to enter a career in organised crime. Many working class youth clubs such as working men's boys' clubs have closed down, too, alongside the closure of industries; although the Burnley Boys Club in Daneshouse does still exist.

Today's ASBO and YOB discourses - aligned with the public bedevilling of "hoodies" - are reflections of a society dealing with a second generation of left-behind young working class men who are aware of and dealing with their social stigmas (Goffman 1975). The implicit message that does not seem to reach neither authorities, nor British society, is that ASBO, YOB and "hoodie culture" together with "chav gang culture" are social and cultural practices that are symptomatic of a generation of young men who are trying to express themselves and make sense of their stigmatised working-class lives without the luxury of having working-class employment careers. Moreover, no effort is made to accept these practices as informal forms of political participation through which young working-

class men engage with society and try to gain power to impact on the social and physical organization of their social life-worlds. The insistence to classify these practices as illegitimate forms of political participation instead to regard them rather as the “urban vernacular” (O’Cadhla 2001) of legitimate forms of political participation and community activism serves to exacerbate the potential for social conflict.

1.4. Informal political practices and the state: a case of “miscommunication”?

In this context, one important question to consider is why it is that the state resists reading and reacting to the informal forms of political participation so vehemently? Informal political practices are a problem for the state because they happen outside its spheres of control and influence. This is because the state is tied down to reading and reacting exclusively to formal forms of political participation because of its institutional nature and role as official gate keeper. It is supposed to administer and govern its citizenry by means of an elected government and attached body of administration. The state establishes its relationship with the citizenry through the regular election ritual and bureaucratic practices. Many of these require a range of knowledge from the citizenry to be able to perform them successfully.

Contemporary formal forms of political participation in Britain are connected to middle class values and practices; i.e. the social majority is represented in public debates with its values whereas working class values have been progressively devalued. This starts with the socialization process in school as Evans (2007) has shown by her analysis of educational discourses. She argues that formal learning in schools replicates the social interactions of middle class families. Thus, it is argued that working class children often perform less well in schools because they are used to other forms of social interaction from home. In post-industrial neo-liberal

capitalist society, Evans argues, middle-class aspirations of self-improvement have become the non-plus-ultra for the whole British society, whereas traditional working-class values such as working class pride and content about one's class position have become devalued. At the same time, social mobility is not as wide-spread as suggested by the government and the "glass ceiling" prevents many working-class people from becoming middle-class. Being "stuck" in their class, in addition to the new stigma attached to being working class, young people are wont to feel left behind with their frustrations and this is likely to fuel the fires of social conflict.

Debates on political participation have undergone a similar and related process to this educational debate. Formal forms of participation include voting and sending in petitions on issues of public concern, engaging in debates or citizen mobilization for middle class concerns such as environmentalism, education and home ownership (Birch 1993, Beetham 2003). Working-class community activism has largely been eradicated through the decline of industrial employment; the disappearing of trade unions, for example, has largely been an outcome of 1980s British politics. Today, working-class values do still exist in former working-class communities but they have been heavily devalued through public discourses of the neo-liberal capitalist British society (Evans 2007). This society recognises individual values based on a certain mode of education, self-improvement and high levels of economic participation (*ibid.*). Traditional working-class values such as the pride of belonging to one's class are seen negatively by dominant classes as leading to a lack of aspiration and therefore have been negatively associated with mental inflexibility as well as "the pride that makes social value out of territoriality" (*ibid.*: 23). As a consequence, the contemporary British public is framed by middle-class values and not only lacks the presence of

working-class values but in fact rejects them. Hence, working-class forms of political participation have developed into informal patterns, thus reinforcing the marginal status of these social groups. It is the urgent task of this thesis to investigate these forms and to examine their connections to the formal political economy.

Similarly, forms of participation of young people and BME (Black Minority Ethnic) groups, as these groups are commonly referred to by policy makers, join the informal sector as they do not fit the middle-class values of the dominant classes and simply do not have the “habitus” or the social capital (Bourdieu 2000 [1984]) required to engage in political society. Thus, young people’s differing cultural practices clash with this adults’ world where formal participation and power are taken for granted as politicians and other adult “movers-and-shakers”⁷ display in public debates. Young people, however, are not even a homogeneous group; they are as diverse as the rest of society, differentiated by social categories of gender, class and ethnicity as well as life-style choices or constraints. The WASP values of the middle-class social majority not only exclude the working class but also ethnic minority communities of non-white background and other religions (Cutler 2006). Certain levels of difference between these groups are socially accepted as long as there are still sufficient similarities regarding the majority of values. As we shall see, youth cultures such as the “moshers”⁸ are mostly accepted in Harrogate because they have the economic capital on disposal in order to engage in the consumption pattern of the social majority of the town. Their middle-class equivalent of the “goths” in Burnley experience less acceptance in

⁷ A colloquial ironic term popularly used in politics to describe powerful and influential people with the right forms of capital and habitus.

⁸ “Moshers” is a subcultural term given to young people of fairly assured middle-class background who listen to rock music and “mosh”, i.e. head-bang to it. The term is used by other subcultural groups to address them.

their local, more working class areas where they feel pushed out by working-class youth. They feel more accepted in the town centre, however, which is a place of consumption. Young South Asian men are socially accepted when they engage in forms of white middle class community activism and formal youth work closely supervised by the state. They are much less accepted, though, when they engage in Islamic cultural practices and when they resist the surveillance of their community activism and youth work by the state.

Even when the state overlooks or blanks them out, informal forms of political participation still have a vast impact on the public and its discourses. These alternative forms of political participation of marginalised working class communities are a problem for the state as poor working class communities have become “ungovernable” for the local authorities in many towns and cities across Britain. These neighbourhoods make headlines in the media for being crime-stricken and drug-stricken, blighted with gang and gun crime, anti-social behaviour of the so-called “YOBs”, segregated between ethnicities, for the lack of policing and becoming no-go areas for the middle classes. Through rules and regulations that are communicated on multiple explicit and implicit levels the state not only encourages citizens to engage in formal political participation, but at the same time puts them legally off from informal forms of political participation and alternative forms of community activism.

1.5. De-politicising the margins? Youth criminalisation through “active citizenship”

During the period in which fieldwork was undertaken the British media and politicians were routinely addressing the problem of “anti-social behaviour”. In so doing, they were expressing their intolerance to everyday

acts of civil disobedience, one example being the riots, performed by “social activists” voicing the to-date unresolved perpetual British problem of class inequalities. The sheer dimension of the problem is featured extensively across British society: there are frequent occurrences of social disturbances, a sad record of housing Western-Europe's biggest prison population per capita as well as the highest number of prison-sentenced young offenders, plus the lowest age of criminal responsibility set at the age of 10,⁹ disturbingly high levels of gang, gun and drug crimes, the highest level of video surveillance of public spaces through CCTV and a tremendously high number of gated communities built in cities - so far only known in places of vast economic differences such as in the developing countries of Latin America. In other words, the divide between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in the UK remains immense.

However, this social divide has been successfully disguised in recent times through the neo-liberal governance strategy of making available universal consumption patterns to the whole body of the citizenry - also named the “class-less” society (Rose 1996, McRobbie 2009). As part of this governance strategy discursive practices were used to homogenize consumption patterns alongside middle-class patterns (Evans 2007): education, housing, health and leisure services had been made available for everybody in the same way. British society had become a society that likes to think of itself as class-less or more specifically as everybody being middle class. Many members of the working class, however, have been thinking and behaving differently. They have been disconnected from formal political participation and have been forced to engage more and more in alternative social, economic and political practices. The neo-liberal climate of individual responsibility for economic success or failure (Rose

⁹ The age of criminal responsibility is 8 years in Scotland and 10 years in England. Most European countries have a much higher age; 16 in Germany, for example.

1996) has turned socially disconnected young working class men into ‘angry young men’ (Winlow 2001). These ‘angry young men’ are doomed to fail with very little welfare support and have started to turn against society. They have become the latest “folk devil” and the focus of a new moral panic about disengaged working class men, provoked by the media’s propagated stereotype of the “chav”; hence continuing the “tradition” of folk devils promoted by the media since the British mods and rockers of the 1950s (Cohen 2002). The means of helping act against this problem are the nationwide introduction of citizen education into the national curriculum as well as youth participation programmes such as youth councils or the “team programme” by the Princes’ Trust, however, acknowledge the problem across all groups of young people and across the whole country.

There has been a long-term trend of falling turnout in British general elections since the 1960s and it has been acknowledged that low turnout has always been the norm in local elections (Whiteley 2003, Electoral Commission 2003, Rallings and Thrasher 2003) even though there was a two percent increase in turnout in the 2005 general election (BBC News 2005). Clearly, it is not a good reflection on government if only one third of the British population bothers to turn out for elections; such as has been the case with 35 percent that voted in the 2003 local elections (Electoral Commission 2003: 4). To gain legitimacy by its population, a government needs a higher turnout. However, it might be argued that white middle class youth are not the political problem *per se* because they still participate socially and economically in legitimised forms and ways, i.e. they are not the ones who are in the press for “anti-social behaviour” but “hoodies”. And as long as they seem to be participating at least socially and economically, they give legitimacy to the norms and values of their society represented by their government and thus legitimise their

government. Thus, falling electoral turnout has also been described as “voter contentment” (Butler 2001). The actual problem, thus, are the white young working class men and women that give society reason to stigmatise them and see them as a “problem” which in turn is being studied by sociologists and the like. Studying them as a ‘problem’, however, overlooks the fact that these groups of young men and women protest against the state. Their protest, thus, becomes subjugated knowledge that is being ignored by the state because it has got the power to decide on the definitions of what counts as official protest (Foucault 2003).

Over the course of the last decade, New Labour has introduced a range of social, political and economic participation policies into their youth agenda in order to include young people into society after young people had been much neglected by Thatcher and her successors. The notion of ‘active citizenship’ was introduced into political discourses, Citizen Education introduced as a subject in schools, and the agenda “Young People Matter” in youth work. The agenda of “Young People Matter” demanded of overburdened and under-paid youth services to deliver a range of services to young people such as the facilitation of their inclusion into political processes as well as the caring support of deprived young people and the protection of vulnerable young people from abuse. In Burnley, overworked and stressed youth and community workers complained that they are supposed to work with groups of youth, when what was actually needed was one-to-one support for individuals that cannot cope any more with the rough life in poor communities. Neo-liberal capitalism does not facilitate responding to these people’s needs. Reflecting the protestant spirit as described Weber (1930) and Bellah (1967; 1975) each person seems to be considered responsible for its own life, even if children as young as 8 or 10, neglected by their drug-user parents who clearly cannot cope themselves with their own situation of deprivation, end up in prison. It

seems rather ironic that policy makers talk under these circumstances about getting young people to participate in communities and politics, to make them contribute something to these communities that do not seem to reciprocate much; but this expectation is part of the “we are all middle class” logic underlying the practices of the neo-liberal and capitalist discourse: it denies the problems and hardship of working class people’s lives who have been cut off from economic, social and political participation in post-industrialism pretending “everyone is middle class now” and has “access” to the social, economic and political lifestyle of this class, thanks to the class-less society provided by New Labour. This resonates with Weber’s (1930) idea that a well-ordered life would not only serve religion but also capitalism. The formal forms of political participation of the working classes, thus, have been eliminated and the political agenda of the working class has been de-politicized. Young working-class people choose to state their political point through “anti-social behaviour” as this informal form of political participation is labelled by the dominant class. It is a way of contemporary class protest and alternative politics meant to resist the state.

The state, in turn, is trying to integrate young people as economic, social and political participants through the formal ways it has at hand. Heavy sanctioning was established in the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act which punishes anyone caught in informal social and economic practices. This tightened penal code allows the police, in cooperation with communities, to give anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) to children as young as ten and dispersal orders to groups of young people; both penal measures are intended to protect the community by regulating young people’s access to or exclusion from certain places (Vaughan 2000), but consequently depriving them of citizenship rights and human rights. Young people that would need one-to-one support and counselling are put instead into

volunteering programs where they are meant to learn to become “worthy” citizens that contribute to the community.

What is interesting, however, is that these programs and their official discourse mainly existed in Burnley and not in Harrogate. The community was often evoked in the official discourses, which require also from the young people to give something back to their community. This is hardly mentioned in more affluent places like Harrogate where youth workers have a lonely life in trying to support a few youths from problem families from one or two housing estates. Volunteering community programs, which are found in poorer towns and areas, thus, are means to reintegrate problematic young people into society, but first of all into their working class community, which is unfortunately falling apart itself. Not only are these programs intended to re-educate young people but also to enforce a middle-class notion of community activism. This aims to reorganize the working-class communities and make them governable again. These programs focus on altering the economic, social and political behaviours of young people to turn them into “decent”, “law-abiding” citizens that are useful to the community and employable in the job market. The educational programs intend to train the young people for formal forms of economic, social and political participation and to undo their informal habitus (Bourdieu 2000 [1984]). Throughout my own field research I encountered young people feeling deeply unsettled by these programs because their working-class values were to be substituted by the individualistic middle-class values such as self-reliant work and consumption patterns. In other words, these programs intend to undertake the transformation of young working class people into middle-class citizens.

The state attempts to de-politicise informal political practices. It does so by making those, who practice them, invisible. In this sense, training them into people with middle-class behaviour is one option; the other is to lock them away in prisons. The early contact of young children with prison life, however, leads usually to a life-long career as a serious criminal. ‘Active citizenship’ is the state’s policy agenda which claims to re-engage young people in political participation, but aims at stopping any informal forms of economic, social and political practices. The state ignores the underlying message of alternative political practices as a different way to claim citizenship back, to defend the human rights of marginal people and to protest against class inequalities. These alternative manifestations of political behaviour can therefore be considered as resistance to the state’s agenda of a homogenised British society. The state wants political participation only in so far as it complies with the form and ensures social and political cohesion. It is necessary that the state starts to reconsider its labelling for informal forms of political participation. If it does not, it might risk political actions of groups of people being stripped of their rights which could have a much more unsettling effect on British society than the 7/7 bombings of the London underground transport system in 2005.

1.6. De-ethnicizing the margins? “Community cohesion” and Islamophobia

Alongside class, ethnicity has been an axial issue in Britain’s colonial past. The surprisingly massive divide between the successful celebration of multiculturalism (with examples such as the Notting Hill Carneval) and the 80s and 90s riots of deprived black communities in places such as Toxteth, Liverpool, and Brixton, London, is becoming more entrenched (CCCS Collective 1982). In the first decade of the new millennium the South Asian communities riot and come under fire by the political public. Again

a new generation of angry young British Asian men is claiming citizenship rights by using the “traditional” political methods of young working-class white men to express their English working class anger and take to the streets of northern English towns (Amin 2003).

Weakened by its domestic affairs the British nation has become weakened by its foreign affairs too; supporting the U.S. in their war against Iraq not only angered the present young generation of British Asian young men it made Britain a key international target for ‘Islamic’ terror; as epitomised by the devastating 7/7 suicide bomb attacks on the London underground transport system in 2005. As a consequence, the British public engages in the bedeviling of its young South Asian Muslim male population (Salgado-Pottier 2008). The public addresses them as a community of “home-grown terrorists”; in doing this it joins the state’s practices of excluding the emerging alien as a threat from the inside of the community. This attempt is part of state practices to maintain the national unity within the imagined community. It does not come as a surprise that the whole generation of angry young British Asian men reacts with even more anger and the anger becomes extended across the whole South Asian community. This threatens the imagined community of the British nation to fall apart.

The state in crisis turns to similar techniques it has tried to make its citizenry class-blind: only this time the aim is to turn its citizens “ethnicity-blind”¹⁰ in order to get rid of the Muslim South Asian “alien”. By announcing the end of multiculturalism the state proclaims the beginning of “community cohesion”, amongst communities that live together beyond cultural differences. This action was suggested in reports written for the national government after the civil disturbances of the 2001 summer in

¹⁰ With “ethnicity-blind” I am referring to certain state practices that reduce citizens’ awareness of ethnic differences, such as the censorship of ethnic identity in the media, for example.

northern English towns (Cantle 2001, Denham 2002). It was implemented directly and indirectly. Directly, it was implemented through the establishment of community cohesion units in the councils of affected towns like Burnley Borough Council. These units' task was to encourage community 'cohesive' activities in order to enforce cohesiveness and to allocate funding for 'cohesive' community activities from the national governments' community cohesion fund.

The policy of community cohesion intended to encourage more "community bridging" and less "community bonding" or the capitalizing on well "bonding" communities (McGhee 2003; 2005). These notions of community are used in the policy documents and draw upon the notion of individual's social capital as first suggested by Bourdieu (2000 [1984]) and which has been adopted by the Northern American political scientist Putnam (2000) with the attempt to turn it into a governance tool in order to make the concept useful for the community as a whole. "Community bonding" means that an entire, homogeneous community consisting of individuals with high amounts of social capital resulting in dense and well-functioning networks within a community, making it cohesive in itself. "Community bridging" means that these networks go across different communities making communities cohesive across their cultural diversities – this is also what the term community cohesion as used in political discourse actually refers to; it does not refer to an individual cohesive community but to cohesiveness across multiple communities. The reports talk about the problem that communities do not live with each other but alongside each other and that on an everyday basis, they would not meet. Community cohesion, thus, suggests that communities need to be encouraged to live with each other and to meet each other on an everyday basis (Cantle 2001, Denham 2002, McGhee 2003; 2005).

The physical make-up of neighbourhoods was also identified as enforcing the problem as neighbourhoods are ethnically organised; public discourses and the government talk about “ethnic segregation”. Indeed, some areas of Burnley have up to 70 percent South Asian residency. Simultaneously to community cohesion activities the government also introduced urban renewal in some of the most deprived areas of Burnley (according to the UK index of multiple deprivation, cf. IMD 2004); many of these correlating with neighbourhoods of predominantly South Asian residency. The activities of urban renewal mainly consist of master plans and CPO.¹¹ Only fairly recently, however, local English authorities have introduced the planning and design of neighbourhoods by themselves but are still very restricted by the constraints of liberal governance. During my fieldwork in Burnley, there was a master plan discussed for the town and consultations on the re-design of local neighbourhood were being run for the residents.

In Britain, the majority of residential buildings in urban public spaces are individually and privately owned, as opposed to the renting culture in Germany, for example, where the majority of residential buildings are rented from public or private housing associations. These are heavily regulated by tenancy laws favouring the tenant resulting from thriving welfare state policies at a time when the British nation was being privatised by Thatcher. Every town and city has large neighbourhoods consisting of the typical Victorian terrace houses which are well known from images of industrial northern English towns and cities. These areas had spread out in the period of industrialization in order to house the industrial workers and their families.¹² During de-industrialisation and the urban decline of

¹¹ CPO stands for Compulsory Purchase Order; a legal tool used by English local authorities across the country to give them the power to be able to implement the new design of local neighbourhoods.

¹² In Germany, companies built housing for their workers that stayed in the companies' ownership; such as the blocks of flats which is the typical make-up of Berlin urban landscape. Companies such as Krupp in Bochum also built houses for their workers.

neighbourhoods and the simultaneous transformation of the working-classes into the middle-classes, those home owners who were able to better themselves would move out of working class areas being able to afford to buy property in more middle-class neighbourhoods. If they were not able to sell their old homes in declining working-class areas, the property would become vacant and deserted. With boarded-up basement windows and front doors, and broken windows on the first floor and uncovered roofs starting to grow trees and bushes out of them, they did not help to make the neighbourhood look nicer. Eventually, more and more residents would leave the areas. Often, these properties become vulnerable to squatting, arsons and other use of derelict space. Under New Labour's urban regeneration agenda, local authorities were able to designate these areas for urban renewal and would apply Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) to the residual residents in streets with a high proportion of vacant properties. Due to the fact that this process of implementing CPOs and finally, getting permission from national government to demolish and build new houses can take many years, sometimes even decades, poor areas are stricken with unused and unusable streets that are ugly and lower further the quality of life for the residents. Streets, which remind you of deserted neighbourhoods in war zones, are blighting northern English towns and cities like the plague.

Community cohesion and neighbourhood regeneration are government activities implemented by different government agencies (mainly housing, and youth and community work) and the connected debates follow separate official logics; the intended results, however, are closely related and were summarised by my informants as 'social engineering' – thus indicating that they could clearly see a connection between the two. In fact, it is part of the government practice to disguise this connection because the state is trying to interfere with citizens' lives in a way it is not authorized to do.

Moreover, both policies are intentionally not connected with each other because they actually address the problem of the other political sector without making it explicit; this is because if this connection would be made explicit, the state would become prone to legal action, because it infringes on citizen rights. Thus, the state practices two key strategies; first, to disguise the state's responsibility regarding urban deprivation, and secondly, to quickly and cheaply fix the problem. Both governance strategies are applied to very poor urban working class areas that often have a high percentage of migrant population. The riots occurred first and foremost because of the poverty of the communities and the connected health problems to poverty and only secondly, because they were migrant communities. By ethnicising the riots the actual problem of class inequalities have once more been de-politicised; this time the state does not blame individuals' inability to take responsibility for their lives but the problem of break-down of communities is essentialised as a problem of South Asian migrant communities "who do not want to mix" with the other communities. Since the more "respectable" working class and more middle class areas in Burnley are not affected by these policies but only working class areas, class is the ultimate problem and not ethnicity. Community cohesion policy, however, emphasises ethnicity and cultural difference and neglects class inequality. Urban regeneration, in turn, forces poorer families out of the communities through CPOs and due to far too expensive house prices in regenerated areas.

The ultimate aim of community cohesion and urban renewal, which is enforced by the combination of the two, is social control – during the research often research participants would accuse the council of "social engineering". The council, however, uses the notion of "participation" in order to actually cover up governance. The state is trying to force migrant communities to participate in society in a form that is acceptable for the

state and supports the state and its government and does not fragment its imagined community through norms and values differing from the ones propagated by public discourse. Therefore, after the riots in 2001 more community and youth workers were employed in Burnley who approached the friendship group of young British-Bangladeshi men from Stoneyholme who were then still in their last years at school. They helped them to set up a formal youth group called “Young People Together”¹³ and trained the older members of the group as voluntary youth workers. In those days, Lancashire Youth and Community Services worked closely with the group. “There was nothing there before we got help with starting the group”, my informants told me. The group received funding from the community cohesion fund and initially, the council and other youth work agencies were very pleased with the group and there was much cooperation with other groups, for example with the local youth theatre. By the time my research started with the group, however, things had changed. The group had run out of funding and was trying to get new financial support; however, the council did not approve any further financial support for the group. Other youth groups and community workers who were still funded through community cohesion, made it very clear why they felt uneasy working with the group: Young People Together was mainly mono-ethnic and had only male members: these conditions did not fit the government’s agenda for community cohesion. Basically, the group did not work community cohesive in the way the state wanted them to. On top of this, the group even taught Islam before and sometimes during their regular meetings to the younger members of the group. This fact was not discussed much amongst other youth agencies, but it was mentioned by a youth worker who was very upset about it calling it unprofessional and against the code of youth work. When the initial funding stream ran out, the group was never successful again with receiving new funding from community

¹³ The name of the group has been anonymised.

cohesion; even though the council seemed to work closely on the funding application together with the group whose leader went to meet the head of the Community Cohesion Unit on a regular basis. During the same period of time, other youth agencies, that used to recruit members for their own youth groups from Young People Together, began to find it more and more difficult to ensure the attendance of British-Bangladeshi boys. The relationships between Young People Together and the other youth and community work agencies in Burnley had gone very cold.

From the perspective of the young British-Bangladeshi men from Young People Together, the state was once more unreliable and neglected its duty to its citizens – and ignored its citizens’ rights. They resisted the state’s force to make them “mix” with other communities on a local level in a way they would have felt uncomfortable with, because their social organization did not match their own neighbourhood. The group was very successful and had many members, because everybody felt welcomed and comfortable in the group and assured that they shared many norms and values. The group was also very popular with the parents of the younger children because they met them regularly at the local mosque. In addition, in times of Islamophobia and heightened racism against “Muslim”-looking young men, many of the younger children were actually very interested in learning more about this religion, their parents’ religion that was being so much condemned by British society. As a result, even more young Muslim men started feeling alienated by this majority practice of “othering” and demonizing them. “I’m starting to lose *iman* (Arabic for ‘faith’)”, is what one of the young men confesses to the group at some point during the aftermaths of 7/7 – the bombing of the London underground transport system in July 2005 - when Burnley became flooded by journalists researching “Islamists”: they were starting to lose trust in their community and British society. As a consequence, many of them wanted to learn more

about Islam, the religion so much condemned by British society; and this, in turn, alienated young Muslim men whose parents' religion was demonized so much by British society. Yet these feelings of alienation made them turn even more to this religion in their search for some guidance in life (Salgado-Pottier 2008). They felt that Islam was giving them moral support and the social norms and values that somehow had gone missing in British society. The fear and hatred directed at British Muslim citizens, made many in this youth group feel that it was its duty to teach their younger members about Islam to reassure their sense of security in their lives. The pressure from the other youth and community work agencies of the town to make them stop teaching and discussing Islam contradicted completely the logics of everyday survival that they had only just developed as a community, and the way of giving sense to their lives in British society. This group interpreted this pressure from the state as destructive for their community cohesion. The state wanted "to mess" with the community and with people's lives. This attack from outside reinforced or might have even created social cohesion as any conflict situation does (Simmel 1955).

The group resisted successfully the state's attempts of de-ethicising the South Asian community of Burnley and this ironically happened with the help of the state itself: it had heavily essentialised and culturalised the problems of the communities as a result of ethnic segregation while downplaying the seriousness of the impact of social deprivation (Harris 2006). The Islamophobic public and political debates had major impacts on national policies focused on community cohesion and youth work, but paradoxically at the same time institutionalised the cultural diversity that the state loathed so much. The state unable to deal with the real social conflict suddenly asked the members of this group, normally excluded from formal participation, to take part in state actions against

fundamentalist Islamism. Selected members of the group and leaders of the Muslim community were invited to meet Hazel Blears, the Minister for Community Cohesion at that time, in Burnley - at a time when the group were not allowed to practice any mono-ethnic and religious youth work. In retrospect, it was an odd attempt to try to reintegrate the de-politicised and de-ethnicised “margins” back into the society, because the government used its legitimate structures of political participation to discuss with the otherwise invisible members of the state. This unequal cooperation is a daring challenge for the state to acknowledge the “disaffected” and “alienated” in times of deep social and political crisis. The future will tell if and how formal and informal structures of political participation will approach and if British society can deal with cultural diversity in its everyday life.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

Following Max Weber's (1980) theory on comprehensive sociology, a detailed description of the research process is the only way to objectivise social sciences that deal with subjective issues. Such a description makes it possible to comprehend the research context and findings and therefore ensures comparability. In line with Weber's philosophy, this chapter gives details of the ethnographic process and the associated data, which is the basis for the present thesis. As my own position as a researcher and my relationship with those that I was researching is critical to understanding the findings of the project, I wish to devote a substantial amount of attention in this chapter to reflecting on methods, ethics and my own epistemological standpoint. The reflexive analysis of the researcher's role in the field and the linked problems of access to the participants in the field are of particular importance in this specific context of studies of marginalized groups in the British society. The empirical research took place between the autumn 2004 and the autumn 2006 in two northern English towns in which I lived for six months: from June to December 2005 in Burnley, and from May until October 2006 in Harrogate. By the end of my fieldwork I had conducted 40 interviews with research participants and experts from Burnley and 19 interviews in Harrogate. Additionally, I produced about 150 pages of field notes on Burnley and about 80 pages of field notes on Harrogate. I regularly bought and collected the local newspapers, the Burnley Express and the Harrogate Advertiser/Ripon Gazette to get additional information on the two towns, i.e. the Harrogate district. I bought books on the history of the towns and read publications of prominent town members, for example, one written by a racist ring leader of the Burnley riots in 2001 (Porter 2005). Moreover, I

reviewed literature on political participation, community activism, and ethnography of marginal groups. Due the range of data that I collected, the methods I used, and the social groups I accessed I was able to collect a comprehensive picture of the complex social situations in Burnley and Harrogate.

2.1. Ethical considerations

Taking the view that ethnography is fundamentally dependant on the quality of human relationships inside the micro-cosmos to be studied, my integration into the local context determined the kind of data I could collect. The quality of the data depends on how good the ethnographer is at getting access to the researched groups, building stable relationships, finding a role in these groups and being recognized as being part of the situation. Ethnographers need to master the art of improvisation – making the most of social situations and to be diplomatic in highly sensitive subjects like mine: political participation. Hence, much of my fieldwork was the ongoing negotiation of my work with different groups to reassure them about my intentions and my trustworthiness.

Initially, I intended not to name the two towns but to call them by the fictional names of “Milltown” and “Spatown” in order to protect my research participants, and to protect myself as at this time the political situation was extremely tense in the UK (Amin 2005) – as headlines in the Guardian such as “Attack on London: Muslims tell Blears of price they’re paying, their anger – and fears” (The Guardian, 03.08.2005: 9) show. The terrorist attacks carried out by members of UK Muslim minorities in London made any approach to these group look suspicious, as much from the state view as from the minority groups, especially as it emerged that some of the alleged bombers were from the region where I carried out my fieldwork (Robben and Nordstrom 1995, Becker 1964). However, in the

end, I decided to keep the real names of both towns for two reasons. First because many of my research participants will have moved on from their social position and will not be identifiable and second it seems to me on reflection that an insider analysis of the actual situation of political participation in these communities can contribute to a better understanding of the political process in migrant and marginalized communities in the UK. My work is therefore to be seen as a contribution to rethink the state's approach to the marginalized groups in society and, maybe, offer new ways of responding. All names and personal details mentioned in the thesis have, however, been anonymised.

My study is unique for two reasons. The first unique dimension is its location and its timing. The two towns were Burnley and Harrogate, the first being a town with a high Muslim percentage and under national scrutiny in the aftermath of the London terrorist attacks. The second unique dimension is the ethnic and cultural identity of the researcher. This thesis is a study of a German female ethnographer going into northern English towns and through fieldwork, participating in public and political fields on the margins. The fact that I was a German woman seemed to have been a positive element in the quality of researcher-researched relationship. This is because I too was seen by them as an 'outsider'. A male UK ethnographer might have come up with very different outcomes. Consequently, my work contributes to the anthropology of social processes in contemporary complex societies (Spradley and McCurdy 1988, Barth 1989, Vered 2000).

2.2. Research context

The research project was devised in consultation with my primary supervisor. I had just finished my MA degree in European Ethnology at the Humboldt-University in Berlin and had had extensive training in urban

ethnography and the study of South Asian migrant groups. To study political participation amongst marginal groups in northern English towns sounded challenging and interesting to me. As an Anglophile (I have had friends in Bolton since the age of 14 and a degree in English and American Studies) I was particularly keen on going back to England and studying English society through the means of ethnography. Not to be English seemed an advantage under the circumstances, because I brought the “fresh eyes of the outsider” with me although, as described later, this was not always an advantage. When I came to Liverpool for my studies I was already acquainted with the identity of northern English mill towns because I had known Bolton very well since I was 14 years of age. I had been to Leeds and York before and knew the Yorkshire Dales and the mind-set of the “gentile” population cultural-historically through the works of the Brontë sisters that I had studied for my degree in English Literature. However, if it had not been for the trajectory of my PhD I would probably not have come to know Burnley and Harrogate so well.

2.3. Methodological framework

Since Malinowski’s work on the Trobriand Islands, ethnography became the discipline that deals with the specificity of local micro-cosmos of society (Malinowski 1972). Through participant observation (Spradley 1980), ethnographers socialize closely with their informants and try to adapt to written and unwritten local rules (Bruyn 1966, Bourgois 2003 [1996]). Standardization of ethnography, thus, is very difficult as each case is different. However a range of methods allows a systematic approach to the field of which participant observation is the most distinctive and important in traditional ethnographic studies abroad as well as in urban studies as the authors of the Chicago School have demonstrated (Park *et al.* 1968 [1925], Foote Whyte 1993 [1943], Thrasher 1936 [1927], Wirth 1956 [1928], Anderson 1961 [1923]). In my case semi-narrative interviews, with

a checklist of key areas I wanted to cover were also a major research tool. These were fully transcribed and analysed. Other data included a detailed field diary and additional documentary material such as local newspapers, local and national government documents, documents of local state agencies and data collected on the site of research. Through the review of literature the data is analysed and the result is a comprehensive account of a cultural group in a particular location. By drawing on a range of methods and materials the ethnographer is actively “constructing the field” (Vered 2000). This is necessary because contemporary ethnography in complex societies will not take place in culturally confined geographical territories but has to find other ways of establishing the field of cultural enquiry (Appadurai 1999, Moore 1987).

My ethnographic research aimed at comparison of two local political cultures, based on two northern English towns, Burnley and Harrogate. However, ethnographic comparisons are not unproblematic. For a comparison, two variables are needed: first of all, variables that stay constant and form the basis for the possibility of a comparison. Secondly, dynamic or contrasting variables are needed in order to complete the comparison. In the case of my research, the contrasting variable was the socio-economic make-up of the two towns, and the variable that stayed constant was the cultural identity of the researcher and the topical focus on political participation and alienation.

2.4. Study sites

One obvious question to attend to is the reason why I selected Burnley and Harrogate for my ethnographic work. I was originally asked by my supervisor, Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg if I was interested in ethnographically accompanying his Joseph-Rowntree research project on local democracy in northern English towns for my PhD (see Wilks-Heeg and Clayton 2006).

The towns were chosen for his project and local stake-holders included in the strategic decisions on the research methods so that there were some initial contacts in these towns through the funding body. Both towns are in the north of England, equally far away from the economic and political radiance of London, and lie one hour's distance from bigger sized northern English cities, Manchester and Leeds. As a result there were some geographical similarities likely to generate comparable data. In order to get data that was sufficiently different to make the comparison useful, the chosen towns had different socio-economic profiles. One was a wealthy market town with an affluent middle-class population and the other was a socially and economically declining mill town with a predominantly working-class population. The study was also concerned with assessing to what extent district councils governing distinct towns have any meaningful power in contemporary two-tier local government structures where most of the resources and functions are with county councils (Wilks-Heeg and Clayton 2006). For my methodological approach, these sites posed a lot of challenges, the key ones being the time constraints that ethnographic research in two sites involves and the challenge of the cultural comparison of two places.

2.5. Ethnographic methodology

Ethnography is time consuming. Schedules, agendas and planning can often become useless, because the ethnographer deals with people who have their own agendas and one cannot expect to be the first priority in their lives. It was therefore important to create as many opportunities for fieldwork even before the real long-term empirical research began. As a consequence, I started to network in and outside the two towns as soon as I had started my studies in Liverpool. I was introduced to the local stakeholders from both towns in the research advisory group meetings of

the project of my supervisor, which proved very valuable in the case of Burnley.

In Burnley a member of the board was the head of the community cohesion unit at Burnley council. He introduced me to a very capable freelance community worker who turned out to be a valuable contact and extremely helpful. She found my research important and wanted to help me, and at the same time was trusted and liked everywhere in the community. She introduced me to many community organizations and projects, such as the women from Burnley Food Links who happened to have a room to rent in their project house. As a result, I enjoyed a wonderful situation living right in the centre of Stoneyholme, one of the key South Asian areas of Burnley and to be located not only right in the centre of the community but also affiliated with the Burnley Food Links project. This would turn out to be of advantage for my presence in the field.

As it happened, the group of young Asian men from Young People Together were connected to this project and also lived in the same neighbourhood. Because we shared the experience of living in the same area, were concerned with similar issues of day to day life, any news from the local area and so on we had quite a lot in common so our relationships became more and more natural. In addition they were sympathetic towards me because I was not from the UK and because my research methods related well to their project. And the same was the case with other projects in the local neighbourhood where I lived and with other areas as well. People could connect with me just because I lived in Burnley and had an idea of what it was like. This enabled me to earn a degree of trust and allowed me to observe and talk to groups that might otherwise have been hard to reach and reluctant to engage.

In Harrogate I had to take a different approach. The members of the board of my supervisor's research project were less interested in my part of the research and I had to rely on other contacts. Another coincidence helped me: a university staff member had a relative living in Ripon, which is part of the Harrogate district. She had a spare room in her house and she and her two children had a keen interest in Germany since their mother/grand mother had been German. Again, given the time and resource constraints I faced, this was an invaluable opportunity to gain access to the field. Moreover, she worked for Harrogate College and was friendly with a youth worker who worked for the college, who in turn was willing to let me come along to his youth clubs. He used to work in Germany as a soldier before his career as a youth worker, which again proved instrumental in enabling me to establish sufficient trust and rapport to gain access to one of my target groups of research participants.

2.6. Everyday fieldwork in Burnley and Harrogate

My everyday research looked very different in Burnley than it did in Harrogate. This, in turn, is reflected in the nature of the data collected and my results. The reasons for these differences in how I conducted my everyday research are resulting from the different geographical/political contexts and socio-economic make-ups of the two towns; these, in turn, have a large impact on the differing forms and levels of political participation in these two places. Because of all the statutory participation work that was undertaken in Burnley, it was much easier for me to get a foot-hold into the public life of the Lancashire mill town. In Harrogate, however, public life was much more private – there were very few statutory services being run which I could attend or use for my research. Instead, there were much more privately organised community-based interest groups, some of them I tried to access but was only successful whenever I had the right forms of social/cultural capital, i.e. I knew a

member of the group or I had something in common with most members of the group.

In Burnley I lived quite centrally in a South Asian neighbourhood with only a ten minutes walk into the town centre. The Food Links project that I was introduced to by Sam had rented a terraced house opposite their allotment, and I rented a room off them to be not only in the heart of the town but also, to become affiliated to a local community project. Because I was “physically” there, I knew of every event, meeting and activity and went, i.e. “stayed at home” whenever I was invited. For example, we had monthly gardening days on a weekend when volunteers from the community were helping in the allotment which I attended, too. It was a nice opportunity to get to meet and talk to people by working together.

Everyday I was very busy: I tried to go to as many public community activities as possible. This included activities organized or connected to one of my closest gate keepers, Sue Woodbridge¹⁴, who was running Community Participation Business (CPB)¹⁵, her own community participation organisation which was at the time mostly performing work given by the council’s community cohesion unit. Sue was very helpful and informed me about many events and sessions running in the community, where she was going or when she could not make it so that I could go along. We also met up on a regular basis, at her office or for lunch to discuss her and my work and the latest events in the town. She was crucial for my work, without her I would not have gained such a good access to different groups across the town. Sue was a bit of an outsider like me; she was originally from Ireland and very trusted by the South Asian

¹⁴ All names and identifying information have been anonymised to protect my research participants’ identities.

¹⁵ The name of the business has been changed to avoid possible identification of individuals.

community, not least because of her Irish origin as it made her belong to a minority in England – an aspect of her identity that the South Asian community strongly connected with.

During the day, unless there were meetings or activities to attend, I would go into town and/or other central areas (such as Top o'th' Town, Burnley Wood, Daneshouse) on a daily basis to spend time in public places, use public facilities and services (the library, the gym), use local businesses (I was a regular in one particular launderette in Burnley Wood, and often used the café in the Daneshouse Sure Start/community centre), use leisure facilities (the route along the canal, Thompson Park, pubs and clubs in town where I went with young people from the town). I made friends with neighbours and other volunteers and participants of community activities who I would meet in town for coffee or meet at home.

I had a time-table with certain things I would attend on a regular basis: the weekly meetings of the Pakistani women's Lunch club, the weekly evening meetings of Young People Together (the "Asian gang"), weekly evening meetings of the Youth Council, the weekly evening meetings of Anti-Racism in Milltown, the evening sessions of the local youth club in Burnley Wood and Top o'th' Town.

Additionally, I went and took part in festivities and community events, such as the Islamic *Eid* celebrations in the South Asian community, which fell into the month of November in this particular year, for which I got a new *shalwar kameez* and had three invites from neighbours to join them in their celebrations. In August I attended and took part in the Reach 3 festival, where they had bands and activities in Queen's park after a procession across the town. I had been helping the community group from

Top o'th' Town with their float and was on the float as well during the whole event.

In Harrogate my fieldwork was different due to the divergent social, economic and political make-up of the town and the nature of my preliminary fieldwork contacts. My accommodation was in Ripon, a "city" 30 minutes from the town of Harrogate but part of the Harrogate district. Without a car, it turned out to be very difficult to research Harrogate and the district on an everyday level, but this in turn reflects the experience that certain groups who cannot afford or are unable to use a car have.

I went over to Harrogate on a daily basis to attend the local youth clubs of Colin, a good friend of my landlady, Susanna, in Fairfax and Starbeck, to attend youth events such as the preliminary Youth Council meeting in Boroughbridge, attended a few sessions of the "Bumps to Babes" group at the TRAX youth service in Harrogate, participated in some detached work in Harrogate, and the Hot Shots Snooker Club in Harrogate, organized and run by young people. Moreover, I attended festivities and one-off events in Harrogate and Ripon such as: ice skating in Bradford with the YOU project, the band night at Knaresborough Castle, the St. Wilfred procession in Ripon in which I participated on the float of the Queen Victoria pub, where my young friend Sarah worked, going to the sea side and fun days with the youth service and an activity session with young people from Calvary Chapel visiting Harrogate from the U.S. I also went to Harrogate College on a regular basis to meet up with Susanna as well as Lilian, a young woman who was supporting the two student union representatives at the college. I also met up with other members of the community, joined my friend Clara at the Army Foundation College where she was a civilian welfare officer for the junior soldiers, had an insight into the charity work of better off women in Harrogate by meeting up with a volunteer from the

Hospice. To get a rounded picture of the political scene in Harrogate, I also attended public meetings council meetings in Harrogate and Northallerton, where the North Yorkshire county council is based, the public consultation meeting at Harrogate Fire Brigade, the 'Action for the Environment' group meeting where strategies for cyclists were discussed.

What becomes clear already is a very eclectic picture of my fieldwork in Harrogate which felt much harder to manage than in Burnley. All the experience I had from accessing communities in Burnley turned out to be of little use in Harrogate. Because of less policy intervention in Harrogate, the communities are hardly organized on a local level. Most social networks in Harrogate and the district are organized on a private economic level, i.e. people know each other from working together or from sharing interests that are not based on local neighbourhood identities. For most people in Harrogate I remained the German visitor - considered as 'the student' and/or 'the tourist' - although often people thought I was Eastern European, and all of them tried to get me a job. This was a significant finding for my research because it inferred that most networks in Harrogate were centered around economic practices, with social or political practices being secondary.

2.7. The reflexive researcher – national and cultural identity

Reflexivity is one of the key tools of ethnography through which objectivity is established in social science, because it defines the particular condition of the ethnographer and its personal context in the field (Weber 1980, Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). My cultural identity has been very important for the way I conducted research, the kind of people I met and the groups I found access to in the end or did not. My studies are undertaken in a foreign context and also, I am an anthropologist in a sociology department. I was undertaking the required modules from the

Faculty of Social Sciences at Liverpool University and making my own cultural adjustments when I started my first approaches to Burnley and Harrogate. I began with Burnley for a range of reasons but mainly because my supervisor and I had made the initial assumption that it would be harder to gain data in Burnley than in Harrogate – an assumption that ultimately turned out to be wrong. Moreover, Burnley is closer to Liverpool so that I could initially travel there just for a day before moving over completely to do my fieldwork. Furthermore, Burnley is about half way between Liverpool and Harrogate so that I was able to set up my fieldwork in Harrogate from Burnley by taking day-trips.

As mentioned above the assumption made by my supervisor and I that it would be much harder to gain access to the communities in Burnley than Harrogate, was wrong. This, I believe was due to my social and cultural identity.¹⁶ That I was perceived differently in different localities was evident from the way in which my research experience differed between the two towns. My national identity, class background and my gender had a different impact in each town and consequently on the way I was able to conduct my research. I have two main explanations for this: one is the different socio-economic make-up of each town and the second is the way I found access to groups, that is the contacts I had into the communities of the two towns. I will talk about the latter in a later section of this chapter.

2.7.1. A German female ethnographer on the margins of northern English towns

In Burnley being German helped me very much in researching the group of young Asian men (see chapter 3) and the “chav gang” (see chapter 5) and ‘compensated’ for my gender. Normally I would have found it difficult to

¹⁶ For the methodological implications of the social identity of the ethnographic researcher see Kulick and Willson (1995).

establish good rapport with this group of young men because in their everyday lives within the South Asian community of Stoneyholme, the genders are predominantly separated. Both groups of young men found me interesting to talk to because I was German. As a foreigner I clearly shared their marginal position in British society, even if I did not have to deal with the same kind of racism they experienced in daily life. The group of young Asian men were also very interested in Germany, German culture, German football, cars, and German politics, so that we always had a lot to talk about. However, some of their admiration for Germany was unfortunately based on anti-Semitic tendencies, which were difficult for me to accept and discuss as this supposed connection linked to a German past from which I distance myself. It seemed natural for them that as a German I would subscribe to anti-Semitic feelings. This revealed how little instruction and information these young men had about Germany's history and present political situation. For them, however, it was just a means to finding an even greater reason to include me in the group. Nevertheless, I made it clear to them that I did not quite agree to this but tried not to discuss these matters further with the group so I did not jeopardize the necessary integration process of my fieldwork. Being female and German also helped my research with the group of Asian women. Because they only met with other women I would not have been able to go along to their meetings if I had been male. Being German, moreover, allowed me to ask a lot of questions and to distance myself from prejudices the Asian women had experienced in British society so that they opened up to me and let me come along to their meetings.

Moreover, I felt more accepted by the white working class community in Burnley than by some of the youth and community workers who came from outside Burnley and who were more middle class. This was mostly the case because I was sharing my everyday life with them and being

visibly present on an everyday basis because I lived in a very central, very working class area of the town. We did find some things in common that we could communicate about. But it was also significant that I had a socially and economically marginal position in British society being German, female and a student, similar, albeit in a different way, to the position of members of the working class in Burnley. Often, people with a white working class background in Burnley, similar to those from the Asian community, were not able to judge my class background because it was over-layed with my foreign identity. This, in turn, helped me as they accepted me and did not distrust me as they would a member of the English middle class with a university education. I did not have the feeling that people thought of me as a “posh cow”, and this was not only the case because of my German accent. Evans (2007) found it more difficult to gain rapport with her research participants because she was seen as a “posh cow” due to her class background and the way she spoke. It helped her that she was a resident of the estate she researched beforehand and, moreover, she started to put on a more working class accent in the course of her research. The fact that my accent in English contains traces of the regional English variation found in Lancashire because of my teenage friendship with a family from Bolton has probably been of additional help.¹⁷ The fact that my higher education and language skills were not always recognized as cultural capital by both communities in Burnley was additionally helpful.

However, being German did not necessarily help me in the middle class context of the youth and community work sector in Burnley and in Harrogate in most contexts. In Burnley, my key contact was foreign herself being Scottish. She was a youth and community worker who moved

¹⁷ My English accent does not sound ‘posh’, I often say my ‘u’s in *upstairs* and *buses* in a northern way as well as my ‘a’s in *bath room* and *glasses*.

relatively easily between the groups and trusted me immediately and liked my research. Another gate keeper was a youth worker working for Burnley Youth Council. He was not from Burnley, was very open minded and interested in alternative and culturally different lifestyles. Eventually, he left youth work to have a career in juggling. I found it much harder to get on with very middle class youth workers who were from Burnley. White working class residents as well as members from the South Asian community, in turn, I got on with much better and with some of them I actually made friends.

In Harrogate, I found it very hard to connect with people; in fact, I found it an obstacle that I was German. In Burnley, most communities received me well as a foreigner and found that it made sense to have a researcher amongst them as they perceived their town as a place with many social problems. In Harrogate, however, it did not seem to make sense to most people that I was trying to research communities there. Either people tried to find different roles for me or they simply ignored me. The first was the case with a youth worker, for example, who suggested to me that I could teach German in the college or anywhere else, as there must be demand for it. My half Brazilian-half Italian friend suggested I should apply to be a barmaid as there was much bar work going. A bus driver taking me to Northallerton, where I wanted to go to a North Yorkshire County Council meeting, thought I was eastern European, something that has been happening to me more frequently only in the very last couple of years in Liverpool. At the time of my research in Harrogate, there were many newly arrived eastern Europeans who worked in the service industry or in low skilled jobs such as Martha from Poland, who worked in a supermarket after having worked in a hotel. Martha was a lone parent of a teenage girl who was in debt and had thus come over to England to work because she could make more money here than in Poland.

In other cases I was simply ignored. When I tried to access the Henge Warriors (see chapter 6) I was not successful at all because firstly, I was a woman and secondly, I was not from the English middle class. I had established good rapport with people in Ripon who knew Martin, the leader of the group. I also knew Sarah who worked in the local pub frequented by a colleague of Martin who also worked in his music shop. So when I went into the shop to meet Martin I was able to refer to the pub and my colleague Sarah. Martin wrote down my mobile phone number and promised to ring me up but he did not. The next time I went to the shop the colleague worked there who gave me Martin's email address. I wrote an email to which I also did not get a response. Apparently, there was not enough interest to engage with someone that did not fit socially and would disappear in the near future. Therefore, the annual Henge Warrior festival went by without me. Because I did not have a car it was too difficult for me to just go along and turn up on the day as it was outside of the Harrogate district. However, it was covered by the local newspaper, the Harrogate Advertiser so I was able to get some data.

Accessing local services or organizations such as religious groups or political parties, I also found much easier in Burnley than in Harrogate. In community activities in Burnley I met a couple of local councillors who were very accessible and gave me interviews. Religious leaders spoke to me and local services were very inclusive and always involved me – not least because they wanted to demonstrate to me that they fulfilled their cohesive and inclusive policies. In Harrogate, however, I found it very difficult to access organizations. Political parties did not respond to my requests, youth services did not seem comfortable with my presence, and semi-public organizations like the Henge Warriors did not give me access to their activities. In Harrogate I had to rely on the very few contacts I had

– people who had some connections to Germans or who were a little more sympathetic to me and my research because they were foreign or interested in people who were different. In Burnley I was very successful because I was foreign; in Harrogate this turned out to be an obstacle which neither my supervisor nor I had anticipated. Consequently, this means that it is not possible to plan ethnographic research because of the “imponderables of field research” (Malinowski 1972). Nevertheless these difficulties generated some key insights.

2.7.2. A ‘community of the excluded’

My key informants and gate keepers in Harrogate all had some connection to Germany or were foreign themselves. The woman I was lodging with and who worked for Harrogate College had a German mother; the youth work coordinator for the Harrogate district used to be a soldier working in Germany, and my local friend in Ripon, who took me out with her friends and gave me an interview, had a German grand-mother. All of these people had some connection to Germany and liked my German-ness and could connect to it. A further good friend I made in Harrogate was a half Brazilian, half Italian woman who worked for the army as a civilian. She had good contacts in Harrogate as she had worked in hospitality before and introduced me to many people and was a good companion for nights out. She herself felt very different and not accepted in the small, very middle class white Anglo-Saxon community of Harrogate. She also suffered from some bullying in her work at the army base because a colleague felt intimidated by her otherness, by her easy-going and outgoing Latin-American/southern-European nature. Thus, most of my close contacts in Harrogate did feel some levels of exclusion from the main community because of their otherness; some were even explicitly excluded.

Thus, I had found access to what I have conceptualized as a “community of the excluded” into which I integrated well because I was also different. Simmel (1955) describes how social conflict creates a web of group-affiliations, based on the common feeling of belonging to an excluded group. Social coherence is constructed on negative feelings towards the ‘Other’, enabling the enhancement and creation of positive feelings about the group values and its members. This mechanism functions well in the excluded groups I have studied and highlights the problem for the state as this coherence built on group solidarity undermines the state’s access to these networks.

All of this had an impact on the quality of the data I was able to collect. In some instances I could collect direct data from my research participants because they trusted me, felt comfortable with me and let me into their group – such as the Asian young men or the Asian women. With them I was able to conduct a couple of one-to-one interviews or group interviews. However, not everyone from both groups wanted to talk to me but we had informal conversations and I could observe them in their groups. The “chav gang” (see chapter 5) is another example of this. I was able to conduct an interview with one of the gang members simply because I knew his mother and had been to see her a couple of times. His mother trusted me and arranged for me to meet him. The other gang members I did not know that well so I was unable to undertake interviews with them but could observe and share informal conversations. I met them a couple of times at the canal or at the community event where they would talk to me and let me stay with their group for a while.

2.8. Comparative anthropology

The research should identify the variable ways of political participation, particularly if there is a pattern of informal political participation.

However, it is important to be cautious as it is easy to fall into a cultural trap. Places like Burnley and Harrogate are not culturally homogenous as this approach could imply. They are culturally heterogeneous because the people living in these two towns form different social groups with varying cultural practices. Similarly national cultures are social constructions because they are not territorially homogenous and are not based on the equation '*people*' equals '*culture*' (Kaschuba 2003). As a consequence, the non-reflected comparison of these two towns would capitalize on culturalizations and homogenizations of the people of both towns by suggesting 'rough' people come from Burnley and 'posh' people from Harrogate - something, which I have aimed to avoid in this thesis because it is not the case for the whole population of the two towns. As described in detail in this chapter, although I could be considered a 'posh' person, I have felt much more comfortable and accepted in Burnley than I have in Harrogate.

2.9. The 'cultural triple twist'

Any ethnographic study is based on comparison. The ethnographer traditionally studies a culturally different society – culturally different to the ethnographer's own culture - and will compare the findings to the cultural norms of the ethnographer's home society. Thus, ethnographic practice is always based on the "comparative consciousness" (Nader 1994). Anything she/he describes is compared to her home culture. His/her measures and notions of descriptions, the values she/he implies, what he/she finds important to describe in the first place will be influenced by his/her cultural background. Because of this explicit comparison of the two towns would be flawed. But also, because the socio-economic make-up of the two towns is different, my access to the two communities was different too and I had different contacts and was given different roles. I found a role much more easily in Burnley than I did in Harrogate. In Burnley I was a

researcher, I was a volunteer and I was German – most communities fully accepted me on these terms. Being culturally alien to the English culture seemed to compensate for the fact that I was female in some situations, for example researching the group of young Asian men. This might have balanced out my being female and that is why they let me stay. Being an ethnographer was very important for them too. The leader of the group was acquainted with the subject and understood my approach to culture and knew that I would understand what they were doing in the group and that I did not assume a particular view of community cohesion but that I would be able to see the value of the work of the group.

I have conceptualized the three different elements and their situational combinations that allowed me group access and enabled me to gain the distance needed to be able to analyse my data as the ‘cultural triple twist’ as it felt sometimes an acrobatic act to sustain my role and recognition based on nationality, class and gender. The three elements and situational combinations were the following: first, my foreignness in studying for a PhD degree in Liverpool; second, for the research to go into two different towns, each with its own sets of cultural practices and values attached; and third, undertaking ethnographic research where it is part of the research methodology to try and understand one’s own culture (as opposed to non-European, traditional societies) (Messerschmidt 1981) from within by subjectively distancing oneself from it through estrangement (Amann and Hirschauer 1997). I had become very close to many of my research participants in the two towns but through research in another town and by being German I was able to find the necessary distance in the end to gain some objectivity in the way I studied my data and to get to final conclusions in the end that are of universal value and can be understood by anyone even without having heard of Burnley and Harrogate. For George Marcus (1998), the strength of ethnography is the creative capacity of the

researcher to adapt to the dynamic complexity of modern societies throughout the research process. This is exactly what I did in my ethnographic fieldwork on political participation in northern English towns. The cultural triple twist allowed me to get the cultural stance necessary to gain conclusions that reflect the multi-faceted and multi-layered character of a globalizing world found in the local, in northern English towns such as Burnley and Harrogate. The two very different specific local contexts in turn facilitated the study of the social categories of class, gender and ethnicity because of their different occurrence in those towns.

Chapter 3

THE POLICIES OF THE “ASIAN GANG”: MODERN BRITISH POLITICS WITH A DIFFERENCE

By definition, the political practices of the state generally address the citizenry in a homogenous way. However, the citizenry is not one homogenous group. This has, in fact, been acknowledged by the state to some extent, for example in studies on electoral turnout regarding varied voting patterns of different social groups (for young people and ethnic minorities: Electoral Commission 2002a; 2002b). But when the state is trying to investigate levels of political participation and reasons for the lack of it, it only focuses on established formal forms of participation. Marginality, however, causes people to engage in both formal and/or informal practices. This lies in the nature of marginalization: being marginalized means that one is not a full member of a particular social group, and hence, is not able to participate to the same degree as full members can. Marginal individuals use both formal and informal political practices with the intention of making sense of their social life-worlds and of having an impact upon them - in other words, to be politically influential. Too narrow a definition of political participation is not useful in explaining how and why people participate in politics since it does not embrace the whole continuum of people's actions and the meanings attached. Thus, an extended notion of “political practices” is useful for an investigation not only of the whole continuum of practices, but also of the *differences* between formal and informal political practices and the *strategies* individuals use when choosing between them.

Building on my methodological reflections, the aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which people from Burnley use both informal and formal political practices - that is, what strategies they deploy in being politically active. This will involve looking at a group of young British Bangladeshi men from Stoneyholme. The data for this chapter is largely taken from the research diary. The method of “thick description” (Geertz 1975b) will be used to illustrate how the formal and informal of political practices are interlinked in the everyday practices of people. Thus, it also becomes clear how important informal practices are in enabling individuals to participate in politics in the first place.

3.1. The culture of community participation

An anthropological definition of political participation is much broader than that assumed by the State and includes formal and informal forms of participation. From an anthropological perspective, notions about community are used to create a mental bridge between the individual and the state in order to fill the vacuum that exists as noted by Gledhill (2000b) and Gilsonan (1977). The gaping chasm between levels of social and political organization, which replicate the micro- and macro-structures of a state and civil society, have to be filled in everyday life by social practices through which meaning is produced. These practices then are interpretative attempts to decode the symbolic practices of the state. Through these imaginative practices individuals produce the social imagination of society and polity, and this is probably where the “civil sphere” as discussed by Habermas (1990) is created. At the same time, the term “community” refers to real neighbourhoods and people meeting up more or less formally, organized in order to impact on the physical and social organization of their neighbourhoods. When people meet up in formal meetings (in the case of, for example, PACT “Police and Communities Together” meetings)

the political character of these meetings is easy to recognize. PACT meetings are usually attended by local community stakeholders (such as the police, councilors, youth and community workers, representatives of local faith organizations, and so on) and issues of crime in the community are being discussed. Yet, when a youth gang meets up at the canal in their local area to discuss issues with local “stakeholders” such as other gangs or the local policeman who is “grassing on people”, this is rarely recognized as a political activity. However, street gangs are social organizations that follow the same principles as, say, political parties as pointed out in sociological theories on social institutions and organisations (Huczynski and Buchanan 2007). Through the symbolic practices of the state some groups are privileged as part of the political system, and other groups are not.

The necessity to distinguish between formal and informal forms of political participation has been established through the culture debate (Bachmann-Medick 2006) and the notion of social or cultural practices - as used in the ethnography of other cultures and as applied to our own society by cultural studies. As such, political practices are understood as social practices through which individuals try to impact on the way they live, which is otherwise determined by the state and the social majority. At the same time, the social context impacts on the range of social practices available to individuals. Thus, it depends on the cultural context whether a person uses formal or informal forms of political participation. However, any given individual is likely to interact in a number of cultural spaces so that (s)he will potentially use varying forms of political practices, formal and informal, in everyday life depending on context.

3.2. The “Asian gang” as political institution: Considering the social practices of British Bangladeshi young men in Burnley

This chapter is oriented toward the “Asian gang”. It explores the sociocultural and the formal and informal political practices of this group of British Bangladeshi young men in Burnley.

In the context of this study, the term “Asian gang” refers to the group of young British Bangladeshi men from Burnley and the term “gang” was used to study their practices in two ways. First, the term is used to refer to the friendship group of young people in a purely positive way and to their cultural practices through which they see themselves as a cohesive group (a gang). They use the (often negative) perceptions by outsiders to strengthen their group identity. Second, the term “gang” is used to refer to the negative image that is perceived of the group by the public of Burnley and the youth and community services. By drawing on the notion of Alexander’s (2000; 2004) “Asian gang”, connections are made to the images of young Asian men and their bedeviling in the public media and the connected moral panic about the cultural practices of these groups of young people (Alexander 2000; 2004, Cohen 2002 [1967]).

This chapter shows how this group uses formal and informal political practices strategically in order to impact on the political in their everyday life as well as on formal politics, depending on the contextual spaces in which the young men interact. This group of men have become accustomed to using these different strategies because they are acting in social spaces that are cultural as well as political. The young men interact in different social spaces that are inherent of varying norms and values reflected in the very different cultural practices of the actors involved. These different cultures involve English culture, Bangladeshi culture and the varying scales of cultures in between resulting from the migrant

experience. South Asian youth culture is another graduation on this cultural scale. Moreover, English culture can be scaled within different graduations – political spaces have different cultural practices as well; politics being understood as a particular cultural practice.¹⁸ The “Asian gang” comprises all these nuances of cultural practices along the cultural scale of politics. The members of the “Asian gang” are “marginal men” in the original meaning by Park (1928).

A particular cultural characteristic of the group is the large extent of informality through which they are organized and their resistance to attempts by outside powers to make the group more formal on terms which are not their own. The group’s major claim is to become formally recognized within the local state context and beyond, in terms of allocation of resources and recognition in public debates – but, significantly, not in spite of their informality but precisely *because* of it. These claims are grounded within the group’s awareness of its members’ highly politicized identities and insecure social life-worlds; thus, the actions of the group have to be read as a symbolic text, claiming justice from a nation state that has been unjust to them as British citizens. As the group - consisting of well-educated, extremely bright, young men - is aware of the power of institutions, they are careful at making these claims explicitly and instead adopt political strategies: they use their informal practices strategically and adopt the culture of formal political practices to some extent in order to make subversive claims. From this results the group’s production of symbolic text through which they can make an impact; the text of the “Asian gang” (Alexander 2000; 2004) becomes a political institution.

¹⁸ The young men often talked about the “Asian politics” existing in the local area – another cultural notion of political practices connected to the migrant experience of people from this local area. The young men, however, having grown up and been socialized in England find the cultural practices of “Asian politics” alienating.

In order to understand how the “Asian gang” becomes a political institution, we have to look at: first, the experience of marginalization of young South Asian men in Burnley; second, the informal cultural practices of the young men from Young People Together¹⁹ within their cultural context (i.e., that of politicized identities and insecure social life-worlds); third, how formal political structures of the state are perceived and understood by the group and the impact they have on the group; and finally, the means by which the group selects and adopts formal political practices in order to interact with the local state and, thus, institutionalize the “Asian gang”.

3.3. Marginalization of young South Asian men in formal politics

Young Asian men participating in youth and community work from Burnley would always have very strong opinions on politics and immediately connect to the topic. This is Misal’s response to the question whether he thought of himself as a political person:

“No, well, I can never see myself being, becoming a councillor, I’m very opinionated, I’m, I fight for what I believe in, I’m very (*unclear*), I respect other people’s views but I don’t see myself in politics, even though I probably could go into, but I don’t want to go into it. It’s never interested me at this time of my life, or I don’t see it interesting me. [*raises his voice*] I, I, I’m interested in terms like I wanna know what’s going on, I wanna know who’s doing what, who’s saying what, and the dynamics of it, but wouldn’t be involved with any, any parties. And I think that should be my personal, uhm, my personal opinion and that should be kept to myself. I just don’t, at this time of my life, I wouldn’t sort of advertise: “I’m in this group, I vote for this person, because I think I’m quite private person, (*unclear*) I want to go into politics, I would highlight that, who I was with obviously, I’d had to [*laughs*] I’d had to be signing up for somebody, but I don’t think I’d see myself in politics. I’m interested in it, don’t get me wrong, I’m interested in everything, but I don’t see myself at the forefront of leading a political party [*laughs*].” (Misal, Burnley, 09.11.2005, archive GK)

¹⁹ Young People Together are a Bangladeshi youth group run by young Bangladeshi youth workers on a voluntary basis in Stoneholme, Burnley.

Similarly to the responses of the Asian women, Misal sees it as a problem to be very opinionated in politics – which is very different to the response from Sarah from Ripon, Harrogate district who said that to be political you have to have stronger views and ethics than she does and that she is just too blasé to be political. Furthermore, a big difference in the responses between Asian men and Asian women was that men would usually mention and reject the notion of “Asian politics”, which women were less likely to mention in the first place. Misal hints at this also:

Misal: “My personal opinion of national and local stuff, they are both important, but in my mind, in this area, in Stoneyholme, there is a lot of internal dynamics, internal politics and I am trying to keep away from any political side.”

GK: “In this area?”

Misal: “In this area, full stop!”

GK: “Ok, no more comments on this?”

Misal: “No more.”

(Misal, Burnley, 09.11.2005, archive GK)

Asis and Sazad, who are also young youth and community workers in Burnley, report a similar opinion to Misal on the topic of “local Asian politics”:

Asis: “But the thing is I’m just one of them people who just go, put your voting and get out of there. A lot of people like elections but the thing is, you know, the local elections like that, very political, yeah, it’s divided the community (*unclear*) That’s, that’s a lot of corruption goes on there, that’s how our community is divided.”

Sazad: “I think a lot of people don’t vote for the party who they vote coz it’s their uncle.”

Asis: “Yeah.”

Sazad: “Or their, you know, friend or someone who stood up. Seriously, and it’s like family related (*unclear*).”

GK: “But these, the, most of the councillors, the Asian councillors have been in their offices for many, many, many, many, many, many years.”

Asis: “And there is a lot of problems because of (*unclear*)”

Sazad: “(*unclear*) cousins and families and stuff.”

Asis: “So if you get, if you get (*unclear*) white people in this area, three people who are white from outside and they come and stand for Labour, they stand for the Conservative and then for Liberal Democrat, yeah, there is not gonna be a lot of people voting for them.”

(Sazad, Asis and Farsi, Burnley, 13.10.2005, archive GK)

According to the young men, formal politics is only formal on the surface. Below it is ‘tribal’ politics with nepotism etc. The young men, thus, have to learn how to deviate and use the formal system for their own needs. So in the end, because they know the two cultural systems, they are actually the winners because they are able to interact within both systems and play them out against each other in the end. The young men clearly enjoy talking about local politics. For them, it is an important topic to talk about the local “Asian” politics, even though they would not like to get involved with it. Having been brought up in Britain, they have a different approach to local politics than the older generation has, which distinguishes less between the private and the public.

In the interview with Abdullah he is quite outspoken about what the everyday experiences of a racially segregated Burnley mean for a South Asian young man:

“In Burnley (...) you don’t take anything for granted. Because anything can really happen at any time. That’s why whenever we go to town centre there’s a few of us. Or if I go I know for a fact that there is. I mean there is always people that I know in the town centre. So there is that element of safety but I don’t like taking my parents down town centre or something like that. Because I don’t want them to see that ugliness of the people if you know what I’m saying. You know, I don’t want them to experience something like that. Come back home and say, you know, these people treated us like that. They said this or -; because they did! You know, my parents both went into the hospital once. And they were coming back and some, you know, like young lads came up to (*unclear*) and were like, you know, throwing face. They wouldn’t be hitting them but they were like

throwing face, erm, making faces and swearing and spitting. And then they just went. And this was like two or three days after what happened in London. This is -, this is the underlying problems within Burnley. Because it is a racist town - full stop!" (Abdullah, Burnley, 20.09.2005, archive GK)

Abdullah is talking about his everyday life-worlds, which are marked by ethnic segregation and racism. He has to adapt his urban practices to these life-worlds in order to make sure that he and his parents are safe. So he, his family and his friends always make sure that someone is informed about when they go into town, or they even avoid town. He also knows that his problem is specific to Burnley – in other towns or cities which are bigger and more cosmopolitan he has not experienced these problems:

"For example if you went to Manchester and somebody said that to you, you know, somebody called you Osama Bin Laden in the town centre - (...) If this was to happen in Manchester then obviously you'd go and you'd say: what the hell is that?! You know, nobody - there'd be people on the side of you and stuff like that because it's so mixed - so cosmopolitan. There is people who, you know, denounce anything like that. You know, nobody would be stupid enough to do something like that as well. Where in Burnley town centre, I mean, they used to do it before. But when they used to do it before you'd have other people condemning, you know, what they did. You know, like somebody would stand up and say, 'Oi, hang on a sec! Don't say something like that. I'm Scots... I'm a Scots person, I'm a Scot, I'm a Welsh, Irish! And look what you English have done to my country as well!' So there is that - you do feel a sense of belonging when there is other people like that as well - who sympathize with you and not with the people who are shouting and coming out (*unclear*). But since what happened in London, there is nothing like that, if somebody calls something out then there is no one else (sticking up for you). Yeah, there won't be! Everyone just looks down and just some people smirks, some people laugh, some people just look down, some people just carry on about their business. They obviously hear, because it's pretty loud as well." (Abdullah, Burnley, 20.09.2005, archive GK)

Moreover, Abdullah is very aware of the structural socio-economic problems of Burnley and the fact that they are rooted in English social and housing policy:

“I mean, me personally I think they (*refers to the council*) have got their own agenda which - you know, all they do is talking - is talking to us for formality sake. But it’s good to let it rip, really, so that people know where you’re coming from and the council know that they’ve got a hard fight on their hands. Because if you just leave it to it they will just do whatever they want. And the housing, you know. I did study geography and stuff. And I’ve seen how the government made big mistakes with making those high-rise flats which are now totally derelict and waiting for demolition. Because you can’t sustain a community - a vertical (*he refers to the previously mentioned high-rising flats*) community basically, you know. It doesn’t work like that. People have lives. They need a bit of greenery. They need to be living on the ground and they need to interact and meet, yeah. So it is pretty bad really. And we weren’t sure what was happening with this project but I’m sure there will be a lot of shit flying as soon as the (*unclear: idea*) is coming to practice. Because – yeah, I can guarantee that! I can guarantee because the people who are living in their houses now; they will be basically forced - almost forced to leave. Because the council are practicing their compulsory purchase orders – CPOs, yeah, so. And now they’re gonna bring these houses down. Build new houses. They gonna offer it to the people to buy back. But the council bought that property off them for not much - not how much it’s worth in the market value. But they paid what they thought was worth. (...) They’re gonna disperse communities. I mean, it’s all to do with community cohesion. All they’re wanting is trying to basically play about with people - their lives. They’re gonna move them out of this area - they’re gonna move into other areas - and basically try and change the demographics of that area. But it’s gonna cause big, big problems! And these new houses that people can’t afford to buy - you’ll find a lot of English people moving in. And a lot of asylum seekers being housed there. A lot of people who work for the NHS - the Filipinos and the Chinese people - moving into these houses. This is what I think will happen. I mean, it’s good to have a rich and diverse society but that society has to be sustainable and has to work. If it’s not gonna work and it’s gonna create problems then it’s not worth it. And Burnley isn’t a town for any (*unclear: one*) to basically experiment with because it’s too fragile a community to do that with. I mean, if it’s somewhere down-south which is more mixed - they are used to see people from different backgrounds and different nationalities. And if it’s a nearby market town (*unclear: of*) a city it makes sense. But with Burnley: no!” (Abdullah, Burnley, 20.09.2005, archive GK)

In Abdullah’s opinion, the community cohesion policy is dangerous and the council is playing with fire. He is able to draw on the expert knowledge of British housing policy because he studied geography at university, and

he applies this knowledge to his real-world experience of living in one of the most deprived areas of the country – an area which is currently undergoing massive regeneration and neighbourhood renewal integrated into the community cohesion agenda. To him, the whole project is social engineering and against the will of the people, believing that functioning urban neighbourhoods have to grow over time, in order for them to suit the people and the people to suit them – meaning that urban development is a process where the neighbourhoods have to be adapted to the needs of the people and people take time to adapt to changes in their neighbourhoods. The language he uses points to a group of people displaced by a state. He believes that the council's housing practices will put many people in despair and they will act.

3.4. Informal cultural practices of Young People Together

Young People Together has a magical attraction for British Bangladeshi male youth from the local area. Their group meetings could truly be called a “cool place”, similar to the ones explored by Skelton and Valentine (1998) in their edited collection of ethnographic studies on the geographies of youth cultures. Young People Together is run by a friendship group of about ten Asian young men in their early twenties who provide space to Bengali male teenagers to spend time in a more or less structured way. However, unstructured play is an essential feature of the group's style of youth work. Even during the time they run structured projects, there will be time (before, after, or at regular intervals, during) where they allow playful behaviour with a lot of input from the younger members of the group - as well as their own playful contributions! Unstructured play allows for contingency, for things to happen that are unforeseen. It allows the young men to negotiate boundaries of the norms and values of the varying social contexts in which they have to interact: British society as a whole; the Bengali community of Stoneyholme; the norms and values of youth work

in Burnley; the regulations and rules of the community centre where they meet; and finally, their own norms and values as a group, that is, the culture of the “Asian gang”, which is linked up with the cultures of the other spaces they inhabit. Thus, unstructured play is a key element that triggers the process of maturing, inherent to adolescence, to moving out of childhood and into full membership of society (Erdheim 1992).

Hence, the allowance of unstructured play is a key feature that turns the space of the youth and community services building in Stoneyholme on a Tuesday night into a “cool place” (Skelton and Valentine 1998). In this space the young men have the opportunity to mature and to learn their role in society without the impact of educational structures imposed on them by youth workers. Practicing the “Asian gang”, thus, is a very appealing cultural activity for young Asian men that provides them with a strong identity, lets them mature and prepares them in finding a place as adults in society. Young People Together is somewhere that young Asian men learn to meaningfully participate politically:

“In the first session I am introduced to a lot of people. This will be the case throughout many sessions because people do not always regularly attend – in particular the older lads who belong to the friendship group but study away from Burnley during term time. Not only do I find it extremely difficult to remember the names and faces of the young men, but for the first couple of weeks I will find it extremely difficult to distinguish between the older members of the group, the workers and the younger members. When I am told to sit down in the seating area in the corridor of the basement of the building by Hassan, the only lad with long hair tied up in a pony tail, I am uncertain whether or not he is a worker. I will find out later that he is. The workers and the teenagers seem to dress very similarly in my opinion and the age difference is not that big from my perspective either. Moreover, the workers will engage in the same activities that the youth do and will show the same informal behaviour. Only very occasionally will they assume a more authoritative demeanour - for example when there is an argument between the younger lads or when they use too many swear words.

Whilst sitting with Hassan he tells me that “This is where the magic happens. This is our chill-out area.” I start getting very excited about the group in anticipation of wonderfully interesting research results. However, during this meeting and the following meetings, I keep waiting for the magic to happen and from my observations I cannot see much more than a group of young men engaging in what looks like the very common, everyday activities of many young men. Nevertheless, the space does look inviting to me, the chairs being comfortable, lower cushioned seats. They are arranged alongside the walls of the spacious corridor; the beige of the seats contrasting with the brown of the carpeted flooring, typical colours for a public building. Everything is in very good condition thanks to the refurbishing of the centre only a few years ago. There are a few low tables as well, and some chairs are grouped around some of the tables. The walls of the community centre are decorated with the artwork of some of the other groups meeting at the centre so that the space looks welcoming.

The group of lads sitting next to us are aged around about 17. They are playing cards and seem very engaged. I am feeling curious and ask my “stranger handler” for tonight what they are playing. “Are you playing Black Jack or what?” he shouts at them. They aren’t playing anything at the moment but shuffling the cards and I feel a bit stupid realizing it myself. They are also talking a lot together which I cannot follow because of it being either in Bengali or young Asian men’s speak with a Burnley accent – or a mix of both. I also observe that they use their mobile phones a lot in conversations, taking them out of pockets, looking at them, texting other friends, playing music files or videos for each other and getting admiring comments from the rest of the group for new phones or particularly interesting videos. Sometimes they hold two phones together to use Bluetooth. None of them actually ever talks on the phone and I am quite impressed that there are so many ways of using a mobile without actually talking on it! The only lads I occasionally see on the phones are the workers who are talking to other friends to find out if they are still coming down to the centre or to make other arrangements.” (Research diary GK, Burnley, 12.04.2005)

Overall, the young men seem to be engaged in rather uninteresting, even profane activities, nothing more than what they might also be doing at home, even if they are very committed to these activities and seem to really enjoy them. To me it seemed like they were not doing anything special, anything different to what I might expect from a group of young people participating in spare time activities. For the young men, however, there is a lot going on. They are engaged in active, particular forms of

communication and interaction amongst their peers. They are having a really good time and really feel that they belong to the group. None of them ever sit on their own.

“The young lads all have similar, short haircuts apart from one of them, Hassan, who, even though he gets teased a lot, is an integrated member of the group and can rely on his mate’s friendships. The target for the teasing is his shoulder length hair that he wears tied up into a pony tail, as well as his fondness for Mickey Mouse. This would be his nickname for some of his friends, he says, and my initial perplexity soon disappears when I notice that his jumper has got a Mickey Mouse application at the front...

In general, clothing seems very important for the young lads and they are all well dressed in brands and fashionable outfits – most of them wear fashionable trainers or builders’ shoes. Some of them wear baggy jeans hanging fashionably low at their knees, another target for the mocking of the group. A worker wonders in jest how they would actually hold up. Without questioning the seriousness of the question, the object of the mocking points at his belt saying that it would it hold up, and then continues his conversation with another friend.

Suddenly, a group of lads starts teasing the leader of the group, Abdullah, by asking if he is going to get married because they have heard rumours. They even come up with details on the nationality of the bride. Abdullah, in his usual way of always treating everyone with respect and in the same manner, neither denies nor confirms the young lads’ information but at the same time tries to not cause a stir. The boys still seem to feel encouraged and push their luck asking Abdullah whether he is gay. Abdullah still keeps to his manner of neither confirming nor denying, instead responding that there is nothing wrong with the word gay, adding that it used to mean ‘happy’ and turning to me for confirmation.²⁰ Experienced, he turns the inquisition into a discussion about the young lads’ life-plans. One of the boys bales out that he is going to get married next year which is followed by a cross fire of inquiring questions from the other lads until he gives in, admitting that he just made it up. Remarkably, the younger boys listen carefully to what Abdullah has to say and engage with him, asking him lots of different kinds of questions. They are interested in his opinion on how one should plan one’s life and if it is any different for them being Bangladeshis in Britain, if certain things are acceptable and others not. Abdullah is putting a lot of effort into giving them good answers.” (Research diary GK, Burnley, 12.04.2005)

²⁰ He will have a straight-forward opinion on this which he might not want to show yet in the early stages of my research with the group.

It becomes clear that the young boys have a lot of normative questions about their particular identities and values related to their migrant and religious background. By being playful about it, teasing the workers and each other, they enter into serious debates about what it means to live as a young British Bangladeshi in the neighbourhood of Stoneyholme. By quizzing Abdullah, the young men are trying to figure out what is expected of them when they become adults. Thus, playful unstructured behaviour is the continuing trigger for meaningful negotiations of identities and moral guidelines for the young lads. The typical, informal social practices of the group are also evident from the following week's observation of the group's session:

"The session has been going on for a while and I am with some young lads and workers in the room with the pool tables and the table tennis table. Suddenly, one of the young men starts to kick off by shouting: "It's fucking boring!", referring to the way the meeting is going tonight. "Watch your language, watch your language!" he is told by a worker and everyone continues their play.

Later on Chanu, one of the workers arrives. It is a common practice of the older lads to come and go throughout the evening.²¹ Abdullah, as leader, is the only one who is there throughout the whole evening. Like the younger lads, the older lads tend to occupy themselves a lot with their mobiles, particularly when they are new phones. Chanu's phone looks funny with something attached to it that looks like a key ring. I enquire and find out that it is a speaker to improve the sound. He demonstrates how it works: the speaker is unplugged from the string and attached to the side of the phone. Now it plays the music louder and to demonstrate Chanu plays a selection of tunes.

Suddenly, there is pandemonium outside in the corridor with the seating where some lads (14-16 years of age) have been playing cards. Chanu goes outside to tell them off. The cards are spread out all over the floor, some of them with the look of abuse. The lads are told by Chanu to pick them up, whilst he stays leaning in the door having turned his attention back to his phone which is playing more tunes. He is a worker but he is not making a big deal out of this and hardly looks up from his phone.

²¹ Again, this is an untypical practice for a youth worker but a typical practice for the young working-class man roaming the streets.

Another young man of a similar age to the workers arrives and Chanu starts talking to him. He passes on documents to him saying that he should apply for jobs at Lancashire council. He seems to be talking about two different jobs and gives advice as to which of the jobs should be easier to get.” (Research diary GK, Burnley, 26.04.2005)

What becomes clear from these notes is that the older lads, as workers, do not draw a line between having conversations amongst themselves when the younger boys are with them but they actually behave in the same way when they are with the younger boys than when they are without them. The following section from my field notes on a later meeting provides another example of the fact that the older lads do not interact any differently with the younger lads than with each other:

“Today, Hassan (a worker, also known as Mickey Mouse) has brought his new car to be admired by his friends. It is a black Renault which is parked in the car park at the back at the centre, and the group (consisting of mostly of the older lads, the workers) sit outside at the side of the car park with a full view of the car. As usual, the group does not waste the opportunity to tease me, asking if I know if this is a German car. This is followed by the young men taking turns in sitting in the driver’s seat and repetitively driving for a couple of metres in the car park. Hassan then demonstrates the sound speaker’s capacity: he leaves all the doors of the car open and turns up the music; hip hop and Asian Fusion blares loudly from inside the car.” (Research diary GK, Burnley, 12.07.2005)

Football, cars and music are some of the things that are very important in the lives of the older lads as well as the younger lads of Young People Together. The older lads engage in their hobbies in front of the younger lads, most of who are inside the building playing snooker or table tennis and supervised by Abdullah; some, however, walk back and forth between the inside of the centre and the group sat outside with the car .

There is no constant focus by the workers on the kids, on engaging them in formal activities or directly supervising and disciplining their behaviour. In showing ‘natural’ behaviour, similar to how they would relate to their

younger brothers at home (some of them have their younger brothers in the club as well), they relate to the young lads at the centre and at the same time allow them a glimpse of what they as older lads do; allowing them to hang around near them if they fancy it, they provide the younger boys with role models with which to engage. It becomes clear to me during my fieldwork that this is the success of the group: the group is 'streetwise'. They engage in activities that they would also engage in on the street, which are also activities that the younger lads participate in when they are not at the centre. This is the reason why the younger lads keep going to the group. And the informal, playful and streetwise character of their youth work also dominates their approach when they run structured projects. It is towards the end of my fieldwork with them, that they finally get some funding to run projects:

“Tonight, Young People Together have started their project work for which they have waited for such a long time. There are different workshops going on all over the two floors of the building and the younger lads are taking part in them with tremendous enthusiasm. It is clear that they love the way the older lads run workshops. The whole atmosphere created by the different workshops in the building is a bit roughhouse, similar to the other meetings, but hey, what does one expect of a big group of lads of all ages? There is pandemonium happening over and over again but the older lads do not find it difficult to regain control. The older lads have master plans of what is supposed to happen and just put them into practice with the younger lads. There are no debates about the bigger picture of sessions. This had been clarified with Abdullah beforehand. There cannot be debates because some of the lads – them being teenagers - will always argue and could potentially spoil everything. They will be strict about doing it their way. This does not seem democratic to the observer, but it works. The older lads use their authority as older men with the younger lads and the younger lads will always obey – maybe with cheeky comments that will never be sanctioned.

Downstairs, there is some art work going on, and a couple of lads do some drawings. Upstairs, there is a drama workshop going on. A group of maybe 20 lads stand in a circle and throw an imaginary ball to each other and act as if they have to catch a real ball. Then there is an imaginary football match going on. The young lads love it and they are really good. Two of the older lads, Sazid and Chanu, are running the drama workshop

and they have to be quite authoritative because otherwise the young lads become a bit wild. In the end, they do a play where a row of four lads sit in front of the other lads, each of them telling a story which only one of them had actually experienced in their lives; the audience then has to guess whose story it is. The atmosphere is great - the young lads love it and pay so much attention, it is unbelievable. I would be very surprised if Young People Together had fewer lads coming in the next week. In the end, when the younger boys have left, the older youth sit together in a circle and discuss how things went, what has to happen differently the next week, and what is going to happen in the drama workshop; together, they will develop a script and characters and will decide who is to play which character.” (Research diary GK, Burnley, 13.12.2005)

It becomes clear from my field notes that the social interaction of the group is always ruled by informality, this being perhaps particularly the case while there is an absence of funding to run projects and when the informality becomes the core structure for much interaction. The young men meet in the centre in order to spend time with their mates and because they enjoy doing this. Even when they have funding and run structured projects they do it in the way of the “Asian gang”. The workers interact informally with each other and with the younger lads. This does not mean that there is no hierarchy. The younger lads follow the instructions of the older lads, the workers. And Abdullah, being the leader of the group, has the final word in the case of any differences.

The group is engaged in negotiating and reinforcing young British Bangladeshi men’s identities in Burnley. Their informal practices are rooted in their hybrid identities as young British Bangladeshi men growing up in a northern English mill town and the young men are claiming the right to act out their identities as members of an “Asian gang”.

3.5. Impact of formal structures on the group

Formal structures impact on the group as a youth work facility, particularly in terms of funding and acceptance from other youth work agencies in

Burnley, as a result of the voluntary workers' informal approach to youth work. The group's unconventional approach to youth work is structurally sanctioned by state agencies. Actors representing the sanctioning structures are: other local youth work agencies that try to "sabotage" the group by withdrawing funding for example or are reluctant to work with them; the management of the local community centre who keeps confronting the group with rules and regulations for the use of the venue; and funding bodies that discontinue the funding of the group. This attempted "sabotage" of the group happens through normative assumptions on how youth work should be undertaken and is executed through state structures and agencies represented in local youth services, local state offices and centres (borough and county), and youth and community work policies such as community cohesion regulations. The group's reluctance to work with other agencies will be discussed separately in my chapter on the notion of resistance (chapter 5).

Hall *et al.* (1999) pointed out that the concept of providing space to young people for unstructured play is largely absent in British youth work. Indeed, youth work in Britain is delivered on two principles: first, the spatial containment of dangerous (usually male) youth, which is commonly expressed in the aim to "keep them off the streets"; and second, the education of unruly youth, turning them into "decent citizens" by occupying them with educational activities, commonly expressed in the aim to "give them something useful to do" (cf. Hall *et al.* 1999). Historically, public fears of unruly youth going out of control can be traced back culturally to Victorian times and remain as underpinning notions for the norms and values of British society today (cf. Nayak 2003). In both towns, Burnley and Harrogate, these cultural norms not only continue to reinforce youth work practices but result in the structural resistance to provide young people with a space for unstructured activities.

By all means, Young People Together is aware of this. Indeed, the group has had some training in youth work provided by the county council as part of the council's youth and community services. This training was offered to the group after the disturbances in 2001 when youth and community services became enforced through government intervention. Yet hardly any of the members from the original group stayed in youth work as their main professional area. Many of them left Burnley for a while to get a university degree, or they found other jobs in Burnley. The young men tell me that they partly decided to leave youth work because they felt it was badly paid. During participant observation of a session, the lads are taking turns at playing table tennis in the pool table room. A conversation began to develop between the older lads in which they tell me about their everyday jobs:

“Hamid tells me that he works as a citizen advisor for Lancashire council in Norris Green,²² a smaller mill town nearby Burnley. He doesn't like the job, he admits and explains that he doesn't like “sitting behind the desk”. He would indeed like to go into youth work and “drive around and do things with young people”. “But it is badly paid”, he says, “and that's what's stopping me from doing so.” In jest, he continues that, in addition, he would be “afraid of becoming weird from doing this job”. “Because there are some people who start sleeping in caves when they have been doing this job for a while,” he says with a pinch of salt. (Research diary GK, Burnley, 09.08.2005)

Hamid is referring to the youth work practice of going on residential with groups of young people and undertaking team-building activities in the countryside. This is a typical practice in youth work in both towns, Burnley and Harrogate and is modelled on the activities of the British middle-class boy scouts who venture into nature. However, Hamid does not seem to recognize full time youth work in this area of practice as a job that can be

²² Identifying information about jobs and names of places has been changed in addition to personal names.

taken seriously for a male adult. Moreover, it could be assumed, that in South Asian culture, going into the countryside to practice survival strategies might be seen as slightly odd and inconsistent with modern, western life. Yet this is not the only problem that Young People Together have with professional youth work. Sazid, for example, is a musician and works in detached youth work.²³ He talks about his work with the other lads in the pool table room and together they agree that:

“The good thing with this detached youth work is that you can do it freelancing,’ says Sazid and adds that he works freelance with the music stuff he is doing, and that this is good money.” (Research diary GK, Burnley, 09.08.2005)

Sazid produces and teaches music – mainly Asian Fusion - which is very popular and prestigious in male and female Asian youth culture. Moreover, the fact that he is an entrepreneur and makes good money affords him additional prestige. He has found a niche in youth work for him that works, but traditional youth work - as promoted by the county council’s youth and community services – does not seem very appealing to either him or his friends.

In addition to the lack of prestige that youth work has for the older group members, they also do not agree with the institutional agenda of public youth work and the norms and values attached to it:

“A few minutes later the lads start talking about political correctness related to the topic of homosexuality. Sazid gets agitated and uses many swear words so that I ask him in jest if he isn’t actually a youth worker. With indignation he replies: ‘No, I used to be one but I stopped doing it because it was too much policy involved and I didn’t like that.’” (Research diary GK, Burnley, 09.08.2005)

²³ Detached youth work is a form of youth work where youth workers leave youth centres and find youths to talk to in the streets of local neighbourhoods.

As Sazid articulates here he does not like to be restricted in how he relates to the younger lads and eventually left youth work for this reason. Abdullah explains to me that this is also the reason why they have been struggling to get funding:

“The problem is ARB²⁴ are good on paper. Because they are structured. We aren’t good on paper because we aren’t structured.” (Research diary GK, Burnley, 13.12.2005)

With the term “structured” Abdullah refers to the codes and practices of statutory youth work. The young men argue they were pushed out of a main career in the sector of youth work in Burnley because they felt alienated by the norms and values prevailing the formal, institutional professional practices and replicated in the explicitly educational agenda of this state service. The young men felt that they were not consistent with their own norms and values – both their personal ones as well as those belonging collectively to the group. Moreover, they had funding withdrawn from their group because they could not fulfil the formal requirements expected of youth work agencies operating within the community cohesion agenda. This had a bad effect on the group’s morale and consequently the young men reduced the time and effort they put into offering activities to the younger boys. Nevertheless, the group insisted on the use of space at the centre for their weekly sessions and continued to open the centre for the boys on a Tuesday night to provide a space to meet and have use of the pool tables and table tennis table. This space was always used by dozens of boys.

²⁴ “Anti-Racism for Burnley - ARB” is a competing youth group recruiting young people across different communities under the community cohesion agenda. The workers from Young People Together used to work together with ARB but stopped over the course of time because of differences between the statutory youth workers from ARB and the volunteers from Young People Together. Only two or three of Young People Together’s children still attend ARB.

The group's "casual" approach to youth work, which they defend with reference to the unavailability of funding to run different kinds of activities for the children (other than providing space and pool tables), and their rejection of formal youth work practices and the attached agendas of community cohesion, education and 'political correctness', has the effect of leaving the group vulnerable in interaction with other agencies in the political arena. This became clear to me on talking to Mary, a key worker from Anti-Racism for Burnley who on one occasion tried to interrogate me about the actual contents of the youth work delivered by the trained young men as she had heard that they were not working "properly with the younger lads".

3.6. 'Project in the mix': institutionalizing the "Asian gang"

The young British-Bangladeshi men from Young People Together use a range of strategies and practices in order to institutionalize the "Asian gang" on the political scene of Burnley and beyond. Their low-threshold approach to youth work is in accordance with their claims-making of social practices representing local experiences and reinforcing unsettled identities, the latter arising from the demonization of young Asian men in the public sphere - symbolically represented in public notions of the "Asian gang" (see, for example, Alexander 2000). In consequence, the young men's attempt to institutionalize the "Asian gang" can be interpreted as a tangible attempt to meaningfully renegotiate and, thus, to make visible and to cope with social life-worlds blatantly burdened by structural racism, Islamophobia and state practices ignoring ongoing social inequalities and the continuing legacy of the colonial past in contemporary Britain. By attempting to institutionalize the "Asian gang" in the political arena of Burnley and beyond, the young men are turning the tables on a society that chastizes and shuns them.

The institutionalization of the “Asian gang” occurs on three cultural levels. First, formal and informal social networks are strategically connected to improve the sustainability of the group in terms of staff and resources. The group’s actions in multiple networks require specific cultural knowledge – that is, knowledge about practices representing norms and values which vary from network to network. Second, the young men use formal and informal practices in their dealings with the younger boys through which they combine low-threshold youth work with formal practices of public-state youth work. This results in the production of meaningful identities, whereby the task of making sure everyone involved feels comfortable and enjoys the sessions is combined with professional practices, allowing the group to gain more agency within the constraining structures in which the group exists; this includes succeeding in securing funding. Third, the young men draw on varying forms of capital strategically in different cultural settings to ensure the success of the group.

By using this range of practices, the young men ensure their access to resources, their visibility and the sustainability of the group. They use local and national, formal and informal, networks, they mobilize varying forms of capital, and they strategically adopt formal practices required by local or national youth and community work policies in a way that correspond to the groups’ norms and values. The group is very creative in the latter and know how to “make-do”. Their low-threshold approach replicates the local practices and social structures of the local neighbourhood and reflects the “code of the street” that can be meaningfully decoded by the young boys attending the club due to the fact that they correspond to their social life-worlds and their everyday experiences of their local area. As a consequence, the group has an important impact on the youth of Stoneyholme, Burnley, and in times of community conflict they are able to mediate between the youth and the community.

3.6.1. Cultural networking as institutionalizing practice

A large, very cohesive, friendship network is the most important informal network mobilized by the individuals to form the group; it is strongly gendered and ethnically organized, with its members being male and almost exclusively of Bangladeshi origin. The foundational and leading core of the group consists of around 10 young men in their early twenties who know each other from school and from growing up in the same neighbourhood; they still live in Stoneyholme and work in and around Burnley. An additional 10 young men from the same school friendship group, study or work away from Burnley but are still considered part of the group and attend whenever they are in Burnley on holidays or term breaks.

The originally informal network of friends became more formalized in the aftermath of the 2001 Burnley riots due to the availability of resources. Community participation, here, can be seen as a means to attract or direct public funding into local structures when there is only a limited amount of money available; such funding is itemized through social policy agendas, thus connecting certain activities, norms and values resulting in governance. As part of the local governance strategy introduced after the summer of disturbances, intending to improve local community relations, additional resources in the youth and community services made it possible for youth workers to locate informal social structures amongst young people. The group of friends in this study was approached to be trained as youth workers and were facilitated in starting up as a formal group; youth work was offered as an accompaniment to these young men's secondary and higher education. Through becoming the formal group Young People Together, the young men got access to resources such as being able to use the facilities of the local community centre for group sessions and money from the community cohesion fund to pay for expenses of projects and

activities. Additionally, to ensure acceptance of the group within the local area, they worked with a local Bangladeshi organization and regularly attended the local Bangladeshi mosque; this resulted in establishing trust with parents in the community, many of who went on to send their boys to the group, ensuring high attendance.

The members of Young People Together strategically operate within multiple social structures on varying levels in order to institutionalize their group on the “market” in Burnley. They are dealing with several individuals, agencies and organizations, as well as government structures and policies. Consequently, this utilizing of multiple networks requires flexible forms of representation of the group members when they interact with agencies and organizations. These interactions are strategic practices through which the group acquires and maintains acceptance amongst their local community, and amongst agencies across Burnley and beyond. Through these strategic marketing strategies the group aims to achieve the highest market share possible. Moreover, by applying these strategies they achieve sustainability for their “product”. Consequently, the group can secure the resources needed, such as the facilities of the local community centre and funding for materials and recurring costs. Similar to campaigning for elections, the group’s communication is strategic and aims to convince the relevant individuals and agencies that their work is sustainable youth work and vital for the cohesiveness of their community.

A crucial liaison for the group in the local neighbourhood has been their work with the Bangladeshi Welfare Association (BWA). This organization is located a few yards away from the community centre, right next to a mosque used by the Bangladeshi community. Unlike the youth and community centre, which is in a building built for its purpose and thus standing out from the other buildings, the BWA and the mosque were put

in an ordinary residential terraced house and thus hidden from the eye of the stranger. The association played a crucial role in setting up the group. Consequently, Young People Together work quite closely with the Association. They also helped them with funding after the council let them down. Moreover, the connection to the mosque, which most of the members and the workers of Young People Together attend more or less regularly, enforces the interlink with the community and thus, the acceptance of the work of the group among the local Bangladeshi community.

3.6.2. Institutionalization through mixing practices and creating meaningful identities

The young men from Young People Together intentionally and strategically mix cultural practices from different systems of meanings. They usually have a very informal way of dealing with the younger boys but at the same time claim to perform good youth work. Finally, the group gets funding from another agency. These are the field notes from the day when they had only just found out about it:

“The group has received some funding from Connexions: And when I arrive they sit downstairs in the hall with the comfy seats and have another Asian young man with them who I think is Bangladeshi too but they all speak English as they usually do with some comments in Bangladeshi.

They decide to sit in the smaller room next door as they need to do proper planning on how to undertake the project. Sazid casually grabs a stack of yellow papers and throws it on the table. You are meant to sit around the table, Abdullah instructs us firmly whilst running in and out of the room sorting out some supervision for the lads in the other room with the table tennis and the snooker.

Hassan has got a piece of paper on which he is meant to take some notes, but he produces some scribbling as well which I find quite funny, it says: “Project in the mix”. And they discuss that they are going to have 3D sculpturing, cooking and drama. The artists says that they will need books to get inspiration from, so he would like to take them to the library or to the museum - they are talking about Manchester or Liverpool. Somebody mentions parental consent forms. None of them talks about any health and

safety concerns or issues (something that other youth agencies would do as the very first thing).

They are really trying to speed things up now, take down the mobile number of the artist and jokingly ask for his house number (as he is from the local neighbourhood, too). They want to see a plan on Sunday. Everybody gets a task. Hamid's brother sits at the table being very quiet. He seems to have been asked to be one of the leaders as well for the project, so he is being asked to get all the lads together. He seems to be the communicator between the young lads and the older ones. He is very silent but the way he sits at the table, listening attentively, he seems to feel very proud that he is seen as one of them. A couple of lists are being made, regarding what is going to happen every week. The artist wants to ask young lads what they want to do. One of the workers says that, no, all of them should go from what YOU say; you set the task and they do what you tell them. If they don't want to do it, fine, some of them will not agree or whatever. Otherwise it will take too long. You tell them what is going to be done, and then they just do it." (Research diary GK, Burnley, 06.12.2005)

3.6.3. Institutionalization through forms of capital

I conclude this half of the chapter by returning to the idea of the public performance of Young People Together (as described earlier), the group now being in 'full swing', as it were, having secured funding. More precisely, a local event is discussed when the group perform their drama piece, entitled "Generations", which is framed by displays from the art workshops and the cooking of food (the latter activity was part of the workshops but for this big event, the professional older lads are doing the cooking). The presentation of the results of their workshops is undertaken with so much energy and enthusiasm by the lads that the event represents a strong statement by the group in making claims for their collective identity and the resources they need to continue. Due to the very professional presentation of the day in terms of marketing strategies, the audience of the performance, i.e., the "customers" or "sales reps" from other agencies, were delivered a very convincing "product".

“Generations” is a creative and vivid, symbolic and meaningful representation of the experiences and identity struggles of young Bangladeshi men growing up in Burnley. It addresses the particular problems and issues relating to their local lives in Burnley, such as: generational conflict; the conflict between tradition and modernity; being an offspring of migrants from traditional, rural communities; being Asian with British socialization; and being part of an extended family spread out across the world, as well as living in very religious families within a secular society. All these topics are addressed artistically with a particular dramatic element: for instance, the relocation into a phantasmagorical, very stereotypical setting in rural Bangladesh is reinforced with comical and musical elements taken from South Asian “Bollywood” movies and Asian Fusion pop music. The audience which is sizable - 150 or more people from the local area are squeezed into the community centre - is deeply engaged and appreciative pleasure; everybody appears to connect to the play, which is also tremendously humorous for the observer. Importantly, the lads have made sure that important individuals from the youth and community work sector are present as well – another political strategy.

3.7. Re-politicizing the British Asian experience

The group of young British Bangladeshi men, as referred to in the sub-heading, uses a range of strategies through which they move from the margins of the social community into the social and political centre of British society. Their key strategy is the appropriation of images of the “Asian gang” and the integration of the connected cultural and discursive practices into formal political participation within the local youth and community sector. Through interlinking practices and images of the “Asian gang” with formal practices of participation, the group of young British Bangladeshi men resist the state’s local and national community policy practices of de-politicizing and de-ethnicizing identities and political

down-scaling of community (and its places) related to the South Asian presence in Burnley (Burnett 2004, McGhee 2003; 2005). These new forms of identity politics are rooted in the experience of young British Asian Muslim men growing up in a northern English mill town (Vertovec 1998) shaped by structural urban deprivation (Atkinson and Moon 1994), who are confronted with structural and open racism and discrimination, Islamophobia, and the migrant experience, and who are trying to create new visions for their local lives beyond the simplistic notions of community by the state. By resisting government agencies through refusing to participate in the state's discourses and practices of community cohesion, the "Asian gang" does not in any way express forms of alienation from British society, but in fact engages strongly - and with much confidence in their citizens' rights - in normative debates about the social and political public life of Britain.

Applying Alexander's (2000; 2004) notion of the "Asian gang" to Young People Together, the group of young British Bangladeshi men from Burnley, it can be argued that the friendship group engages in cohesive sub-cultural practices against the notion of the "new Asian folk devil" as conjured up by the British media public since the 2001 riots in northern English mill towns (Alexander 2000; 2004). The group engages in informal forms of political participation against the formal practices of Burnley youth and community activists and practitioners who follow the community-cohesion agenda and in turn culturalize, essentialize and reject the practices of the "Asian gang".

The "Asian gang" used to be an informal youth gang, a friendship group of young British Bangladeshi men who grew up together in the same South Asian neighbourhood of Burnley. In the aftermath of the "riots", a youth worker helped to establish the group formally in order to give them a space

for activities seen as “valuable” to the community. This “transformation of the gang” follows the common practice of youth work in disaffected neighbourhoods with gang problems. For example, in the Chicago of the 1920s, youth gangs were taken over by agencies as a club, given a name, and affiliated with the larger structure (Thrasher 1936 [1927]: 508). By and by, the members of the club “are made to understand the roles they play and given some part in the life of the community” (*ibid.*). Initially, this went down well with the “Asian gang”, but after a few years, conflicts arose from community cohesion policies, particularly in relation to the structures with which the state wanted the “Asian gang” to be affiliated and the normative restraining of too many cultural practices of the “Asian gang”. This resulted in the “Asian gang” getting into conflict with other youth and community groups in the town, which was clearly linked to the practices of de-ethnicization by the social policy of community cohesion. Throughout the research the group challenged the researcher’s link with other youth and community groups in the town until the challenge was turned back on them towards the end of the fieldwork when good relationships had been established over the time of a whole year. After the session, a friendly and relaxed conversation developed which allowed for challenging Abdullah on the group’s strong resistance of cooperation with other agencies. Abdullah angrily replied:

“We have heard that shit before that Young People Together would not work multi-agency. And that is just not true. If you work with other agencies, they just steal your ideas. In fact, we do work with other agencies, but only the ones we trust such as Sue and Miriam and Annemarie and Burnley Food Links, and we work with the council.” (Field notes, Abdullah, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

When enquired about their co-operation with ARB (Anti-Racism for Burnley), Abdullah continues to be agitated:

“No, tell me how that would work! Can you be a student at Liverpool University and Lancaster University? No, you can’t! Some of the lads from Young People Together used to go to ARB but they have stopped because they had enough. They, ARB, have messed them up.” (Field notes Abdullah, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

Abdullah addresses a serious problem of community-cohesion policy’s practices of de-ethnicization as a basis for community work resulting in the unsettling of identities. In deprived migrant communities, ethnicity can become an important part of identity; identity being understood as a mix of forms of identification. In varying social situations people draw upon different means of identification in order to feel they belong to the group. Ethnicity as a form of group identity has to be understood as an important form of identification in the de-territorialized life-worlds of migrants. Through them they connect to the global flows which contain images and means of identification for migrants (Appadurai 1996; 1999, for transnationalism and diaspora see Vertovec and Cohen 1999). To ask individuals to refrain from using ethnicity in community activism as means of integrating them into the social majority consequently results in their resistance - simply because the migrant’s experience of their social life-worlds differs from the representations of the social life-worlds of the social majority by which they feel misrepresented. With its new social policies of community cohesion Britain is following the way of continental Europe to force the integration of migrant communities through practices of cultural assimilation (McGhee 2005: 57, Hussain and Bagguley 2005, Young 2003). Groups such as ARB are multi-ethnic youth groups working against racism. The basic notion is the stressing of communality between ethnicities and the ignoring of underlying structural economical problems of Burnley, that disadvantage South Asian and white working-class communities, resulting in confused young people.

The conflict has also resulted in the retreat of young South Asian people from Burnley's youth theatre. Abdullah pointed out that, in current productions, one would not find any Asian faces amongst the actors – except in one year when they had eight productions! It is clear that the group does not want to work with the youth theatre. Abdullah does not go into the details of the source of tensions with the youth theatre, but suggests that they treated a number of group members badly. He was pleased to learn that one leader had recently left. The group's resistance also involves challenging the practices of other youth work agencies, such as bussing children in from other communities. This is rejected by the group with the argument that it was bad community work practice. It also reflects the tensions that have been created through the state formalizing the volunteer and community sector, resulting in community activists becoming staff and adopting an "employee" attitude, which in turn results in a clear separation between work and private life as well as an instrumentalization of community involvement. Ultimately, this is a key difference between state and community work, with the result that people feel used and not genuinely cared for. This also becomes clear when Abdullah expresses their frustration with other youth and community work agencies in Burnley:

"They only work for their figures, and only for their money. After 5 o'clock they do nothing anymore but shit onions. Brunshaw Action Group used to (*word missing*) us tickets for free. 20 tickets! I rung them up and asked, look, why do we get these tickets for free? And they were upfront saying they would need some Asian faces for their numbers. And I hung up on them immediately. That would be as if we would phone ARB and order some white faces to come to Young People Together. That's just bad! If you want them to come, you have to work with them. You cannot just come over to order them for putting them into your books!" (Field notes on Abdullah, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

It is important to emphasize that local youth and community projects in Burnley are under a lot of economic constraints regarding the state's allocation of finances, and are often severely under-funded. There is no steady flow of income to these agencies, but they instead have to write bids in which they show evidence that their project should be funded by the state or state agencies (for example the National Lottery). In order to apply to the community-cohesion fund, projects have to prove that they are cohesive. One way of doing this is by evaluating the ethnicity of participants. Through this means of governmentality, the state is trying to force communities to change their behaviour in community activities – this tool of governmentality is called “social bridging” or “social capital” in the language used by governments (Putnam 2000) and is outlined in government's social policy documents such as the Local Government Association's (2005) “Guidance on Community Cohesion”. McGhee (2005) criticizes this approach, suggesting it is not clear how the transformation from social bonding to social bridging of social capital can be achieved, since the approach does not suggest “the process by which the defensive and often antagonistic identification procedure associated with communal identities is to be disrupted” (*ibid.*: 53). Clearly, Abdullah and his group resist the governmentality of the state in terms of the instrumentalization of community practices intended to change behaviour on the surface without tackling the underlying structural problems of the town:

“We don't want to work with people if we think we can't get anything out of it. ARB are not interested in others coming a long. For example, at your place last time when Mary Thatcher was saying that thing (*he refers to the managing youth worker refusing my presence in staff meetings whilst he was present*) I thought: ‘Bloody hell! She has come to all our meetings, even the staff meeting when we were planning things. So why can't she come to theirs?’ - How many agencies have actually phoned you and asked you to work with them? Only us! There you go! The problem is Breaking Barriers are good on paper - because they are structured. We aren't good

on paper because we aren't structured." (Field notes on Abdullah, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

Here, Abdullah points out his group's resistance to new practices of segregation within the youth and community work sector of Burnley. Through the creation of new categories of "others" beyond ethnicity, gender or 'race', organizations within the sector connect with each other through "paying lip service" to the community-cohesion agenda. Agencies like BBB are deeply integrated within the structural organization of the local youth and community services (through the employment of workers who are employed there) and within the community-cohesion agenda (through the funding they get from the community-cohesion fund) and the cooperation with the council, especially the community cohesion unit. They have the professional knowledge necessary for adapting their work to social policies and are thus "good on paper", as Abdullah points out to me. To local realities, however, they are perhaps not so well adapted. Since their work is geared towards the policy of community cohesion, they focus on the assimilation of communities and ignore the structural problems of deprived Asian and white communities (McGhee 2005) that result in their social stigmatization and marginalization. The structural problems are wide-ranging: intergenerational unemployment, drug consumption - and, associated with this crime, prostitution and criminal gangs - racism, violent crime, mental health problems and others. Instead, BBB, and many other youth and community services, align their work with the political discourses of urban regeneration and city marketing (Binder 2000). They also attempted to make young people think in these terms - coaching them to think that Burnley is a good place to live, where everyone can get on well, while the main problem facing marginalized communities is that they do not think positively of themselves ("community pride" is the buzz word), which denies the reality of social deprivation (Atkinson and Moon 1994). By coaching young people's way of thinking about the towns, the

youth agencies are trying to impact on the social construction of marginalization. In doing this, they completely ignore that marginalization is the social reality produced through social injustice and state neglect.

In reality, youth services rarely manage to reach the young people that are 'hard to reach' with these practices because they do not connect with their social life-worlds. BBB have to pick young people up from around the town because they meet in the town centre away from the communities. They work formally with the young people; youth sessions are structured and educational, bad language and swear words are not allowed, nor is threatening behaviour – just like in any other public service. Thus, Young People Together have a very different way of working with their young people. This becomes clear when the group challenges the researcher about value differences between Muslim and secular public spheres. Enquiring about her opinion on prostitution and homosexuality, she holds back her opinion, which annoys Sazid: "I don't like it when people are vague with their answers because they want to be politically correct." (Field notes, Sazid, Burnley, 09.08.2005, archive GK). To prove that he is not very politically correct himself, he engages in a lot of swearing following this statement. Referring to the code of practice of youth workers to refrain from bad language, this is what he replies when challenged that he could not be a youth worker as he was swearing too much:

"No. I used to be one but I stopped doing it because it was too much policy involved. I didn't like that. You might think of me as a bad person because I am very straightforward and speak my mind but this is the way I am and this is the only way I am." (Field notes, Sazid, Burnley, 09.08.2005, archive GK)

Overall, this is one of the underlying codes of the youth work of Young People Together. They resist de-ethnicized and de-politicized policies of state community cohesion politics and youth work introduced after the

riots, and refuse to accept the glossing over and palliation (of structural economic deprivation, ethnic segregation and mental health problems rooted in these problems) that characterizes contemporary city marketing of urban renewal attempting to turn Burnley into a brand that “sells” to all communities, including the “marginalized”. The group’s resistance is expressed in their consistent practices in keeping it “real” (by using the cultural practices of the “Asian gang”) as against the principles of youth work and community cohesion. Not only do they feel comfortable with these practices because they are authentically rooted in their neighbourhood but, because of this, they are also credible to the local young people they work with. The group works alongside the cultural practice of being “streetwise” (Anderson 1990) which means that their cultural practices reflect the “code” of the street with any signifiers attached to this. This means that the workers do not evade topics or language connected to the following categories (but which does not mean that they encourage this): violence, ethnic codes, racism, Islamic practices, Islamophobia, drugs, abuse, rivalries amongst youth gangs, youth language, abusive language, homophobia, etc. As a result, ethnicity - such as being South Asian but also being the “Asian gang”, i.e. being British Asian in Burnley and knowing the local “code” of the streets of the neighbourhood - becomes a resource to this group of young men on which they can capitalize and provide successful (i.e. extremely well attended) youth work. Part of the “code” of the street is that the neighbourhood is ethnically organized, so that the Bengali and Pakistani youth go to different youth clubs. This does not fit into the concept of community cohesion and is criticized by other agencies providing youth work in Burnley. When this is being pointed out to Abdullah in the same conversation towards the end of the fieldwork, he angrily replies:

“Oh, there is J. for the Pakistani young people! It is not strictly so that they go there and Bengali people go there but generally it is. “They” have to

understand why Young People Together and J. don't mix. If the other agencies don't understand that they have to learn it!" (Field notes, Abdullah, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

What "they" do not understand is that the group's valuable work is based on the fact that they practice as "cultural brokers" (Welz 1996). Not only do they understand the "code" of the street but also they understand the cultural practices, i.e. the norms and values of the "social majority" of the town resulting from their up-bringing and education in Britain. Thus, they are able to act as mediators between the young people and the community of the area in times of conflict. An example is the occurrence of a stabbing in Burnley which was reported in the local newspaper as the following:

"Three arrested after stabbing: Two young men were stabbed in an incident at Kitchen's Garage in the early hours of yesterday. The victims, who are aged 18 and 22 and live in Burnley, are being treated at Burnley General Hospital. Detectives have launched an investigation and three men – a 25-year-old from Burnley and a 23-year-old and a 28-year-old from Accrington – have been arrested and are helping police with their inquiries. It is not yet known what sparked the attacks at the Trafalgar Street petrol station, which happened shortly after 1 a.m. yesterday." (Burnley Express, 8.11.2005, p. 5)

On the evening of November 8th, a very worried but also agitated Abdullah reports the following first thing on the night: "We have got riots on hand. Haven't you heard about the stabbing last Sunday? It was racially motivated! I can't tell you any more about it!" (Field notes, Abdullah, Burnley, 08.11.2005, archive GK). On enquiry, more information on the stabbing is obtained from the group. A Bengali young man from the local area was attacked with a knife by two white men. Their ethnicities had not been mentioned in the newspaper article, but the young men from Young People Together already knew all about it and had been busy negotiating the situation with the young people to avoid an escalation of the situation.

From what Abdullah says it seems that the young British Bangladeshi men from the local area are very upset and thinking of revenge.

Three days later, there is a PACT meeting in the local area and the stabbing is on the agenda too:

The local beat officer informs us that three arrests have been made and that the attack “was not racially motivated” (*original wording*). The police had intended to keep the incident “very low key” (*original wording*) which would explain why the ethnicity of the men involved had not been mentioned in the newspaper. There are youth workers from the Bengali community present (who are not linked with Young People Together) who had a few more enquiries. They told the police officer that the community was very upset about the stabbing and that it has the impression that the case has not been dealt with in a way that shows the seriousness of this crime, probably referring to the fact that ethnicity was not mentioned and that the police seem to treat the case as not racially motivated. One participant makes a reference to another racially motivated incident involving Bengali boys that had been in the newspaper a while ago, which is immediately argued against by the police officer: ‘this is an event from the past, it happened long time ago and is over and dealt with’ (*wording accounted by memory*). However, the South Asian man feels the need to reply that, no, these sorts of events made memories come back. They let the officer know that there is a peaceful protest or march planned outside Burnley police station. (Research notes on PACT meeting in South Asian neighbourhood, Burnley, 11.11.2005, archive GK)

In the end, unrest did not break out - perhaps due in no small measure to the work of the youth and community work agencies such as Young People Together and the other Asian youth workers that participated in the PACT meeting. Their work has arguably had such a de-escalating and de-fusing impact precisely because they have succeeded in addressing ethnicity through using signifiers from the modes and codes of the street that fit with the everyday experience of the street of young Asian men from Burnley. In the case of the attack on the Bengali woman, they immediately challenged the de-ethnicized report of the police and the local press and made the ethnic conflict visible in their work with the young people simply

because it was visible in the community itself. Everyone in the community knew that the victim was Bengali and the perpetrators were white. The police's "community cohesive" approach to this incident – playing ignorant to the ethnicities of the involved individuals – was angrily rejected by the South Asian youth from the neighbourhood. As a result of Abdullah's and his friends' everyday experiences of people's fears and their own experiences of an ethnically segregated town they have made an active choice to resist the community cohesion agenda – even if this means that their group will not get any more funding from the community cohesion fund:

“With the council - this is from a Young People Together perspective: We've had many discussions and they don't seem to want to, you know - they seem to say there is enough funding there but they don't seem to want to part with any of the money that's been (*Abdullah starts laughing*) given to them. (*Abdullah gets an attack of laughter*) Which is really bad! Sorry, (*Abdullah is still laughing and his speech unclear*) the council - they've got enough money but they don't seem to want to give it - they don't want to seem to give anything away. They just make it run round in circles: get this, get this, get this. And then in the end they just -; you find out they don't really have much money to give you. So Burnley Borough Council - that department is pretty pointless to be honest with you. Yeah, they should go! I mean they'd be better just sleeping all day (*both of us laugh because his laughter is so infectious*) and come in on weekends. Just to fill in their time sheets. You can print that!” (Abdullah, Burnley, 20.09.2005, archive GK)

Towards the end of the period of research with the young men, the group finally gets new funding to engage in activities with children, although unsurprisingly not from their previous funder, the community-cohesion fund, but from a new funding agency, called “Positive Activities for Young People” (PAYP).

This chapter shows, using the analytical category of resistance, that the state misreads informal forms of political participation amongst

marginalized groups as “social disaffection and political alienation”. By labelling these activities in this way, the state excludes informal forms of political participation from the range of practices that are understood as legitimate for its citizenry. Instead, such forms could be read as individualized or anti-social behaviour, or other behaviour that is not recognized as relating in a positive way to the state or the community. The ethnographic data shows that people’s behaviour is political despite the mainstream perception that it is not. The resistance category permits us to examine how informal practices relate to the practices of the state and the wider society. Even if the conflict created by these marginal groups is negative, it is still a way of being connected to the social majority. As a consequence, it is argued that there needs to be a more critical examination of state practices of labelling “apolitical” behaviour as social and political “alienation”. By taking the point of view of the “marginalized”, it becomes possible to recognize “apolitical” behaviour as reactions to discourses and practices of the state and/or the wider community. Thus, individuals adopt practices of resistance through which they connect to formal political structures and forms of participation which would not otherwise be accessible to them. For this they use varying, often strategic, practices of informal participation (often mixed with formal social or political participation and often they alternate between formal and informal forms) resulting in the successful “navigation” through and “management” of bureaucratic structures, authorities and policies that would otherwise not be accessible, and would instead result in disempowering socio-economic structures and excluding spatial arrangements enforcing their social marginalization. In this chapter, the “Asian gang” was discussed who also stand as a hope for a new kind of South Asian identity politics in the British South Asian community.

Chapter 4

VEILED POLITICS IN BURNLEY:

THE MUSLIM WOMEN'S LUNCH CLUB AS A TRANSLATION NETWORK

The importance of civic ground work for the establishing of participatory and integrative structures in the society is the key focus in this chapter. The state privileges formal forms of political participation neglecting to acknowledge thereby civil participation generated through informal social interaction. I argue that these structures are still highly relevant as political participation as they provide civic structures for a cohesive state and society. The data used to illustrate this point in this chapter is taken from a group of British-Pakistani women in Burnley. The group meet on a regular basis in a government-run community centre in an area of the town with predominantly South Asian residents.

Muslim women are often seen as weak political agents in Muslim as well as western societies – with the headscarf perceived by some in the West as a symbol of female oppression and assignation to the private space of the home. In this vein, Lewis refers to the “majoritarian commentators” who “increasingly interpret the persistence of so-called ‘ethnic’ dress as a failure of integration” (2009: 69). Ahmed (2005) talks about the isolation that Muslim women still experience in Britain which, one could argue, is rather disempowering and certainly not encouraging a position to make a political difference in society. However, I argue that Muslim women perform an important role of political participation contributing to the integration of Muslims through their work in the “background” of the men’s activities in their community. They are the ones who meet the local

neighbours at home in the community everyday when the men are at work, they have a large impact on the decision of the education of their children, of family health politics. In fact, the women produce the social fabric through which the norms and values of the potentially contradicting cultures can be translated into each other and make sense. The core strategy of the British-Pakistani women is similar to the young British-Bangladeshi men from Young People Together: by mixing formal and informal political practices they merge them together into meaningful social practices that have a strong social impact and political significance. They are creating the fabric for successful social integration and community cohesion. However, they are not quite doing it in the way the state anticipates political participation; like the Asian gang they have to resist and challenge the state to a large extent.

4.1. Micro-structures and everyday politics

Following Gledhill (2000b) and Gilsonan (1977), there is a gaping chasm between levels of social and political organization replicating the micro- and macro-structures of a state and civil society. These gaps have to be filled in everyday life by social practices through which meaning is produced that can then be attached to the symbolic practices of the state; through these imaginative practices individuals produce the social imagination of society and polity. These practices are the everyday politics as described by Michel de Certeau (1988) in "The Practice of Everyday Life"; and by studying them we can achieve a clearer idea of how the macro-structures of politics and the state translate into and operate within the micro-structures of society. Studying Muslim women's political participation in the local context, thus, means to look beyond the criticised veil and to understand the women's integrative power through social practices that are illegible to the state and the state's understanding of integration. The macro-structures of politics and the state operate in public

arenas – spaces that are less accessible for Muslim women who, depending on their degree of religiosity, tend to feel less comfortable in public political spaces usually dominated by men. Obeying religious rules is important for practicing Muslims – having this taken away can result in the fear of losing one’s faith and identity – with dangerous consequences for the migrant experience where more effort has to be put into stabilizing identities. In consequence, in order to study how politics works in the local context of Muslim women, it is necessary to study the women’s formal practices as well as their informal practices. The state’s notion of integration and formal political participation has to be questioned, since typically, these spaces have to be public, secular and using the formal language of the state. Once again, the state is referring to ideal types of citizens and citizens’ political participation based on hegemonic ideas of citizenship and civic behaviour. And in privileging “good politics” the state ignores any social activity that is not included in this hegemonic notion of the political (Hellman 1992, Gledhill 2000c).

Burdick (1992: 183-4 as cited in Gledhill 2000c: 195-6) suggests shifting the focus from the actual formal political practices (such as social movements, for example) to the “arenas” in which they exist (i.e. the social, political or ideological contexts and discourses) in order to examine the set of ideological, discursive and practical structures which are encountered by marginal groups when they want to get involved. Social activity which does not fall into the category of formal politics, nonetheless, has a political influence by impacting on the normative framework in which formal political activities occur, and, thus, impact on formal political practices (Gledhill 2000c). The activities of the network of British Pakistani women in Burnley are of political relevance because they operate across the spectrum of formal and informal participation by mainly engaging in forms of everyday politics. These local, social and discursive

practices are precisely what fills the gap between macro- and micro-structures and explains how individuals imagine the space between the social and the political.

4.2. Translation networks as political practice

The key practice of the British Pakistani women in the lunch club was the creation of a meaningful social network that functions as cultural translations between Pakistani/Muslim and English/secular norms and values. During their weekly formal club meetings and other formal or informal meetings outside the venue of the club, the women engaged in the continuous social processes of socio-cultural and political integration of migrant groups. The meetings of the lunch club were integrated in a network of other formal and informal social organisations: religious, professional as well as family and friendship networks. This “translation network” was produced through the women’s discursive negotiations of their families’ everyday practices within the contradicting secular British and Islamic South Asian local context. This included the comparing and interpreting of the two differing, contradicting cultural contexts, resulting in the production of new meanings. As a consequence of this and because of the particular nature of the lunch club, the women were actively able to impact on the norms and values of the South Asian community in Burnley and, thus, deliver community cohesion work for the British society as a whole.

The notion of “translation networks” developed from the analysis of my data is a theoretical as well as an analytical category. Not only does it emphasise the cultural-political contributions of the women’s practices: the translation of culturally different meanings and the sense-making of the gap between the social and the political through imagination; it also refers to the strategic-practical, political dimension of the women’s activities: the

creation and mobilization of formal and informal social networks that are utilized in order to modify hegemonic norms and values in the community. Translation networks combine the theoretical notion of translation spaces with the analytical notion of actor-network theory (Latour 2005). The theoretical notion of translation has emerged from debates in postcolonial studies, cultural studies and linguistics (Bachmann-Medick 2006). It acknowledges the existing power relations in a post-colonial world and, resulting from this, the many struggles for power over the determination of meaning and conflicting norms and values between and within cultural societies. The notion of translation emphasises this and allows for the negotiation of various forms of translation. The combination of the notion of translation with actor-network theory turns it into an analytical category which enabled me to examine the practices of the women.

Transferring this concept to the data on the women's group allows me to direct the scientific enquiry towards meanings beyond the official ones represented within the homogenous cultural spaces of society. This method enables us to recognize the "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault 2003) of minority societies beyond the official mainstream ones represented through the government. Thus, the methodological combination of both notions, of translation spaces AND actor network theory (Latour 2005), enables the socio-political dissemination of the women's re-negotiation and sense-making of culturally conflicting norms and values. The acquired formal, political relevance has to be acknowledged by majoritarian British society.

In the following I will explore my ethnographic data on the Burnley Lunch Club in order to illustrate how the everyday forms of civic participation of the Pakistani women impacts socially and politically and in consequence have a very important integrative function and have to be seen as civic forms of political participation.

4.3. The women from the Lunch Club

The Lunch Club has been initiated by Fahmida, the coordinator for the Sure Start centre, who runs the Club as part of the healthy living services that the centre offers as there is the demand for it from the Asian women of the local community. Burnley resident Fahmida, who is not from the Daneshouse neighbourhood, was married to a man from Pakistan and has two children. She is in her early thirties, always dressed in a pretty-coloured headscarf matching her Asian dress, the *shalwar kameez*, a friendly looking, and intelligent woman with a university degree who always has a calm smile. The club is advertised as an open session where issues of health, healthy eating and the family are being discussed. However, the reason why the women really are so keen to go along every week is the fact that they will be discussing Islamic practices supervised and run by a female Islamic scholar with women from the local neighbourhood which are a network of largely family and friendship acquaintances. Because the club is located at a statutory service, it cannot advertise its teaching of Islam since they do not go in line with the community cohesion regulations (Burnett 2004). But for the women the teaching is very important as their families will support their attendance of the club more. It is not that false information is being given, the club is simply based on the cultural practices of this group of women that would not be supported by the state.

Through connecting the acquaintance network of women from Daneshouse to the public Sure Start centre of the local area, and determining the contents of the sessions by inviting a female Islamic scholar, the discursive practices of the women become of micro-political relevance. The women discuss issues of their local lives in relationship to public, secular and religious norms and values represented through the space, a government

funded public centre, and the presence of an Islamic scholar. Because of the catchment area and mainly word-of-mouth advertising, most women knew each other before the start of the club. This provides the space in which the largest extent of translation work is taking place; the socio-political and cultural context in which the Lunch Club meets contributes to the discursive structure created by the women. I support the opinion that by interacting across multiple structures, the women act as “cultural translators” (Hall 1994b) within a larger social network.²⁵ Through relating to varying value systems and systems of meaning, the women re-negotiate meanings for concepts that have been blurred through conflicting meanings derived from more than one cultural system. Since the women have access to more than one cultural system resulting from their migration background, they are able to renegotiate and to “translate” and act as “cultural translators” (cf. Kather 2002). Since the women are doing this not in a private space but a public space provided by government and structured by this as well as the teachings of Islam, the women’s practices gain their increased political relevance. The women discursively connect to multiple cultural systems (social, religious, political and national) and produce new meanings that are disseminated within their formal and informal networks. The notion of the space indicates that their cultural translations need ‘somewhere’ in which meanings are translated and negotiated.

4.4. Mixing secular and inter-religious practices

When she started the group, the organizer, Fahmida, felt that the women needed a space where they could discuss with their peers issues that were of relevance to their everyday lives. The social space of this translation space is created through membership. The women have the feeling that

²⁵ Hall (1994b), with his concept of cultural translation, refers in particular to Salman Rushie’s notion of translated individuals.

they belong to the club and they feel very comfortable attending the meetings. The women can be sure that only Asian and/or Muslim women (with the only exception of the female researcher) will attend as a result of the venue's location in a predominantly Asian area which provides a (gendered) space to learn and discuss the teaching of Islam. The women know that they have many shared cultural experiences, practices, norms and values. Thus, in every meeting there will be at least five or six women who wear a *niqab* (the Islamic face scarf) on arrival which they will put beside them, folded neatly. They can come along to meetings with their veil and do not have to fear being stared at. Moreover, many of the contributions from the women originate from the particular life-worlds that they share. Consequently, the other members of the group find it easy to relate to accounts; they will nod, make noises of agreement or add to a preceding contribution by sharing a similar experience. This space, thus, allows the women to integrate into British society on their own terms. It provides a safe space where they can discuss issues that are very important to them and where they know that the other participants are sympathetic.

It is clear from the outset that the women in the group have a shared "language"; not only can most of them speak one or more South Asian languages, but they can use terms and concepts that originate from their Islamic or South Asian context. This is crucial as some of the older women in the group do not speak English very well. They will either ask if they can speak in Urdu, or the group will even encourage them to speak Urdu if they find it hard to say something in English. One of the younger women will then translate it for me. Furthermore, the women frequently use South Asian or Islamic terms in their conversations.

Some of the woman will frequently use the Arabic phrases "inshalah" (god willing) or "mashalah" (what god has wished), signifying her religious

identity. The women feel comfortable using such symbolic references because they know that they will be recognized by the other members of the club. At the same time, the frequent use of these references also contributes to the creation of the group's identity. The women feel that they belong, because symbolic references are used that they understand and that are important parts of their individual cultural/religious identity.

It becomes apparent from these two examples around the practices that the women from the Lunch Club use the club for the negotiation of new forms of meaning that fit with their identities. This results from the fact that they are not happy with the "heavily cultured" form of Islam they have learned from their parents. The women are negotiating a "third space" (Bhabha 2004, Soja 1996) within civil society in order to deal with the contradicting norms and values which they face because their identities are based on two very different cultural contexts: the "traditional" Pakistani one from their parents and a "modern" British one. Their cultural practices in their everyday lives gain more authority through doing this. Moreover, the women have a space where they can discuss their doubts about not living religiously and they get support to develop coping strategies. This means that the Lunch Club is a space where the boundaries between the private and the public are negotiated and become observable. As a result, the Lunch Club is a crucial space for the Muslim women where they can negotiate their conflicting identities as modern but religious women in Britain. Here, they obtain strategies on how they can deal with conflicting norms and values.

The negotiation and creation of new points of reference has been discussed as "survival strategies" in Hellermann (2004). This description is useful because it points out the importance of these negotiations for the individuals. The women are not just "having a natter" and being lectured in

a minority religion that makes them feel different from the majority of the population in Burnley. Rather, they are involved in negotiating issues that are of the highest relevance to themselves and their community because this structures and helps them to make sense of events in their everyday lives. Thus, the negotiations help them to construct logics within the disjuncting of norms and values within their fragmented life-worlds. The fact that these disconnections are indeed serious was demonstrated in the preceding case studies. Consequently, it is crucially important to take into account that people's imaginings of civil society and the public sphere are informed by their everyday life practices. The Lunch Club could thus be understood as a form of re-ordering things that have gotten "shaken up" in the lives of the British Pakistani women. In their discussions they are trying to find a new order which is equivalent to their imagination of the public sphere that is relevant to them. This enables them to participate in this civil society as more reliable subjects. Their practices are practices that are marked by marginality; marginal groups find it very important to continue their practices in order to find new places for them in mainstream society. This has been discussed by Hellermann (2004) in regard to the survival strategies of migrants, and by Högdahl (2004) in regard to "urban loophole" strategies of marginal groups. Negotiating practices as undertaken by the women create new structures of civil society in which marginal groups can better participate. So for example, when the women discuss the Islamic dress, when it is appropriate for a women to cover up, or whether it is a problem that the daughters of some of the women are taken to an Islamic school by a male bus driver, or how acceptable it is for a woman to move to a different city to start a university degree. In the club, the women can discuss together where the line needs to be drawn between behaviour that is *halal* (lawful) and *haram* (unlawful).

Places like the Lunch Club are very important spaces in which cultural difference is negotiated and turned into practical strategies. As a result, individuals are enabled to cope with expectations of their families and everyday life. It is a space for negotiating cultural translations between the Pakistani and the British culture. For the women, discussing the parallels and differences between their Islamic culture brought over from Pakistan and the secular culture of Britain is a social practice that helps the women to create a coherent cultural system of meaning for themselves. Moreover, many women in the club are mothers or are likely to become mothers in the future, and most of them have either lived in both Pakistan and England, or have relatives in Pakistan and regularly travel there for visits. Thus, the women have many experiences in common that are rooted in the two cultural systems. The Lunch Club is crucial for developing strategies that helps the women to translate, for themselves but also for their children, who are born and raised in one of the most deprived communities in Britain. Moreover, often the women's own parents follow norms and values rooted in cultural systems that they remember from their experiences in Pakistan; as a result of migration they can show fundamentalist tendencies in regard to their diasporic memories (Werbner 2004, Hall 1990, Vertovec and Cohen 1999). As a result, I argue that the Lunch Club has a crucial function in producing reliable local subjects; that is, women who are confident in their social practices and who can make claims that their practices are *halal* (lawful) as opposed to *haram* (unlawful) - because of the authority they obtain through attending meetings where they are being taught "pure" Islam.

4.5. The Lunch Club as political network

The first interesting aspect to be discussed here is that the women from the Lunch Club use a variety of networks that they themselves produce and interlink strategically. They use professional networks from the Sure Start

centre, i.e. Fahmida asks all her volunteers and ex-volunteers to come along to the meetings. Moreover, they bring their female relatives and, additionally, some of the women from the Lunch Club are linked with a group of women meeting at the local mosque on Sunday mornings for some Islamic readings and prayers. (There is also another organization, 'El-Zarah Women's Organization' that is interlinked with some of the women from the Lunch Club.) In the course of the meetings of the Lunch Club, the mosque meetings are mentioned and access for research purposes negotiated with the women. The mosque is informed about the researcher, and a headscarf is arranged for her. Simultaneously the researcher is invited to Arabic classes that some of the women attend at the mosque.

Consequently, because of the multi-natured networks in which the Lunch Club is localized (professional, private, educational and religious), the members of the club are embedded in firm social networks. These networks consist of regular face-to-face interaction and of multiple institutional networks (such as the Lunch Club at the Sure Start centre, the mosque group, the Arabic class at the mosque, and El-Zarah Women's Organization), as well as private networks through family and friendships. These multiple joinings of relationships and networks ensure the high attendance rate of the Lunch Club and it becoming 'institutionalized'.

The second important observation in regard to the political practices of the Lunch Club is that the women meet in a semi-public locality, which appears very appealing to the women. It is not a private space in a private home which could be awkward for the host and for the visitors (the women are integrated into British culture to the degree that they *do* want some separation of the public and the private). The meetings of the Lunch Club are understood as a community by the women that need a community space. It is not an intrinsic public space; the fact that these women know the majority of the visitors to the Sure Start centre turns it into a semi-

private space in terms of atmosphere. Having attended the club for three months and having been a frequent visitor to the café and the gym at the centre, I found out that a large part of the people who come to the centre are regulars and that there will always be a known face and somebody who will have a chat with you. Moreover, the centre is a community place, being at the heart of the community; indeed, the centre does feel very much community based to me. Many of the visitors live locally or at least have local business related to the community. As a result, the local feel of the centre is something to which everybody who attends the centre can relate.

The third aspect of political practice deals with the teaching and discussion of topics related to Islam as central to the Lunch Club. This is another very essential strategy to establish and keep the Lunch Club running. The teaching of Islam is seen as something highly valuable amongst the Muslim community in Burnley. The research participants repeatedly insist on the point that gaining and spreading as much knowledge on Islam as is possible is seen as the ultimate aim of every Muslim, because the Muslim faith says that Allah will give him/her reward for the knowledge that s/he learns and spreads. Gaining reward through obeying religious rules and spreading Islam is an important practice for Muslims. One could often overhear members of the Lunch Club outside of the meetings making references to the teaching of Islam in the sessions, partly to justify their visits. Furthermore, the teacher emphasized in the sessions that she taught us the right knowledge on Islam. I learnt that there was a highly cultured form of Islam that is followed by the elders of the community. However, it would be essential for Muslims to learn the practices and beliefs of “pure Islam”. In this context, Eade’s (2004: 64) discussion of Gardner’s (1995) findings in her research on the religious practices of migrants in England originating from Sylhet in Bangladesh would signify their distinction from

their poorer country men in Bangladesh by subscribing to the beliefs and practices of a “pure Islam”:

“[S]tatus and power operate on many different levels and take many different forms. Often they are associated with economic class and economic capital but not always. Since status is never more than the way in which people perceive each other, it is never fixed, but continually changing” (Gardner 1995: 134, as quoted in Eade 2004: 64).

This means that Bourdieu’s (1998; 2000 [1984]) notion of capital and class also has to include cultural capital through religious practices. Certain religious practices are identified by different social groups as more valuable and as achieving more cultural capital than others. The same notion applies to the women from the Lunch Club. Since they are taught “pure Islam” in the club by a woman who has studied Islam for many years, the women can assert their attendance against any family duties or husbands that might not otherwise want them to go. Furthermore, the women can claim to be taught “pure Islam” which enables them to gain status and cultural capital which also reflects well on their husbands and children.

Consequently, the central practice of the Lunch Club, the teaching of Islam, works with a twofold intention: on the one hand it allows the women to take time out from their family duties for two hours a week; on the other hand, it motivates them to attend regularly as they gain more status and social capital through learning about “pure Islam”. The teaching of Islam in the Lunch Club is consequently an essential condition to ensure the regular attendance of the women. This is due to the particular cultural context of the British Pakistani women from Burnley. However, it requires much skilful manoeuvring of Fahmida, as organizer, to comply with the regulations that the Sure Start policy requires of sessions run by the centre. She understands, though, how essential this is to the women in being able,

and feeling motivated, to come along; at the same time, she knows how to “sell” it to the centre. The need for her strategic action reflects the problems resulting from the policies of secular state institutions that demand the provision of “faith-free” services. However, it has been pointed out by Göle (2002: 173&179) that it is essential for us to understand that any form of “Islamization” unsettles the “consensual principles and homogenous structures” of the (national) public spheres. She argues it is crucial to “de-familiarize” our gaze and consequently deal with the “social discord” which results from the secular and religious practices within the Muslim public (*ibid.*). For a secular area with a large Muslim community, this means that the state has to pay some attention to the problems created by the clash of religious and secular norms and values that the Muslim community experiences in Britain.

The fourth relevant aspect concerning the social practices of the Lunch Club is gender. It relates to the third aspect in some ways; nonetheless it is worthwhile to deal with it separately. The Lunch Club clearly is a gendered space; all its participants are female, which is completely taken for granted by everybody. Once more, it is the precondition for the women’s attendance in the first place which has its rationale in the cultural practices of the women based on Islamic ideas which demand the segregation of the genders. Western secular societies such as Britain, however, reject the segregation of genders in public places (with the exception of single-sex schools which still exist in many places). Being found in a predominantly South Asian area, gender practices at the centre are oriented towards Muslim practices because they are the practices of the majority of the community and many local women volunteer at the centre. Many of the services on offer are divided between the genders such as courses and the gym, for example. The gym has both women- and men-only hours for most of their sessions.

The final important aspect to analyse as part of the strategic, social, hence political, practice of the Lunch Club is the use of the Sure Start centre as the location for these meetings. Based at Sure Start, the Lunch Club takes place within the secular British institutional context which recognizes volunteering and the taking part in sessions and training as means of gaining status (within British society). And therein lies the integrative value of the Lunch Club. The women meeting here are meeting as volunteers at the centre. They are affiliated to the centre and take part in other activities at the centre that are recognized as community activities. As the women understand their learning about Islam as their contribution to the local community, they understand their learning as part of voluntary practices – voluntary practices being accepted as civic forms of political participation. As a consequence, it is the integrative power of the women’s strategy that they use the centre, with its network of volunteers, as a practice accepted by dominant society to “cover up” a practice that is less acceptable: learning about Islam.

4.6. “Heavily cultured” and “pure” Islam

Four examples of the social practices of the women show how they re-negotiate meanings that have become unsettled due to conflicting norms and values: the role and behaviour of women in “heavily cultured” Islam versus “pure” Islam; family planning and health practices and Islam; child raising and education (girls and Islamic schools); and Islamic practices in secular/Christian contexts. “Heavily cultured” Islam and “pure” Islam are terms used to describe the varying Islamic practices within the community by the women and is a common practice of second generation Muslim migrants in which they try to align their practices in accordance more with western values and distinguish them from their parents’ traditional religious values (Eade 2004: 64).

The role and behaviour of women in Islamic cultures is widely discussed, in public and academic debates; it is thus not surprising that it is a recurring topic in the women's discursive practices. Commonly, the women express that they feel that the "heavily cultured" form of Islam which they learnt from their parents is a burden to them. Shabnam explains to me in my interview with her why it is the women's desire to learn more about Islam in the meetings of the Lunch Club:

"They (the women) are just out there learning more about their religion and stuff. Coz I think we were all taught Islam as children but we were taught Islam as our parents wanted it to be taught. Very much heavily cultured rather than the proper religion. So people are coming out there trying to focus much more on the religious side rather than on the cultural side. And realizing that it's actually two massively different parts [pause] of life...culture and religion (*unclear speech*) pick and choose." (Interview with Shabnam, Burnley, 09.12.2005)

Shabnam explains the women's desire for learning more about Islam so that they could obtain a stronger position in arguing against their elders. Similarly, in the session on women and education, Shammi (the mother of Fahmida) talks about her father in Pakistan who allowed his daughters to have an education. His own father, Shammi's grandfather, in turn, was very much against it and gave his son a hard time for having his daughters educated. Shammi is very open in her account because she knows that the other women share her experience to some degree and will not judge her family in Pakistan for being "backwards" – a term used by the women themselves to describe the communities in Pakistan where their families come from and their relatives still live. By using this term, the women show that they have largely integrated into the norms and values of the British society that might use this culturally charged term to describe rural communities in Pakistan. However, only at the Lunch Club do they feel comfortable discussing this because these "backward" communities are

still the ones from which they originate. The translation space of the Lunch Club, thus, gives the opportunity to discuss the “developmental stages” of different societies and the cultural values attached to them. On another occasion, a very long discussion unfolds when one woman, Nasira, admits that she finds it difficult not to celebrate her children’s birthday in accordance with the teachings of Islam. The other women find it easy to connect to this problem and agree that it would not be understood by a non-Muslim.

“There are about twice as many women today than there was last time, me being the only white woman again (with exception of the white Muslim woman who works at the Chai centre²⁶). Actually, a lot of the women who come to the club also work at the Chai centre, like Rana, who comes a long and joins us at half past ten, and Fahmida’s mother (I think her name is Shammi), who comes a long as well and also seems to work for the Chai centre. Today we are taught about women and education and our teacher quotes Malcom X to explain why women should be educated, against the idea of the older Islamic generation who are opposed to women’s education: “When you educate women, you educate a nation; when you educate a man, you educate an individual”. Fahmida’s mother gives her example about her father who allowed his daughters to have education in Pakistan but his father being very much against it and being difficult. The teacher explains to us that this Islamic practice is based on the rule that women should ideally go a maximum of 48 miles away to get education. If it is above 48 miles they should be accompanied by a man, a “mehrem” - the teacher explains that is “somebody you cannot marry” (referring to the father or brother of a woman). Ideally, women should be taught by women and if they have to be taught by men, only through a veil. A good place to go for education would be Blackburn, says a young woman who is wearing a facescarf. She has only just taken her A-levels and will be educated through the Open University from next year. Blackburn is good because there you can wear a facescarf and people do not look at you twice. You can even wear your “kabala” (Islamic dress) and nobody looks at you because people there are used to seeing this dress. This is followed by the attempt of the teacher to give us other examples from Islam to illustrate that these rules make sense. Some of them are intended to keep you healthy and well, such as the rule to use the “miswak” (this is a wooden stick to clean your teeth). Moreover, it is important to eat meat. The teacher refers

²⁶ Chai Centre is the name given to the Sure Start Centre in Daneshouse.

to vegetarian practices in Britain. She does not have anything against vegetarians, but says we should try to have a little bit of meat sometimes, at least once in our lives, because becoming a vegetarian means you are making "halal" meat (i.e. something that has been given to people by God) "haram" (i.e. forbidden by God). She means that human beings should not empower themselves over God by turning things given by God into things forbidden by God. The teacher is very eager to teach us how we should see things, that as much education as possible is good, and that a good Muslim will always strive for as much education as possible, but that s/he should always get Islam education as well. Then we read a text about Hazrat Aisha, the prophet's wife, and about how educated she was, and we are supposed to discuss who we find are our role models." (Research diary, Burnley, 24.08.2005, archive GK)

What becomes clear from these observations taken from the field diary is that the women are keen on getting religious instruction on how to cope with everyday life in the Muslim community of Burnley. They resist "heavily cultured" forms of Islam that disadvantages women in society through recourse to ideas of "pure" Islam – the ground rules of Islamic practice which are re-interpreted by their scholarly woman teacher. These rules are not more lenient than the practices of the women's parent generation, but they are more rationally explained and better adapted to a life-style in western secular society. Together the women also look for solutions to occasions where they find some rules too hard to follow in a non-Islamic society. Why these meetings of the women are so political is stated by the teacher herself when she quotes Malcom X: "*When you educate women, you educate a nation, when you educate a man, you educate an individual*". Due to these women's strong influential position at home in their families - i.e. the values they adopt in raising and teaching their children - their role is of political importance. They perform the groundwork in forming and changing social values; in this sense, their actions in the home are of political relevance.

4.7. Islamic health practices

The perceived contradictions between Islamic and “gori” (i.e. western orthodox) medicine with regard to the norms of health and family planning practices is renegotiated several times amongst the women at different stages of the fieldwork. It is experienced directly when the women go to see their “English” GPs, i.e. white GPs of non-Asian decent who prioritize western orthodox health practices over any religious health practice and who are not empathetic with the rationale of Islamic health practices. Nasira recounts an occasion when she went to see her “gori doctor” when she was suffering from dizziness caused by her religious fasting during Ramadan. The doctor’s advice was to stop fasting, which Nasira was not very happy about. The doctor was not able to empathize with the motivation of a Muslim in fasting (i.e. that it gives him or her spiritual power to get through the rest of the year and thus has a positive effect on their mental health). Confused by contradicting health practices, Nasira feels she might not want to consult her doctor the next time she experiences health problems whilst fasting, which could result in diseases not being recognized at an early stage. The other women are very empathetic and advise her to see an Asian doctor next time to make sure that she gets advice that is more helpful for her. It is ultimately about ‘twisting’ religious discourse to take care of the health of these women in a western style, while making them believe they have received Islamic advice. This needs special anthropological training for doctors who are sensitive to the cultural context.

Family planning is another topic that the women discuss often and in a very frank manner. One of the topics was contraception and the women talked about it very openly and with no embarrassment. There is a very heated debate about taking the pill throughout Ramadan in order to be able to continue fasting throughout the month. This seems to be a practice that

is used by some women. A woman is forbidden to fast and to pray while she is on her period. There are certain rules when she has to be “off it” (meaning her period) to continue fasting after having a bath. One of the Pashto women, Tayeba, says that she has just started a pack of pills and wants to finish them; she does not think she makes things easy for herself because if she stopped taking the pill and her fast, it would be easier to fast later in the year when the days are shorter. All the other women are of a different opinion and have quite a go at her. At some point she says that it seems to her that contraception is *haram* (i.e. forbidden by God). Most women agree saying that it is *haram* because Allah wants you to have lots of children as they are a gift from him. But Tayeba says that she is taking the pill because she cannot cope with having more children, while the other women counter-argue that, in the old days, their parents had lots of children.

Thus, the women’s meetings are an important place to negotiate family planning, cultural, religious and health issues. They resist using the formal way of accessing the British health system because the advice they get there does not appear to understand Islam. At the Lunch Club they can exchange advice on how to use the British system and what to do if it does not fit in with their Islamic beliefs.

4.8. Child-raising and education

While health and family planning practices are an important area of discussion for the women, another important topic is that of Islamic schools; the women are very animated talking about this. They think that Islamic schools are better than state schools. All the women would like to send their children to Islamic schools, they agree, and one woman whose children are in their teens, regrets that two of her sons were sent to state schools, because she can see such a difference. Children show more

discipline and respect when taught in Islamic schools, in contrast to those sent to state schools. Also, it is important for the women that children get taught about Islam. The fees are not that high for Islamic schools (approximately £1,100 a year) but transport seems to be a big problem. Nasira asks about mini-buses to Islamic schools, and one of the other women answers “Oh there are lots of buses going, dear”, indicating that sending their children to Islamic schools is a very common and sensible thing to do for Muslim parents in this area. However, the fees for such transport is high, approaching £22 a week. Nasira expresses her surprise at this, indicating that she finds this very expensive, and the other women agree. “But what can you do, you just have to manage”, they say, and they discuss their own situations, which includes reference to their husbands’ lowly paid work (many of them work in take-aways) and that they have to try to manage. I can tell from Nasira’s face that she would really like to send her children to Islamic schools too. The teacher then tells us that there is, however, a problem with sending girls to these schools, and she seems to be the only one very much concerned about this because the other women do not really follow her argument. She says that if girls get sent away to these schools, there is an issue when they get to 13 or 14 and start to mature, because parents do not like sending them away with a male driver. (Some drivers do not take them either for their own protection.) Here, the only thing the women agree on is that they think it is a good thing that drivers do not have teenage girls on their buses.

“We then talk about the objective of “tarbiyah” which is “to raise children with values and means that will help them to be righteous and happy”. For this the chair has copied a couple of pages from Beshir and Beshir (1998) which we read together. After this, we do a questionnaire about how good we feel our parents were in raising us when we were young, and then we discuss it together. In the end, the chair reads out a couple of cases where we have to judge whether or not the parent has done a good job. The women are animated with all the questions, but this is especially so with the last exercise; here they become very lively and question the cases a lot

and ask for more information (such as the age of the children in the cases). At some point they talk about slapping children to make them behave, and the fact that in schools they are not even allowed anymore to send children into the corner or to stand in an awkward position. Then one woman says that they would slap children at the mosque, that one day her son came home with a bad bruise on his back and that she stopped sending her children to that mosque. Another woman agrees that they are very strict at mosques, but on the other hand some children really behave very badly.” (Research diary, Burnley, 17.08.2005, archive GK)

Islamic schools are an important concern in current public debates in Britain and they were a concern in Burnley too. British society is concerned about losing control over what is taught to children; especially when it has religious content. It becomes obvious from the observations that Islamic schools are an issue amongst South Asian parents in Burnley, especially amongst parents of girls. During the time of the research, central “super schools” were built in Burnley to replace the ones in the local area. Informally, it was discussed within the communities that these “super schools” were part of the community cohesion strategy in order to get the communities to better mix. There was some ethnic segregation in schools in Burnley; schools in Stoneyholme and Daneshouse had an intake of mainly South Asian children which replicated the make-up of the neighbourhood. A particular issue for the South Asian community was that single-sex schools would become mixed-sex schools in becoming part of the super schools. Parents of girls were worried about this and started considering sending their girls to faith schools. Hence, the fact that the women are discussing the option of sending their children to Islamic schools replicates these concerns. The Lunch Club, thus, is a place where different concerns about secular and religious schools are being negotiated.

4.9. Micro/macro-politics of Muslim women

There are multiple forms of political practices depending on social life-worlds and varying notions of politics. More formal notions of political

practices that have become established under the term “political participation” are based on notions of citizenship and civil society, as discussed in Putnam (2000), and are linked to Habermas’ (1989) idea of the public sphere as a fundamental part of the nation-state. These theories have been critiqued widely for their Eurocentrism, particularly in the case of postcolonial Muslim societies (Eickelman and Salvatore 2004). Consequently, in attempting to describe a Muslim public, one has to pay attention to the fact that the notion of the public sphere is a European concept (originally connected to the bourgeois class on the continent) and could prove to be difficult to apply to the postcolonial Muslim context. The boundaries between the private and the public in western societies are blurred already; they are much more blurred, however, in the postcolonial Muslim context. In Islamic societies, the private and the public are organized and segmented differently than to western secular societies (Salvatore 2004). Religious practices belong to the public sphere in Islamic societies and not to the private as in secular societies.

This can be seen in the varying ideas of, and beliefs in, what it means to be political which emerge in the interviews of my research participants. Shabnam, for example, thinks of herself as a very political person because she takes an interest in foreign policy:

GK: “Do you think you’re a political person?”

Shabnam: *(Without hesitation)* “Yes!!”

GK: “Why?”

Shabnam: “I’m not much into local politics but I’m very much into sort of international politics, I am. America and England and the foreign policies and Israel and Palestine and...”

GK: “Iraq?”

Shabnam: “Definitely! Very, very... something I’m really, really passionate about. It really upsets me. It angers me at times as well that they can do things and get away with it and then on the same hand attack those countries for doing pretty much the same thing. I mean they’re attacking Korea – they

want to attack Korea and Iran because they've got nuclear weapons (...) It's about who has the same beliefs as you and who doesn't have...I don't mean religious beliefs; I just mean social beliefs and things like that. I think it's very, it's very... There's a lot of double standards out there in the international (politics)."

(Shabnam, Burnley, 09.12.2005, archive GK)

4.10.1. De-feminizing politics

The women's practices gain even more relevance when contextualized with the women's attitude towards formal politics. All of the women interviewed hold a very strong opinion about formal politics: it is not a sphere where they feel they should or want to engage in. The women give a range of reasons for this that I have summarized under three main notions: first, the idea that formal politics is de-feminizing, second, that formal politics is a power struggle whereas the women prefer compassion/grassroots politics, and third, the women take an apolitical stance regarding the habitus and distinction of engaging in formal politics.

It is the male image that makes the women dislike the idea of being political. Being political means to become visible outside the private space. The private, the family, however, is seen as the realm of the woman in Muslim society, whereas the public is the realm of the man. Consequently, political actions that make a woman visible in the public sphere are seen as socially unacceptable for a woman. The women's different ways of relating to formal politics do all seem to boil down to a kind of politics that has a male face so that women find it hard to identify with. When asked if she would like to play a more active role in politics, however, Shabnam answers that she does not see this as something appropriate for a Muslim woman. Nevertheless, she finds it important to have an impact on the civil behaviour of people in her social environment and, in this context she also

emphasizes her voluntary work in the gym and her part time job in the women's asylum:

Shabnam: "I would (like to play a more active role) but it would kind of go against some of my religious beliefs because they'd be lots of men to talk to and things like that but I would love to. I would love...If I could go into politics I would because I'm really passionate about it but it's just the men, and there's so many men out there and I think it would be really hard for a single Asian, one single Asian woman to come in and change everything even though I'd love to do that."

GK: "Maybe if you were two women? You have to find another one and..."

Shabnam: "I'd find...if I could I would! It's something...even if I can't get into politics, if I start with my nephews and nieces at home and educate them correctly and then they can go on to their friends and educate them correctly and they can go home and tell their families and focus on the positive rather than the negative and work towards a better, you know, a more realistic goal in everything."

(Shabnam, Burnley, 09.12.2005, archive GK)

GK: "Do you think you are a political person, do you think of yourself as a political person?"

Shaheen: "Not really, no."

GK: "What makes a person political then?"

Shaheen: "Uhm, I think (*pauses*) if you actually understand the system, and I don't think I understand the system, I don't (*laughs*) Sometimes I just think, dear God, you know, why is Tony and ehm, what's the other guy, the conservative, well he's chang-, well he's not there anymore. (...) Who is still running for the, the leader. Uh, I don't understand sometimes why they're standing in the House of Parliament and argue with each other because, it's just like, (*unclear*) for God's sake (*laughs*)."

(Shaheen, Burnley, 11.11.2005, archive GK)

Saleha's explanations confirm the male face of politics. She thinks that being political is characterized by being 'macho-male'. This does not suit the traditional image of women, even less so of an Asian woman.

When being asked if she would not want to stand for office, Nasira, as well, replies abruptly: 'No! No way!' - she could not see how any mother would have the time for that. She had expressed in another situation before that she did not feel comfortable in a largely male environment. Thus, she never goes to any of the PACT meetings in the area because she knows that there will be men and she would feel uncomfortable.

4.10.2. Compassion politics

Many Asian women from Burnley similarly felt that they were not political. However, they wanted to pass on their norms and values through their work with communities or children. This is the traditional role of women, to pass on family values. Even though this is of little visibility, it is grassroots politics and it does have a long lasting impact. Men's politics are often more visible but not necessarily as sustainable:

The women are also very active when it comes to council services. Nasira phones up the council if she is not happy with them, which apparently seems to happen very often as Nasira generally thinks that the council do not do a good job. On one occasion, she got a letter from the council saying that there was going to be an extra removal of bins for Christmas. She phoned the council and asked why they would not also do an extra one for *Eid* (Muslim celebration at the end of the month of Ramadan). The person she talked to at the council seemed pleased about the suggestion and said that they had never thought about that and that he will look into it and phone her back. He never did. She had to phone again a week later, and another person said that she did not know about an extra removal. In the end, Nasira was told that she could put out an extra black bag that would be collected as an exception.

Nasira, meanwhile, has a similar attitude to Shabnam. She is very active in the local community and likes to point out that she finds it important to participate. She never misses the Lunch Club sessions, and she also regularly attends meetings of the El-Zarah women's organization and the "ladies' meetings" of the Local Network²⁷. She also participated in a project where members of the community were trained up as interviewers to work for the Make-Nice²⁸ programme, the council housing scheme for the local area. They were meant to go and see people whose houses were due to be demolished and ask them about their views. In the end, Nasira could not make the training day due to family commitments so she did not take part in the actual interviewing. She also thought that the pay of only 15 per interview was not very much; she adds that the council and Make-Nice had more money to spend. It was pointed out to her that it was meant to serve a good cause as it was for the community (thus one might not mind bad pay) Nasira disagrees, saying that the community cannot decide about what is happening and the houses will be demolished anyway. Consequently, the job would have been not so much for the community as for the housing company, Make-Nice. They have got money, she knows, and they should have paid the interviewers more.

When asked about the council and whether she voted in elections, Nasira explains that she does vote and that her polling station is at the local school. She thinks that it is a very easy thing; she just goes down there early in the morning when it is still quiet. I ask her if she knows about postal voting and the controversy around fraud that is currently being dealt with in a pending court case.²⁹ She replies that she would not do postal

²⁷ Local Network is an organization that was set up by local government and community groups after the riots in order to facilitate tackling social problems and to serve as a "warning system" to prevent another riot.

²⁸ The name of the programme has been changed.

²⁹ At the time of the research, a Burnley councillor was in court for postal voting fraud.

voting, precisely because it is easier to manipulate. She does not understand why the councillor in the fraud case in question has committed fraud and she thinks that he did not know what he was doing. He is an old man, she says, and he will certainly feel humiliated by going into prison.

Saleha, in turn, also has a very effective approach in dealing with local services. In her case, it is the local police that she had to call because of a racial attack after she had just moved into a new area. She gives me an account of a very serious incident:

“Because, they were just pestering my kids. Like, somebody threw bleach at my daughter once and so I got angry and I told ‘em what for and then one evening about 20 youths came and an older man and they were throwing bottles through my back garden and then they were (unclear) the door and shouting (unclear). So I went out and I said “Come on then. I want you to take me on. Come on”. And they wouldn’t. They stood by my gate – they wouldn’t come on my property, just by my gate. So I rang the police. I said “You can hear it”. I said “Come up”. The police station at the bottom of my road, right at the bottom, I mean it’s on a hill where I am (unclear) and they said “Oh we can’t for two hours”. I said “You can’t?”. I said “What I’ll do is, I’ll ring Bradford and I’ll get half of Bradford up here in forty minutes”. And he said “You can’t do that”. I said “I can”. I said “Because I’m stuck in this house with four little children on my own while there’s about 20-odd people outside.” And then 10 minutes later there was a knock on the door – the police were here!” (Saleha, Burnley, 09.12.2005, archive GK)

It does not take much effort to understand why Saleha does not have a high opinion of the police. Nevertheless, she has found a strategy for dealing with local authorities even though it might seem slightly unconventional. In dealing with local authorities, but more so in dealing with racism in their local neighbourhoods, the women have to be unconventional which is interesting, because under Islam unconventionality is not seen as a positive. This shows the central role of women in social change and integration. They are the ones that are doing the everyday groundwork in the local

community. They have to rely on their communication skills and on having “the guts” to confront people - whether this is the reluctant person on the other end of the phone or the person in the street who abuses their foreign neighbours, not expecting them to talk back. As a further example of this, read about an incident that happened to Fahmida in her local neighbourhood:

“Well, on this particular occasion, there was a group of, a group of young children between maybe sort of (hisses, clicks her tongue) the ages of five and maybe fifteen, sixteen, and they were sat at the far end, and I could hear them shouting “Pakis” and making comments, and my husband and I had taken the boys to the park to play and I said to my husband, “right, I am going up to them because I’m not having this and it’s really unfair if I (unclear: let) my children down to play and they are innocent, they haven’t done anything and they have got to experience or be exposed to something like that I am not having this”. My husband said, “oh, no, because you are just creating trouble, and if they are finding out where we live they might start uhm vandalizing stuff, and, you know, damaging the car”. And I said, “no, I need to go and speak to them because otherwise I won’t know. They are gonna think, oh, she is only Asian, she is not bothered, she is not gonna do anything and just carry on”. And then, I happened to see somebody calling a girl from the group and I said, “excuse me, are you, are you, do you know any of these people?”, and she said, “oh yes, that’s my daughter”, and I explained what had gone on and I was really annoyed at this time and my tone had changed, I was, I was quite upset, and uhm, so she calls her daughter and said, “you should know better, I have told you about this!” and then the rest of her friends came up and I said to them, you know, I said “I have come down her for a bit of peace with my children and it is really unfair that they have got to be exposed to this, and it’s really cruel” and I said to one of the children who were laughing, “If you carry on I will call the police and you will get done for racism” and that, and that shut them up really. (...) The lady was then, she was apologetic but I thought inside (radiant voice), shall I challenge them, shall I not, because sometimes it can backfire, can’t it, if you challenge somebody because (unclear) if they find out where we live, or if we ever came again, they might bring some more friends and start attacking us or, but uhm I’m glad I did that because I felt better and at least they know now that it was wrong and I won’t take it and I won’t stand for it and it’s happened a few times, and it’s put me off from going to that park where I live, uhm, (clicks her tongue) but I think the youth they’ve got nothing

better to do and because they don't have a lot of contact with Asian people I suppose they don't know." (Fahmida, Burnley, 02.11.2005, archive GK)

What becomes clear is that the Asian women from the Lunch Club carry out a great deal of anti-racism work in their local area. They need much confidence and the communication skills to challenge their local neighbours. The men seem to be quite absent from participating in everyday social practices between the local communities. They might be integrated in their work places that, in the case of Burnley, often can be ethnically organized; many South Asian men work as taxi drivers for South Asian run companies or in South Asian run take-a-ways. In the evening they sit at home or meet their friends – often South Asian too. The women, however, are dealing with all local communities on an everyday level and they enforce norms and values, and align Muslim and British norms and values, on an everyday basis. Shabnam explains her strategy of trying to challenge racist behaviour. She is one of the women who wear *niqab* (the face scarf) in public and she is used to experiencing hostile reactions from other people:

"I'm fairly confident in my personal self, and people who want to put me into a category, I think they do that because they are not educated and I don't mean educated as in schooling, I mean, as in they don't have the correct knowledge, (*unclear*) people, maybe it's (*unclear*) ignorance sometimes, maybe they just not had any contact with somebo-, like, suppose sometimes when one had like always, uhm, problems with terrorists and stuff and some people have maybe jokingly said, "oh, you're a terrorist because you are a Muslim", and it hasn't upset me but it's made me think about things a little bit more, but I've not got upset about things at all because I'm complete in myself and in my self-definition for me, I am what I am, you don't know who I am, and as long as I'm ok with that, that's fine by me." (Shabnam, Burnley, 09.12.2005, archive GK)

These stories from Shabnam, Fahmida and Saleha show how much time and effort the women have to invest in re-imagining their local environment as "not racist" and how much effort they have to put into

dealing with racist incidents. Thus, the women from the Lunch Club need spaces where they can restore themselves and renegotiate their identities.

Shaheen continues to explain what she finds is also the problem with politics that it should be about making a difference to the community but that it is about a power struggle at the end of the day:

“I think sometimes uhm I think people set out into politics with really good intentions about really wanting to make a difference and wanting to air the local community’s views, but then they get tied up in this uh power struggle. Uhm, and than those views and those opinions are lost because they’re involved in this power struggle and they are being, their strings being pulled by somebody higher than them and they can’t really do anything about it, so that’s maybe I don’t really, I’m not, I’m not political at all.” (Shaheen, Burnley, 11.11.2005, archive GK)

Similarly to the other Asian women, Saleha does a lot of informal civic “ground work” in the community to help younger Asian women:

“Quite a lot of girls that are, like, single now and you, sort of looking for partners, and “How did you manage to find a partner after you and your first one?” and, you know “How did you get through the divorce?”; I just offer them advice on, like, practical things to do like, like one of my friends at the moment is actually going through a divorce (*unclear*) (*unclear*: she’s got her English divorce but not her Asian one), and you know, it’s like, how do you go about the divorce thing and how come out better for it and how do you move on from it?” (Saleha, Nelson/ Burnley, 09.12.2005, archive GK)

Women’s social activism is often connected to the emotional experience of being a woman and wanting to give something back to women who are going through similar experiences (Mann 2002). They would often engage in community development and organizations which help women such as women’s shelters, for example.

4.10.3. The apolitical as ultra-political

Saleha is another Asian woman who thinks that being political should not involve having strong views. This is her answer when being questioned whether she was a political person:

GK: "Do you think you're a political person?"

Saleha: "I try not to be!"

GK: (*Surprised*) "You try not to be? Why?"

Saleha: "Yeah, because I've strong views, strong opinions; I like a good challenge and I always make sure I win. And I can fight tooth and nail to win. It's like when I was at college, we used to have debates and discussions and I was the only one that used to point out the negatives. Everybody would sit there agreeing with the tutor and I'm: 'Whoah. Hold on. No, no, no, no; I don't agree with this.' 'Why don't you agree?' 'Because this, this, this, this.' I said 'That (*unclear speech*) for that kind of group of people; not for this group of people because this group of people have different needs.' I'd always, and Tom (*her friend*), he used to say to me 'Please, not today.'" (*Laughs*) "But if I didn't go he'd miss me. He'd say 'Oh I missed having my discussion with you this week because,' he says, 'I don't know what you're going to throw at me'. So, I'd rather not be political because I have strong views. Because if I get into a discussion I don't like to back down."

(Saleha, Burnley, 09.12.2005, archive GK)

The next quote is from Shaheen who is very reflective herself when she admits that she sits on the fence. It was Bertholt Brecht who said that opportunists are the ones who make the difference when it comes to voting. The paradox here being that the most 'apolitical people' are arguably the most political:

GK: "Working for the community is maybe political?"

Shaheen: "Maybe then I am, maybe then I am political. Because I do care about the young people, the young people that are in Burnley. Maybe I'm not so political in my own area, because I don't

know why I'm not really (pause) I don't know maybe it's coz I a lot like working in Burnley, I really want to make a difference in Burnley, but I have lost hope in Nelson (laughs) I don't know, it's a bit weird. And also because uhm I don't necessarily have the contacts in Nelson, but I do have the contacts in Burnley, so I work a lot in Burnley."

(Shaheen, Burnley, 11.11.2005, archive GK)

Shaheen is quite open at admitting that she does not think she is a very political person. Her definition of this, however, is different to Sarah's. When Sarah felt that being political means to have strong views, for Shaheen it means to be well informed about the political system.

"I try not to be! (...) Because, erm, I've strong views, strong opinions; I like a good challenge and I always make sure I win. And I can fight tooth and nail to win. It's like when I was at college, we used to have debates and discussions and I was the only one that used to point out the negatives. Everybody would sit there agreeing with the tutor and I'm "Whoah. Hold on. No, no, no, no; I don't agree with this." "Why don't you agree?" "Because this, this, this, this." I said "That (*unclear*) or that kind of group of people; not for this group of people because this group of people have different needs. I'd always, and Tom (was it Tom? Yeah), he used to say to me "Please, not today". [*Laughs*]. But if I didn't go he'd miss me. He'd say "Oh I missed having my discussion with you this week because," he says, "I don't know what you're going to throw at me". So, I'd rather not be political because I have strong views. Because if I get into a discussion I don't like to back down." (Saleha, Nelson/Burnley, 09.12.2005, archive GK)

GK: "So, what do you think politics is then?"

Saleha: "I think politics should be more honest and they're not honest. Neither are politicians. And with me, what you see is what you get. And if somebody doesn't like to hear it and I know it's the truth I'll say it (...) To them, but to me it's more like "Be honest". If something's wrong, say it's wrong. If something's right, say it's right. Don't cover up. It's like all this care in the community thing and stuff – and you have all these people assessing people's needs and stuff and they haven't got the qualified staff to do it. It's like these health care workers aren't even trained, you know what I mean, they're just, like, normal people that go assess somebody and they haven't even got the qualifications to do it. (...) Because, you

know, and, it's like, that's all they've been employed to do, that job, because of the job's equal opportunities (*unclear*). You have to have so many Asians, so many English, so many that are (*unclear*) and to me that's wrong. To me, the best qualified should go for the job. Not to keep up the numbers with equalities."

(Saleha, Nelson/Burnley, 09.12.2005, archive GK)

This shows that Saleha has very strong views on the British health care system and the recruitment of staff, which she does not hold back on. Clearly she has got political views on the state of society which she voices in concrete situations when she complains about the system. She would not do it inside a political arena though, a space which is clearly marked as a political space. In the next interview section, she explains why for a woman it is often hard to speak up:

"I've seen things. And I haven't like...I've actually approached, in Nelson, I've approached, anonymously, I've approached the social care people and the social workers and mental health team and I've put down ideas and I've said "I don't agree with this, this, this, blah, blah, blah. You're doing this wrong. I come from Bradford. I've seen how this works and how it can worked and why don't you try this approach. And, they get a bit stuck because they're like "She's not qualified to say all this but she knows more". And they get a bit stumped. But I've done it and I've said, even though it's been anonymously, I've done it, you know. Mostly it's with mental health and I see people with mental illness walking the streets of Nelson, yeah. Totally gone out their heads. And they're not getting the care they should get." (Saleha, Nelson/Burnley, 09.12.2005, archive GK)

When she complained in the past she was criticized for her lack of status as an expert. She made her case by saying that she knows the local community. If she had been a man it is likely that she would not have been told she was not an expert and thus not entitled to speak out. Saleha also engages regularly with the local council about the refuse collection policy which is another example of her political everyday engagement:

"I don't like mess, I don't like dirt. This last week, well since they started this recycling stuff, there's been so much mess, when they're picking up the recycling stuff, they're throwing half of it on the floor. They're leaving

cartons around, bottles, you know, around, tins down the street, (*unclear*) and it's so dirty. I'm always ringing 'em, "Look, pick this up." Then they'll send somebody around to pick it up and... But they, I mean, they'll probably get sick of me ringing, but at least they do it then, when I ring, complain, I say, "Well you're not doing it right." (...) I ring up Town Hall... I ring their number and they've got different departments so they put me in touch with the environment, I ring them and say, "Right, the dustbin men have been or the thingy men have been, the recycling men and they haven't picked half of the stuff," I said, "and what they have picked, half of it's litter on the road." And then they'll send, you know the road sweeper, or they'll send the truck back out either that day or the next day when they're free to pick up the rest of the mess. So, I mean, they do try but they don't try hard enough. (...) I mean I'm lucky, I've got a big paper bag from my old house when I used to (*unclear*), but people don't have that. They have to put it in carrier bags and people come round knocking 'em all and y'know, and, like, they have the blue bags to all the plastics in and they have they green bags to put your tins and your glass but I don't think the containers are big enough to house everything. Especially when families are bigger. So, I mean, we do a lot of recycling but when they're full, I have to put 'em in the bin, y'know, and the bins aren't big enough. And the collections aren't, they're too like, in between the time is two weeks. My rubbish got collected today, two bags got left behind for my rubbish, coz they wouldn't fit in my bin. Because there's five of us living in our house, that one grey bin's not big enough for us. The recycling is done the week after and even the recycling stuff is not big enough for us because we have a lot more... (...) instead of coming round the back to collect the recycling stuff, they come round the front. Now, the green bin has holes at the bottom, and on the laminate flooring, I mean, you have to carry it. Water drips all the way through, I can't... (...) Well all the people were actually putting it round the back and they were only collecting a few round the front so I rang 'em and said, "Look, all the Asian people are putting them round the back," I said, "Why... Maybe you need to send out letters again, to tell them 'round the round the front'." I said, "I put them round the front but there's only a handful of us that are doing that." But they still haven't. They're putting them out the back. Silly that, really, innit?" (Saleha, Nelson/Burnley, 09.12.2005, archive GK)

Quite in contrast to Asian women, young Asian men, like young men in general, do not like to admit that they are not political or strongly agree to being political and are aware that this contributes to their forms of capital.

"I'm not political at all. I sit on the fence for most of the time, sometime, well, sometime, she says, most of the time, sometimes I sit on the fence. Uhm. (pause) But I don't know makes me political (pause) I think it's maybe just having strong views about who they support in terms of Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrats." (Shaheen, Burnley, 11.11.2005, archive GK)

Fahmida, meanwhile, thinks that she is not a political person as she lacks knowledge on the institutional structure of the national political system in Britain:

Fahmida: "I don't know a lot about, I am not a political person (...) I am not really, I mean, I suppose, I thought at one time I might do an A-level in politics just to get my head round you know, how the government works and I have done some of it in law so I do know a bit about the House of Parliament and how the law (...) (and) how legislation is enacted. But I do have an interest, and I think it's just taking up time and, and a few times I have brought books from the library just to read but I have just found them really boring, I haven't done." (*chuckles*)

GK: "Books on politics?"

Fahmida: "Yeah, yeah, just to understand how it works." (*chuckles*)
"But I'd like to, I'd like to find out, I suppose if I went to a lecture or some-, or do something or a session I would go (*unclear speech*) just so that you know how the world works so when you watch the news you know how the system works and who is doing what and, you know, but I am interested in keeping up to date with the news and I make a point of trying to watch that everyday if I can. And I listen to the radio a lot as well at home."

GK: "Which, which radio station do you listen to?"

Fahmida: "It's Radio five live, yeah. Just to keep up to date with the news and with what's happening in the world."

GK: "Do you read newspapers as well?"

Fahmida: "I'd love to but I don't have time (*chuckles*) No, I don't have time at all. I try and watch the TV when I can. And even if I do watch TV I try and watch the news or documentaries, something that is educational, something I benefit from, I really don't like watching something like EastEnders."

(Fahmida, Burnley, 02.11.2005, archive GK)

Nonetheless, she would like to have more knowledge on politics and, thus, be more political. For her, it clearly is a sign of status when somebody has knowledge on how institutional politics work. Moreover, she finds it important to point out that she is not “thick” and that she has a fair knowledge of politics but that she would like to know more. For her job, however, she works with both the community and the council, and she is trying to improve the contact between the two which could be seen as a very political job. Yet, she does not see this in context of her “private” interest in politics.

4.11. Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis of the social practices, spaces and life-worlds of the group of British Pakistani women in Burnley provides a balanced account of the forms and levels of their political participation. Applying the notion of translation spaces, the problem of the blurring of boundaries between the private and the public can be studied. Within this space, the women act as “cultural translators” through negotiating new meanings for cultural concepts that are blurred between the two cultures, the Pakistani-Muslim and the British. Thus, translation spaces are spaces where disjuncting norms and values can be re-negotiated and boundaries re-established. Consequently, they have a crucial function in producing “reliable local subjects” (Appadurai 1996). These individuals are able to cope with the contradicting and disjointed norms and values that result from experiences made in multiple localities characterized with disparate formations of public and private spaces. Being a “reliable local subject” is the most essential condition for any form of participation.

Based on the above, it is clear now that the social practices of the Lunch Club are elaborate ways of applying political practices by British Pakistani

women in Burnley. Moreover, they have a complex comprehension of civic behaviour located within their social life-worlds that differs from established definitions in social theory (and in wider western society). The Lunch Club produces a translation space in which western notions of the public, as well as multiple Islamic concepts of public and private, are amalgamated into new ideas of participation and of contributing to the "common good". Consequently, translation spaces are the site of political practices. They can be studied as an interface between the private and the public, from which new notions of the civil sphere can be obtained.

Moreover, the women make strategic use of the teachings of Islam. They invite a teacher into their sessions and, through the teaching, they gain status and can make claims on how they want to live. Consequently, the British-Pakistani women from the Lunch Club have strategies through which they can create their own spaces and concepts of life and are not oppressed in their communities. For the production of the translation space, particular social practices are essential, ones that might appear as disparate activities taking place in a public space run by the British state - such as the activation and mixing of private and professional networks, the teaching of Islam as a central practice, and the gendered nature of the location. These practices are fundamental for the creation of the translation space. They are political practices because a space is produced where the women can negotiate their images of the civil sphere and their understanding of their impact as political subjects. In this space, the women can negotiate their very personal and often isolated experiences of being a South Asian Muslim woman in Burnley. This is possible because the women use their own system of reference signifying their personal experiences. Moreover, the women have a space where they can verify their norms and values. Salvatore (2001) and Nageeb (2005) have pointed out that the sociological understanding of Islam and Islamization has arisen under the impact of an

“ubiquitous hyper-discourse” on Islam, one which is rooted in the growing translocal, transcultural space between the West and the “Muslim world”. As a result, we have to acknowledge the complexity of the various manifestations of Islamization and its movements.

The women from the Lunch Club engage in political practices through the production of translation spaces. In these spaces, disintegrating and unsettled meanings, norms and values (resulting from the postcolonial context –the migrant experience- and hegemonic constellations of power – the state’s demand of the ideal type of citizens’ participation) become renegotiated and assured. The production, utilization and interconnection of formal and informal social networks enforces the socio-political impact of their practices because the women sustainably alter the meanings, norms and values inherent in the hegemonic context where the social meets the political. The women become political agents producing translation-networks which bridge different (formal and informal) social networks through their everyday practices. In doing so, these women have an impact on the normative framework in which formal politics occurs.

Chapter 5

RESISTANCE: THE POLITICS OF “CHAV GANGS”

This chapter is based on ethnographic work with “chav gangs” in Burnley and Harrogate and explores the local politics of resistance of these gangs against local authorities. The focus is on the dynamics of conflicts between the larger society and these groups to show that despite commonly held assumptions such “marginalized” groups are not alienated in the classical use of the word. Rather, by taking part in their local groups individuals in chav gangs relate directly and indirectly to other social groups and hence to the wider society. These groups demonstrate their norms and values in different, often conflicting, ways to the dominant social majority through everyday practices.

Simmel demonstrates in his sociology of conflict how individuals' group affiliations (and this could be anything from nations, parties or gangs) depend on “whether satisfaction of a need or a creation of a value is to be left to the competition of individual forces or to their rational organization, to their working against or for one another” (1955: 73). In other words, marginalization depends on the adopted point of view: individuals might not at all feel marginalized in their everyday lives as long as they interact within their groups and have their own means at hand to interact with the “rest” of society. However, marginalized social groups like the ones analysed here often feel let down by the state and the society in the sense that their scope for having a “good life” as citizens of Burnley and, to some extent, Harrogate is very limited. They experience “the death of the social” (Rose 1996) in the sense that the state provides only limited mechanisms of

support to them to improve their quality of life. In consequence, they withdraw themselves from the social as idealized in engagement in the public sphere. The cultural practices developed by these informally organized social groups cause conflict with the social majority - which usually lives far distant from the deprived parts of society - as soon as they claim space and resources. Simmel understands this process as a way of resolving divergent dualism resulting from dissociation (1977: 13).

Following Simmel, conflicts are therefore to be understood as forms of “sociation” (translated from German *Vergesellschaftung*) through which marginalized individuals become socially re-integrated into the wider society (*ibid.*). Being cut-off from formal forms of political participation due to the lack of state power in their local areas, individuals use informal forms of participation that enable them to connect with the wider society and make their claims heard. This way of participating in politics is denominated as resistance (Lawler 2004). It is expressed by a systematic disobedience of dominant rules in everyday practices (De Certeau 1988 [1984]), or what Scott describes as the “weapons of the weak” (1985). The data on the “chav gang” as a particular type of “youth gang” will exemplify how informal political organizations function in Burnley and Harrogate. These case studies will provide insights into a broader comprehension of how, when and what these informal politicians achieve (for) their aims.

5.1. The insider politics of “gangland”

This chapter also aims to deconstruct the negative political connotations of the terms “gang” and “chav”. The Chicago School established the study of gangs as a method of examining the informal social and political organization of “chaotic” neighbourhoods in urban deprived areas (Foote Whyte 1993 [1943], Thrasher 1936 [1927]). It still seems very appropriate to apply these methods today to the areas in Burnley and Harrogate where

“chav gangs” are considered as the cause for “social problems” and their cultural practices are perceived by the wider community as signs of social “disaffection” and political “alienation”. The cultural practices of all agencies involved in these areas have been investigated through the focus on urban conflicts, and the different logics of the involved actions established. This method of “multi-sited ethnography” (Lang 1998, Marcus 1998) allows for a closer examination of conflicts and the cultural logics at stake and helps to question the claim that “chav gangs” do not participate in the wider social community.

Local “chav gangs” consist of young, mostly male youth from “deprived” areas. When they talk about their towns, their members distinguish between the “inside” and the “outside” of neighbourhoods. The way they use this differentiation refers to Thrasher’s (1936 [1927]) notion of “gangland”; “gangland” stands for “inside” whereas the rest of the town is referred to as “outside”. Thrasher’s “Gangland” is made up of the geographically and socially “interstitial areas” of towns or cities (*ibid.*: 22). These are deprived areas of towns and cities and “poverty belts”, made up of regions characterized by deteriorating neighbourhoods, shifting populations and the mobility and disorganization of a “slum” (*ibid.*). These areas are abandoned by the better-offs (those who could afford to move away and make up the social majority), encroached by business and industry and in an “interstitial” zone of urban growth, as well as isolated from the “wider culture of the larger community” through competition and conflict (*ibid.*: 23). Thrasher concludes that “gangland” is made up of urban areas that escape the administrative control and protection of the city government resulting in the disorganized conditions of the life in these areas (*ibid.*). Away from the organizing influence of the mainstream community of the town, the origin of the gang stems from conflict over the organization of “gangland” which Thrasher also describes as the

“economic, social and cultural frontier which marks the interstice” (*ibid.*). Involved in this conflict over “gangland” are local authorities and local gangs, and the core of the conflict results from the authorities’ “opposition on the part of the conventional social order to the gang’s unsupervised activities” (*ibid.*: 26).

5.2. Waste policies of the “chav gang”

A good example for the logics of “chav gangs” is the issue of neighbourhood improvement and cleanliness of local streets. Although stereotypical representations might suggest otherwise, the “chav gang” is actually very concerned about the state of their local streets: “We like our streets clean”, says Andy in an interview. He and his friends feel that the council does not care about the state of their local streets, implying that the council is busier with wealthier areas of the town and not with their more deprived area. He cannot see that ringing the council up and pointing the problem out to them would be an option because, he believes, the people working in the council would certainly not listen to them. He and his friends are thinking of other means:

“We were gonna go downtown outside council and just throw rubbish all over outside. And leave it there in front to come and clean it all up. And keep doing it, keep doing it, keep doing it until they realize there is a problem somewhere!” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

Because the council does not listen to the people in his local area, Andy and his friends are thinking of taking “civil action”: collecting all the rubbish from their local streets and moving it somewhere visible to the council. They plan to place the rubbish right in front of a council building and, for a higher impact, do this repetitively.

This would not be the first time that they had undertaken this kind of action. On another occasion, he and his friends had noticed that their

families suddenly struggled to dispose of their domestic refuse. This had resulted from the council's introduction of local recycling schemes, under which it had distributed smaller bins to households. Their families had real difficulties coping with the smaller size of their wheelie bins, so the gang decided to take the following action:

"You know, like last time we carried wheelie bins up onto car park. We just left them all there, like 200 wheelie bins (...) from the area, from my mum's back garden (...). We just put them into the car park (...) and they brought new ones (...). When they brought the new ones we brought them ones back so everyone had two wheelie bins to an 'ouse. But everyone kept nicking them and set them on fire eventually coz there were too many of them (...). Because me mum and that - if you've got over a certain amount of people in your house you are supposed to have a big bin. But we didn't even have a wheelie bin at the time (...). Shani's family's supposed to have a big bin but they've only got a small bin. And really I think the bin's about that big -" (*indicates its height with his hands*) "for a big family! So we - what we did: instead of those using like writing and stuff - coz they don't listen - or ringing them up, we just nicked the wheelie bins from people's back gardens (...). But when we nicked everyone's wheelie bins they had no choice because there were that many people ringing up for them; they had to send them to everyone's house!" (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

Clearly, Andy is unaware of any wrong-doing in his account. From the council's point of view, their action might look like a criminal offence; for the gang, however, this is not only "a good laugh", but also an appropriate way to get what they want from the local authorities. They did this intentionally, in order to force the council to supply the homes of the area with more bins, so that families could dispose of their rubbish without problems. They knew from experience that the conventional way of ringing up the council to make it aware of local problems would not lead anywhere. They knew that, for them, following the standard procedure of a complaint had never brought any positive results. Consequently, the gang applied an unconventional strategy to satisfy the community's needs: by temporarily removing the bins, they could force the council to distribute

more bins. Ultimately, the “chav gang’s” action had a corrective impact on the local waste removal policies of the council, and must therefore be considered as an alternative form of political participation.

Andy and his friends are very concerned with the waste problem of their area and understand the wider implications of living in a place full of waste and dirt. This also becomes clear from the fact that Andy continues by himself talking about this issue in the interview:

“One - one of these days though they’re gonna realize - they’re gonna click onto, like, the areas just keep going messier and messier. It’s like this new recycle thing they’ve brought out that’s made it even worse to the areas.” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.05, archive GK: 21-22)

Questioned about why he thinks the new recycling policies and facilities have made the situation “even worse”, Andy explains:

“Coz there is that many people now who, like, whose wheelie bins aren’t big enough for all the recycle stuff and stuff. And they got the blue bins or the carrier bags. So what they do is they just bagging it all up and throw it onto the car park. All the rubbish, all garden stuff is going onto the car park. So eventually that car park is just going to be a rats’ place. There is that many black bags and stuff that all rats are gonna come out and just rip them up. (...) No, it’s - it’s getting worse and worse now. At first they put just a few bags up, ledges and stuff. But now there is a big corner full of black bags and ledges where there is - where kids and (*unclear*) go as well.” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

The council may have intended to educate people to produce less rubbish, but this rationale is not accepted by Andy, who is very concerned about the rubbish that is no longer removed effectively by the council. Fly tipping in “deprived” areas has an impact on the well-being of young people growing up in these areas. Anybody - anywhere in a town - should have the right to live in a clean environment, so the council should remove rubbish from all areas, rich and poor. However, Andy’s elaborations on this topic are very

revealing, since they contradict the common assumption that young people from “deprived” backgrounds are unconcerned about the cleanliness of streets, or even carelessly drop their litter wherever they go. Andy turns out to be a local expert in waste management, and he explains why people drop their litter in the streets: there are insufficient numbers of public bins in the streets of his local neighbourhood:

“If they can’t see a bin they just throw it on the floor. There is rubbish all over the floor eventually. But if there were bins...” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

In Andy’s opinion, people would be willing to use bins if sufficient numbers were provided, but drop their litter because there are too few bins provided in the public streets. He thinks that the fact that they live in a poorer area turns him and his friends into outcasts who are excluded from public services. When asked why he thinks that there were no bins, he elaborates on another course of action he once took to have an impact on the council’s policy of keeping the public space tidy:

“The yellow ones always used to get set on fire. (...) I’d set the red bins on fire (...). Coz they were just stupid bins. They were in the park (...), in the little park. But they were of the size (*unclear*) - I was about Det’s (*his brother*) age - 11 year old - when I did it. They were no bigger than an actual little house bin what you had in the corner. They were like that and they were just like plunked on a piece of plastic into the ground and you had to use them for rubbish. You’d fit about five crisp packets in them and they were full. So I’d set them - we set them on fire. And then about three week later they put the new metal ones in so no one could set them on fire again. (...) When we do something like that - (*unclear*) setting the bins on fire all the time - we gotta keep paying for new ones. They just changed it and put it into a metal one. But that’s - that’s the way (*unclear*) changing things. (*unclear*) way we do it!” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

It becomes clear that the actions of young working class men like Andy are not arbitrary, nor is the gang just “having a laugh”; this was not even the case when Andy was a couple of years younger. These actions were, in

fact, direct responses to the council decision to use unsuitable containers for rubbish. This flawed decision annoyed Andy in his everyday life because these bins were always full and incited people to pollute the environment. At a very young age, this direct communication channel to the council was developing when the bins were set on fire over and over again until they got replaced by metal ones (which were not necessarily bigger but they could not be set on fire anymore). Young people like Andy are very aware of the fact that it costs public money to replace public bins, but because nobody listened to his community's concerns, his gang dealt creatively with the council to get what the community wanted - by putting economic pressure on the council's budget.

That "chav gangs" use arson as a means of airing their anger about the pollution of their local neighbourhood also becomes clear when Andy is asked about the local fly-tipping previously mentioned by him. When asked whether he or his family have considered phoning up the council since it has to take actions when they are informed about fly-tipping, he interrupts the question with rage:

"No! No one's bothered yet - we're just gonna set it all on fire! (...) We did it last time on bonfire night as well. (...) Everyone's already been throwing their rubbish in there. I saw rubbish bags as well put into the middle and they were only small (*unclear*). But it just burns that rubbish away. From corners and that. Don't know how long it's been since bonfire night now but it's full again - whole corners in th' car park are full again! It's actually people throwing cookers and fridges and microwaves and stuff over the wall now - it's getting that hard to get rid of rubbish! People are just throwing it in empty places, empty back gardens and things like that. Like mine, our back gardens gets - coz (*unclear*) stay full of black bags. And my mum, she takes it all down to dump. She dumps it herself - that's based on her own petrol money - (*unclear*) just to get rid of rubbish so that she don't have to pay that 80 pound fine for the back garden. Coz they've put that fine thing on, haven't they. If your back garden's full of rubbish and stuff you get an 80 pound fine. But for half of the time it's not in the people-who-live-there's fault. It's the actual new way and bins and stuff - if you haven't got a bin. And they've changed it all. It's gonna be

like - it's not gonna be fair not to recycle if you haven't got a bin, so. But eventually (*unclear*) car park and set it all on fire - (*unclear*) petrol...“ (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

5.3. Youth clubs and snooker centers

However, the “chav gang” does not only engage in activities recognized as destructive by the public making the gang extremely visible in town because they leave their visible marks. Even though they resist attending the local youth centre – an end-terraced house that is used for the community during limited hours in the week - as they ignore any other forms of structured youth work; they would not, however, damage the facilities because Andy's mother works as a volunteer at the centre, so Andy sees it as belonging to his neighbourhood. Andy tries to explain why young people from his area nevertheless resist going there:

“I don't go to it, so. I don't really pay attention. I reckon it's a good idea for kids but they just - right know they just take the Mickey out of it because they've been granted something they'd never had before. So they just take the Mickey a little bit out of it. But eventually when they realize - just when they get a bit older - all the younger ones who are messing about now realize why it's there: to keep them off the street and keep them out of trouble. They'll all start calming down. They don't know why it's there, I don't think.” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

The local children from the area ‘take the Mickey’ out of the centre because they are aware of the underlying educational intention. He and his friends know perfectly well that they cannot afford to become ‘tamed’ youth in the area they live in because this would mean that they would never get what they really need. It is not profitable to become a ‘good citizen’ without power. Because his mother works at the centre, Andy is careful how he talks about the centre. However, it is quite likely that he might get bullied for the fact that his mother works there, so all he can do is not go there and not pay much attention to it:

“We use snooker centres instead. (*Unclear*) behind the new building where the car park used to be - there is a snooker centre behind there. We are going down there with it now being winter and it’s cold outside now.” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

The snooker centre is the second choice of space for the group to meet – ideally they prefer to meet outside in the streets where nobody can regulate their activities. They have adopted the snooker centre as their space, so they protect it - and their access to it - by maintaining good relations with the owner, simply by obeying some rules (such as behaving themselves when they are in there, at least as much as they can). In turn, the owner turns a blind eye to the fact that they bring in cans of beer:

“I know they never checked ours. I think he knows what we do, like. But they don’t say... It’s a sound person. It’s one of them. But he’s strict on us, like. But he knows we go back. And after we’ve used like four cans of our own we go back and buy another pint so he don’t get too suspicious. But we spend altogether about thirty pound.” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

“When we leave we are not that actually - we are not actually drunk - just enough drunk. Just one more, maybe two more and we’re drunk. So that’s why before we know we get legless we leave, like, finish off (*unclear*) and go - finish whatever is left in the bag on the outside. So when we are legless we are outside and we are not actually inside making a mess of his snooker hall.” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

This supports the argument that the “chav gang” does not commit random acts of vandalism - merely against the state, in the form of local authorities. Non-state agencies that are more lenient towards the practices of the group are related to in a rather protective way, since they provide the group with a less-structured place where they can interact without restraint and engage in activities that are enjoyable and important to them, such as playing snooker and drinking beer. Andy and his friends also understand that there is a business involved in their visits to the snooker centre. Because they feel respected as customers, they also show their respect to the owner.

Thus, they behave as mature and responsible economic actors. When I ask Andy if he thinks that the owner will let the group in again after an incident where one of them had made a mess in the bathroom, he responds:

“Yeah, he will... We are his best customers. I think we’re going (*unclear*) these three days, maybe four days. (*Unclear*) goes down a lot more than we, them two (*unclear*) every day because they get money coming in, a lot more than (*unclear*). But I do get on with him (*unclear*).” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

It becomes clear that Andy and his friends have a particular way of looking at the places and spaces they use. Struggling to become full members of the community through full employment with the accompanying wage, they affiliate with agencies that show them respect, and identify with localities in which they have some form of social standing: their local gang in their local neighbourhood. This process can be understood in terms of changing masculinities, as young working-class men had to develop new forms of identity following the decline of industries in northern English towns which used to be a main source for male working class identities (Winlow 2001):

“It’s just intimidation really, innit. People get scared from us. It’s only because people (*unclear*) just don’t bother us. It’s been a bad image on us. Now we are making a bad - trying to make a bad image by drinking and stuff. But that’s the only thing we can do now coz there is nothing else for us to do yet. We’re all an age when there is nothing there for us. It’s hard to get a job at the age of 16, 17. So there is nothing else to do but getting drunk and forget about everything else.” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

The “chav gang” suffers from spatial exclusion on an everyday basis, restricting their radius of action in the town. Andy mentions the new sports centre, which is due to be opened in the town centre in a couple of months, suggesting that his “gang” is looking forward to the opening because it would give them more choice of activities:

Andy: "The new one (*refers to the new sports centre*) - everyone is waiting for that to open coz everyone is dying to go in it. Some of them will start going to the gym there. All - me and my mates - want and start to go to the gym now. We probably start going swimming coz it is a lot closer now. You don't have to walk through town to get to it. So you don't have to pass people on the street and stuff."

GK: "Right, where did you go before?"

Andy: "The one near the police station, across from Tesco's. But to get to that one you have to walk through the bus station or through town. We don't really like going through town or through bus station. (...) Coz it's a lot of us, coz it's a big gang of us. And for walking down someone's - the older people - get scared because they think we gonna mug down by go beat 'em up and take some'ing of 'em. So (*unclear*) it's why they don't like us walking around in gangs and all that. Coz the older people are getting scared from us. They say we want to wear hoodies. That's one of them. But I don't want to wear them because (...) it scares people. But that's why we don't go swanning around towns (*unclear*) centres. We stay out of centre."

(Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

In his narration, Andy relates to public concerns about young people, which are reflected in media reports and policy regulations. For example, local councils can impose a range of restrictions (including anti-social behaviour orders and dispersal orders) on individuals, groups of young people and whole public areas such as town centres on the basis of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Vaughan 2000). Restricting young people who will grow up to become citizens of the community in their movement around town by bedevilling their cultural practices of moving around in "gangs" and wearing outfits that distinguish them from other youth cultures or adult society, has been a common practice by the public media in Britain for many decades (Cohen 2002 [1967]). In particular, this has impacted on working class young men, and can still be seen as part of the British class conflict.

5.4. Inside and outside

This conflict, however, has become of a different nature ever since young working class men have had to look for other forms of identification since the industrial decline and loss of working class jobs (Winlow 2001). This has resulted in the physical enforcement of restrictions concerning the movement of young working class men in town centres and in the enforcement of localness of young working class men that traditionally have been identified strongly with local neighbourhoods. These physical restrictions have enforced the experienced dichotomy of the “inside” and “outside” of places, which structures the way Andy experiences the town, and in turn fosters his and his friends’ notions and practices of resistance. Asked about politics and what he understands by this word, he immediately expresses reticence, and identifies politics with the state who excludes him and his friends from public services and places:

“To me it just means a lot of jib-jab. Just wanna go do stuff. They are trying to change things too quick. And they are saying, like, this person wants to do this, that person wants to do that. But really, neither way they are just losing. Like Labour wins (*unclear*) they were saying they’re gonna put lights in bus stops and change the bus station, you know, that bus stops that we have. They wanted to change them and do stuff with them. Like make them look better and stuff. (...) But it’s not really a point in doing that because they will get trashed. At the end of it it’s just gonna get, like, they’ll clean it up. But eventually they’ll just gonna have to give it in coz it’s just gonna get trashed up. Coz there’s people that don’t care about the right things like that. Where the other, Labour, they wanted it for a reason. They wanted to use the money. An’ for good and not for like things on the outside. They wanted to use it for the stuff on the inside of places like areas and younger people to get them something and somewhere in life.” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

Andy seems to confuse political agencies. Coming from a traditional working class family he sympathizes with the Labour party which his parents presumably sympathize with and who also held the majority of seats of Burnley council at the time this research was conducted. However,

he still sees the council as the “state” which ignores the needs of his neighbourhood even though Labour holds the majority. To get a clearer idea of how Andy distinguishes between the inside and outside of places he is asked what he understands by the outside of places:

“The outside is the actual towns! They wanted to clean the towns up instead of the actual place. They wanted to, like, the main streets where the buses go to look nice. But then what’s behind there they don’t get to see. So if you gonna clean one thing you might as well clean the full thing. Like Labour wanted to do. But other places, like Green Street - that Green one it were. Can’t remember what it were called, Green Teams or something. They wanted to do the main streets. That it looked nice. But they were forgetting about the things behind the main streets. Like, where the buses don’t go but other people will (*unclear*) If someone comes to visit from a different country and they are just passing through and just stop and just walk round; then they see behind the clean streets the messy streets. That makes them think: well, I’m not coming here again. Because on the in... - on them one lane it’s clean - on the outside of the lane it’s not. So they are making you see something you don’t wanna see. Really, you are seeing like an image instead of the actual - the real thing.” (Andy, 13.12.2005, Burnley, archive GK: 24)

For Andy the town is divided into two different categories of place, the “outside” and the “inside”. The inside of places are the local areas such as the one he lives in: his local neighbourhood, off the main streets that are passageways to other places or into the town centre. That he calls this the “inside” also means that they are the places he gets to see and to use as the local “insider” whereas the “outside” of places, which are the town centre and the main roads that go into Burnley, are not part of his everyday social life-worlds; in these parts he is an outsider and does not feel any ownership. Consequently, there is a pattern becoming visible to the actions of the “chav gang”: perceived as “vandalism” by the public, they are committed either within the “outside” of places or to objects in the “inside” that are considered as unacceptable for the local area, for example ugly or useless “street furniture”. These unsupervised activities have to be understood as informal forms of political participation through which the

gang regains control over the physical and social organization of their local area and other areas inside and outside of “gangland”, and consequently connect to the socio-political organization of the town. Thus, the urban practices of “chav gangs” could be understood as the “urban vernacular” (O’Cadhla 2001) of the formal political practices of the social majority which lives outside of “gangland”. To the outsider, it might seem as if “chav gangs” commit damage to public streets, pavements or parks in arbitrary actions. Yet, these actions are strategic practices to reclaim their neighbourhoods or other localities in other parts of the towns. These practices are reactions to processes of exclusion of working class youths from the use of local areas and facilities, or of displacement of working class youths from local areas (for example through dispersal orders).

Further ethnographic data collected in both towns, Burnley and Harrogate, support the argument that “chav gangs” are not as alienated from society as the media public wants to make us believe. In fact, they use informal forms of political participation resulting in practices that show clear engagement with the norms and values of English society. The following data provide more examples for the spatial practices and the connected “insider/outsider” dichotomies used by “chav gangs”.

Another example for young people resisting physical restrictions in public spaces of Burnley is the locality around the ‘Tim Bobbin’ pub and the ‘Garmin and Gobbler’ off-license shop next to it. The pub is located on a very busy main road leading out of the town centre and into a working class area. The space there is mainly used for local youths who are too young to get into pubs. Here, they meet and drink together. Older members of the group buy the alcohol for them or they get it from some off-licenses that do not keep to the age-restrictions for selling alcohol. Earlier in the year before the fieldwork started in Burnley, a dispersal order had been

imposed on the locality around the pub because local residents and the landlord felt that they could not deal with the youths anymore who were “causing havoc” because they kept running inside the pub. This order allowed the police to break up groups of youths and to send them away. A local community beat officer, however, reports that the police were now confronted with the problem of where to send the youths to when they break them up. He suggests that there is a need for local youth centres or astroturfs³⁰ to which they could send the youths. Another problem for the police was that they could not follow the young people up because they would immediately get called to the “next situation”. A few months ago the dispersal order finished and now it would be a matter of time that the word spread that the youths can come back.

Areas like the space in front and behind the ‘Tim Bobbin’ at the busy street, as well as the remote space of the canal which is much used by Andy’s gang, do not have to be part of “gangland” to be used by gangs. They can be running through residential areas but still tend to become an “extension of gangland” or “a ‘finger’ of the slum” (Thrasher 1936 [1927]: 23). The “intramural frontier” (*ibid.*) are borderlands and boundaries between residential and manufacturing areas, between migrant communities, between the city and the country/the suburb and between contiguous towns.

Public policy and the media public work hand-in-hand in stigmatizing the Bobbin Lot’s behaviour, as they call themselves and are called by youth gangs from other areas. The Bobbin Lot, however, is reacting to the physical restriction that the state imposes on them and expressing their resistance to constraining orders enforced by the state. If the Bobbin Lot

³⁰ According to the policeman, astro turfs are generally seen as popular solutions to the problem of children being a nuisance in streets – because they can simply be sent there.

operate along similar lines of cultural logics as Andy's gang, this means that the locality around the 'Tim Bobbin' pub belongs to their "inside" of the area and is an important space for them to meet. By imposing constraining orders the state is committing offences to the "chav gang" – similar to the useless bins put up in the "inside" of places. Yet, they are of much more gravity as they push the "chav gang" out of their local area to other areas that are in the "outside" for them. Consequently, acts of "anti-social" behaviour have to be understood as cultural practices of "chav gangs" clearly relating to the policies of the state. They are expressions of the "chav gangs" resistance to the state and, thus, established as informal forms of political participation.

The imaginary 'football pitch' in front of the 'Tim Bobbin' pub is another zone of resistance through which young men express their resistance to being pushed out of the inside of their local areas. To get a better idea of what is going on in the area of the 'Tim Bobbin', it was decided to do a night of detached work. After having talked to two youths at the back of the pub, which seems to be a popular space for the Bobbin Lot to meet - we are told that there are usually a lot of empty bottles of alcoholic drinks to be found the next morning, as observed by the two. We walk around the pub to the front of it and are confronted with three young men aged around 16 in dark jeans and track suits who have decided to turn the wider part of the street with the additional lanes turning into the junction and two bus bays facing each other into a football pitch. The bus shelters are used as goals and the wide street is the pitch. As it is late afternoon /early evening, the street is very busy with traffic which does not seem to bother the three lads. They kick the ball very skilfully from one side to the other around the cars trying not to get hit by them so that it looks as if they are tackling players of the opposite team. It looks very dangerous how they kick the ball around and run around using the gaps between the cars. Their audience

are a couple of girls that sit in the bus stop opposite the 'Tim Bobbin'. Moreover, the drivers and passer-bys are more audience. The traffic is busy and dangerous because the drivers pay attention to the lanes that they have to change into for going into the junction and are surprised to find themselves on a football pitch. The boys make a lot of hard shots targeting the bus shelter "goals" and Rich, the youth worker expresses his concerns about the "football players'" safety and that damage could be caused as well as his liability as a youth worker. Some effort is made to talk to the youths but they do not pay any notice to anything else but the "match". Their faces look heated and they glow with adrenaline from the excitement of the exercise and the additional danger of their play. Seconds later, the youth worker suggests to retreat to the inside of the pub with the chance to continue to observe the "match" through the window. From his perspective as a youth worker, Rich says that you cannot work with these youths in this situation because they are in a group and because there are girls around whom they would want to impress. Minutes later the group is gone, and Rich assumes that they have been moved by the police. Twenty minutes later they are back on the scene resuming their match, but another five minutes later we see them approached by the police and moved again. This would be a typical scene, Rich says. They are always back five minutes later.

It could have been possible that the "football players" were members of the Bobbin Lot, i.e. young men with the watching girls from the local area. Just as likely, however, it could have been that they were youths from other areas who have been pushed out of their "gangland" and engage in "gang practices" in the "intramural frontier", the extension of their "gangland" – which are particularly visible as "anti-social" practices to the wider community of Burnley because this space is in a residential area, usually the "outside" of "gangland". Or, if they are members of the "Bobbin Lot",

their football practice expresses their disagreement against the use of space by traffic that connects the town centre to other places outside of the town – the outside of the town. They are still too young to own cars but rely on their short radius of action in their local area. Moreover, they probably still live with their parents, so the public space of their local neighbourhood is the only space where they can meet their friends unsupervised by their parents.

Notions of resistance against being pushed out from the “inside” of places, the local streets of young people’s neighbourhoods can also be found in Harrogate, although in less intensity, since it is a more affluent place with less “deprived” areas. In most areas of Harrogate “chav gangs” mainly leave marks of their practices and are less likely to perform them visibly in central places of the town. Like the bins being set on fire in Burnley, “chav gangs” in Harrogate inscribe their cultural signs in the public urban space to affirm their right of using this space which, in the following case, is on the “outside” of their local areas – the town centre’s posh Valley Gardens. At night time and hidden away from the eye of the public who do not frequent the park after sunset, “chav gangs” leave broken glass bottles in the paddling pool which is found in the park’s playground. These territorial marks became a political issue when they were discussed in a “multi-agency problem solving meeting” on the 18th of July 2006 at local government offices in Harrogate.

The meeting was attended by the youth work coordinator of Harrogate district, the anti-social behaviour coordinator, a housing representative, a public protection officer, the head of parks and open spaces and a police officer. The group agrees that the broken glass is a nuisance to local parents taking their children to the pool, and to tourists because it would not look nice. Photographs had been taken of the “crime scene” by the Head of Parks and Open Spaces which were being shown round the table. The youth workers informed the group that “moshers” (middle-class youths who listen to guitar/rock music) and “chavs” (working-class youths

listening to electronic/dance music) had had fights in the same park and that the problem resulted from “youths being displaced from the town centre”. The park ranger admitted that he had no power in exerting physical enforcement, and, thus, asked the police officer present to step in, who agreed to look at the files of arrested persons within the area in question. The group identified alcohol as a key factor contributing to the excess practices in the park and everyone at the table seemed to be aware of a local off-license breaching age-restrictions (in England one has to be aged 18 to buy alcohol and to consume it publicly). Then, the council’s head of parks and open spaces mentions the possibility of changing the opening times of the park, perhaps using current consultations to open up a dialogue about provisions for teenagers. Yet he expressed his doubts that it would be possible to go against the resistance of “influential” local residents. Another “crime scene” in the park is mentioned - the band stand where young people used to leave biking marks on the whitewashed walls. Similarly, suggestions to improve the situation and to provide space for young people have been resisted by local residents. (Research notes GK, Harrogate, 18.07.2006)

Even though “mosher gangs” are mentioned as fighting with “chav gangs” in this particular park, they are not the group of youth that get pushed out of the town, but the “chav gangs”. They are pushed out of the “inside” of their local areas and feel stigmatized outside of them, and therefore commit acts of “vandalism” in the “outside” of their area. The town’s park is such an “outside” area. “mosher gangs”, however, are middle class youth gangs that congregate visibly and with confidence in the town centre where they are usually tolerated and not moved. In consequence, the “disaffected” behaviour of “chav gangs” in Burnley and Harrogate has to be understood as practices of resistance against state practices that alienate them from society. Their actions are a way of reconnecting with formal politics by other means.

The examples of Burnley and Harrogate “chav gangs” clearly showed that these groups of young people engage in political practices of resistance that are often misunderstood as “alienated” behaviour by the wider community. Applying Goffman’s (1975 [1967]) notion of stigma management it has to

be argued that the cultural practices of “chav gangs” are, by no means, expressions of social alienation. In fact, they are political practices through which “chav gangs” engage with the norms and values of the social majority, regardless of their lack of legitimacy. Following Goffman’s and the Birmingham School’s lines of argument, counter-cultural practices always have to be understood as being in dialogue with the culture of the social majority. They are not arbitrary acts but closely connected to the social and political organization of the community. Another example for this is the group’s practice of handling the police – this is what Andy answers when asked about the state practice of ‘stop-and-search’ through the police and whether the police have ever found anything on him or his friends: “Naw! (*he chuckles*) We’re all too brainy for them. Everything that’s illegal goes into the bush.” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK) Thus, the practice of hiding “everything illegal” relates to the norms of the social majority to prohibit illegal substances and knives. Hiding them, thus, has to be understood not as an expression of alienation but of a comprehensive understanding of and engagement with the norms and values of the social majority.

These young people’s social life-worlds are structured around the “inside” and “outside” of places. Their local use of space depends on the accessibility of space and facilities in their neighbourhood. Consequently, the physical, social and political organization of their local areas matters to them, but the political arenas - in which the organization of the local is negotiated and determined - are not accessible for them. This exclusion from the majority spaces of the towns forces the youths to develop their own politics to be able to have an impact. Their strategies of action are forms of resistance, and have to be understood as informal forms of political participation. Since these forms cannot be found within the defined brackets of stately politics, the state dismisses them as void and

labels them as “anti-social” or “disaffected” behaviour. The state always has normative power over what counts as formal forms of participation because these are defined by it; thus, the state is exerting power and control over citizens participating in formal forms of political participation. Citizens participating in informal forms of political participation, however, are outside of the sphere of state power and therefore potentially committing criminal offences. As a result, citizens’ informal forms of political participation are acts of resistance to state control and power.

Thus, the “chav gang’s” practices of resistance are structured around the imagined opposition of the “inside” and “outside” of places and they are the means for gaining control over disorganized or excluding local urban space. They have their own politics based on their “Weltanschauung” (view of life) as structured around the opposition of the inside and the outside world; “chav gangs” care for the inside of their territory, meaning their local neighbourhood. In consequence, the “chav gang” resists decisions about the use of space and resources imposed on “the inside of places” by political elites as the field data (the dumped rubbish in front of town hall, the ‘nicking’ of wheelie bins and the arson of bins) exemplifies. Furthermore, “chav gangs” are strictly against the “new ways of doing things”, because this is considered as interference on the “inside of places” from the rejected “outside”. The new council policies belong definitely to this last category.

5.5. “Chav” politics: stigma and sociation

The way the term “chav gang” is used in this chapter refers to a group of young people from economically deprived communities from both towns. These men usually have a lower class or working class origin and engage in the cultural practices of “chav” culture (Nayak 2003). Not all groups studied in this section might have used the term “chav” themselves to

address their group. However, they are much aware of the social stigma attached to their practices and that their group members are persecuted by the state through the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 that tightened the juvenile penal code (Vaughan 2000, Morgan 2007). To empower themselves, these groups capitalize on their stigma and reclaim the stereotype, turning it into something that gives them “respect” on the street and strengthens their group identity against other hostile “gangs” or disrespect from the wider community. The stereotype of the “chav” is commonly associated with white male youth from “deprived” areas; nevertheless, I have come across “chav gangs” with mixed ethnic members in which local and class identities replaced ethnicity as a primary source of identification.

This chapter shows, using the analytical category of resistance, that the state misreads informal forms of political participation amongst marginalized groups as “social disaffection and political alienation”. By labelling these activities in this way, the state excludes informal forms of political participation from the range of practices that are understood as legitimate for its citizenry. Instead, such forms could be read as individualized or anti-social behaviour, or other behaviour that is not recognized as relating in a positive way to the state or the community. The ethnographic data shows that people’s behaviour is political despite the mainstream perception that it is not. The resistance category permits us to examine how informal practices relate to the practices of the state and the wider society. Even if the conflict created by these marginal groups is negative, it still is a way of being connected to the social majority. As a consequence, it is argued that there needs to be a more critical examination of state practices of labelling “apolitical” behaviour as social and political “alienation”. By taking the point of view of the “marginalized”, it becomes possible to recognize “apolitical” behaviour as reactions to discourses and

practices of the state and/or the wider community. Thus, individuals adopt practices of resistance through which they connect to formal political structures and forms of participation which would not otherwise be accessible to them. For this they use varying, often strategic, practices of informal participation (often mixed with formal social or political participation and often they alternate between formal and informal forms) resulting in the successful “navigation” through and “management” of bureaucratic structures, authorities and policies that would otherwise not be accessible, and would instead result in disempowering socio-economic structures and excluding spatial arrangements enforcing their social marginalization.

We have seen here how “chav gangs” channel their frustration about failing urban policy and enforced criminal laws for youth offenders to the wider society through informal forms of political participation relating to their “urban vernacular”: their own “language” of political participation, which is part of their cultural practices as “chav gangs”. Drawing on notions of conflict as forms of sociation (Simmel 1977) and resistance as forms of participation of “marginalized” groups, it has been argued that the examples of “chav gangs”, and in many similar ways the same is the case for the “Asian gang” described and discussed in chapter 3, show cultural practices through which they connect to the discourses and practices of the state and the social majority. Because they use informal forms of resistance, their actions are labelled as social and political “alienation”, “anti-social” behaviour and “disaffection” (or even “radicalization” in regard to the “Asian gang”) by the state. The chapter has argued that their actions are clearly related to wider society, since these forms of resistance are cultural practices through which they distinguish themselves from wider society, but they also use the cultural system of wider society as a relational system for their practices, for example by reclaiming prerogative

public notions of young white working-class men labelled as “chavs” as part of their practices. This is similarly the case for young Asian men, discussed more in detail in chapter 3, who are being labelled as “Asian folk devils” (Alexander 2000; 2004).

Chapter 6

THE ANTI-POLITICS OF ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN HARROGATE AND BURNLEY

In contemporary society, certain forms of political participation are given more legitimacy by the state than others – hence my notion of formal and informal forms of political participation. Informal forms are de-legitimized in multiple ways as discussed in my previous chapters on the “Asian gang”, the “chav gang” and the Pakistani women’s Lunch Club. This chapter is on the legitimized forms of political participation of young people/young adults; these are forms that are given preference to by the state. These forms are enforced through educational institutions (schools and youth services) that propagate notions of “youth participation” through “active citizenship”; in 2002 citizenship education was introduced as a statutory subject in England (Lopes *et al.* 2009), and youth participation was integrated into statutory youth work agendas through the 2005 *Youth Matters* Green Paper and the 2006 *Respect Action Plan* (Clark 2008). However, recently, these propagated forms have been discussed as having at their core rather a socio-economic nature (Clark 2008) and ultimately, of an anti-political nature as the data presented in this chapter will show. They are not about encouraging young people to contest and question the delegation of power and allocation of resources but to participate in the bureaucratic procedures legitimizing and supporting the government and the socio-economic structure of society. Lukose (2005: 513) has made a point in debating “consumer citizenship” in connection to young people and education. She made the point that neo-liberalization has produced citizens that comprehend participation, also within the context of

education, mainly in terms of economic participation, such as for example consumption. Active citizens are citizens turned into consumers – political participation is understood to be about individualized and passive activities offered by the government. Promoting active citizenship, thus, is the attempt of the government to turn marginal individuals into passive consumers of citizenship and the state. Economic participation amongst young people, thus, is seen as closely related to political participation.

The ruling class has the power of defining the legitimate “correct” forms of political participation as many authors have shown. Bourdieu (1998) discussed such a process in “Distinction” where he offers an account of why certain people feel entitled to speak and others do not. Putnam (2000) has applied Bourdieu’s concept of “social capital” for political participation and outlines how the state can use social capital to engage people in the accepted forms of politics. McRobbie (2009) shows how the state depoliticises groups of people by subversively undermining the groups’ norms and values through discursive practices in the media. She takes the example of feminism which has been turned into something rather unattractive by New Labour from which many young women distance themselves today. Finally, Ferguson (2006) has described how the state uses bureaucracy as an “anti-politics machine”. Through the introduction and spreading of the bureaucratic apparatus, the gaining and use of power is impeded by bureaucratic procedures that curb political attempts. As a result, Weber’s definition and function of bureaucracy as being politically neutral, is turned upside down and it becomes a political instrument for the state. By framing my data with these theories, I aim to show how the state has the power of definition over legitimate forms of political participation and through this forces marginal groups into acceptable everyday practices of citizens under the “stretched” label of political participation: being educated or economically active, obeying the

law and the moral code of the community, paying taxes, and supporting the system of government.

The notion of the “stretched” label of political participation implies that the state has extended the traditional forms of political participation; statutory discourses on political participation implicitly also include social and economic participation. This has happened by the conscious interchanging use of the notion of “political participation” and “active citizenship”, thus including “acceptable” social and economic behaviour as part of political participation. This results, of course, from the fact that participation can be defined in many different ways. Political apathy amongst young people, however, is discursively connected to an underlying “moral irresponsibility” in contemporary public discourses framed by New Labour (Ashcroft 2008: 55, Fahmy 2003: 2). And *vice versa*, political participation is discursively connected to morally responsibly behaving citizens. Ashcroft (2008) also establishes the discursive connection between citizen education and active participation which are jointly promoted to “instil morality and prevent societal decay among the young” (p. 7). At the same time, Ashcroft also notes that at its very core, political participation can be of a problematic nature as it is “potentially subversive” and she identifies a conflict between statutory education and youth provision’s policy of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination practices and the need to encourage participation and political consciousness (*ibid*, p. 12). Ashcroft talks about the need to “diminish the risky aspects” felt by “those in authority” who “naturally want to control it” (*ibid.*); and with this she refers to the extensive youth support for the British National Party. From her own practice as a youth worker she knows that a common approach in dealing with this is by “either ignoring or obstructing what lies at the margins” (*ibid.*). Subcultural youth practices are another example of young people

trying to find a political platform in order to be heard, but who are met with silent opposition by the community.

The data from this research shows that economic participation is closely connected to political participation – in theory and in practice. This has started to show during data collection: volunteering was always seen by the research participants, as well as the gate keepers or expert interviewees, as a form of social, political participation; young people participate in structures and institutions determined by the state. This was also reflected in policy documents on volunteering (DfES 2006). At the same time, I often heard from the young people volunteering as well as the youth workers running volunteering schemes for young people that their participation is “good for their CVs” – meaning that they will be in a better position from an economic point of view to get a job once they have been volunteers for the community. In this chapter I present data on Sarah, a young woman from Harrogate who does not show high levels of political participation but at the same time thinks she is participating in the structures of the state as she is economically active even though she left education as a teenager. Her example shows that economic participation is valued more than political participation amongst “Future Girls” (Harris 2004). This is a result from the strategy of New Labour to secure the support of young people. Real political behaviour has been given a very unfeminine image (McRobbie 2009); so that Sarah feels by driving a pink four-by-four carrying the logo of the *Barbie* doll she not only emphasizes her gender identity but also economically participates by working in lower skilled jobs to afford her fashionable car. Her example is supported with data on the “corner and the college boys”³¹: members of a chav gang and of a Youth Council. To feel entitled to speak is reserved for the “college boy” who has had the training in bureaucratic procedure and language, and

³¹ The notion of the corner and the college boys is taken from Foote Whyte (1943).

in consequence, has the right forms of capital to feel entitled to participate in formal politics. However, the real local issues that young disadvantaged working class men voice in their informal way of participating (as also discussed in the chapter on resistance), as the formal ways are obstructed to them as they do not feel the propensity to speak due to their lack of the right forms of capital, are simply labelled as unacceptable or anti-social behaviour that is being criminalized. Two final sets of ethnographic data will be used to illustrate the point: drawn from observations of the *Henge Warriors* and the *goths*. Their examples show that lifestyle politics, even though highly adapted to the bureaucratic procedures of the state, are not acceptable as they are too politicised and challenging the state.

Bourdieu (1998), Putnam (2000), McRobbie (2009) and Fergusson (2006) have all been thinking about how we can discuss political participation in connection to governance. How do the state and its citizenry communicate with each other? How can the citizen make claims and how can the state take these into consideration? What kind of claims can the state accept? Does the state expect all forms of political participation of its citizen or only certain forms and what does the state do if the citizen shows the wrong forms of political participation? I argue in this thesis that the state labels its citizens as politically alienated if they show the wrong forms of political participation; these forms are illegitimate forms of political participation. The informal political economy as discussed in my examples from my field research receives very little credit from the government. Maybe in the long run, the government will appreciate these informal practices more as states have done in the Latin American context where whole government and NGO programmes are based on the informal economic practices in order to systematically improve the whole economy of the country (Vincent 1998).

6.1. *Social capital*

In "Practical Reason", Bourdieu (1998) uses the terminology of "capital" in order to explain society. He understands class merely as a concept which does not exist in the real world. In their everyday life, people do not think about how they should behave according to their class. Instead, he argues that in the real world people's social positions are relational and constructed through their social and cultural practices. Bourdieu understands society as social spaces, which he also understands as structure of differences (1998: 49). Through *capital* together with *habitus*, people position themselves in the "social field". *Capital*, thus, represents the range of commodities and practices that people use to mark their social position and difference to other social groups within the *social field*. The main forms of *capital* used by Bourdieu are "economic capital" and "cultural capital"; other forms are "social" and "symbolic capital". *Economic capital* refers to commodities and income that a person has; *cultural capital* to education. *Symbolic capital* is used to disguise power relationships and turn them into affectionate relationships. It can also emerge from prestige obtained through other forms of capital or the obtaining of education from prestigious institutions. Giftedness and talent in the fine arts that cannot be acquired through education are another source for *symbolic capital*. Resulting from symbolic capital individuals are enabled to be catapulted into higher social positions within the social field even when they are lacking the forms of *capital* usually required. States often use *symbolic capital* to increase their symbolic power over citizens (Bourdieu 1998: 108-122). Symbolic capital can also derive from social capital, the latter primarily resulting from family relationships, however, friendship and professional networks can be counted as *social capital*, too.

Bourdieu develops his definition of *social capital* through a sociological approach. He studied social mobility and social stratification in French

society and argued that these depend on the forms of *capital* possessed by individuals. His notion of *social capital* has been applied for the study of political participation by Putnam (2000). Putnam argues that levels of political and civic participation depend on the amount of *social capital* accessible to a member of the society. The bigger people's social networks are, the more they engage in activities that are connected to civic or political participation in the wider sense; for example activities in associations and clubs and trade union organization are included by Putnam.

In the everyday life of the local, Bourdieu's and Putnam's approaches only work to certain extents since Bourdieu's work is mainly based on French values and perceptions, which are not the same as those in the UK, and Putnam mainly works with quantitative data. Putnam, however, acknowledges "the dark side of social capital" meaning the mechanisms that exclude certain groups from acquiring and utilizing legitimized social capital. These persons are excluded from full participation in society even though they might have the desire to participate by using what would be considered legitimized social capital in their own cultural context. Putnam was not able, however, to present sufficient empirical evidence for this affirmation through his quantitative data. Therefore, my study focuses exactly on these mechanisms that exclude marginal groups from acquiring and utilizing legitimized social capital, consequently resulting in their exclusion from political participation in British society. Bourdieu (2000 [1984]) uses the terms "habitus" and "distinction" to explain these mechanisms that include and exclude people from participation in certain social groups. The notion of *habitus* describes how people have internalized a behaviour that indicates their membership to certain social groups. During their socialisation they have learnt how to behave so that their fellow group members recognize their membership. It is virtually

impossible for outsiders to learn the *habitus* of the group. The term *distinction* refers to the sum of practices that people use in order to designate their social positioning, i.e. their social memberships and also their differences to other social groups. *Habitus* is one form of *distinction*; consumption practices are another form that follow a certain group *habitus*. Only by consuming certain things do people show their belonging to their social group. Bourdieu initially applied *habitus* and *distinction* to class behaviour, i.e. the social stratifications in French society, but then he also showed that they operate in more complex ways in the social field than simply along class boundaries. Similarly, Ödegaard and Berglund (2008) argue that political participation in late modernity often is not an individual choice but rather a statement of social class. Therefore, suggesting that political participation is a matter of choice as political scientists such as Putnam do, means ignoring structural social inequalities such as class or ethnicity. In consequence, governmental discourses on political participation give the impression that inclusion in democratic processes does not rely on these aspects of *social capital* with their connections to *symbolic capital*. The government only works with the ideal types of political participation without including the complexities of how *social* and *symbolic capital* works in the social reality. The government's discourses, however, are part of the creation of the nation state as an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) and technologies of governance. These inclusive participation discourses also exist in Burnley and Harrogate. Local authorities are legally obliged to work in an inclusive manner and reach out to all communities. However, in both towns local authorities struggle to reach all citizens. Bourdieu's and Putnam's sociological approaches try to explain why certain people participate in formal political participation; however, the problem is really that the authorities do not possess the right forms of capital to reach these groups.

6.2. The “anti-politics machine”³²

After looking at the sociological and political science approaches of Bourdieu and Putnam, it is now useful to look at Fergusson’s (2006) anthropological approach for looking at the state’s attempts to organize citizens’ political participation. Fergusson has developed his theory within the Latin American context where we have and are still seeing new democracies evolving. Following his argument, there is a conflict between meaning and power which results in the disengagements of citizens in legitimate forms of political participation. The participatory structures that the state imposes on its citizens are depoliticising any of those social actions of citizens organizing local resources and leadership that are meaningful local practices and hence were political initially. By implementing state power through bureaucracy, which has been described by Weber (1980) as a key tool for governance, the state destroys those meaningful local political practices. In fact, the instalment of bureaucratic structures (through statutory agencies, bureaucratic procedures, civil servants, bureaucratic language) is one of the first necessary actions of new or reconfigured nation states through which they attempt to gain control over citizens. On one hand, this is a necessary practice for nation states to create a national consciousness for individual citizens through the creation of the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). Here, the state becomes visible and meaningful to citizens through bureaucracy understood as a symbolic practice. On the other hand, this practice erases real political behaviour as argued by Fergusson (2006): by forcing the citizens to adapt to bureaucratic procedures, their political attitudes and demands become modified until they fit into the governing structures. Political notions that disagree with governance become depoliticized in this way: they will be ignored, modified or main-streamed within the inside of the “anti-politics machine” which is the bureaucratic structure of a state (Fergusson 2006). I

³² This term is taken from Fergusson (2006).

will show in this chapter how this applies to marginal groups in Burnley and Harrogate.

6.3. Anti-feminism

A third notion that is relevant to my argument in this chapter is McRobbie's (2009) take on anti-feminism which can be seen as one representation of the "anti-politics machine". McRobbie (2009) argues that many forms of political participation have been depoliticised and superimposed with economic participation in the form of consumption practices that find much social acceptability as replacements for political participation. Real political behaviour that challenges the established public order of a state is not encouraged by the state as it could potentially undermine the social order or those in power. Thus, feminism is not very popular amongst young women these days. Women are seen as having the same rights as men, and full gender equality is assumed as being the current state of the sexes in contemporary British society. This discourse of empowerment has substituted feminism: since women are talked about as having the same rights as men, there is no need for women to support feminist arguments. This process has disempowered women to claim their rights and they have been disarticulated (McRobbie 2009). Instead, young women are encouraged to become "top girls" (*ibid.*): to become economically responsibly acting citizens that are well educated and employed, hence independent young women that can make a living by themselves and even have a career, but who at the same time present themselves femininely as potential sexual partners to men. Because of their economic independence, they have to emphasize their femininity in order to not come across as lesbian or aggressive woman which both is now associated with feminism. McRobbie (2009) shows how this is mediated and undertaken through the media and consumption. Films such as "Bridget Jones' Diary" suggest to women that it is "not OK" to be in your

mid-thirties and not have a permanent male partner. And sexualized images of female celebrities are role models for acceptably groomed women. McRobbie (2009) argues that this is the result of the New Labour project: neoliberalism has turned women into responsibly acting individuals that are economically active, but who at the same time know their place in society and will not go against the hegemonic norms of how a woman should present herself. Consequently, she will be a good citizen but she will not be a politically active feminist or politically active in any other visible form as this is seen as connected to the image of the aggressive feminist.

6.4. The girl with the pink *Barbie* car

Sarah is a good example of politically participating young women affected by the “anti-politics machine”. The young woman in her early twenties lives in the City of Ripon which is part of the Harrogate District. Her father works for the army, and her mother in retail. She was born in Germany where her father was stationed and she has a German grand mother on her mother's side. After taking her GCSE Sarah had decided against taking her A-levels and took up a vocational training in a “typical” woman's profession in the beauty industry and worked in several lower paid jobs at the time of the research. To her it is very important that she is economically active by working and having an income that enables her to spend money to her liking. In the interview, she expresses her consternation regarding economically inactive individuals:

“When you get people in the pub going: 'Oh, can't come out this weekend, I've got no money'; it's like: 'Well, get a job! It can't be that difficult to get a job when I've got three!' So I have no time (*inserted*: for those) that cry poverty and don't work (...) There's loads (*inserted*: of jobs) but people don't wanna do them, though. I mean there is jobs going at the factory but nobody wants to work there. That's fine but then don't cry poverty to me. And also because it's easier to stay at home and get paid than it is to go out

and work. (...) I don't mix in them circles of people. Tanja is the only person I know that's in that situation; I don't have people... these friends like that. (*She comments on herself:*) It was just very politically, wasn't it? I don't mix in them circles (*she chuckles*). It's true though, yeah, I have no interest in them." (Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

Sarah understands economic participation as equally valuable as political participation, or even more valuable than certain forms of it such as publicly voicing one's opinion on one's economic situation, for example. However, whilst she puts much emphasis on economic participation as being equally important as political participation, simultaneously, she puts less emphasis on *cultural capital*, i.e. education. In her case, she left school at the age of 16 instead of pursuing an academic education as she was more interested in earning her own money as soon as possible. In her case, economic practices are strongly connected to her social networks, i.e. she successfully transfers *social capital* into *economic capital*. Most of her jobs she has found through people she knew and who recommended her for jobs. Hence, in her case, knowing the right people helped her to get good jobs. Closely connected to *social capital* is *symbolic capital*, i.e. forms of *habitus* and *distinction* that allowed her participation in the relevant social fields where she could develop the networks that helped her into her jobs. Moreover, at the same time she reproduces the status quo as she has very little ambitions to climb up in the social hierarchy but remains in the same social positioning as her parents. It seems to be the objective of the state to keep its citizens in its social place and not to encourage real social mobility apart from individuals that take care of themselves and do not become a burden to the social system of the state.

Even when she is asked in a straightforward manner about formal political participation, she does not hesitate to quickly return to emphasizing economic participation over political participation by pointing out that she

would not understand the political system that helps the underprivileged instead of the privileged:

“I just said I just so don’t believe in the system and how it works; it’s just so on its arse. It shouldn’t... like you think: ‘well, is me voting really gonna make a difference?’ If you think about it... But I still vote because I still want to make a difference. But in all honesty it’s just like... It’s just really chuffed in the people who are trying to work hard for a living and giving hand out to people that are not. And as soon as somebody tried to do something about it: ‘It’s against my human rights!’” (Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

Somehow, Sarah’s understanding of her formal political participation is an automatically integrated part of her economic participation. In her view, economic participation is the precondition for being granted the right to participate politically. Her attitude resonates with New Labour’s concept of “active citizenship”: good citizens have to participate economically as well as politically (Ashcroft 2008). In turn, a lack of economic participation reduces a person’s right to political participation which in turn echoes the logic of New Labour again. Having identified a problem within the political system, she is asked to elaborate further about this and this is her response:

“It’s just... it’s just... they just give money to people who wanna stay at home and than scrutinize people who work hard for lives. It’s like when... if I want to buy a house now, I couldn’t afford to buy a house; if I got pregnant they’d give me a house tomorrow!” (Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

Sarah repeats stereotyped discourses on the lower class such as the commonness of teenage pregnancy (Yardley 2008). This shows also how little she is informed, because nobody gets a house for free, not even a pregnant teenager. She repeats stereotyped discourses spread in the public media without thinking about them. Through this she is making clear that

she is a “top girl” (McRobbie 2009: 55-58, Harris 2004) – a young woman who is a successful economic agent following the agenda of New Labour. She positions herself clearly and has no empathy with young women who are single parent. The demonization of teenage pregnancy in the media public is part of the neoliberal agenda of New Labour. Responsible citizens do not have to depend on the state like young mothers without education do. Anti-feminism within the female active citizenship agenda means that Sarah has no sympathy with young mothers as their sexual identity is stained by not being independent active citizens. Sarah has not inclinations of ever finding herself in a similar situation when she would have to rely on the state. She has fully internalized New Labour’s female active citizenship agenda. However, interestingly, her best friend is a single mum after having had a teenage pregnancy. Endearingly Sarah talks about her as being befriended with a “chav” but at the same time they spend much time together, Sarah goes round to her friend’s home and they go out together on a Saturday night to local pubs and the one and only local pub in the town. Her fierce words about teenage mums indicate that to some extent she is aware of her lower-class background but the thin line between unacceptable femininity and female active citizenship. In consequence, her display of consumption in the shape of the *Barbie* car displays her intact femininity.

Nevertheless, Sarah is aware of her privilege of still living with her parents and not having to pay any rent. Instead, she can spend all the money she earns “on herself”:

“People could say I’m spoilt, but no! I won’t say I’m spoilt, I work hard (...) for my leisure. That’s what I said, no, erm, yeah. Live at home, work three jobs, spend money I get, on anything really.” (Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

Hence, Sarah's life-style is strongly connected to consumption, and not only does she find it important to express herself by the things she buys. She also finds that she leads a very acceptable life-style in that she does not have to spend her income on necessary things such as paying for rent and food but that she can buy more or less "unnecessary" commodities – I put "unnecessary" into quotations marks as Sarah might not find them unnecessary. McRobbie (2009) has described these typical activities of women, of working and spending, as defining features of new modes of female citizenship (124). By actively participating in consumer culture, these women display that they are active participants in the labour market. Her pink four-by-four jeep which has ornamental stickers of the *Barbie* doll logo displayed on both sides, is the perfect commodity for her to display her economic and at the same time, her female citizenship. It is interpreted by her as an ironic political statement – a statement that is anti-political and promotes the right consumption choices over formal political actions such as the membership in political parties, for example:

GK: "OK, before we talk politics..."

Sarah: "Don't do politics!" (*she chuckles*)

GK: "You don't, we don't do politics? (...) Do we do hobbies?"

Sarah: "No. Mind you, I have a pink car (*she chuckles*) - of course I do politics. I've got a pink car!"

(Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

By driving her pink *Barbie* car, Sarah intentionally makes her anti-political statement displaying gendered consumption. She drives the giant version of the *Barbie* doll car that any little girl plays with as the *Barbie* brand dominates the toy market and hardly any parent can keep *Barbie* away from their little daughter's bed room. However, the *Barbie* doll is also the most hated girls' toy by feminists as *Barbie* represents the most archetypal stereotyped role model for girls. Even though Sarah is an economically active and independent young woman, by driving a *Barbie* car she

neutralizes her, for men potentially threatening independence and signals her disposition to comply with pre- and post-feminist notions of femininity.

In conversations with her friends, Sarah's pink car is the topical point of reference time and time again. In the interview, she is incited to talk more about the car. Why did she buy the car in the first place?

“Coz it’s good fun! Coz I didn’t want a belly button (*she refers to a very small car*), and that was on E-bay and I love pink. And I just like the fact that it’s girly but it’s a four by four. My dad saw it on eBay. (...) Coz I got the 2CV and it was all right, but it doesn’t go very fast. (...) I said I’m gonna have to race through to Harrogate and back twice a day to do WaterBaby (*a local swimming club for babies*), if I need a car that’s, you know, bit more reliable, he said, that’s fine, we’ll have a look on eBay. Then I come from work and he said: ‘I’ve seen a car for you on eBay.’ I went, ‘What is it?’ And it was my pink *Barbie* car. And he said, ‘Do you want it?’ And I went: ‘Yeah!’ And I went to pick it up the next day (...) I went down and got it. It’s cool!” (Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

Evidentially, the *Barbie* car is a very important commodity featuring Sarah's life-style, and, also, because it is often mentioned by her and her friends in many situations. She adds that it was “a bargain” purchased at only £750, and that it is not only cheap in tax and insurance because of its small engine - she endearingly calls its engine “a grass cutter” - but also in terms of costs for petrol. Being asked what it means to her to be the driver of “a *Barbie* car” and how it is different to a “belly button”, she responds:

“It’s cool! (...) It’s a four by four, so it’s a bit chunky. And it’s old, so it’s got no power steering (...) so it’s like that... (*she groans and moves hands as if driving a car.*) You got to *drive* it! You can’t just *sit* in it and let it run. You got to *work* it!” (Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

That life-style politics are strongly connected to economic capital, i.e. the goods one can afford, but at the same time also to practices of distinction,

i.e. the kind of goods one buys, becomes clear when Sarah talks about her second car, a *Citroen 2CV* and the local *2CV* club named “Stray Snails” in Harrogate which she had joined but stopped going to because she did not feel comfortable in the meetings with the most male club members much older than her. And so her father continued going instead of her:

Sarah: “I joined the club with my car. And then it was really boring, it’s just full of middle aged men, talking about cars. So dad goes instead. (...) he’s got more in common with middle aged men than me.”

GK: “So what did you talk to them? Did you have anything to talk about or...?”

Sarah: “Yeah, they asked why I bought my, erm, they asked my why I bought a *2CV*, and I said coz I’ve just passed my driving test and I didn’t want to buy a belly button, meaning I don’t want a little *Fiat* or a little *Corsa*, (...) a little ‘I’ve just passed my test’ car.”

GK: “And what did they say?”

Sarah: “They thought it was great!”

GK: “And then that was the end of conversation.”

Sarah: “Pretty much. And then they would go: it was really reliable.”

(Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

Owning a *Citroen 2CV* was initially so important to Sarah that she decided to join the club when she found it advertised one day when someone had put a leaflet under her windscreen wiper. Again, her decision to buy the car was not solely influenced by the need for transport. Additionally, she obtained a commodity that would help her express her life-style as an active participant in consumer culture as well as in the labour market.

Soon after, however, Sarah noticed that “Stray Snails” was not the right club for her because she did not have enough in common with the other members. The company of “middle aged men” made her feel uncomfortable in her identity as a young woman who finds it important to stress her femininity. The same would be the case if she joined a political party or engaged in any other forms of formal political participation – she

would find that usually, people are much older than her and often they are men. Her decision to quit the “Stray Snails” reflects her life-style politics;

A large part of Sarah’s politics are life-style politics which are mainly based on her consumption practices. For example, what kind of car she drives is very important to her. However, she is also informed about local political issues from being quite involved in the local community through her work. She works part-time at the local Queen Victoria pub³³ in Ripon which is also frequented by some local politicians. From them she is also quite well informed about local politics:³⁴

“What do I know about Ripon council, I know Barnie, he drinks in the Billy. He used to be (*inserted*: a councillor), he is not anymore, he used to be Holmes’ side kick. John Holmes used to be the mayor, and he is his side kick. He is right hand man. With Mike Wilson. So but we knew Holmie, as we call him, coz he was in the army with my dad, so we know Holmie, and then obviously Mike Wilson was his sidekick. And I think that’s about all I know. I know they wanna build some houses on the lotties behind my house. They want to build houses on the lotties. The allotments. So I’ll probably get involved with that and just kick off. Which will be cool! There is a meeting, uhm, there is a council meeting some day this week, isn’t it, but it’s not on the agenda to talk about the allotments, so Mike Wilson came, keeps me in touch when he comes into the pub. Think it’s county council, which could have been the one you went to. No, it was on the agenda. He’s telling me when it’s coming up on the agenda. I’ll take Laura with me, she’ll call the riot! (*she chuckles*)” (Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

Sarah left school before her A-levels and did a vocational course. Since then she has been working in different more or less skilled jobs such as a beauty therapist, a swim guard for the Waterbabies, a bar maid; a typical career for young women in the Harrogate district with a working class to

³³ The name of the pub has been changed to protect Sarah’s identity.

³⁴ On the downside, working in a pub also means that she is exposed to the typical pub talk which can also include social stereotypes held by the dominant class about the lower classes, which she sometimes repeats as we have just seen an earlier interview extract.

lower middle class background (McRobbie and Garber 1976a). She is highly economically active in traditionally mostly very feminine jobs (the beauty therapist, the bar maid, and working with babies). At the same time she consumes much for her life-style. In doing this she is the ideal young woman sought after by New Labour: economically active as well as signalling an economically active life-style (McRobbie 2009). Hence, she also complies with it in her answer when she is asked more directly about her political involvement:

GK: "Do you think you are a political person?"

Sarah: "No!"

GK: "Why not, what do you think makes a political person, what do you have to do to be..."

Sarah: "...political? I think to be political you have to have stronger views and ethics and, than I do, I'm just, I'm too blasé to be political. I'm just happy and run with the flow."

(Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

Interestingly, she does not even seem embarrassed at all to admit that she is not very political. Within the New Labour discourse, being economically and socially active compensates fully for political participation. In fact, Sarah complies with the desired image of women that are not visibly active in politics and hence clearly positions herself as a renegade of feminism (McRobbie 2009).³⁵ In her account, Sarah then turns to New Labour's middle-class notions of political participation:

Sarah: "The only thing I'll do do is slightly, (*unclear*) say political: do a lot of recycling, don't do plastic bags, uhm, that's why I have such a big hand bag (*chuckles*) Just things like that, really, and just little bits and pieces that I can do."

GK: "Uhuh."

Sarah: "Apart from that... yeah. Grow a lot of our own veg on my lottie."

³⁵ This could also reflect the generally perceived idea of the active participation in politics as seen as connected to more far-left or far-right values that are seen as hugely beyond the "civic" values of the mainstream white middle class.

GK: "Yeah, good. So maybe you are an environmentalist?"

Sarah: "Environmental-, I would like to be more environmentalist, but I'd like to have more time to do it! And also I think if I had my own house I would be more of an environmentalist. (...) coz obviously I'd just be by myself to look after so I'd be able to do it."

(Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

After having rejected the idea of being political in the form of having strong views – a form that could be seen as a form of traditional feminism - she considers middle-class life-style politics as being political, such as practicing recycling and working on one's own allotment (Pofert 1999). Her participation in alternative and ecological life-styles are typical practices belonging to the habitus and distinction of the middle class through which they distinguish themselves from the working class. This is due to the fact that the old form of distinction, the type of work, does not consistently function anymore today due to the decline of working class jobs. Sarah finds that as she does not put enough energy into this it cannot really be called political behaviour.

But then she herself continues to talk about something she does that a lot of young white and Asian women from both towns find important: to pass on her norms and values to the community or younger people:

Sarah: "But I'm all into getting kids being into being environmentalist. Big kids, because they're just fab, and I do loads of stuff with kids (...) with sort of like getting kids and understanding recycling and something like that, not putting rubbish on the floor and all that sort of stuff."

GK: "When do you do that?"

Sarah: "Just generally looking after kids when I do child-minding and looking after kids and, you know."

GK: "Do you know like kids in your local area, do you look after them?"

Sarah: "Not as many as I used to, but, yeah. Yeah, a few."

(Sarah, Ripon/Harrogate district, 07.09.2006, archive GK)

Sarah is committed to engaging with young people and to raise their awareness in environmental matters. That she is committed to working in education also became clear when she started a new job whilst I was doing research in Harrogate. She got a new job at Harrogate College where she lectured a course in the beauty industry as she had had been trained in this course herself as was hence qualified. Even though one could argue that her economic practices and types of jobs reproduce the notion of the ideal young female citizen as produced in New Labour's discourses, she is committed to education of other young people and children at the same time. However, the contents of her educational engagement remains on the level of the agenda that New Labour has for young women. To speak with Weber, the ideal type of a New Labour young female citizen is highly economically active but not really political in a politicalized way such as movements as feminism represent. Women who become very visible in political arenas through taking radical political stances are not very popular with New Labour with the latest case being Hazel Blears who famously wore a badge saying "Rocking the boat" when she left her office as community secretary during the Whitehall expenses scandal in 2009. To reduce the damage to her career she eventually had to apologize for the way she resigned which made her look very humiliated (The Guardian 2009). Whilst she only claimed that her timing had been wrong, everyone knew that her whole performance had been "wrong".

6.5. *Corner boys and college boys*³⁶

After having described the reasons for a lack of political participation amongst young women, I am now interested in investigating why some young people decide to participate in formal politics, and others do not. The research findings used for this thesis show that knowledge about

³⁶ These terms are used by Foote Whyte (1943) to describe the different social practices of young men in a working class neighbourhood in the Chicago of the 1920s.

formal forms of political participation can become useless for, or even impede, successful local, informal political practices. This is due to the fact that formal forms of political practices are not only highly education-based, but also often detached from local political everyday practices in the community and restricted to formal spaces. This point is argued through the analysis of two different groups of young people in Burnley: the Burnley youth council and a Burnley “chav gang”. Following Foote Whyte’s (1993 [1943]) enquiring notion why some young men became “corner boys” and others “college boys” in the Chicago of the 1920s, the same question was applied to the case of Burnley: why do some young men become members of the Burnley Youth Council whereas other young men become members of a Burnley “chav gang”?

To find out about the young people’s motivations to participate either in a youth gang or on the youth council, both groups were researched over a period of six months. The data showed that the young people have very different motivations to participate in the two groups. The views of Scott and Shane from the youth council and Andy from the youth gang are given below. Naturally, the members of the council were asked directly about their reasons for membership in this forum, whereas Andy was asked what he thought more generally about formal forms of politics and youth groups. This is Scott’s response in which he summarizes his motivation for meeting with the youth council:

“I’m on the youth council because I believe that young people are listened to less than adults and their views aren’t valued as much as they should be, and even some organizations that do hold events where they’ll (be attended) by children, it’s like, ‘pick out the colour of the swings for this new park even though we won’t have the funding to make it.’ I just think that it should change.” (Scott, Burnley youth council, 10.11.2005, archive GK)

In this interview extract Scott refers to a range of issues that need to be addressed in the debate on children's participation. The notion that it is a problem that young people are not listened to is a typical notion that was frequently turning up in statutory discourses at the time of my research in Burnley (DfES 2005) and Scott will have learnt this way of arguing for his role as a youth councillor from the youth workers that accompanied the youth council. Through these discursive practices of creating young people as a group of people that are represented by politicians, the state is trying to raise people into the "ideal type" (Weber 1980) of citizens. However, Scott also points towards a blatant discrepancy between the statutory discourses of youth participation and the actual capacity and ability of the state to deliver on the young people's suggestions. What I heard youth workers commonly say was that they wanted young people to make suggestions, but that at the same time telling them that there is very little funding to implement what they would suggest. And it seems that Scott already has a good idea that the inclusion of youth in politics is something that might be referred to as "lip service" in the vernacular. His fellow youth councillor makes another good point:

"The thing is, with us being young and that, we don't really have the issues with the council tax and stuff like that, and sending our kids to school, that doesn't apply to us. We're still on the youth side of the fence, so we don't really need to know our councillors yet because we don't have to complain to them yet. We're actually active members within the council because of Burnley Youth Council so I suppose we're youth councillors. (...) The councillors of this town are doing the exact same job as us, but they're doing it on adult and future things. We're doing it about the kids now, because that's what reality we're in. I'm sure we'll progress into councillors in the future." (Shane, Burnley youth council, 10.11.2005, archive GK)

Shane makes the point that many political issues simply do not interest young people because they are not relevant to young people's life-worlds. And he also points out that in the future it might be likely that they become

real councillors. And this is the key reason for why the state has such an interest in having young people participate in youth councils. They are training young people in the administrative logics of the state that then helps the state to govern. “Good citizenship” thus means to learn and practice the language of bureaucracy that the state understands and can deal with. In consequence, the answers of Scott and Shane are well phrased and very confident; clearly the youth workers have spent much time on training the young people in using the statutory vernacular and in speaking to adults. They resemble the participation discourses by youth workers that have been established through the “Youth Matters” Green Paper produced by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES 2005). In fact, these discourses have been criticised for their intention to create young people as good subjects rather than good citizens (Clark 2008). The emphasis of this youth work, thus, is more on teaching young people their duties than their democratic rights as citizens. These duties are strongly connected to the norms and values of the social majority or the ruling class (Bourdieu 1998). In Scott’s and Shane’s answers, these norms are incorporated within their logic of participating on the youth council.

Now let us turn to another youth group that is politically active but in a different way. Instead of engaging in formal political participation, the friends of Andy practice informal political participation. They are a Burnley “chav gang”, and when asked about their opinions on politics, they give quite different answers than the members of the youth council. Initially, Andy pretends he would not know the word “political” when asked whether he thought of himself as a political person. He pretends to confuse it with “polite”:

GK: “Do you think you are a political person?”

Andy: (*Pretends he does not understand, shrugs his shoulders, hesitates*)
 "I think I am kind of, but I'm not too sure. I think it means I'm
 aaaaa.... (*thinks for a while*) Can't pronounce that word."
 GK: "Pardon?"
 Andy: "Can't pronounce the word!"
 GK: "Which word?"
 Andy: "What you said!" (*chuckles*)
 GK: "What I said, political?"
 Andy: "Yeah."
 GK: "If you can't pronounce it, how am I to pronounce it, I'm the
 bloody foreigner" (*chuckles*)
 Andy: "That was hard, that one, that was a bit hard. Don't know what it
 means, so."
 GK: "Political, to be political? What do you think, you don't know what
 it means, being political? Politics..."
 Andy: "I think it means being polite or something like that."
 GK: "Polite? No (*unclear*)."
 Andy: "Something like that."
 (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

That Andy was trying to fob the interviewer off becomes clear when he is taken to task. He is a bright young 16 year old who must have an idea of what politics could mean but because the concepts of formal politics lie beyond his realm of everyday practice and experiences, he resists talking about them as a less well educated person than the interviewer. He is clearly aware that it is a behaviour that the state would like to see of him in the sense of being an obedient citizen and not a resistant working class man taking to the streets to rally. When challenged "on his level", all of a sudden he is able to be very clear about what he thinks of politics:

GK: "Now you are taking the mickey, you are taking the piss, yeah."
 Andy: "No, I'm not, I'm not one of them. Nope!"
 GK: "So what does politics mean to you?"
 Andy: "To me, it just means a lot of jib-jab. Just wanna go do stuff. They are trying to change things too quick and they are saying like, this person wants to do this, that person wants to do that, but really, neither way, they are just losing, like Labour wins (*unclear*) Green Street (*unclear*) they were saying they're gonna put lights in bus stops and change the bus station, you know, that bus stops that we

have, they wanted to change them and do stuff with them, like make them look better and stuff. (...) They wanted to change them and stuff like in the actual full country. But there's no point really in doing that because they will get trashed. At the end of it it's just gonna get like... they'll clean it up, but eventually they'll just gonna have to give it in, coz it's just gonna get trashed up. Coz there's people that don't care about the right things like that. Where (sic: whereas) the other Labour, they wanted it for a reason, they wanted to use the money an' for good and not for like things on the outside. They wanted to use it for the stuff on the inside of places, like areas, and younger people, to get them something and somewhere in life."

(Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

In his initial mocking of my question, Andy pretends he would not understand the question and pretends to confuse politics with polite.³⁷ In the end, he shows that he has a fairly good idea what it means, i.e. Old Labour and New Labour, but that he is not interested in it. This data shows the negative messages from social institutions on young people like Andy. Individuals internalize their situation and Andy was just too frightened to express an opinion because it was dim. So instead, he initially behaves in his usual way and mocks politics. My swearing then broke the barrier to Andy.

This conversation shows the need to take into account the hierarchies of the social field in order to understand the political participation of this group of young people. Bourdieu (1998) argues that individuals are actors who are placed within these social fields according to their forms of capital. The political field is organized in a similar way. Through their forms of capital, individuals are allocated their positions in the hierarchy – a higher position gives the legitimacy to rule, i.e. to be politically

³⁷ He is right to some extent, however, because the words 'polite' and 'political' are etymologically and cultural-historically connected to each other. Polite stems from Latin pol'tus, the past-participle of pol're, polish; political stems from Latin pol'ticus, political (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology); so that both words have the same word stem. Moreover, cultural-historically the polite society used to be the society with the political influence and power.

influential. Andy is clearly aware of his low position in the social field and, thus, his lack of legitimacy to ever become politically influential. The specific process that makes some individuals feel entitled to speak politically and others not, is elaborated by Bourdieu (2000 [1984]) in his work "Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste":

"The propensity to speak politically, even in the most rudimentary way, that is, by producing a 'yes' or a 'no', or putting a cross beside a prefabricated answer, is strictly proportionate to the sense of having the right to speak." (Bourdieu 2000 [1984]: 411)

Clearly, Andy has a very good sense of the fact that he has not got the right to speak. In consequence, it just does not make sense to him to participate in formal politics in any way. Bourdieu (2000 [1984]) has described this process of silencing those who do not have the "propensity to speak":

"The authorized speech of status-generated competence, a powerful speech which helps to create what it says, is answered by the silence of an equally status-linked incompetence, which is experienced as technical incapacity and leaves not choice but delegation – a misrecognized dispossession of the less competent by the more competent, of women by men, of the less educated by the more educated, of those who 'do not know to speak' by those who 'speak well'. The propensity to delegate responsibility for political matters to others recognized as technically competent varies in inverse ratio to the educational capital possessed, because the educational qualification (and the culture it is presumed to guarantee) is tacitly regarded –by it's holders but also by others – as a legitimate title to the exercise of authority." (Bourdieu 2000 [1984]: 413-14)

This means that educational capital is tacitly regarded as legitimate title to the exercise of authority. The less educational capital is possessed by individuals, the more likely they will feel incompetent talking about politics and will delegate responsibilities for political matters to others recognized as technically competent. Lack of educational capital, thus, leads to a lower position in the social and political field. It silences

individuals such as Andy who clearly feels he lacks the “propensity to speak”. To these individuals it feels like a joke to be asked whether they think of themselves as political, because due to their position in the social field and their lack of cultural capital, they are not supposed to speak politically. Thus, the question actually makes fun of their powerlessness – thus people like Andy respond with resistance – the resistance to answer this question seriously. As a consequence of his lack of cultural capital which keeps him from entering formal political fields, he increases his social capital through informal political fields; through joining a local youth gang. Foote Whyte (1993 [1943]) studies the phenomenon of why some young men join formal politics and others informal, by researching two youth gangs in “Cornerville”³⁸ in the Chicago of the 1920s who he called the “corner boys” and the “college boys”. The corner boys were less educated and participated less in social work activities than the college boys and Foote Whyte was interested in finding out why this was the case – why some boys wanted to achieve and climb up the social ladder and others did not. Foote Whyte argued that Cornerville’s problem was not the lack of organization but the failure of its own social organization to mesh with the structure of the society around it:

“The entire course of the corner boy’s training in the social life of his district prepares him for a career in the rackets or in Democratic politics. If he moves in the other direction, he must take pains to break away from most of the ties that hold him to Cornerville. In effect, the society at large puts a premium on disloyalty to Cornerville and penalizes those who are best adjusted to the life of the district. At the same time the society holds out attractive rewards in terms of money and material possessions to the “successful” man. For most Cornerville people these rewards are available only through advancement in the world of rackets and politics.” (Foote Whyte 1993 [1943]: 273-4)

³⁸ A fictional name for a deprived area in Chicago given by Foote Whyte (1943).

As a consequence, the local young men, the corner boys had to decide at some point if they wanted to stay loyal to their local area or if they wanted individual social advancement. That Andy and his gang are more on the “racket side of things” in Burnley becomes clear from the high frequency of interaction they have with the local police:

“We see him (the local police man) all the time now, everywhere we are now, even in Brollie road, coz they know we’re in a gang they come and stop and they check us a few times, you know, that search thing they do. (...) They search us all the time, coz we’re in a gang. They, it’s the police new rule, when they pull you over and ask your name and address and stuff, they’re gonna check your pockets and stuff.” (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

It becomes clear from this interview section that Andy who is only 16 years of age and his gang are frequently stopped and searched by the police. These stop and searches are part of their everyday lives in Burnley. Part of the everyday challenges that this group of young men have to pass are to escape arrests or confiscation of their knives and alcoholic drinks by the police as Andy and his friends regularly engage in under-age drinking and possibly also illegal drug taking. These frequent escapes from the police are part of the practices that have been coined as being “streetwise” by Elijah Anderson (1990). This terminology refers to the code of the street through which individuals ensure their everyday survival of the social chaos of the streets in deprived neighbourhoods. Another form of these practices is the outwitting of local authorities. It is part of being “streetwise” to understand how to deal with the local state such as in the form of the police. Every youth gang, thus, will have certain practices of how to deal with the state. In consequence, at the local level they know how to deal with the formal state, i.e. they are “official-wise”, too. The following is Andy’s answer to whether the police have ever found

something when the gang was being searched and it clearly shows that they know the rules of the game, i.e. they understand the law and which behaviour is acceptable and which is not, and here I would like to quote the same extract from Andy's interview as on page 161: "Naw! We're all too brainy for them. *(He chuckles)* Everything that's illegal goes into the bush." (Andy, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

Thus, the comparison of the case of Burnley youth council and the Burnley youth gang shows that individuals use different strategies to interact in different spaces. The Youth Council is a very formal space structured by the youth workers who are employed by the statutory agency, the county council's youth and community services. They follow the state's "Youth Matters" agenda which intends to train young people into "obedient subjects" rather than "citizen of age" (Clark 2008). This becomes clear from the language used by the members of the youth council which is the same language used by the youth workers and the government in "Youth Matters". Through the consistent use of the term "young people" who are not "listened to" enough and "whose views are not valued", the heterogeneous group of young people, children and young adults are gathered into one group that can be represented by a group of young people on the Youth Council, simply because age is used as a homogenizing category – a typical governance practice by the state which has been learned by the members of the Youth Council and incorporated into their language. Thus, Burnley youth council represents a formal and statutory legalized space, whereas the Burnley youth gang represents the informal spaces of the city. Nevertheless, the gang is able to use formal and informal strategies to participate in politics and society. The chosen forms of participation result from the forms and amounts of social capital at the disposal of the individual.

Burnley is a deprived town, struck by de-industrialization and the accompanying economic and social decline. According to the 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation, some areas in Burnley were amongst the top 50 most deprived council areas in the country, and 25 percent of Burnley's population lives in areas classified as some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the county (2004 Deprivation Indices, ODPM/DCLG, quoted in Burnley Borough Council 2005). In 2004, 18.6 percent of all households in Burnley receive housing benefits (Housing Benefits Statistics 2004, DWP, quoted in Burnley Borough Council 2005). In 2002, more than half the population had an average income of less than £15,000 (Experian Income Data via Community Data Services website, quoted in Burnley Borough Council 2005). In 2004, 42 percent of 16-year-olds achieved five or more "good" GCSE passes (DfES/DCSF, quoted in Burnley Borough Council 2005). The members of the "Chav gang" originate from one of these most deprived areas and fall into the category of young people who are not achieving in schools. The members of the Youth Council, however, originate (with one exception) from middle-class areas in Burnley.

The state's practice of authorizing certain practices as political participation and disqualifying others results in the selection of young people who can connect to this: a young person on the Youth Council has got the educational capital to connect to the official practices, hence they attend the council, whereas a members of a youth gang is lacking the educational capital and cannot connect to them. A young person from the Youth Council has got enough social and cultural capital (i.e. educational training) to understand and be able to connect to the official forms of political participation provided by the state. A member of a youth gang, however, is not able to do so because he does not possess the amount of

social and cultural capital the youth council member does. That policy discourses on political participation are based on cultural capital and, thus, implicitly replicate class structures has been shown by Bagnall *et al.* (2003).

It is very ironic that the Chav gang, in being the utmost political in their actions as they are very vocal statements of protest about how they have to live as working class young people in a deprived part of an industrial town, are discarded by the state as politically alienated and dysfunctional young people stigmatized with ASBOs and other punitive procedures. In consequence, the forms of political participation that the state discursively fabricates through the notion of “good citizenship” are far from being political, but rather economic participation. The state wants economically active citizens with middle class norms and values which the state tries to train young people into through agencies such as the youth council.

6.6. The Henge Warriors

The Henge Warriors are an example for a group of young people that are economically active and have a clear political agenda, but which is closely entangled with a socially marginal type of life-style politics that the state cannot deal with in turn. This group is an environmentalist activism group who are campaigning for the protection of the Thornborough Henges, an ancient site near Harrogate in North Yorkshire that is faced with the threat of being turned into a quarry site. The Thornborough Henges are of a similar nature to the Stonehenge in the English south but of a much smaller size, and thus hardly heard of outside Harrogate. During the fieldwork in Harrogate, the council was discussing an application for quarrying which the Henge Warriors object to since they find the Henges worthy of protection and they are against arbitrary destruction of landscapes. As part of their promotion of the conservation of ancient sites and the surrounding

landscapes, the Henge Warriors also promote ecological life-styles. The Henge Warriors were not only interested in protecting the Henges site and the environment but they also had a strong interest in music. One of their founding members works in a local music shop in Ripon, part of the Harrogate district. For their campaign for the protection of Henges they had had the idea of organizing a music festival to promote local bands, local ecological life-styles and to collect signatures for a petition to the council against the quarrying:

“Henge Warriors’ is a club dedicated to arranging musical events in the aid of, and drawing attention to, ancient sites under threat from the ravages of the modern world. Membership of Henge Warriors is free and this entitles members to attend Henge Warriors festivals and events. Some events are free, others will entail a minimal cost. Members attending such events agree to be bound by our club rules and ethical policy. In general this means that while attending Henge warrior events you commit to minimising your impact both on the environment and have respect for other people. Henge Warriors is a “not for profit” organisation staffed by volunteers, funds raised are donated to heritage campaigns and also fund other Henge Warriors events. (...) Henge warriors was first formed because of the need to raise awareness of the plight of the Thornborough Henges in North Yorkshire. This ancient monument complex is still being quarried despite the loss of important archaeology linked to Yorkshires’ greatest archaeological site.” (Henge Warriors 2008)

The Henge Warriors are also connected to other campaigns to sustain the Thornborough Henges and other ancient sites across England and Ireland:

“Described by English Heritage as the most important ancient site between Stonehenge and the Orkneys, many people are shocked to learn that the entire area is subject to extensive quarrying, with proposals that aim to surround the major monuments by gravel quarries, this will drop the land surface by up to 11m, leaving behind only the major monuments surrounded by lakes - A devastating landscape transformation and a sad loss to world heritage.” (Henge Warriors 2008)

That the Henge Warriors are an exclusive social group became clear in the course of the research. Having approached the group several times in person face-to-face, as well as having sent an email to the organizer of the group, no response came from the group even though initially some interest in being part of the research had been manifested. Due to its strong link to the local rock band scene through the organizer who works in the local music shop, the group's code is male, white and middle class. Membership is exclusive and access to the group restricted by the requirement of being invited to join by another club member.

Membership is furthermore selective via the use of a trademark that is accessible only to well-educated British people. The trademark of the group is a phrenology chart. A phrenology chart is a drawing of the silhouette of a head looked at from the side. The area of the brain is partitioned and each part is given a number. In the trademark of the Henge Warriors, the numbers representing the areas of the brain are exchanged with the letters making up the words "Henge Warriors". Phrenology was an attempt of the natural sciences in the 19th century to explain how the mind works. It was assumed that the brain was divided into different areas responsible for different tasks. The size of the head was also understood to be of significance; the bigger the head, the more intellectually able the person was assumed to be resulting from bigger or more numerous different areas within the mind. Thus, measuring heads was an important practice in phrenology, and human racial theory was based on this, too. From the taking of bigger measurements of heads amongst the "white race" it was concluded that white people are more intelligent, and thus can claim to be the superior race. Yet, from today's perspective phrenology was a racist practice particularly favoured by the Victorian upper classes.³⁹

³⁹ Representations of the cultural *Zeitgeist* of the Victorian upper classes can be found in Victorian fictional works such as "Middlemarch" by George Elliot and "Dracula" by Bram Stoker. In both

When I first learned about the Henge Warriors from some Ripon locals I noticed that they made a point of distancing themselves from the Warriors. Furthermore, I concluded from the accompanying smirking that they regarded the activities of the Henge Warriors as different to the norms and values of the average Harrogate citizen. The group's use of the phrenology chart is another expression of the fact that the group feel their membership is exclusive. Young middle class people participating in eco-political activism or "anarcho-environmentalism" (Shepherd 2002) is a contemporary cultural phenomenon reflecting young people's endeavours of making sense of the destruction accompanying modern, global life. At the same time, it is a position of young people who want to disagree with norms and values of mainstream consumer society (Hetherington 1998) and who are against participation in the destruction of our planet. In consequence, the practices of the Henge Warriors are exclusive practices embedded in spaces that are symbolically distinct and not accessible to everyone – typical practice of young people in subcultural environmental movements (Strandbu and Kränge 2003). By favouring a certain kind of rock music that is clearly gendered as a male space, not only are women excluded, but by additional exclusive practices, such as references to phrenology and making the group difficult to access, they make sure that they stay amongst themselves. Thus, the life-style politics of the Henge Warriors are exclusive political practices based on the social and cultural capital of the members. Certain music preferences are seen as a common practice of young political activists (Leung and Kier 2008). To be able to participate in their group one has to share their habitus and their forms of capital which the researcher was not able to being German and female. In consequence, the access for research to their group was restricted resulting

novels phrenology is mentioned as a scientific method to examine human intelligence. This way of thinking, however, had appeared within many intellectual debates across the whole of Europe,

in a limited amount of collected data. Identifying with a particular youth music scene, in this case rock music, and the phenomenon of a civic-political agenda supported through the participation in this scene, is a modern practice supported by the argument of the “blurring of the political” (Beck, Hajer and Kesselring 1999). Borneman and Senders (2000) argue that the Love Parade in Berlin is a new political movement “without a head”; and Hitzler and Pfadenhauer (1999) also use the example of techno music as a “different kind of politics“, which nonetheless creates norms and values similar to the ones of civic society. That the social majority of Ripon distances themselves from the practices of the Henge Warriors results from the dominant notion of good citizenship which is accompanied by normative ideas of what civic action should look like (Banaji 2008). Ödegaard and Berglund (2008) also talk about a shift among young people’s political participation from formal political activity, to cause-oriented political activity. Formal political activity is understood to be participating in voluntary organizations with a political agenda, whereas cause-oriented political activities are more or less *ad hoc* activities, limited to part-time activities and focused upon single issues. That young people’s participation in environmental activism does depend on the forms of capital which they obtain, is shown by Strandbu and Krangle (2003). When, as in the case of the Henge Warriors, identity, lifestyle and aesthetics are given a high priority; there are stronger mechanisms of distinction in operation. Members of environmental organizations, such as the Henge Warriors, are thus more likely to be middle class than working class. Working class young people would resist joining the group as their identities are based on distinguishing themselves from middle-class values.

and culminated in the German holocaust in the middle of the 20th century.

For the state, however, this creates a problem. The state can only deal with “ideal types” (Weber) of citizens. Formal forms of political participation that are closely connected to subcultural practices are “under the radar” of the state. Notions of “good citizenship” are not connected to subcultural logics. In consequence, even though the Henge Warriors are economically active and, thus, economically participating and hence potential candidates as “good citizens”, their subcultural norms and values disagree with the middle class norms and values that the “ideal type” of a citizen holds. In consequence, the imagined community of the nation state is threatened and the social cohesion of the state is seen as under attack.

6.7. An ice rink for Burnley’s goths

The following example of Ted also confirms that lifestyle is strongly related to the forms of political participation chosen by individuals. Ted is a young man with a middle class background who would be classed by other youth cultures as a “goth”. He would not refer to himself as a goth, though, but he and his friends like to wear clothes that tend to be of black colour:

“I get called goth but I don’t really class myself as anything because I’m, I don’t dress the same as my friends as they are more or less always in black, I’m not always in black, so... (...) (*inserted*: I never chose to be a goth) but in a sense I already was because of the music I listen to, because I don’t listen to like the new bands of like metal and rock, I prefer the old bands, because it’s more talent there than now. Coz like you had to have talent then, otherwise wouldn’t have got where they got, whereas now it seems like anyone picks up an instrument, than that’s it, they are (off). We’ve got too many bands.” (Ted, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

Ted also likes skateboarding and sometimes wears accessories worn by skaters and also punks. This only shows that modern youth cultures are more fluid and crossovers can be found because the original meanings attached to their cultural practices have changed. It is still about style, but

the meaning of this style is changing (Hebdige 1979). Music has always been an important means of distinction for youth cultures, and it still is, as Ted elaborates:

Ted: “Although at band stand we have couple of uh, like, what my type of people (...) uh, see, my friends, my friends mainly involve like people who listen to heavy metal and rock music and that type of genre of music (...) Uh, also with the hanging around at the band stand we have people who my type of friends call “chavs” because they listen to like dance music a lot.”

GK: Can I, could I tell from how they are dressed that they are chavs?

Ted: Usually, tracksuits. Nothing but tracksuits, or socks tucked into their shoes, eh, pants tucked into their socks. With the baseball caps.

GK: Ah, so they hang out at the band stand.

Ted: Yeah, as well as my friend, so it’s usually, sometimes it ends up in argument, coz they call my friends “goth”, we call them “chav”. So it’s like just a borderline really for a fight at times.

(Ted, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

That goths are more accepted in the town centre of Burnley than the chavs has already been discussed in chapter 5. This is to a large extent simply because they have more economic capital; they tend to consume more and their consumption practices are more acceptable. They also tend to engage less in practices of resistance and in acceptable use of the town’s space to some extent; or because they turn their use of the town into a lifestyle, i.e. into forms of capital. Even though they tend to be members of a youth culture, they have much cultural capital at disposal. First, they are overall middle-class and come from more middle-class areas in Burnley which also means that they have more educational capital because they went to better schools and were supported more by parents who value school education (Evans 2006). Second, through their habitus they connect to middle-class lifestyles (Bourdieu 2000 [1984]). Skateboarding and listening to rock music are activities of middle-class children through

which they distinguish themselves from the “chavs”, i.e. children from a working class background.

“One of my plans I have for the future is to play ice hockey professionally. It’s the number one ambition I have.” (Ted, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

Ted’s hobby is very important for him and he would like to turn it into his profession as well. He even has a vision for Burnley to set up a street hockey team. He is aware of the town’s reputation for football and would like to establish a new reputation for street hockey because he is not interested in football, and nor are his friends:

“I’d also tell people like what my favourite sport is which is street hockey and ice hockey. I play street hockey, yeah, but there is not real street hockey team in Burnley. So me and my friends are trying to get a team together, take on other towns, showing that in Burnley you can kick your butt on sport. Show other towns that we can kick the butt at street hockey instead of at football.” (Ted, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

Unlike Andy’s gang, Ted and his gang take it for granted that they have an established space for their activities in the town. They even claim more visibility for, and establishment of, their activities through getting a team together and playing against other towns in order to compete with Burnley’s reputation for their football. Their striving for visibility and establishment in spaces, however, is contested by working class youth, the “chavs” who make their own claims to their spaces in their local neighbourhood:

“I used to live with my mum, up at the Burnley general hospital, it, the area there was ok, but lately it’s just gone very rough, too many trouble makers in my opinion. And not enough enforcers, if I were playing street hockey up there, there won’t be enough enforcers, which go round and basically clean up the play. See, a lot of the times I can refer to things with ice

hockey terms, coz I'm uh, if ice hockey was a religion, I'd be a follower of it." (Ted, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

Ted and his friends engage in a lot of sports activities for which they use the public space of the town. They also use a couple of steps near the town's pedestrian zone for their skating. Not only at the band stand, but also in the local neighbourhood where Ted grew up, there has always been conflict between his friends and youth from a more deprived background, the "chavs". Both groups would compete for the use of public streets, however Ted and his friends would have the police on their side whereas the "chavs" would not. Thus, Ted even finds that there are not enough police men ("enforcers") in his local area to disperse the "chavs" ("to clean up the play"). He and his friends are so confident about their right of space in the town for their own usage that they even write to the council to get space that would allocate them some space exclusively for their practice – playing ice hockey. For this they write to the council to suggest turning the old sports centre into an ice rink:

"They're building the new sports centre, and me and my friends have handed in offers about what to do with the old one instead of tearing it down, and they've just turned them away and not listened coz we've said turn it into an ice rink to make more money for Burnley, and they've just turned away. (...) We wrote letters in. (...) We did (get a letter back), and they said that they're not interested which I didn't think were fair, coz at the end of the day we were thinking about Burnley, making more money for Burnley, and then they just turned round and said we don't care." (Ted, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

Unlike the examples of resistance of the "chav gangs" in chapter 5, Ted and his friends understand how the formal channels of political participation work in Burnley. They understand that writing in petitions is a way of communicating one's opinion and wishes. Moreover, they understand that money is always a good argument which they have used in their letter as well. At the same time, they are not as disillusioned yet about

the lack of response from the council as the chavs are. This example also shows that people use the private to connect to the public. Private lifestyles have become political due to the limiting resolution of the political. Hitzler and Pfadenhauer (1998; 1999) have shown this through the example of techno as a political movement of a “different” kind. Its followers feel that they have different norms and values than the social majority which at the same time apply for a considerable amount of people who enjoy to get together for techno parties which is for example supported through their slogan “we are one different family”. In consequence, they try to establish spaces in which they can live their norms and values, such as the institutionalization of the Love Parade in Berlin, for example; the equivalent to this would have been the ice rink for the goths of Burnley.

Young white men from both towns usually connected strongly with the topic, either strongly rejecting the topic or strongly engaging with it. One young white man from Burnley admitted to be confused by the topic when questioned whether he thought of himself as a political person:

GK: “Do you think you are a political person?”

Ted: “No!”

GK: “Why not?”

Ted: “I’d rather not get involved with politics, I confuse myself anyway
[giggles]”

GK: “So...”

Ted: “...it’d confuse me more!”

GK: “So what do you think politics is, politics, what do you think it is?
What does it mean, what is politics?”

Ted: “Politics to me means like helping to try and run the country, but that (*unclear*) confuse me if I get involved with politics, so I’d rather leave it to people who know what they’re doing.”

(Ted, Burnley, 13.12.2005, archive GK)

So the example of the ice rink for Burnley's goths is another example for the importance of the private for the engagement in public matters. Political practices are not universally inclusive but they are always strongly connected to people's life-style. The state's attempts to make young people participate more in politics ignore this as the young person is modelled on the ideal citizen who has a middle-class, mainstream life-style. And the same is the case for class as life-styles show a correlation with class. The ideal citizen is middle-class so that the young working-class man does not feel included by the state's means of citizen communication.

6.8. Political apolitical *Badfellas*⁴⁰: political extremism

Finally, I would like to deal with some sensitive data collected on a young man with a lower middle class/upper working class background from Harrogate called Peter who holds a few far-right political views. This data strengthens my argument that the state only wants to induce certain forms of political participation amongst its citizens which should be underpinned by mainstream middle class norms and values. I hesitate to give individuals who hold far-right views the acknowledgement of a subcultural group because acknowledgment can potentially mean a tacit agreement. However, I believe that it is important for my argument to acknowledge the logic of thinking of a young lower-middle class man. In fact, far-right ideology has been identified as a frequently occurring part of the rite of passage amongst some young men (Kimmel 2007) and hence should be considered and taken seriously, if only as a way of thinking that occurs in the difficult time of adolescence that most young men grow out of eventually. The lack of working class jobs in a de-industrialized Britain means that young working class men (assuming that today's lower middle

⁴⁰ "Badfellas" is the title of Winlow's (2001) book on changing masculinities in the de-industrialised northeast of England in which he argues that being a badfella has become a new career for working class young men.

class used to be part of the working class in the past) do not “learn to labour” (Willis 1977) anymore.

I have to say that he expressed them to me very much towards the end of the interview when he clearly felt safe to express these views without being judged by me. By no means did he hold those views upfront to me. Being questioned about whether he thought of himself as a political person, Peter had a good response which did not let him look like it was his choice not to be interested in politics instead of showing that he did not have the knowledge:

“I think, views, I think the way government uh governs the world affects me but I wouldn’t sort of say I was political, no. Obviously things, everyone, everyone is political, do you know what I mean, someone complains about the price of 20 fags, do you know what I mean, that’s politics. If someone complains about the traffic jam, you know what I mean, that’s politics. End of the day, no one can say they are not political because whatever anybody does every day is affected by the government, so whenever anybody says they are not political they blatantly are but (they don’t) realize so I’d say I’m a political person, yeah. But I’m not like a Tory (boy) or anything, you know, I wouldn’t be that interested in it.” (Peter, Harrogate, 01.09.2006, archive GK)

His response clearly shows that young people are not alienated from politics. He is very aware of the impact politics has on his everyday life. However, he argues that it does not interest him enough to participate more actively. Only when questioned further whether he would actively support a party he starts ridiculing and thus indicating that this is not his comfortable area of interaction:

GK: “You are not like sort of support-, like for a particular party or something?”

Peter: “No, I wouldn’t. I suppose I wouldn’t vote for anyone but I’d vote for the Raving Green Mental Looney party (*chuckles*) as far as I’m concerned, do you know what I mean?”

GK: "The what? The Raving..."

Peter: "...Looney party."

GK: "Ok. Do you actually vote in elections?"

Peter: "No, I have never voted."

GK: "And never had the idea of, maybe I'm gonna go and vote or something?"

Peter: "I would do, yeah. I don't think I'm on the electoral register really."
(Peter, Harrogate, 01.09.2006, archive GK)

It also becomes clear that it is not very important to Peter to be able to vote. He argues, however, that it is a matter of age, that he is too young to have engaged with politics properly. Even though he jokes about voting for the Monster Raving Loony Party, a joke party from the past, he, in fact, has more tendencies towards the far right of the political spectrum which will only become obvious later on towards the end of the interview. This is his response to the question if he knew which party he would vote for if there were general elections now:

"I suppose I, I wouldn't be sure but if I, if I sort of sat down and looked into it, I'd have a good idea of it, you know I won't put that much time or effort into it, so. I might do when I'm older but I'm only 20 years. So."
(Peter, Harrogate, 01.09.2006, archive GK)

What needs to be said here is that Peter is a young man outside of education and work. He currently had a court sentence pending and had been sent to prison before, an experience that has left some deep marks on his young life because he felt very intimidated being in an adult prison. He is a good example for the "badfellas", i.e. the new masculinities that Winlow (2001) talks about in his book. Because of de-industrialisation, young working class men, who largely make up the lower middle class today, have to find new identities outside their class. Involvement in crime seems to replace the lost pride in being working class. The state does not do much for Peter at the moment so why should he be interested in political parties and voting? Still, when questioned about the likelihood of

big parties winning elections Peter shows that he is quite well informed and aware of the problem of the majority voting system in Britain and that it is something that he finds frustrating:

Peter: “You know one of them is gonna win so it’s either fucking the Tory party or the fucking LibDems or whatever, the Conservative party.”

GK: “Or Labour? Labour is in power?”

Peter: “Or Labour, yeah, Labour, obviously it’s gonna be one of them, do you know what I mean? No outsiders are ever gonna win. They might get seats and that, do you know what I mean, in Parliament, a few more seats, but they are never ever gonna like get anything like (*unclear*).”

(Peter, Harrogate, 01.09.2006, archive GK)

That Peter is the perfect example of the “political apolitical person” becomes clear from these interview sections and towards the end of the interview when good rapport between interviewer and interviewee had been established. Only at the end of the interview Peter hesitatingly expresses interest in far-right politics based on some racist views – something that will have something to do with his young age and search for new masculinities as a “badfella” (Winlow 2001) because clearly, he is fascinated by the display of masculinity of far-right parties. He tells me about a man he knows who follows the local patriotic dress-code of North Yorkshire men supporting the far-right, who has a shaved head and tattoos saying “North Yorkshire till I die” and the image of the pit-bull dog. Moreover, Peter reproduces populist discourses on foreign low-skilled workers taking the jobs of the English in the hospitality industry in Harrogate and surrounding areas.

6.9. The problem with “rocking the boat”

The ethnographic examples in this chapter show that the state understands only certain notions with political participation which is mainly economic participation. When the state talks about active citizenship it is referring to

active consumers: individuals, who are economically active, hold a job, pay taxes and consume as part of a mainstream culture of consumption. Through social capital individuals' positions in the social field are predetermined which means in consequence that they can only participate politically in certain political groups. This is explored through the example of the Burnley "chav gang" and the Burnley youth council. The social background of young people determines their choice of forms of political participation. For the "chav gang" member it does not make sense to learn formal forms of political participation as he does not have access to formal political spaces in the first place. He has to heavily rely on informal notions in order to survive in the deprived local neighbourhood. Through the notion of the anti-politics machine I show how the state tries to depoliticize young people by training them in bureaucratic procedures. Real local political community activism is only encouraged if it conforms to bureaucratic state procedures. The example of the ice rink for the Burnley goths shows that middle class young people have the knowledge of the forms of political participation that is understood by the state. They have not become disillusioned that the state will not listen to them like the "chav gang" has. Anti-feminism is another notion that suggests that young women have been depoliticized by encouraging their identity as consumers instead of political citizens. Through communication channels like the media the state encourages the image of the economically active woman that at the same time refrains from making dominant claims in terms of gender relationships. Neo-liberal citizenship, hence, is of a gendered nature. The neoliberal female citizens holds down a full time job but at the same time is well groomed and has children in a relationship with traditional roles in terms of male dominance and female subordination, not just in the private but also in the public. Feminism has been turned into a stigma for femininity so that the visible claims-making political female is de-feminized and stigmatized and has become the modern witch. The

examples of the Henge Warriors and the far-right bedfella given for the impact of life-style politics on people's willingness to participate in meaningful forms of politics also show that the state is not interested in these kinds of forms of political participation as they do not fit into the ideal type of citizenship participation that the state has.

Conclusion

This PhD has examined notions of “political participation” and “political alienation” through the methods of ethnography and by deploying an anthropological framework. It has challenged dominant views of the construction of the state and contested the nature and purpose of political participation, as defined by theorists such as Putnam (2000). The data presented here suggests that “political alienation” is an ill defined term and is invariably connected to detachment from the formal democratic process. The voices heard and the practices described in the thesis indicate that political alienation is overstated and that political expressions in the widest sense are part and parcel of everyday lives for the participants in the study. The thesis has followed an interdisciplinary approach, drawing across different social science disciplines and utilizing an ethnographic method. For this PhD, local ethnographic long-term research was conducted in two northern English towns in order to collect information on what really matters to ordinary people in their everyday local lives, and how relevant and accessible local political practices are to them.

The key details and the most prescient issues raised in this thesis are perhaps located in and on the margins. This is where the crux of the matter lies as the margins are often hard to reach, for the state as well as for the researcher. People living on the margins are the ones who are seen to be not participating properly in civic and political life; they are the ones that are “hard-to-reach” for the state - but likewise for the researcher. Hence, I have taken an approach that might seem “novel” in the socio-political sciences, but is considered customary in anthropology. The bottom up approach developed here starts from the perspective of the local people “on the margins” of society. I was interested primarily in what was important and relevant to them, and, secondly, how this articulates and disconnects

with the state and formal political practices. In the analysis I cross-referenced and triangulated my data with theory across several disciplines in order to create a cohesive and meaningful story of people's political participation on the margins that captures a broad range of practices and experiences.

Based on anthropological research methodology including the capitalization on the researcher's personal identity (ethnicity, nationality, gender) it has been possible to gather reliable data from "hard-to-reach" groups. This results from the establishing of trusting, lasting face-to-face relationships with the research participants which included engaging in and with their local lives on a daily basis and a fully overt research approach. This transparency also led to the on-going negotiation of my research project with the research participants. I fully support this approach as the most ethical, even though it might also be the most challenging and tiring due to on-going challenges, questions and the continuous building and maintaining of trust. My intention has been to give the otherwise marginal voices of my research participants and, in so doing, to raise the pitch of discussions about what political participation actually means in contemporary Britain.

1. Formal and informal forms of political participation

The state operates through the formal political participation of its citizenry providing a definition for recognized formal participation in civic and political life. The formal modes of political participation are voting, party membership and so on. Conformity to laws, civic participation and community activism, however, are also understood by the state as political participation. Through the creation of "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991 [1983]) the state enforces these legitimized forms of political participation. These forms of participation are based on hegemonic values

relating to the dominant class. Because of this, the state cannot reach all groups. Marginal groups are outside the hegemonic discourses and cannot necessarily identify with the norms and values of the dominant class on which the legitimized forms of political participation are based. These groups do not feel part of the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991 [1983]) of the state. They are outside any existing formal social and political networks; hence they reject the forms of political participation offered by the state.

The only attention given to these marginal groups by the state is through the social policy of deviance control. This is reflected in the penal code affecting young people such as anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), as well as community integration policies such as community cohesion. Policies to reach young people or ethnic minorities tend to identify community leaders that do not necessarily have community recognition for representation. A common assumption made in state policies is, however, that minority groups are homogenous and their needs can be universally addressed through state-identified representatives. In fact state policies tend to address “the public” as a homogenous group yet nation-states are no more homogenous than are marginal groups. As the findings of the thesis indicate there are a range of “publics” that have diverse and often competing outlooks, needs and political priorities.

“Gangland” (Thrasher 1936 [1927]) provides a clear warning of what happens when the state fails to reach its citizens. The ‘Gangland’ thesis remains applicable in the UK today as many still find themselves on the margins of administrative responsibilities. They are on the margins because most state social aid no longer reaches them and social agencies fail to hear them. Benefits and health services are only provided for them to a small degree. For example, if a citizen cannot provide a permanent address, they

become excluded from services such as the provision of certain prescribed drugs. Social benefits are only provided if the person makes an effort to look for work. Furthermore, 'Gangland' is found geographically on the margins, not just socially. It is found in the abandoned parts of the city, in former industrial areas or socially deprived neighbourhoods. Finally, it is found on the margins of the legal economy. Often, 'Gangland's' inhabitants cannot find legitimate income and are deprived of social benefits so that they have to turn to informal economies such as drug dealing. As a consequence, people on the margins will try to institutionalize their informal groups outside the legitimized practices of citizen participation. The question to be asked then is what constitutes informal participation when citizens have abandoned the modes of formal participation? A key practice is the resistance that people develop outside formal state processes by using group solidarity and creative networks as informal forms of community participation.

The group of young British Bangladeshi men - the "Asian gang" engage actively in public community activism. With their youth work they affect the politics of the youth and community work services in Burnley. Thus, they actually have a direct impact on both life in the locale and the state. Initially, the state was interested in cooperating with them because it had an urgent interest to integrate young Asian Muslim men better into British society after the 2001 mill town riots. In the aftermath, by consulting community leaders the state skillfully labeled the riots as an outcome of a failure of integration, rather than the outcome of economic decline within deprived communities. The community cohesion agenda became established, attempting to pressurize communities into changing their behaviour that the state labeled as ethnic segregation. The group of young Asian Muslim men began to resist the state's policies and practices because they were contrary to their local group solidarity cultural practices that

enabled them to be cohesive and protected against racism and deprivation. Being the “Asian gang” (Alexander 2000; 2004) is important for the work of the group because being a ‘cool place’ is their key attraction (Skelton and Valentine 1998). Moreover, their group is so effective because they work and act “streetwise” (Anderson 1990) according to the code of the street which means that they are highly accepted by the local youth. Through the group’s resistance to the state and their creative attempts to get new funding, the young Asian men secured the continuation of their youth work and, thus, their impact on the political agenda of youth and community services in Burnley. They remain positioned inside the political arena of Burnley and have continuously been consulted as community leaders by local councilors and politicians external to the town.

There are different characteristics of informal political participation which together comprise a typology of political participation. These are gender, class and ethnicity specific and often connect with formal participation but in a creative way, a way that the state has not intended. The women participants in the study clearly have a different way of connecting to politics than do the men. Women’s political participation is often more individualized or belongs to private spaces, whereas the men enjoy being political in a public way - a way that makes them visible. The Pakistani women from the Lunch Club find it inappropriate for women to take part in formal politics by going to public political meetings. They would never consider standing for the office of councilor, for example. Often they would not consider themselves to be very political at all because they feel too ill-informed but aim to get more information. At the same time they feel that their meetings are important and valuable. They have a highly integrative impact because the women occupy and develop a space where they can discuss the contradictory norms and values from the two cultures

in which they live. The negotiated social issues are then taken back into their families where they are dispersed through a translation space.

“Chav gang” members have a working class background and spend their time living and using the space of ‘Gangland’. Being in a “chav gang” is their way of demonstrating group solidarity in the light of the state having withdrawn from their local areas. Young Council members and the members of the Henge Warriors have a middle class background and stay clear of ‘Gangland’. They live in middle class areas and interact with the state through formal political practices. Youth Council members come to regular meetings with youth workers, and the Henge Warriors campaign against local stone quarrying by writing petitions and collecting signatures. These strategies are used by people in Burnley in order to create groups for other types of solidarity than the ones offered by the state. Hence, the Pakistani women produce a translation space and the young Asian men become the “Asian gang” in order to do so. Individuals’ strategies are used for social participation. Consumption is an accepted mainstream social participation used instead of political participation in order to gain conformity with the social majority (the dominant class).

Different political arenas require different forms of political participation. Formal political arenas are the parliament, the council, public consultation, or community cohesion activities. Informal political arenas are the street in the case of the “chav gang”, or the Pakistani women’s meetings of the Lunch Club, which is a semi-private space. To engage in these different arenas requires a certain habitus (Bourdieu 1998; 2000 [1984]) for each arena as well as certain forms of capital, cultural and social. One important example is terminology. The state uses different terminology from that in communities. While a “chav gang” member talks about the inside and outside of an area, state officials talk about local areas and

neighbourhoods, the town centre and streets connecting the centre with other areas. The state requires ‘politically correct’ language to be used in youth work. The language of the “Asian gang” however is rooted in their community and their locale. Consequently, the “Asian gang” resist and reject ‘politically correct’ language.

That political participation is a matter of class is typified by the process by which some young men become “college boys” (Foote Whyte 1993 [1943]), whereas others become “corner boys” (*ibid.*). As discussed in earlier chapters similar distinctions can be seen in Burnley and Harrogate. Some young men become members of a “chav gang”, whilst others join the Youth Council or engage in other formal forms of political participation, such as the group of Henge Warriors in Harrogate.

2. Sociology of the underdog

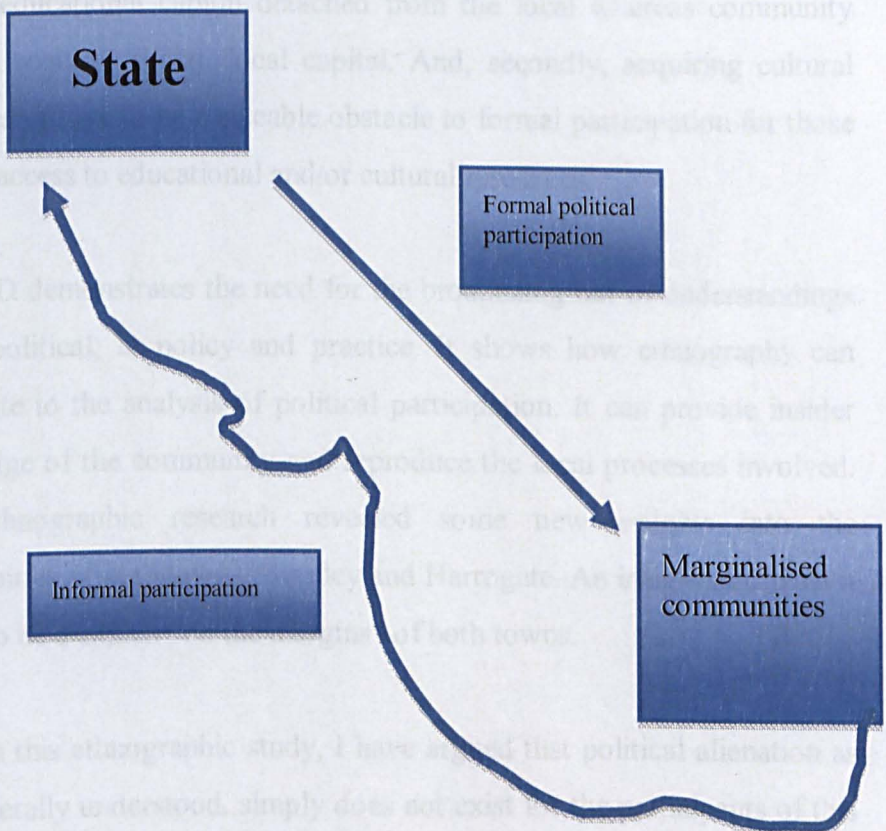
My PhD takes the approach of understanding the logics and social life-worlds of my research participants and contributes to the “sociology of the underdog” literature. I was interested in their views in politics and in what is relevant to them in their everyday lives. Hence, my approach advances the “sociology of the underdog” literature as first established by the Chicago School in the 1920s led by Robert E. Park (Park *et al.* 1968 [1925]). Further contributions to this literature of resistance were made by studies on the “Ghetto” and the “Hobo” conducted by Wirth (1956 [1928]) and Anderson (1961 [1923]) respectively. Although informed by this tradition of observing and narrating the everyday lives of marginalized individuals I followed more the trajectory set by Foote White (1993 [1943]) and Thrasher (1936 [1927]). I have sought to give importance to both the existence and the actions of gangs, applying Foote Whyte and Thrasher’s theory of youth gangs in Chicago in the 1920s to “chav gangs” in Burnley and Harrogate in the early 21st century. Similar to the practices

of marginalized young men in the urban U.S. 90 years ago, today's "chav gangs" in Britain are cohesive social formations that act politically in the "inside and outside" of places; their local neighbourhoods and bordering areas. They are not politically alienated from society; rather they practice forms of resistance to make political claims not only to local agencies but to society as a whole.

Community activism and civic engagement take a different nature on the margins than in the centre of society. Demonstrating this point, the theoretical work of the Chicago School was advanced and augmented by the Birmingham School at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1960s to 1980s. The local struggle for resources and meaning for young working class men has been described by Willis (1981 [1990]) in "Learning to Labour" and Robins and Cohen (1978) in "Knuckle Sandwich". The claims-making of the "chav gang" follows this British working class tradition of resisting education and the state. The lack of understanding for and the politicization and criminalization of their subcultural practices by the media is still the same than in the British 1960s and 70s (Robins and Cohen 1978, Hebdige 1979). Subcultural practices of ethnic minority groups have been the focus of the Birmingham School in the 1980s too in the work "The Empire Strikes Back" (CCCS Collective 1982). The new trajectory today, however, is that South Asian young men have developed into the "Asian gang" (Alexander 2000; 2004) by adopting the British working class tradition of community activism. The chapter of the "Asian gang", thus, is about the 'making of the *post-colonial* working class', to speak with E.P. Thompson (1980 [1963]), who are displaying a new Creole form of post-colonial working class anger through which they gain recognition and new political agency.

3. Application

My work demonstrates the need for the broadening out of understandings of the political, in policy and practice. The following graph suggests a way of understanding the dynamic between the state and marginalized groups. The state imposes legitimate forms of political participation on various social groups but for the reasons discussed, those groups prefer informal forms of engagement and participation through which they relate to the state. These informal forms can cause conflict, but they are always part of processes of sociation (Vergesellschaftung) (Simmel 1955). Hence, marginalized individuals do have a political impact on how societies and states are organized.



The state does use discursive practices of inclusive participation but it does not reach all individuals. The ways in which individuals connect to legitimate/formal forms of political participation depends on the forms of capital and notions of distinctions that individuals can draw upon. This in turn leads to membership of particular social groups able to access and interact in certain social and political fields. Through cultural conventions (and spatial organization of the exertion of power) individuals are usually able to identify and participate in spaces and forms of (political) participation. The research demonstrates that community activism and political participation require different forms of social capital and cannot be understood as belonging to the same category. Evidence for this is based on two counter-arguments. Firstly, political participation requires cultural/educational capital detached from the local whereas community activism requires social, local capital. And, secondly, acquiring cultural capital can prove to be a sizeable obstacle to formal participation for those lacking access to educational and/or cultural resources.

This PhD demonstrates the need for the broadening out of understandings of the political, in policy and practice. It shows how ethnography can contribute to the analysis of political participation. It can provide insider knowledge of the community and reproduce the local processes involved. This ethnographic research revealed some new insights into the communities of both towns, Burnley and Harrogate. An insight into what it means to be a citizen “on the margins” of both towns.

Through this ethnographic study, I have argued that political alienation as it is generally understood, simply does not exist for the participants of this study. Instead there are different types of political participation, formal and informal. There are a large variety of informal forms of political participation that are used creatively by marginalized groups. As a result,

this ethnographic study delivers data that enables sensitive recognition of different forms of social and political participation that function as processes of sociation (translated from German *Vergesellschaftung*) (Simmel 1955). Ethnography is a research method that has the flexibility to analyse different contexts and places. To this end, the ethnographic approach made it possible for this study to observe and engage with diverse social groups in different parts of communities and in different towns in order to scrutinize the nature of both formal and informal forms of political participation.

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