SYMBOLIC ETHNICITY AND THE DILEMMAS OF DIFFERENCE

Talking Indianness with New Zealand-born Gujaratis

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Abstract

Marcus Banks (1996: 8) argues that the life of ethnicity has been lived out through the writings of academics rather than in the lives of the people they have studied and, indeed, local discourses of ethnicity are remarkably understudied. This thesis takes a step towards addressing the lack of attention given to local discourses of ethnicity by exploring the ways in which sixteen New Zealand-born Gujaratis talked about their Indianness in interviews conducted specifically for this project. Herbert Gans' (1979) notion of symbolic ethnicity is initially employed as a framework for understanding participants' narratives. Although this analysis gives an indication of the salience of ethnicity in the lives of my participants, it fails to account for the complex dilemmas of difference they expressed – the definition of 'Indian culture' in terms of difference from other 'cultures' and the suggestion that they were different from other New Zealanders by virtue of their Indianness. These issues are explained through an exploration of the assumptions about the cultural and the person that were inherent in notions expressed by participants of living in 'two worlds' and having to find a balance between them. This analysis suggests that participants constructed both 'culture' and 'the individual' as highly individuated categories. It is argued that these conceptualizations of 'culture' and 'the individual' can be usefully understood in terms of reflexive, or liquid, modernity and reflexive individualism. Under the conditions of late modernity, reflexive – that is, self-directed and self-oriented – thought and activity become idealised and individuals are ideologically cast as the producers of their own biographies. My participants' discussions of their Indianness can, therefore, be understood to represent a kind of 'self-reflexive ethnicity' that is centred on the person rather than on social networks or cultural practices. This mode of ethnicity does not necessarily require the decline of such networks and practices; they are simply reconfigured in terms of personal choice.

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Introduction

Being different overshadows the production of difference (Das Gupta 1997: 591).

In recent decades considerable academic attention has been given to deconstructing (Banks 1996) and reconstructing (Levine 1999) the elusive notion of 'ethnicity'. Although the adjective 'ethnic' has a long history within the English language (Fenton 2003: 15), it was not until the 1970s that 'ethnicity' came to be widely used (Fenton 2003: 1). As a substantial academic industry began to develop around 'ethnicity', the term quickly gained wider currency (Urry 1995) to the extent that there can now be little doubt that "the discourse on ethnicity has escaped from the academy and into the field" (Banks 1996: 189). The terminology of 'ethnicity' is used in public administration and shapes public policy. New Zealand's 'Office of Ethnic Affairs' exists exclusively for the purposes of managing the affairs of "people whose culture and traditions distinguish them from the majority in New Zealand" (Office of Ethnic Affairs 2007).¹ Ethnicity is recorded in the census and people are obliged to ethnically identify themselves in a variety of official contexts from applying for a job or university to becoming a patient at a medical or dental practice.² The term has attained political significance with individuals and collectivities demanding particular rights and privileges on the basis of ethnicity (Urry 1995). Reference to 'ethnicity' is also common in media reporting and appears to have attained an increasingly prominent role in public arenas. In the major cities of New Zealand, scarcely a weekend goes by without an 'ethnic' fair, bazaar or festival of some kind, and popular culture seems increasingly 'ethnically inspired'.

¹ The tendency to associate 'ethnicity' with only minority groups is common in public policy and the media, but is usually avoided in academia. This research has understood the term 'ethnicity' to be equally applicable to both minority and majority groups.

² Medical practices operating under New Zealand's Primary Health Organization system require patients to state their ethnicity on a form when signing up as patients of the practice. Pamphlets on ethnicity are available in some practices and the following PHO definition of ethnicity was displayed in a prominent position in the reception area of a medical centre I visited recently: "Ethnicity is based on self identification and is not the same as the country that you were born in, the country you live in or your ancestry. You can belong to more than one ethnic group and during your life may choose to identify yourself with other ethnic groups".

As reference to ‘ethnicity’ has proliferated, academics have raised concern as to both the meanings of the term and the nature of the entity to which it refers. Academic debate has raged not only over whether ‘ethnicity’ represents primordial or socially constructed ties, but also over whether the word refers directly to something ‘out there’, a ‘real’ social phenomenon (Fenton 2003: 2). Marcus Banks, for example, (1996: 187) “locates ethnicity very firmly in the heads of the analysts”. He argues that ‘ethnicity’ “is an analytical tool devised and used by academics to make sense of or explain the actions and feelings of the people studied” (Banks 1996: 186). Thus, while clearly on the side of the social constructionists, Banks takes the argument a step further and places the constructing in the hands of the academics. He argues that the ‘life’ of ‘ethnicity’ “has been lived out through the work of a number of influential authors (and not in the lives of the people they have studied)” (1996: 8).

Such a critique is in many ways justified. Despite the prevalence of reference to ‘ethnicity’ in a variety of social contexts, little is known about the meanings that the general public attach to the term. General public or local discourses of ethnicity have received little academic attention (Fenton 2003: 25). Accordingly, this research follows ‘ethnicity’ into the field and attempts to locate it in the lives of ‘the people’. It is not my intention to ascertain whether ‘ethnicity’ existed as a ‘real’ social phenomenon before the emergence of an academic discourse; I have serious doubts as to whether it is either possible or worthwhile to answer such a question and it is certainly beyond the scope of this project. An alternative approach might be to examine whether ‘ethnicity’ is *experienced* as real by the general public by exploring the extent to which people act by reference to their ‘ethnic’ identities.³ But this would require participant observation too extensive for a project of this size. Instead I focus on how people have adopted the terminology of ‘ethnicity’.

³ An interesting approach to this issue was adopted in an earlier project on ‘ethnicity’ in New Zealand – the Youth and Family Project. This project, funded by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (FRST), involved research conducted within the Department of Anthropology at Victoria University of Wellington for four years between 1994 and 1998 (YFP 2003). This research resulted in a number of unpublished ‘working’ papers. As part of this project, participants (N = 739) were asked in a questionnaire “Do you identify as a member of an ethnic group?”. This is a question not often posed in research as many researchers assume that both ‘ethnicity’ and ‘ethnic groups’ exist a priori. Interestingly, 56% of respondents answered ‘no’, leading researchers to conclude that “For a number of people ethnicity is clearly neither an everyday reality nor a category of great relevance in their lives” (Urry, Thomson & Williams 2004: 2).

In this research, I attempt to address, albeit in a small way, the lack of attention given to local discourses of ethnicity. This is achieved through an exploration of the connections and disconnections between the way members of the general public talk about their 'ethnicity' and the way 'ethnicity' is articulated in the academic notion of 'symbolic ethnicity'. This mode of ethnicity was proposed by Herbert Gans (1979) to explain the persistence of ethnic groups in 1970s America. At this time, scholars were observing a rise of 'unmeltable ethnics' (Novak 1972) who asserted their ethnic identities despite their widespread Americanization (Glazer & Moynihan 1970 [1963], 1975). Scholars suggested this signalled the emergence of a 'new ethnicity'. According to Gans, the feeling of being ethnic was becoming more important than the culture associated with it. He argued that the old structural and communal bases for ethnicity were diminishing leaving an ethnicity based increasingly on ethnic identity and voluntary, intermittent ethnic activity.

The notion of symbolic ethnicity has not been particularly influential in academia. However, it addresses a tension between homogenization and differentiation that is particularly relevant to processes of globalization, identity politics and balkanization that are currently subject to extensive scholarly discussion (Castells 1997: 1-2). Symbolic ethnicity provides a good starting point for analysis of local discourses of ethnicity, but, as the following discussion will show, its explanatory power may be somewhat limited. By investigating how symbolic ethnicity relates to local discourses, this research attempts to demonstrate the need for closer attention to local discourses in the formulation of academic theories of ethnicity.

This project did not, however, begin with 'ethnicity', but rather with a specific 'ethnic' grouping: New Zealand Indians. This choice was directed partially by personal interest, but also with an eye to contributing to the currently very small body of academic literature on Indians in New Zealand. Although by certain measures Indians constitute New Zealand's third largest immigrant group and have been a presence in this country

for over a century, they remain remarkably understudied.⁴ The few works specifically about New Zealand Indians that do exist have tended to adopt a largely historical and/or demographic approach and much of the literature is somewhat dated. Terence McGee's (1961) geography thesis on the Indian 'community' in Wellington is perhaps the earliest work and, although rich in detail, reflects the ideas of its time in its assimilationist assumptions. The 1980s saw a wealth of related research including a collection of essays edited by Kapil Tiwari (1980) on Indians in New Zealand, Jacqueline Leckie's PhD thesis on the history of Gujaratis in New Zealand (1981) and Hew McLeod's history of Punjabi immigrants to the Waikato (1986). Lalita Kasanji (1982) and Sashi Meanger (1989) also completed Masters theses on New Zealand Gujaratis in this decade.

Although Jacqui Leckie has continued to play an important role in recording the history of Indians in New Zealand (1989, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1998), few studies of Indian New Zealanders were conducted through the 1990s. One, the Youth and Family Project, resulted in a number of working papers focused specifically on Indian participants (Barr 1997; Williams 1997). These papers contain some remarkably rich material, but have sadly remained unpublished. The dearth of literature, particularly current literature, on New Zealand Indians has, however, been recognised. Sharmila Bernau (2006) has recently completed an excellent study of Hindu identity amongst Indians in Wellington which aims to incorporate the history of Indian New Zealanders into mainstream academic discourse on the history of the nation (2006: 8). Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's (2007) and Jacqui Leckie's (2007) chapters in a volume on New Zealanders of Asian descent have similarly located Indians in the 'making of New Zealand'.⁵ This thesis is intended to complement these studies by taking a more ethnographic rather than a

⁴ In the 2001 census, Indians were recorded as the fifth largest 'ethnic' group in New Zealand following New Zealand Europeans and Maori (not regarded as immigrant groups) and Chinese and Samoans (often grouped together with other 'Pacific peoples' but outnumbering Indians regardless) (Statistics New Zealand 2001).

⁵ Leckie is also expected to publish a book-length history of Indians in New Zealand later this year.

historical approach through analysing discourses of Indianness, and also New Zealandness, in the narratives of Indian New Zealanders.⁶

This approach to 'Indianness' is unique not only to studies of New Zealand Indians, but also to studies of diasporic Indians generally. The literature on the Indian diaspora is extensive (e.g. Clarke, Peach & Vertovec 1990; Dubey 2003; Ghosh & Chatterjee 2004; Jacobsen & Kumar 2004; Jayaram 2004; Parekh, Singh & Vertovec 2003; Vertovec 2000), but attention has tended to focus on issues related to integration and the maintenance of 'Indian culture' and 'Indian' social structures. This research takes a step back from such issues and examines the assumptions and values expressed by participants in discussions of Indianness. Some studies of diasporic Indians have points of alignment with my approach (Das Gupta 1997; Handa 2003) and are referred to where appropriate.

In this thesis, the ways in which New Zealand Indians talk about Indianness will be understood as local discourses of ethnicity.⁷ A recurrent theme in my research was difference – difference as an Indian from other New Zealanders, difference from other Indians, difference as an individual from anybody else. It was decided to analyse this theme by drawing on the notion of 'ethnicity', as the available academic literature on this subject seemed best suited to the purpose. I acknowledge, however, that much of what I say can be equally applied to notions of 'race' and 'nationality' or 'identity' in general and will make these connections myself where their relevance is particularly pertinent. The attachment of the term 'ethnicity' to 'Indian' is potentially problematic not just because it ignores a range of other academic terms. Banks might argue that it involves arbitrarily attaching an analytical term to a local one (1996: 186). However, it has been necessary for the purposes of this thesis to enable discussion of more productive matters than

⁶ See also Frieson, Murphy & Kearns (2005) for an interesting analysis of Indian transnationalism in Auckland, the Asia:NZ website for a number of interesting papers presented as part of their Kiwi India Series (Asia:NZ Foundation 2004), DeSouza (2006) for a discussion of migration and motherhood amongst women from Goa, as well as Vasil & Yoon (1996) and Wilson (2005).

⁷ Although the decision to focus on one particular ethnic grouping was made before the decision to explore issues of ethnicity, talking to people about *their* ethnicity had the added benefit of avoiding the dilemmas of asking participants to think and talk of 'ethnicity' in highly abstract terms. The difficulties of talking about ethnicity in general and abstract terms is discussed in the methods section of this introduction and also alluded to in Chapter Two.

whether 'Indian' is an 'ethnicity' and all the related conundrums regarding the 'reality' status of 'ethnicity'. In short, this thesis attempts to further understanding of local discourses of ethnicity by exploring the adequacy of symbolic ethnicity as a framework for explaining the dilemmas of difference expressed by participants.

Research Methodology and Methods

My research for this project has involved fifteen interviews with sixteen New Zealand Indians. In the process of defining the aims of this project, it was decided to investigate only New Zealand Indians who were born in New Zealand, who trace their descent back to the region of Gujarat in India and who currently live in Wellington. Limiting investigation to Wellingtonians was a necessary practicality. The decision to focus on those who are New Zealand-born was motivated by a desire to move away from experiences of ethnicity that are fundamentally shaped by issues of migration. The decision to interview only people from one region of India was made as a result of my preliminary analysis of the earlier interviews with New Zealand Indians conducted as part of the Youth and Family Project.⁸

Participants in the twenty-five Youth and Family Project interviews analysed traced their descent back to a number of regions in India sometimes via other localities such as Fiji and East Africa. These interviews were instrumental not only in shaping my own interview questions, but also in highlighting the diversity within the Indian population. The Youth and Family interviews clearly demonstrated that different New Zealand Indians had very different ways of talking about their Indianess. These differences were most pronounced across regional boundaries, and particularly between Gujaratis and non-Gujaratis.⁹ It was evident that unless I wanted to study this diversity itself, I needed

⁸ As mentioned earlier, the Youth and Family Project involved research conducted within the Department of Anthropology at Victoria University of Wellington for four years between 1994 and 1998 (YFP 2003).

⁹ The reasons for differences between Gujaratis and non-Gujaratis are numerous, but in a Wellington context important factors include the majority status Gujaratis in Wellington (and in most parts of New Zealand) and the dominance of Gujaratis in the primary 'Indian' organisations – the Wellington Indian Association and the Wellington Indian Sports Club – both in terms of membership and in terms of positions on the executive.

to focus on people from one particular region. As there are a large number of Gujaratis in Wellington and as they are a group with one of the longest histories of residence in New Zealand, they were a good collectivity from which to recruit New Zealand-born participants. Thus, although some of my participants have family migration histories that include Fiji and East Africa, all are New Zealand-born and identify as Gujaratis.

Despite all my participants being Gujarati, this thesis examines not how they speak about Gujaratiness, but how they speak about Indianness. I have done this because throughout my interviews the words Gujarati and Indian were used fairly interchangeably: *“we’re not in conversational Indian at home at all” (Savita, female, 24).*¹⁰ This by no means suggests that the distinction between the two is irrelevant; many of my participants explicitly stated their distinctiveness as Gujaratis from other Indians: *“Gujaratis are a special brand of Indian. We’re different. I feel that we’re far superior to a lot of Indians and it’s just different, you know, and we’re unique” (Maan, male, 30).* Some scholars have, in fact, suggested that regional differences may be becoming more important in New Zealand due to the increasing heterogeneity of the Indian population in the country (Bandyopadhyay 2007: 132-5).¹¹ My participants’ interchangeable use of the terms Indian and Gujarati can be explained by the lack of familiarity with regional differences and identities within the category Indian amongst non-Indians (such as myself) in the wider New Zealand context. Another significant factor may be participants’ position as members of the dominant regional grouping – Indianness in Wellington (and to a large extent in New Zealand) has tended to be defined in terms of Gujaratiness. I suspect that conflation of regional and national identity may well be less common amongst immigrants who trace their descent to regions of India that fewer New Zealand Indians identify with. As I was not studying the relationships between the varied ‘ethnic’ categories with which my participants might identify, I did not ask them to explain their use of the two terms or the different meanings they attach to them. In this thesis, I am going to adopt the terminology most common amongst my participants – I will use the term ‘Indian’ to refer to their

¹⁰ The interchangeable use of the terms ‘Indian’ and ‘Gujarati’ amongst Gujaratis has been noted in other studies of Indian New Zealanders (Kasanji 1982: 5, 135-6; Bernau 2006: 71).

¹¹ See Bandyopadhyay (2007) for a discussion of the diversity within New Zealand’s Indian population and the ways in which multiculturalism undermines these differences.

‘ethnicity’ unless I am describing a situation in which being Gujarati is of particular significance.

A further characteristic of my participants is that they are all born, if not practicing, Hindus. As with the term ‘Gujarati’, the words ‘Hindu’ and ‘Indian’ were also used interchangeably by participants.¹² Many participants equated being Indian with being Hindu and described being Indian in terms of knowing and practicing those things considered to be Hindu:

It's really difficult to separate religion and culture in my head [...] If you don't go to the temple, you're actually missing out on a big bit of the culture. Like Navratri, and Diwali are religious festivals, but they're also cultural festivals as well. So I go for the cultural aspects [...] like I fasted for Shravan month [...] out of cultural respect; I go to Navratri for the cultural aspect. Because you can't, you just can't separate them. The food goes with the event, goes with the religion. It's all one and the same (Lata, female, 25).

As making distinctions between religion and ethnicity is unnecessary for the purposes of this study, I have also adopted participants’ terminology in this instance, and include participants’ discussions of Hinduism as part of their discourses of Indianness.

Participants were recruited between July and September of 2006 through mutual acquaintances by word of mouth and by utilising a snowball technique. Although those participants who were recruited by snowball technique were often related to the participant who had provided their details, an effort was made to use multiple unrelated entry points to avoid having a participant group dominated by one tightly knit network. Nevertheless, I suspect that all my participants know each other, such is the nature of the Gujarati ‘community’ in Wellington.¹³ Only three of my participants did not appear to be related to anybody else in my participant group. The rest were members of one of a total of five families and were related to between one and three others in the participant group.¹⁴ However, no two participants were living in the same household, nor

¹² Barr (1997: 6) and Bernau (2006: 71) have also noted a tendency to conflate ‘Indianness’ and ‘Hinduism’.

¹³ I use ‘community’ throughout this thesis as a ‘native term’.

¹⁴ Some of these relationships were not clearly stated in interviews. Some people who I assume are kin were recruited independently, but similarities in their family histories suggested they must be related in some way. Likewise, it is very possible that members of my participant group are related in ways that I am not aware of.

had they done so for many years. My participant group consisted of nine women and seven men, with a fairly even age spread from teens to sixties (Table 1).¹⁵ All participants had at least one parent who had been born outside of New Zealand, and many had two non-New Zealand-born parents. However, most had multiple generations of their family currently living in the country.

The small number of participants involved in this study was necessary to enable greater

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Kin Group
Aparna	18	F	1
Dipankar	24	M	NA
Savita	24	F	2
Harsha	25	M	2
Lata	25	F	NA
Maan	30	M	NA
Veena	38	F	3
Bhaskar	40	M	4
Jasmine	40	F	5
Meenakshi	42	F	2
Satya	45	F	5
Arun	46	M	3
Ranjna	fifties	F	2
Mahesh	61	M	4
Karuna	63	F	4
Kiran	66	M	1

Table 1

depth in the interviews and for managing the quantity of data generated. However, having such a small participant group makes it difficult to extrapolate findings beyond this group. Nevertheless, the consistencies between interviews suggest findings are generally applicable to New Zealand-born Gujaratis living in Wellington. Many findings may well be relevant to Gujaratis living outside the Wellington region and wider applicability is also possible. However, such generalizability is by no means supported by this research and was not the objective of this project. This study is intended to be indicative rather than exemplary. The highly qualitative approach adopted aims to provide a valid description of what people said in a specific research location (Tolich and Davidson 1999: 34). In doing so, concepts and connections will be extended and a specific theoretic approach will be developed that may be applicable to a wider population (Brewer 2000: 77).

Fourteen of my participants were interviewed individually and two siblings were interviewed together. Some of the spouses and/or children of those participants who were interviewed individually were present during the interview and some of them participated in the discussion. However, no comments made by non-participant spouses

¹⁵ I have not given details of participants' occupations as I believe this makes them too easily identifiable to those that know them. Participants who have the same number recorded in the 'kin group' column of Table 1 are believed to be related by blood or marriage.

or children have been included in this account. Participants selected a location for the interview that best suited them. Most were interviewed in their homes, but some were interviewed at Victoria University and one was interviewed at his work-place.

The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions. An interview schedule was developed (see Appendix) and this was loosely adhered to in the interviews. Interviews lasted between about 45 minutes and just under three hours and yielded a large quantity of elaborate, detailed and complex data. My first interview was quite different from those that followed as I did not realise that abstract questions would not be received well by my participants. I arrived at my first interview expecting to discuss at length the meanings of 'ethnicity' and the value of multicultural policy. It quickly became apparent to me that such areas were not meaningful to my participants and that I needed to adjust my approach accordingly.

In the remaining interviews I began by asking for a brief family history of immigration followed by details of the participant's education, occupation and marital status. The next section focused on the day-to-day activities of the participants. I asked them to describe an average day and then asked specifically about 'Indian' things they do. This was followed with some more abstract questions about being Indian and being both Indian and a New Zealander. I did retain the questions about ethnicity in general and about multiculturalism that I asked in my first interview, but these did not yield much response from participants. Fourteen interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. One could not be recorded due to technical failure, but extensive notes were taken during the interview.

These transcriptions and notes were read and re-read, coded and ordered under a large number of thematic headings that related to specific hypotheses of symbolic ethnicity such as 'the social', 'the cultural', 'identity' and 'choice'. Themes originally focussed on what participants were saying based on an assumption of a simple one-to-one relationship between what participants said and the 'real' world of lived experience. However, as analysis developed and writing began, it became clear that such assumptions were problematic. I began to focus less on what participants were saying and more on

how they were constructing their narratives. What were participants emphasising, what aspects of their lives did they downplay and what assumptions were they making? The material was then re-ordered into new themes that responded better to such questions and writing began once again.

Participants responded to questions in a remarkably open and frank manner. However, as with any interview, participants' narratives were partial and situational. Some participants made it clear that how they responded to a question may not accurately reflect how they feel about the matter and suggested that they might respond differently if asked again. For example Dipankar told me emphatically that he does not feel like a full New Zealander because he's not European, but when asked to elaborate on this statement much later in the interview he responded: "*Oh god, did I say that? Like where did that come from? Oh my god!*". Lata provided a similar reminder about the realities of interviewing in this reflection: "*That's quite an analytical thing to say. I don't know how real [...] If you ask me this tomorrow I'm sure that I'd phrase it differently and say it differently and who knows if it'd come out the same {laughing}*". Because of this partiality, I have endeavoured to make it clear throughout this account that I am discussing the way participants talk about Indianess and not how they feel or act in situations outside an interview. Although inconsistencies such as those described above may indicate that even generalising about the way people talk about Indianess is impossible, there were enough consistencies within and between interviews to provide ample support for the claims I make in this thesis.¹⁶

A further concern in this research has been my status as a non-Gujarati, non-Indian researcher. The first question I am usually asked by those to whom I explain my research for the first time is what my connection to India is. The lack of any personal connection has been treated as somewhat peculiar. With the notable exception of Jacqui Leckie, research on Indians in New Zealand has been predominantly conducted by researchers of Indian or South Asian descent. These scholars have often entered their research with some personal knowledge of the communities that form the subject of their study and may experience greater solidarity with participants. Although I am myself an immigrant,

¹⁶ Partiality of narratives is common to much interview-based research in the social sciences. For more on this issue see Becker and Geer (2003: 249-304) and Dean and Whyte (2003: 350-9).

I am White and ‘speak Kiwi’ so I am generally identified as a ‘native’ Pakeha New Zealander.¹⁷ This could potentially have made participants cautious in criticising New Zealand and particularly in describing incidents of racism. Nevertheless, I did not find participants to be in any way hesitant in responding to questions and I suspect that my status as a non-Indian made some participants feel more comfortable about being critical of aspects of Indianness and about revealing personal information than if I had been of Indian descent. Furthermore, I feel my analysis has benefited from my personal distance from Indianness, which has enabled me to see the peculiarity of many aspects of Indianness that my participants described as completely ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ to them.

This research has generated a substantive body of remarkably rich material. Participants were highly reflective and articulate and at times delightfully candid in their responses to interview questions. The frank insightfulness of participants’ responses is, I believe, the strength of this study and I have therefore quoted extensively from interviews in this thesis. All interview quotes have been italicised to indicate participants’ voices. Some repetition of words, phrases such as ‘you know’ and interjections such as ‘um’ and ‘ah’ have been removed from quotes as they are not relevant to analysis and their removal makes reading easier.

A History of Gujaratis in New Zealand and Wellington

In 1809 a Bengali man became the first (recorded) Indian to set foot in New Zealand when he jumped ship off the coast of the South Island and went on to live with local Maori (Bandyopadhyay 2007: 125). Amongst the earliest Indians in New Zealand were a Goan gold prospector known as ‘Black Peters’ and two Punjabi brothers, Bir Singh Gill and Phunam Singh Gill, who arrived in New Zealand in 1890 (Leckie 1998: 163). However, the largest numbers of migrants in the pioneer phase of Indian settlement in New Zealand came from the southern region of the state of Gujarat (Bandyopadhyay 2007: 127). The names of the first Gujaratis in New Zealand is not known, but by 1903 Narotum Barber, Keshav Chhiba and two brothers, Gulab and Makan Jivan had arrived

¹⁷ I capitalize ‘White’ throughout this thesis (except when quoting directly) to indicate that I am referring not to an objective phenotypical characteristic, but to a cultural category.

in the country (Leckie 1998: 165). Other Gujaratis began to arrive in small groups from around 1910 (Bernau 2006: 12). The Gujarati population in New Zealand has grown through a process of 'chain migration' where migrants encourage and assist kin, partners and co-villagers to migrate to the same destination. As a result, a remarkably large percentage of Gujaratis in New Zealand trace their ancestry to villages in present day Navsari and Bardoli sub-districts of the Surat District. Most Gujaratis in New Zealand belong to one of two main agricultural sub-castes, Koli and Kanbi (Leckie 1998: 167).

Until 1921, Indians could migrate to New Zealand fairly easily compared to other non-White potential immigrants because of their status as British subjects (Bernau 2006: 12).¹⁸ Early Gujarati immigrants were all male and were usually young and married. The first female Gujaratis arrived in 1922, but migration of Gujarati women to New Zealand remained rare until after World War II.¹⁹ The very early migrants were remarkably small in number with only 181 Indians recorded in New Zealand's 1916 census (Leckie 1998: 169) and 671 in the 1921 census (Bandyopadhyay 2007: 126). They did not intend to settle permanently in New Zealand, but rather to accumulate wealth and retire to India.

The first wave of migrants often worked in manual labour which required little spoken or written English. Common occupations included bush clearing, road construction, flax cutting, ditch digging and swamp draining.²⁰ Early migrants also found work in the service industry, particularly in boarding houses and hotels. However, working for wages was seen by many as a stepping stone to self-employment. Some common early forms of self-employment included bottle collecting and selling fruit and vegetables. Fruit and vegetable retail initially involved hawking goods from a basket or barrow, but by World War I some Gujaratis were leasing shops and sites in Auckland and Wellington (Leckie 1998: 169). Several Gujarati families have operated or been employed in more general small retail outlets such as dairies and superettes (Leckie 1998: 170).

¹⁸ To gain entry, Indian migrants had to pass an 'education test' which was relatively simple with prior coaching (Leckie 1998: 168).

¹⁹ The migration of Gujarati women to New Zealand began in 1922 with the arrival of Divalliben Daji and Dudhiben Moral (Leckie 1998: 165).

²⁰ Gujaratis in these forms of employment often travelled in small work gangs (Leckie 1998: 169).

Although the leasing of shops by Gujaratis and other Indians stirred some racist hostility from Pakeha retailers (Leckie 1998: 169), it was when they began to lease and purchase land suitable for market gardening after 1920 that hostility reached substantial levels. A White New Zealand League was founded in Pukekohe mainly by market gardeners and shopkeepers alarmed by the prospect of ‘racial’ competition. The League provoked widespread xenophobia throughout New Zealand. The White New Zealand League itself did not last long, but the occupational discrimination and racism towards Indians in New Zealand it had incited continued for decades (Leckie 1998: 171). This xenophobia was reflected in immigration policy. The 1921 Immigration Restriction Amendment Act allowed entry only to those who were related to those already here – wives, children under 21 years and fiancés of the men.²¹ This reinforced the kinship basis of Indian migration and is largely responsible for the substantial dominance of Indians from Gujarat and the Punjab in New Zealand until the 1990s (Leckie 1998: 172-3).

The experience of racial discrimination encouraged Indians in New Zealand to form organisations in which they could collectively counteract “oppressive legislation and discriminatory immigration policy” and foster cultural practice (NZICA 2003). Regional organizations were established in Auckland, Wellington and Taumarunui (the ‘Country Section’) and these joined forces to form the New Zealand Indian Central Association in 1926 (Bandyopadhyay 2007: 128).²² With the exception of the Country Section New Zealand Indian Association (which is dominated by Punjabi Sikhs), the activities of the Indian associations largely reflected a Gujarati identity (Leckie 1998: 178). Indian sports clubs were also established in some places around this time.

By World War II, Gujaratis in New Zealand were investing increasing amounts of time, money, labour and identity in New Zealand. Increasing investment in shops and market gardens resulted in the immigration of substantial numbers of Indian women to meet the

²¹ The fiancés of Indian women resident in New Zealand were not allowed entry until after World War II (Leckie 1998: 173).

²² Regional organizations were later formed in Pukekohe, Bay of Plenty, Christchurch, Manawatu, Waikato and Taranaki and these too became affiliated with the national association.

need for family labour (Leckie 1998: 173). Thus families, rather than single males, began increasingly to reside in New Zealand. Family immigration was further encouraged by changes to New Zealand's immigration policy after World War II which discouraged lengthy absences for Asian residents (Leckie 1998: 174).

Recent decades have seen both continuities and discontinuities in the history of Gujaratis in New Zealand. Although racism and racist attacks towards Indians do still occur, general public attitudes no longer condone overt discrimination against ethnic minorities (Leckie 1998: 179).²³ The Indian population in New Zealand doubled in ten years from just over 30,000 in 1991 to over 60,000 in 2001 largely due to changes in immigration regulations. The large numbers of new immigrants have substantially reduced the percentage of Indians born in New Zealand (Bernau 2006: 15) and the numerical dominance of Gujaratis. The coups in Fiji have seen Fijian Indians overtake Gujaratis as the most populous Indian collectivity in New Zealand (Leckie 1998: 163) and changes to a points-based immigration policy has seen a dramatic increase in the numbers of professionals migrating to New Zealand from India. Professional, managerial and technical occupations have become increasingly common among New Zealand Gujaratis since the 1960s, reflecting increased tertiary education amongst the second and third generation as well as the influx of professional migrants (Leckie 1998: 172).

The organizations established in the 1920s continue to play a role in the lives of New Zealand Gujaratis today. The Wellington Indian Association (WIA), established in 1925 has a current membership of approximately 600 families. This membership consists almost entirely of Gujarati Hindus related in some way to the families that have been here for many generations (Bernau 2006: 69-70). The Association is housed in a large complex in Kilbirnie and activities include the running of a *Gita* class (which deals with religious matters), a Gujarati school and preschool and a ladies auxiliary as well as paying

²³ It may be the case, however, that racism has become more subtle rather than actually lessening. A Massey University study conducted in 1996 found that 60 percent of New Zealanders believed that too many immigrants from Asia and Pacific countries were resident in the country. 40 percent of respondents felt that Asian immigrants were taking away jobs from New Zealand-born citizens (Bandyopadhyay 2007: 136).

and maintaining a full time priest or *pujari* from India and the organisation and hosting of 'Indian bazaars' (Bernau 2006: 70-1). The Wellington Indian Sports Club, established in 1935, fields many men's, women's and junior hockey and cricket teams as well as organising social events (WISC 2004). Although non-Indians and Indians of different backgrounds are represented in their membership, the comments of my participants suggest that this club is also dominated by Gujaratis.²⁴ With increasing numbers of Indians living in New Zealand, decreased racial tension and the continuation of collective expressions of 'ethnic' identity in the form of organisations, Indianness in New Zealand is becoming increasingly public. In Wellington this is evident in the architectural prominence of the Association buildings, the attendance of large numbers of the non-Indian public at Indian bazaars and the popularity of the Diwali celebrations sponsored by the Wellington City Council.

Theoretical Framework

Before outlining the specifics of symbolic ethnicity, it is necessary to identify the particular type of ethnic relation that is the subject of this thesis and develop a working definition of ethnicity upon which future discussion will be based. As Eriksen (2002: 13) rightly points out, the term 'ethnicity' is used to refer to a great number of very different social phenomena. In this research I am dealing with only one area of such phenomena. Using Eriksen's (2002: 14) list of standard kinds of 'ethnic' relations, my study can be viewed as one of 'urban ethnic minorities'. However, I feel the term 'post-diasporic' minority more accurately describes the context. I adopt Mukadam and Mawani's (2006) term here to highlight that my participants have not themselves migrated, but have a family history of migration. Using the term 'post-diasporic' also avoids the awkward terminology associated with specifying the particular 'generation' under study, which is particularly complicated for my participants whose parents' generally have different migration histories.

²⁴ Many other organisations with some 'Indian' connection have emerged in Wellington since the establishment of the WIA and WISC.

Although most of those who write on 'ethnicity' do not bother to define the term (Eriksen 2002: 11), after several decades of popularity there have now been many attempts to establish a fixed meaning of the word that is suitable for all purposes. Banks rightly points out that the attachment of the particular term 'ethnicity' to certain happenings is the elaboration of the observer, but most scholars agree that there is something 'out there' that corresponds to what observers call 'ethnicity' (Fenton 2003: 3; Levine 1999: 168). But what is the nature of that something we call 'ethnicity'? The term 'ethnic group' is consistently used to refer to 'a people' of some sort, but what defines that 'people' remains a matter of contention (Eriksen 2002: 11). Textbook definitions usually list characteristics such as a common name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity (Hutchinson & Smith 1996: 6-7). Variations on such definition are numerous and have usually developed through discussion of the source and durability of 'ethnic' ties.

Approaches to this argument can be grouped into two broad camps, the primordialists and situationalists. In crude terms the argument of the primordialists is that 'ethnicity' is part of our 'natural' makeup (Spencer 2006: 76). Within this camp approaches range from sociobiological explanations for the formation of ethnic bonds to arguments that ethnic identity develops from certain 'givens' of social existence, such as blood and kin connections, religion, language, region and custom which form ineffable, affective and *a priori* bonds (Spencer 2006: 76-7). Situationalists have criticised primordialist views of ethnicity for their static and naturalistic explanations. They have pointed to the malleability of 'ethnicity' arguing that 'ethnic' identities undergo renewal, modification and remaking (Spencer 2006: 78; Hutchinson & Smith 1996: 8) and are variously invoked depending on the circumstance. Situationalist approaches are premised upon the understanding that ethnicity is socially constructed rather than 'natural'. The most extreme forms of situationalism involve overtly instrumentalist arguments that "treat ethnicity as a social, political, and cultural resource for different interest- and status-groups" (Hutchinson & Smith 1996: 8). However, many scholars who can be grouped in the situationalist camp have focused not on *why* people appeal to ethnicity, but instead on the processes of construction (Hutchinson & Smith 1996: 9; Anderson 2001: 213).

This research has been conducted with an understanding that ‘ethnicity’ is socially and culturally constructed.²⁵ A constructivist view of ‘ethnicity’ seems the most logical response both to the academic literature and to my own observations in conducting this study.²⁶ I do not, however, accept instrumentalist suggestions that deployment of ‘ethnicity’ is necessarily explicit, deliberate, and calculated. Instead I employ Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov’s understanding of situationalism which suggests that there are many ways in which “ethnic – and non-ethnic – ways of seeing, interpreting, and experiencing social relations are *unselfconsciously* “triggered” or activated by proximate situational cues” (2004: 51, my emphasis).

My approach to ‘ethnicity’ can be further described as being fundamentally concerned with categorization. As constructivist approaches have become widespread and ethnicity has become increasingly defined in terms of participants’ perceptions and identifications rather than objective commonalities, scholars have been increasingly concerned with categorization and classification (Brubaker, Loveman & Stamatov 2004: 31). A key figure in this approach is Fredrik Barth (1969) whose discussion of ethnic boundaries, occasionally labelled a ‘transactionalist’ approach (Hutchinson & Smith 1996: 9), drew attention to the importance of practices of classification and categorization, rather than cultural commonalities (Brubaker, Loveman & Stamatov 2004: 32). Barth argued that the persistence of a group is ensured by its social boundaries. While the cultural content enclosed by the boundary may be variable (Barth 1969: 14), and the boundary may be permeable (Barth 1969: 21), a boundary is consistently maintained. Barth has been criticised for assuming the fixity of bounded ethnic identities, but his attention to the role of boundaries of (constructed) difference in defining ethnic groups has been highly

²⁵ Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov (2004: 49) argue that Geertz’ much-cited idea of primordial attachments refers not to *actual* ‘givens’ of social existence but to *perceived* ‘givens’. They suggest that primordialism cannot be so easily dismissed because participants’ primordialism can be studied without endorsing analytical primordialism (Brubaker, Loveman & Stamatov 2004: 50). While this may be the case (indeed participants’ primordialism is discussed at length later in this thesis), analytical primordialism certainly exists in sociobiological arguments and, I believe, in other forms of primordialism, and it is this approach that is rejected by this research.

²⁶ A thorough examination and well-reasoned dismissal of primordialism is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis and thus I have relied on the good reasoning of others in developing my approach.

influential. As the title of this thesis suggests, boundaries of difference were also a central theme in participants' discussions of Indianness.

For many subsequent scholars the classificatory element of 'ethnicity' has formed merely an aspect of a more general constructivist definition of the term. For example, Fenton defines ethnicity as "the *social construction* of descent and culture, the social mobilization of descent and culture, and the meanings and implications of classifications systems built around them" (2003: 3, original emphasis). His contention that "[p]eople or peoples do not just possess cultures or share ancestry; *they elaborate these into the idea of a community founded upon these attributes*" suggests a system of classifying and then elaboration of categories into communities (2003: 3, original emphasis). However, categorization remains implicit in the definition. Conversely, scholars advocating a cognitive approach to 'ethnicity' have located processes of classification and categorization at the centre of the concept. Levine defines ethnicity as "that method of classifying people (both self and other) that uses origin (socially constructed) as its primary reference" (1999: 168). Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov (2004: 47) similarly argue that ethnicity (as well as race and nation) is not an entity in the world, but a perspective on the world that involves classifying oneself and others.²⁷ Although the specific cognitive processes involved in this system of classification (e.g. Levine's (1999: 169) notion of the embodied mind) are beyond the scope of this thesis, an understanding of ethnicity as a system of classification has been useful in clarifying the specific mechanisms of construction involved in the production of 'ethnic' groups.

Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov (2004: 45) criticise the 'groupism' inherent in much academic writing which unquestioningly takes 'groups' as basic units of analysis. They suggest one advantage of a cognitive approach is that it shifts analytical attention to

²⁷ Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov (2004: 47-49) argue that ethnicity, race and nation constitute an integrated domain as they all involve classification of people (although each has its specific variations). Although I have described participants' talk about Indianness as a discourse of ethnicity, this is not their terminology. Some participants explicitly suggested that 'nationality' was a better term than 'ethnicity' and many suggested that they used 'Indian' as a racial category when they included Sri Lankans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in their discussions of Indianness. Talk about Indianness is referred to as a discourse of ethnicity because it was the most accurate available academic term in most contexts. As mentioned above, I acknowledge that much of what I say can be equally applied to notions of 'race' and 'nationality' and will make these connections myself in some areas of discussion.

‘group-making’ and ‘grouping’ activities which construct ethnic categories as “discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogenous, and externally bounded groups”. Levine argues that too much attention has been given to the social and cultural dimensions of ethnicity and suggests that once we begin to see ethnicity simply as part of a system of classification based on origin, we can explore how particular ethnic categories arise, are elaborated with (socially constructed) social, cultural and identity properties and become salient in social action. This research has not asked how the category ‘Indian’ originated, but understands participants’ discourses as elaborations on the category ‘Indian’ used to construct a meaningful ‘group’ (Indian) defined by boundaries of difference. This approach can be seen as somewhat akin to Fenton’s (1999, 2003: 25-50) attention to the importance of an emergence of a *discourse* of ethnicity in order to make ‘ethnic’ categories meaningful. The focus on local discourses in this study is intended to build on Fenton’s discussion of the development of scholarly discourses.

Having outlined my approach to ethnicity in detail, I must emphasise that it is not my intention to offer a critique of my participants’ discourses of ethnicity. When I discuss ways in which participants talk about Indianness it will be evident that they express a range of situational and primordial discourses. While I certainly analyse their discourses, I do not wish to suggest any one local discourse is better or more correct than another. I take the viewpoint that

[e]xperience of the world, however imbued with immediate interpretations, is neither true nor false; it simply *is*. The on-going history of the world cannot be interpreted as an intellectual conversation in which problems can be solved by convincing people that they have got it all wrong (Friedman 1997: 88, original emphasis).

I do, however, intend to critique academic discourses of ‘ethnicity’, not only in terms of how they respond to local discourses, but also in terms of their alignment with my understanding of the term.

The first chapter of this thesis involves an exploration of the specific hypotheses associated with symbolic ethnicity in relation to my participants. According to Gans (1979) and later Alba (1990), amongst third and fourth generation White post-diasporic peoples in America, ‘ethnic’ activity is becoming increasingly intermittent and privatised

as ‘ethnicity’ becomes increasingly identity- rather than culturally- or communally-based. Following Gans, several other scholars have sought to test the applicability of symbolic ethnicity to their participant groups, some finding support for Gans’ hypotheses (Alba 1990) and others not (Kivisto & Nefzger 1993; Winter 1996; Rebhun 2004). This research begins with a ‘test’ of this kind. In Chapter One I will examine the extent to which the symbolic ethnicity model offered by Gans (1979) and Alba (1990) explains my participants’ descriptions of their Indianness by exploring matters of cultural practice, social interactions with other Indians and identity. Discussion will then turn to the issue of ethnic options, an area of study developed in response to the high level of choice in when and how to play ethnic roles associated with symbolic ethnicity. Drawing on the work of Mary Waters (1990, 1999) and Miri Song (2003), I will examine my participants’ choices in being Indian, being New Zealanders and how to be Indian as well as exploring how they negotiate being both Indian and ‘Kiwi’.²⁸ It will become evident that on the whole participants’ descriptions of their Indianness do not indicate symbolic ethnicity. Although explanations can be found for this in matters of generational proximity to immigration and the effects of racial classification, the inconclusiveness of analysis in Chapter One will indicate the need for an alternative approach.

In Chapters Two and Three I diverge from a conventional symbolic ethnicity approach to explore the recurrent dilemmas of difference in participants’ narratives. This is achieved through an examination of the assumptions about ‘culture’ and the ‘individual’ inherent in the notion of living ‘between two worlds’. In Chapter Two I will explore cultural dilemmas of difference and argue that the cultural has been ‘ethnified’ in the way participants talk about Indianness as well as in academic discourses of symbolic ethnicity. I will discuss how a self-conscious ‘culture’ is extracted from non-reflective cultural experience and used in the construction of boundaries of difference between ‘ethnic’ groupings. In Chapter Three I will explore individual dilemmas of difference and argue that participants expressed highly individuated notions of personhood and thus emphasized ‘individual’ choice and the uniqueness of the ‘individual’. Implications for symbolic ethnicity will be discussed throughout.

²⁸ ‘Kiwi’ is a widely used colloquial term that refers to New Zealanders and can be used as a descriptive term to describe things that are from New Zealand and/or characteristically New Zealand.

In Chapter Four I attempt to resolve the tensions and contradictions described in Chapters Two and Three – between performed self-conscious Indianness and lived non-conscious Indianness, and between individual choice and community obligation. I suggest that while symbolic ethnicity provides clues as to the meanings behind these tensions, it does not provide a full explanation. I argue that participants' discourses of an individualised and highly 'ethnified' Indianness can be more usefully understood as a product of 'reflexive' (Beck, Giddens & Lash 1994) or 'liquid' (Bauman 2000, 2001, 2005) modernity and reflexive individualism (Giddens 1991; Beck 1998; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). I propose a notion of self-reflexive ethnicity, a mode of ethnicity that arises in response to the institutionalised individualism and dogma of free choice that characterise the current period.

Chapter One

Symbolic Ethnicity

The notion of symbolic ethnicity was proposed by Herbert Gans (1979) to explain the apparent ‘ethnic revival’ of 1970s America. According to Gans, this ‘revival’ indicated an increased attention to ethnic identities and highly visible symbols of ethnicity, but a decline in other aspects of ethnicity. Amongst third and fourth generation White post-diasporic Americans he observed a decline in active membership in ethnic organizations and ethnic homogeneity of marriage partners, friends and acquaintances as well as a decrease in the practice of ‘ethnic cultures’ as identity became the central basis of ethnicity. As behavioural expectations associated with ethnic roles became increasingly rare, choice of when and how to ‘play ethnic roles’, became increasingly available. Having found support for Gans’ hypotheses amongst his participants, Alba concluded that a paradoxical divergence was observable amongst many White Americans “between the long-run and seemingly irreversible decline of objective ethnic differences – in education and work, family and community – and the continuing subjective importance of ethnic origins” (1990: 290). In short, although by no means “unauthentic, unserious, or meaningless” (Gans 1994: 574), symbolic ethnicity was seen by both Gans and Alba to be largely peripheral to everyday life. In this chapter I will examine the extent to which a symbolic ethnicity model explains my participants’ descriptions of their Indianness. I will explore matters of cultural practice, social interactions with other Indians and identity, as well as looking for evidence of increased choice in when and how to play ethnic roles.

The Cultural

Herbert Gans argued that people in the third generation are less and less interested in their ethnic ‘cultures’ (1979: 7-8) as ‘old ethnic cultures’ serve no useful function for them (1979: 6). He contended that members of the third generation refrain from ethnic behaviour that requires arduous or time-consuming commitment to a ‘culture’ that must be practiced constantly and look for easy and intermittent ways of expressing their

identity that do not conflict with other ways of life (1979: 8). Support for this argument in my participants' discussions of Indianness is somewhat mixed.²⁹

Although most participants described the ability to speak Gujarati as very important, younger participants were on the whole significantly less fluent in the language than older participants.³⁰ My youngest participant described herself as very fluent in Gujarati, but most participants suggested that older Gujaratis and Gujaratis in the past spoke Gujarati more fluently and more frequently than younger Gujaratis today. A similar situation was described in relation to the preparation and consumption of food that was classified as 'Indian'. Older participants reported eating 'Indian' food significantly more frequently than younger participants and many participants suggested that older Gujaratis and Gujaratis in the past cooked more 'authentic' 'Indian' food as they did not take 'shortcuts' in their preparation:

The majority of people here can't cook proper Indian meals compared to what my parents and grandparents used to make and it's different now. It's all modernised. It's not real (Bhaskar, male, 40).

SATYA: Even though I cook Indian meals and that, you sort of, you don't shortcut it, but you don't go as authentic, you know?

JASMINE: Add buckets of oil {laughter}

SATYA: Or, you know, the poppadoms and things like that. I mean I just buy those sort of things whereas the older tradition like to go through all the thing and make all that [...] My mother-in-law, and I think most Indian old women are like this, they like to just cook and cook and cook

JASMINE: {Putting on Indian accent} Why do you want to buy it when I can make it at home?

SATYA: Exactly

In addition, many younger interviewees reported that they ate beef, much to the disappointment of their mothers: *"As we got older, meat crept into the diet and slowly beef did too, but not around Mum. And now Mum knows that we eat beef. She's like 'Just give it up. Do something for*

²⁹ In this thesis I will use the word 'culture' in a number of contexts. When discussing 'culture' generally, I will use the term 'the cultural' to avoid essentialism. When discussing the ways in which academics and participants have talked about the cultural, I will either refer to their 'discourses of culture', or simply use the term 'culture' in quotation marks to indicate that I am discussing their usage and not my own. Likewise, when discussing academics' conceptualization of the cultural, I will refer either to their 'concept of culture'/'the culture concept' or use the term 'culture' in quotation marks. Much of what is discussed in this chapter as 'Indian culture' might otherwise be labelled 'Hindu' or 'Gujarati'. However, 'Indian' was the term used most frequently by participants. See the introduction to this thesis for an explanation of the conflation of 'Indian', 'Gujarati' and 'Hindu' in participants' narratives.

³⁰ When I differentiate between older and younger participants I am including those in their teens, twenties and thirties as 'younger', those in their fifties and sixties as 'older' and those in their forties as somewhat ambiguous.

your culture. Give up the beef” (Lata, female, 25).³¹ However, despite describing themselves as more open to non-Indian foods than older Gujaratis, many younger participants regularly consumed Indian food: *“I’ve noticed like if I go away somewhere or go away for work and I don’t have some form of Indian meal, after about 3 or 4 days I really start to miss it”* (Savita, female, 24). Although some older participants had worn saris regularly in the past, Indian dress was described by participants as reserved only for special ‘Indian’ occasions and to a large extent a female activity. Jasmine’s use of the word ‘costume’ to describe Indian dress was representative of an attitude towards Indianness amongst some participants as something one did on special occasions, something one got dressed up for.

My participants reported highly varied levels of religious observance. Most participants indicated that they did not pray regularly. For example, Dipankar told me he prays *“occasionally. I did this morning for my driving test {laughs}”*. Older interviewees tended to describe higher levels of observance: *“we say our prayers every day before we go to work. We **strongly** follow our religious festivities”* (Mahesh, male, 61). However, my youngest participant also reported daily prayer: *“Every night before we have dinner [...] we light a candle and pray for like two minutes and then we eat [...] In the mornings before I eat anything I light a candle as well and then I say a few words”* (Aparna, female, 18). In addition, all participants reported marking certain ‘Indian’ days of significance in some way, and many participants continued to celebrate several Indian festivals, particularly *Diwali*, *Navratri* and *Rakshabandan*. Nevertheless, participants strongly associated frequent and orthodox religious observance with older Gujaratis and Gujaratis in the past. Younger participants especially expressed a preference for intermittent and home-centred practices rather than those requiring persistent religious practice and attendance at the Wellington Indian Association. Several younger participants suggested religious celebrations held little significance for them and they would forget them altogether if they were not reminded by their mothers:

AMANDA: *Would you eat anything special on Diwali or anything?*

MAAN: *To me it has no significance in terms of its meaning. If my mum and dad invite me to come around and have a meal because it’s such and such a day, I don’t actually get caught up in the day; I’ll just have the meal to keep my mum and dad happy.*

³¹ Rebhun (2004: 353) found similar weakening of dietary laws amongst his Jewish American participants.

In short, while strict observance of cultural practices in terms of language, food, dress and religion were associated by many participants with older Gujaratis and Gujaratis in the past, many participants, including younger ones, reported that they were themselves fluent in Gujarati, they often ate 'Indian' food and were culturally, if not religiously, observant in marking 'Indian' days of significance.

The Social

According to Alba, symbolic ethnicity is characterised by "a detachment of ethnicity from ethnic networks, organizations, and neighborhoods" (Alba 1990: 30). He and Gans suggest that intermarriage is becoming widespread, friendship circles are becoming ethnically diverse and active membership in ethnic organizations is becoming rare to the extent that many who identify in ethnic terms only have limited contact with persons of the same ethnic background (Alba 1990: 301; Gans 1979: 8). Some of my participants similarly suggested that their social worlds did not "bear a deep imprint of ethnicity" (Alba 1990: 301). They described their friendship groups as ethnically mixed and suggested that exogamous marriage was becoming both more common and more acceptable:³²

My wife and I would like them to marry Indians, but in this day and age you're not going to be able to tell ten years down the, you're not going to be able to say, you know. And from looking out there on the streets these days, there's a lot of inter-racial marriages so you can never tell (Bhaskear, male, 40).

A few years ago my brother was seeing a non-Indian and my parents didn't like it [...] He left home and I had nothing to do with him for about a year I think [...] It was basically like they disowned him in a way [...] So back then I think it was a big issue [...] Since then I've had a number of cousins marry non-Indians or non-Gujaratis and I know it's hard for my parents, but I think they're probably more open and

³² What exactly constitutes endogamous and exogamous marriage is a matter of some complexity in relation to my participant group. In the past, custom amongst Gujaratis has stipulated marriage within ones own sub-caste. From the comments of my participants it appeared that caste was still a consideration for many when choosing a marriage partner for themselves or their children. As well as inter-caste marriage, religiously exogamous marriage was a concern for my participants. However, perhaps because of the reported significant increase in marriage to non-Indians, the form of intermarriage discussed most frequently by participants was inter-ethnic marriage. Marriage to Gujaratis was clearly preferred over marriage to Indians from other states of India, but the tendency of participants to equate Indian with Gujarati made it difficult to assess the extent to which marriage to a non-Gujarati Indian was less problematic than marriage to a non-Indian. The general feeling amongst participants appeared to be that the boundaries of endogamy were extending, so that whereas once parents were drawing the line at marriage within the sub-caste, today 'Indian' was the boundary around which contentions arose.

accepting to it than what they were, but I think ideally they would want us all to marry Gujaratis (Savita, female, 24).

Two of my participants were themselves in serious long-term relationships with non-Indians. In addition, some of my participants described their involvement in the Wellington Indian Association and the Wellington Indian Sports Club as consisting of easy and intermittent attendance at significant social or cultural events of the kind described by Gans as “ceremonial; and thus symbolic to begin with” (1979: 10). Some suggested that membership without involvement was not unusual: *“I know a lot of people that belong to our Indian association and things like that, but have nothing to do with them. They just pay their money and belong and like to have the newsletters and see what’s happening, but they don’t attend anything” (Ranjna, fifties, female).* Participants also expressed the opinion that others were becoming less willing to make the effort to involve themselves in these organisations and some made comments that suggested this was true of themselves.³³

However, many of my participants described themselves as very involved in the Wellington Indian Association and/or the Wellington Indian Sports Club.³⁴

I’m involved in the Indian community, in the Indian Sports Club. And so probably once a week we’ll have a meeting of some form or I’ll need to go and do something to do with it [...] I’m not part of a team but I do probably fill in every week for a team [...] I probably spend a good four, five hours at the turf over the weekend just watching and hanging out [...] For the last about four, five years, I’ve been on the executive committee of the sports club [...] I reckon probably at least three out of four weekends I’d have something to do with them (Savita, female, 24).

The friendship groups of many participants were described as dominated by Gujaratis and marriage to non-Indians was described by most as an exception to the rule and less ideal than marrying within the ethnic grouping. Of my thirteen participants who were in serious relationships, ten were or had been³⁵ married to Gujaratis and one was in a serious long-term relationship with a Gujarati. In addition, all participants, even the least

³³ Further to this point, Sharmila Bernau (2006: 75-7) describes the dwindling attendance and absence of younger member at the WIA’s *Gita* class and Arun reported decreasing numbers in the Gujarati Sunday school despite increasing number of Gujaratis in Wellington, although he suggested that numbers had stabilised following the establishment of the Gujarati preschool.

³⁴ Three of my participants reported involvement in other organizations, one in the Hare Krishna movement, another in a caste-based organisation, and another in classical Indian and Bollywood dancing.

³⁵ One participant was a widower.

communally involved, expressed a strong sense of ‘community’. All participants talked extensively about the ‘Indian community’ or the ‘Gujarati community’ and described these ‘communities’ as very ‘real’ entities that one could belong to, be outside of, and be monitored by.³⁶

According to Gans (1979: 12), symbolic ethnicity “does not require functioning groups or networks; feelings of identity can be developed by allegiances to symbolic groups that never meet, or to collectivities that meet only occasionally, and exist as groups only for the handful of officers that keep them going”. While my participants described trends towards less intense involvement in formal organizations and increasing ethnic heterogeneity in friendship groups, acquaintances and marriage partners, all participants suggested they were part of strong Gujarati social networks.

Identity

According to Alba (1990: 18), ethnic identity is the “pivotal notion” of symbolic ethnicity. As discussed earlier, symbolic ethnicity involves an increasing emphasis on ethnic identity, despite a decline in cultural practice and ethnic social networks. Again, however, the degree to which this explains the narratives of my participants is mixed. When asked ‘Is being Indian or Gujarati important to you?’, my two oldest participants replied that it was not particularly important. Both reported high levels of ‘Indian’ cultural practice, were involved in formal organizations and had strong Gujarati social networks. Three participants said being Indian was important to them in some ways: *“Some areas of my life yes it is important to me, but it’s hard to define exactly what is important” (Jasmine, female, 40)*. These participants were relatively uninvolved in formal organizations and were not particularly culturally observant. The vast majority of participants said being Indian or Gujarati was important to them with reasons including the need to be proud of ones

³⁶ The variety of contexts participants used the term ‘community’ and their difficulty in explaining the boundaries of these communities suggested that ‘community’ was a catch-all phrase used to mean different things in different contexts. ‘Community’ was sometimes used to refer to a group as small as members of the Wellington Indian Association and/or the Sports Club and as big as all New Zealand Indians. Most participants used Indian/Gujarati ‘community’ to refer to an essentially Gujarati community composed of members of the organisations and other Gujaratis seen at events such as weddings. Participants described this ‘community’ as being connected by common acquaintances and gossip networks.

origins, the significance of Indianess as a point of distinction from others, or statements such as ‘it’s who I am’, ‘it’s my identity’, or ‘it gives me a sense of belonging’: *“I think it’s just important because it gives you a sense of belonging and it has, like it’s part, that’s what you are, you’re Gujarati Indian [...] it’s what makes you I guess”* (Savita, female, 24). Those who described their Indianess as very important suggested they were no more communally involved or culturally observant than those who simply replied yes. It appeared that while the importance placed on being Indian was not wholeheartedly connected to the salience of ethnicity in other aspects of life, the two factors were not entirely disconnected.

Consciousness of Indianness in everyday life also varied amongst participants. Some suggested they very rarely reflected upon their Indianness: *“Never really wake up thinking ‘Hey, I’m a New Zealand Indian’ kind of thing, nothing like that. You just kind of wake up and think ‘Ah yeah another day’”* (Harsha, male, 25). Others suggested such reflection was a regular occurrence and was usually prompted by interaction with non-Indians:³⁷

I’m just one of those people that thinks about it all the time [...] But it probably doesn’t need to be that way. Because my Gujarati friends, I don’t reckon they think about being Indian much at all. It’s just who they are [...] I seem to think about it a lot. It probably affects something that I do or something that I say every day [...] Having a non-Indian partner, you talk about your childhood and stuff, there’s so many times when he’ll say ‘That’s an Indian thing’ [...] I definitely think that being with [my non-Indian partner] makes me very conscious of it [...] I can talk about my cultural identity quite a lot because I feel sometimes like I’m on the defence a lot, like to Indians sort of just proving that yeah I’m western but I’m Indian and to New Zealand, like Pakeha New Zealand, I’m one of you but I’m different [...] Quite a lot of my thinking is shaped by conversations that I’ve had with people and having to think about my positioning and justify it to someone (Lata, female, 25).

Because of the correlation between contact with non-Indians and consciousness of Indianness, such consciousness was described by participants who indicated that their social networks were more ethnically heterogeneous.

³⁷ An interesting parallel can be drawn here with Wang’s (1992 in Nederveen Pieterse 1997: 368) notion of enclosure ethnicity. Wang argues that ethnic identity is not salient for those who are enclosed within the ethnic experience (‘the fish don’t talk about the water’), but becomes salient through assimilatory contact with others. Although Wang is talking in terms of anthropology’s ‘primitive isolates’ the concept can be related to a tightly knit ethnic community or, as Nederveen Pieterse (1997: 375-6) has described it, a community with “an *inward-looking* strategy of collective self-definition...looking inward, marrying inward, buying black, voting black, celebrating blackness”. Such an ‘inward-looking strategy’ is an over-emphasis in the case of my participants, but it retains the idea that increased social contact with others leads to increasing salience of ethnic identity. This was something that was also found by Waters (1990: 44): “asked about times when they became especially aware of their own and others’ ethnicities, most people mentioned the transition from living at home with their parents to being independent. For many who had grown up in ethnically homogenous environments, leaving home was the first time they were exposed to people from other ethnic groups”.

In addition to feelings of ‘being’ Indian, many participants expressed feelings of belonging, or not belonging, to an Indian ‘community’ and to India. Some participants were critical of the Indian ‘community’ and positioned themselves as outside the ‘community’ in their discussions of it:

JASMINE: *It's just like we're really on the outer anyway. Like we feel we're really on the outer.*

SATYA: *I don't really feel like I fit in the community. Like if we're with the family, I really feel like an outsider. They don't make me feel like that, but I feel like that. And I think it would be this language thing that you can't, it makes you feel really duncey. You can't sort of join and participate. You just sit on the outside.*

AMANDA: *Do you think they see you as being on the outside?*

SATYA: *Yip*

JASMINE: *Yeah I do.*

I do feel that I don't fit into the Gujarati community that well. And that's just because of how we grew up. We played hockey with the Indian Sports Club when we were kids, but we weren't related to anybody on the team [...] We didn't know the person on our team's father's brother's mother's sister's cousin's neighbour. So my sister and I always felt like we didn't belong [...] And they know that we're different because we're not the same caste. And even my Indian friends now, they know that I wasn't at all the same things as them growing up and we weren't over at each others' houses and stuff, that kind of stuff. They know that I wouldn't have been active in the Sports Club or the Indian Association because I'd only go a few times a year or at the functions, things like that [...] I'm part of the community, but not at the same time (Lata, female, 25).

However, many participants were very accepting of the ‘community’ in their discussions of it and described the ‘community’ as giving them strong feelings of belonging: *“they make you feel ‘belong’ and that’s the same thing with the community here is that with my peers, with my friends they make me feel like I belong and that’s why it’s special.”* (Maan, male, 30). As one might expect, participants who described themselves as very involved in formal organizations and their social networks as dominated by Gujaratis expressed strong feelings of belonging to the community.

My participants expressed varied feelings of connectedness to ‘the homeland’, India. Of my sixteen participants, only three had never been to India. Those who had been had made between one and six trips, with most having been two or three times. Although a few did not enjoy their time in India – *“it was nothing compared to what I had pictured in my mind. [...] I couldn't believe it, it was like ‘We live in a shack! There is no running water! Electricity, it goes off at*

what time?’ [...] I think I like my luxuries” (Meenaksbi, female, 42)³⁸ – almost all of those who had been described having enjoyed the experience and feeling some sense of belonging. However, all recognised there were ways in which they didn’t ‘belong’ in India and almost all continued to see Wellington as home:

Because I’ve been in New Zealand for my whole life, I probably think of New Zealand as home [...] If I am in India I think of India as home, but I’d never want to live there. I just like going there as a holiday every now and again. So I’d probably think of New Zealand more as home (Aparna, female, 18).

They can spot you a mile away and know that you’re not from India. I mean you may have the same skin colour, but they can definitely notice that you’re not from around there (Harsha, male, 25).

India’s a holiday destination at the end of the day, not a home. And it could be a six month holiday but it’s still not a home (Maan, male, 30).

All of the three participants who had not been to India planned to go. However, one explicitly described India as a rather arbitrarily bounded landmass from which her Indianess was entirely removed:

It’s funny though, when I think of India I think of it as a country, just as I think about China as a country or Japan as a country [...] Like culture’s everywhere, Indian culture. You can transport culture. So I don’t feel an affinity to the country other than I was really interested to go to China, for it’s history and it’s richness and it’s unique identity and stuff. I know that I will, it will be different than me going to China, because I am Indian and there is a cultural connection, but it’s still a bit of land to me [...] I don’t think you need to go to India to be Indian. And I don’t think because I’m Indian I have to go to India (Lata, female, 25).

Those who expressed the greatest sense of belonging to India described a strong connection to a family home. For example, Harsha recounted how much it had meant to him when his father had showed him the gravestones of his ancestors and pointed out the boundaries of the family land.

When one considers these different aspects of identity as a whole, it is evident that symbolic ethnicity is not an appropriate explanation. Certainly there was some indication of a disconnection of the strength of identity from the degree of community

³⁸ A few participants expressed frustration with those who did not like going to India, saying that these people should learn to love India for what it is and not judge it in terms of their New Zealand expectations. Many participants saw distaste for India as a result of making the first trip when in ones teens and made efforts to take their own children before they reached such an age: *“I was really very, very keen to get them to India before they became teenagers really, because I thought I’ve seen lots of Gujaratis who take their kids back to India as teenagers or late teens and they absolutely hate it because they just, one they don’t know anyone, and secondly they, it’s just so dirty and different for them. Whereas I have this belief that if you can go before you’re a teenager and you don’t mind the dirt and the sort of backward or country-style lifestyle, you can accept it a lot better” (Arun, male, 46).*

involvement and cultural practice, but this was by no means clear-cut. Support for symbolic ethnicity can be found in the appearance of a relationship between heterogeneous social networks and consciousness of Indianness, but expressions of feelings of belonging to the 'community' and to India were positively correlated with reports of actual involvement in the community and visits to family homes.

Symbolic Indianness?

The above discussion suggests that participants' Indianness cannot on the whole be characterised as symbolic. At the risk of undermining the heterogeneity of my participant group, describing them in terms of a number of 'types' proves useful in showing the relationships between the different aspects discussed above and in giving a clearer picture of the group as a whole.³⁹ Some of my participants had family connections to the earliest Gujarati settlers in Wellington and belonged to one of the two main sub-castes in Wellington. They belonged to a particular kin network described by many participants as the 'core' of the Gujarati 'community' due to its dominance in the Wellington Indian Association and the Wellington Indian Sports Club. Participants who were members of this 'communal core' described themselves as very involved in the 'community' both in terms of participation in formal organizations and in terms of the dominance of Gujaratis (mostly other 'communal core' Gujaratis) in their close social networks. The narratives of these participants suggested that although older members of this 'communal' core continued to observe custom, the core communal youth tended to take the cultural aspects of their Indianess for granted and were very occasional in their cultural practice. The communal core tended to place high importance on their Indianess, but had little cause to reflect on it on a day-to-day basis.

The group of participants I have labelled 'peripheral communal' described themselves as having close non-Gujarati friends as well as strong Gujarati social networks. They were usually at least somewhat involved in the WIA and WISC, but were members of a minority caste, had no kin connection to the early Gujarati settlers or lived outside of

³⁹ Levine (1997) has similarly described different New Zealand Jewish 'types'.

Wellington City and thus reported feeling a lesser sense of belonging to the Gujarati ‘community’. The narratives of these participants suggested they did not take the cultural aspects of their Indianness for granted to the same extent as the ‘communal core’ and were more culturally observant. Two of my participants fit into neither of these ‘types’ due the strong heterogeneity of their social networks. Both had non-Indian partners and mostly non-Indian friends and were uninvolved in formal ‘Indian’ organizations. They differed significantly, however, in their reported levels of cultural practice.

One explanation for the lack of support for symbolic ethnicity in my participants’ descriptions of their Indianness can be found in the matter of generation. Gans described symbolic ethnicity as characteristic of third and fourth generation post-diasporic peoples. According to Alba (1990: 5), “ethnic differences appear to be strongest among the generations closest to the immigrant experience and grow fainter among those further away”. The situation for my participants was complicated because, unlike Alba’s participants for whom “the generational composition of ethnic groups changes over time” (1990: 5), a constant flow of newcomers from India and Fiji means the Gujarati community is far from homogenous in terms of generation. My participants were all either the first or second generation to be born in New Zealand, but almost all had two or three older generations of one side of their family living here. However, most of my participants had a parent who had been born or raised in India, Fiji or Africa. If this was the reason behind the lack of symbolic ethnicity, one would predict that as numbers of wholly third and fourth generation Gujaratis grow (hastened by growing preference for New Zealand-born or raised spouses), their ethnicity will change in the direction of symbolic ethnicity.

This conclusion can easily be drawn from suggestions made by many participants that Indianness in general was decreasing both generationally and over time:

I think as each generation of Indians is here in New Zealand, there’ll be more and more lost [...] I mean I know and I’ve seen it. I’m not nearly as Indian as my folks. My kids aren’t as Indian as I am, you know? So given another couple of generations within our own family, I’d say it probably isn’t going to matter too much, [...] I think that’s the same with any culture. They’re just going to assimilate into the environment they’re in (Arun, male 46).

I guarantee my grandchildren [...] won't be able to identify being an Indian and that's a lot of problems the younger kids are having now. They don't like the traditional ways, they don't identify themselves as being Indian. They're more Kivis, they're more westernised, they don't believe in the old traditions and stuff. So I guarantee you within the next 20 or 30 years there'll be no Indians, or they'll be colour only, put it that way. But the way they live and the style of living and the way they dress etcetera, it will be very hard for you to find a traditional Indian around here [...] Now they [kids] have got so many other things going on that you know there's no time [...] there's no real place for the culture. It's sad, but it's the way it's going to be [...] Basically there's a majority of the chances of my children, my grandchildren and generations further on, they won't be marrying Indians and they won't be like Indians (Bhaskar, male, 40).

But as always there are complications, particularly in the communal aspects of my participants' Indianness. As discussed above, many of my youngest participants were very involved in formal 'Indian' organizations and had strong networks of Gujarati friends. Many participants asserted that this was unlikely to change over time:

AMANDA: Do you think future generations will be less Indian?

KIRAN: A few years ago I would have said yes. Now I'd say no because there's still a very, very strong cultural activity here and that is retaining the Indian heritage in the young people. I mean my son, he was the last person to sort of carry on; he's very, very Indian. He's more Indian than I am. He's more involved in Indian activities than I ever was. My little grandchildren, my little twins, I know what's going to happen there, because my daughter, though she's born here, she's also very, very culturally minded and she does a lot of programmes, she's involved in all the dance productions and everything and I know what's going to happen. My grandkids are going to retain that. So I don't think it's going to sink. It's going to survive [...] If you talk about Gujaratis in Wellington, especially the Sports Club, they're really dynamite. They've got so much cultural and they retain it. They're really good for the community. The Sports Club has really kept all our young ones in tow.

The second possible reason an absence of features of symbolic ethnicity amongst my participants lies in Bhaskar's comment that future generations might be 'colour only'. As discussed above, the existing literature on symbolic ethnicity has focussed on White 'ethnics' for whom ethnicity is largely invisible and can thus be accessed at will. In the following discussion of ethnic options I will explore how my participants' racial classification may affect the possibility of their Indianness being entirely symbolic.

Ethnic Options

The availability of choice has been central to the concept of symbolic ethnicity from its outset. Gans (1979: 7-8) argued that symbolic ethnicity was characterised by people's ability to choose when and how to play ethnic roles, which was possible due to the sharp decline in behavioural expectations associated with such roles. According to Alba (1990:

303), “choice is probably the key to unlocking the full implications of the transition underway from community to identity as a basis for ethnicity among whites”. Building on the hypotheses of symbolic ethnicity, Mary Waters coined the phrase ‘ethnic options’ (1990) to express people’s choices as to whether to identify with an ethnic grouping as well as how to do so. She argued that for White ‘ethnics’ in America a large number of choices were available as to which, if any, ethnic group to identify with. Waters asserted, however, that such options were not available to people who were racially classified as others ascribed identities to them based on their physical appearance: “[h]istory and current power relations create and shape the opportunities people face in their day-to-day lives giving some people “ethnic options” and others “racial labels” (1999: 47). Song (2003) has further explored Waters’ notion of ethnic options and suggests a less polarized model. She argues that, contrary to Waters’ assertions, racially classified groups are able, although in limited ways, to exercise ethnic options by negotiating and working at asserting their desired ethnic identities. My participants described ethnic options as well as ethnic constraints in a number of areas. These can be divided into choices about being Indian, choices about being New Zealanders, choices about how to be Indian, and negotiating being both Indians and ‘Kiwis’.

In contrast to Waters’ White participants, many of my participants expressed the opinion that ‘being Indian’ was not something that could be chosen or changed:

I think that’s one of the biggest things that I’d want to pass on to my kids definitely and that you are Indian and that no matter what you are always going to be Indian (Savita, female, 24).

Whatever happens, whatever you say, once you’re an Indian, you’re always an Indian, you can never change that (Kiran, male, 66).

Many gave examples of individuals who had attempted to ‘opt out’ (Song 2003: 56-7) of being Indian, but suggested it was not possible to fully disidentify or ‘disengage’ (Levine 1997): “*They don’t want to be part of the community. They don’t want to have anything to do with doing anything [...] I think that makes them think that they aren’t Indian, yeah. That’s not to say that I don’t see those people as being Indian. I do. They are still Indian*” (Meenakshi, female, 42).

A reason very frequently given for the inability to opt out of Indianness was physical appearance. My participants suggested that their physical appearance provided a highly

visible pointer to their ethnicity and, as a result, they were frequently reminded of their ethnicity when interacting with both non-Indians and other Indians. Most participants indicated that when meeting others, particularly for the first time, they were frequently asked where they came from or similar questions regarding their ethnicity. Many suggested that those that met them were also keen to talk about 'Indian culture':

*People instantly start talking about Indian stuff to you. And that's reflecting your ethnicity and stuff [...] She went to me 'I **love** Indian celebrations, it's so colourful, the flowers' [...] People will go 'I **love** Bollywood films' [...] and people comment on, the Indian arranged marriage one's a classic. You get that all the time. Like 'So are your parents going to have one of those for you?' just assuming that it's something everybody does [...] And the 'I love dhal' thing [...] 'Oh I went to a great Indian restaurant the other day, had great dhal' (Lata, female, 25, original emphasis).*

I think it happens to me a lot because I work with people [...] 'Oh where are you from?', you know? Or 'Is that an Indian name?' or whatever. 'Oh did you do you training here or did you do it...?', you know? 'I thought you were a New Zealander, your accent is...', you know. 'Your English is so good' and something like this (Ranjna, female, fifties).

Participants suggested that their Indianness consistently became salient when interacting with other Indians. All participants described being asked by other Indians where their family was from and to whom they were related:

The thing that really bothers me is other Indians asking you. Like this woman at the dairy asked me twice [...] who I was and who my father was (Jasmine, female, 40).

This is their way of making a connection with you to find out whose parents you are or what village you came from so they can somehow map you into place. So they can work out where you belong, you're from this side or whatever [...] It doesn't bother me because I know it's just their way of working out who you are. Yeah and that still, yes it happens regularly (Meenakshi, female, 42).

When asked whether they could choose not to be Indian, many of my participants referred to this salience of their Indianness in their interactions with others. They responded with some reference to their physical appearance and suggested that others could visually identify them as Indian and expected them to identify accordingly:⁴⁰

If you look like an Indian then people are going to let you know (Maan, male, 30).

Everyone knows that obviously you don't have pale skin then you're obviously some other form of something, type thing (Savita, female, 24).

⁴⁰ This contrasts with Levine's (1997: 107) Jewish participants who felt that could distance themselves from their Jewishness because people could not identify them as Jews based on their physical appearance.

Participants described their physical appearance as something they could not change and thus did not see being Indian as optional: *“It’s the way they look, they’re Indians so they’re Indian, that’s it”* (Bhaskar, male, 40).⁴¹ Despite giving several examples of having their ethnicity mistakenly identified, all participants depicted ‘Indian’ as a category that could be defined in terms of phenotypes and suggested their physical appearance was a reminder to themselves as well as to others of their inherent identity: *“Even if they chose to [forget they’re Indian] I think deep down inside they’d know. They’d look in the mirror and see oh obviously I’m an Indian”* (Maan, male, 30).

The notion that ethnic options were restricted by physical appearance was also evident in participants’ discussions of their ability to be full New Zealanders. A few participants described being identified by others as Indian based on their physical appearance and suggested that this in some ways precluded an identity as a New Zealander:

When I walk down the street, when people haven’t spoken to me, heard my accent, don’t know, the first thing they look at is the colour of my skin, and I really do believe that I’m a New Zealander, but not like a full New Zealander, because when people see me, the first thing they see is me being Indian (Lata, female, 25).

Generally when people see me [...] for some reason, because of the colour of the skin etc. and the way I look, they assume I’m not from here. [...] I said to my friends, ‘If you didn’t know me and if you saw me on the street, how would you see me? Would you know that I was a New Zealander or would you see me as an Indian?’ and they basically said, ‘You’re an Indian as far as we know until we talk to you’ [...] That’s a lot of the way the majority of New Zealanders look at Indians, you know. They don’t really care where they’re born. It’s the way they look, they’re Indians so they’re Indian, that’s it (Bhaskar, male, 40).

Thus, physical appearance was described by participants as making Indianness compulsory and limiting possibilities for New Zealandness.

Other explanations given for the non-voluntary nature of Indianness were birth, blood and upbringing. According to participants, a person is born into a particular ethnic group. They suggested that ‘blood’ (also discussed in the form of DNA, descent and

⁴¹ Lalita Kasanji (1982: 4) has made a very similar observation in her thesis on Wellington Gujaratis: “If their cultural traditions were abandoned the Gujaratis would still be classified as racially, if not ethnically, different by most New Zealanders because of their physical traits which symbolise a different cultural world view from the New Zealand European population. Hence the Gujaratis can never avoid their ethnicity”. See Kasanji (1982: 134) for similar quotes from her Wellington Gujarati participants regarding being Indian due to physical appearance.

ancestry) was central to making them Indian and was something that could not be altered:⁴²

Your heritage, that will always be Indian. That's something you can't take out [...] When I say heritage it's like thinking of your parents, your grandparents, your grandparents before that and that they were true Indians. They will always be in your blood. They will always be there in your thoughts (Meenakshi, female, 42).

MAHESH: *Everyone belongs to an ethnic group by birth. You can deny anything you like, but you're either this or that depending on which part of the globe your genes originated from.*

AMANDA: *So you couldn't decide not to be that group?*

MAHESH: *Absolutely not. I mean, you can't just by putting a paintbrush over you pretend to be something which you're not.*

In addition, participants suggested that Indianness is acquired during an 'Indian upbringing' and becomes a kind of internalised habitus intrinsic to self that cannot be cast aside:

My upbringing makes me Indian [...] If you took my upbringing away of course I'm not Indian [...] Where do you think I learned to pour tea into my saucer, it's watching my elders do it. That piece of wire that cleans your tongue and going what the hell is this and then being taught what it is, you know what I mean? That's all part of your upbringing (Maan, male, 30).

I have these thoughts about am I Indian or am I Kinni? [...] I think sometimes, you know, which way am I? Have I changed so much that I'm not an Indian any more? [...] I suppose a lot of it's in my upbringing and so it's there, you know? It's like it's just part of me now. So if I was to lose that, it's like I'm losing myself so yeah (Arun, male, 46).

The work of Waters and Song does not account for the way participants' own notions of matters such as birth, blood and upbringing may affect their articulation of ethnicity as a matter of choice. However, there is much support for Song's less polarised model of ethnic options in my participants' narratives. Although participants described themselves as unable to discard their Indianess altogether, due in large part to their racial classification, they discussed the specific ways in which they enacted their Indianess as a site open to much negotiation.

Participants described choices in how to be Indian as having to be negotiated in terms of Indian systems of protocol in which certain activities were defined as appropriately

⁴² See Kasanji (1982: 134) for similar quotes from her Wellington Gujarati participants regarding being Indians by birth and origin.

‘Indian’ and others as inappropriately ‘Indian’. All participants described such systems of protocol, either in the context of their interactions with other Indians or, most frequently, in the context of either themselves or others having ‘broken the rules’:

When I’m at a formal Indian do, I’m not going to sit there and talk about how I got drunk with my mates and I know that Indian people, they always ask you about your job first and what level of school you’re in. There’s types of conversation that you have (Lata, female, 25).

We went out for five years before we even got married which was a big no-no (Meenakshi, female, 42).

I ended up buying my own house, which is not sort of something really that Indian women sort of do. They usually sort of stay at home and then get married (Jasmine, female, 40).

Participants suggested that the activities of members of the Gujarati ‘community’ were constantly monitored by kin and the wider Gujarati ‘community’ and that un-Indian activity could negatively affect a person’s family honour:⁴³

There was a lot of respect, a lot of respect and the thing that virtually kept us and my generation in line was that fact [...] Everybody knew everybody or you knew someone who knew someone so you’ve always got this older person looking down on you [...] I grew up in that situation where the older people that we knew that was somewhere, could always see you so if you didn’t behave yourself, did something that was out of the norm, someone’s going to see you (Kiran, male, 66).

Gossip was identified by participants as the mechanism through which the ‘community’ is able to regulate the behaviour of its members with many commenting on how quickly news of ‘un-Indian’ behaviour could spread:⁴⁴

Do you remember that documentary on TV and that girl said that she was gay and we were absolutely pissing ourselves laughing because we thought ‘Shit man tomorrow the phones are going to be going hotwire’.

⁴³ Although a thorough examination of gender differences in my participants’ discussions of their Indianness is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to at least acknowledge the existence of such differences. As Song (2003: 47) argues, “Because ethnic boundary keeping tends to rely on rules about appropriate behavior in relations to marriage, family relationships, and sexuality, women are particularly subject to scrutiny concerning their intimate friendships and relationships and their behaviour more generally”. Many of my participants discussed how parents and the Gujarati ‘community’ had higher behavioural expectations of females than males. See Das Gupta (1997: 582-4) for a discussion of the gendered nature of experiences of ethnicity amongst second generation South Asian Americans.

⁴⁴ The importance of gossip has been discussed in many studies of New Zealand Indians. Kasanji (1982: 103) has described gossip as “an important sanction against non-conformity” within the Wellington Gujarati community and Kirsty Barr (1997: 9) suggests that for her New Zealand Indian participants “[u]ltimately it is the gossip network or the ‘what others might think’ element which manages a family’s marriage prospects”. Also see Meanger (1989: 58, 95, 107) regarding gossip and Sawicka (1995: 6) regarding family honour and gossip. See Handa (2003: 29) for a discussion of the consequences of non-compliance with norms of behaviour amongst second generation South Asian Canadian young women.

You know {putting on Indian accent} ‘Oo did you hear that. Whose daughter was that?’ (Satya, female, 45).

Individuals whose divergence from the remit of accepted and normal practices became public knowledge were depicted by participants as subject to disapproval and accusations of being ‘too Western’:⁴⁵

Because I don’t show my face around the community enough, that means that they might think of me in a certain way. Like I do recognise that that has an impact, has an effect [...] I feel sometimes like I’m on the defence a lot, like to Indians sort of just proving that yeah I’m Western but I’m Indian (Lata, female, 25).

I know that Indians are quite critical, you know? Like they might say to someone ‘Oh she doesn’t have anything to do with the Indian community’, [...] ‘She has a Pakeha boyfriend’ or whatever, ‘She does all these things that aren’t Indian enough’, or whatever they think (Savita, female, 24).

According to participants, extreme cases of ‘un-Indian’ activity could lead to ostracism by the family and the ‘community’. This was only described in relation to people dating or marrying non-Indians against the will of their parents: *“One of my aunts married a European person and she was sort of left out in the cold for a wee while” (Bhaskar, male, 40).* In general, those who displayed un-Indian behaviour depicted themselves as subject to the thinly disguised disapproval of the Gujarati ‘community’ and the disappointment of their parents:

The Gujarati community, the wider Indian community gives us looks and says ‘Oh it’s fine for your kid but not mine’ [...] I have changed how my parents look at me now. I’ve changed the relationship. I’ve done something bad. I’m not as good an Indian daughter as I was. And it was easier to lie than it was to tell them the truth. (Lata, female, 25).

Jasmine and Satya said they felt inadequate about their Indianness and uncomfortable amongst other Indians as they had failed to comply with many aspects of Indian protocol: *“I’m more comfortable in the New Zealand side [...] I find if I’m amongst a lot of Indians I really do feel really uncomfortable and I don’t feel like I fit” (Satya, female, 45).*

Despite such constraints, participants described matters of how to be Indian as open to much negotiation. Frequently this involved hiding deviation from the system of protocol from parents and other members of the Gujarati ‘community’. Participants depicted this

⁴⁵ See Tuan (1999: 115) for a discussion of Asian Americans being judged ‘too American’ and insufficiently knowledgeable about Chinese or Japanese ways by their foreign-born counterparts. See Handa (2003: 70) for a discussion of the dichotomy of too Indian versus too Canadian.

as occurring particularly during their teenage years, in order to maintain an image of a good Indian son or daughter:⁴⁶

All my teenage years I've been sneaking around, like all the other Indian kids, sneaking around and telling lies [...] There's this code, just lie you back each other up. Younger generation doesn't tell anything up to the older generation. There's all these rules (Lata, female, 25).

If I had gone out with someone who was not an Indian [...] I would never have brought them home so would have done all of that behind everyone's back effectively [...] Even for me when I was seeing [my wife] I wouldn't have told my folks initially that I was seeing her until I was pretty sure that it was serious, before I even sort of mentioned it to them (Arun, male, 46).

Examples were also given of openly asserting ethnic options, either by pushing the limits of acceptable Indian behaviour or transgressing altogether and dealing with the consequences:

So we were looking for protocol, what's going to be acceptable to Mum and Dad. So 'Well what did Nila and Vijay do?' [...] So in our heads, my sister and I, the rule was if you're going to shack up with your non-Indian partner, put a ring on your finger first (Lata, female, 25).

Normally the Indian ceremony is always carried out first and then it's the English part, the registry, and I decided no, I wanted the English ceremony to be first [...] Everybody was like 'What is she doing? What is she doing?' And I remember looking at my dad thinking my dad's going to be thinking 'What are you doing?' I thought I really want to do it this way. I don't care [...] And everyone thought this is really odd [...] I think I broke tradition there and I think a lot of people started doing it my way. I don't know why [...] it was kind of like I set that standard (Meenakshi, female, 42).

Participants also described many ways in which they negotiated being simultaneously Indian and Kiwi. Many participants described this as a problem of living in two worlds and having to find balance between them. Some described this process as characterised by a lack of ethnic options and feelings of being 'between two worlds', belonging fully in neither:⁴⁷

It was like Eastern versus Western all my life [...] it was hard because you were expected to be Indian at home even though you had a sort of like an Indian New Zealand mother and then be a Westerner at school and I couldn't match the two. I couldn't match them even when I left home. That's why I was so confused

⁴⁶ Handa (2003: 121) writes that she was "struck by how instrumental lying is in maintaining the next-to-impossible status of the good South Asian girl".

⁴⁷ Lalita Kasanji (1982: 149) found that her Wellington Gujarati participants experienced feelings of marginality particularly during their adolescence "when young New Zealand Indians are not allowed, by parents, to participate in the same social activities as their European peers".

[...] I don't feel in an Indian camp and I don't feel in a New Zealand camp. I feel in the middle [...] But I've got my head around it now (Jasmine, female, 40).

I guess the worst times in terms of feeling would be when people assume that you're not a New Zealander because in the end you've sort of been here so long that you end up getting into a sort of a situation where you think you're an in-between. You're neither a New Zealander nor an Indian. You sort of, you don't fit into either properly. And that's sort of like the worst times, times that you sort of feel worst [...] maybe that's one reason why I hang out with lots of Gujaratis who have been here a long time, etcetera, it's because you don't have that kind of feeling at all (Arun, male, 46).

Most, however, described a situation of personally negotiated compromises and of working towards an ideal synthesis of New Zealand and Indian values and practices. These participants suggested that being both Indians and New Zealanders enabled them to attain 'the best of both worlds':⁴⁸

It's [being both a New Zealander and Indian] never really been a struggle. I always kind of use it as an advantage (Aparna, female, 18).

I've had the best of both worlds so I'm really lucky (Maan, male, 30).

I think we've got the best of two worlds really come to think of it. [...] I can't complain, I've had a good life. I've had two cultures you know [...] I've got the best of both worlds (Ranjna, female, fifties).

My participants described their ability to belong in both worlds in terms of switching between enacting Indian and New Zealand identities depending on the situation.⁴⁹ According to Roger Ballard, "cultures, like languages, are *codes*, which actors use to express themselves in a given context; and as the context changes, so those with the requisite competence simply switch code" (1994: 31 cited in Song 2003: 107). Song (2003: 49) has described this system of code switching as a process of moving between particular 'scripts' of behaviour, which both explicitly and implicitly stipulate adherence to particular values and/or certain forms of behaviour. My participants' descriptions of

⁴⁸ Kasanji's (1989: 4) Wellington Gujarati participants similarly described participating with a sense of belonging in both worlds leading her to conclude that rather than existing "on the margins of two social worlds with no full membership in either", they had a 'dual ethnic identity' as New Zealand Indians.

⁴⁹ Kasanji (1982: 147) found that her young Gujarati participants alternated their roles according to each social situation from being Indian to European in attitude.

their code switching abilities suggested they were skilled cultural navigators maneuvering between different social worlds:⁵⁰

LATA: I just feel comfortable in all different situations because that's just how I grew up. Like Indian function, that's completely normal to me, hanging out with my mates is totally normal to me and the Indian world creeps in to that. So I wouldn't say one's more comfortable than the other, yeah I just feel comfortable in the different situations.

AMANDA: Do you feel like you ever behave differently?

LATA: Oh totally, of course you do. But that's just the same as saying when you go to your grandparents' house for dinner you behave differently than when you're out drinking on a Friday night with your mates [...] Because it happens sort of side by side, you don't realise that you're switching, it's just normal [...] It happens at a very sub-conscious level. It's just is the way it is.

I can be both very, very easily, very, very easily [...] I can adapt to whatever the circumstances arise. I can hold a conversation with probably senior Indian members of the community. I can do the same on the Kivi side [...] It happens naturally. I don't think about it. I don't think about. I could talk to you right now as I am and about ten minutes later I could be talking to some businessman coming here from Fiji or I have a lot to do with a guy in town, Mosham's and I start talking in Hindi to him and he's a Muslim. I can adapt. I don't have differences with people (Kiran, male, 66).

Thus, while participants described constraints to their ethnic options due to their physical appearance and notions of blood, birth and upbringing, they suggested the specifics of how to enact Indianness and balancing Indianness and Kiwiness were open to individual choice and personal negotiation.

Concluding Remarks

On the surface my participants' discussions of their Indianness appear to confirm the value of using the ideas developed around symbolic ethnicity. This is encapsulated in the startling similarities between a statement of Herbert Gans and a comment made by one of my participants:

Perhaps the most important factor in the development of symbolic ethnicity was probably the awareness, which I think many second generation people had already reached, that neither the practice of ethnic culture nor participation in ethnic organizations were essential to being and feeling ethnic (Gans 1979: 14).

⁵⁰ In her study of West Indian Americans, Waters found similar examples of code-switching: "[i]mmigrants who had been the United States a long time could take advantage of accent and language to code-switch back and forth between American and foreign identities" (1999: 78).

I think wisdom has taught me that I don't have to be with Indians or do Indian type things in order to be an Indian [...] I can express it in any way that I wish whether that's meeting my family or [my partner] and I eating a curry meal (Jasmine, female, 40).

It is therefore tempting to seek explanations for the ways in which participants' ethnicity does not appear to be symbolic within the established confines of the theory itself. This can be done by attending to the matters of generation and racial classification. It is possible to conclude from the discussion above that the inability to explain participants' descriptions of their Indianness totally in terms of symbolic ethnicity stems from their generational proximity to immigration and their ethno-racial classification. One could argue that as members of a second generation of sorts they remain closely connected to the homeland and heavily influenced by the immigrant culture of their parents. Because their differences from the majority of the population are visible, or at least perceived by themselves to be, ethnicity remains salient in many social situations and can be neither entirely optional nor entirely symbolic.

Regardless of the accuracy of the above hypotheses, the explanatory power of symbolic ethnicity is limited. Ultimately, one has to ask what exactly one might learn from knowing that the ethnicity of a grouping or individual can be characterised as 'symbolic'. The analysis that has been conducted in this chapter is useful in providing a picture of participants' cultural practices, communal involvements and identities as well as constraints and negotiations of ethnic options. It also gives some indication of the salience of ethnicity in the lives of my participants. But it does not do justice to the complexity of my participants' narratives and does not interrogate the assumptions inherent in such narratives. For example, what exactly *is* 'Indian culture' and why *should* a person be able to choose their ethnicity? Symbolic ethnicity gives little account of the dilemmas of difference that seemed to permeate so many aspects of participants' discussions of their Indianness such as 'Indian culture' as 'different' and 'Indian' people as 'different'. In the following chapter I attempt to provide answers to some of these questions and to explore such dilemmas by examining underlying assumptions about 'culture' and the 'individual' inherent in the 'two worlds' model of post-diasporic ethnicity.

Chapter Two

Cultural Dilemmas of Difference

[O]ur quest for radical alterity shapes and is shaped by our conceptualizations of “cultures” as discrete, self-contained, self-reproducing universes of shared customary practices and beliefs (Keesing 1994: 306).

Participants described being both Indian and ‘Kiwi’ as a problem of living in ‘two worlds’ and having to find balance between them. This ‘two worlds’ model of ethnicity is also pervasive in studies of post-diasporic peoples and is implicit in the work of symbolic ethnicity scholars. Because the ethnic identities of post-diasporic individuals must be negotiated with ‘coethnics’ as well as with their peers and in the wider society more generally, a popular way of theorizing the experiences of these individuals, particularly those in the second generation, has been to describe them as being between two ‘worlds’ or ‘cultures’ (see Watson 1997; Anwar 1998 cited in Song 2003).⁵¹ The experience of ‘culture conflict’ has been widely associated with the second generation as they are seen to be invested in belonging in the wider society as well as to the culture of their parents and are likely to be “deeply involved in transactions across the ethnic boundary” (Ballard 1994: 29 in Song 2003: 105). Recently the idea of being ‘between two cultures’ as well as assertions that second-generation young people are likely to suffer ‘culture conflict’ have been subject to criticisms of being overly simplistic (Song 2003; Mukadam & Mawani 2006) and pathologizing (Das Gupta 1997: 586; Handa 2003; Bernau 2006: 29-30, 58).

Little attention has been paid, however, to the specific discourses of ‘culture’ and the ‘individual’ upon which this ‘culture clash’, ‘two worlds’ model depends. As the following discussion will illustrate, these discourses are fundamentally grounded in notions of difference. Both the cultural and the person are constructed as highly individuated categories defined in terms of their uniqueness amongst other ‘cultures’ or other persons. In the case of the cultural, this is achieved through the association of specific cultural practices with an ethnic group in a process that can be understood as the ethnification of the cultural. Discourses of the ‘individual’, on the other hand, are based

⁵¹ As each of my participants has at least one parent who was born and raised in either India, Fiji or East Africa, they at least partially fit common definitions of the second generation as persons whose parents are immigrants.

on particular notions of personhood, which assume a single, autonomous and unique 'self'. Cultural dilemmas of difference will be explored in this chapter before turning to individual dilemmas of difference in Chapter Three.

As has been discussed, although symbolic ethnicity provides a particular framework for understanding the cultural practices of an ethnic grouping, closer examination of participants' narratives suggests that this type of analysis is problematic. Primarily, it fails to account for the strong emphasis on 'culture' as difference in participants' discussions of Indianness. There appear to be two key reasons for this. First, a conventional symbolic ethnicity analysis of culture only accounts for those aspects of the cultural that are highly visible and thus almost inherently symbolic. Symbolic ethnicity scholars 'test' only a very narrow range of cultural attributes: celebration of festivals, attendance at places of worship and other clearly demarcated customary practices. 'Culture' thus depicted is defined as existing in itself and separate from everyday life of 'economy' and 'society'. The result is that studies of symbolic ethnicity examine exactly those aspects of 'culture' that can be easily separated from everyday life and made voluntary. Furthermore, such a limited conceptualization of culture aids in the construction of 'cultures' as unique, complete, cohesive and bounded units characterised by their separation and distinctiveness from other cultures.

Second, the analysis of 'culture' undertaken in studies of symbolic ethnicity gives little indication of how aspects of the cultural come to be labelled 'ethnic' or, in this case, Indian. Monisha Das Gupta has criticised what she calls 'the ethnicity paradigm' for its focus on the loss or persistence of ethnicity (1997: 573). She argues that the ethnicity paradigm names certain practices as 'traditional' and others as 'ethnic-American' assuming that 'tradition' is easily identifiable and transparent (1997: 582). Symbolic ethnicity studies fall within the ethnicity paradigm in the sense that they are concerned with the persistence of 'ethnicity' as indicated by the continuation of cultural practices that are 'traditionally' associated with that ethnic grouping. Arguing that a turn towards voluntary, intermittent and privatised practice of 'culture' suggests 'ethnicity' is becoming increasingly symbolic (Gans 1979; Alba 1990), these studies are "steeped in the

opposition between old, ethnic culture and new, American culture” (Das Gupta 1997: 581) failing to problematise what constitutes old, traditional or ethnic ‘culture’.

In studies of symbolic ethnicity, cultural practices are categorised as ‘belonging’ to one and not another ethnic group. While this is not intrinsically problematic, symbolic ethnicity scholars have tended to overlook the processes whereby cultural elements come to be seen as belonging to one ethnic group and not another. Certain cultural practices, often described as ‘traditional,’ are assumed to be authentically representative of certain ethnic groups and a failure to engage in such cultural practices is depicted as suggestive of symbolic (as opposed to rigorous, constant and pervasive) ethnicity. Writers on symbolic ethnicity do not clearly articulate that such cultural elements do not *essentially* belong to a particular ethnic group, but have come to be seen in this way in a process of constructing an ethnic identity via claims to a distinctive ‘culture’. In suggesting that the continuation of ‘traditional’ cultural practices is an indicator of the ‘strength’ of ethnicity, symbolic ethnicity scholars imply a simple one-to-one relationship between ethnicity and the cultural and in many ways conflate the two. More attention needs to be paid to the ethnification of the cultural, the utilisation of certain elements of the cultural to construct boundaries of difference between different ethnic groups and the arbitrariness of the lines along which the boundaries are drawn.

In order to gain a better understanding of the role of the cultural in participants’ discourses of ethnicity, the following discussion will not examine participants’ vigilance in adhering to predefined cultural practices. Instead I will explore the assumptions evident in the way participants talk about the cultural as I have done with my consideration of the writings of scholars of symbolic ethnicity. However, before launching into a discussion of participants’ discourses of culture, it is necessary to briefly clarify how aspects of my participants’ talk were identified as such. Participants described actions and artefacts, ways of thinking, people and groups as ‘Indian’. Sometimes they attached the term ‘culture’ to these discussions both in the sense of ‘the Indian way’ and ‘the Indian group’. However, the word ‘culture’ was frequently absent from their discussions leaving it unclear whether they were talking about Indianness in terms of ‘ethnicity’ or ‘culture’. The association between ‘ethnic group’ and ‘culture’ is familiar in

both academic and general public discourse, but the academic literature on ethnicity usually makes some distinction between the two. As Fredrik Barth (1969: 14) asserts:

although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant.

One way of describing the relationship between ethnicity and the cultural is that while many aspects of a person's cultural experience may be shared with a great variety of others, only certain aspects of the cultural are utilised in the construction and maintenance of the boundaries that constitute ethnic identities and ethnic groupings (Fenton 1999: 8).

Of course my participants did not talk in such abstract terms. Only one participant made a clear distinction between her ethnicity and her 'culture': *"Ethnicity represents the group of people so Indian, this is what it means to me, and my culture is New Zealand plus Indian"* (Jasmine, female, 40). Other participants made no such distinction and told me that they did not use the word ethnicity in their everyday lives and had only a vague idea of the meaning of the term: *"I wouldn't use that term [...] I mean the only times those words would really crop up would be like immigration forms like coming in and out of the country or whatever, but otherwise not really, only if I'm doing maybe a survey or something like that"* (Harsha, male, 25).⁵² While all participants, including Jasmine, used the term ethnicity rarely or not at all in interviews, the word 'culture' was used more frequently. Participants, for instance, spoke of there being multiple 'cultures' in New Zealand. I have included as discourses of culture those parts of participants' talk in which the word 'culture' was used as well as parts of their talk that I regard, from an academic perspective, to be related to aspects an anthropologist would call the cultural. Despite the potential ambiguities of such an approach it is useful in demonstrating the ways in which participants utilise aspects of the cultural in defining the boundaries of their Indianness.

⁵² This was also found in the Youth and Family Project (Urry, Thomson & Williams 2004: 2).

What Constitutes ‘Culture’?

Benedict Anderson (1991: 4) has described modern nations as ‘modular’ as they are both constructed and defined by sets of artefacts that are transplantable such as flags, anthems, currencies, etc. Similarly, Keesing (1994: 307) and Banks (1996: 81) have criticised academic discourses of the cultural that construct ‘culture’ as a modular entity consisting of a repertoire of standardized forms of ‘difference’ – language, food, festivals, dress, dance and religion.⁵³ According to Banks (1996: 81), until the 1980s most non-anthropologists expressed problematic understandings of culture as “some kind of child’s construction kit” with ‘objects’ and attitudes as discrete items, building blocks, that can be easily added or subtracted. Banks criticises these writers for constructing ‘culture’ as ‘thin’, consisting solely of externally observable practices and objects. He suggests that minority migrant groups often understand culture in a similar way and “tend to reify and objectify their cultural experience and to look to the ‘preservation’ of cultural artefacts such as specific items of food or clothing”. Keesing (1994: 307) similarly suggests that Third World elites have adopted reified and essentialised discourses of culture, derived in part from anthropology, and represent their ‘culture’ “by its fetishized material forms and performances: “traditional dress,” dances, artifacts”. Both Keesing and Banks suggest that in general public discourse, culture is constructed as a highly circumscribed set of customary practices and artefacts.

It was certainly this form of the cultural that was prioritised in the discourse of my participants.⁵⁴ Food, language, and religious celebrations featured most prominently in their responses to questions of what they do that is ‘Indian’ and what makes them Indian. Although participants problematised the role of customs in defining their Indianness, these aspects of ‘culture’ were the first to come to mind: *“What makes me*

⁵³ This aspect of anthropological concepts of culture has also been described as ‘totalization’. This process involves identifying cultural forms that stereotypically epitomize a group and differentiate that group from others (Brightman 1995: 523) and “making specific features of a society’s thought or practice not only its essence but also its totality” (Appadurai 1988: 41 in Brightman 1995: 523).

⁵⁴ See Bandyopadhyay (2007: 141-5) for a discussion of the reduction of ‘Indian culture’ in New Zealand to a small number of easily identifiable markers. Bandyopadhyay argues that this has happened as a result of the multicultural policies of New Zealand’s government which have encouraged the diaspora to reinvent its homogeneity (rather than to emphasise regional and religious diversities).

Indian? Should I say food? It doesn't really, but it seems like a logical answer at this stage" (Dipankar, male, 24). Some participants most clearly expressed the primacy of this particular discourse of 'culture' in relation to 'New Zealand culture':

A lot of my like Kiwi friends they all have interests in different cultures, like since I do Indian classical dancing, they're like 'It's so cool that your culture actually has like a type of dance' and all my friends get involved in different cultures because they don't have a culture of their own, kind of thing, so they always saying 'Oh it's really good that you stick with your Indian culture' (Aparna, female, 18).

One of my European friends said that 'You're so lucky to have culture' and I couldn't understand what she was talking about. She said 'Well I have none, you know? There's nothing that I can truly say is unique to my culture. I don't have festivals apart from Christmas and that's nothing to do with who I am' [...] When I think of New Zealand culture, what is New Zealand culture? I don't really think there is much of a culture for New Zealand. I really don't. Because I think it's generic in a way. That's not fair, I take it back. I don't want to say like the fish and chips and the beer gut and stuff like that. That's not really culture at all; I don't consider that as culture (Meenaksbi, female, 42).

Due to a lack of distinctive markers such as dance and festivals, these participants appear to suggest that there is no such thing as New Zealand or Kiwi 'culture'.

Participants also constructed the cultural in slightly less circumscribed terms than Banks' and Keesing's fetishized 'construction kit' culture. All participants described their Indianness in terms of shared meanings and understandings in social contexts.⁵⁵ They described these as arising from a common value system centred on family and social respect. Family was frequently cited as something fundamental to people's Indianness: *"the family is culture really"* (Lata, female, 25).⁵⁶ Aspects of 'Indian family values' described by participants included intimate and frequent contact with wider kinship networks, knowledge of family history and looking after parents in their old age:⁵⁷

...those strong links for family and yeah that extended family environment, the need to look after your own elders and support your own, where possible, your own family [...] Going back to that previous question of what it is that makes you Indian, it's also about how strongly you relate to your family tree as in who's part

⁵⁵ Sharmila Bernau (2006: 37) makes an interesting and related point in her thesis on identity amongst Hindu Indian New Zealanders when she suggests that what many of her participants appear to be more worried about when they express concern about a 'loss of culture' is a loss of values rather than the more tangible aspects such as food and festivals.

⁵⁶ Kasanji (1982: 105) also found that a strongly unified family was important to her second generation Wellington Gujarati participants.

⁵⁷ This parallels some anthropological views that the cultural is linked intimately with the social – it is what people use/do in social contexts (Urry 2007 personal communication).

of it and where they fit in and you know how many generations back they're linked, that kind of stuff, which a lot of Indians do (Arun, male, 46).

Respect was similarly constructed as a key aspect of 'Indian culture': *"in our system, depending on age it's sort of a respect thing as you go up, you know the older they are, the more you should respect"* (Bhaskar, male, 40). 'Indian' values of family and respect were described by participants as resulting in a third area of 'Indian' shared meanings and understanding – concern for the 'family name' or *ijjat*: *"I would never disgrace my family, my family name [...] That still goes back to perhaps how I was brought up"* (Meenakshi, female, 42).⁵⁸ Participants also described having 'Indian' understandings of appropriate and inappropriate 'Indian' practices (discussed as 'Indian' systems of protocol in Chapter One) and the difficulties of negotiating these behavioural expectations. Most participants alluded to these less tangible aspects of 'culture' unreflectively amongst a mish-mash of cultural attributes. Two participants, however, made a clear distinction between 'culture' as tangible customary practice and artefacts and 'culture' as less tangible thoughts, feelings and shared understandings:

AMANDA: What makes you Indian?

LATA: I think it's practical stuff, the way that I grew up, like behavioural stuff like rituals and food and all that kind of stuff and it's way of thinking as well, definitely a way of thinking. Because like I keep talking about, you know, the life plan, how you're supposed to do this, this, this and that and there's the whole, the duty and the obligation, you're obligated to your parents and there's the expectation that you will take care of them in their old age and that you won't leave home until you're married and when you married, if you're a girl, you go to the other person's family. Like just ways of thinking. So it's practical tangible stuff that you can see and it's a way of thinking as well. Yeah, that's in a nutshell, I would say, that's what being Indian is [...] I can go into another Indian family and kind of, pretty much get the concrete stuff. There'll be different nuances and maybe there family's more liberal or traditional or whatever, but there's stuff that's the same. I could pretty much pick the kind of food that I was going to get, pretty much know what to say and what not to say.

They're not particular things that I do, but it's more about what I'm conscious of around me in my thoughts [...] There's just a knowing, there's just an understanding and it's like, it's more like a feeling and a thought [...] It's just a deep knowing (Jasmine, female, 40).

The final area of 'Indian culture' described by participants involved essentially banal, mundane aspects of everyday life. These mundane cultural practices can be seen as in many ways analogous to Billig's (1995) notion of banal nationalism, or what Malinowski (1961 [1922]: 18) referred to as "the imponderabilia of actual life". Many examples of this banal culture centred on personal hygiene: brushing one's teeth first thing in the

⁵⁸ See Kasanji (1982: 101-3) for more on respect, obedience and family honour.

morning before breakfast, using an Indian tongue-cleaner to scrape ones tongue clean, and washing ones hands before eating absolutely anything. Other examples included particular 'Indian' ways of eating, washing the dishes, drinking tea and having dinner parties as well as 'Indian' topics of conversation:

They're right into oral hygiene, the old. Flossing. Washing their dentures. Scraping their tongues, hocking into the kitchen sink, gargling, rinsing their mouths... (Dipankar, male, 24).

Indians, when they're having their chai and stuff, like their tea [...] what they do is they actually hold the saucer and pour their tea in it to help cool it down and they either blow on it or just drink it straight out of there (Harsba, male, 25).

I don't know if anyone's told you how we wash dishes. I wash my dishes with soapy water and then I put them on the bench and then I rinse them out with water. That's just the way it's done. And my friends just think that crazy (Meenaksbi, female, 42).

Although some participants were quick to offer examples of banal culture when asked about 'Indian' things they do, most responded instead with more modular discourses of culture until asked specifically about their involvement in aspects of banal culture: *"A lot of it's just part of life I think. You know like I go home and I eat Indian food or you go home and eat with your hands. You know, just those little things and like I guess that's what makes you Indian, but I don't class it as 'Ob that's an Indian thing'" (Savita, female, 24).* Thus, although individual participants and the participant group as a whole expressed more nuanced and far-reaching discourses of 'culture' than those criticised by Banks and Keesing as well those evident in studies of symbolic ethnicity, they expressed a marked prioritising of a modular discourse.

'Culture' and Everyday Life

Related to this critique of the reduction of the cultural to a set of customs is the notion that such discourses separate the cultural from everyday life: "[e]thnic culture in many ways is disconnected from the everyday realities and restricted to limited areas of social experience; customs are usually emphasized as being 'different' from lived experience" (Urry 1995: 6). In a study of New Zealand Indians, Gwyn Williams (1997: 11) has argued that the "limited nature of the cultural domain is indicated by the perception that Indian culture is left behind as one steps out of the front door of the Indian household and thereby enters a different, Western world, as interviewees put it". This is a very strong

motif in the ‘two worlds’ model of ethnicity common to studies of post-diasporic peoples. All my participants associated ‘Indian culture’ most strongly with specific ‘Indian’ social spheres and described the everyday worlds of work and education as predominantly or exclusively New Zealand, Western, European, English or ‘normal’:

We always spoke Gujarati at home and English outside the home [...] As soon as we came home from school it was like suddenly speaking Indian, do everything for my dad, you know, we used to go and get his slippers. Everything was orientated around my dad. And went back to school, speaking English, doing English stuff, come back home, you know (Meenakshi, female, 42).

In the home I was an Indian and outside the home I wasn't an Indian and that was the difference. The Indianness remained in the house (Kiran, male, 66).

A few participants were fairly consistent in expressing the kind of unproblematised discourses of ‘culture as custom separate from everyday life’ described by Williams (1997: 11). These participants defined their ‘Indian culture’ in terms of custom limited to ‘Indian’ social contexts and described New Zealand or Western everyday life as lacking in ‘culture’ (as described above). However, the nuanced discourses of the cultural expressed by most participants were reflected in their construction of ‘Indian culture’ as part of their ‘everyday’ lives in terms of Indian protocols (see Chapter One). Many of my participants suggested that for every stage of life there were expectations regarding appropriate and inappropriate ‘Indian’ actions resulting in a prescribed life path:

We don't date; we get engaged and get married. Education, you know, you must go to varsity, you must, you know, be seen to do well there (Maan, male, 30).

You know the normal Indian life path is you stay with your family, you go to school, go to university get a job and get married and it'll probably be to somebody that's the same caste as you, might be semi-arranged or something or whatever [...] The life's plan is to go to school, go to university, you get a qualification, you get the graduate recruitment job {laughter} and you're in at the graduate level in some company or some firm and yeah that's how you start your career and there will be a career (Lata, female, 25).

In this discourse of ‘Indian culture’, participants suggest that the choices they make in many different spheres of their lives are made in reference to, or are even directed by, a particular ‘Indian’ set of expectations. In this way, ‘Indian culture’ is constructed as very much a part of their everyday lives.

These ‘everyday’ discourses of culture were supported by participants’ discussion of the ‘banal’ and ‘values/ways of thinking’ aspects of Indian culture as something they were

not actively taught and do not reflect upon, that is unless prompted to by an interview on the subject.⁵⁹ One participant also suggested that their ‘Indian ways of thinking’, absorbed non-consciously in the process of an ‘Indian’ upbringing, affected them in the everyday world of work:

We eat with our hands because that's just the way it's done. So that's something that we always do that's Indian at home [...] I think it just got incorporated into your life even though you didn't realise it was happening, you know? (Meenakshi, female, 42).

I think it's more of a social, because they didn't you know drum it into you [...] I think more because my parents probably ninety percent of their friends are Indian and you know like everything you do you're going to something that's Indian or you're, you know, things like that, so that's where I think you get a lot of your values and where you learn a lot from (Savita, female, 24).

I guess just sort of part of the cultural upbringing that you have as an Indian, you learn just to respect your elders and not necessarily question them and that [...] and when I'm in the workplace I don't you know, if there's someone older than me I don't have a problem talking or debating or even disagreeing with them, but I think it doesn't come naturally to me to, and I suppose that's part of that upbringing that I had and those cultural values that I sort of have been brought up with and have learned (Arun, male, 46).

A further way in which participants described ‘culture’ as part of everyday life was by suggesting that their ‘culture’ extended beyond the boundaries of Indianness. Although, as I have noted, some participants suggested there was no such thing as New Zealand ‘culture’, others argued that a New Zealand ‘culture’ did exist and that the New Zealandness of their everyday lives was also *their* ‘culture’:

The fact that I can share in cultural practices here like school camp and the way I was schooled and going down to the dairy for an ice-cream and all that kind of stuff [...] Because we were all born in New Zealand and raised in New Zealand, you didn't stick out like a sore thumb. You could talk about burger rings and PE and the All Blacks and, you know what I mean? (Lata, female, 25).

*A lot of New Zealand people don't sort of, there's debate as to whether there's a culture and it's like well of course you, **everybody** has a culture, just that some are more noticeable than others because you're visible or you know certain practices or whatever (Jasmine, female, 40, original emphasis).*

I was born in New Zealand. I mean I went to school here, I was brought up here and I had two cultures, right? Like European and the Gujarati culture (Karuna, female, 63).

However, even amongst those that argued for the existence of a New Zealand ‘culture’, there was also a tendency to construct this ‘culture’ in the same way as ‘Indian culture’ in

⁵⁹ See also Savita's comment above regarding not thinking about the banal aspects of culture.

the form of clearly demarcated customs separate from the everyday worlds of work and education:

*A comment that I always get is ‘Oh I wish I came from a culture that was so rich and colourful and beautiful and oh the lovely food’ and you **do** come from this amazing culture. I look into your culture all the time, like the whole Sunday roast thing, that’s a full-on cultural experience for me. Like I had my first roast when I was fifteen and it was **amazing**. And the sort of formality around dinners and things and how Christmas is celebrated [...] I find the whole Sunday roast thing, and the camping and the tramping and the going to the pub and, you know, that’s all not my culture. It’s becoming my culture or it’s part of my culture, but there’s another part of my culture as well (Lata, female, 25, original emphasis).*

We have rugby, beer and jandals and all those kind of you know beaches and all that kind of outdoorsy activities, you know, that everyone here loves doing. So yeah I think that’s for me, I think it means most about being a New Zealander (Arun, male, 46).

Furthermore, alongside of the non-conscious everyday discourses of culture, participants also discussed their ‘Indian culture’ as an object of conscious reflection and assertion in a way that separated the cultural from everyday life. All of my participants were able to list special qualities that they claimed defined their ‘Indian culture’ – “there’s probably a set of things that are Indian which people could probably do” (Savita, female, 24). They talked about actively teaching these special qualities to their children in the home and sending their children to Gujarati preschool and ‘Sunday school’ to further their learning. Many participants spoke of themselves or others actively seeking knowledge of their ‘Indian culture’ often in the context of wanting to pass on the newly acquired knowledge to their children:

I think I’m becoming stronger and stronger in it [Indian culture] now because I’m more aware and I’m thinking about it for my kids (Lata, female, 25).

I know a few of my friends’ children who have got children and that and when it’s time to teach your children, they want to learn a lot more about their own and maybe things that they didn’t know either so they could pass it on to their children even with the Indian preschool and all that sort of thing (Ranjna, female, fifties).

My participants also spoke of ‘Indian culture’ as something that needed to be preserved, maintained and passed on:

*...culture, well how much of that do we keep now? [...] I like to think I **have** got culture. That does worry me a bit because I feel like once my parents are no longer here, how will I keep up that culture? Because besides going to India every now and again, it’s not really enough, yeah (Meenakshi, female, 42, original emphasis).*

Indians are marrying Indians based in New Zealand so they’re not bringing back a lot of culture from India and that’s quite important. A lot of Kivis or Indians in New Zealand don’t speak Gujarati and are not really caught up into all that kind of stuff. Can I see the culture being diluted? Yes I do (Maan, male, 30).

In this discourse of culture, consciousness becomes fundamental. Participants suggest they need to retain or gain conscious knowledge of the language, festivals, values and other elements that define 'Indian culture' as 'Indian'. Gwyn Williams (1997: 14) has described this discourse of culture as an object of conscious reflection as the result of a cultural genesis that occurs in a migratory context as people attempt to remain Indian while living outside of India. He argues that this emergence of 'culture' and Indianness as individuated categories viewed in themselves and in isolation from everyday existence, involves "the transformation of sociocultural aspects of life once lived by not necessarily reflected upon, into the bounded whole of a distinct culture". In this way 'culture' is abstracted from pre-migration social contexts and conceived as something in and of itself. This discourse of culture was clearly articulated by many of my participants:

DIPANKAR: You use culture and everyday life as synonymous which I find really strange because for me culture is something outside of everyday life...I think culture embraces dress and dance and food [...]

AMANDA: Do you think you're very 'cultural'?

DIPANKAR: No. No, but I can when I want to be.

Now they've [kids] got so many other things going on that you know there's no time [...] There's no real place for the culture. It's sad, but it's the way it's going to be (Bhaskar, male, 40).

Thus, participants express multiple and seemingly contradictory discourses of culture. Culture is predominantly constructed as an object of conscious reflection reserved for particular social contexts, but is also depicted as everyday and non-conscious. This apparent contradiction is resolved, however, when it is recognised that what remains consistent is 'culture' defined in terms of difference.

'Cultures' and Difference

While Barth (1969: 15) argued that ethnic groups should be defined in terms of their ethnic boundaries, culture concepts in anthropology have been criticised for being overly bounded. Critics have called for recognition of the long history of contact between different 'cultures' to illustrate that 'cultures' have never been physically isolated from each other (Wolf 1982) and in the modern world are in increasingly frequent and intensive contact (Appadurai 1996). Other critics have asserted that even when physical

contact with other cultures is acknowledged, there is a tendency in anthropology to construct cultures as discrete and bounded wholes characterised by their separation and distinctiveness from each other (Keesing 1994).

My participants clearly articulated a concept of 'Indian culture' defined in terms of difference from non-Indian New Zealanders. Several of the examples of 'Indian culture' given by participants were described with reference to non-Indians:

In my non-Indian friends I see people that don't go and see their grandparents from one month to the next or don't even know who their first cousins are or things like that whereas with us, you know, my brother got married last year and we struggled to cut his list down to 300 people from our side (Savita, female, 24).

We gossip a lot about who's marrying who, and who's engaged and oh they've just been looking for a boy for her, or a girl for him, you know. You don't talk about that in a Pakeha household (Lata, female, 25).

Others simply suggested that 'Indian' and 'New Zealand' were fundamentally different: *"I liked being part of two like completely different ways of life"* (Aparna, female, 18). Some participants suggested that distinctiveness was 'the essence of being Indian':

That's the essence of being an Indian, I reckon. You know the distinctness of the costume, the food and the language and we're losing all of it because if you look now, even the European styling is coming off the Asian styling. We're losing our sort of identity in a sense. So you take those three things away and there's no Indian basically (Bhaskar, male, 40).

The importance of such distinctiveness appeared to underlie participants' tendency to default to discourses of culture as custom. When questioned about aspects of the cultural that might be considered banal, many participants commented that they did not consider these as aspects of their 'Indian culture' because they did not see them as different from the practices of non-Indian New Zealanders or as unique to 'Indian culture': *"I never think of those things as being different, it's just normal"* (Aparna, female, 18).

The 'Indian' systems of protocol described were depicted as mechanisms of boundary maintenance that played a significant role in defining 'Indianness' within the Gujarati

‘community’. Participants suggested that unacceptable activity was defined as New Zealand or Western and appropriate activity was defined as Indian.⁶⁰

When I ask them ‘How come I can’t do this?’, they’re like ‘Well this is us and that’s them’ (Aparna, female, 18).

‘You’re Indian. Indians don’t do this’ (Dipankar, male, 24).

They do say ‘our way’ ‘their way’ [...] Making the distinction [...] Like ‘White society does things differently to us’. It wasn’t always stated, but there’s a lot of ‘we, Indian, we, Indian’, that language is definitely there (Lata, female, 25).

In all of these extracts, participants refer to their parents as the primary agents in the construction of the boundaries between ‘New Zealand’ and ‘Indian’. Das Gupta (1997: 577-9) has written of a similar process, which she describes as the ‘invention of the “authentic” immigrant family’, among her American South Asian participants. She suggests first generation parents constructed a high, pristine version of ‘Indian culture’ in contrast to their stereotypes of ‘American culture’ which they saw as degenerate. They positioned ‘traditions’ as distinct from ‘American’ ways:

The first generation, in self-consciously distancing themselves from what they perceived to be ‘American,’ were in the process of inventing what they understood to be appropriately ‘Indian’...If children acted without their parents’ mandate, their parents defined the children’s behaviour as alien and undesirable – in short, ‘American’...What is ‘Indian,’ then, is not automatically what is preserved but what is *constructed* as preserved (Das Gupta 1997: 580).

Some of my participants also described a process whereby they defined as Indian anything that they saw as separating them from other New Zealanders:

I think every teenager rebels against their parents and I think it was more that as opposed to rebelling against being Indian, but that was the biggest thing you could pick on, you know? ‘I hate my mum and dad’. God

⁶⁰ Kasanji (1982: 8) argues that “The Gujaratis’ evaluation of the New Zealand society indicates its incompatibility with Indian views. These social and cultural differences, together with the intimate relationships with members of the ethnic group, reinforce the Gujaratis’ ethnic boundaries”. See Kasanji (1982: 149) for another discussion of how Wellington Gujaratis are expected to conform to Indian norms. Meanger also describes the use of the phrase “It’s all right for them but not for us” amongst Gujaratis in New Zealand (1989: 61-2) and describes how certain activities are frowned upon by the Indian community (1989: 82-3, 107). Amita Handa, a South Asian Canadian, writes of a similar process of defining South Asian in opposition to Canadian: “if I admit to transgressing the boundaries that mark the east, I automatically find myself in the other half of the binary – complicit in whiteness and Westernness” (2003: 14; see also 22, 97). Again gender appears to be of relevance. Handa (2003) provides a strong argument that notions of femininity and restriction of female sexuality are fundamental to the maintenance of the boundary between Canadian and South Asian, East and West.

knows, everyone's hated their mum and dad when they were 14, 15 and they were Indian so you hated them about being Indian (Maan, male, 30).

[My sister] quite often points out to me that that's not necessarily an Indian thing. Lots of families are like that. But more Indian families would be more likely to be like this than, like the whole sex before marriage thing – lots of Christian families or even non-Christian families may feel like that, but you can say that a significant number of Indian families are more likely to be like that (Lata, female, 25).

Handa (2003: 112), writing on South Asians in Canada, argues that “the restriction of social activities by parents becomes part of what actually defines being South Asian”. For my participants too, the restriction of their social activities became part of their definitions of Indianness. This discourse of Indian and New Zealand ‘cultures’ as separate entities was reinforced by discussion of specific Indian and New Zealand social contexts and switching between enacting Indian and New Zealand roles, as described above. ‘New Zealand’ and ‘Indian’ were frequently depicted as two separate social and cultural worlds: “*Living in two different worlds in one place, you don't know if you're one or the other and you try to get the best out of both*” (Bhaskar, male, 40).

My participants did challenge the boundedness of these worlds in some ways. Some suggested that it was difficult to define things or aspects of themselves as either ‘Indian’ or ‘New Zealand’:

You don't know what's what or where certain things have come from [...] I can't split them up. I don't know what's Indian, what's New Zealand, or what's really Jasmine (Jasmine, female, 40).

We just look at it as one. We don't differentiate like that. [...] We never think that the Indian half or the New Zealand half should think this way or that way (Mabesh, male, 61).

Others described specific instances of fusion of ‘Indian’ and ‘New Zealand European’ cultural elements:

I think it's just a mixture because if it was going to be a New Zealand versus Indian thing you wouldn't go to the pub with your Indian friends (Savita, female, 24).

AMANDA: *So you didn't celebrate Christmas when you were little?*
LATA: *No, no we totally did, but it was sort of Indianised.*

It's quite funny like even if I have some kind of European food like pasta, sometimes I guess it's like the freshness rubbed off on us, it's just like sometimes I'll still put a bit of chilli powder in it just to give it a bit of kick (Harsha, male, 25).

In comments such as these participants portrayed the boundary between ‘Indian’ and ‘New Zealand’ as blurred, fluid and permeable. However, at no point did any participant suggest that the vagueness of the alleged boundary posed a challenge to the idea of ‘cultures’ as separate entities. Whether depicting themselves as either between two worlds or getting the best of both, participants consistently constructed ‘cultures’ in terms of boundaries of difference.

Cultural Authenticity

While discussing ‘cultures’ as bounded wholes defined in terms of uniquely different cultural attributes, my participants also articulated strong notions of cultural authenticity. To a large extent this was expressed during discussions of Indian systems of protocol. When one understands that such systems involve the definition of appropriate activity as ‘Indian’ and the definition of actions deemed inappropriate for an Indian person as Kiwi/Western, it is clear that notions of authentic Indianness are involved. A consequence of any transgression is being labelled too Western, having the genuineness of ones Indianness called into question. As discussed in Chapter One, participants indicated that systems of protocol were enforced particularly by kin and also the wider Gujarati ‘community’, through monitoring, gossip and the threat of damaging family honour. Thus participants locate the system of authenticity outside of themselves as something that they might experience the effects of, but not actually believe in or monitor themselves.

Participants expressed personal notions of authenticity more subtly as a scale of Indianness. The system of Indian protocol was discursively extrapolated by participants beyond acceptable and unacceptable actions into a hierarchical scale in which actions and artefacts were deemed more or less ‘Indian’ and, by counterpart, more or less ‘Kiwi/Western’.⁶¹ Participants judged themselves and others as being more or less Indian based upon their display of actions and use of artefacts deemed appropriately Indian or overly ‘Kiwi/Western’. Being New Zealand-born, my participants expressed a

⁶¹ See Handa (2003: 82-5) for a discussion of scales of Indianness, including the concept of ‘fresh’ in a Canadian context.

consciousness of their status as New Zealand Indians rather than as Indian Indians and suggested that it was also possible to be located at an excessively Indian end of the scale. Participants described certain cultural practices and use of artefacts, as well as people, as ‘fresh’. This is an abbreviation of ‘fresh off the boat’ used to signify the recent arrival of a person and the association of their cultural ways with a restrictive ‘Indian culture’ seen to be inappropriate for those living outside of India:

Oh I guess we used fresh in a sense like fresh off the boat you know from India kind of thing so I guess that's what we call people that haven't been here for too long [...] I think freshness is like just how traditional or stuck in the old ways, like old kind of mentality, the old kind of Indian way. Say if someone was from India and they came here and they wore like socks with jandals or something like that, I'd say that was pretty fresh, but I don't think someone could be born here and, I don't know, maybe they would, but it's that type of thing that would sort of stereotype them as being fresh (Harsha, male, 25).

People born in India generally are more Indian than Indians born here [...] Going to a bhajan⁶² is very fresh. Yeah those type of things. Your clothes, wearing sandals, shit that doesn't happen here, that's fresh (Maan, male, 30).

Throughout my interviews it was very common for participants to compare themselves to other Indians and to implicitly or explicitly rate both themselves and others in terms of levels of ‘Indianness’. Some participants also compared their current level of Indianness with their past Indianness. In making such comparisons, reference was often made to concepts such as tradition, strictness and liberalness:

I'm a lot more Indian than my sister is. Like I cook Indian food and I get really excited about wearing Indian clothes and going to things, and I go to the concerts with Mum and I'll watch Bollywood movies with Mum. And my sister's just like nah, she can't cook anything, she cheats most Shravan months (Lata, female, 25).⁶³

If I was to sort of rate myself against other Indians we would probably be seen as very Western. [...] When I was growing up [...] I felt much more strongly about, you know, I'm an Indian, this is who I am and this is what I do, than I sort of do now [...] I consider if it was on a scale, I'd be right up here, now I'm sort of just a little bit below. I'm still nowhere near down this end or in the bottom half even, but I'm just not quite where I was, you know, in terms of some of those views (Arun, male, 46).

Thus, even those participants who challenged the ‘community’s’ limited understanding of the ways in which a person can be authentically Indian, expressed their own

⁶² A *bhajan* is a performance of Hindu devotional songs.

⁶³ According to participants, *Shravan* month is the most holy month in the Hindu calendar in which many important festivals are celebrated. It is customary to abstain from eating meat in this month and, for more orthodox Hindus, to only eat one full meal each day. Lata refers to her sister eating meat during *Shravan* as ‘cheating’.

essentialising discourses of activities as more or less 'Indian'. In doing so, they reinforced an image of 'Indian culture' as a bounded and clearly demarcated entity.

Some participants also indirectly indicated their essentialist understandings of Indianness when they spoke about being selective in what aspects of Indianness they chose to retain and continue to practise. For example, Jasmine and Satya asserted that they had 'chucked out' much of the religious practice and customs which they described as "*man-made crap*" because "*everybody's adapted it to how they think it should be*".⁶⁴ Although they are identifying the constructed nature of much that is seen to constitute 'Indian culture', they also imply that there are aspects of Indianness that are somehow 'naturally' and essentially 'Indian'.

Participants did not, however, suggest that the boundaries of authentic Indianness were fixed or unchanging: "*Indian culture's evolving here and it's almost, **almost** ok if you're living in sin when you're engaged, but still not ideal*" (Lata, female, 25). Nor did they suggest that all members of the Gujarati 'community' had the same understandings of authentic Indianness. For example, in the following extract Maan explains why his parents fail to realise how important his Indianness is to him: "*Maybe I don't do what they want me to do, the bhajans and the jandals right, which is like the ultimate Indian for them, ok? Maybe not going back to India to get married, right? [...] Maybe I'm not as Indian as they'd hoped for me to be*" (Maan, male, 30). In this way participants expressed discourses of a single, essential, immutable Indianness as well as discourses of Indianness as plural and in a state of constant flux. However, while participants construct authentic Indianness as variable across time and from person to person, the boundary between 'Indians' and 'others' remains intact.

Concluding Remarks

The above discussion of local discourses of culture clearly demonstrates a need for scholars of ethnicity, symbolic and otherwise, to reconceptualise the cultural in less narrowly defined terms and to understand the cultural as a tool used by individuals and collectivities in the construction and maintenance of boundaries of difference between

⁶⁴ This reflects the secular influences of the dominant New Zealand culture.

ethnic 'groups'. A common method for dealing with issues of cultural essentialism in studies of ethnicity has been to accept whatever participants identify as constituting 'culture' as such. While this approach recognises that no practice or artefact essentially belongs to and represents a particular ethnic group, it simply transfers the task of essentialism from the scholar to the participant and then continues in a fetishized, bounded portrayal of 'culture'. As Brightman asserts, "To the degree that the local reckonings of we-ness and other-ness...are reproduced in anthropological representations of boundaries...the work of delimiting cultural units is displaced onto the people themselves" (1995: 519).

According to Das Gupta (1997: 590), the ethnicity paradigm "does not provide adequate tools to examine what counts as ethnic culture in an immigrant situation or why and how certain expressions of culture come to dominate an immigrant community's articulations of its identity and to what effect". Symbolic ethnicity is characteristic of this paradigm. By uncritically adopting the cultural terminology of their participants, many scholars of symbolic ethnicity simply perpetuate constructions of 'cultures' as bounded entities. What is needed is more thorough acknowledgement that cultural attributes are not intrinsic properties of particular ethnic groupings, but embellishments, elaborations on categories that serve to construct boundaries of difference between these categories and thereby construct them as meaningful 'groups' (Levine 1999).

This chapter has provided an explanation of the 'two worlds' of Indianness and Kiwiness in terms of the construction of the cultural as a bounded entity defined by its difference from other 'cultures'. In order to fully understand how a person can be perceived to perform a task of finding a balance between these worlds, it is now necessary to examine the particular assumptions about personhood that underlie this perception.

Chapter Three

Individual Dilemmas of Difference

Ask whoever you wish what it means to be an individual, and the answer – whether it comes from a philosopher or from a person who has never cared nor even heard what philosophers do for their living – will be pretty similar: to be individual means to be *unlike* anyone else (Bauman 2005: 15, original emphasis).

Scholars of symbolic ethnicity have often made connections between ethnicity and individualism. It is argued that symbolic ethnicity is a product of “middle American individualism” (Gans 1988 in Alba 1990: 300) which “insists on the autonomy of the individual within his or her social milieu of friends and family, on the freedom to be different, an absolute unique individual, within the private sphere” (Alba 1990: 300). There are two aspects to this model of personhood: the autonomy of the person and the uniqueness of the person. The limitations of symbolic ethnicity as an explanatory framework for my participants’ ethnic options stem from a failure to adequately examine constructions of ‘individuals’ as autonomous and unique beings in the narratives of participants. According to Brian Morris, within Western intellectual traditions the human subject has tended to be conceptualised as an “‘individuated’ asocial being” (1994: 2). Such conceptualizations are clearly evident in the ‘two worlds’ model of ethnicity so common in both academic and local discourses of ethnicity (Williams 1997: 6). The view that living between ‘two worlds’ is somehow problematic assumes that there is only one ‘self’ to deal with the two worlds and that the ‘individual’ is entirely separable from the world(s) of which they are a part and thus able to perform the act of finding balance between them (Williams 1997: 10). These individuated notions of personhood will be explored in my participants’ discussions of Indianness before turning to their implications for matters of personal choice and uniqueness.

The ‘Individual’, the Cultural and the Social

Anthropological concepts of persons as individuated beings differ from concepts of partible personhood (Strathern 1988: 185) which are thought to be common in non-industrial societies where personhood is based primarily on kinship and communal

identities. In such non-industrial societies, personhood is assigned, not by the self, but by others and is inseparable from roles and statuses acquired during the processes of social life. Unlike notions of individuated personhood, partible personhood never involves a singularised identity as an ‘individual’, but is defined by external circumstances and positions in the cycle of social life and is thus dependent on social contexts (Williams 1997: 7). In contrast, individuated personhood involves the conceptual separation of the person from both the social and the natural world (Morris 1994: 16).

Many of my participants expressed the idea of a self that is distinguishable from their Indianness and some articulated this explicitly:

I found it really difficult to separate myself out [...] I think I just see myself as just me, but I do have an awareness of both sides [...] I feel like I've worked through it now and I think I've come to a point in my life now where I love my Indian side for what it's worth and I love my English side, my New Zealand side, and I've learned to balance that now. I've learned to probably look above it and think well I'm me first and this is what makes me and yeah I think I've made friends with my Indian side I think. I still feel inadequate about that side (Jasmine, female, 40).

In the above extract Jasmine describes a self that is ‘just me’, separable from both Indian and New Zealand ‘sides’, able to make friends with these ‘sides’ and feel ‘inadequate’ about them. Describing Indianness as only a ‘side’ or ‘part’ of the self was very common amongst participants – “I see it as being part of me” (Harsha, male, 24). In this discourse of the cultural, the social and the individual, Indianness is constructed as internal to the human subject, but it does not define the individual. The self remains sufficiently separable to be able to accept and proudly acknowledge the Indian side or to abandon it as the person chooses.

Most frequently participants expressed the notion of there being only a single self to deal with the two worlds by distinguishing between ‘being themselves’ and fulfilling ‘Indian’ and ‘New Zealand/European’ social roles as required:

The Indian part's only really when you go out now and you only really become Indian when you meet elderly people because most of the people my age act like me, you know [...] We've been brought up in such a way that ok fine when we meet elder people we need to show respect, we need to act like Indians, and we will. But if we're out in town we'll just be acting like everybody else (Bhaskar, male, 40).

In making this distinction between a 'self' and social roles as 'Indian' or 'Kiwi', participants suggested the existence of a 'true self' that exists behind these social masks (see also Williams 1997: 8-9). According to Morris, such appeals to an 'innerself' are characteristic of notions of individuated personhood (1994: 16). Some participants suggested that certain social roles, either 'Indian' or 'Kiwi', may be more aligned with their 'true selves', but the barrier between self and these social roles was consistently maintained:

I feel I behave more different around Indian people than I do around New Zealand people though. Like I hold back a bit more around Indian people because there's certain things I don't want to talk to them about, but with my New Zealand friends, because they know so much about what I think about being Indian [...] I just talk openly about that with my friends so I don't change myself when I'm with them. I probably change myself more to fit in with the Indian things (Lata, female, 25).

In a more extreme example, Jasmine describes having to remove herself from social roles within her family in order to uncover her 'true self' from beneath a cultural baggage of 'Indianness' that is ultimately inauthentic:

I lived for a long time on my own and probably just had the privilege to develop on my own away from my family and grow into me, because I sort of didn't know who I was, who I was, until I started living on my own...sometimes the Indian thing, being Indian doesn't fit me because my whole philosophy is that you're a human being first (Jasmine, female, 40, original emphasis).

Williams asserts that "the ideal of being oneself is premised on the idea that there is a whole and unitary self that a person can uncover by cutting away the layers that 'culture', 'society' or upbringing have imposed upon them to reveal the 'essence' of who they 'really' are" (1997: 8). Thus, individual identity is defined in terms of the self rather than in terms of external social roles. By distinguishing between a 'true self' and Indian social roles, participants suggested that a person's identity as an 'individual' has priority over any 'cultural' identity or social connections (Williams 1997: 10).

However, some of my participants also expressed more partible notions of the person when they suggested they could not conceive of their Indianness as a separate entity from themselves and could not truly renounce their Indianness due to their Indian social connections. Some participants had difficulty responding to questions of what makes them Indian, describing 'self' and 'Indian' as fundamentally interconnected:

That's what you are [...] it's what makes you I guess (Savita, female, 24).

What makes me Indian? Me (Maan, male, 30).

Indian is who I am [...] It's who I am. That's who I equate myself to be. I say I'm an Indian and yeah, and so that's why it's important to me (Ranjna, female, fifties).

Some also hinted at the inability to separate self from society when they suggested that their ability to 'opt out' of Indianness was restricted by 'Indian' connectedness. Participants described themselves as embedded within a network of connections with other Gujaratis, particularly family members, and suggested that they were unable to conceive of themselves except in relation to these 'Indian' connections. They also suggested that those that knew them could not help but locate them in these networks. Participants talked about these networks of connectedness as something from which one could disengage, but not fundamentally disconnect.⁶⁵

We're in it [the Indian 'community'] because you can't be out of it [...] I think you're just inextricably linked to the community. You may not be active in the community, and by active I mean the association type stuff and the religion and all that type stuff, yeah I think I can't help but be connected to it (Lata, female, 25).

Assertions of unbreakable ties between the individual and Indianness, self and society, reflect wider concerns that being Indian is ultimately not a matter of choice and that an 'Indian' person is in 'essence' 'Indian' (see Chapter One). Nevertheless, such assertions were rare. On the whole my participants depicted the person as an intrinsically autonomous 'individual'. They expressed a universal view of human rights in which person is first and foremost an 'individual' irrespective of ethnic identity or connections.

Agency and Choice

Despite recognising that Indianness was ultimately not a matter of personal choice, many of my participants implied that it *should* be optional. Participants appeared to want to

⁶⁵ Although, for those who saw the 'community' as purely involving the Wellington Indian association and the sports club, fundamentally disconnecting from the 'community' was simply a matter of not being a member.

portray Indianness as an issue of personal identity, and thus a matter of individual agency:

APARNA: One of my older cousins who lives in Australia, she got married to a Kiwi guy, she can't speak Gujarati and once she even said 'Oh I don't want to be associated with Indian people'. Like you get those people that are like that so personally I don't think anything makes you Indian except for the way that you think. Like if you think you're Indian then you are. If you don't think you are well then the colour of your skin can't really say that you are. Like if you can't speak the language, if you've never been to India, if you don't like Indian people, then that can't really make you Indian [...]

AMANDA: So your cousin that said that, do you reckon she's not Indian anymore?

APARNA: Well to me she is, because it's like well you're born to Indian parents, but the way she acts she tries to act not Indian. Like once she said 'Oh I just don't like Indian people' and it's kind of like but you are one.

AMANDA: Do you think she sees herself as being Indian?

APARNA: No, she doesn't.

AMANDA: Do you think most other people see her as being Indian?

APARNA: Probably not. Like from the way she acts they think no. But then it's one of those things, like you are Indian. It's a fact that you can't change. But then the way you act, like she acts like she's not Indian.

Some of my friends aren't necessarily very religious, but to them it's about their identity and who they are (Arun, male, 46).

It is clear that for all of my participants notions of what makes a person Indian were highly complex and frequently contradictory. For many a degree of confusion appeared to stem from a contradiction between a desire to portray Indianness as something optional and personal and their ideas about being Indian as something inherent and fixed:

I guess you could think that you're not Indian. You know, it's just a thought really. Yeah 'I'm not Indian', but you've got brown skin [...] Everyone knows that obviously you don't have pale skin then you're obviously some other form of something type thing. But then obviously if you don't believe that you're Indian and you don't want to practice the Indian things or whatever [...] I think you just have to personally believe that you're Indian (Savita, female, 24).

Ranjna told me that: “that feeling inside that I’m an Indian, that’s what makes me Indian. It doesn’t matter I guess, the outside things don’t really matter”. However, only a short while later, when discussing others who have attempted to opt out of being Indian, she suggested that choosing not to be Indian would be an act of denial of ‘reality’: “the mind is quite powerful and I think that we can think ourselves out of that...I guess they’re fooling themselves [...] you’re still Indian [...] you can just change your mind, you can just trick your mind”. Shortly afterwards she changed her mind again in favour of Indianness as optional: “if I don’t want to be an Indian, you know, my skin

colour and they're just all physical. I guess I can be a non-Indian if my mind does not want to be Indian. Just like people change their religions and faith and whatever they want".

My younger participants particularly expressed the view that Indianness should be based on a personal emotional attachment rather than outward display of compliance with notions of Indianness:

My parents think if you're Hindu you shouldn't have to go to church just to prove it, you know, you shouldn't. It's just like whatever culture you are, you shouldn't have to go somewhere to prove it. You should kind of keep it inside you all the time [...] Like if you're a culture you shouldn't have to go somewhere to tell people 'Oh look I am Hindu' (Aparna, female, 18).⁶⁶

The activity within the organisations, like the Indian association and stuff, for a lot of Gujaratis that does define their Indianness, being involved in all that sort of stuff. And I'm so removed from it now. I don't think that matters as much because I know what it all means to me (Lata, female, 25).

Indianness as an emotional attachment is favourable to these participants as it is more compatible with notions of individual agency than communal involvement which is seen to be motivated by a concern for the opinion of others.

An emphasis on the virtues of choice was also evident in the way participants talked about having 'the best of both worlds'. Participants constructed this as a highly positive aspect of their lives as they have more choices than other New Zealanders who did not have an alternative 'ethnic' identity to draw on:

I guess that sometimes, based on convenience I'm either Indian or I'm Kiwi [...] I've had the best of both worlds so I'm really lucky (Maan, male, 30).

I guess I sort of sometimes feel like I'm lucky because I can sit on two fences. You know, when it suits me I can be in one area or the other (Arun, male, 46).

I think we've got the best of two worlds really come to think of it. [...] I can't complain. I've had a good life. I've had two cultures you know [...] I've got the best of both worlds (Ranjna, female, fifties).

Despite creating the potential for getting the 'best of both worlds', however, 'Indian culture' was associated particularly by younger participants with a lack of choice and this was clearly undesirable. Western or New Zealand 'culture' was depicted as offering a

⁶⁶ As discussed in the introduction, my participants tended to conflate the categories 'Indian' and 'Hindu' and 'Indian culture' and 'Hinduism'.

comparatively high degree of personal autonomy and choice: *“my parents are very Western, you know, like they don’t wear saris at home and they’re very open and they let you out and you’re allowed to drink”* (Savita, female, 24). Jasmine explained that for her being a New Zealander means *“having the freedom to be yourself and from the Indian camp, my Indian side that was extremely attractive to me”* (Jasmine, female, 40). My younger participants described aspects of Indian ‘culture’ such as the respect system and other ‘community’ expectations as an unfair constraint on their freedom and individuality.

Nevertheless, despite the association of ‘Indian culture’ with a lack of choice and freedom, participants of all ages frequently emphasized that they were not forced into doing anything and that their parents were not strict:

It’s not strict, like we don’t have to do it; it’s just like optional. If you want to do it you can [...] My family is not strictly Hindu [...] pray whenever you want to kind of thing [...] [My parents] never really forced me [...] I’ve never like felt like I’ve been forced to. Since my family’s not strict Hindu, I’ve never felt like ‘Oh I want to get out of this’ because we know everything, all the celebrations that happen. But we don’t actively take part in a lot of them [...] It’s just like you’re Gujarati. It doesn’t hold you back at all (Aparna, female, 18).

Kiran emphasised that although his marriage was arranged, he had had the option to reject his parents’ choice of partner: *“we had the option, each of us had the option of saying yes or no once she arrived here. There was no force”* (Kiran, male, 66). Bhaskar similarly emphasised that his choice of marriage partner was not an act of blind obedience to his parents’ wishes: *“It just happened to be a fluke that I married a girl who was Indian, Gujarati and the same caste”* (Bhaskar, male, 40). In addition, describing parents or oneself as ‘liberal’ or ‘not strict’ was framed as a positive characteristic:

[My father] wasn’t overly strict, because when I see these other women here and what these other people go through I think ‘Oh my god, Dad didn’t do that’. Some of them go all out. You know, really extreme (Satya, female, 45).

I’m sure if I hadn’t met my husband-to-be when I did, my mother would have started looking for someone for me [...] I don’t think she would have forced it [...] And religion wasn’t something mum pushed upon us either. It was something that she did. She prayed and she did this and that, but it wasn’t something that she’d say ‘We all have to do this’, you know (Meenakshi, female, 42).

When participants emphasised that their Indianness did not restrict or constrain their individual autonomy and choices in any way, this was often discussed in relation to other Indians who participants saw as overly constrained by their Indianness:

Some Indian people, they just stick to themselves because it's what they know and whatever and I'm very different to that and I like to go and try different things and meet different cultures and things (Jasmine, female, 40).

Arun repeatedly commented on how, unlike other Indians, he did not have any 'hang-ups' about a range of things such as socialising with non-Indians, eating non-Indian foods, and attending Sri Lankan (rather than Indian) musical performances. The frequency with which Arun referred to his lack of 'hang-ups' during the interview suggested that it was important to him that he be perceived by me as not having his personal agency constrained in any way.

Resistance to any notion of being constrained by ones 'culture' or following it blindly without exercising individual autonomy, was also evident in the desire expressed by many participants to know the meaning behind Indian cultural practices. My participants criticised the way older generations did not really question their 'culture' and did things simply because 'it's just the way it's done'. Many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of explanation that was provided to them by their parents about cultural matters and described a desire to understand why they were required to do things as part of their 'culture':

I knew that we had to walk around the table 7 times and he [my husband] had to go first. Why is that? And what's the whole thing about the rice throwing and the dot on the forehead? It's just something that you see and you just have to do it. [...] I remember getting hold of somebody from varsity actually. I went around to her house and she sat me down and she explained it all to me. And it was just all clear, and I thought I can relate to that, I can understand that [...] That made the whole ceremony more important to me (Meenakshi, female, 42).

I like to know and I think it's really great on the internet you can actually get information around what all the various festivals and cultural activities are. Whereas twenty years ago, if I was to ask my grandparents, they wouldn't have known why you've done something. It's just that it was done. Or if they did know, they couldn't tell you in a way that I'd understand (Arun, male, 46).

Last year when he [my son] got married he made about three or four visits to the priest. The priest was quite impressed with him up in Auckland because he was telling me that, you know, he came and he wanted me to explain the meaning of all the ceremonies that he was going to partake in and all those sort of things, questioned and got the meaning of it all before he was going to partake in that ceremony (Ranjna, female, fifties).

In exploring the meaning behind cultural practices, participants were able to create a connection between their adherence with those cultural practices and their right to

exercise personal choice. They constructed this adherence as an active choice, an aspect of agency, rather than as merely passive obedience to cultural norms. This emphasis on agency was particularly noteworthy in participants' discussions of 'community' obligation.

Many participants expressed a strong attachment to 'community' aspects of their Indianness:

I really enjoy like the family interaction and like the wider community interaction. Like you do have your aunties and uncles, but then you also have this other massive group of people that you're not related to, but that you still interact with so often [...] I think that's really important, so you never feel alone (Savita, female, 24).

I think you start to see what a huge support system you have [...] If I needed help, if anything happened to my family, I know the vast community, not just my family and extended family, but the outer [less closely connected people], are going to be there. You know, I can count on them to help me (Meenaksh, female, 42).

It was widely acknowledged, however, that belonging to this 'community' also involved some degree of constraint and obligation that could potentially compromise a person's capacity for agency:

There's down sides. Everyone knows everyone's business. You're so worried about what everyone thinks of you and that kind of stuff. [...] Family pressure and obligation and not feeling like you can do your own thing and having to prove yourself all the time (Lata, female, 25).

With the Wellington Indian Sports Club I'm a very active member [...] so those kind of activities sort of just eat into your time (Arun, male, 46).

A few participants expressed strong resistance to such obligations and constraints. This is compatible with the arguments of symbolic ethnicity scholars who suggest that symbolic ethnicity involves attachment to a 'community without cost', that is, to a community "of a type that will not interfere with a person's individuality" (Waters 1990: 151). These participants suggested that the expectations and obligations of the 'community' were an unfair violation of their autonomy:

Being part of that community [the Wellington Indian Sports Club] sometimes encroached on my life and on my privacy [...] I didn't want to feel restricted again with the Sports Club and then feel obligated to them [...] I'm really protective of my rights and my freedom because I've earned that. I've well earned that for myself and so I was really, really careful. So I made some friends, but I was really, really selective. I was very selective [...] Suddenly you start opening up your world and then feeling obligated to people and I didn't sort of want that [...] I've had to train myself that I mustn't do things out of duty [...] I have to do things

because I really want to do things [...] I shouldn't do anything because it's expected of me or anything (Jasmine, female, 40).

However, far more common than those who rejected 'community' obligations were those who consolidated them with their notions of individual autonomy by constructing involvement in, and allegiance to, community as a matter of choice. Some participants suggested that the commitments and obligations associated with belonging to the 'community' were something they willingly accepted when they *chose* to get involved in 'community' affairs:

The thing is if you want you distance from them, or you're sick of them or sick of going to these things, you just don't go. But then you've still got that sense of belonging when you turn up (Savita, female, 24).

It's not really much to ask considering what you get out of it in the end (Meenakshi, female, 42).

In addition, some participants expressed pride in *choosing* to abide by the expectations of the Gujarati 'community' suggesting that such an adherence to the group's dominant values and norms gave them an increased sense of belonging and social connectedness with their coethnics. They suggested that this heightened belonging provided them with a sense of security about who they were. For example, Aparna's comments below construct community expectations as a producer of a sense of belonging:

I probably belong more to Indian culture than Kivi culture because with Gujarati culture it's just like if I break those rules, then it would let my whole family down. If I break the Kivi rules it's not going to let anyone down. I stick to both cultures, but when it comes down to real important things then I listen to like what my parents would have to say over what my friends would have to say. So I belong more to like Gujarati culture than Kivi (Aparna, female, 18).

The above discussion indicates that my participants' value for choice was such that even obedience to community expectations and submission to obligations were reinterpreted in terms of an expression of individual agency.⁶⁷ This emphasis on choice in participants narratives not only constructed the individual as an autonomous being, but also implied that participants were unique beings by virtue of their ability to "fashion a personalized stance toward ethnic group membership" (Song 2003: 58).

⁶⁷ One could suggest that participants' assumption of the inherent autonomy of personhood is such that they can affiliate themselves with a 'community' and comply with the norms of that 'community' without perceiving these activities as a threat to their autonomy.

The 'Individual' and Difference

Scholars of symbolic ethnicity have argued that part of the compatibility of this mode of ethnicity with individualism lies in its emphasis on ethnic identities which offer additional ways of defining one's distinctiveness from others (Alba 1990: 300; Gans: 1979: 16). According to Waters (1990: 151), being 'ethnic' makes people feel "unique and special...They are not like everyone else".⁶⁸ The notion of ethnicity as a source of distinction from others was also evident in my participants' narratives. In Chapter Two I discussed how Indianness was often constructed in terms of its difference from non-Indian, usually White, New Zealandness and an obvious extension of this is that participants saw themselves as 'different' from other New Zealanders by virtue of their Indianness: *"I felt different. I felt Indian. I felt Indian and I knew that Indian was different than the European person next to me"* (Lata, female, 25). However, my participants did not describe this 'difference' as an entirely positive aspect of their Indianness. Instead they alternated between either celebrations of or resistance to being 'different' from other New Zealanders. This appeared to stem from a desire to be both as good as (i.e. the same as) and better than (i.e. different from) other New Zealanders.

Negative constructions of difference were most frequently expressed in terms of being treated 'differently' by others *because* of their Indianness. Participants suggested that non-Indians were quick to identify them as Indian and made certain assumptions about them based on this initial categorisation. Almost all participants described having experienced 'different treatment' in one form or another. Many described being teased and bullied at school and a few gave other examples of prejudicial treatment:

You do get treated differently out there. People's reactions to you are different compared to what they have to others. I've had instance where people have said 'Well if I can't pronounce your name, I can't hire you for a job'. And I've had comments made to me about my colour or the type of food I eat [...] Sometimes you get overlooked because of people's prejudices. It happens [...] [My kids will] go for jobs and stuff where they know they're better than the people that are going up against them, but because of who they are or what they are, they miss out (Bhaskar, male, 40).

⁶⁸ Waters uses 'ethnic' to denote *minority* ethnic group, so that the majority ethnic group is not itself ethnic, but rather a 'normal' against which 'ethnics' can claim uniqueness.

Examples of ‘different treatment’ described by participants also included non-Indians making assumptive statements based on stereotypes. Participants suggested that the stereotype of the New Zealand Indian included attributes such as owning and working in a dairy, being wealthy, and having strict parents who restricted their socialising and, particularly, their dating. Some described the New Zealand Indian stereotype as including recent immigration, an Indian accent and a limited understanding of English:

We own all the dairies. Shit, what else? We all go back to India to get married. We all have a thousand people at our weddings. What else? A lot of them think we're really rich because they think if they own a family business they must be really rich. That's the stereotypical thought process, I reckon [...] Oh, we all like cricket (Maan, male, 30).

Participants described instances when they had been expected to act in accordance with certain stereotypes:

Someone once thought I couldn't speak English when I was waitressing. One of the customers commented on how fantastic my English was. I nearly belted him one [...] I said 'I've been working really hard at perfecting the New Zealand accent' (Lata, female, 25).

No matter how many generations you are, like New Zealand born, you still look like an Indian and I think people will always stereotype [...] We found a make-up purse out in the street so I took to the police station and he said to me, the cop said to me 'Did you find that outside your dairy?' [...] I was quite shocked with that (Jasmine, female, 40).

In addition, as discussed in Chapter One, some participants indicated that others (Indians as well as non-Indians) frequently initiated conversations with them about matters related to Indianness.

Reactions to these kinds of ‘different treatment’ varied amongst participants and many described their attitudes towards ‘being different’ changing during the course of their lives. Two participants challenged the idea that they were necessarily ‘different’ by virtue of their Indianness by appealing to a notion of a common humanity:

*AMANDA: And would you say that being Indian or Gujarati is important to you?
KARUNA: I don't know. I don't think so. I mean you're a human being, right?*

People talk about differences, whether you're Indian or Chinese or whatever. You've got a needle there? Ok poke your finger and poke my finger. Look at the colour there, no difference. So I go beyond. Look at that, tell me where the difference is (Kiran, male, 66).

Karuna's and Kiran's statements assert a definition of persons as 'human beings' rather than in terms of social, or, in this case, ethnic, roles. Other participants expressed similar notions of personhood when they suggested that 'different treatment' based on stereotypes was inherently 'wrong' or 'bad' as it involved a failure to recognise the existence of personal 'individuality' separate from Indianness:

People assume that you live your life a certain way and yeah, you do. I mean it's all true. You can comment on all of it, but they don't even ask you for your name sometimes. They talk to you about your ethnicity before they talk to you about who you are and what you're doing with your life (Lata, female, 25).

Lata's dislike for the way people defined her in terms of her Indianness and immediately wanted to talk to her about it stemmed from their lack of regard for who she is and what she does as an 'individual'. Although few participants as clearly articulated the situation as Lata, similar notions regarding the individual and culture/society appeared to underlie a resistance to the idea that they might be treated 'differently' based on their Indianness. Participants implied that identifying a person with any social or cultural category, and treating them as 'different' as a consequence, fails to recognise their personal autonomy and freedom from any inherited social and cultural roles.

However, Karuna's and Kiran's assertions of a common humanity stood out from the narratives of other participants as they rejected definitions in terms of Indianness in favour of membership in an even broader collectivity, whereas others sought to emphasise the intrinsic uniqueness of 'individuals'. That is not to say that other participants did not express resistance to 'being different'. Most participants spoke of a time in their lives when they would have preferred to have been 'not-different' from other New Zealanders. Such comments were framed in terms of a desire to be 'as good as' – that is, 'the same as' – other New Zealanders who constituted the dominant population. Their resistance to being treated as 'different' therefore stemmed from a desire to be 'normal' and to 'fit in' as members of their immediate society in New Zealand rather than from an appeal to be treated just like any other 'human being'. Unlike Karuna and Kiran, they did not suggest that, as human beings, they were *inherently* similar to other members of this society.

When you're a child and you're in school, you try to cover it up, you know? We eat English food for dinner every night, that kind of stuff (Dipankar, male, 24).

JASMINE: *We just got so much bullying at school [...]*
 AMANDA: *And how did that make you feel about being Indian?*
 JASMINE: *Constantly different. I was aware of it all of the time. I hated it. Just hated it.*
 SATYA: *Just wanted to be normal, aye? Just wanted to be normal. Fit in with the rest. It was really horrible [...]*
 JASMINE: *I think we all just desperately wanted to fit in and be like everybody else.*

My participants' expressions of a desire for 'normality' and 'fitting-in' were phrased as being in their past and were particularly associated with experiences at school and during adolescence. Such times were spoken of as a period of youthful rebellion against aspects of their Indianness. But these feelings had passed as they realised that in fact they were 'proud' of their Indianness: *I accepted it somewhere along the line. I made peace with the fact that I'm Indian. And it is something to be proud of. It's quite a unique thing (Dipankar, male, 24).*⁶⁹

Expressions of being 'proud' of their Indianness were equally common among my younger and older participants. However, while older participants did not tend to offer explanations for the need to be proud to be Indian, younger participants referred specifically to the role of Indianness in defining their distinctiveness from other 'ordinary' New Zealanders. In accordance with the arguments associated with symbolic ethnicity, many of my younger participants described their Indianness as important because it is what makes them unique:⁷⁰

LATA: *I've just got to teach my kid that sari stuff because my kid's going to grow up in New Zealand and be a half Indian New Zealander.*
 AMANDA: *Why do you think they need to know that?*
 LATA: *Because it's bloody important. It's the thing that makes us different [...] When people see me, the first thing they see is me being Indian. And that's totally cool because I identify as Indian before New Zealander.*
 AMANDA: *Really? Why?*
 LATA: *Because it's different! I grew up really differently to all my mates [...]*
 AMANDA: *Do you think it's quite important to you that you're different?*
 LATA: *Yeah*
 AMANDA: *Is it something that you'd like to maintain?*
 LATA: *Yeah. I think I'm becoming stronger and stronger in it now. Because I'm more aware and I'm thinking about it for my kids [...] I have Gujarati friends who married non-Indians, had babies and named their kids Amanda, yeah Amanda! You know what I mean? And I found it really weird. I was like how's*

⁶⁹ Although not all participants experienced dissatisfaction with their Indianness during their teens, the lifecycle of identity involving teenage ethnic shame was a motif familiar to all, experienced by many and accepted as an expected pattern by several.

⁷⁰ See also Dipankar's comment above regarding being proud to be Indian because it's a "unique thing".

their kid going to know they're Indian. They've got a non-Indian father, growing up in mainstream New Zealand, that's like a whole chunk of identity gone.

AMANDA: *Why is it important that they know they're Indian?*

LATA: *Because there are things that make us different. The way we talk to each other, the way we do things, so you've got to hold on, you've just got to know where you've come from. You do. You've totally got to know where you come from. Because walking down the street, there's something different about you compared to the person that's walking next to you. So why is that? You look different. Yeah, I don't know. I've just always thought it's really important.*

AMANDA: *Would you say that being Indian or Gujarati is important to you?*

MEENAKSHI: *I have to say yes. Why? It gives me a feeling of I'm somebody. I don't know. Maybe I want to be labelled. I don't know [...] I kind of started appreciating it a bit more, you know? I am lucky to be an Indian [...] There are special things about being an Indian that's unique to being just an Indian. I don't know what in particular, but it's good being an Indian. I like it [...] I'm certainly not embarrassed or ashamed of it*

Maan makes this point even more strongly when he suggests that at some point in the future, New Zealand Indians may be similar to other New Zealanders in everything they do, but will remain proud of their Indianness simply because it will be a point of personal distinction: *I can see people going through a phase where they're proud to be Indian, but they don't know why [...] Proud to be Indian because they're different, but why are they different because we all do the same thing every day* (Maan, male, 30).

Some participants described continuing their efforts to assert their similarity with other New Zealanders into adulthood. Unlike during their youth, however, this was not depicted as involving a denial of aspects of Indianness. Many participants suggested that, in order to demonstrate to non-Indians that they were as good as the dominant New Zealand society, they engaged in certain activities that illustrated their high levels of integration (rather than assimilation). In the following statement Bhaskar suggests that he goes out to pubs and restaurants and mixes with non-Indians to show his similarity with other New Zealanders: *"That's why I go out a lot. That's why I mix with a lot of non-Indian people. To show them that, hey, we're not different"* (Bhaskar, male, 40).

Thus, younger participants' emphasis on pride of Indianness as a point of distinction suggests that, while 'difference' was source of prejudicial treatment, this was outweighed by its importance as a positive source of 'identity'. Interestingly, my two oldest participants, Karuna and Kiran were the only two to express consistent regard for commonalities over uniqueness and difference. As mentioned in Chapter One, they also

suggested that being Indian was not particularly important to them. This may indicate that particularly individuated notions of personhood and public expressions of ‘difference’ and uniqueness are a fairly recent phenomenon.

Finally, as indicated in the discussion above regarding assertions of personal agency in matters of Indianness, many younger participants emphasised the unique and personalized nature of their Indianness. This was also evident in participants’ reactions to stereotypes which frequently involved assertions of the diversity within the ‘community’:

When you see [Indian] people out there that are quite rude or abrupt or like scam people or whatever it really offends me because I think you’re giving Indians a bad name or when you see it in the media, you know, that guy that took someone’s lotto ticket or whatever and they labelled it Indians, ‘That’s what Indians do’. And you just think god no, it’s just one person [...] We’re not like that at all (Savita, female, 24).

We’re all different. We’re all at different levels. We’ve all got different thoughts, but, you know, we all get seen as the same (Bhaskar, male, 40).

I think a lot of people just used to think that all Indians played hockey, cricket and had a corner dairy and I was hell-bent on proving them wrong. We’re not all like that, you know? (Meenakshi, female, 42).

Just as ‘difference’ was described as an important source of distinction from the ‘mainstream’, many participants stressed their personal distinctiveness from other Indians by suggesting that they had developed their own unique styles of Indianness.⁷¹ For example, Dipankar told me that he had his own stereotypes of New Zealand Indians – “Drives a big booming car, gelled hair, earring, that kind of thing, that kind of guy” (Dipankar, male, 24). He says he sometimes feels less comfortable with other Gujaratis because “if you’re interacting with them socially they’re often so involved with their cars or their fashion or their, you know, whereas I’m more into art and literature and stuff like that”. Another male participant in his twenties, Harsha, seemed keen to describe his daily prayer as something that he did as an individual, not out of conformity to cultural expectations: “for me it’s just something for me. It’s just my own little thing that I do I guess. People wouldn’t exactly call me a cultural person, but I don’t know it’s just something I do”. In addition, Meenakshi described her desire to know the meaning

⁷¹ This emphasis on the importance of uniqueness in individuated notions of personhood has been noted by other scholars. Drawing heavily on the work of Erving Goffman, Spencer Cahill (1998: 137) argues that modern Western conceptualizations of the person suggest that the person possesses a unique self or personality and that, in order to qualify as a person, ‘individuals’ in such societies must show evidence of possessing a personal identity or ‘style’.

behind the cultural practices surrounding weddings as her own personal mission: “*So I had a mission, I had to go and find out and this is purely just for me*” (Meenakshi, female, 42).

Thus, particularly younger participants stressed varied forms of ‘difference’ and thereby depicted themselves as unique individuals. They were resistant to the notion of ‘different treatment’ based on Indianness for its failure to recognise their autonomy from their social and cultural roles, but they were also keen to emphasise their ‘difference’ as Indians as a point of distinction from ‘mainstream’ New Zealanders. This ambiguity between resistance to being labelled ‘Indian’ and assertion of Indianness is partially resolved by participants’ assertions of their perceived ‘right to be different’ *within* an Indian collectivity. They emphasised that their personal enactments of Indianness were unique and ‘individual’.

Concluding Remarks

My participants depicted the person as an intrinsically unique and autonomous individual seen to possess universal and natural qualities which emphasise this autonomy and uniqueness. Choice was one such ‘natural’ quality. Participants took for granted that choice is a “universal, fundamental and inalienable aspect of being a person” (Williams 1997: 9) and thus constructed all events in terms of choice. As Williams (1997: 28) has argued, “[o]nce a person accepts the premise that they are a free and choosing individual it can be hard for them to see how choice could not be part of any events in which they are involved”. By constructing their ethnicity as a site of personal choice, young participants particularly portrayed themselves as autonomous agents, as unique by virtue of their ability to fashion a personalized Indianness. Thus, ethnicity need not be symbolic, removed from communal ties and characterised by an abundance of ‘actual’ choices in order to be compatible with individualism. Even factors which appear to constrain individual autonomy can be reconstructed as involving personal choice and thus could be reconciled with the values of individualism.

This complexity is missed by some scholars of symbolic ethnicity when they unquestioningly adopt the discourses of the participants and valorize purely optional ethnicity:

The ultimate goal of a pluralist society should be a situation of symbolic ethnicity for all Americans. If all Americans were free to exercise their “ethnic option” with the certainty that there would be no costs associated with it, we could all enjoy the voluntary, pleasurable aspects of ethnic traditions in the way that my respondents describe their own enjoyments (Waters 1990: 167).

Song concludes in a similar way to Waters, with commendations for a society in which people “are free to affiliate or disaffiliate themselves from ethnic groups at will” (Song 2003: 144). This viewpoint reflects the recent attention to and celebration of personal agency in the social sciences. Certainly, there is a lot to be said for recognising the ways in which people work towards their own syntheses of the values and practices associated with different ethnic groups. However, it is also important not to underestimate constraints or to unquestioningly valorize choice and the uniqueness of the ‘individual’. While racially ascribed identities are, of course, not ideal, Waters and Song run the risk of constructing the individual as a *naturally* autonomous, free and choosing being and any identification in terms of social or cultural roles as an unfair constraint on personal agency and autonomy. There is little recognition that a strong resistance to socially ascribed roles is a relatively recent phenomenon and that ‘actual’ freedom to exercise ethnic options may be less relevant than a desire for such options.

Returning to the ‘two worlds’ model of ethnicity, it is now clear that notions that people need to find a balance between Indianness and Kiwiness involve assumptions about both the cultural and the person. Such a balancing act is dependent on the discursive construction of the two as individuated categories. This is encapsulated in the notion of selecting which aspects of Indian ‘culture’ to perpetuate. My younger participants particularly expressed the notion that what they considered to be the less savoury aspects of Indian ‘culture’ could and should be rejected (Williams 1997: 30). Because ‘culture’ has been constructed as separate from everyday life and defined in terms of clearly demarcated customs and artefacts, the individual, who stands outside of ‘culture’, is able to cast aside aspects of ‘culture’ at will. Younger participants particularly depicted the process of choosing how to be Indian as one of dividing ‘culture’ into ‘good’ and ‘bad’

aspects to be accepted or rejected (see also Williams 1997: 30). Some articulated this very clearly:

JASMINE: I think I've really had to sort out what are things I want to keep for me and what are things that can be chucked out.

SATYA: That's what I was thinking too. Like being selective about what's nice to you.

Most participants, however, expressed notions of selectivity by depicting themselves as active, autonomous agents negotiating the boundaries of acceptable 'Indianness', choosing when to transgress and when to comply. Thus, "the individuated person confronts the individuated category of culture and constructs, for themselves, a cultural identity" (Williams 1997: 30).

Analysis could quite feasibly end here. It has been ascertained that symbolic ethnicity is not an accurate description of my participants' Indianness and that their narratives of Indianness are dependent on notions of the cultural and of the person that are fundamentally concerned with difference. But it is possible to take this exploration of ethnicity a step further and enquire into the sources of these individuated discourses of 'culture' and the 'individual'. Although symbolic ethnicity provides some clues in the form of "middle American individualism" (Gans 1988 in Alba 1990: 300), in the following chapter I will suggest that notions of reflexive modernity and reflexive individualism offer more productive explanations.

Chapter Four

Towards a Self-Reflexive Ethnicity

[W]e have no choice but to choose (Giddens 1991: 81).

In the preceding two chapters I have drawn attention to two processes – ethnification and individualization. Examination of these processes in relation to my participants reveals contradictions between performed self-conscious Indianness and lived non-conscious Indianness, and between individual choice and community obligation. The nature of these contradictions clearly indicates that much can be learned from the complex relationship between those aspects of participants' narratives that can be explained in terms of symbolic ethnicity and those that cannot. It must be acknowledged that my participants' emphasis on modular aspects of the cultural suggests an increased importance of intermittent and 'symbolic' rather than mundane and everyday aspects of the cultural. However, a banal, lived, non-conscious Indianness also continues alongside of a performed, self-conscious Indianness. Similarly, participants expressed a strong desire for individual autonomy, but indicated that they maintained strong communal Gujarati networks.

The emphasis on individual choice in the narratives of my participants, their ability to construct even situations of obedience and obligation as matters of personal choice, and the existence of lived non-conscious Indianness and performed self-conscious Indianness alongside each other, all suggest that there are wider processes at work than can be accounted for within the confines of the approaches associated with symbolic ethnicity. In the discussion that follows, I suggest that notions of reflexive, or liquid, modernity and reflexive individualism provide an additional explanatory framework for understanding the narratives of my participants. Some discussion of the basic tenets of these concepts will be necessary before demonstrating their relevance for studies of ethnicity and interpretation of the narratives of my participants.

The concepts of reflexive modernity and reflexive individualism have been developed primarily by Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens in order to describe the current period

of 'late', 'high' (Giddens 1991: 3) or 'second' modernity and the particular conceptualisations and enactments of personhood it produces. The emphases of these prominent social theorists differ, however. Giddens (1991: 194) draws attention to multiple and contested knowledges and authorities, whereas Beck (1998) highlights the proliferation and normalisation of risk. Nevertheless, their ideas are compatible in many ways, at least in the areas of their writing that are of relevance to this research. This is also the case with the work of Zygmunt Bauman who has written of a 'liquid' modernity (2000, 2005) and an 'individualized society' (2001). Bauman's terminology differs from that of Giddens and Beck as does his emphasis, but his work can be productively connected with theirs to gain a better understanding of the modern age and its individualizing tendencies. All three scholars identify recent times as a period of late modernity characterised by a lack of socially ascribed roles. They suggest that this arises from the conditions of institutionalised individualism and the disembedding of social institutions. As increasing areas of life become open to individual choice, notions of self-actualisation emerge and reflexive (self-directed and self-oriented) thought and action are idealized. Thus, individuals are cast as "architects of their own destiny" (Howland 2007).

The Individual and Society

According to Bauman, the idea of 'individualization' involves an "emancipation of the individual from the ascribed, inherited and inborn determination of his or her social character" (2001: 144). For Bauman this is a relatively recent occurrence indicated by the appearance of the very term 'individual'. He asserts that the word first entered English usage in the seventeenth century, but originally referred to an attribute of 'indivisibility', the fact that a single person is the smallest unit of humanity (2005: 18), and it was only much later that the term came to stipulate uniqueness and autonomy (2005: 19). Giddens similarly suggests that the current emphasis on individuality and the notion that each person possesses a unique character were absent in pre-modern times (1991: 74-5). In the past, due to the close interconnection of social identities and the dominance of the local 'community', life was ordered within relatively defined channels and social roles were largely ascribed (Giddens 1991: 80-83). Giddens is not suggesting here a blind submission to static tradition. He acknowledges that "no culture eliminates choice

altogether...and all traditions are effectively choices among an indefinite range of possible behaviour patterns". Although he does often tread dangerously close to suggesting that the plurality of choices available in high modernity can actually be *explained* by the fact of living in a post-traditional order (1991: 82), Giddens' main point is simply that in the past choices concerning personal identity and independent action were not available to most people, or at least were not perceived by most people to be available, especially to the extent that they are today.

Jeffrey Alexander has criticised Giddens' simplistic juxtaposition of 'tradition' and 'modernity' and much of his criticism can also be directed at Beck's work (although to a lesser extent) (1996: 136). However, Alexander concedes that there is something in the contemporary social condition that is different from the past (1996: 137-8). He suggests that the changes have something to do with the increased capacity of humans for reflexivity and that this stems from the separation of cultural forms from ascriptive institutional, moral and 'geographic' positions (1996: 137-8). These changes, according to Alexander, make "the structures of cultural logics and emotional effects more accessible, the construction of syncretic meanings more possible, and the options for different kinds of social actions more widely available" (1996: 138). These arguments can be found in the work of Beck, Giddens and Bauman and they potentially hold significant explanatory power for the narratives of my participants.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim assert that the desire to lead 'a life of your own' is widespread in the West today (2002: 22), particularly among the better educated and more affluent members of the younger generation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 38). Beck observes that the existence of individualization has been demonstrated empirically in many qualitative studies in which people demand control over all aspects of their lives. He argues that however illusory and ideological claims for the right to ones 'own life' may be, their prevalence cannot be disregarded. Such individualization, Beck suggests, arises from the actual conditions of life in recent decades (1998: 92) and elsewhere he and Beck-Gernsheim assert that individualization is a structural characteristic of highly differentiated, urbanized societies (2002: xxi, 5) to the extent that "individualization is becoming *the social structure of second modern society itself*" (2002: xxii, original emphasis).

A significant aspect of the social structure of late modernity described by Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim is the disembedding of social institutions. Giddens suggests that the transition from pre-modern to modern times has involved social and institutional functions becoming increasingly separated from one another. Thus, modes of activity become more specialised and diffused, 'society' becomes broken down into separate functional spheres and social relations are lifted out of their local contexts (Giddens 1991: 8). Rather than being integrated by 'society' in terms of the entirety of their social identities, it is suggested that 'individuals' are now only partly and temporarily involved in 'society' as they migrate between different functional worlds. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim have noted, they are thus forced to take their lives into their own hands (2002: 23).

Indications of this situation can be seen in the numerous ways in which various modern institutions require persons to initiate 'individual' action. This process is best illustrated in the conditions of the labour market and its requisite processes of acquiring, proffering and applying work skills. The education system requires people to individually plan their own course of learning and thus produce their own labour situation, in the process creating their own social biographies (Beck 1998: 93). Progress through formal education requires an individual to be personally successful in assessments and acquire individual credentials that lead eventually to individualized career opportunities (Beck 1998: 94). Entry into the labour market also forces a degree of mobility on the person and this removes them from localised ties to others including family and neighbourhood. As a result, people experience a sense of personal destiny separable from their natal families and communities in which they were socialized (Beck 1998: 94). This sense of individualization is reinforced by competition for work which compels people to 'advertise' their individuality and uniqueness in order to secure employment. Thus, people are structurally compelled to engage the world as 'individuals' stressing their personal abilities and their particular skills and attributes as well as their individual interpretations and ideals.

Although these trends are arguably characteristic of all modernity, it has been suggested that in more recent times they become intensified. This situation is described as liquid or reflexive modernity. Education has been prolonged over a far more extended period than in the past and the juridification of labour relations has decreased dependence on interest groups such as unions. According to Beck, a further significant change can be seen in the situation of women where their increasing involvement in the work force encourages the individualization of family ties (1998: 131). It is suggested that ultimately familiar institutions and transcendent ideologies that have characterised modernity until recently have been increasingly undermined. While identity in simple or organised modernity was relatively stable, “a fairly unambiguous reflection of factors such as occupation or familial status”, in late or reflexive modernity the continued decline of ‘traditional’ ties and the rise of individualized patterns of consumption have made identity increasingly ambiguous (Sweetman 2003: 530).

Beck has argued that these processes of individualization erode the certainties of socially ascribed roles. People are increasingly ‘set free’ from the social forms that developed with the coming of industrial society; forms such as class, stratification, nation, neighbourhood, family and the different gender status of men and women become less significant (Beck 1998: 87). Inequalities certainly do not disappear, but, as social risks are individualized, class distinctions are deprived of their association with collective social identity (Beck 1998: 100). A person can no longer determine their personal identity, outlook, relations, family position or social and political ideas from knowing their class position and instead must choose between a wide range of different lifestyles, subcultures, social ties and identities (Beck 1998: 131). With these changes, life opportunities are more open to personal construction and decision-making and no longer closed off by restrictions to decision making (Beck 1998: 135).

This disembedding of social institutions and institutionalized individualism has relevance for studies of ethnicity in terms of the separation of the ‘individual’ from ‘society’ that it encourages. According to Bauman, the decline in socially ascribed roles in many ways marks the “end of the definition of the human being as a social being” (Touraine 1998: 177 in Bauman 2000: 178). ‘Society’, these scholars suggest, becomes an external variable

to be individually manipulated. Social determinants that impact on a person's life must be conceived of as 'environmental variables' that the individual must creatively consolidate in a self-directed biography. The individual must learn to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of action (Beck 1998: 135), to adopt an "ego-centred world view" (Beck 1998: 136). Accordingly, in conditions of reflexive modernity, ethnicity might be expected to be constructed by 'individuals' as an external variable to be personally negotiated. Such a conceptualization of ethnicity was clearly evident in my participants' narratives of their Indianness, particularly in the 'two worlds' model which they used to describe their personal negotiations of their dual identities as Indians and New Zealanders.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that as a result of this separation of the self from society in late modernity, conceptualizations of personhood become increasingly self-referential rather than tied to social roles: "to be an individual means 'I am who I am'. Which means: a unique being, a one and only creature ... so thoroughly unique that my uniqueness cannot be described using words that may have more than one referent" (Bauman 2005: 15). The ideal of individuality becomes authenticity – being 'true to oneself' and finding 'the real me'. As this 'true' or 'real' self is conceptualized as a "*pristine* self, unaffected (unpolluted, unstifled, undeformed) by outside pressures" (Bauman 2005: 17, original emphasis), disentangling the true from the false self involves the rejection of dependencies (Giddens 1991: 78-9, 147-8) and all traits which are inauthentic by virtue of emanating from feelings and past situations imposed on them by others (Giddens 1991: 78-9).

In the context of ethnicity, conditions of reflexive modernity therefore encourage resistance to being defined by others in terms of existing social identities such as those expressed in ethnicity. Such conditions also encourage a concern for 'true selves' with clear distinctions being drawn between these selves and ethnicity. In addition, persons living in conditions of reflexive modernity would be expected to construct their ethnicity as a matter of personal choice rather than accepting it as something imposed on them by others or involving dependencies. This was indeed clearly the case for my participants. In their narratives, their separation of themselves as individuals from their Indianness

was most evident in their portrayal of a 'true self' that existed independently of any identification as 'Indian' and in their descriptions of having developed personalized forms of Indianness through choice and individual agency. However, the view that Indianness, or any ethnicity for that matter, can be an area open to personal negotiations requires some further exploration.

Agency, Choice and the Reflexive Project of the Self

Giddens describes the increasing openness of various life opportunities to individual choice in terms of the "routine contemplation of counterfactuals" (1991: 28). He argues that under conditions of modernity, "the question, 'How shall I live?' has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat – and many other things – as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity" (1991: 14). According to Giddens, in a 'post-traditional' society, the multitude of potential courses of action available at any given moment results in the need to be attuned to a constant selection between "possible worlds" (1991: 28). In this regard, Giddens argues for the importance of mediated experience. He suggests, in a manner akin to Appadurai's (1996: 53) emphasis on the role of imagination in modern, media-saturated times, that with the increasing globalisation of media, "a multi-farious number of milieux are, in principle, rendered visible to anyone who cares to glean the relevant information" (Giddens 1991: 84). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 5) make a similar point when they suggest that urbanization "carries the role models of the world out there into the village living room" through such means as education, tourism, advertising, mass media and consumerism.

This contemplation of counterfactuals pushes ideas of a personal 'lifestyle' to the centre of experience as choice becomes a fundamental component of day-to-day activity. Thus, people are compelled to repeatedly constitute themselves as individuals, "to make themselves the centre of their own planning and conduct in life" (Beck 1998: 88). Both Giddens and Beck suggest that the conditions of reflexive modernity result in an idealisation of reflexive engagement and practice and by this they are referring to activity that is self-directed and self-oriented. According to Giddens (1991: 3), in late modernity,

“the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists has to be reflexively made”. Thus, the standard biography becomes not socially prescribed, but self-reflexive, self-produced, a chosen or ‘do-it-yourself’ biography (Beck 1998: 88). Furthermore, questions of ‘How shall I live?’ become questions of ‘Who should I be?’. Chosen lifestyles become fundamental to the making and remaking of self-identity as they “give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity” (Giddens 1991: 81). It is suggested that in late modernity, the self comes to be increasingly seen as “a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible...we are not what we are but what we make of ourselves” (Giddens 1991: 75).

The abundance of ‘possible worlds’ and the importance of lifestyle choices associated with reflexive modernity have relevance for matters of ethnicity in the sense that, once separated from the self, ‘being ethnic’ becomes conceptualized as one among many possible lifestyle choices. Giddens’ discussion of ‘traditions’ illustrates this point well. He argues that in late modernity ‘traditions’ are forced to explain and justify themselves as they are among the familiar institutions and transcendent ideologies that are undermined and open to contestation under the conditions of the current period (1994: 105). The persistence of ‘traditions’ is dependent on their ability to enter into active dialogue with other ‘traditions’ and alternative modes of doing things in a process of discursive justification (Giddens 1994: 105). Bauman has argued that ‘communities’ have lost the ability to regulate their members “routinely, matter-of-factly and without self-consciousness”. Thus, the issue of shaping and coordinating human actions is cast as a problem and as “an object of choice, decision and purposeful effort. Fewer and fewer patterns of daily routines remained uncontested and so self-evident” (Bauman 2005: 20).

Accordingly, studies of ethnicity in late modernity might be expected to reveal increasing attempts to justify cultural practices within ethnic groupings. This was observed in my research in the form of a desire expressed by many participants for explanations of ‘Indian’ cultural practices. Concomitant with the need for justification of Indianness is the increasing openness of meanings of Indianness to contestation. This was evident in many participants’ discussions of the way they and their acquaintances ‘played’ with notions of Indianness:

A lot of my friends know I do classical Indian dancing and they mock it, but for fun [...] The people I'm friends with, the way they joke about it, it's never serious, because they know my parents own a dairy and they're just like 'Oh typical'. But they never say it in a way that makes you feel bad [...] We just do it for laughs because like I've got a few Chinese friends and I've got friends from all different cultures, like a few Maori friends, a few European friends and it's just like we all just joke about each other like that, but no-one ever takes it seriously which is good (Aparna female, 18).

DIPANKAR: *I like, you know, Indian dress. Sometimes put on a turban.*

AMANDA: *Really? I thought only the Punjabis wore turbans?*

DIPANKAR: *Yeah but my mum knows a Punjabi and she got a turban for me through him.*

AMANDA: *When do you wear it?*

DIPANKAR: *Occasionally round the house [...]*

AMANDA: *Do you speak Gujarati at home?*

DIPANKAR: *Ab, no. Sometimes I do to be funny {laughs} I'll say little things*

These guys at my work give me a lot of grief because I am Indian in a very, very joking light hearted, we all laugh kind of manner and I love it and it's fantastic (Maan, male, 30).

Such a lack of reverence for Indianness was far more prevalent amongst my younger participants suggesting the recent advent of the construction of Indianness as a lifestyle choice that needs to be justified.

The notion that Indianness can be understood as a lifestyle choice is exemplified in participants' discussion of Indianess as something that is fashionable and can be consumed by both Indians and non-Indians:

It's funny, being Indian's become really cool again. It's really cool to be Indian now. Like you say you're Indian and people get all like 'Oo' and then they'll tell you some Bollywood film they've just seen or tell you about how they love dhal. It's in. [...] Now everyone wants a piece of it [...] So it's changed. It's more mainstream. [...] I find people a lot more interested in it now than they were when I was a kid [...] I've definitely in my twenties felt like I need to make more of an effort with the Indian community and stuff [...] Maybe it was that it seems to be a lot more entered the mainstream and stuff. And, you know, you're connected to it so you want to, I don't know (Lata, female, 25).

I say [to my daughter] 'Well I can't see why you don't want to be Indian'. I said 'It's so trendy to be Indian at the moment. It's so in' (Satya, female, 45).

A lot of people do like saris or anything to do with the Indian culture as well. So not just Indian people would like to see things like that [Indian cultural events] [...] I saw a Pacific Island chick the other day wearing kind of like a skirt or something or a dress made out of an Indian sari and so I don't know I'm just guessing, but she obviously likes the Indian kind of thing and maybe she would like to see more Indian-type cultural things going on (Harsha, male, 25).

While none of my participants suggested that their decision either to embrace or to deny their Indianness was dependent on matters of current fashion, the very possibility that

Indianness was now 'trendy' suggests it has been conceptually disembedded from its larger social contexts and from 'Indian' people to an extent that it can be understood and articulated as a matter of lifestyle choice.

Furthermore, when one reflects on the constitution of ethnicity as a lifestyle choice in relation to the disembedding and diversification of social contexts, a useful explanatory framework emerges for the construction of 'culture' as a set of clearly demarcated customs separable from everyday life. According to Giddens, the disembedding of social institutions enables different lifestyles to be attached to specific milieus of action or 'lifestyle sectors' (Giddens 1991: 190). This 'regionalisation' of activity means that "modes of action followed in one context may be more or less substantially at variance with those adopted in others" (Giddens 1991: 83). Drawing on the notions of Goffman (1969), Giddens suggests that an individual is required to adjust their 'presentation of self' in relation to the expectations of 'appropriate' behaviour for each situation (1991: 190). Such an analysis can easily be applied to ethnicity and cultural practices associated with particular ethnic groupings. The diversification and compartmentalization of social contexts characteristic of late modernity can be seen to position an ethnic identity as one among many presentations of self. Thus 'culture' becomes a disembedded institution in itself applicable only in certain lifestyle sectors where an 'ethnic' presentation of self is deemed appropriate. A construction of Indianness as both a lifestyle sector and a presentation of self was evident in the narratives of my participants in the way they prioritised modular discourses of the cultural which clearly demarcated it from everyday life and in their discussions of switching between enacting 'Indian' and 'Kiwi' roles. For example, Lata suggested that she behaved differently in social contexts that she described as 'Indian' and asserted that moving from a 'Kiwi' to an 'Indian' presentation of herself was *"just the same as saying when you go to your grandparents' house for dinner you behave differently than when you're out drinking on a Friday night with your mates"*.

Finally, however, it is necessary to consider the 'actual' availability of choice in conditions of late modernity. Although the conceptualization of 'tradition' as a choice among many 'possible worlds' enables even community obligation and adherence to ethnic norms to be constructed as matters of personal choice, the tension between a

view of choice as a universal right of 'individuals' and experience of constraints to that choice, cannot be denied. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 5) argue that even the 'choice' of seemingly unaltered lifestyles and 'traditional' certainties represents "decisions against new longings and aroused desires".⁷² However, the ability of individuals to act upon these new longings and desires and to truly decide for themselves is highly variable.

In criticizing the ideas of Beck and Giddens, Matthew Adams has argued that these scholars have failed to recognise that the notion of reflexive individualism is based on a series of culturally-specific assumptions. He asserts that what he refers to as the 'myth' of reflexive individualism is an extension of modernist principles regarding the self as a separate and bounded, rationally choosing entity disconnected from a cultural and social 'back-drop' (2003: 231). Adams contends that the 'reflexive project of the self' "rather than being supremely capable of transcending cultural, social and historical restrictions, is a culturally located, politically normative discourse steeped...in modernist principles" (2003: 231). But this to me appears to be exactly Giddens' and Beck's point: reflexive individualism's significance is not so much an abundance of 'actual' choices made by rationally choosing subjects, but rather the culturally-specific assumption that the individual is at the centre of a world from which they are entirely separable and through which they can choose their own path.

In order to understand the 'actual' availability of choice in high modernity, it is necessary to return to the notion that reflexive individualism is institutionalised. According to Giddens, the influence of lifestyle choices and life-planning is more or less universal in circumstances of high modernity, regardless of how objectively limiting social situations may be (1991: 85). In reality, lifestyle choices continue to be very much conditioned by life chances, but the institutional components of modernity ensure that even the most underprivileged are affected by the promise of alternative 'possible worlds', contemplation of counterfactuals and an idealisation of reflexive self-actualisation.

⁷² Pam Nilan provides an interesting example of a similar reflexive constitution of a group identity. She describes how devout Muslim youth in Indonesia adopt a filtering and selecting approach to popular culture retaining positive aspects of Western modernity and marginalizing those aspects that are culturally inappropriate (2006: 91). She describes this as a 'reflexive habitus' (2006: 92). These Muslim youth explain their devoutness not in terms of dogma, but as a careful consideration in terms of the moral and spiritual understandings of the religion. Nilan sees this as an example of "quite intense reflexivity in the life trajectory" (2006: 98) and "self conscious construction of a reflexive biography" (2006: 108).

Possibilities are still experienced as possibilities even if they are possibilities denied. As Giddens argues,

[c]lass divisions and other fundamental lines of inequality such as those connected with gender or ethnicity, can be partly *defined* in terms of differential access to forms of self-actualisation and empowerment...Holding out the possibility of emancipation, modern institutions at the same time create mechanisms of suppression, rather than actualisation of self (1991: 6, original emphasis).

Bauman has articulated this dilemma of choice as a gap between *de jure* and *de facto* autonomy (2000: 31). He argues that the notion that any 'individual' is responsible for all their successes and failures *presumes* that a person has the right to choose freely. However, according to Bauman, there is a wide and growing gap between "individuality as fate and individuality as the practical and realistic capacity for self-assertion" (2000: 34). This gap, he argues, forms the main contradiction of what he calls liquid modernity (2000: 38). Bauman asserts that *de facto* individuality is the privilege of a few as access to it is unevenly distributed across the planet (2005: 25).

Furthermore, while today some people are more able to escape from their surrounding social circumstances than in 'traditional' times, they are increasingly dependent on abstract institutions for their existence, institutions that are largely beyond their control (Giddens 1991: 192). According to Beck (1998: 131), individualization is the most advanced form of societalization as it involves standardization and control. Although removed from 'traditional' commitments and support relationships, the individual is today constrained by a dependence on the market, law, education and consumer fashions (Beck 1998: 90). As well as being unable to opt out of individualization and the promise of lifestyle choice, people in high modernity continue to have little control over the range and consequences of the choices that are available to them (Giddens 1994: 75; Bauman 2001: 6). As Beck argues, nowhere does reflexive individualism equate with unmitigated free choice as its institutionalization means that today "people are condemned to individualization" (Beck 1994: 15).

The implications of this tension between *de jure* and *de facto* individuality for studies of ethnicity are exemplified in my participants' narratives. My participants' discussions of their Indianness revealed a tension between an apparent lack of choice due to

community obligations and the 'givens' of their biological inheritance, and a belief in an individual right to choose. While participants suggested that they were inherently and essentially 'Indian', they also described a process of 'becoming' Indian through personally developing pride in their 'culture' and identity, actively participating in the 'community', actively seeking knowledge of aspects of Indianness and developing their own styles of Indianness. 'Becoming Indian', then, is not a matter of choosing between a variety of potential ethnic identities, but rather becoming what one believes one *is*. Although individualization transforms human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task' (Bauman 2000: 31), a person's choices are "predicated on the strongly held belief that the chooser has absolutely no choice but to choose the specific group to which he or she 'belongs'" (Bauman 2000: 171). My participants suggested that to some extent Indianness could be rejected, but that any rejection meant not-belonging rather than gaining a new sense of belonging to some other collectivity. In the words of Bauman, "[o]ne must *choose* loyalty to one's nature...the choice is not between different referents of belonging, but between belongingness and rootlessness, home and homelessness, being and nothingness" (Bauman 2000: 173, original emphasis).

Giddens, Beck and Bauman suggest that, under the conditions of late modernity, autonomy and personal agency become not just a right, but a duty. However, although individuals are ideologically cast as architects of their own destiny, this does not amount to 'real' self-actualisation. Nevertheless, the actualities of choice are less relevant than the idealisation of self-oriented and self-produced action. The widespread belief that autonomy is a universal human right encourages 'individuals' to construct narratives of the self in which all actions appear to stem from personal choice to the extent that "[o]bedience to standards...appears in the disguise of free will, rather than revealing itself as an external force" (Bauman 2000: 86). Matters of ethnicity, then, are likely to be constructed in terms of personal choice and individual agency regardless of the actual conditions under which those choices were made.

Self-Reflexive Ethnicity

The type of ethnicity described above can be described as a self-reflexive ethnicity. This concept essentially refers to the phenomenon of individuals constructing narratives of their ethnicity that are significantly oriented around the self. This involves an emphasis on personal choice, but what exactly those choices are and the degree to which they are 'really' choices is highly variable. In today's society of individuals everyone *must* be individual (Bauman 2005: 16). Accordingly, my participants draw on their Indianness as one source of differentiation. Aspects of their cultural inheritance are drawn upon to construct boundaries of difference between different groupings that enhance claims to the uniqueness of Indianness and thus of Indians in general. Certain aspects of the cultural such as dress, dance and food are more suited to this enhancement than others, not least because they have become standardised forms of difference across ethnic groupings. As Bauman argues, in order for a person to convince others of their individuality, they must use shared, commonly recognizable and legible tokens (2005: 16). Such aspects of the cultural then become prioritised over the more banal, lived aspects of Indianness (and complex problematic aspects such as race and caste) particularly in public presentations of Indianness. As customs become more symbolic, they are enacted in an increasingly conscious manner. Contrary to the hypotheses of symbolic ethnicity, however, mundane, non-conscious aspects of Indianness may well continue, although in more private contexts. It is simply the case that these aspects of Indianness are, by their very nature, less frequently reflected upon and articulated as a point of distinction.

In addition, discourses of Indianness as optional are prioritised as they are in greater alignment with images of an ideal reflexive self than those that depict constraint to personal agency. However, again in conflict with the concept of symbolic ethnicity, prioritising such discourses does not necessarily reflect a decline in ethnic networks and participation in 'community' affairs. It simply necessitates the reconfiguration of any communal duties and obligations in terms of personal choice. This discursive construction of Indianness as a personal lifestyle choice is a way for my participants to

narrate and define their self-identities as highly differentiated and unique and to suggest that they are active agents in their own biographies, autonomous in thought and action. They discursively subordinate their ethnicity to their individuality in order to construct themselves as ideal reflexive selves and, in doing so, present themselves as individuals in ethnic garb.

Concluding Remarks

The literature on symbolic ethnicity has provided many useful pointers in the direction of reflexive individualism. However, by operating with predefined notions of 'ethnic culture' and taking the autonomy of the 'individual' for granted, symbolic ethnicity scholars have remained limited to somewhat inconsequential questions of whether the ethnicity of a grouping or of an individual can be characterised as symbolic. According to Gans, as ethnic roles become increasingly voluntary, people "refrain from ethnic behaviour that requires arduous or time-consuming commitment, either to a culture that must be practiced constantly, or to organizations that demand active membership" (1979: 8). What is not recognized by symbolic ethnicity scholars is that individualism does not require such trends. An approach involving self-reflexive ethnicity understands ethnicity as re-centered on the person rather than being located in social groups or artefacts and practices representative of a cultural identity. While identity is, indeed, far better suited to such purposes than ethnic social networks and cultural practices, the latter need not necessarily be discarded. Self-reflexive ethnicity simply requires such networks and practices to be conceptually reconfigured so that they revolve around an autonomous 'individual'. It must be acknowledged, however, that Gans (1979) developed his notion of symbolic ethnicity at a time when the literature on reflexive modernity and reflexive individualism was not available. Interestingly, the period he describes is one of particular significance in terms of the arguments of scholars of late modernity. Writing at a time of supposed transition from early to late and liquid modernity, Gans in many ways documented the emergence of the trends towards greater flexibility in personal identities described above, without recognizing the tension between *de jure* and *de facto* autonomy, something that is now possible with the benefit of time.

Symbolic ethnicity, therefore, can be understood as an 'ideal' response to the conditions identified as 'reflexive' or 'liquid' modernity, in the sense that it is most 'materially' in alignment with the ideals of the period. There are clear connections between the notion of symbolic ethnicity and Bauman's discussion of 'cloakroom', 'spectacle' or 'carnival' communities (2000: 200). Such communities, he suggests, gather only for the purposes of viewing a 'spectacle'. They dress for the occasion and adopt a particular behavioural script for the occasion in order to mark it as a special event. Their special dress creates a uniformity among their members, but when the spectacle ends, members of the cloakroom community put on their street clothes once again and return to their ordinary lives with their mundane and varied roles. Bauman describes these communities as 'explosive' communities as they function as 'events' that break the monotony of everyday life and individuality. Symbolic ethnicity provides the context for just such a community; it offers members a chance to belong and to 'be somebody', but remains peripheral to their everyday lives and does not encroach too far on their individual autonomy. However, while symbolic ethnicity may be an 'ideal' response to reflexive or liquid modernity, it is simply one response out of many 'possible worlds'.

In this chapter I have sought to explain the curious ways in which my participants' descriptions of their Indianness both supported and conflicted with the hypotheses of symbolic ethnicity. Such an explanation has been provided by using ideas of a self-reflexive ethnicity which is seen as a product of reflexive or liquid modernity and reflexive individualism. A self-reflexive ethnicity would incorporate symbolic ethnicity, but also acknowledges that a prioritising of symbolic aspects does not necessarily require the demise of non-symbolic, non-individualised aspects. Self-reflexive ethnicity places a similar emphasis on choice and individualism, but it shows how these values are culturally and socially constructed. It also illustrates that choice in matters of ethnicity does not necessarily result in symbolic ethnicity. Under the conditions of reflexive modernity a person can 'choose' 'tradition' and even 'fundamentalism'. Furthermore, this 'choice' of 'constraint' can be experienced as a very positive aspect of identity. Although participants described the Indian 'community' as a restrictor of their ethnic options, many not only suggested that their participation in that community was an option that

they voluntarily chose for themselves, but also implied that their resultant obligation to that community was fundamental to their sense of belonging.

Conclusion

When talking with my participants I was struck by the regularity with which three themes recurred. The first was the importance of being different. Participants told me that Indian 'culture' was 'different' and as such it offered them the chance to 'be somebody'. They told me that they, as Indians, were 'different' from other New Zealanders and that, while this could lead to discrimination and stereotyping, it also enhanced their uniqueness as 'individuals'. The second aspect of participants' talk to catch my attention was not so much a theme, but an emphasis. Participants repeatedly stressed that they were not forced into 'Indian' cultural observance, that their Indianness was an area of personal choice. Finally, participants spoke at length of activities being more or less acceptable for an 'Indian' person to engage in and implied that both activities and persons could be scaled according to their degree of Indianness. They described systems of protocol to be observed and associated degrees of authenticity. These aspects of participants' discussions of their Indianness appeared related to each other in complex ways. The notion of Indianness as difference is clearly compatible with a system of authenticity as is the notion of individuality with choice. However, notions of individuality and choice appear, at least initially, to be inherently incompatible with systems of protocol and appeals to authenticity.

In analysing my material, symbolic ethnicity appealed as a framework for understanding participants' discussions of their Indianness due to its commonsensical approach, its exploration of the relationships between different aspects of ethnicity and its sensitivity to tensions between homogeneity and difference. The cultural, social and identity aspects of participants' Indianness, however, all provided mixed support for the hypotheses associated with symbolic ethnicity. An exploration of participants' ethnic options suggested that the effects of ethno-racial classification could significantly limit the symbolic nature of their ethnicity. However, while this analysis provided a revealing illustration of the salience of Indianness in the lives of my participants, in the end a conventional symbolic ethnicity approach proved unable to account for the complexities of my participants' narratives.

Such complexities could be better explained by exploring assumptions about the cultural and the person inherent in notions of living between two worlds and trying to find a balance between them. Although participants expressed a far broader understanding of the cultural than that evident in many studies of symbolic ethnicity, they tended to prioritise the modular aspects of Indianness such as food and language over the mundane and meanings-based aspects such as tongue cleaners and systems of protocol. Participants described the cultural as something essentially separate from everyday life and defined in terms of difference and uniqueness in relation to other 'cultures'. In doing so they constructed the cultural as a highly individuated category – 'culture'. The person was similarly constructed as an individuated category defined in terms of uniqueness. Participants depicted themselves as consisting of a single, 'individual' self and suggested that as individuals they were inherently autonomous beings, entirely separable from their cultural and social roles. They assumed that choice was a natural property and universal right of individuals. This assumption led participants not only to suggest that individuals should be able to make personal choices in matters of Indianness, but also to construct matters of obligation and obedience as ultimately matters of their free choice. Participants expressed a value for their uniqueness as individuals in a number of ways. They were resistant to having their uniqueness denied by being treated as representatives of a homogenous 'Indian' collectivity, they embraced Indianness as a point of distinction from other New Zealanders and they suggested that they had their own personalised ways of being Indian. All such individualizations of the person were significantly more apparent in the narratives of my younger rather than my older participants. By constructing the cultural and the person as such highly individuated categories younger participants particularly were able to conceive of themselves as 'individual' persons standing outside of 'culture' and personally selecting the parts of it they perceived were sufficiently appealing or useful to continue to practice.

Such notions of 'culture' and the individual are explored, although in some areas only indirectly, in the theories of reflexive or liquid modernity and reflexive individualism associated with Beck, Giddens and Bauman. They argue that the current age is characterised by a lack of socially ascribed roles due to the disembedding of social

institutions and the institutionalization of individualism. It is suggested that modern people are constantly confronted with choices about what to do and who to be. They are aware of multiple possible worlds and are given the task of constructing a personal biography of the self. People are ideologically cast as architects of their own destiny as self-directed and self-oriented thought and activity become idealised. Applied to ethnic contexts, the individual becomes entirely separable from their ethnicity and ethnic identity becomes a particular 'presentation of self' relevant to particular 'lifestyle spheres'. The 'true self' is only defined in relation to itself and not by these outside influences. In terms of the Indianness of my participants, their identity remained on one level inherent and irreversible, but on another level it was redefined as a currently fashionable lifestyle choice, open to contestation, acceptance or rejection. In the construction of themselves as ideal reflexive selves, my participants reconfigured their obligations and duties of obedience as matters of personal choice. Thus, Indianness becomes a kind of self-reflexive ethnicity, centred on the person rather than on social groups or cultural practices. Symbolic ethnicity can thus be represented as just one form of self-reflexive ethnicity, albeit an 'ideal' one.

An advantage of applying notions of self-reflexivity to ethnicity is the ability to illustrate the connections between particular discourses of ethnicity and wider social and historical contexts. It enables scholars of ethnicity to move away from an overemphasis on the significance of particular generations in examining post-diasporic contexts and to recognise that the significance of cultural practices, social networks and identities that are associated with ethnicity change over time in relation to wider historical processes and not just as a reaction to increasing distance from the immigrating generation. Extensive further research will be required amongst other people identifying in ethnic terms in other parts of the world to fully explore the relevance of a notion of self-reflexive ethnicity. Much could also be learned by following the development of a single ethnic category, such as 'Indian', over time. As a sizeable body of material on local discourses of ethnicity becomes available it should be possible to compare different discourses and the social and cultural climates in which they prevail. Thus, viewing ethnicity as something in process, subject to 'macro' historical changes, has the potential to enable

connections to be drawn between the different forms of ethnicity that have been theorised (Nederveen Pieterse 1997).

Further connections are also possible between notions of ethnicity and other ideas on identity. Barth's concept of ethnicity as constituted by boundaries of perceived difference has been criticised for its general applicability to any form of identity and for telling us little specifically about ethnicity. Yet, as this thesis has shown, much can be learned by conceiving of ethnicity as linked to other forms of identity and by exploring how changes in the significance of identity in general have implications for notions of ethnicity. It does, however, remain necessary to identify what distinguishes ethnicity from other forms of identity. In this thesis, ethnicity has been conceived of as a system of classification based on origin, but such an approach is equally applicable to the categories of race and nationality (Brubaker, Loveman & Stamatov 2004: 47-49). If one adds to this conceptualization that boundaries between ethnic groupings are usually constructed and maintained by notions of cultural difference, it remains applicable to these other identities. Nevertheless, although academics have consistently distinguished between race, nation and ethnicity, it would be interesting to see if such academic distinctions have any relevance in local discourses. More study of local discourses is therefore necessary to establish connections and disconnections between forms of identity.

Finally, further study is necessary to understand the relationship between local discourses of ethnicity and other discourses of ethnicity. As Chapter Two indicated, the construction of 'culture' as 'difference' is both a feature of academic discourses and of local discourses. Public and governmental discourses of multiculturalism currently prevalent in New Zealand in the areas of politics and public policy as well as in the media also have clear implications for the construction of modern cultural concepts in terms of standardized forms of difference. There is much scope for study of how these different discourses influence and are influenced by one another. While we may never know if ethnicity ever existed before it entered academic discourse, by tracing its journey from academic writings, through public policy and into the lives of 'the people', we will

surely gain a significant understanding of the phenomena to which the term 'ethnicity' refers to today.

Appendix

Interview Schedule: *Ethnic Identities amongst New Zealand-born Gujaratis*

Researcher: Amanda Gilbertson

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Section A: Demographics

- Date of Birth
- Sex
- Religion
- Occupation
- Highest Qualification
- Area of Family Origin

Section B: Immigration History

- Could you please tell me about how your family came to be in NZ?

Section C: Lifestyle

- I'm just trying to get an idea of what your life is like on a normal day-to-day basis. So could you please describe for me an average day and an average week in your life?
- How much do you think being Indian/Gujarati impacts on your everyday life?
 - Do you eat Indian food and wear Indian dress regularly?
 - Do you celebrate any Indian holidays? What about NZ holidays?
 - Are there certain things that you do that make you feel Indian/Gujarati?
 - Are there things you do that make you feel like a New Zealander?
 - Do you belong to any cultural or religious groups?
 - How often do you attend activities organized by these groups?
 - What languages do you speak?
 - What ethnic groups are your closest friends from?
 - Do you feel more comfortable being around Indians than non-Indians? At what times? Any idea why?
 - Was it important to you and your parents that you date/marry someone from your own ethnic group? Would you prefer your children to marry an Indian/Gujarati?
 - Who do you support in the Olympics/cricket?
 - Do you prefer to use professionals from your own cultural background?
- Is it common for people to ask or comment on your ethnic background?
- Do you think people treat you differently because they classify you as Indian?
- Do you think there are stereotypes of New Zealand Indians? What do you think of these stereotypes?

- Have you been to Gujarat? What was it like? Did you feel like you belonged?

Section D: Boundaries

- Do you think there is a Wellington Indian community? Who belongs to this community and who doesn't?

Section E: Being Indian

- How do you identify yourself ethnically?
- What do you think makes you Indian/Gujarati? What does being Indian/ Gujarati mean to you?
- When you were growing up, did your parents talk much about their homeland and culture?
- Would you say that being Indian/Gujarati is important to you? Why? Have you felt this way all your life?
- How important do you think being Indian/Gujarati is to your children?
- What would you like your children/grandchildren to learn about being Indian/Gujarati?

Section F: Dual Identities

- Where do you think of as home?
- How does NZ fit into your ideas about who you are?
- What do you think it means to be a NZer?
- Are you happy/comfortable with having a mixed cultural background and more than one sense of identity?

Section G: Ethnicity

- What do you think about the terms 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group'?
- What about culture?
- Do you think you belong to an ethnic group?
- When you were growing up, did you consider yourself part of an ethnic group?

Section H: Multiculturalism

- What do you think people mean when they say New Zealand is multicultural?

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