From Diasporas to Multi-Locality:
Writing British Asian Cities

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Working Paper

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Honey

she doesn't get cabs often
she prefers the anonymity of the bus

............... 
the driver slits the silence
with a question
kidar kay rehnay vaallayho?
[Where do you live/ come from?]
(Shamshad Khan 2007: 37, extract]

This short extract from the poem Honey, from the Manchester based poet Shamshad Khan forms part of her first published selection of poetry, Meglomaniac. It was also performed at the (Greater) Manchester British Asian Cities event held at the (then) Indus 5 restaurant in Longsight. The taxi driver in the narrative asks the female passenger 'Where do you live/ come from' in Urdu and provides the opening of the first section of a poem which ends:

Pakistan's a big place
England's a big place
but the world
is a small one
(2007: 39)

The concerns expressed in this poem enable us to think about the space of the Asian city as one in tension between the local and the global. What authors have called the glocal (Eade, 1997) or the fragility of the local (Appadurai 1996). In Shamshad's poem Manchester is paradoxically referenced by the Pakistani nature of the taxi driver, who might by Somalian in South East London, or Sikh in Birmingham. But of course in reality, it is our own social networks, our own 'world' which is a small one and locates us back into the city. It is perhaps the privilege of writing which enables these kinds of movements with relatively low costs. In examining the writings that create the narrative of British Asian Manchester the interconnections between personal stories, institutional documentation and transnational flows persist as key themes.

The historiography of Manchester's urban formation is intimately tied in with the growth of empire and the global interconnections that this fostered. Not only were commodities circulating through this system but as Visram (2002) has shown this was also the period of the first significant South Asian presence in Britain. While towns like Oldham and Rochdale were narrativised as the centres of industrial production (Gurr and Hunt, 1989) Manchester is perceived of as the headquarters of finance capital and the buying and selling of cotton (R. Mc Neil and M. Nevell 2000 ). Indeed, as part of the nexus of the tourism industry and popular history, accounts of Manchester write the city in varied and often contradictory terms, from the city of cotton to the heartland of working class struggle. Indeed, the local history unit at the
Manchester City library boasts an introductory book list about the city which comprises of eighty volumes. However, one aspect of this story which is uniformly neglected is the role of migrant labour. At the heart of the formation of Manchester and Liverpool, the major urban areas of the North West of England is the movement of peoples. Pnina Werbner's (1990) book on Pakistani migration to Manchester, *The Migration Process*, most usefully provides a migration history to Manchester which offers a linear trajectory from the Irish, to the Jews to post-war new commonwealth migration. To some extent this kind of narrative stands in contrast to the local history accounts which focus much more on place than on people.

The general writing about the history of Manchester also reflects the various genres of writing that will be explored in this chapter. The central role of the local state in generating administrative and other forms of writing, through departments such as tourism and heritage, also provides publishing and printing opportunities for local histories, as well as many other forms of writing. Each local authority department is engaged in an ongoing writing of the city within which the South Asian presence is either explicitly present or embedded within the wider population. Alongside all of the other accounts of cities present in this volume, a certain privileging of the local state emerges when considering writing about British Asians and the city. This is perhaps due to the fact that the infrastructure required for publishing is beyond the reach of minorities at the local level. Indeed, one of the arguments developed in this chapter relates to the trans-local nature of British South Asian writing, in contrast to writings about the British Asian city. Cultural production in the form of writing and media in English and vernacular languages often operate at the interface between the state (local and national) and autonomous, often transnational, production. At the one end national daily Urdu newspapers such at the Daily Jang, are entirely private enterprises, but do rely in their English production on advertisements from the state. At the other side are publishing houses like Manchester based Suitcase, which are privately owned but rely on public funding for their productions. In considering these different spheres of production of writing and actual texts themselves, competing and overlapping versions of what the British Asian city constitutes emerge.

Whilst the state tends to have some role in the various genres of writing the Asian city at the level of production, another aspect that is examined in this chapter is the way in which distinct genres of writing overlap when it comes to the British Asian presence. A useful way of understanding this is through the concept of ‘narrative harmony’. In examining local racist expressions and contestations of community within the Isle of Dogs at a time of an active British National Party presence, Back and Keith (1999) observed the existence of what they termed “narrative harmony”, as the discourses proffered by the BNP entered into synergy with local debates around belonging and entitlement. This notion of ‘narrative harmony’ is an interesting concept that enables a connection between localized events and their broader resonance. In applying this concept to writing about the city, narrative harmony can be taken literally to demonstrate how, across genres, a focus on a particular theme or a trope emerges that comes to be metonymic for Asian-ness in the city. In cityscapes this is often spatial. For Manchester, it is the area of Rusholme and in
particular Wilmslow Road, or the Curry Mile as it is colloquially referred to, which consistently appears in different narratives to signify Manchester's Asian presence. Indeed, the 'Curry Mile' makes an appearance in all of the different genres of writing which are considered in this chapter in various forms and guises.

Institutional Narratives

One of the ways in which we come to know whether an urban space is a 'British Asian City' is through the statistical information that comes to numerically write the city. Collection of demographic information about Britain's population began in 1801 as a response to the fears of overpopulation and food shortages (Statistics.gov, 2001) and has taken place since at ten yearly intervals. The intimate linkage between knowledge about the population and governance has subsequently shaped the growth of the Census and the questions that are asked. The goal of the census, as outlined in the Census Act of 1920, is to “obtain statistical information with a view to ascertaining the social and civil condition of the population” (Graham and Waterman 2005: 89).

It was in the 1970s that the debate about asking a question on race/ethnicity began with the recognition that the question about country of birth of respondent was not sufficient to capture the increasing number of British born people from the former colonies. The inclusion of a question was actively resisted by the left of the Labour party as well as anti-racist campaigners, who saw it as a means of exerting restrictions on an already targeted population. The same debates resurfaced in the lead up to the 1991 census and indeed the only justification given for the inclusion of an ethnicity question comes in the form of a select committee report: “The object of asking ethnic questions is, in conjunction with other indicators of general disadvantage, to assist Government and local authorities to identify and work against all aspects of racial disadvantage and racial discrimination” (House of Commons Select Committee on Home Affairs Report, HC 33_1, p. ix, as quoted in Ballard 1997: 14). It is not so much the allusion to racial discrimination that is important in this quote, but rather the central role given to local government in the implementation of policies concerned with minority ethnic groups. Subsequently, the 2001 Census adopted for the inclusion of a question about religion, something that was prevalent for the North of Ireland, but not for the other parts of the UK. The proposals for the 2011 Census are to include questions on; national identity, main language use, English proficiency, citizenship. In each of these cases, it is clear that more information is being gathered about minorities, rather than the majority. The main rationale again being for purposes of planning provision around language provision and services, though this does not provide rationale for the inclusion of a question about national identity.

Demographic data about a population in a particular area of governance often provides the foundation upon which claims are made about the nature of urban spaces. Since the 2001 Census there has been the recurrence of a theme about the 'non-white' city. This was most discussed in the British Asian Cities workshop held in Leicester, which has been the target for much of this discourse. Statistics and numerical representations of the city come to the fore in these debates. In the wake of the 1991 Census, ethno-national categories to describe the British Asian
population became normative media discourse in discussions of urban spaces. So places like Leicester and Birmingham will become majority non-white by 2010 according to media analysis supported by a statistical logic. Though this discourse on non-whiteness, to a large extent, is a re-inscription of the fears about being ‘swamped’ which dominated race discourse in the early 1980s. The pertinent question arises about how ‘the numbers game’ changes when considering places like Manchester, which does not produce such sensational statistics. In 1971 the number of those living in Manchester born in India was 2879 (0.5% of Manchester residents) and the number of those born in Pakistan was 3388 (0.6% of Manchester residents), by 1981 those born in India had actually decreased for Indians to 2742 (0.6% of Manchester population) and increased for Pakistanis to 4975 (1.1% of Manchester residents) and for the first time Bangladeshis appear on the record at 607 (0.1% of Manchester residents). Though the 1981 figures do not include those born in Britain so to some extent are underestimates of the actual population. In 1991 for the first time, ethnicity was recorded to account for those born in Britain. Once again the figures are relatively low with those of Indian origin recorded as : 4432 (1.1%); Pakistani heritage as 15371 (3.8%); and Bangladeshi origin at 1997 (0.5%). It is perhaps more important to take into account the way in which Manchester is central to the region as a whole and this is also true for the South Asian population. When taking into account the ten local authorities of the Greater Manchester area, which includes independent centres of British Asian populations in places like Oldham and Rochdale, then the significance of Manchester becomes easier to understand, nonetheless remains statistically not as important as Birmingham or Bradford.

Statistical narratives of the city tie in with local government discourse and policies about the population but are also deeply influenced by national concerns. The enumeration of religion in the 2001 Census, creates a majority of Muslims amongst the minorities of Manchester. So while the combined South Asian population at Census 2001 was 32603 (8.3% Manchester residents) The Muslim population (which included non-South Asians) was 9.1 % of the population (35746 residents). The presence of a question about religion and the overall serious implications of statistical understandings are starkly illustrated when one looks at the Government agenda on tackling violent extremism, which determines which areas get funding on the basis of numbers of Muslims present. The Preventing Violent Extremism funding stream is predicated on population statistics:

Our aim is to develop resilient British Muslim communities as part of our response to this threat. The fund will therefore be focused on local authorities with sizeable Muslim communities. As a starting point, authorities with populations of 5% or more should be considered for funding. (DCLG, 2007: 6)

Writing the British Asian city in terms of numbers ties in with multiple policy discourses. In this context, the disciplining arm of the state deploys population narratives to determine a particular type of community: Muslim. It is these same demographics that tie into other discourses, such as that of delivering education. In the Manchester British Asian cities event, representative of the local authority education department and members of the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education debated the way in which religious education was taught. Perhaps crucially, there was a recognition in the way that the multiplicity within the
traditions does not get presented in the teaching curriculum. Thus the categorisation of religion that is offered by the Census of Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Buddhist, Christian etc. does not fully reflect the lived diversity of those traditions in the UK. This is similar to the criticism of the ethnicity question by anthropologists following the 1991 Census (see Ballard, 1996).

The shift from viewing migrant groups and their diasporas in ethnic to religious terms is not just present in the workings of the state but can be seen in academic accounts also. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the scholarship of Pnina Werbner, who has written three volumes, based on over thirty years of study from the 1970s onwards, of a group of Pakistani families in Manchester. Werbner’s first book, *The Migration Process: Capital, Gifts and Offerings Among British Pakistanis*, is a finely honed ethnography of a small group of Punjabi Pakistani entrepreneurial families in Manchester. Dense in its detail and anthropological theory, the book presents the perfectly bounded lives of migrants in the context of inner city Manchester. The City here is presented as one of immigration, flux and movement:

> Manchester has been a city of immigrants since its emergence as a great industrial metropolis at the end of the eighteenth century....As a city in transition, nineteenth century Manchester encapsulated the contradiction of its age (Werbner, 1990: 11)

The settlement of Pakistani Punjabi migrants fits into this narrative well and the emergence of an enterprise culture amongst these Asian men provides continuity with immigrants before them. In the second part of the book, the specificity of Manchester is lost as we enter the domestic terrain and the lives of females and families is explored. It is only in the final section where public events involving interaction with the local state and MPs is described that the city re-emerges. In the second text *Imagined Diasporas amongst Manchester Muslims: The Public Performance of Pakistani Transnational Identity Politics* much more attention is paid to a public sphere, but the city remains largely mute. Indeed, the many spaces described by Werbner, of the Mosque, the fundraiser and the demonstration could be in any city of England or even Europe. This sense of the absent city finds its logical conclusion in the volume *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult* where encounters in Manchester take Werbner to North West Pakistan and to the study of a sufi lodge. The transnational linkages that connect the shrine to the UK are emphasised, but by now Manchester merges into a melange of British Asian Cities; Bradford, Birmingham etc. What is consistent in Werbner’s anthropology is the people under study in contrast to the places in which they live.

One thematic common ground shared by local state and academic accounts is the recurrent presence of Wilmslow Road and Rusholme as symbolic of the South Asian presence. Manchester City Councils' vision for the urban, is set out in its Agenda 2010 documentation:

> Manchester is a modern and dynamic city, which celebrates its rich mixture of origins, cultures, religions, languages and customs. It is a city where the talents of all sections of the community are recognised within a fair and just society, without racial discrimination, harassment and violence. And where employment and economic prosperity are on the same high standard
throughout all of Manchester’s communities, regardless of ethnicity. (Agenda 2010 Charter pg. 1)

Here the diversity of the City is encompassed within a catch all diversity speak, in which any specificity is contained by ‘mixture’ and equality. In contrast the City Council’s website for visitors to Manchester emphasises culinary distinction:

*Taste Manchester*
You can eat your way around the World in Manchester, sampling everything from Armenian to Australian to African. There are the sights and smells of Chinatown and Rusholme’s Curry Mile, up market and traditional takes on Italian, Spanish and French, and a host of International restaurants offering gourmet global fare

*The Curry Mile*
A couple of miles out of the City Centre is Rusholme, where bright neon restaurant signs bustle for attention along the lengthy strip. Names to look out for include Shaandaar Restaurant and Spicy Hut, which offers Pakistani specials. (http://www.visitmanchester.com/)

The City is being written about here in terms of the Council’s role to provide leadership in terms of ‘diversity’ and equality issues, whilst also servicing the tourist industry. Here the British Asian city only appears as it services the demands of various aspects of the local state. This takes place despite the relatively low population of British Asian settlers, which at 22.7% (2001 Census) is considerably lower than the adjacent Longsight (34.5%) ward. Here a contrast between the national state’s assumed usage of demographics for planning and governance contrasts with the actual local state’s requirement for projecting itself as a multicultural space.

Academic writing on Manchester provides further evidence of the way that Wilmslow Road is central to constructions of Asian Manchester. The following extract is from a vignette on the road in the volume *A Post Colonial People South Asians In Britain*:

The ‘Curry Mile’, which occupies a half-mile stretch of Wilmslow Road, is one of the most popular areas of Manchester among locals and visitors alike. A wander down Wilmslow Road reveals a bustling, polycultural area filled with take-aways, grocers, boutiques and various other shops catering to Asian, Arabic and white clientele amongst others. However, its most striking feature, for which it has earned its nickname, is the massive concentration of ‘Indian’ restaurants. (Kirmani, 2006: 327)

As an iconic site, the 'Indian restaurant' ties into discourses about racism, which have been explored in my own article on food and British South Asians, *The Political Economy of the Samosa*.

....the British Asian press regularly reports on the hostility and racist vandalism which also greets such venues, with headlines such as: ‘Race hate rises to the top of the menu’ (Eastern Eye, 3 October, 1997). The cultural producer and commentator Jatinder Verma, quoted in Alibhai-Brown
(2001:110), states the conundrum clearly: ‘I do not think imaginatively we have become multicultural. I think in diet we have, absolutely, but I don’t think that has translated from our stomachs to our brains yet’. (Kalra, 2004:24)

Wilmslow Road is then just one of the many ‘Curry Miles’ that are sites of interaction between majorities and minorities. These are mostly benign but can also be hostile. One of the particularities of Wilmslow Road is its role during the annual Muslim Eid festivals. During these periods the road becomes the congregation point for young men performing masculinity. Local mainstream media regularly reports on Eid, sometimes in celebration at others in terms of nuisance to residents or police harassment:

_Eid patrols stepped up_

TWO hundred officers will police this weekend’s Eid celebrations in Manchester - but the days of serious trouble are long gone, according to community leaders.

The Muslim celebrations to mark the end of a month of fasting will attract 10,000 people from all over the country to Rusholme tonight and tomorrow night.

But a combination of tough action on trouble-makers during previous Eid celebrations and the greater numbers of young families taking part means the atmosphere of the event has changed for the better, say police and community leaders.

(Manchester Evening News John Scheerhout p.1 12/10/2007)

In this media article the context for this current period of celebration is the unwritten contrast to previous periods of trouble. These have been documented in the academic text, _Critique of Exotica_ by, then, Manchester based academic, John Hutnyk:

It was 1996 that Amer Rafique, a 21 year old part-time waiter lost his eye to police brutality on Eid. That this incident happened at all seems almost unsurprising given the long, long list of violence against black people at the hands of the police in the UK. That it occurred during Eid in Manchester us also unsurprising given regular excessive over-policing of celebrations in Rusholme, an area with a long-established Asian commercial and residential presence......This area is an attraction to a wide cross-section of communities, and as such deserves greater attention than is often afforded it by the mass media, which only zeros in on the possibility of a riot story after such incidents...

Rusholme is as ‘mutlicultural’ as any area can be in Britain (Hutnyk, 2000: 173-175)

This recounting of Amer Rafique’s case also tells of the protests in Rusholme against the police and squarely locates his story in the local as well as the national. Other academic accounts have, however, neglected this history when relating the
Pakistani Muslim story of Manchester. Pnina Werbner's book, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims* (2002) contains a picture of one of the demonstrations protesting about Amer Rafique's case (plate 9.1, p. 235) with only the caption 'Demonstrations against alleged police violence in Manchester' by way of an explanation. The text makes no reference to the case and the use of the word alleged in the caption actually seeks to delegitimize the protest through the veil of academic neutrality. Here both the specificity of the demonstration and its geographical location on Wilmslow Road, materially and symbolically the site of the violence, highlights the way in which writing produces and erases presence.

Institutional stories of the local authority or academic variety can arguably be said to be writing about the other. Both locate the presence of British South Asians, not only with ongoing discourses about migration but also in terms of innovation, entrepreneurship. The flip-side to these positive narratives is the accounts of racial violence, institutional neglect and countless reports attempting to address inequality and differentials in life outcomes. It is difficult to account for the quantity of this output, let alone its quality. But perhaps more problematically what kind of impact this discursive terrain has had on the actual lives of Manchester's South Asian settlers is almost impossible to assess. Other genres such as the recording or oral histories, depending on the processes involved potentially have more of an immediate impact on those involved. Oral history also partly fills the gap between authorised accounts and self-representation through fictional writing.

**Oral Histories**

If statistics write a city for purposes of governance, then perhaps the polar opposite to this officialising discourse is the recording of individual oral histories. Even though the funding for recording oral histories is often in some way linked back to the local state, the actual accounts of people's lives are varied and diverse. Manchester benefits from being one of those places that was central to the initial recording of working class histories and therefore was one of the first places to publish a book on a South Asian community. The Sikh Family History Project produced a booklet entitled 'Speaking for Ourselves' which was published in 1986 and contains the histories of several pre-second World War II Sikh families, in Manchester. This was a pioneering exercise, in many ways, as it included a great deal of photographic and historical information about the formation of the Sikh community in Manchester, which in the discourse of statistics and the census would not be considered such a significant population, when compared to Birmingham or London. Indeed, institutional accounts completely neglect what is a pioneering group of settlers. Oral narratives therefore enable the emergence of different kinds of voices from those authorised in the previous accounts. The margins within what is termed the British Asian city are allowed to emerge due to the limited and specific nature of the oral history genre. Not just in terms of community but also women's voices are often given prominence which for present purposes provides another perspective on the city. The following accounts from the 'Speaking for Ourselves' booklet illustrate this point:

My husband came to Britain after partition and I joined him eleven years later. I thought the houses in Britain were very strange and ugly. I was depressed for ages....Everybody was friendly but I never went out shopping for two years
after I came here....Slowly I got used to it. (Fitzgerald et al, 1986:39)

One woman living alone can get very distressed and lonely when the husband is out working all day. We talked a lot about our own country and we were always home sick at first, but there was no home for us to go to so we came to think of Britain as home. (Fitzgerald et al, 1986:41)

These narratives can be contrasted to one of the men interviewed:

I thought Moss Side was a very beautiful part of Manchester with neighbours that were very kind and helpful. (Fitzgerald et al, 1986:38)

In 2001, the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource centre ‘established a community history project and produced eight posters on the Sikh community in Manchester, which followed up some of the families involved in the original project in the 1980s. What was interesting about the AIURRRC, Community History Project is that while it focused on Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage communities, in some senses replicating the units of analysis of the state, it disrupted this by engaging in a process that overcame the so called ‘generation gap’. Young people were encouraged to interview members of their own community to find out about why and how they came to Manchester. The outcome of their interviews and data collection was the development of a teaching pack; Exploring Our Roots, that aimed to raise awareness of the experiences of immigrants to Britain from the 1940s to 1975. This process of using oral history as a resource for teaching material again illustrates the intimate connection with the local state, as the education department is ultimately benefiting from the results of the project. Nonetheless, by engaging young people in the research process and by launching the oral history collections at public events, much clearer lines of impact, at least in the short term, can be seen when compared to institutional text making and dissemination.

With their focus on individuals and families to a large extent the relevance of the city is often lost in oral history narratives. However, in the Moving Stories, project which was an oral history exhibition at the People’s History Museum in Manchester in 2002, carried out by Irna Qureshi, there is some reference to the city which ties in with the conceptualisation of narrative harmony, as well as the location of the city within a region as previously outlined:

In the 1970s, my mum and dad didn’t have a car then. So there was five kids, mum and dad, and we were all little. We weren’t big enough to look after ourselves! And we’d all get on the bus from Bradford to Manchester. In those days it was much further away than it is nowadays for some reason. It took longer to get anywhere. But we’d get on the bus to come and eat at This n That’ which is a very very famous old curry house. They did traditional Asian food at weekends, you know like haleem and nihari and all that you know, the Sunday foods! So we would come just for that. There was also Sanam in Rusholme. We used to go there as well. We would come for the day and then we would go back on the bus. And then, I think we got a car and we’d fit in as many families as we could my family, some other family who we call uncle and aunty but they’re not really uncle and aunty like Farid uncle and aunty, the Butts, the Shahs, and we’d all try and fit in all the cars and drive over to eat in
Inevitably, the discourse about Manchester revolves around food and the Wilmslow Road. In thematic terms, the links between these oral history accounts and Pnina Werbner’s ethnography *The Migration Process* can easily be drawn. In particular, accounts of women’s lives. But Werbner’s texts are marked by their absence of actual interview data and are rather summative. Most academic accounts keep away from the long narratives offered by oral histories, which provides both the counter point as well as the distinctiveness of the genre.

Oral history has been the preferred mode for community and advocacy group when engaging in issues of community self-representation. Even though the genre suffers from the problems of all forms of writing, in that the author ultimately makes editorial decisions, there is considerable weight attached to the authenticity of oral accounts. The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre was established in the name of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah, a ten year old boy who was murdered in a racist incident in a Manchester school in the 1980s. The community history project is part of the AIURRC’s aims at addressing racism in school through the production of resource materials. The death of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah itself generated one of the first documents in the country to seriously consider the question of racism and schooling. *Murder in the Playground: Report of the Macdonald Inquiry into Racism and Racial Violence in Manchester Schools* was the outcome of a Judicial Inquiry led by Justice Macdonald. This large report, stretching to over five hundred pages, took evidence from a large number of people relating to the death of Ahmed in 1986. Given the local context of the death, the report remains to a large extent a procedural document looking at systemic failures and the role of multicultural education. The specificity of Manchester some how gets lost in the attempt to establish rationale and blame, this is probably due to the genre of legal writing that the report embodies.

Neither oral histories nor local institutional histories have written about the history of racial violence and anti-racist mobilising in Manchester. Perhaps the nearest resource to documenting this history can be found in the Tandana website (www.tandana.org) which also relies heavily on oral history and presents the story of the Asian Youth Movements. One of the presentations at the Manchester British Asian cities seminar was by Anandi Ramamurthy who presented on some of the issue involved in collecting material for the Tandana website. Her research consisted of collecting narratives by South Asians of their experiences of migration, school and political organising in the 1970s and 1980s. Whilst the histories are of relevance across Britain, they were particularly focused on the cities in which the participants lived. The project, which was funded by the National Lottery, resulted in a website as well as a booklet for use in schools. The fact that this project was funded by the semi-state organisation; The National lottery is particularly ironic given the stance of the AYM’s, particularly the Manchester branch to the issue of state funding:

MOHSIN ZULFIQAR
Manchester AYM took a very principled stand that we won’t accept any State funding, but the State funding came indirectly. Especially, Manchester City Council took a decision to provide coaches for immigration cases, so the coaches were coming free; so you just informed them, you know, we want to take a coach to Birmingham, and the number of people began to fall going to
demonstrations. I remember a time when coaches would have eight or ten people going to Birmingham or London or Bradford for demonstrations. So it means that that element which, when you’re trying to get the money yourself to take a coach you do much more work, now the only work was that, publicise the coach, ‘hey the coach will be going from Longsight at such and such time, and no work was done. (Ramamurthy, 2007: 29)

Though this stance was actually to be found in all of the AYM’s up and down the country, there was a distinct character to the Manchester AYM that reflects the general themes of this chapter (Ramamurthy, 2000X). Firstly, the class character of the members reflected the dominance of the Universities and students (at least for South Manchester). Secondly, Manchester attracted a greater diversity of South Asian immigrants in terms of class than places like Bradford and so, there was a women’s wing in the Manchester AYM, which made it distinct from Bradford (though similar to Leicester). A quote from one of Ramamurthy’s female interviewees reflects urban differences in organisation:

what I like about Manchester was it was quite formal, and I think this is something, that discipline ... I think Bradford AYM was an inspiration in the way they were structured and they were quite formal about things in a way I think Southall wouldn’t have been, because Southall had a degree of familiarity and a bit of a macho culture. And I liked the formality of Bradford and Manchester; their structures, committees, Chairs, you know, appointments, all that kind of stuff... it was not just about people’s egos and about people who were popular being appointed to positions and it was more democratic and fair, and encouraged women to get involved as well stand for positions... People were much more committed to the cause and it was less about egos. (Ramamurthy, 2008)

Despite the fact that Bradford AYM and Manchester AYM were sister organisations with the same constitution and political aims, the cosmopolitan nature of a student town like Manchester meant that its long term impact was not as great as it was in Bradford. Whereas in Bradford there is a more established legacy, not least in terms of a community owned building that was established by the AYM. The fluid nature of student towns has meant that many of the original members of the Manchester AYM moved to other parts of the country and their class origins meant that they were quickly engaged in public sector careers (Ramamurthy, 2008).

Oral history is one of the few modes of writing through which alter-narratives of the South Asian presence in Britain gets recorded. At the Manchester event, Ramamurthy’s presentation generated a debate about what is representative or not when generating oral history. A challenge that was not made in the discussion following the academic commentators, despite the fact that similar sources are being made use of, that is qualitative research, in each genre. This is perhaps the great strength of oral history in that it creates the space to challenge and question accounts of the past. Arguably however, it is still finally up to the author of the published article or book or even of the questioner to set the agenda of an oral history. It can be argued that it is only self-representation of the British Asian author or cultural producer that can overcome the problems of authorship and institutional
power, a theme that I turn to next.

Cultural Production

At the same time that Pnina Werbner was conducting her fieldwork for the book *The Migration Process*, other writers were at work in Manchester, under the aegis of the Pakistani Workers Association. This was a grouping of left wing and communist, South Asian heritage young people who were organising under the banner of the oldest British South Asian self-organised political groups; the Workers Association’s. The Pakistani Worker’s Association in Manchester, was similar in many ways to the Manchester AYM (and shared some members), in that it was primarily an organisation of students and middle class intellectuals. This is reflected in their ability to be the central hub of a national publication: *Paikaar*. The following is an example of the political stance taken by the magazine:

In Britain, attacks by racists and fascists continue to be a regular feature of our lives, the most recent case being the brutal murder in broad daylight of Tahir Akram in Oldham. Such attacks take place in a climate of racism generated by the state, be in under a labour or Tory government. It is not surprising therefore, that all the states initiatives...multicultural politics, official reports...police hot lines etc. etc. have failed to halt the increase in vicious attacks and murders. Editorial Aijaz Kalam, p. 3 *Paikaar*, Vol., 1989, No.s 2/3

Though the publication *Paikaar* was in the form of a news magazine, it was essentially a political commentary and critique, with a message to mobilise. The issues were produced in South Manchester but its political message and campaigning work stretched way beyond the bounds of the city. Printed in both English and Urdu, *Paikaar* is an example of the vast amount of literature produced by small scale publishers and self-publishers in vernacular and English languages.

Due to the liminal nature of the British South Asian vernacular press, only snapshots are possible of its range and extent. Publications are often short lived and are self-published with little presence outside of the particular language community they serve. Darshan S. Tatla is the only person to have systematically catalogued one of the South language publications in Britain. His co-authored book *Sikhs in Britain* contains a comprehensive list of Punjabi-Gurmukhi language publications produced in Britain since the 1950s. However, the other South Asian languages and other forms of vernacular writing have not been documented and due to their localised and specific nature are likely to remain off the record. In the Greater Manchester area, there are at the time of writing, six Urdu, fortnightly magazines and two monthly publications. This is in addition to two free bilingual, Urdu-English newspapers that come out on a weekly basis. This vernacular media provides translations of British news as well as news about Pakistan/Mirpur. In addition the monthly magazines carry poetry and short stories. Alongside these local outputs, The Daily Jang, a bilingual Urdu-English newspaper that has a certified circulation of 14000 is probably still the most read vernacular publication amongst Manchester South Asians. Where the Daily Jang is the most widely circulated daily media, The Garavi Gujarat, a monthly Gujarati language magazine boasts a circulation of over 65000. This print media has been supplemented by satellite TV, in which the ever changing numbers of channels means that actual effort to enumerate them is a difficult task. However,
Manchester is home to two channels catering for the Pakistani and Kashmiri communities respectively. DM Digital was launched in 2005 with a fairly standard mix of talk shows, films and music. Perhaps of most interest for an international satellite channel (broadcasting on the Sky system, it is received throughout Europe and Asia), is that its morning chat/news show is called ‘Good Morning Manchester’ though the contents are very varied. The only show with a specific focus on the city is ‘Spotlight on Manchester’ which consists of an outside broadcast team going to areas such as Wilmslow Road and Longsight to talk to random people about topical issues. The second channel broadcasting from Manchester is Kashmir Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). This caters almost exclusively to an audience interested in Kashmiri issues, with very little programming concerned with British audiences.

Too a large extent the future of vernacular languages is largely predictable and indicates a secular decline in print media though the less linguistically demanding visual media is likely to remain. For example, in the last ten years the Daily Jang has seen its circulation fall from 18000 to 14000 and to a large extent it is only new immigrants and the migrant generation that maintain the print media. Even though the provision of community language teaching by supplementary schools, religious institutions and other bodies continues, and the number of young people taking O’ levels and A levels in South Asian heritage languages continues to increase, the extent to which this process actually produces new readers is difficult to gauge. Nonetheless, the presence of poets and writers who are engaging in fusion and hybrid forms of writing indicate that the influence of these vernaculars will nonetheless be felt for some time to come. Indeed, Shamshad's poem that opened this chapter reflects this bilingualism. As the print media has declined, other forms of vernacular writing, such as Urdu poetry have also waned. As part of the workshop event in Manchester, the final session was devoted to poetry, with Shamshad Khan (the author of the poem opening this chapter) and Basir Kazmi performing. Kazmi is a renowned Urdu poet, known in his own right and because of his father's enormous stature in the world of the Ghazal form of sub-continental poetry. A relatively recent arrival in Manchester, Kazmi is probably one of the best known Urdu poets in Britain today. The following poem was inspired by his view of working in various jobs in Britain:

Working for Them

How much work should we do?
Surely now we should rest
We’ll dedicate to them
the pain they have given.
Only those who’ve suffered
can dispense happiness.
How many more remain
to be ensnared by them?
Night too resembles day,
so when should we have rest?
Leave these dead jobs, Basir;
let’s do things for ourselves.
(Kazmi in Kalra 2009: 17)
Basir represents the most public edge of what is a relatively unexplored corpus of vernacular literature that writes the Asian city. This work came along with the poets and writers who migrated to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. In a nice vignette in Pnina Werbner's essay 'The fiction of unity in ethnic politics' in the edited collection Black and Ethnic Leadership the description of the formation of the Pakistani Cultural Literary Society in Manchester is given:

..the society was founded by a small cadre of Urdu poets and poetry lovers who worked together on the night shift in Mc Vitie’s, a factory producing biscuits and cookies which has a large Pakistani workforce. The meal breaks in Mc Vitie’s became nightly poetry sessions....The McVities’s workers formed the core of the literary society found in 1970...(1991: 124)

From the factory floor to the community centre, the 1980s witnessed a flourishing of Urdu mushairas, poetry recitals, in Greater Manchester. Facilitated by the appointment of South Asian cultural workers in local authorities, the mushaira became an authentic way of engaging with the poetic cultures of the subcontinent in a new context. Not only were poetry recitations prominent throughout England, but this literary form also generated a published corpus. Compilations of Urdu poetry would be relatively cheaply published in South Asia and then circulated through bookshops and libraries in the UK. In Manchester, it was Rolex Books on Wilmslow Road which fulfilled this key role for distribution. Throughout the UK, Urdu is probably the most popular form for poetic publications and the refrain 'poets of the pound' reflects the fact that the relative economic prosperity of South Asian populations in the UK, has meant that mediocre literature gets published, because writers can pay printers in pounds. Thus the names of 'a book of the pound' or 'a writer of the pound' becomes an insult towards the writer. The mid 1990s saw the heyday of mushairas with a three day conference in Oldham dedicated to the form. Two factors led to the decline of mushairas, firstly a shift away in state funding from vernacular languages and secondly, the decline in the generation of those proficient in Urdu. In their place a generation of British Asian writers emerged with English as their first language

The novel, ‘Curry Mile’ was written by part-time writer, full time Manchester local authority worker, Zahid Hussain. The book focuses on the life of a young woman from Manchester, who having spent time in London returns to open a restaurant on the Curry Mile in Rusholme. This extract from the novel reflects the thoughts of the novelists main protagonist, Sorayah Butt as she returns to Manchester:

It fell into place then, how Pakistani Manchester was. London pulsed to a different Asian rhythm. From Edgware Road to Green Street, Southall and all the other boroughs and districts in and around the capital, there was a greater Indian or Bangladeshi influence. Here life was more earthy, more alive. With the growing number of Arab boutiques, takeaways and restaurants springing up on the Mile she could see the glimmer of London’s Marble Arch rising above the skyline. (Hussein, 2006: 49)

While the setting is Manchester, the tropes of family conflict and intergenerational change are familiar and British. The novel overlays this with a useful set of subplots which expose the conflation of business and family competition. ix Sorayah Butt
ends up in competition with her own father in the restaurant trade and thus conflict and reconciliation provide the driving force of the novel. Written at a heady pace, the novel, deals with the somewhat familiar thematics of British Asian life in an entertaining manner and perhaps most interestingly from the perspective of a young woman.

‘Curry Mile,’ was published by a South Manchester based Black and Asian writers publishers called Suitcase Press, who in turn were part-funded by the Arts Council.\textsuperscript{9} As a semi-government institution the Arts Council is another institution that produces writing about the region. In the Northwest, cultural policy in terms of publishing opportunities has written extensively about the absence of publishing opportunities for minority ethnic groups:

It has always been difficult to accurately assess the amount of culturally diverse work being published, especially through literary magazines (where unless the authors are personally known to the editors, ethnic origin cannot be judged from a contributor’s name alone). There are no publishers in the north west concentrating exclusively on culturally diverse material, although, for instance,..... There are a small number of ethnically diverse people working in the sector in the north west, but this is, at best, probably only in keeping with the poor national picture (Tranter 2004: 26)

This rather gloomy assessment is indicative of the way in which the state of Asian and Black arts is generally viewed in the Northwest. Yet, the ‘Curry Mile’, Wilmslow Road is also the site where a visual arts project, managed by the Asian Visual Arts company, Shisha and a South Asian lesbian and gay group (Sphere) was partially located. The exhibition was called: ‘Mixing It Up: QUEERING Curry Mile and CURRYING Canal Street’ and consisted of a series of installations and events that were intended to challenge the preconceived iconic notions of these two spaces, one in terms of sexuality (Canal Street) and the other ethnicity (Wilmslow Road).\textsuperscript{x} The events themselves were part of a Phd project being carried out by the Curator and illustrate the ways in which academia, local institutions, autonomous bodies (Arts Council) and cultural texts entwine to create a normative account of the sheen and shine of multicultural Asian Britain that creates a blurring, at the level of production as well as creation, of the various genres of representing Asian Manchester. Yet these are all contested terrains. After the British Asian Cities symposium in March 2008, in which brief reference was made to the ‘Mixing it up’ exhibition, I received the following email from the curator of the event:

I wanted to talk through one point you raised in your abstract, specifically your incorporation of "Mixing It Up" into "a normative account of the sheen and shine of multicultural Asian Britain," as you suggest, which I found problematic. Art on Curry Mile is still a new thing--Curry Mile is written into the city's oxford road cultural corridor narratives only to provide "color" not aesthetics.......The whole point of that project was to de-stabilize the normative narratives (spun as much by the city as by the restaurants, themselves) with (homo)sexualized ones which were also gendered. (Alpesh Patel, email, 9/4/8)

This email response clearly demonstrates how our own workshops and symposiums
further add to the creation of discourse about the British Asian City. Indeed, they are part of the weave that includes, academic, artistic and media texts. What is well illustrated by the discontent of the exhibition’s curator at my comments is the way in which specific interest groups come to contest the space of the city, such that the notion of a single Asian British city only arises out of the incorporation of this fluidity into institutional spaces. While Patel is correct to note the distinction from other forms of state sponsored multiculturalism, that the exhibition marks, there is no acknowledgement that the exhibition simultaneously also (however, unintentionally) also serves as an erasure of the history of Wilmslow Road as a racialised space (no art work was funded to memorialise Amer Rafique) or even a vernacular cultural space (the multiple non-state funded mushairas and meetings that have taken place in the restaurants there). Let alone an area, that has not been touched on in this chapter, that is a site for mobilisation of Islamic and Islamist groups. In this sense the ‘Mixing it up’ exhibition, for all its desire to challenge normative narratives only re-inscribes dominant liberal notions of what is tolerable and what is not.

Conclusion

Examining writing about British Asian Manchester enables a broader discussion of the city through the lens of a particular set of writings. The themes examined in this chapter can be best reiterated through reflecting on the event that was organised by the Writing the British Asian City project in Indus 5 restaurant in South Manchester in 2007. The participants, rather than producing something distinctively local about Manchester as a city scape, evoked cross-cultural, cosmopolitan concerns. The glocal nature of Manchester can be seen in the shift in Phina Werbner’s work from a local account of Pakistani entrepreneurs in the book *The Migration Process* to an overt concern with transnational political mobilisations, ostensibly with the same group of people, in the book, *Imagined Diasporas amongst Manchester Muslims*. In this second text the Manchester locality is almost incidental to the concerns that are being expressed. From the academic commentators through to the poetic performances the city was a site from which to make more general comments about Asian Britain. The writers and commentators present were using the city as an exemplary from which to push out from its boundaries or representing Manchester as a transnational rather than local space. These forms of writing are perhaps more aptly seen as part of an emergent South Asian or Asian Muslim transnational cultural sphere, in which writing the local becomes a conscious act, rather than an intrinsic part of the textual production. Nonetheless, the importance of Manchester as the site of production of these texts and the source of funding for much of this work, retains the centrality of the local at least in terms of institutional loci.

While each genre of writing explored in this chapter offers some distinct account of British Asian Manchester, the narrative harmonies that exist across the various forms considered is also worth highlighting. Firstly, the consistent appearance of Wilmslow Road, Rusholme and the coined ‘Curry Mile’ is symptomatic of the way in which people and place become linked. Even though the current Wilmslow Road is an ever hanging culinary site, with the increasing presence of North African and Arabic food, the textual canon still produces it as South Asian. Secondly, the necessity to take into account the racism of the street or of everyday violence appears in a range of media and academic texts and is also infused into the output of cultural producers.
These two areas may be obvious concerns for the British Asian city, but they also reflect the inter-relationship between the specificity of the local Manchester context – in the discussions of Wilmslow Road- as well as more general concerns such as racism. Manchester as a city case study highlights the oscillation between the micro-local concerns and those issues that take on national and some times international importance.

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The British National Party is a far right electoral party that advocates repatriation for new commonwealth immigrants and their offspring, amongst other policies. In their current form they are particularly vociferously anti-Muslim.

A full analysis of the discourse on no-white spaces can be found in Finney and Simpson (2009)

Indeed, Amer Rafique was given compensation for the loss of his eye, though the police did not admit culpability.

This may be due to the fact that all of Werbner’s work was conducted in English or through translators. Across the various genres of writing that have been illustrated the recurrence of the visible site of an Asian presence also indicates the dominance of English language texts in the languages of representation. The visibility of Wilmslow Road works alongside the dominance of English to create a way of understanding the British Asian city. In this process, the vernacular languages of the British Asian city are silenced or marginalised. Indeed, the issue of translation remains strangely absent in many of the narratives, even the academic one’s outlined so far.

This debate arose interestingly at the Manchester workshop, where a member of the Leicester AYM was present and discussed the masculine nature of the organisation.

For a history of the Indian Workers Association, see http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/Learning%20Packages/Social%20Justice/social_justice_lp_02.asp. In the late 1970s, there were Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani Workers Associations organised throughout the UK.

There are some interesting examples of narrative harmony between Hussein’s novel and Werbner’s The Migration Process, but these are complementary rather than overlapping.

The Arts Council is Britain’s main public sector funding body for the arts. See www.artscouncil.org.uk

Canal street is an area of bars and restaurants that is in the heart of what is known as Manchester’s Gay Village.

See http://www.leeds.ac.uk/brasian/manchester.htm for details of the events and participants.