

**Diasporic fashion space:
women's experiences of
'South Asian' dress aesthetics
in London.**

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Shivani Pandey Derrington, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Abstract

This thesis responds to the emergence of a ‘diasporic fashion space’ in London, examining its implications for women of South Asian descent and their lived experiences of dress. It draws upon in-depth qualitative research in which women provided testimony about their dress biographies, wardrobe collections and aesthetic agency. The aim is to complement, and advance, past research that considered the production and marketing of ‘South Asian’ fashions and textiles in Britain (e.g. Bhachu 2003, Dwyer & Jackson 2003) through a more sustained analysis of the consumption and use of styles and materials. The research is situated in relation to both specific bodies of scholarship – such as that on contemporary British Asian fashion cultures – and wider currents of thought – in particular on diasporic geographies and geographies of fashion. The approach taken draws especially from work within fashion studies that has sought to recognise lived experiences of dress. The thesis develops its argument through four complementary perspectives on the testimonies constructed in the empirical research. First, it considers the role of dress in inhabiting what is termed ‘British Asian fashion space’ and ideas of British Asian identity. Second, it then examines how dress functions as a technology of diasporic selfhood, focusing on the practice of dress choices both in everyday life and in significant ceremonies such as weddings. The third substantive chapter focuses on the interrelated materialities and memories of dress, considering both the collections of clothing held within women’s wardrobes and their embodied wear. The final substantive chapter foregrounds the relations between dress and place, focusing on both the general contextuality of dress practices and the navigations of London’s fashion scenes by the women researched. Overall, the thesis shows how dress is a material practice that both allows and demands a contextually sensitive objectification of diasporic selves, social relations and sensibilities.

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I would like to end by offering immense thanks and gratitude to the women whom I interviewed. They not only let me in to their lives and homes but also provided insightful and thought provoking narratives on South Asian dress aesthetics. I remember happy times, talking of many aspects of our lives. I received warm welcomes, friendship, advice on mothering as well as the fascinating dress stories to think about. Without their generosity and kindness this thesis could not have taken the shape it ultimately has.



**Chapter One:
Introduction**

CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction

The thesis in an orange lengha:

“I have got an orange lengha that I just wore to my friend’s wedding at the weekend. And it’s just beautiful. It [...] fits me really [...] well and is kind of just off the shoulders. Kind of a little lengha top and it’s got diamante embroidery around the rims and little diamante bits all the way, like speckled all the way through on the skirt and it’s like a fish tail skirt. So it flares out at the bottom and there’s like that much embroidery at the bottom, so that all kind of like spirals upwards. But [...] it just looks really beautiful when you put it on [...] I guess clothes are more about how you feel when you put them on” (Satinder)

This thesis considers British Asian women’s experiences of dress aesthetics. As Satinder articulates above, clothes matter, in part because of how we *feel* when we put them on. This thesis argues that how we feel in dress is an embodied, socio-spatially situated experience that at once realises the corporeal nature of our selves whilst acknowledging the habitual demands of our everyday lives. These everyday lives are culturally and geographically contextualised. For British Asian diasporic women, crucial to those contextualisations are modern migrations and global mobilities. The narratives of British Asian women constructed for this thesis reveal that discussions of dress speak of many common imaginaries. Ideas of identity, gender, age, ethnicity, and class are all thought of and felt through dress. Looking at these thoughts and feelings through the narratives of British Asian women in turn enables one to open up discussion of the embodied geographies of these women’s cultural lives.

It is the contention of this thesis that dress has a manifold ability to speak of diasporic lives. Satinder’s description of her orange lengha reveals how in the moment of dressing diverse conceptualisations of the relationship between self, society and dress come into one’s mind. In Satinder’s description, a vivid portrait of the garment is painted, one where the affection she feels for it is apparent. The lengha is animate, active, expressive of whom she wishes to present to the world around her. She wears this garment to weddings; it is place and space specific. She wears this style as a British Asian in the UK, creating in British diaspora space new dress presences and

visibilities as she wears it. Satinder's account also illustrates something of the nature of diasporic cultural cosmopolitanism. By knowing the styles of lengha, fabrics, levels of ornamentation and cuts that best suit her, as well as matching the social context, she has created for herself a relationship with materiality that enables cultural competence. Satinder has an in-depth knowledge of how to wear South Asian garments in Britain. This knowledge demonstrates, and gives room for the analysis of, the practical everyday engagements with the material forms of fashion by British women of South Asian descent. This thesis pursues that analysis.

Satinder has a collection of garments stored in her wardrobe that enables this material cosmopolitanism to develop. Writers have increasingly acknowledged that the wardrobe is a key place and moment where we can examine ideas of dress (e.g. Woodward 2007). In our wardrobes, items of clothing are stored which when worn on our bodies take on agency, transforming us into socialised beings and enabling, or indeed curtailing, our relationship with the places and spaces around us. In housing garments that we wear a wardrobe is a material collection that acts as a resource with which we articulate our multiple identities. But wardrobes also house clothes we rarely or never wear, but which we keep for other reasons. Specifically, wardrobes are also archives of memories, containing clothes we used to wear or that others wore and gave to us.

Satinder is a British Asian woman living in London whose relationship to dress is reflective of her various intersecting identities: British, Asian and others. Her looks, and their articulation of her identities through dress, have been learned, becoming habitual and acting as a technology of diasporic selfhood. As Satinder comments,

“At the end of the day, all clothes do at the end of the day is have their place don't they? You wouldn't turn up at work you know, in sparkly spangly lengha...” (Satinder)

Through an embodied relationship to clothing, British Asian women are developing looks which reflect cultural expectations, respect traditions and strike out to create new innovative styles. Experiences from their pasts combine with current influences to create these learned dress behaviours. Cultural heritage and the family are important sources of instruction regarding dress, as are wider influences from living and growing up in Britain. Place has great significance in our

dress decisions; indeed it becomes apparent that we learn how to dress to in relation to the places around us.

Dressing also brings to light the anxieties and dilemmas about the reflexive production of our embodied selves. The relationship to dress is a personal and embodied one. Wearing the right clothes brings back memories, makes the body feel good, and enables us to dress with success in our social worlds. Speaking of the memories and significance we attach to garments, Satinder comments:

“They remind you of times, like my orange lengha, every time you put something on and it makes you feel good, it changes your whole perception of whatever you’re doing, doesn’t it? [...] You stand that much taller and I’ve always had a good time in it [...] that’s [why] clothes are so important [...] aren’t they? They make such a difference. Like if you step out the door and you’re wearing something and thinking yes I look good today then your whole way of dealing with your day is just completely different to what it would be if you’d just gone out wearing something you didn’t really like or you were feeling uncomfortable [in]”. (Satinder)

Dress is ultimately a way to express the ‘me’. As Riza, another British Asian woman living in London commented, “my clothes definitely are just a reflection of my personality and who I am” (Riza). Who I am is expressed daily by women through their dress. Looking at fashion and dress through a cultural geographical lens enables the spatialities of diasporic identities to be articulated. Dress equally talks of the subjectivities, materialities and embodied relationships women have to space.

This thesis responds to the emergence of a ‘diasporic fashion space’ in London, examining its implications for women of South Asian descent and their lived experiences of dress. It draws upon in-depth qualitative research in which women (including Satinder and Riza) provided testimony about their dress biographies, wardrobe collections and “aesthetic agency” (Mercer 2004:8). The intention was to construct a space for the testimony of these women, allowing them to speak of ideas of dress, self and society. The women I interviewed were all of South Asian descent and had lived or were living in London. This is perhaps where the similarities ended and the differences in personal biographies came to the fore. Their ages ranged from late teens to mid fifties. They lived in central London and the suburbs. They had historical links with India,

Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Kenya. The women had migrated direct from South Asia, via East Africa, or had been born in the UK. Whether the migration to Britain happened in their lifetimes or had been undertaken by family members, South Asia was alive in their thoughts. Equally they were, in diverse ways, Londoners. Their specific place based experiences of this city were vital in informing their dress practices. The women interviewed were, above all, wonderfully generous to me, giving me their time and friendship. I am grateful and thankful that they took the time to speak to me and gave this research a perspective on British Asian's women's dress practices which recognises how they are sensitive, unique and deeply personal.

This PhD worked within the 'Fashioning diaspora space: textiles, pattern and cultural exchange between Britain and South Asia' project funded by the AHRC through its Diasporas, Migration and Identities research programme. The project brought together cultural geographers from the Department of Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London and fashion and textile researchers based in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The vast majority of the materials deployed in the thesis were generated solely within the PhD project, but I have drawn a little on wider project materials. For example, community participation days were held at the V&A, and within these I conducted focus groups that asked women to discuss their dress experiences.

An aim of this study was to complement and advance existing research that had looked at how South Asian fashions had been produced and marketed in Britain (e.g. Bhachu 2003, Dwyer & Jackson 2003). In focusing on women's testimonies about their dress biographies, wardrobe collections and aesthetic agency, this thesis shifts the focus from fashion designers and retailers to the 'consumption' of South Asian fashions when brought home, stored in a wardrobe and dressed in by British Asian women. As well as being situated in relation to specific bodies of scholarship – such as that on contemporary British Asian fashion cultures – the thesis also speaks to wider currents of thought – in particular on diasporic geographies and geographies of fashion. The approach taken draws especially from work within fashion studies that has sought to recognise the embodied and lived experiences of dress, as I will discuss further in Chapter Three.

In the thesis I have organised the participants' testimony into four complementary perspectives, which are developed through Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven. First, I consider the role of dress in inhabiting not only what I term a 'British Asian fashion space' but also ideas of British

Asian identity. Second, I examine how dress functions as a ‘technology’ of diasporic selfhood, focusing on the practices of dress choice both in everyday life and for significant ceremonies such as weddings. Third, I focus on the interrelated materialities and memories of dress, considering the memory work done by both the collections of clothing held within women’s wardrobes and the embodied wearing of items. Fourth, I foreground the relations between dress and place, focusing on both the contextuality of dress in general and on the more specific navigations of London’s fashion scenes by my research informants. Overall, the testimony of these women showed me how dress is a material practice that both allows and demands a contextually sensitive discussion of diasporic selves, social relations and sensibilities. I will return later in this Introduction to the interpretive foci of the research and the remits of the thesis chapters that follow. I now wish to consider the research aims of this thesis.

Research Aims

The overall objective of the research was to explore the diasporic fashion space created in London from a particular perspective, namely the experiences of South Asian dress aesthetics for women of South Asian descent. More specifically, that objective was pursued through four principal research aims, each foregrounding a distinctive area of interest (though, of course, these interrelate). Metaphorically, these aims can be understood as four ‘lenses’ or ‘windows’ through which the experience of dress is viewed.

- The first such lens looks at dress in relation to public discourses of identity. It aims to understand how dress relates to forms of identity, specifically for British Asian women. This aim is addressed most directly in Chapter Four.
- The second lens looks at dress in more practical terms, as a technology of the embodied self. It aims to understand how dress is a bodily technique through which the selves of British Asian women are presented and constituted. This aim is addressed most directly in Chapter Five.

- The third lens looks at dress in terms of its material agencies. It aims to consider the potential for clothing to be an ‘evocative object’ and explores this in relation to practices of memory and embodiment for British Asian women. This aim is addressed most directly in Chapter Six.
- The fourth lens looks at dress as a contextually modulated practice. It aims to understand how dress is both shaped by and reactive to places and their normative cultural framings. This aim is addressed most directly in Chapter Seven.

Given that these aims are fore-grounded within different chapters, I now elaborate on them by outlining the structure of the thesis.

Structure of the Thesis

This Introduction is followed by seven chapters: The first (Chapter Two) focuses on the methodology used in this research; the second (Chapter Three) setting out the wider research contexts from which the research draws and to which it contributes; the following four (Chapters Four through to Seven) taking in turn the research aims set out above; and the final chapter bringing these discussions together into a Conclusion addressed to my research aims. Let me elaborate on each of these chapters in turn.

In *Chapter Two – Methodology*, I discuss how the research was conducted and the methodologies used. I describe how my overall methodological approach was used to create space for the interviewee’s stories to be told and got their testimony to be heard. I give details of the fifteen women interviewed, how they were recruited, the interviewing process, the empirical materials generated and their use in this thesis. I also give discussion of my own positionality, my methods of qualitative data analysis and the textual styles I use in this thesis to enable the voices of my participants to be heard.

In *Chapter Three - ‘The Cultural Geographies of Diaspora and Fashion: a Contextual Review’*, I situate the thesis with regard to wider research debates and literatures. My aim is threefold: to establish the research agendas to which the research contributes; to set out the rationales for the approaches taken in thesis; and to lay a foundation of key ideas and arguments that I will take forward into

the substantive chapters that follow. This contextual review is comparatively detailed and lengthy. This is deliberate. It allows the subsequent chapters to foreground the dialogue with my research participants. They draw upon ideas and arguments developed in Chapter Three, but can then deploy them without swamping the voices and experiences of the British Asian women I worked with. Chapter Three surveys approaches within the interdisciplinary fields of diaspora and fashion studies, as well as considering how these approaches have been brought together in a more focused body of work on British Asian fashion cultures. These three foci comprise its three main sections.

Firstly, then, I consider work that has looked at diasporic geographies. My general approach to this work is as a Cultural Geographer, reflecting on how it highlights the cultural and geographical implications of modern migrations and global mobilities. My discussion here begins by reviewing the different emphases of varying definitions of diaspora: from those focused more on cultural dispersal, to those attuned more to questions of identity politics, to those with an explicit appeal to notions of space. I then draw out how scholarship on diaspora relates to discussions of two related concepts: cultural hybridity and cosmopolitanism. Finally, I turn to other aspects of diaspora studies with particular relevance to my own substantive area of study, through work on gender and on the role of material culture within diasporic lives.

The second section of the chapter turns to the interdisciplinary body of work concerned with fashion and dress. Endorsing approaches that view fashion as a lens through which to consider the subjective experience of modernity, I develop my argument through four foci. First, I set out the engagements that already exist between fashion studies and Cultural Geography. My aim here is not simply to list the work produced by Geographers that attends to questions of fashion and dress; it is, instead, to demonstrate that fashion studies is engaged in what we might term a 'geographical turn' that can be usefully extended by this thesis's attention to diasporic geographies. My second focus is to advance the importance of studying dress (i.e. the practical everyday engagement with the material forms of fashion), an agenda that I suggest can be productively developed through the attention to people's relationships to their wardrobes that this thesis prioritises. Third, I show how such work sits within a wider interest in dress and embodiment. I discuss the key ideas that have brought the body back into accounts of dressing. I consider how dressing the body is both habitual and throws up dilemmas and anxieties about the

reflexive production of our embodied selves. Fourth, and finally in this section, I outline the relations between fashion studies and interests in ‘material culture’. I address the arguments of those who have called for a material culture approach to dress and fashion. I situate those calls within longer standing and still vibrant traditions of work on textiles as both cloth and culture, and I draw out suggestions about the material agencies of garments within practices of dress. This lays important groundwork for argument I develop in Chapter Six.

Having considered these two broad and diffuse bodies of work, diaspora and fashion studies, the third section of Chapter Three has a narrower focus: research that has thought about British Asian fashions in particular. Much of this work highlights British Asian agency in new, diasporic forms of fashionable design and dress. These works talk of new creative ‘minority ethnic’ / British Asian enterprises, new media forms that support them, and the reengagements with South Asian dress forms by British Asians which have fuelled these industries. I argue for the value of this thesis in extending the focus on fashion providers into detailed work on consumers’ practices of dress and experiences of South Asian dress aesthetics.

Chapter Four – ‘Fashioning British Asian Identities’ is the first substantive chapter of the thesis. It focuses on the relations between dress and public discourses of identity; specifically, it concerns the fashioning of British Asian women’s identities. I argue that diaspora refers to more than the dispersal of a people or culture, instead designating an arena through which politics of identity and belonging play out. I suggest that a ‘British Asian fashion space’ has emerged as such a diasporic arena; and that this chapter extends existing literatures by approaching that space from the perspective of the ordinary women who inhabit it as ‘consumers’ and wearers of clothes. The chapter is structured in three main parts. I first look at how the women I researched relate to the general ideas of British Asian identity and a British Asian fashion space. The general lines of argumentation are twofold: to recognise ‘British Asian’ as a (variably) imagined space of identity; and to move beyond somewhat gestural proclamations of the British Asian as a ‘hybrid’ culture, by considering how these women variably framed the cultural mixings within British Asian fashion space. In the second part of the chapter I focus specifically on gender. I report on how the women saw British Asian fashion space as gendered in important ways, such that for women it both imposed dress expectations but also opened up new possibilities for creative dressing that were less apparent for men. Whilst all these arguments are woven through testimony from the

women I worked with, in the last part of the chapter I present four longer narratives that speak in more detail about the various ways in which British Asian fashion space is inhabited. Focused on the “aesthetic agency” (Mercer 2004:8) and cosmopolitan competencies (Vertovec 2010) of women within this space, these stories also illustrate the complex ‘intersectional’ identities being expressed through engagements with British Asian fashion.

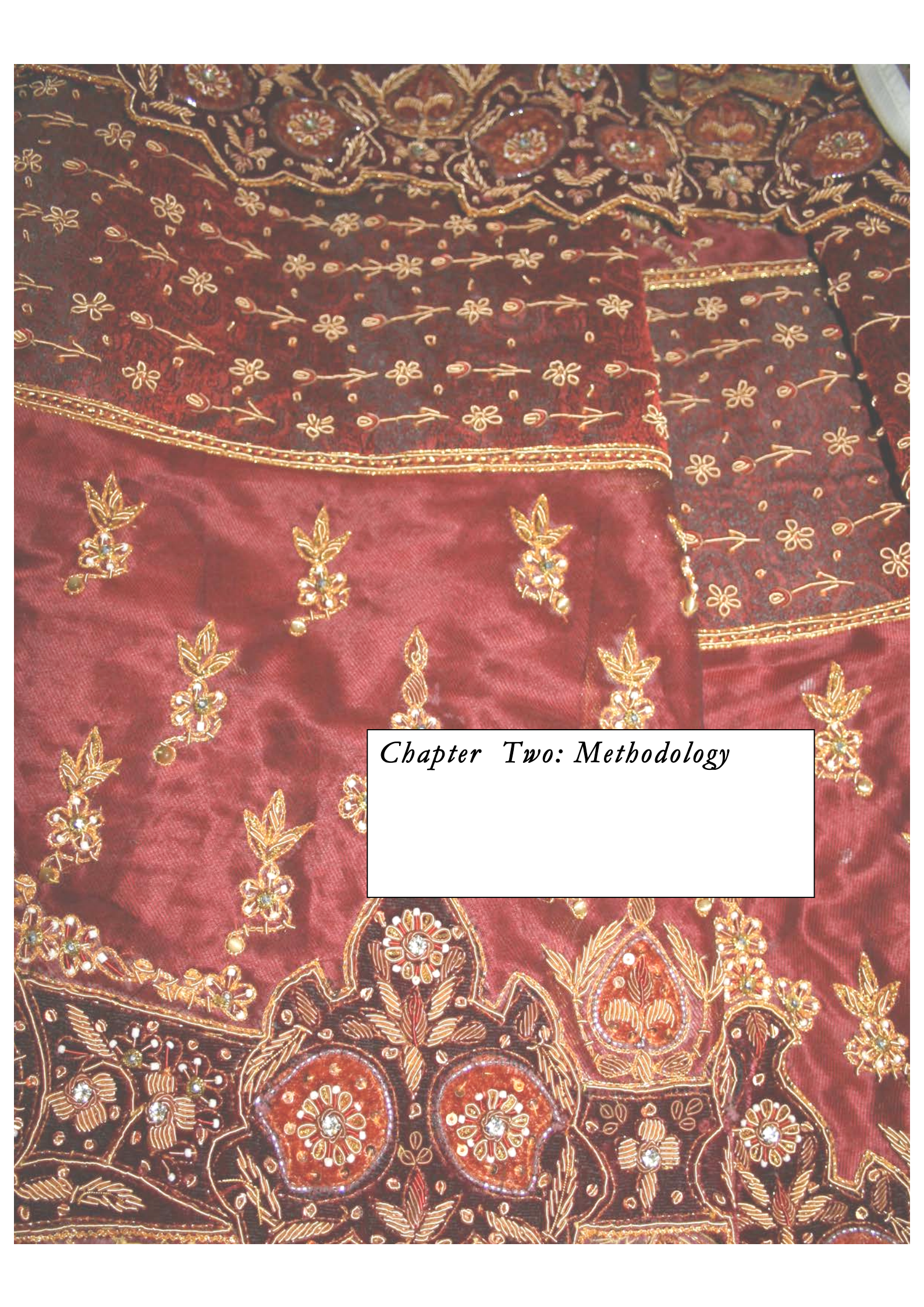
In *Chapter Five – ‘Dressing Me’: habit, anxiety and the British Asian wardrobe as technology of self’* I pick up from these portraits of how women inhabit ‘British Asian fashion space’ and their aesthetic agency and cosmopolitan competency in so doing. Rather than focusing on the public discourses of identity associated with the ‘British Asian’ per se, I foreground my participants’ own senses of selfhood and the role of dress within these. My aim is to develop a stronger sense of how women learn and develop an appropriate dress practice; the possibility for such learning to be both a form of cultural competence but also an arena for anxiety; and of how, in consequence, women’s wardrobes work as material resources that, to adapt Craik’s (1994) phrase, comprise a ‘technology of the diasporic self’. The chapter works principally through three concepts that I introduced in Chapter Three: the habitus; fashion and anxiety; and the ‘wardrobe moment’. Substantively, I work these into three sets of substantive stories concerned, respectively, with: how the women learned dress tastes, practices and judgements; dressing for weddings; and the organisation of ‘wardrobes’ or clothing collections. In so doing I consider both exceptional moments and ordinary routines of dress.

Chapter Six – ‘Dress, Materialities and Memories’ develops a complementary perspective, highlighting some of the material agencies of dress. Specifically, the aim of this chapter is to consider the relationship of dress and its materiality to memories and bodies. The discussion draws on arguments that clothing, like other forms of material culture, has the capacity both to ‘objectify’ social relations and identities and to ‘affect’ through its material intensities of colour, texture and pattern. Using Sherry Turkle’s notion, I explore the potential for clothes within my participants’ wardrobes to become ‘evocative objects’, “companions to... [their] emotional lives [and]... provocations to thought” (Turkle 2007:5). I pursue this analysis with a particular focus on matters of memory and cultural heritage, and take it in two main directions. The first part of the chapter deals with the relations between clothes and memory and examines how my participants’ wardrobes could include personal ‘archives’ of their own and others’ dress histories.

The second part of the chapter takes a complementary tack, coming out of the wardrobe to focus on the embodied experiences of South Asian dress forms. The materials presented draw out the pleasures and challenges of these dressed embodiments and reflect on how such wearing allows embodied forms of memory work.

Chapter Seven—'Placing Diasporic Dress: Contexts and Scenes' is both the final substantive chapter and begins to draw the thesis to a conclusion. The relations between dress and place are a recurring theme in the preceding chapters. In Chapter Four, for example, I argue that my research participants' engagements with public discourses of identity as British Asian women are shaped by variable imaginations and inhabitations of 'British Asian fashion space'. In Chapter Five, when thinking about these women's wardrobes as 'technologies of the diasporic self', I emphasise the contextually sensitive nature of dress choices and see how these are sometimes materialised in the geographical organisation and categorisation of wardrobes. In Chapter Six I explore different sites and milieux of memory associated with South Asian clothes in London, from the personal archive to the female body. In Chapter Seven, I foreground two particular aspects of place and context more pointedly. First, I consider the contextually specific nature of dress practices. Drawing conceptually on Tim Cresswell's seminal account of what it means to be 'in and out of place' (Cresswell 1996) I present testimony about the role of dress in 'fitting in', 'standing out' and both responding to and reshaping the geographies of public space. Second, I reflect on the geographies of South Asian fashion scenes within London. Here, I complement accounts of the importance of South Asian retail areas in London to the women interviewed with an extended portrait of two participants who encountered South Asian fashion rather differently.

Chapter Eight: 'Conclusion' returns to the research aims set out above, reflecting on the key findings and arguments in relation to each. It considers the significance of dress to the British Asian women who participated in the research and to wider understandings of diasporic identity.



Chapter Two: Methodology

CHAPTER TWO:

Methodology

Introduction

Having introduced the project, described my research aims and set out the thesis chapter structure I now turn to how the research was conducted and the methodologies it used. I begin by describing the overall methodological approach adopted, namely to give room for women to talk about their use of dress in their daily lives, and to interpret this testimony so as to develop understanding of the diverse experiences of British Asian diasporic space. My ambition, then, was to create spaces for stories to be told and for this testimony to shape the written interpretation offered in the thesis. This approach was enacted through the interviewing of fifteen key informants, whose textualised voices play a central role in the thesis. More specifically, in this chapter I therefore outline how participants were recruited; the interviewing process; and the empirical material generated beyond interview transcripts (e.g. photographs) and its use in the thesis. I also address my own positionality, my methods of qualitative data analysis, and the written styles I used to enable the voices of my participants to be heard. Throughout each stage of the research process -- recruitment, interviewing, analysis and writing -- my aim was to be open, responsive and to listen to the people I met with and the stories they very generously shared with me.

Methodological Approach

This thesis has a qualitative methodology, being based on in-depth conversational, semi-structured interviews with fifteen British Asian women. The main aim of my methodological approach was to construct a space where these women could speak about their dress aesthetics, and in turn to craft a thesis that could present their voices. That process was actively shaped by my own research practices, of course: in relation to how I recruited participants, the questions I asked them to stimulate our conversations, and the processes of interpretation and textual

construction that I adopted. Nonetheless, my prime commitment was to the testimonies I was being given. As Holloway and Jefferson caution, the researcher's relationship to the testimony of research participants is complex and contentious; "If we are prepared to disagree, modify, select and interpret what they tell us, is this not an example of the kind of power that we, as researchers, have that should be kept in check by being faithful to the voices of those we are researching?" (Holloway and Jefferson 2010:3). Thus, in my own research, participants' testimonies were the basis for the arguments developed and feature strongly in the thesis text.

Practically, the research was conducted through long, semi-structured interviews that gave time and space for women to offer their own testimonies as to the role of dress within their cultural lives (McCracken 1988). The aim was to examine the embodied experience of clothing textiles and its role in materialising ideas of self, biography, society and diasporic space. Whilst recognising the wider social dimensions of my subject matter, I aimed to look at individuals' dress experiences as personal rather than typical of a designated diasporic group, and to examine the diversity of experiences of a British Asian diasporic fashion space (see also Johnson 1990). I wished to construct and present testimony from people who consumed fashion as dress in this British Asian fashion space.

My 'long interview' approach drew in part on wider methodological literatures on 'life story' interviews (e.g. Josselson and Lieblich 1993, 1995; Lieblich and Josselson 1994, 1997; Spradley 1979). Atkinson comments that: "An individual life, and the role it plays in the larger community, is best understood through story. We become fully aware, fully conscious, of our own lives through the process of putting them together in story form. It is through story that we gain context and recognize meaning." (Atkinson 1998:7). By articulating our life stories, or in the case of this thesis 'dress stories', our ideas of self, dress and society come together and become meaningful. Atkinson further writes that: "Telling our story enables us to be heard, recognized, and acknowledged by others. Story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear" (Atkinson 1998:7). Important too were ideas of 'dialogic ethnography' (Clifford 1983). James Clifford coined this term to indicate that research committed to cultural understanding and description (ethnography) is not synonymous with the practice of participant-observation. Since this is a common equation, it would not be helpful to describe my own research as ethnographic. Nonetheless, my approach took from Clifford his emphasis on the

value of testimony from participants in a cultural world or practice, usually gained through interviewing methods. For Clifford, this dialogic approach offers forms of authority different from those afforded by reporting the researcher's own observations and experiences. Those being studied are not so much described and interpreted as involved in a process that can vocalize their cultural understandings. This emphasis chimed with my own concern for constructing a space where women could speak about their dress aesthetics.

Drawing on these broader bodies of work on long-interviews, life stories and dialogic ethnography, I based the research on a series of qualitative interviews with women of South Asian descent. Details of the topics initiated in interviews, of the interviewees, and of the times and dates when we met are provided in the thesis Appendices. Later in Chapter Two I will also say more about the details of the interview process. In outline, the interviews were designed to hear the nuanced, subtle stories these women had to narrate which illustrated the unique, place and person specific relationships we have to dress. As Limb and Dwyer discuss, qualitative methods such as these become a "means of understanding people's elusive sense of place" (Limb and Dwyer 2001:3). The interviews were aimed to give the women space to speak of both their intimate relationships with dress and how these related to wider identity dynamics and transnational geographies; as Northey et al. comment, "Qualitative research... explor[es] relationships intimately and on many levels" (Northey, Tepperman and Russell 2005:79). My rationale was that without testimony from the users of this fashion space, academic discussion on British Asian fashion would not fully recognise the embodied and lived nature of these fashions when worn by women as dress.

The interviews and the narratives provided to me were rich and thought provoking. I found that in almost all cases people seemed to enjoy describing to me what they wore. This might be because they had a special interest in textiles or fashion and style (I will discuss this issue further shortly, in relation to participant recruitment). However, I think it also speaks to the evocative memories and emotions people associate with garments. It seems that people, when asked to talk about clothes, find many thoughts and ideas come to the fore. Writers have discussed more generally how the 'memory charge' of objects means that they provide ways into richer narratives of biography, both personal and social. Gosden and Marshall (1999) discuss the influential work of Hoskins (1998), describing how in her experience of research the people she interviewed in

Indonesia expressed themselves and their narratives with greater eloquence when describing the biographies of their material possessions:

“...Hoskins (1998)... looked at how individual people’s biographies were tied up in objects. She shifts the focus from the biographies that objects may accumulate to the way in which objects are used to create and sustain the meanings of people’s lives. Hoskins, working in Sumba in eastern Indonesia, found that when she asked people about the story of their lives she elicited little response, but when she asked them about significant objects she got a mass of detail about people’s biographies.” (1999:174)

Kate Pahl and colleagues have drawn inspiration from such work in a recent project that looks at the artifacts people keep in the home and how these relate back to their stories of migration (Pahl and Rowsell 2010; see also the project website, www.everyobjecttellsastory.org.uk). Here, people with histories of migration or from diasporic cultures related memories and experiences back to objects they had kept in their lives and in their homes. People can be seen to create their stories of self and identity through material artifacts in a form of ‘artifactual literacy’. The idea becomes apparent that self, memory and heritage are not separate from material culture and can be expressed through paying attention to our evocative possessions. Objects such as clothes are not just products of commercial systems of provision; they materialise a much wider variety of personal worlds. As Kopytoff states: “...in any society, the individual is often caught between the cultural structure of commoditization and his own personal attempts to bring a value order to the universe of things” (1986:76). Objects can take on new symbolic values for their owners. This symbolism in turn stems from the material engagements that we have with objects. As Gamble frames it: “Materiality is about these engagements, and symbolism is the extension of what we know of such engagements through the metaphoric use of an embodied social life” (2004:85). Thus, my methodological approach was to generate dialogue that explored both material engagements with, and symbolic values of, South Asian dress aesthetics for British women of South Asian descent.

Participants

As Limb and Dwyer write, “a philosophical starting point for researchers using qualitative methodologies is that knowledge is situated and partial. This view of knowledge is based upon recognition of the social world as something that is not fixed or easily known but that is made up of competing social constructions, representations and performances.” (Limb and Dwyer 2001:8). On that basis, the research was designed not to deliver information from a sample population whose views could be generalized empirically to represent all British Asian women. Rather, my concern was with recruiting participants who could offer variably situated knowledges about engagements with South Asian dress aesthetics, with drawing out their varying representations and performances, and then reflecting on the inevitable partiality of such qualitative data. Specifically, in terms of participants, fifteen women were interviewed. As I mentioned earlier the women were all of South Asian descent, but from that point their biographies differed greatly. Brief biographical portraits are provided in Appendix A. All but one of the women interviewed were living in London; one had recently left London and moved to Bristol but had otherwise lived there her whole life. There were two women in their 50s. There were two women in their late teens. The rest of the women were between 25 and 50 years old. They lived in many different areas of London. Eight women were of Indian origin; two women had migrated to the UK from Kenya; one woman was of Pakistani origin; one woman was of Sri Lankan origin; and three women were of Bangladeshi origin. Of the Indian women, 6 were of Punjabi origin, 3 were of Gujarati origin and 1 was of Bengali origin.

In keeping with the qualitative nature of the research, the selection of participants was not governed by the production of a sample ripe for empirical generalization (Emmel 2013). Instead, the aim was to recruit participants all of whom inhabited the identity space of British Asian womanhood but in diverse ways. In line with a conceptualisation of diaspora space as a multiply inhabited terrain (Brah 1996), the selection of participants allowed a focus on British Asian women’s experiences to be combined with a resistance to their essentialisation. Likewise, the conversations we had inevitably included practices and items of dress understood by participants to be in some way distinctively British Asian, but related these to a wider range of practices, forms of dress and fashion dynamics. My research was practically arranged and conducted to chime with wider anthropological insights on the nature of the South Asian diaspora in the UK, which emphasise heterogeneity and its status as a “regional diaspora of cultural consumption” (Werbner 2010:76). Empirically, existing work on British Asian fashion has tended to focus on

youthful consumers, framed in relation to so-called 'second generation' diasporic cultures, often in the 1990s. It has also, understandably given the currents of public discourse, focused on contentious aspects of dress, such as visible forms of Muslim identity. The selection of participants was also designed to ensure that such issues were present but did not predominate.

I will now provide details of how the women interviewed were recruited. Broadly, this was through a 'snow-balling' or process of 'referral sampling' from initial contacts (Atkinson & Flint 2004). One of the first women I interviewed was Shashi. I met her through contact with an organization who had a relationship with the wider Fashioning Diaspora Space project. Shashi then put me in touch with a number of her friends and family. Thus Amrita, Preeti, Hema and Shobha became involved with this research. Divya and Mary also had an involvement with the organization through which I met Shashi. I emailed them and they agreed to meet with me and be interviewed. Also involved with the Fashioning Diaspora Space project was Charanjit, in her capacity as a museum and library professional. She agreed to be involved in the research and to also email her contacts in the media asking if anyone else would like to participate. This is how I met Satinder and Riza. Saira was an old university friend of mine and she introduced me to Barnali with whom she had been to school. I met Jasminder through a friend in Bristol where we both live. I first met Rejona and Jamila at a Fashioning Diaspora Space project focus group. These groups were held at the V&A Museum; participants had been recruited through the museum's mailing lists with British Asian community groups in London. Following the group discussion, I contacted Rejona and Jamila and asked if they would meet with me again for my own research. They kindly agreed.

The group of women recruited thus drew on personal contacts and subsequent referral. Whilst some initial contacts, and many of the referrals, had no direct connection to the V&A, clearly that institution and my project's links to it played an important role. Whilst it is dangerous to read too much into knowledge of an institution like the V&A, it is likely that the sample was shaped by an interest in fashion, textiles and aesthetics. Some women were artists, some were textile artists, and some were involved with the V&A in other capacities or with fashion or textiles. Thus, the project's connections into the V&A potentially strengthened the degree to which referral sampling tends to recruit people with an interest in the topic being studied. However, there were also women amongst my sample who had no specific interest in fashion and design beyond

personal practices of dress, yet their stories were no less of interest nor less shaped by ideas of aesthetic agency. The women interviewed were for the main not impacted by severe economic difficulties or constraints. They were articulate and educated. Whilst diverse in life experiences, dress styles and interests, age and cultural biographies, it would be fair to say that collectively they tended to embrace the potential for aesthetic agency with forms and levels of confidence that might not be shared by all British Asian women.

The stories articulated in the thesis also need to be contextualized geographically. The women were all resident in London or had just recently moved away from the city. The research therefore speaks of experiences of British Asian fashion space, but in particular of London's British Asian fashion space. London is not of course geographically homogeneous. The women had differing personal geographies within the city (an issue I explore substantively in Chapter Seven). Whilst they engaged with South Asian retail areas in London, none of them lived in them. The group of women here interviewed is thus specific in some ways, but not stereotypically specific. There are many other British Asian geographies and practices of diasporic aesthetic agency that can be researched. This thesis is intended as a starting point and contribution to that wider endeavour.

Interviewing Practice and Research Ethics

The interviews with the women were all conducted in 2008; precise dates of interviews are given in Appendix A. The interviews ranged in length, depending on the amount of time the women were able to give me. Practically, I began interviews with areas of discussion to explore (see Appendix B for schedules), but I also kept the discussion open, fluid, and moving in directions that the interviewee led. In line with my overall approach, my style as an interviewer was to focus on listening and encouraging as well as asking questions.

I was concerned that the interviews needed to be conducted in a way that respected not only the views of the women but also respected them personally. With this in mind, the research involved a careful consideration of the ethical treatment of research participants. In line with my institution's procedures for the ethical review of research, this involved an administratively 'light-touch' process in which I discussed ethical issues with my PhD supervisor and agreed responses

and procedures with him. My principal concerns included informed consent, the avoidance of harm, and a humane research experience, in which the women were valued as people helping an endeavour of cultural understanding and not simply as research subjects to be administered according to agreed procedures and protocols. In the recruitment process I emailed the women and began a conversation with them. I described that I was involved in the Fashioning Diaspora Space project and looking to talk to women of South Asian descent about their relationships with dress and South Asian clothing textiles. I asked if they would be willing to participate. If they agreed to participate, then when we met I explained the research further, detailing the themes I would ask about and checking whether they wanted any further information before the interviewing began. After interviews I thanked them in person and by email and reminded them of my contact details should they have any additional questions or thoughts. Further on in the PhD process, and in relation to the writing of the thesis, I emailed the women to let them know that the research was nearing completion, that I would pseudonymise their names within the thesis, and that they could if they wanted view a copy of the PhD. If during the course of the interview I took photographs of their clothes I asked if they were happy for me to include those photographs in the PhD. Only where permission was given have photos been included. In order to maintain pseudonymity, I took the decision that no photographs in the PhD would feature the women themselves. Permission to use such photos had been sought and given for publication elsewhere, but their use within the PhD would have unpicked the pseudonyms given. I have also described the women and their recruitment in ways that address the requirement for methodological transparency without jeopardizing my commitment to pseudonymity. I have selected and presented interview data in ways that avoid any negative consequences for the women. I did not gain permission from the women to publish the transcripts of interviews in full. Whilst recognizing an academic interest in methodological transparency, I do not think to do so would be appropriate given the nature of the consent process I undertook nor my commitment to constructing a textual space in which the women's voices were articulated and heard.

With regard to the interviewing, I asked people to participate in a two-stage process, though when preferred by the interviewee the two stages could be conducted together, as two parts of a single meeting. Most participants undertook both stages, though on a few occasions the second stage was not possible (see Appendix A for details). My interview schedules (see Appendix B) had some overview questions, designed to get discussion going and to develop a relationship

between the interviewee and myself. However, in most cases the interviews developed well and these initial prompts operated more as reminders of potential areas of interest that, as interviewer, I kept in mind whilst encouraging interviewees to tell me their dress based stories. I wished to hear stories on a general level about people's inhabitations of dress in British Asian fashion space as well as hearing more specific dress based testimony where people spoke to me about particular garments in more detail. Schematically, the first stage of the interview process focused more on the former and the second stage more on the latter. A few interviews stayed at a more general level. Some others felt happy to talk to me in depth from the outset. Ideally, I also wished to be allowed to see some of the garments discussed in the interviews and to photograph them. Generally, the second stage of the interview process was designed to explore questions raised in the earlier discussion in greater depth, to develop lines of questioning related to specific garments, and where agreeable to the interviewee, involved my access to the women's homes, where they showed me these garments, talked about them with me, and let me photograph them. I met eight of the fifteen women in their home and so was able to visualize and photograph any garments or textiles discussed. As well as trying to gain admittance into the home, where the lady could accommodate me, I tried to meet up more than once. The purpose of both of these interview methods was to gain familiarity, to allow the person to get to know me too and to obtain a more in depth garment based discussion. However, on other occasions the discussion progressed to the second stage of in-depth discussion about specific garments or specific events even if conducted outside of the home. In total, twelve of the fifteen women interviewed participated in both stages of the interview process as covered by my schedules, three only in the first stage.

For the first meeting, I would either meet them in their homes or in a neutral location such as a café. The interviewees would lead the choice of location. I felt that when discussing something as intimate as one's dress practices it was important to be led by the interviewee's choice of venue. However many of the women invited me to their homes straight away. Even in the home I felt there was a division of space that I only crossed if invited. The sitting room, garden or the dining room were areas I was easily invited into. Clothes could be brought into these areas to be shown. The bedroom, where the clothes were perhaps housed everyday, was a more intimate space and therefore I only entered into it if the woman was comfortable with me being there and with me taking photographs of her clothes in that setting.

All testimony in this thesis is taken from these interviews, except for one instance where I use a piece of dialogue from a focus group discussion at the V&A. As noted above, Jamila and Rejona were recruited through a focus group meeting organized by the Fashioning Diaspora Space project at the V&A. I interviewed both women independently after this group, but one small piece of focus group discussion amplified a theme they had discussed in interview, and is included on that basis. Given I use this one small piece of dialogue I should say a little more about the focus group process from which it arose. As part of the wider Fashioning Diaspora Space project, these group discussions ran for about an hour and I facilitated them along with colleagues from the project. Groups ranged from 8 to 10 people and discussion moved from initial introductions by each group member to dialogue between the participants. The theme was British Asian fashion and style. In line with wider discussions of focus groups as a method in social science and Human Geography research (Cameron 2005, Conradson 2005, Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook 2007), the aim was to generate discussion that would draw upon and engage with the wider discourses at play in this subject area, rather than to elicit in-depth personal dress stories. Whilst participants sometimes developed their conversation through reference to personal experience, on the whole the discussion in these groups kept this more 'public' tone.

In terms of inscription, the interviews, and the focus group discussions, were recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed. I also kept a research diary where I noted ideas about the research, thoughts arising from interviews and aspects of the interviewing that would not be present in audio recordings or transcripts (e.g. the character of the interview encounter, its location, and my impressions of the interviewee). As noted above, where given permission and appropriate to the interview process I also took photographs of clothes discussed in the interview or that women wanted to talk about to illustrate particular ideas and stories. Some of these photographs appear in the thesis. Some I have used as title pages and their purpose is purely decorative. However, in the empirical chapters (Chapters Four to Seven) photographs are also occasionally used to illustrate the discussion. In some cases this is where one of the women has talked to me about a garment and allowed me to photograph it; here I have included the photograph to give readers an opportunity to see the garment for themselves.

The focus for this research, however, is not on the photographs taken but on the testimonies generated, so the analysis of the photographs does not proceed further. The analysis of the material qualities of textiles is a well-established approach in textile studies and has gained wider purchase through understandings of dress as ‘material culture’ (a trend I discuss in Chapter Three). However, in the context of my overall approach, I judged that using photos within such a material analysis, and distinct from interviewees’ own discussion of garments, was a different interpretive endeavour to my own. Another research method in this context might be ‘photographic elicitation’ (see Harper 2012). With the benefit of hindsight, I might have used this technique further to enhance my conversations with interviewees on specific garments and contexts. Whilst the physical handling and discussion of garments in women’s homes was of great value, photo elicitation might have strengthened the discussions of specific clothes undertaken outside of the home. In particular, one limitation of my interviewing practice, which became more evident to me as I analysed materials, was its capacity to discuss the contexts of dress practice. I deal with this issue throughout the substantive chapters, and especially within Chapter Seven, but asking women to bring photos of dress items and dress events could have strengthened my data in this area. It is certainly arguable that future projects around subjects such as dress might benefit from this technique. In my own case, I think such a practice would have enriched some of the interview discussions, though given the agreement made with regard to pseudonymity the photos would not have been reproducible within the thesis.

Another method, which was clearly an option to enhance my study of experiences of dress aesthetics, was participant observation (for an overview see Atkinson & Hammersley 2007). It might have been possible, with greater research time, to go, for example, with participants to the South Asian retail areas of London and look at garment selection and experiences of these spaces. At the outset of the project it was my aim to pursue this avenue of enquiry. However my imminent maternity leave at the end of 2008 meant that this was not possible. With hindsight, again I think the absence of those materials leaves my discussion of dress, place and contextuality somewhat ‘distanced’ from the spaces being discussed. However, the interview materials constructed do, in my judgment, allow a valid interpretation of how South Asian dress aesthetics are related to both normative geographies of place and variegated urban geographies. These are my foci in Chapter Seven.

Positionality

Hopkins discusses how “it is useful for researchers to think critically about the positionalities of researchers and the researched” (2007:390). Certainly, given the partial nature and situated nature of knowledge recognized in most accounts of qualitative research (Limb & Dwyer 2001), it is important to reflect on those involved in the research, including myself. For England, “reflexivity is self critical sympathetic introspection and the self conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher” (1994:244). I am a British Asian woman and when this project began I was in my early thirties. My parents had migrated to the UK from North India and I was born in Cambridge. My family are Hindus. Whilst I had not grown up in London I had lived there for eight years prior to the project. I had a personal interest in South Asian fashions but no professional investment in the subject matter. During the interviews there were both times when I identified with the stories I heard and equally times when I found myself fascinated by accounts which were different to my own experiences of British Asian fashion space. Many of the stories reawakened memories for me of childhood engagements or explorations of new styles as a younger woman. I grew up outside of London, and I had limited access to the South Asian retail areas some of the women discussed. As a child my family and I would make periodic trips to these retail areas or to social events such as weddings in London. Each time I would be mesmerized by the difference between public spaces in Cambridge and what I saw of Green Street in Newham or the High Street in Wembley, where the selling of South Asian vegetables and spices was, at least in my imagination, accompanied by a majority of ladies wearing saris or Punjabi suits. I would watch other children my age wearing lenghas and Punjabi suits at weddings whilst I wore western party dresses. One of my reasons for undertaking the research was to revisit some of those questions about how dress related to senses of identity, difference and self.

My own investments in the research clearly matter. However, I share with Rose (1997) some skepticism about both the possibility and desirability of addressing the situated nature of qualitative research solely through a ‘transparent reflexivity’. I think it unlikely, at least without professional assistance, that I can understand all my own investments in this topic or articulate all facets of my own identity that might have had a bearing upon the project. I am also unconvinced what such a level of self-scrutiny would achieve, other than a great deal of writing about myself rather than my professed topic. Instead, I think Rose is right to emphasise the ‘constitutive

negotiation' of the research process (1997:316). In other words, of greater importance is how my interviewees and I related to each other, working together to shape the research process. As discussed above, the fifteen women who participated in the research had diverse biographies and attitudes, but shared an interest in the aesthetic agency of dress and a broad identification as 'British Asian'. I differed and shared in a similar way (see the brief portraits of research participants, including myself, in Appendix A). Some aspects of similarity eased the research dialogue. Being a woman was important. I think it would have been very hard for a man to create a space of shared discussion in a similar way. Being British Asian and able to speak Hindi meant that when people spoke with me of garments and South Asian cultural artifacts or events I already had an ability to reference them. Some forms of difference also became means of connection. I was pregnant during the fieldwork period; at the start of the interviewing mid-way through my pregnancy and by the end quite heavily pregnant. This marked me out as different but could also provide a shared topic of conversation, including with regard to intimate issues such as dress and embodiment. My own dress practices were, at others' prompting, at times discussed during the interviews. I aimed for an equal dialogue, albeit one in which my participants' lives and views, rather than my own, were of prime concern. With respect to my own embodied presence, sometimes I wore western maternity wear for the interviews and sometimes a Kurti top over maternity jeans. I was given advice that the sari was a good garment for pregnancy and after as it did not require adjusting in the same way as western garments, though I did not wear it to interviews so as not to over-determine the dress forms we would discuss. These personal offers of advice added to the enjoyment and the connections I made with the ladies who agreed to participate in the research. The project has indeed renewed and changed my daily engagement with South Asian fashions.

Of course, some of the women were more similar to me, for example in terms of age, than others. And it would be fair to say that some of the dialogues felt easier for participants than others, though the reasons for this would be complex (partly reflecting perceived personal affinity, perhaps, but equally potentially shaped by the immediate contexts of interviews, how much time the women felt they had and so forth). The length of time spent together was important but not an absolute determination of the depth of discussion that emerged. In some cases, discussions just worked at a deep level from the outset and when it came to analysis spoke particularly well to the principal interpretive themes that emerged in the research. Overall,

though, all the participants provided rich and important materials that have helped to shape my interpretation and analysis. The thesis presents testimony from all the women I interviewed. The extents vary somewhat, but this reflects too the issues of written style which I will discuss later on this chapter. Each woman's voice is heard in the text. Each played an important role in shaping my analysis.

I mention at times in the thesis that I enjoyed the research process and the gratitude I felt towards the women who took time out from their lives to talk to me. This enjoyment sprang from a number of sources. Firstly, it was a genuine pleasure to meet such a group of interesting ladies. As a researcher I felt it was generous of them to take the time to speak with me. The discussion that flowed was always insightful to me. I never knew where the discussion would lead. At times women opened up to me about the tension and joy of dressing for occasions such as weddings; other times we discussed the mundane stresses and practices of choosing what to wear or how women felt about performing public identities through dress; and elsewhere we thought about garments in terms of bereavement and the love between a mother and a daughter. The enjoyment also stemmed from appreciating the competencies demonstrated in the testimonies. I was struck, and felt somewhat inspired, by accounts of relatively confident and enjoyable engagement with dress. I appreciated too the sense of common womanhood that discussions of dress created.

In interpreting the materials it was apparent that some issues were little discussed. Sexuality rarely came up. Racism too was only raised by some of the women I interviewed. Both subjects were not directly enquired about but only some women's answers moved on to discuss them. Notwithstanding their emphasis in many academic accounts of diaspora culture, I felt that it was not my position to insist on the discussion of these topics, which may have required more intimacy to develop between interviewer and interviewee. I was also wary of assuming their importance or making participants feel that such issues were what I 'was really after'. In that context, one potential criticism of the research presented here is that it lacked the length of engagement with participants that would have yielded testimony on intimate and hurtful experiences. In other words, the materials I present remain those that we feel at ease discussing in public. There may be some truth in that. On the other hand, I think the discussions presented do clearly demonstrate a move beyond the public discourses present, for example, in the focus

group discussions I undertook with the Fashioning Diaspora Space project. The women told me about their lives, about births and deaths, about their relations to their own bodies, amongst much else. It is perhaps fairest, then, to say that the data constructed emphasized women's own aesthetic agency, discussed how this operated in wider relations of power, but only on occasions dealt directly with hurtful and violent reactions to the women's dressed presence. It may be that to hear stories of racism and oppressive power a different research process or focus would be required.

The analysis and writing through of materials

I have been focusing on the qualitative methodology that underpins the data presented in the thesis and the research relations that shaped the data so constructed. I turn now to issues of qualitative data analysis. Given the centrality of interviewing to my methodology, the records of these interviews were the principal form of data analysed.

The audio recordings of the interviews were safely stored, listened to, and fully transcribed. Transcription, and the wider process of textually inscribing qualitative interview data, is not a purely clerical task but requires careful reflection for choices made and the kinds of 'voicings' of participants consequently constructed (Oliver, Serovich and Mason 2005). For example, in the thesis text I have edited quotations from the transcripts to make them more readable in some respects (a form of what Oliver et al. call 'denaturalism'). Most of the women, like me, inflected their speech with 'you know' and 'like' and other such phrases. I have taken some of these out for the reader. In part this is a response to on going feedback from the participants who said that they did not wish to be presented with these inflections in their testimonies. It also reflects my own desire to create a textual space in which these women could be heard. In print, the removal of natural speech forms paradoxically ensures that voices are 'heard', without the interference of phrases that work as communicative tools in conversational exchanges but can devalue testimony in print.

The process of analysis began by closely reading the transcripts, initially in parallel to listening to the interviews via the audio files. Listening again to them reminded me of the nuances and intonations of each person's voice. I also referred back to my research diary for information on

meetings and thoughts noted at the time. I went through each transcript repeatedly, drawing out themes from the text. I created a document for each interviewee that detailed themes, ideas and particular moments of testimony that inspired thought. From this stage I then looked across all the interviewees' themes and drew out more general thematics that had resonance across interviews, as well as noting more exceptional themes and reflecting on whilst they too might matter. In this way I worked across what Anselm Strauss (1989) terms practices of 'open' coding (identifying *in vivo* analytic themes in the transcripts) and 'axial' coding (focusing on the relationships between these open codes and their 'clustering' into broader thematics). This was a recursive process, working between coding memos and transcripts to test, refine and validate the themes emerging. As Strauss states: "Good analysis is predicated on good data: not so much in the initial generating of possibly relevant categories and relationships, as in the later grounding and verifying of emergent theory" (Strauss 1989:266). I therefore kept analysis of the transcripts open to new ideas and thoughts that emerged from the testimonies of other women interviewed, working backwards and forwards to slowly build up my analytical constructs.

I then progressed these open and axial codes through a form of what Strauss terms 'selective coding', with a focus on the textual production marked by informant testimony. I called these collated selective coding documents 'abstracts'. I created twelve such abstracts on the following themes: 'Bodily adjustments for the sari or South Asian clothing', 'Fashion – personal looks', 'In the beginning, childhood memories', 'Mothers', 'Weddings', 'British Asian Identity', 'Gender', 'Material Culture', 'Technologies of self', 'Encounters in public space', 'Geographies of dress', 'The Wardrobe'. These abstracts were then worked with to form the four substantive chapters in the thesis. Each of those was drafted first primarily through the empirical materials, and then further developed and contextualized in relation to relevant lines of interpretation in later drafts.

In creating the selective coding 'abstracts' I also identified two genres of textual work through which I could explore the issues arising. On the one hand, I found testimony from the women coalescing around thematics. Practically, this meant going back to individual transcripts in order to extract from them, and then combining these extracts together. This was a process of cutting and stitching across the interview testimony. On the other hand, I also identified 'stories' from my participants that had particular powers. These were not simply present in and ready for extracting from the transcript, but rather needed to be constructed as narratives from readings of

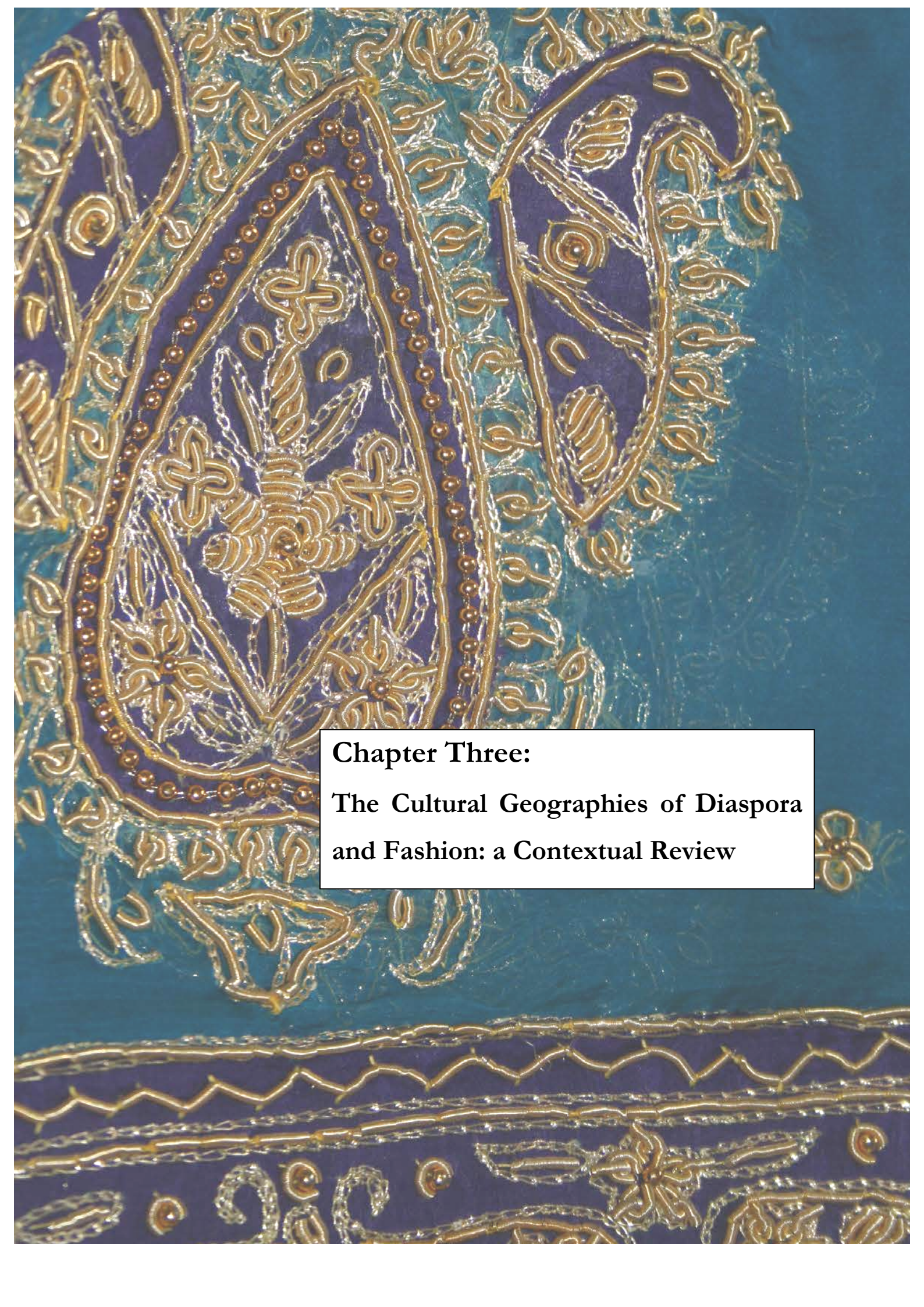
a woman's testimony across the piece. Textually, then, this was less about cutting and stitching and more about working with materials to craft some sort of personal portrait (cf Miller 2009). These portraits were particularly useful, I felt, in illustrating how specific themes or sub-themes came together. For example, in Chapter Four I am able to express more strongly the intersectionality of these women's identities through this 'dress story' form. These stories took a great deal of time to assemble and to judge, but within the thesis may appear somewhat descriptive. This was deliberate. My ambition was to complement forms of analysis focused on telling the reader what has been found out – the sort of grounded, qualitative data analysis pioneered by Strauss and now standard practice in the social sciences – with forms of interpretive narrative text that could show rather than tell.

Both these interpretive practices served the same purpose: to allow the women to speak and be heard. As indicated above, issues about how the research was written through were important here. My interest here was not in textual experimentation, but I sought to consider carefully the writing strategies and textual styles that could best represent the nature of the research process, the kinds of authority appropriate to that process, and the audiences this research might reach through different forms of dissemination. In so doing, I drew upon wider reflections on the writing of qualitative and ethnographic research (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Richardson 1990, Van Maanen 2011). All texts are crafted but I was wary of drawing the women's accounts into a text that solely served my own interpretive purposes. James Clifford reminds us that "[e]thnographic discourses are not, in any event, the speeches of invented characters" (Clifford 2002:50-51); in other words, for me, this kind of research involves working with accounts from individuals whose voices should be respected. The ethnographic authority, as Clifford terms it, of this thesis is bound up with the presentation of my participants' voices, the creation of a space where they can speak. As Clifford argues, "if afforded an autonomous textual space, transcribed at length, indigenous statements make sense in terms different from those of the arranging ethnographer" (Clifford 2002:51). Rather than avoiding or smoothing out this tension, I tried to work with it through composition and written style of the thesis. I deliberately condensed much of the academic discussions relevant to the thesis into a contextual review (Chapter Three) that could then function as a memory inflecting and energizing the reading of the later substantive chapters. Those four substantive chapters are also designed to enable both stories to be recounted and interpretive thematics to be drawn forth. They are testimony led and full room is

given to the stories of dress that these women presented; but they are also organised in terms of distinctive interpretive 'lenses' through which the material is seen. These lenses relate to the thesis's key aims, as described in the introductory chapter. I deliberately designed the thesis to embody some tensions between participants' stories and these interpretive lenses and aims. Unsurprisingly, people do not talk neatly about one thematic and then another. Their narratives interweave multiple ideas into a whole story of dress and I maintain a sense of that in the final text. In part this illustrates the interconnected nature of those ideas. It also speaks to how cultural geographic experiences and narratives resist easy capture within analytical 'boxes'. I take it to be part of the research imagination to make manifest the translations and distances between experience, narrative and interpretation. This text's composition reflects that belief.

Conclusions

In setting out the methodology of the research, I have discussed the semi-structured interviews I conducted, how these created space for women to talk about their dress practices, and how through using qualitative data analysis and writing styles I attempted to create a space for their voices to be heard. In setting out the inevitably partial nature of the knowledge presented here, I discussed how I recruited participants and how they were interviewed. The stories that will be presented in this thesis are from particular women who talked about their experiences in a particular place, namely London. There are other stories of British Asian Fashion space that could be heard through interviewing other women, or by using other methods. However this does not negate the interesting, diverse stories these ladies shared with me and for which I am always grateful. Having discussed the methodology I used, I shall now move on to discuss the existing literatures, which were significant to the research.



Chapter Three:

**The Cultural Geographies of Diaspora
and Fashion: a Contextual Review**

CHAPTER THREE:

The Cultural Geographies of Diaspora and Fashion: a Contextual Review

Introduction

In this chapter I consider the wider debates that the thesis draws upon and informs. To that end, the chapter looks at approaches within the interdisciplinary fields of diaspora and fashion studies, as well as considering how these approaches have been brought together in a more focused body of work on British Asian fashion cultures. The chapter is organised in three main sections. Firstly, I consider work that has looked at diasporic geographies. My general approach to this work is as a Cultural Geographer, reflecting on how it highlights the cultural and geographical implications of modern migrations and global mobilities. My discussion here begins by reviewing the different emphases of varying definitions of diaspora: from those focused more on cultural dispersal, to those attuned more to questions of identity politics, to those with an explicit appeal to notions of space. I then draw out how scholarship on diaspora relates to discussions of two related concepts: cultural hybridity and cosmopolitanism. Finally, I turn to other aspects of diaspora studies with particular relevance to my own substantive area of study, through work on gender and on the role of material culture within diasporic lives.

The second section of the chapter considers the interdisciplinary body of work focused on fashion and dress. In particular, looking at approaches that view fashion as a lens through which to consider the subjective experience of modernity, I further this review through four foci. First, I describe the engagements that already have happened between fashion studies and Cultural Geography. I do not aim to list the work produced by Geographers around questions of fashion and dress; instead I aim to illustrate that fashion studies is engaged in what we might be considered a 'geographical turn' as it looks to explore the role of fashion and dress in the modern world. In reviewing this development I also highlight the potential for the spatial thinking of diaspora studies to enrich further the understanding of modern fashion and dress. I then turn more directly to issues of dress, i.e. the practical everyday engagement with the material forms of fashion. My second focus is therefore past work on 'wardrobes'. A number of writers, but most

recently and influentially Sophie Woodward (2007), have argued that the insight that selves are fashioned via clothing can be developed by thinking about people's relationships to their wardrobes, i.e. their clothing collections. As I discussed in Chapter 1, this focus on the wardrobe was part of my own methodology, so I give it specific attention here. I outline how the wardrobe has the potential to operate both as a resource with which to articulate our identities and as an archive of memories. Third, I show how such work sits within a wider interest in dress and embodiment. I discuss work that has brought the body back into accounts of dressing by arguing that dressing is a learned behaviour developed in the 'habitus' by individuals in relation to the demands of their everyday lives. I consider how dressing the body therefore also throws up dilemmas and anxieties about the reflexive production of our embodied selves. Fourth, and finally in this section, I outline the relations between fashion studies and interests in 'material culture'. I address the arguments of those who have called for a material culture approach to dress and fashion. I situate those calls within longer standing and still vibrant traditions of work on textiles as both cloth and culture, and I draw out suggestions about the material agencies of garments within practices of dress.

Having considered two broad and diffuse bodies of work, diaspora and fashion studies, the third section of this contextual review has a narrower focus: research that has thought about British Asian fashions in particular. This thesis argues for a comparatively innovative bringing together of diaspora and fashion studies, but this union is not without precedent. There is an existent body of work that addresses British Asian fashion cultures. Much of this work comes from a perspective that highlights British Asian agency in new, diasporic forms of fashionable design and dress. These works talk of new creative 'minority ethnic' / British Asian enterprises, new media forms that support them, and the reengagements with South Asian dress forms by British Asians which have fuelled these industries. In part, this casts a new light on wider work on fashion and its global and metropolitan geographies; the very landscape of British cities has been altered by this presence and new fashion landscapes have emerged. It also, however, offers a powerful development of wider interests in dress and embodiment. In work focused on the negotiation of diasporic South Asian identity performance, and on specific facets of dress such as religious codes and visibility, dress here is seen to be partly personal, intimate and individual, but also socially motivated, political and drawn into wider cultural narratives.

Diasporic Geographies

The experience of diaspora can be cast as a key condition of the modern world, which not only creates new transformative cultures of existence for those who partook in movement and travel but also for those societies who were in residence when they arrived. The condition of diaspora questions ideas of identity politics forged through simple equations of culture, place and nation. It opens up the diverse narratives of belonging and identity that stem from a mixing of cultural and spatial experiences. In a sense, in relation to bodies of work on global migration, what diaspora studies ask is what happens next? Once migration has taken place, what cultural outcomes are there? Who are ‘we’ when ‘we’ are distanced from a homeland, or ‘our’ homeland has new arrivals who bring new ways of being into our social worlds?

In this section I explore this thematic of ‘diasporic geographies’. I firstly look at different ways in which diaspora has been defined in academic literatures. I then move on to approach the vast body of work that looks at diaspora through a focus on two key theoretical lenses: cultural hybridity and cosmopolitanism. Finally, I pull out other aspects of diasporic scholarship that have particular relevance to my own substantive focus, namely: accounts that consider the gendering of diaspora; and existing work on the relations of diaspora and material culture, which pays particular attention to diasporic homes and home-making.

Defining Diaspora

The aim of the following section is to look at three distinct approaches as to what ‘diaspora’ is and as to what concerns ‘Diaspora Studies’. Firstly I will look at how Cohen (1997) sees diaspora as dispersals of populations and cultures. Secondly I will look at how diaspora can be seen in relation to cultural identity and forms of belonging in a post-national politics. Thirdly I will consider how notions of ‘diaspora space’ and ‘transnational spaces’ have been highlighted and conceptualised.

Diaspora as Dispersal of Populations and Cultures

Etymologically, “the word Diaspora is derived from the Greek verb *sperio* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over)” (Cohen 1997:xi). It is about dispersal, displacement and what this means for the spatial location of cultural belongings. Claire Dwyer has argued “that theories of diaspora offer new ways of thinking about the connections between global-local geographies” (Dwyer 1999c:496). This thesis shares that ‘cultural geographic’ approach. Thinking about diaspora then becomes a useful way of looking at the links between people and the places they develop, inhabit and otherwise relate to. In diaspora, ideas of belonging operate across nations, cultures, religions and languages. “What all these diaspora communities share, however, is the memory of shared journeys or migrations and recognition that another place, another ‘homeland’ has some claim on their emotions and loyalties” (Dwyer 1999c:499). Dwyer discusses how established understandings of diaspora sought to create a model of diasporic migration. However, the conceptualisation of this term as a form of social categorisation has been moved on to see a more open theoretical space, which seeks to reflect a whole host of historical and contemporary migrations, and to explore not only their physical movements but also their emotional geographies. Tolia-Kelly writes that diaspora, whilst being a challenged term, still has resonance as it enables one to consider “an imagined community where non-territorial connections are sustained through the community’s sense of joined past cultural nationalism or rupture from a sense of bounded connection.” (Tolia-Kelly 2004:327).

Working through historical examples of diasporic migrations, Robin Cohen sets out different types of diasporic movement / scattering and settlements / sowings, using horticultural metaphors. Although he acknowledges that there are cross-overs between the groups, he argues that broadly migration has created five different forms of diaspora. These are: a) ‘Weeding’ (or ‘Victim Diasporas’, in which populations have been forcibly cast out, as with many Jewish migrations); b) ‘Sowing’ (or ‘Imperial Diasporas’, in which populations are planted elsewhere as part of a process of colonization of new territories, such as in British imperial settler diasporas); c) ‘Transplanting’ (or ‘Labour Diasporas’, where populations are moved as part efforts to create new global economies, such as indentured Indian migrants within the British Empire); d) ‘Layering’ (or ‘Trade Diasporas’, such as Lebanese and Chinese diasporas); and e) ‘Cross-

pollinating' (or 'Cultural Diasporas', where the emphasis is on new, hybrid forms of culture, something Cohen exemplifies in relation to post-war migrants from the Caribbean and South Asia to the UK (1997:177, Table 8.1). For this last group Cohen argues that just as plants cross-pollinate, then so too has such 'cross-pollination' occurred through migrations, both in relation to human populations and in relation to cultural forms. In so doing, he signals how diaspora raises questions not only about the genesis and forms of global population movements, but also about their cultural consequences. Whatever concerns one might have about the metaphor, the notion of 'cross-pollination' further suggests that these consequences are not confined to distinct, separate diasporic populations. Cohen suggests here, then, that 'diaspora' enables one to see cultural processes at work that have transformed societies and lives more generally. Such issues are the concern of a second definitional approach to diaspora, one in which questions of race, ethnicity and identity politics are centred, but also opened up towards wider problematics concerning experiences of movement, settlement and multiplied identification.

Diaspora as Cultural Identity Politics

One question that the concept of diaspora brings to the fore is who then 'belongs' in a nation? What geographical histories exist which mean that one person is considered an insider or indeed an outsider to national culture? What are the politics of such adjudications? Are they always framed around a distinction of inside and outside, or can they create more complex spaces between? For Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk the concept of 'belonging' is central to these debates. Our belongings, after all, are rarely simple: "Belonging, then, is never a simple question of affiliation to a singular idea of ethnicity or nationalism, but rather about the multivocality of belongings." (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005:29). Such multivocality poses potential problems to ideas of the nation state; by engagement with diasporic populations, new areas of progressive politics can be opened up. For Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk diaspora is a key social form which at once questions the national hegemonic discourses and revitalises them. However the outcome of such diasporic identity politics is ambiguous and disparate: "The potential for erasing ethnic and national ties is inherent within the notion of diaspora but in practice what often occurs is both syncretic cultural

formation and re-enforced ethnic nationalist ties within the same diasporic space.” (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005:33).

Such complexities are certainly suggested by the South Asian diaspora in Britain. For some the very term British Asian is so politically loaded that it needs correcting; for example to the term ‘BrAsian’, which self-consciously erases part of itself to create a new term (Ali, Kalra, Sayyid 2008). Werbner (2010) discusses the complexities of the South Asian diaspora. She argues that in this case there is no single common homeland or identity to be longed for. The study of South Asian groups who have migrated to the UK is a study of heterogeneity. To call these migrants collectively is to evoke ideas of a group whose identity is plural and shifting. Composed of peoples from five different nation states, many religions, languages and vastly different political ties, the South Asian diaspora in the UK is perhaps best seen as a “regional diaspora of cultural consumption” (Werbner 2010:76). Crucially, it is the commonality of cultural engagement which allows this diaspora to find ways to overcome political boundaries and create “coalitions and alliances which mitigate such conflicts” (Werbner 2010:76). They are not however simply defined by these alliances, they are also influenced by and participate in the other cultures their daily lives encounter. This wider engagement goes beyond any crude notion of ‘assimilation’ (Werbner 2010:77); South Asians in Britain, Werbner suggests, maintained a sense of themselves with regards to both host nation and their original nations. This perhaps resonates with Clifford’s view that: “Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, both roots *and* routes to construct what Gilroy (1987) describes as alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference.” (Clifford 1997:251). The cultural politics of belonging are thus multiply charged, playing off appeals to both presence and distance. As Dwyer says about diaspora politics more generally, “It is also a form of resistance, a cultural politics, opposed to nationalism and assimilation.” (1999c:500).

Diaspora Space

Knott (2010) argues that to understand diaspora we need to bring together the physical, mental and social. Focusing on the 'production of space', she argues, is a lens through which to do this. It layers together the imagination (imaginative geographies), materiality (the built forms of places) and sociality (the social conduct that comes to define places). As Cresswell puts it: "We exist in and are surrounded by places – centres of meaning. Places are neither totally material nor completely mental; they are combinations of the material and the mental and cannot be reduced to either." (Cresswell 1996: 13). For Knott, by attending to place, spatial approaches to diaspora combine an attention to mobility with concerns for settlement and dwelling. Indeed, she argues, "a key challenge for diaspora studies is to engage with the realities of settlement" (Knott 2010:83).

The work of Avtar Brah is of particular significance here. In her book *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), Brah reworks an understanding of space as produced by diasporic groups. She suggests a number of concepts for understanding the spatialities created by the experience of diaspora, centring on the notion of 'diaspora space' itself:

"Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed, disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition" (1996: 208).

Diaspora space is a concept that allows us to look at the places where new traditions are invented. New identities emerge and are reworked by all those touched by migration processes. Brah argues that "diaspora space is the site where *the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native.*" (1996: 209). It is not only a space of difference and multiplicity, but also one in which difference refuses to be coded within bounded designations. Even when narratives talk of 'we', ideas of race, religion, class, language and age cut across such groupings. Our cultural locations are not singular or fixed, but open to flux and multiplicity. As Brah puts it: "The *concept* of

diaspora signals these processes of *multi-locationality across geographical, cultural and psychic boundaries*” (1996: 194).

So what is created, fostered and displayed in diaspora spaces? Perhaps new forms of stylization of self and identity are indicative of transformations within such a space; stylizations of self such as the diasporic dress practices which this thesis considers. Certainly, that is one of the emphases developed in a concept that echoes Brah’s, that of ‘transnational space’. In their volume on *Transnational Spaces* (2004), Jackson, Crang and Dwyer propose a new way of examining place and culture. To them: “Transnational space is one which examines the social lives of all participants in transnational cultures, as it can be seen that the social and cultural lives of many individuals operate in an area beyond the ‘boundaries of individual nation-states’” (2004:5). Transnationality is experienced by peoples who see themselves as ‘transmigrants’ *as well as* by people who see themselves as non-migrants. Looking at the cultural experiences of diaspora in this way offers a new engagement with place. This engagement acknowledges that whilst affiliations may be global, everyday lives exist in the local, place specific contexts and this needs due consideration. Transnationality is here seen to exist in both the “grounded and the flighty” (2004:8). “On the one hand, the transnational operates as a figure that liquefies geographies, contests appeals to local contexts and local studies, and evokes a condition in which we are all in some ways implicated. On the other hand, the transnational also operates as a more grounded and grounding notion, with the proven potential for correcting over generalized accounts of cultural globalization and displacement.” (Crang, Dwyer and Jackson 2003: 440) I think that this has resonance with the experience of dress, which can be seen to be both a relationship with the conceptual and with the corporeal.

Commodity culture and its relations to transnational spaces are of particular interest to Crang, Dwyer and Jackson (2003), as they seek to examine the links between the movement of “particular people, things and ideas” and their resultant “material and symbolic geographies” (2003:451). Commodity culture allows the authors to illustrate that whilst the transnational operates globally, it is also very much involved in national and local geographies:

“[Commodity cultures] are grounded in several places and in complex ways.... An emphasis on the transnationality of contemporary commodity culture does not deny the continued salience of the national in a globalizing world. Rather, it emphasizes the active constitution of identities through the process of commodification across specific national spaces” (2003:451).

Centring processes of commodification also removes the assumption that diasporic cultures involve only ethnic minorities. Diasporic cultures are commodified and then sold beyond the diasporic community. Such cultural traffic raises questions of appropriation and authenticity, but for Dwyer and Crang (2002) the commodification of diasporic cultural forms is not inevitably corrosive of them. Rather, they conceive of commercial culture as one realm within which cultural identity work can be done:

“Commodity culture does not inevitably result in the production of superficial, thin and bland ethnic differentiations. Nor does it inevitably involve the appropriation of ethnic forms constructed as ‘authentic’ through being located as exterior to the operations of commodity culture. Rather, as in the case discussed here, commodity culture can mobilize varied ways of thinking about cultural difference – varied ‘multicultural imaginaries’. Indeed, it is a field within which creative work can be done on fashioning those imaginaries of cultural difference and ethnicity.” (Dwyer and Crang 2002:427)

Empirically, Dwyer and Crang focus on a British Asian fashion label, Ghulam Sakina, to explore these processes. One aim of this thesis is to further these discussions by turning from fashion producers to the consumers of South Asian fashions in Britain.

Diaspora and Hybridity

“As people move (and are moved) across the globe, they transform local identities into new and hybrid forms. Sometimes, people in motion are reborn” (Howell 2000:59)

So far, then, I have been arguing that diaspora – as both concept and lived reality – is not just a demographic description of a migrant population, but rather suggests a field of enquiry concerned with the politics of cultural identity and belonging, processes of cultural production and consumption, and local-global spaces. I now turn to a specific set of debates around which such questions have been pursued: the relations between diaspora and cultural hybridity. Brah and Coombes (2000) argue that: “In an increasingly globalized world, the term ‘hybridity’ has become the means for reflecting upon the relationship between ‘the local’ and ‘the global’ and the multiple ways in which globality, region and locality feature in economic, political, and cultural

forms and practices.” (Brah and Coombes 2000:12). Notions of hybridity have been important (albeit sometimes ambivalently used) in many accounts of diaspora as a form of cultural change. Such accounts are often connected to notions of cultural mobility as well as being linked to discussions of cultural creativity and cultural production. These discussions range from the celebratory to less optimistic accounts of cultural appropriation. Studies also consider the particular sites or spaces in which these dual processes are enacted, such as those of the city. In the following section I consider some of the studies which contribute to this field.

As charted by Hutnyk (2010), the term hybridity has been used by many authors in many different ways. Gilroy, for example, has used the term to look at new cultural forms, especially musical forms such as hip hop, that emerge by blending together techniques and styles of expression from multiple sites and traditions. Hall focuses on the critical view that hybridity offers on ideas of national culture, suggesting that “hybridity is transforming British life” (Hutnyk 2010:60). Chambers likewise argues that ideas of tradition are being altered due to hybridity; Bhabha uses hybridity to develop his conceptualisation of the ‘third space’; and Clifford discusses how travel or hybridizing is the “new global condition” (Hutnyk 2010:60). Hybridity is a term used with mixed sentiments. Robert Young, along with others, is concerned by the sense of mixing two distinct elements to create something new (Young 1995). This propagates the idea of a culture having claims to being pure in some other times and places (when not hybridized), and thus can position hybridity as the exception that proves the rule of cultural purity. For Young, such a logic is apparent in the longer history of the term and its use with respect to racial miscegenation. There is, however, still some resonance for authors, in so far as hybridity encapsulates the cultural translations and crossings that occur in a culture which receives a new migrant community, within, to return to Brah’s phrase, ‘diaspora space’. Thus Hutnyk, a frequent critic of simply celebratory accounts of cultural hybridity, argues that “As the term hybridity appears in several guises, it is important to look at what it achieves, what contexts its use might obscure, and what it leaves aside” (2010:62).

The relations between cultural mobility and hybridity are considered by many authors. The movement of people to create diasporic communities has in itself created diasporic cultures which reach out globally: “Such populations may result in diasporic or ‘hybrid’ cultures as cultures are ‘transmitted’ and transformed within new locations and contexts, creating new forms;

developing them in new ways, or giving new appreciations of difference and diversity” (Laurie, Dwyer, Holloway and Smith 1999:22). Christine Chivallon (2002) discusses the important impact of Gilroy’s work on ideas of diaspora and cultural creativity. For her, Gilroy proposes a way of looking at diaspora as hybrid, unlocalised and centred on ideas of networks and connections, contrasting with former conceptions of diaspora (in particular those concerned with a Jewish Diaspora) that centred on ideas of homeland, exile and return. Clifford furthers this focus on connectivity, framing diaspora as about ‘routes’ and ‘travelling cultures’ (1997). This concept of a diverse, hybrid mobile culture is one of particular significance to the migrant South Asian communities in Britain, not joined in memory of a singular homeland and often shaped by experiences of migration that have been multiple and broken.

In his account of what he terms *The Turbulence of Migration*, Nikos Papastergiadis (2007) offers a parallel framework for looking at cultural difference and mobility. Hutnyk argues (2010:59) that Papastergiadis’s work is an example of where the term hybridity intersects with theories of diaspora and opens up an area of discussion concerned with how a nation state operates dualities of ‘host and guest’ or ‘identity’ and ‘difference’ or even just ‘same’ and ‘not same’ (2010:59). Papastergiadis suggests that identities should not be thought of as linked to a particular place, but instead as hybrid and as constantly being created and remade. This he refers to as the ‘deterritorialization of culture’. This process, he suggests, sits in tension with the traditional links made between culture and place, links that posit a culture as the correct one for a particular place. That tension is very much alive. The presumption that cultures are distinct, autonomous and territorialized has continued. Even multiculturalism, in his view, assumes that the debate is about how much minority cultures can or cannot adapt and be compatible with a main national culture, and vice versa. Papastergiadis proposes a more dynamic, less fixed account of culture: “It now transpires that it is the cultural and political decisions of their members that are more important than either their historical lineages or geographic positions. It is what people do and how they communicate with each other, rather than who they are or where they live, that may prove to be decisive.” (2007:201). For Papastergiadis, we cannot look at ‘groups’ in terms of exclusion or inclusion, or who their ancestors were; instead we need to see people in terms of their cultural projects and expressions of identity.

Such an approach is developed by those writers who focus on hybridity in the context of cultural production. For Kalra et al., a major theme here is the relationship between diaspora and ‘cultural creativity’, which they see as “a site for the ferment of hybridity” and an area which “offers great potential for resistance to the politics of homogeneity” (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005:2). The cultural output of diasporic people and the subsequent commodification of these cultural forms are their interest: “If the level of institutional change remains relatively untouched by diasporic mobilization, this is certainly not the case at the level of cultural production and consumption.” (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005:37). Whilst they discuss music and literature, dress and fashion are also clearly relevant forms of cultural creativity here, as I will discuss further in the final section of the review. Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk state that “An emphasis on the aesthetic and experiential dimensions of diaspora has made an enormous impact on cultural and literary studies. Music, film and the visual arts all benefit from an interculturalism that is deemed integral to the diaspora experience.” (2005:37). They state that fashionings of difference, and living through experiences of migration, create a self-consciousness which fuels cultural creativity. The area which has generated the most debate is that of literature and indeed “Diaspora has become a central motif for defining a range of new writings and criticisms in the broader arena of what has come to be called Postcolonial studies” (ibid., 2005:43). Whilst music, film and fashion have also been studied, the work on literature has created a coherent theoretical space for the discussion of diasporic or post-colonial cultural creativity. “In the field of literary theory, the term ‘diaspora’ has emerged with the most prominence and force as part of a much wider range of projects that desire the undoing of Orientalism, the exposure of Eurocentrism, and work to undermine the centrality of the male figure as agent” (2005:43).

The interpretation of cultural commodities as ‘text’, available for new and imaginative readings, is one reason why literary theory is seen to have achieved significance in the examination of diasporic artistic innovations. The complexities of cultural translation are key here; as Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk put it, “One of the central processes enunciated in the colonial encounter which comes to the imperial centres in the creation of diaspora spaces is that of translation.” (2005:43). Drawing from the work of Homi Bhabha, they argue that the essence of diasporic experience is a translation of cultural memories into experiences in a new environment. More generally, such translation of cultures is a site for cultural change or reflexivity. Thinking of ‘hybridity’ in terms of cultural translation also offers a more nuanced approach to cultural

commodification. Generally, Hutnyk is wary of easy celebrations of creative cultural hybridization, arguing that whilst cultural difference ‘sells’ in contemporary society this has “not yet translated into any significant socioeconomic redress of multi-racial exclusions within Fortress Europe.” (Hutnyk 2000:4). Certainly, even within the realm of cultural production and consumption, the implications of such translations are an open question. Has appropriation of South Asian cultural forms in to areas of UK society imagined to be ‘mainstream’ resulted in a change in the social and political encounters of ethnic minorities in this country? Or, does any popularity still signify Orientalist agendas, whereby the acceptance of these South Asian cultural forms is still used to create an ‘Other’ to be consumed (Kalra and Hutnyk 2001)? Kalra and Hutnyk (2001) also look at aspects of South Asian culture that have been less amenable to cultural appropriation. The ideas and concepts which have proven ‘unpalatable’ for white mainstream tastes speak about what is missing and unacceptable from these emergences. They express forms of difference that resist translation; as Kalra et al. put it, “the problem of cultural difference is, then, that which cannot be translated” (2005:43). As I will discuss in some more depth in the last part of this review, fashion and dress are cultural forms where we can see South Asian culture both translating – as it becomes fashionable in various ways, as in the late twentieth century proclamations of Asian Kool – and proving difficultly different.

Laurie, Dwyer, Holloway and Smith also discuss how cultures are consumed in a globalized world marked by an “increased accessibility to diversity and difference” (Laurie, Dwyer, Holloway and Smith 1999:22). However the authors here feel that there is something inherently capitalistic about this consumption and that in part at least it is driven by the desire to “further profit gained by commodifying difference as those with money are offered the chance to consume ethnic difference” (Laurie, Dwyer, Holloway and Smith 1999:23). How people react to these global networks is differentiated of course by their situations within them. Laurie et al. suggest that for some these ‘new’ networks have been appreciated and accepted as enhancements to an individual’s social world, whilst for others the response to these changes has been a closing down and rejection of global influences. As Assayag and Benei argue, we cannot “suggest that there has been a continual and undifferentiated intermingling of these cartographic imaginaries; far from it.” (2003:2/3). Hutnyk, in his critique of ‘Asian Kool’, suggests that whilst there are some examples of Asian culture impacting British mainstream cultural consciousness (he gives the examples of “2nd Generation magazine, Asian Dub Foundation or the high street curry house”

(2000:4)), South Asian diasporas have not always benefited themselves. The engagements with South Asian culture in mainstream British society, for Hutnyk, are still more accessible to middle class consumers: “It seems that the fashion for *bindis* and sitars is not a guaranteed market option for the majority of *desi* diasporic even as it is they who have a large share in producing the cultural content of a refashioned multicultural Britain, explored as the latest ‘cool Britannia’ consumer product for the avaricious global culture-munching machine.” (2000:4). However one might view them, though, the impact of diasporic cultural commodities can be seen easily in the landscapes of global cities. One example is the ethnicised shopping centres of London, including those of South Asian fashion. Dwyer (2010a) argues that these areas are becoming sites where cultural consumption is undertaken, including by diasporic consumers. For Dwyer these new commercial cultural spaces are examples of new diasporic spaces opening up within the city.

Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism

For all the limits of a literal notion of cultural hybridity, I have been arguing that the term has usefully opened up attention to diasporic forms of cultural creativity, translation and production / consumption. I want now to turn to the forms of competency suggested by such a cultural scene; and to do that I want to consider the relations between diasporic culture and cosmopolitanism.

The Anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1996) frames cultural cosmopolitanism as an ability to engage with multiple cultures. Central, then, to cosmopolitanism are the competencies that enable its undertaking:

“... cosmopolitanism can be a matter of competence, and competence of both a generalized and a more specialized kind. There is the aspect of a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one’s way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting. And there is cultural competence in the stricter sense of the term, a built-up skill in manoeuvring more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings.” (Hannerz 1996:103).

Hannerz, however, sees cosmopolitanism as an elitist cultural dynamic, where a certain privileged few access and interact with a variety of cultures, not in an attempt to assimilate, but instead in an

attempt to “control”: “Competence with regard to alien cultures itself entails a sense of mastery, as an aspect of the self. One’s understandings have expanded, a little more of the world is somehow under control” (1996:103). He argues that ‘Cosmopolitans’ cherry pick ideas and cultural experiences from other cultures, but always know how to leave and return to their own preferred culture. Spatially, Hannerz’s Cosmopolitans are travellers, venturing out but then sitting somewhat apart from the ‘local’ cultures that they come to know and master. I would argue that diaspora studies provocatively rework Hannerz’s model, in so far as they centre subjects who are neither locals nor elites floating above them.

Certainly, many have written about how diasporic experiences generate abilities to adapt and to create new ways of living. Emmanuel Ma Mung (2004) talks of how diaspora, or the experience of migration, can be seen as a ‘spatial resource’, one the migrant builds on to create a niche for themselves in their new environment. As Vertovec writes, “notions of (cultural) translation, creolization, crossover, cut ‘n’ mix, hyphenated identity, bricolage, hybridity, syncretism, third space, multicultural, inter-culturalism and transculturalism” (2010:67) have all been used by scholars looking to explore the competences created by migrations and cross-cultural movements. For Vertovec, these contacts can have the effect of creating a way of life (for some) that enables a greater ability to move between cultures. He writes of this as a kind of diasporic cosmopolitanism. Moving away from an equation of cosmopolitanism with elitism, he instead looks at work that has considered ‘working class cosmopolitans’ (Werbner 1999) or ‘everyday cosmopolitans’ (Ang, Brand, Noble and Wilding 2002). He talks about how this sense of cosmopolitanism might give people who have lived in diasporic conditions a certain openness or urge to participate in new cultures. It might give them the ability to see others’ perspectives, having been exposed to many perspectives themselves. That is not to say that all diasporic people have an urge to embrace other cultures, but it might mean that they have a heightened ability to do so. Moreover, Vertovec describes how this might be put into practice. He describes how the experience of diaspora is one in which cultural traditions are maintained, as well as new cultural practices incorporated into daily life. New forms of eating, dressing, speech and such are brought into one’s life. This might be done to “entail pleasure, ease of interaction, better understanding, social or economic advantage, social distinction or sheer survival” (Vertovec 2010:65). He elaborates that one way of thinking about how this is achieved is to frame cosmopolitanism in terms of Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘habitus’. Here, culture becomes a “toolkit” (Vertovec 2010:65)

by which we construct an appropriate way of being in the world. Other authors as Vertovec points out, have highlighted how all the meanings which may be learned are “embedded in class, locality, gender, religion, age, sexuality, ‘subculture’ and other configurations of social meaning” (2010:66). These cosmopolitans are not free-floating, but forged through the conditions of diasporic life.

Vertovec describes the different competencies that cosmopolitans might use. Koehn and Rosenau (2002:114) have developed a list for what these might entail, that Vertovec deploys. Firstly there might be greater ‘analytic competence’, enabling people to understand and be more aware of others’ beliefs. Also there are ‘emotional competencies’, which might enable a person to have multiple identities and also be open to new cultural influences. Then there is ‘creative’ or imaginative competence, which might enable people to “tap into diverse cultural sources for inspiration” (2010:67). Finally, Koehn and Rosenau suggest ‘behavioural’ competencies, which might mean being able to use more than one language, but also the ability to pick up on different non-verbal cultural messages and to use this ability to “avoid and resolve communication misunderstandings across diverse communication styles” (Vertovec 2010:67). Cosmopolitanism perhaps provides a way, then, of highlighting exactly how people find ways of “living with difference” (Vertovec 2010: 68).

Ballard (1994) talks about this idea too, with respect to what he calls ‘code switching and cultural navigation’ (1994:30). He describes an ability for cultural navigation as being analogous to being bilingual: “Just as individuals can be bilingual, so they can also be multicultural, with the competence to behave appropriately in a number of different arenas, and to switch codes as appropriate” (1994:31). In his book *Desh Pardesh*, Ballard (1994) presents a series of writings from authors discussing how South Asians in Britain have developed and changed with a new generation, for whom home or ‘desh’ is Britain and ‘pardesh’ or abroad is South Asia. “Most of the rising generation are acutely aware of how much they differ from both parents *and* from the surrounding white majority, and as a result they are strongly committed to ordering their own lives on their own terms.” (1994:34). Thus, for Ballard, whilst young British Asians at the time were inhabiting both the world of their parents’ generation and the wider British social world, they also saw themselves as different from both and were creating new worlds, distinct to

themselves which spoke of a cosmopolitan, diasporic identity drawing from a range of cultural influences.

With reference to these debates the recent work of Shah, Dwyer and Modood (2010) is also of interest. They look at how young British working class Pakistanis have higher levels of Higher Educational achievement than their white working class peers. Drawing on Bourdieu's ideas of 'cultural capital', Shah et al. argue that for some working class Pakistanis colonial and post-colonial histories mean that they have middle class aspirations whilst living within working class economic limitations. That, combined with other social networks such as extended families and support from older siblings, means that education is seen as a vital goal which enables success in British life. Thus, new ways of life are created not just through the lived milieu we find ourselves in, but equally due to our aspirations and expectations of life which are shaped in relation to those milieu. A similar argument is developed in Mica Nava's account of "domestic cosmopolitanism" (2007:135). Nava also draws from the work of Bourdieu and his idea of the 'habitus'. In considering cosmopolitan proclivities and competencies, she argues for:

“... the importance of the family, of the ways families provide a site – a ‘habitus’ – for the fusion of differences, for ‘embodied history, internalised as second nature’ (Bourdieu 1990:56), and the transmission of inclusive dispositions across generations..... A cosmopolitan habitus, it must be noted does not consist only of feelings and practices of inclusively; it is also the breeding ground of ... humiliation and rebellion. These darker moods are also part of the historical picture.” (Nava 2007:135 & 14).

Thus, inhabiting and producing diaspora space is both an ongoing practical accomplishment and a matter of embodied dispositions. In this thesis, I deliberately focus on practices of dress in order to access this lived, practised character to diasporic culture and its cosmopolitanism. In so doing, I also recognise that the diasporic space in which we find ourselves is not solely a place where our identities are celebrated and expressed, but one where they are undertaken, regulated and curtailed. Diasporic cosmopolitanism is developed through a life long journey negotiating behaviours in the 'habitus'.

Diaspora and Gender

The relations between diaspora and gender have been widely considered. Nadjie Al-Ali (2010) argues that both fields, diaspora and gender studies, have had effects upon each other. Gender studies, for example, have found a resonance with discussion centred on “marginalization, subversion, fluidity, hybridity and transgression” (2010:118). For Al-Ali, however, whilst feminist theories have been deployed in diaspora studies, there is still a large body of work that she feels remains unduly gender blind. She aims to redress this by looking at the “centrality of gender within diasporic imaginations of home, nation, community and citizenship” (2010:118). One area of research highlighted by Al-Ali considers whether diasporas find themselves remaking traditional gender roles or whether these roles are even more reverently kept to in diasporic cultures. She says that research has shown that both dynamics occur, but that women should not be regarded as passive subjects in these processes.

Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk (2005) echo such concerns. Like Al-Ali, they ask whether “diaspora and hybridity helps to constitute a subject beyond the traditional divide of gender, or whether these terms can contribute to the emancipation of women (and indeed men) from cultural orthodoxy?” (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005:51). Yuval Davis (1997) had previously argued that diasporic women can become the reproducers of ethnic and national identities. They safeguard the boundaries of diasporic identity and actively keep cultural traditions alive. Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk agree that the realities of migration often see women performing a home making or culture carrying role. Men and women have been distinguished in their migration experiences through the performance of different roles in the act of re-settlement in a new nation. Women are seen as leading the re-establishment of home making practices and in doing so become entangled with the need to continue these practices both in an act of memorialisation but also in an act of distinguishing one’s ethnicity, nationality or religion. This dynamic is seen through the use of material culture, in religious ritual and in dress practices. In traditional discourse, diaspora women are seen to continue these practices whilst men are allowed a greater degree of adaptation to the host nation in their daily lives, related to “a gender division that construes women as vessels of culture and men as vehicles of labour power” (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005:52).

Such a division can in turn make women’s behaviour and embodied practice especially telling in relation to diasporic cultural dynamics. For example, in many representations of diasporic cultures gender relations are key; all too often men are demonised as oppressive whilst women

are to be pitied and protected from their cultures. Whether it be Muslim women's choices concerning the veil or South Asian arranged marriages, public discourse all too often takes them as transparently indicative of the oppression that South Asian women were imagined to face. As Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk put it: "Impressionistic understandings of the wearing of the veil, the custom of arranged marriages, generational conflicts and bodily mutilations were used as an indictment of non-Western lifestyles. Indeed, it is women's bodies that become the marker for cultural difference and therefore diasporic connectivity" (2005:55). They argue that women were thought of as markers for tradition, a bind doubly true for diasporic women born in a new country. Here it is imagined that "only modernity (from a Eurocentric perspective) is deemed to save them" (2005:56).

Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk argue that in this challenging context diasporic women have resisted patriarchal and dominant ideologies from both host community and their ethnic community. Debates challenging the assumptions of femininity and motherhood as natural characteristics assigned to women have of course existed for many years in feminist studies. These ideas hold particular poignancy for diasporic women. The role of cultural carrier can thus be either restricting, when a woman seeks not to participate in these functions, or indeed liberating when these functions provide independence and motivation for women.

Finally, it is important to recognise that such accounts of gendered diasporic dynamics do not presume a singular lived experience shared by all diasporic women; "(wo)man does not constitute an homogenous category of analysis" (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005:51). The lives of diasporic women are of course diverse and differentiated in many ways. As Brown states, "the experiences of South Asian women in the diaspora, and even in one country, differ considerably according to age, location, religion and class. It would therefore be entirely wrong to assume that there is one stereotype of a South Asian woman oppressed and powerless in a patriarchal society." (Brown 2006: 91). Thus the gendered dynamics and experiences of diaspora cannot be seen without due thought to relational ideas of ethnicity, class, race, sexuality, age and perhaps nationality or transnationality. All these various facets of identity intersect.

Diaspora, Home and Material Culture

“It may be argued that discourses and narratives of home have come to constitute the most salient forms of expressing places of belonging in a world in movement, where many social relations are not localized, and therefore within easy reach.” (Fog Olwig 1998:236).

I signalled above that scholarship within diaspora studies has noted the potential for a gendered division of labour within which women play a particular role as ‘cultural carriers’. One expression of this is in relation to home-making. ‘Home’ is of course a central concept in diaspora studies. As Stock argues: “At the core of the concept of diaspora lies the image of a remembered home that stands at a distance both temporally and spatially” (Stock 2010:26). Furthermore, the ‘Home’ in relation to diaspora has another meaning, as it asks the question do we feel at home in a new nation? Ideas of diaspora, however, do not see the home as simply caught between a longing for a lost home and an attempt to fit into (to belong to) a new one (Brah 1996). Stock describes the notion of home as a fluid one: “At each moment in time, various home spaces may compete, collide or complement each other” (Stock 2010:27). At the heart of such complexities is the physical home itself, that is, the home as domestic space. In diaspora, the domestic becomes implicated in these wider geographies of home and belonging. Home then becomes a site rife with recollection, nostalgia and longing for past selves or societies as well as being a site that situates us within the places we inhabit.

That intersection has been made particularly apparent in research on domestic ‘belongings’. This work deliberately employs the multiple meanings of that term: as both an emotional and cultural sensibility (a sense of belonging, a sense of longing); and as material possessions (the belongings with which we, for example, furnish and fashion domestic space). Clarke (2001), for example, argues that the study of material cultures of the home can be used to look at how we present ourselves in relation to how we imagine others see us. Generally, then, she considers “how the increasing emphasis on home decoration as a practice, its intersection with class, gender and ethnicity, is related to the construction of ideal and actual contemporary social worlds” (2001:25). Her argument is that the materiality of domestic space means that it ‘objectifies’ the complex impulses and social relations of home-making: “The house objectifies the vision the occupants have of themselves in the eyes of others and as such it becomes an entity and process to live up

to, give time to, show off to.” (2001:42). More specifically, one of her exemplary cases is the domestic space of a family she calls the Santoses. Chilean migrants in London, the Santoses had moved a few years previously to a flat somewhat distant from other members of London’s Chilean community. Clarke is especially intrigued by a disjuncture in the flat’s decoration. The main living area has barely been touched since the family moved in, and is furnished largely with second hand items. In contrast, the children’s bedrooms are recently decorated and immaculate, with an aesthetic that Clarke terms ‘modern european’. For Clarke, the flat thus objectifies a diasporic project of home making in which the parents’ lives are subordinated to a project of making their children feel at home in London.

Generally, Rapport and Dawson recognise that home thus becomes a place which reflects the “ambiguities and fluidities, the migrancies and paradoxes, of identity in the world today.” (1998:9). The relationship people have to place and identity may be observable in their relationship to the home and the self that is allowed to be expressed within it. As Fog Olwig discusses, “Home in other words, is created through social relations as they unfold in the give-and-take of ordinary everyday life. Whereas home may become a fairly abstract space of self-knowledge in narratives, it is a very concrete space of rights and obligations in the social life of the narrators.” (1998:235). Home is at once a space where ideologies are played out, as well as being the space where everyday materialities collide with these ideologies and our lives take shape.

A further example of this is provided by Tolia-Kelly in her study of memory and the use of artefacts in the British Asian home (2004). Tolia-Kelly examines the idea that “history-heritage narratives” are associative of “post-colonial lived experience” (2004:326). She looks at how “visual and material cultures, help situate diasporic groups politically and socially within ‘structures of feeling’ that have evolved through their varied relationships with national identity” (2004:326-327). As she states it:

“The diasporic materials of culture are the precipitates of their collective social memory, together forming a collage of connective landscapes, cultural iconologies and symbols of the communal experience of displacement from a sense of belonging and ‘home’. These materials represent the physical buffer between their experience of displacement and the difficulty in dealing with marginalization from new points of settlement. These cultures operate as a

psychic investment in a set of ‘textures of identification’; they reflect this transnational community’s shared ‘structures of feeling’, which have various formations and flows dependent on the routes and roots of migration and point of settlement.” (2004:327)

Her research involved looking at the personal effects of women from North London. In particular she looked at the religious shrines of these Hindu Women. The iconography and figures displayed provided links to past homes and bring memories into the current home. Drawing from the work of Gilroy and Toni Morrison, Tolia-Kelly uses the idea of ‘re-memory’ to suggest a form of memory that is not linear; instead it is complex, it can be the memory of others, or it can be a memory activated by sensory stimuli. For Tolia-Kelly, the home is the site where these memories and re-memories become realised through the use of particular material cultures. Such work is illustrative of how diasporic culture has a material quality.

In that light, it is important to recognise that the materiality of diasporic culture is not limited to the home (for a recent wider review see Crang 2010). There are many material forms and spaces through which diaspora culture is performed. This thesis’s focus on dress is therefore designed to develop the engagement between diaspora and material culture studies via its focus on dress.

Diasporic Geographies: Conclusion

The existent literature on diaspora is voluminous and growing. The review developed here therefore pursued particular lines of argumentation appropriate to the subject matter of the thesis. The aim was both to signal areas of diasporic scholarship that have been of particular influence to my own research and to set out a rationale for how this study contributes to the wider field.

More specifically, then, I began by discussing definitions of diaspora. In particular, I argued that diaspora was not only a demographic description applied to the migration histories of peoples, but also a notion through which complex politics of identity and belonging are expressed. Those politics of identity and belonging are also bound up with questions of space. I considered formulations of ‘diaspora space’ and ‘transnational space’, drawing out how such notions extend diaspora culture beyond any singular population and instead cast it as a process that engages and

transforms a range of actors. I noted too how such work enacts a dual understanding of space: on the one hand, emphasising the complexity and multiplicity of diasporic cultural locations; on the other, committing to understanding diaspora culture in relation to specific sites, places and spatial practices. It is in that spirit that this thesis approaches the experiences of dress for women of South Asian origin in London. By presenting place based, everyday stories we can see how abstract notions of diaspora culture are translated in to lived practice and engagement with society through dress. Moreover, looking at dress challenges notions of cultural identity politics operating solely in national discourse; instead cultural identity here operates on the body, in the wardrobes and in the public presentations of self of diasporic women.

Two key conceptual notions associated with diaspora scholarship were also discussed above. First, I considered the notion of cultural hybridity. Whilst recognising the problematic connotations of the term – in particular with regard to the mixing of previously pure and separate cultures – I argued that the notion of hybridity had opened up a body of work concerned with diasporic cultural creativity, processes of cultural translation, and forms of cultural production and consumption. Second, I paired that concern with an interest in the competencies required to navigate such terrains, as understood in a particular approach to the cosmopolitan. Here, diaspora is associated with the capacity to travel across cultural domains and to translate between them. With regards to dress, attention to the new ‘hybrid’ stylizations created through the mingling of cultures in a diasporic fashion space is thus complemented by a concern for the skills that enable a range of contextually specific dress practices to be undertaken. Some forms of South Asian dress are used and some are rejected in order to create an individual relationship with dress and diasporic biography.

Finally I considered two further sets of issues within diaspora studies that, I argue, relate particularly strongly to this study. The first was gender. Here I argued that whilst diaspora studies can be criticised for insufficient attention to gendered dynamics, nonetheless a substantial body of work has emerged that considers, in particular, the implication of diasporic women’s subjectivities into contested processes of cultural reproduction. This literature suggests that women’s bodies are often the ground upon which such contests are played out. My argument is thus that dress may offer a particularly rich insight into women’s diasporic experiences and to the gendering of diaspora cultures. Second, given the material character of dress, I turned to existent

work on diasporic material culture. Unsurprisingly given the centrality of ideas of ‘home’ within diasporic thought, much of this work has attended to the domestic realm, seeing how it objectifies wider cultural dynamics in the everyday spaces of home-making. This work, I would suggest, offers an interesting provocation to extend research into other areas of diasporic material culture. Food, often as part of domestic life but also in relation to public cultures of eating out, has been much discussed (see Crang 2010); but dress is clearly a realm ripe for further investigation, with work on domestic space highlighting questions about both its objectifications of diasporic subjectivities and its capacity to perform memories. I therefore now develop this contextual review by considering existent work on fashion and dress, before looking more directly at work specifically on British Asian fashion.

Fashioning Geographies

The second part of this contextual review situates the thesis in relation to the interdisciplinary field of ‘fashion studies’ and in particular its approach to practices of dress. If the origins of fashion studies lie in a subset of Art History concerned with costume, recently a widening interest in the field has both complicated and enriched its intellectual lineages. As Lillethun (2007a) charts, many other disciplines have now engaged with fashion studies: Anthropology, History, Sociology, Business and Geography, among others. Recent field defining texts, such as *The Fashion Reader* (Welters and Lillethun, 2007), and journals such as *Fashion Theory* have recognised and reinforced this interdisciplinarity. In turn, fashion studies have broadened, addressing a wide range of social, cultural and economic aspects of fashion. For Lillethun (2007a), the wider interest in fashion studies is driven by a number of coinciding factors, including: wider cultural dynamics, such as an increased appreciation of the role of fashion in society generally and within a less masculinist academy more specifically; and the relevance of fashion to intellectual concerns that have preoccupied the humanities and social sciences over the last two decades, such as globalization, consumer cultures, identity and embodiment. Breward and Evans insightfully frame this congruence more conceptually, casting fashion as a method for looking at “the subjective experience of modern life” (2005:2). Following from the work of Giddens (1991), they see “reflexivity or self scrutiny” as a crucial experience of modernity, the subjective manifestation of

the modern world's dynamics of 'creative destruction' and de-traditionalization. In turn, they describe fashion as an exemplary modern form, both being "a market-driven cycle of consumer desire and demand" (2005:2) and a medium for "the fabrication of self" (2005:2). Many other fashion theorists have also centred the relationship between fashion and modernity. Elizabeth Wilson (2005) writes, for instance, about how fashion opens up a side to modernity's character long dismissed by masculinist social scientists as irrational and frivolous.

My approach to fashion studies seeks to take forward this relating of fashion and the fabrication of modern selves. Above, I argued that diaspora could be taken as a key condition of the modern world, one that gives us important insights with regard to contemporary cultural geographies of identity. My approach in this thesis is to connect together an understanding of the fashioning of modern selves with the recognition of diaspora thinking as central to the portrayal of modern culture and its geographies. I therefore begin this review by reflecting on the account of modern cultural geographies present within fashion studies, focusing especially on how this could be, and has been, informed by diaspora theory. Important for me too is Breward's and Evans' recognition that 'fashion' reaches beyond the confines of a fashion system and its cultural-economic logics and institutional forms (designers, media and so on). If fashion is a medium for the fabrication of self, as they put it, then the field of fashion studies needs to engage everyday practices of 'dress'. The first part of this review therefore considers the relations between fashion and dress in the modern world, attending in particular to the cultural geographies of these relations. The second part of the review then further develops an approach to fashion focused on 'dress', via work that accesses fashion 'through the wardrobe'.

The third and fourth parts of the review then turn to further currents of conceptual thought within fashion studies that have brought questions of dress to the fore. Respectively, these are embodiment and material culture. In considering them I also deliberately parallel the focus I gave to gender and material culture in my discussion of diaspora studies. Embodiment and the relationship between body, society and dress have become central concerns of fashion studies, driven in particular by the work of Entwistle (2000) and Craik (1994), both of whom develop accounts centred on the relationship between learned dress behaviours and the embodied 'habitus'. Material culture studies have long intersected with fashion studies, given the long traditions of work in the latter on what we might call 'hem-line history' and the detailed

appreciation of material form. Initially cast in opposition to the wider framing of fashion studies as a cultural investigation of modern experience and subjectivity, such material concerns are now increasingly recognised as vital components of fashion cultures. This recognition parallels wider ‘returns’ to materiality within cultural studies broadly defined (for the case of Cultural Geography, see Jackson 2000 for an early commentary; for recent statements of some of the diverse theoretical imperatives behind such moves see Bennett 2010 and Miller 2010). Informed by the wider resurgence in material culture studies, here clothing is thought of as artefact and as an objectification of social forms. The social, cultural and personal significance of fashion is materially constituted. Clothing is also thought to have material agency of its own. Cultural significance is not just projected on to clothes but enabled through their material qualities and the sensory, embodied relationships we have with them.

Fashion and Dress in the Modern World

However, to begin I consider the relations between fashion and dress in the modern world. In so doing I consider the implication of fashion studies in spatial framings of its subject matter, highlighting the potential for the spatial thinking of diaspora studies to enrich understanding of modern fashion and dress.

In tracing out the history of fashion studies, Lillethun observes that early writings on fashion, influenced by social Darwinism, saw a hierarchy of fashions, with western tailored clothing at its “pinnacle” (2007a:79) and other dress forms such as draped clothing lower down the scale of ‘civilization’. More generally, ‘Fashion’, as a system, was very much located in Western society and separated out from the wider human concerns with ‘dress’. The modern West developed fashion cultures; in other societies they ‘only dressed’. Writers such as Craik (1994) and Niessen (2003) have critiqued this Eurocentricism and argued against its ignoring of circuits of fashion in other societies. I suggest that two trends within fashion studies have sought to improve matters. First, paralleling wider theorisations of modernity (Miller 1994, Featherstone, Lash and Robertson 1995), there has been growing attention paid to the geographies of modern fashion, i.e. how modern fashion is constituted in particular contexts and how these contexts are globally distributed. Second, the approach to dress has changed from positioning it ‘outside’ of fashion

(both spatially and socially) to a recognition of dress practices as part of the dynamics of self-fabrication in which fashion systems more narrowly defined are implicated. I want now to consider both these trends and to suggest that they are open to still further development through engagements with diaspora theory.

In setting out the relations between fashion and modernity, Breward and Evans call for a situating of fashion within “specific historical, geographic and cultural contexts” (2005:3). They argue that fashion needs to be seen as “both a social and spatial practice” as well as being in the realm of “image and artefact” (2005:3). The predominant form of such situating has been to locate fashion within the modern city, and more substantively, within particular and diverse modern cities (Lillethun 2007a:78). Generally, the modern preoccupation with fashioning the self is related to the quality of city life. Entwistle, for example, argues that “The anonymity of the city opens up new possibilities for creating oneself, giving one the freedom to experiment with appearance ...” (Entwistle 2000:139). The relationship between the city and fashion is an area where Geographers have contributed to fashion studies, arguing that specific cities are vital to fashion cultures and that fashion shapes particular city cultures (see for example Breward 2004; Breward and Gilbert 2006; Gilbert 2000). Introducing a wider collection of essays on the relationship between fashion and world cities (Breward and Gilbert 2006), Gilbert writes,

“Studies of urban culture have moved beyond a narrow concern for literary or fine art representations of the city, towards an engagement with other ways in which the city is expressed and performed. This turn has also increased the appreciation of the fashion traditions of great cities as an alternative, more demotic and fragmentary form of urban expression.” (2006:7)

Different cities develop distinctive fashion cultures: a point illustrated in Gilbert’s comparative discussion of masculine fashion cultures in London and their feminised counterparts in Paris (2006); and since developed in work that has moved beyond a focus on the fashion industry’s major cultural and economic centres and into a wider range of urban contexts (see for example Larner, Molloy and Goodrum 2007 on New Zealand). Such differences reflect how the fashion system is embedded within urban contexts. Streets help to shape catwalks (Polhemus 1994). Thus, arguing against a top-down, hierarchical portrait of fashion’s cultural flows, Wilson (1985)

talks about how urban fashion styles are developed by subcultures and informed by the cultural mobilities that shape these. For Wilson, our engagement with fashion requires an urban audience that one can perform to and learn from. The relationship between individuality and conformity as expressed through clothing and fashion (here Wilson is informed by the urban theory of Simmel) is also considered as requiring an urban platform to develop: “To dress fashionably is both to stand out and to merge with the crowd, to lay claim to the exclusive and to follow its herd.” (1985:6).

This work on the urban contexts of fashion has, however, had less to say about ethnicity than one might expect. Here, it can therefore usefully be extended by engaging with scholarship more squarely focused on dress and its relations to ethnic identity, led by the seminal work of Joanne Eicher. In *Dress and Ethnicity*, Eicher (1995) sees dress as communicative of ethnicity. Looking at dress and accessories across a range of case studies, the book considers how bodies are modified, how ethnic dress is influenced by migration, and how dress (along with other cultural practices) serves to bring people together or separate them. She also recognises that ethnicity, dress and gender are linked. As she states: “Gender issues involve modesty and flamboyance, concealment and exposure in dress, concerns which are often related to how members of an ethnic group identify proper dress for men and women within cultural parameters” (1995:3). People live out ethnic politics on their bodies. For Eicher, “Dress is a coded sensory system of non-verbal communication that aids human interaction in space and time” (1995:1) She argues that through dress we send out signals which communicate with others as to the identity that we wish to display. Dress and other adornments serve to “set off either or both cognitive and affective processes that result in recognition or lack of recognition by the viewer” (1995:1). The viewer sees our dress and interprets our articulations of self. However, this interpretation can be fraught, as it is always subject to misinterpretations. Our best-laid plans over dress can be seen by others in variable ways, which we could not always have foreseen.

If somewhat ignored in work on modern urban fashion cultures, scholarship on dress and the social semiotics of ethnicity has come more to the fore in a parallel development within fashion studies, the examination of globalisation (Maynard 2004). Complementing research on the globalised political economy of the fashion industry, Ross (2008) looks at how globalisation has been associated with an increasing westernization of dress globally. He argues that the

commodification of clothing and its related industries have been central to creating the global economy itself. “The homogenization of clothing may be a symptom of globalization, but at the same time the profits deriving from the clothing industry have made that globalization possible” (Ross 2008:172). However, that is not to say individuals have not had agency in negotiating the globalising nature of this industry and fashions; “People across the world have developed strategies for negotiating their own relationships to the global economy, to the global international order and to the global cultural regime” (Ross 2008:170). We are not passive in our engagement with the globalisation of fashion. As Jackson (2007) argues, in global consumption cultures local geographies still matter. In that sense, Tranberg Hansen’s (2000) analysis of how global trade in secondhand western clothing is translated into the cultural economy of ‘salaula’ in Zambia is exemplary of wider processes in which global fashion flows are materially and symbolically re-made locally or ‘indigenised’.

Moreover, global fashion flows are themselves more complex than allowed for by a generalised account of westernization. For sure, in part what accounts of global fashion identify are circulations of western fashion styles. Zelinsky (2004), for example, considers the adoption (and non-adoption) of the ‘western suit’ (or as he terms it ‘Modern Western Male Attire’ / MWMA) as a window on the global historical geographies of modernity. Goodrum (2005) examines the contemporary fashion industry and how Britishness is constructed and exported globally through labels such as Burberry and Paul Smith. And Trevor-Roper’s (2007) analysis of the role of the kilt and tartan in the re-imagining of Scottish identity in the C18 and C19 is extended by Faiers (2008) as he considers the ongoing, global circulations of tartan. But such flows sit alongside mobilisations of non-western and ethnicised fashion styles.

Thus, a collection of essays convened by Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkovich and Carla Jones (2003) explores the issues surrounding the globalisation of Asian dress. Resisting a purely celebratory account, they argue that this globalisation often reproduces Orientalist dualisms which see Asia as the feminine Other to the masculine West. The aim of their work is to challenge these stereotypes. Kondo’s (1997) earlier monograph likewise considered globally circulating Asian styles (here in both fashion and theatre). An interview with Kondo also opens Puwar and Bhatia’s specially edited double issue of the journal *Fashion Theory* focused on ‘Fashion and Orientalism’. (2003) Here, arguments about the Orientalist framings of Asian dress recur.

Echoing debates over the multicultural commodification of ethnic difference (considered above in relation to the politics of cultural hybridity), Sharma and Sharma (2003) reflect on the attempts to control and package difference in global capitalism. Zahir (2003) reinforces their argument about the potential for paranoia in relation to difference that refuses packaging in her discussion of art works invoking the 'veil'; and Lewis (2007) considers the awkward place of the veil and other religious apparel in fashion economies and spaces. Lewis's recent edited collection on 'modest fashion' and the mediation of faith in modern fashion cultures extends this focus (Lewis 2013b). These contemporary analyses are also contextualised in relation to longer histories of presence for Asian dress forms within 'Western' fashion cultures. Tolini Finamore (2003) interprets the 'coloniale moderne' aesthetic of inter-war French fashion and its subsumption of the Asian exotic. Elsewhere, Steele and Major (1999) present the longer history of chinoiserie in fashion; Colaiacomo and Caratozzolo (2010) look at the relationship between Indian clothing and Italian fashion designs from the 1950s to the 1990s; and Ashmore (2006, 2010) examines the role of Eastern dress within London's various 'bohemian' cultures, laying out how across the twentieth century different expressions of 'ethnic' clothing had distinctly different receptions depending on the areas of the city they inhabited and the race, ethnicity and class of the wearer. Complex agencies are recognised to be at play within these global flows. Nagrath (2003), for example, highlights how Indian fashion designers both reproduce and negotiate Orientalist framings of their work. And in a fascinating analysis, Leshkovich and Jones (2003) trace out not only the recurrent forms of 'Asian Chic' within contemporary western fashion cultures (from Nehru jackets in the 1960s to Japanese modernism in the 1980s or cheongsam inspired dresses in the early 2000s) but also how these styles then travel back to East Asia (they focus especially on urban Indonesia) as part of the consumer cultures of the emergent urban middle class (as they phrase it, thus making Asian Chic chic in Asia).

Rabine's (2002) work on how African fashion is globally networked is also notable. She demonstrates how the globalization of African styles is forged through complex transnational circulations of people, cultural artefacts and identities. She argues that whilst studies of globalisation have tended to focus on the "dominant, high-tech networks – of the mass media, the internet, or mass marketed consumer culture – produced and disseminated by corporate capitalism" (2002:2) one must also recognise the role of less corporate "networks, peopled by suitcase vendors who transport their goods with them in suitcases and trunks, producers and

consumers creating transnational popular cultural forms.” (2002:3). Tulloch (2004, 2010) takes on such insights and engages them more explicitly with diaspora theory and politics. She sees dress for the African Diaspora as a method by which they have “managed their sense of self and sense of place through the styling of the body” (2004:11). Her book *Black Style* seeks to “expose the complexities and ‘ongoing redefinition’ of what it means to be black through the black body and how it is dressed” and to trace out “the development of an African diaspora aesthetic” (2004:17). Her argument is that such an aesthetic is constructed within and through diaspora space. As Kobena Mercer puts it in his foreword to *Black Style*:

“The attentions to detail that catch your eye; the nuances, inflections and accents that make an impression; the subtle traffic of signs taken out of one code and translated into another; all suggest that black style is not the uniform expression of some unchanging ethnic ‘essence’, but is best understood as an act of aesthetic agency inscribed into a material world of immense social disparity.” (2004:8)

Let me summarise. In seeking to correct assumed equations between fashion and a privileged Western culture, studies have increasingly looked to explore fashion’s cultural geographies. In part attention has focused on the local, urban settings for fashion cultures; in equal measure, though, there has been recognition of the global circulations of sartorial styles and materials. These foci come together in approaches that emphasise transnational spaces of fashion circulation, ethnicised dress styles, and the role of diasporic populations within these. Fashion studies have recognised the diversity of styles and flows within global culture. I will comment more on such work below, in a more direct consideration of existing work on British Asian fashion cultures. But by now it should be clear, then, that engaging fashion studies with the diaspora theory considered earlier in this chapter - with its foci on diaspora and transnational spaces, cultural creativity and diasporic production and consumption, and cosmopolitan competencies – has the potential to enrich what we might term the ‘geographical turn’ in fashion studies.

(Ad)dressing Fashion Through the Wardrobe

The geographical turn in fashion studies is not unrelated to a contemporary engagement between questions of fashion and studies of dress. As we saw above, in seeking to avoid top-down, hierarchical accounts of fashion cultures that fixate on particular figures, institutions and sites, writings on fashion have sought to recognise the cultures of dress that exist beyond a narrowly defined fashion system. Rather than dismissing dress as an anthropological subject matter for settings outside of the Euro-American fashion system, it is recognised that these wider cultures of dress play a crucial role to the fashion system both in terms of production (as sources of inspiration) and consumption (as markets). I now turn to consider such work on dress more directly. I begin with research focused on practices of dress, viewed through the lens of people's (especially women's) relations to their wardrobes. I then consider accounts focused on fashion and embodiment and on fashion and the material culture of clothing, respectively.

In framing the collection *Through The Wardrobe* (2001) editors Guy, Green and Banim argue that the humble wardrobe actually provides a particularly fertile site for exploring women's relationships with their clothes and the fashion system that largely provides them. Their approach has been developed in subsequent studies, most notably in Sophie Woodward's book *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (2007), but also in work that sets the wardrobe within the material circulations, collections and disposals of domestic life (Gregson and Beale 2004, Gregson 2007). A central concern of this work is why the "wardrobe moment" (Woodward 2007:3) – when we confront our clothing collections and decide what to wear -- poses such difficulty and asks of us so many questions. The answers revolve around the role of fashion in fabricating the self; as Woodward puts it, "getting dressed can be theorized as an act of identity construction, as choosing what to wear is an act of 'surfacing', 'presenting' and drawing in aspects of the self and relationships" (2007:7). Constructing outfits can thus be a creative activity that enables self-expression; simultaneously it can create anxieties and unease (see also Clarke and Miller 2002). The wardrobe moment speaks to the fundamentally ambivalent nature of dress and indeed of self-identity in the modern world.

For Guy, Green and Banim (2001), the fashioning of the self through dress raises questions about authenticity. They reject an understanding of women's relationship with the fashion system as one where a woman negotiates her way through hegemonic images of fashion and accepts or rejects them to create a 'true self' that is revealed through clothes. They argue that this assumption would be mistaken on two counts. Firstly, it falsely sees the meanings of clothes as being stable, whereas in fact they are mutable, contextual and negotiated. Secondly, a fixation on the revelation of an authentic self suggests that our identity itself is in a "fixed state" (2001:8). Instead, they view the wardrobe as a place where multiple identities can be realised and expressed. Moreover, they argue that "self-realization is achieved by a dynamic exchange (between the internal and the external) as we live as social beings" (2001:8). When we dress we do so reflexively; we both express ourselves and also view the images of ourselves dressed, draw meanings from these images and imagine how others might see us. For Woodward, "clothing materializes questions of identity in a particularly intimate way" (2007:20). Clothing is a material form; it is worn, felt and imagined through its bodily engagements. Clothing decisions are thus central to women's ideas of the body and of course conversely, clothing is decided upon by women's perceptions of their bodily appearances. Such perceptions are focused in the image that is reflected back at us from the mirror. The act of viewing our dressed selves, argues Woodward, happens in the context of, and in conjunction with, the external stimulus of media representations of fashionable women. The wardrobe therefore becomes a central site and resource in how we relate to others and how we construct ourselves in those relations. Adam (2001), for example, discusses clothes for larger women and how these women use their own gaze, and the imagined gazes of others, to create looks that they feel are appropriate (see also Colls 2004, 2006). Lynch, Radina and Stalp (2007) consider age (in)appropriate wear in a discussion of 'growing old and dressing (dis)gracefully'. Women are aware of socially prescribed dress behaviours, however it is up to them whether they choose to adapt these or accept them. Identity is here thought of as an evolving process, one in which we actively construct ourselves through clothes.

Woodward too conceptualises identity as materialised through clothing as fluid, moving, at times enabling and at times inhibiting. Based on in-depth ethnographic research conducted over fifteen months with women based in London and Nottingham, she traces through the "individual,

biographical and aesthetic” responses women have with their wardrobe, as well as looking at the bigger picture, the “social and commercial, that impinges upon them” (Woodward 2007:4). Thus, “Starting with the wardrobe, as a personal collection, the book moves through to the considerations of the gaze of others, to external influences, such as fashion” (Woodward 2007:4). The wardrobe is understood as a site that mediates private and public, self and society. Taking seriously the “wardrobe moment”, and the act of getting dressed, allows us to examine the “publicly presented self” in its moment of inception (Woodward 2007:3). This is where women negotiate the demands of public display and “appearance management”. Contained in the wardrobe, then, are complex understandings about the spaces of everyday life and the forms of dress and self that are appropriate to them.

Woodward further argues for the value of work centred on the wardrobe itself, rather than just on what is worn in various social situations, because clothing that is rejected never makes it beyond this personal space. Wardrobe moments and collections tell us not only about the selves being fashioned but also about selves that fail, or that are rejected, or that become alien to us. Banim and Guy (2001) also look at how clothing that is no longer worn is kept and the meanings clothes have beyond their everyday wear. The wardrobe here becomes a repository for identities. Clothes in the wardrobe become material manifestations of our memories and biographies. Woodward too discusses how memories as well as clothing find themselves housed in wardrobe space. The sensual, tactile nature of clothing is thought about “as it holds the shape of the body, materializes personal narratives and biographies” (Woodward 2007:5). Woodward proposes that biography is materialized in these clothes as forcefully as it might be in a memoir. Moreover, these material biographies have an on-going life; when an item is re-worn, or perhaps taken out but not selected, it brings with it a host of memories and makes the past “present in the act of dressing” (Woodward 2007:6). This biographical character to dress can also manifest itself as a method of personal control; she describes how one of her ‘case studies’ “is in fact taking control of her life” and using her clothes to monitor herself in order not to repeat former behaviors (Woodward 2007:65).

Generally, then, the wardrobe is an iconic site illustrating that when it comes to clothes and the fabrication of selfhood it is the mundane and everyday acts of dressing which inform a woman’s

“sense of who they are” much more than the world of “celebrity or high fashion” (Woodward 2007:153). The wardrobe extends the geographies of fashion, beyond global fashion networks and urban fashion cultures and into the embodied material practices of dress. The wardrobe positions dress in relation to biographies, social relationships and the spaces of everyday life as well as public circuits of fashion culture, all of these being brought together (sometimes successfully, sometimes not) in our “personal aesthetics” (Woodward 2007: 67).

Embodiment, Fashion and Dress

The growing attention paid to dress and to personal aesthetics within fashion studies owes much to a wider recognition of the body within the human sciences. Recent years have seen fashion studies reinvigorated by a focus on dress and embodiment (Entwistle 2000, Entwistle and Wilson 2001, Johnson and Foster 2007), but previously the body had been surprisingly absent. Soper (2001) discusses how traditions of philosophy and social theory, with their platonic emphasis on the mind over the body, had not given enough credence to how the body shapes identity. More specifically, Sweetman (2001) argues that sociologists neglected the phenomenological dimension of dressing in favour of its semiotics. Wilson’s work (1985) was an early attempt to link the biological body to the social being through its relationship to dress. For her, the body is a cultural artefact whose “boundaries are unclear” (1985:2). A hybrid of culture and biology, the body posed problems for cultural and social theory. The body was an uncomfortable site, deemed less relevant than the ‘self’. The ‘self’, existing within the body but located in the mind, was prioritised. Thus, fashion was understood as something the mind controlled to rein in the body or to mask one’s true self from others (Craik 1994). Fashion was seen as a means to hide away the true self.

A range of work has contested this neglect of embodiment when considering fashion as a fabrication of the self. Craik (1994) argues that if we view dressing as an “active process” (1994:1) then we can see it as a means by which we construct and present “a bodily self” (1994:1). More recently, Miller (2010) again raises the question of where the self lies, tracing out its implications in widely held judgements about the superficiality of dress and fashion. Miller seeks to counter such views. The distinction between surface and interior, he suggests, is one that is

conceptualised in different ways by different cultures. Miller refutes the Western mind and body split as universal: “The problem with viewing clothing as the surface that represents, or fails to represent, the inner core of true being is that we are then inclined to consider people who take clothes seriously as themselves superficial” (2010:13), he argues. Drawing on his own ethnographic research, he presents two case studies to illustrate how the relationship between surface, interior and clothing does not have to be cast in these terms. Trinidadians, for example, have a great interest in fashion and the display of self through clothing. The self is explicitly constructed through clothing and lies on the surface available for the world to see and understand. It is the surface that is prioritised as being where the self exists. Miller also describes the relationship that Indian women have to the sari (see also Banerjee and Miller 2003). The sari is a garment that extends the body and has powerful emotional connotations: “The sari turns a woman into a person who interacts with others and with the self through this constantly shifting material” (2010:31). Dress again constitutes the self, rather than covering it. For Miller, this has important implications for how we theorise and approach the relations between dress, body and identity. Identity, for him, is an embodied performance, in which dress plays a vital role. Identity is not only constituted in the spheres of public discourse and in their shaping of thought. It is flesh, fabric, sensual too. It is felt not just thought: “Through the realm of clothing, we can see how, for most peoples, systems of thinking about the world also have to *feel right*” (Miller 2010:41). Wider social forces might in part drive our relationship to dress; however, how clothes feel on our bodies also informs our dress decisions. Dress is therefore a way to look at the embodied experience of society and of the identities constructed within it. In the case of this thesis, dress is a way of exploring the embodied experience of being British Asian (and a woman, and aged, and of a class fraction, and all the other identity positions my participants’ held).

Joanne Entwistle’s work has been particularly important in developing more embodied approaches in fashion studies – especially through her book *The Fashioned Body* (2000) – and I want therefore to consider her contribution, and its theoretical underpinnings, in more depth. Entwistle argues that “Fashion is about bodies: it is produced, promoted and worn by bodies.” (2000:1). Whilst her more recent work (Entwistle 2009) has explored this assertion in relation to the commercial cultures of fashion, especially the modelling industry and its forms of labour, I am especially interested in its implications for how we understand everyday practices of dress. For Entwistle, dress does not merely drape the body for reasons of practicality, it also serves to

embellish the body and add new meanings that without dress would not be visible. Dress is, in some ways, a second skin: “Dress has an intimate relationship to the body.... [it] forms part of our epidermis - it lies on the boundary between self and other.” (2000: 93 & 91). Demonstrating an admirably spatially inflected sensibility, Entwistle proposes “a sociology of dress as *situated* bodily practice” (Entwistle 2000:39; emphasis added).

In developing her approach, Entwistle draws upon a range of social theorists, including Mauss, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Goffman and in particular Bourdieu. She details how Mauss saw the body as culturally constructed and highlights his idea of ‘technologies of the body’, the different ways men and women learned how to use their bodies appropriately in different societies. Foucault looked at the idea of a ‘technology of self’, in an approach that saw the body as constructed by individuals in ways that were socially prescribed and implicated in wider processes of ‘making up’ people into socially recognised subjects. For example, as Entwistle comments, “discourses on dress at work operate less by imposing dress on the bodies of workers, and more by stimulating ways of thinking and acting on the self” (2000:26); so we might wear tailored suits in an office, not because a dress code is advised to us, but because we know through subtle indicators that following an unspoken dress code may bring us greater success in that office space (see Entwistle 1997 for further discussion). Whilst Foucault’s concerns are largely about the forms of power operational within everyday bodily conduct, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, she suggests, offers a stronger sense of the body as flesh and ourselves as sensory beings. Dress mediates our inhabitation of the world:

“...dress and the body exist in dialectic relationship to one another. Dress operates on the phenomenal body; it is a very crucial aspect of our every day experience of embodiment, while the body is a dynamic field, which gives life and fullness to dress” (Entwistle and Wilson 1998:94).

Goffman, meanwhile, helps in the situating and spatialising of that inhabitation and of our somatic conduct. For Entwistle, “Dress in everyday life is always located spatially and temporally: when getting dressed one orientates oneself to the situation, acting in particular ways upon the body” (2000:29). Here she appeals to Goffman’s account of the presentation of self in everyday life (Goffman 1959), Space, to Goffman, is something we learn how to experience at different times in different ways. We judge our conduct according to the situations in which we find ourselves. The self is thus performed rather than fixed. It is situational. Dressing is one way in

which we learn how to manage this spatiality of everyday life effectively; “Goffman reminds us of the territorial nature of space and describes how we have to negotiate crowds, dark quiet spaces and so on” (Entwistle 2000:33).

Entwistle proposes, then, an embodied approach to fashion and dress that looks both ‘inwards’ (viewing dress as part of the production of embodied selves) and ‘outwards’ (viewing dress in relation to its social contexts, recognising “how it is shaped by techniques, attitudes, aesthetics and so on, which are socially and historically located.”) (Entwistle 2000:93). Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Bourdieu 1977), and its application to the sociology of cultural taste and aesthetics (Bourdieu 1984), are seen to be especially helpful in this regard, particularly via his development of the concept of the ‘habitus’. For Entwistle, “The habitus is used to describe the way we come to live in our bodies and how our body is both structured by our social situation, primarily our social class, but also produced through our own embodied activities.... It can be argued that the habitus predisposes individuals to particular ways of dressing” (Entwistle 2007:103). Bourdieu coins the notion of the bodily ‘hexis’ to describe the embodiment of our habitus in our styles of deportment, our gestures, our ways of carrying ourselves and so on. Dress can be conceptualised as part of the hexis in so far as it forms part of our habitual embodiment, whilst at the same time illustrating how such habits are open to self-reflexivity and a conscious engagement with wider social forces. As Fowler puts it:

“This stress on the unconscious and bodily expressions of the social (‘hexis’)... does not deny the emergence of complex forms of resistance but it does stress the durability of the earliest actions learnt through example or apprenticeship, that is through the mastery of practice” (Fowler 1997: 17).

Craik also draws on the idea of the habitus. For her, dress is a “technical” device developed in relation to an individual body and its lived “milieu” (1994:4). Clothes “construct a personal habitus” of “specialised techniques and ingrained knowledge” (1994:4) that give people the tools by which they negotiate the varying demands of their lives. The body, to Craik, is physical but it is trained to display “postures, movements and gestures” (1994:4) which are correct for its social environment. Fashion then becomes more than a circuit of economic activity; it becomes a means for “acculturation” (1994:5).

“In short, clothes are activated by the wearing of them just as bodies are actualised by the clothes they wear. In acknowledging this interdependence, fashion can be considered as an elaborated body technique through which a range of personal and social statements can be articulated. Fashion systems adapt to the requirements of distinct habituses” (Craik 1994:16)

Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and hexis suggest that ‘dress performances’ become so ingrained that they often become if not unconscious then products of tacit knowledge. However, it would be a mistake, I suggest, to ignore the elements of self-conscious reflection in embodied practices of dress. These are very usefully brought to the fore in accounts that emphasise the articulation of the embodied self with the social through practices of reflexivity and experimental anxiety. In an influential article on ‘fashion and anxiety’, Clarke and Miller (2002) argue that it is less the case that our dress is dictated by the fashion industry than that the fashion system exists because of the existential need for modern selves to be fashioned. In the modern world there are greater freedoms, but also requirements, for us to present who we are, to others and to ourselves. For Clarke and Miller, the predominant experience of this self-fashioning is anxiety. Based on ethnographic research with women in London, they emphasise the concern expressed for fashioning selves that gain social approval. In shopping for clothes and in choosing what to wear, the women spoken to relied in many instances on the opinions and advice of significant others (friends, family, and to a lesser extent public style gurus). For Clarke and Miller, we are endlessly anxious about how we are presenting ourselves and so we endlessly need new looks to facilitate this performance.

The embodied nature of such anxieties is brought to the fore in Longhurst’s discussion of the dress practices of pregnant women from Hamilton, NZ (Longhurst 2005). Longhurst argues that the fashion industry does not simply respond to our anxious relationship to dress, but helps to foster it. She illustrates how the development of pregnancy fashions and the rise of celebrity pregnancy images in the media (together forming a culture of ‘pregnancy chic’) have created a situation where women who are pregnant find themselves expected to conform to idealised body images: “Rather than opening up possibilities, ‘pregnancy chic’ represents for some women a new set of pressures to perform the self in yet another tightly prescribed manner.” (Longhurst 2005:443). Interestingly, though, her research also shows that partly because of this fashion culture, pregnant women find themselves able to enter public spaces displaying their pregnant figures: “Some pregnant women have thrown away the idea that the pregnant body must be

hidden and have instead adopted a fashionable and sometimes revealing style as a way of resisting constructions of the pregnant subject as modest, ‘respectable’, domestic, private and associated with nature.” (Longhurst 2005: 443). In contrast, professional women attempted to use their ‘normal’ clothes longer in the workplace, to avoid the implications that their changing bodies would no longer be fit for professional work. In pregnancy, then, women experienced anxious choices about how to present their embodied selves, conscious of having to navigate (dynamic) cultural norms, the materialities of their own bodies, the gazes of other people and the shaping of all of these across social space. As Longhurst summaries her more general argument:

“Clothes matter, however, not just for pregnant women. Clothes are used to construct different images, at different times and in different spatial contexts. Fashion and clothing are cultural constructions of embodied subjectivities—subjectivities which are intimately bound to spatialities. Lifestyle, social class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity become expressed through the production, consumption, wearing, storage and circulation of clothes in particular spaces” (Longhurst 2005:443)

Fashion and Material Culture

Running in parallel to such framings of fashion and clothing as constructing embodied subjectivities are currents of thought centred on questions of material culture. Generally, the notion of material culture looks to move beyond a perceived preoccupation with “images, talk and text” (Dant 1999:1) in cultural studies. As part of a wider concern for the ‘more than human’ constitution of our worlds, analysts of material culture argue that “society cannot be grasped independently of its material stuff” (Dant 1999:2). Most commonly this recognition of material stuff has been focused on objects, examining how they are “not just representations, but also have a physical presence in the world which has material consequence.” (Dant 1999:1/2). As Miller and Woodward (2012) phrase it, “The definition of contemporary material studies is that we need to be at least as concerned with how objects make people as with how people make objects” (2012:19).

The relevance of such arguments in the context of fashion and dress should by now be clear. If, as Crane puts it, fashion plays a central role in the “social construction of identity” (2000:1) then it does so because identity is never purely social, but a material-social assemblage. Clothes are cultural artefacts with their own agency. Thus, for Crane clothes enable different social identities to be performed and to be perceived. Clothing is also a material artefact that sits on the body and shapes us, physically and psychologically. Dress, then, has certain ‘affordances’ that shape both the social landscape and individual subjects. For material culture theorists, the significance of such shaping is only increased by the fact that we rarely pay it much critical attention. Miller, for example, argues that the more we are unaware of the materials of our lives, the more commanding a force they exert on our actions and activities: “They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so” (2005b:5).

In part this power comes from how objects and materials ‘objectify’ the apparently ‘immaterial’ realms of social relations, values, beliefs and so on. But this objectification is not simply a case of cultural meanings being projected onto inert and otherwise indistinguishable materials. Making the case for approaching clothing as material culture, Miller argues that it is the material qualities of clothing – in particular their apprehension through touch and sight – that gives it the capacity to become so meaningful; it is the “sensual and the aesthetic – what cloth feels and looks like – [that] is the source of its capacity to objectify myth, cosmology and also morality, power and values” (2005b:1). Dress has a capacity to speak to people, to be expressive of people, to be felt by people. Such capacities speak to a wider interest in what we might call ‘material agency’. From Latour’s assertion that ‘objects have agency too’ (Latour 2005) to Bennett’s appeal to a ‘vital materialism’ (Bennett 2010), social theory is now replete with calls to recognise material agency. Clothing presents a particularly powerful case of how materials are part of the very fabric of human worlds. Long-standing traditions of scholarship focused on clothing objects – in costume history or in fashion design practice, for example – and on the materials that constitute them – in textile studies – are no longer seen in opposition to the project of recognising the socio-cultural importance of dress.

Let me illustrate through two fascinating case studies. The first is Banerjee and Miller’s account of *The Sari* (2003). In this book, a picture of sari wearing in contemporary India ranging from urban Delhi to rural villages in West Bengal, the authors are at pains to present cloth and human subject in dynamic interplay. Cloth becomes clothing when on the body and through embodied

performance; and embodiment is undertaken through the material affordances of cloth that becomes clothing. Thus on the one hand, the sari is presented as a “lived garment” not as an “object of clothing” (2003:1). Entwistle has commented more generally on how the “importance of the body to dress is such that encounters with dress, divorced from the body, are strangely alienating” (Entwistle 2007 - taken from Welters and Lillethun 2007a:95). For Banerjee and Miller, it is an opening encounter with Mina, the book’s central protagonist, which makes the point. Once wrapped around Mina’s body,

“Suddenly the cloth comes alive: it exaggerates her vivacity as she turns around, her elegance as the pleats rustle at her ankles, her flirtatiousness as it slowly threatens to slide off her shoulder, her authority and dexterity as she controls its folds. Meanwhile, though we may not realise it, the sari is also scratching her with its home made rice starch, and scaring her with its constant threat to lose its shape....” (Banerjee and Miller 2003:10)

The reader is asked to “imagine” this scenario, to imagine Mina in the act of wearing. To see her inhabiting a moment in time and to see how the vitality and subtleties of her life are being expressed in the inhabitation of this garment. It is the split second, the act of recognition, the act of ‘reading’ another we are being invited into. Mina makes the sari, but the sari also makes Mina. The sari is seen in terms reminiscent of Entwistle’s conception of dress as a secondary epidermis, a negotiating layer between inner and outer self. Banerjee and Miller, quoting Tarlo, see the sari “in constant motion, being drawn, adjusted, withdrawn and redrawn in such a variety of ways that it seems almost like a part of the female body” (Tarlo 1996:160 – taken from Banerjee and Miller 2003). The act of wearing a sari can also be seen as an act of learning a technique of the body. “The potential ambiguity and transformative ability of the sari were often the first things that women commented upon simultaneously.” (Banerjee and Miller 2003:245). As I argued above, modernity has been “generally associated with a decline in relatively fixed forms of identity and social position” (Banerjee and Miller 2003:249) and this may be especially true for women; “It is often argued that for many women, the problem of contemporary living is that an individual finds herself having to identify with a growing variety of different roles and situations during the course of a day” (Banerjee and Miller 2003:249). In this context, the sari is enabling for the modern Indian woman. It has the capacity to create different dresses in one garment, as the skilled wearer can change its drape as judged appropriate to the context. At the same time, the material agency of the sari can be less amenable. It can scratch. Its wearer can lose control of

it. It can betray us.

Thomas (2007) also provides an account of the lived materiality of garments, but in relation to the consumption cultures of colonial India. Focusing on the dress of Mary Curzon in her position as Vicereine of India, she too combines attention to minute materialities, embodied practice and wider socio-political forces: “By tracing the woven embodied and material biographies of Mary Curzon’s clothing and clothing practices we can chart the intimate historical cultural geographies of modernity and colonial power” (Thomas 2007:370). One particularly notable example discussed is the so-called Peacock Dress, made up for Mary by House of Worth in Paris for the Delhi Durbar of 1903 held in celebration of the coronation of Edward VII. The fabric for this ball gown was made in India - cloth of gold, with a pattern of peacock feathers (the eyes of which are marked by iridescent beetle wings), supplemented by jewel work on the bodice and a hem of white roses. Thomas describes the significance of this dress in multiple ways. Firstly it was “the most elaborate synthesis of ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ design possible” (2007:391). The style of dress was fashionable as judged by European sensibilities; but the level of adornment was also elaborate enough to denote her rank as judged by both Indian sensibilities and European projections of these (the dress performing a sense of Oriental riches, not least because the beetle wings were widely perceived as emeralds). Second, the dress had a more narrowly political iconography too; by substituting the peacock throne with the peacock dress, Thomas describes Mary as validating “the legitimacy of the British Raj as the rightful inheritor of the Mughul Empire” (2007:392). Third, on a personal level Mary also wore a garment which made her stand out within both the Indian and European crowds: “It tied the spaces of India and Europe together through its material production, yet the individual design of the dress is indicative of her own agency in conveying the primacy of her position to her audiences” (2007:393). Finally, in all these registers cultural symbolism went hand in hand with affective power. The dress allowed Mary to ‘embody imperial spectacle’, as Thomas terms it (2007: 370), by being spectacular. It imposed itself upon the event. It had material agency.

Fashioning Geographies: Conclusions

In the above section I have set this thesis within literatures from Fashion Studies. I have drawn out two broad agendas within the field that this thesis advances. First, I have sought to tease out what I think we can fairly call a 'geographical turn' in fashion studies. This 'turn' is marked by a concern for addressing fashion not just as a closed off economic and aesthetic system but as socio-spatially located practices. The 'locating' of fashion has taken many forms, but I identified four spatial figures that have been particularly influential: the global; the city; the wardrobe; the body. Whilst driving forward distinct bodies of scholarship, these geographies are not to be held separate. Each provides a different window through which to trace out their mutual constitution. In discussing this work I have also tried to demonstrate the potential for engaging it with the sort of diaspora theory discussed in the first part of the chapter. In part such an engagement offers a substantive contribution, for example by correcting the comparative absence of work on ethnicity within fashion studies. But it also affords the possibility of a rich dialogue between diaspora and fashion studies; in which, for instance, fashion studies learn from a diasporic conception of the complexities of cultural locations.

The second broad agenda running through the above review has been the reinvigoration of research on dress. This renewed interest in dressing has corrected the balance between discussions of fashion as a system and the experience of wearing clothes on the body. It has generated various interrelated currents of work, for example focused on: the everyday negotiations of wardrobes as we decide what to wear; the role of clothes in the performance of embodied subjectivities; and the material presences and effects of clothes. In all cases, personal experiences and agencies have been brought back into the picture. In the context of this thesis, this vibrant range of work offers, I suggest, a fertile ground in which to develop further our understanding of diaspora culture. Diaspora studies have much to gain by engaging with the nuanced relations between subjectivities, bodies, socialities, materials and spaces being explored in accounts of fashion and dress. This thesis seeks to develop such an engagement.

British Asian Fashion

In the third and final part of this contextual review, I now move on to look specifically at the existing literature surrounding South Asian diasporic cultures of fashion. I consider first research on the provision of South Asian fashions in Britain, which is primarily focused on the work of designers, producers and retailers. I then turn to existing research that is more focused on the consumption of these fashion cultures and that attends in more depth to practices of British Asian dress. In both cases, given the preceding discussions, my particular concern is to assess the extent to which existing research has brought together insights from diaspora and fashion studies.

British Asian Fashion and Design

Diaspora and fashion studies have been brought together in three main ways within existing literatures on British Asian fashion and design. These concern, respectively, questions of British Asian entrepreneurial agency, of transnational space, and of creative stylization. I will take each in turn.

First, then, in work on British Asian fashion there is an emphasis on British Asian diasporic agency, in particular the agency of British Asian women. Parminder Bhachu's work is prominent here. Bhachu's interests are centred on the experience of 'twice migrants', people of South Asian origin who migrated to the UK via east Africa. In particular her focus is on Sikh and Punjabi groups, and their entrepreneurial activities. She argues that these migrants were particularly successful at establishing themselves in Britain as they lacked the powerful "myth of return" (2004:4a) of migrants who came direct from South Asia. In her book *Dangerous Designs* (2004a) and elsewhere, she develops this argument in relation to British Asian fashion. Her research charts the journey of South Asian dress forms (especially the Punjabi suit) from a marginalised dress practice to mainstream awareness. Central to her narrative are British Asian fashion entrepreneurs. Their economic activities are understood to be both culturally and politically shaped and culturally and politically significant. Thus, their success in part reflects their openness to new cultural and economic forms as a response to marginalisation; as Bhachu puts it, they "developed their improvisational, collaborative aesthetics on the margins in Britain and in previous sites where they had to struggle to constitute their ethnic identities" (2004:3a). In turn,

the emergence of British Asian fashion entrepreneurship has not only economic effects: “These new dynamics of identities through new cultural and commercial forms have created new ways of being British, new clothes aesthetics, and new sartorial economies” (2004:146a). Bhachu pays particular attention to the role of women within this entrepreneurial cultural economy, portraying them in heroic terms: “British Asian women fashion entrepreneurs have started new national and transnational rhythms of fashion. Global connectors par excellence” (2004: 5a).

Raghuram’s (2004) research on South Asian fashion entrepreneurship echoes such concerns. She argues that whilst work on globalisation had at first focused on major corporations increasingly “the social embeddedness of economic transactions” (2004:67) is being considered through work on the relations between commerce and transnational communities. Such work extends research on minority ethnic businesses, combining attention to “ethnic minority niches” (2004:68) where businesses meet the demands of ethnic minority communities with work on the role of transnational connections in cultural and economic life. What Raghuram argues (drawing from Hardill, Raghuram and Strange (2002)) is that the local knowledge of minority ethnic markets is fostered by global knowledge; there is, then, an “embeddedness” (2004:68) to the British Asian fashion economy that is both local and global. More particularly, Raghuram seeks to correct the gender blindness of much work on ethnic entrepreneurship. For example, the case study of Malini’s retail business is used to illustrate the vital role of women within the British Asian fashion economy and its implications for wider accounts of the gendering of South Asian diasporas. In brief, Malini found her own fashion consumption needs unmet by shops and fashion retailers in the UK, so she set up her own production and retail business, using producers in India to make the clothes. Malini thus made an economic niche using her cultural capital as a consumer and her diasporic connections. Raghuram recognises how this reworks some of the dominant discourses concerning gender and South Asian diasporic identity which, as I considered earlier, frame diasporic men as labour power and hence engaged with the modernity of the host society and diasporic women as embodied bearers of cultural tradition and as home-makers. In narratives of British Asian fashion, such as Malini’s, these gendered dualisms of economic innovation and cultural tradition are broken down.

Claire Dwyer’s work also argues that commercial and cultural dynamics are intertwined in British Asian fashion businesses: “The history of British post-war settlement in Britain could be told

through an account of the changing fortunes of the British Asian fashion retailing sector” (2010a:150). In a recent essay, she outlines how this history encompasses entrepreneurship, changing gendered identities, all worked out through changes in clothing provision and choices. The success of the British Asian textile and fashion industries is in part, she suggests, due to the importance placed upon textiles and dress in South Asian cultures. Early entrepreneurship began with door to door selling then, progressively, Asian shopping areas such as Wembley and Southall in London developed. Later still, as Bhachu has argued, combined with an urge to reassert diasporic identities, younger British Asians started re-engaging with South Asian fashions. Using South Asia as a point of inspiration a new style started to emerge; “British Asian women used clothing to fabricate new hybrid identities” (2010a:151). New British Asian designers gained success, using transnational networks to facilitate production. Fusing together eastern and western influences they supplied the growing demand. Also at this time, as Dwyer discusses, subsidiary media forms such as British Asian fashion journalism and British Asian wedding fairs and websites began to take off. This interest spilled over into mainstream media, shops and fashions. Clothing in this context perhaps provided British Asians with a way of displaying new identities. Overall, for Dwyer British Asian styles in the post-war period represent diasporic culture and its combination of global and local orientations: “Successive generations have transformed British Asian style through engagement with the fashion industries of the subcontinent and through fusion with more mainstream British fashion” (2010a:159).

A second, related emphasis that brings together insights from diaspora and fashion studies is focused on transnational and diaspora space. Whilst very much apparent in the writings of Bhachu and Raghuram, it is in Dwyer’s work that this theme is given the most explicit attention. As noted earlier, Dwyer co-edited a collection of essays on *Transnational Spaces* (2004) and in her own contribution to the volume she illustrates the notion in relation to British Asian fashion designers / retailers (Dwyer 2004). In this essay, Dwyer outlines five case studies -- Banwait Bros., Damini, Afreen, Ghulam Sakina and East / Anokhi -- looking at their transnationality as, or in relation to, ‘biography’, ‘business practice’, ‘stylization’ and ‘consumers’ (2004:63). Dwyer’s nuanced accounts of these cases reinforce some of the arguments developed by Bhachu and Raghuram. We see, for instance, that the intertwining of commerce and culture in British Asian fashion is embedded in transnational social connections, including (but not limited to) family ties. For example, Afreen is a label run by Naella Ahmed in London with connections to a tailoring

and dressmaking shop in Pakistan. Designs are faxed or emailed over for production in Karachi and then sent back to the UK for sale. Banwait Bros. offers a story of a family spread across three continents actively marketing their transnationality. The label Ghulam Sakina, established by the young British-Pakistani designer Liaqat Rasul, narrates a story of professional relationships with fashion and textile designers in India, driven by a complex amalgam of biographical, commercial and aesthetic forces. However, in my reading at least, Dwyer's work has two distinctive emphases. First, her account is spatially attuned. She combines attention to diverse forms of transnational mobility with a rich reading of how these help to constitute particular, contextually specific spaces. For example, she describes how the Banwait Bros. shop in Southall, London has different spaces over its two floors that engage different markets: the traditional fabric shop on the ground floor and above it a floor designed to attract a new market of young South Asian women wishing to purchase designer wear. Daminis' shop spaces are interpreted as creating a 'high street' look, their contemporary, modern feel attracting a new generation of Asian customer to see a new generation of designs and styles. Second, apparent here too is a more expansive definition of transnational agency. British Asian entrepreneurs are central figures, but they operate in a more expansive and complex cultural circuitry. Dwyer's accounts include non-British Asian entrepreneurs (in the case of East / Anokhi); and a strong sense of the importance of wider perceptions of British Asian fashion in shaping the field.

Crucial here are the media. As Rajinder Dudrah writes, "The media and British Asian fashion can be considered as two parallel tracks running alongside each other" (2010:139). Dudrah argues that there are two forms of media representation of British Asians: those from mainstream British media, and those from British Asian media forms. These intersect. In a recent essay he traces out their post-war history, reflecting on how they play out through British diaspora space. As we have seen, during this period British Asians were establishing fashion economies in British cities, where shops provided unstitched fabrics (as well as ready made garments) to cater for the home stitching economies of British Asian households. Dudrah argues that these economies were not simply domestic, but had a public role as they met demand from communities who at weekends wished to dress up to socialise together. A major form of this socialisation in the 1960s and 1970s was to attend viewings of Bollywood films. These films in turn provided fuel for fashion style as audiences took home ideas of new styles and cuts on display. Dudrah also charts the development of British Asian fashion in relation to representations in the media. As he

comments, initially “British Asian fashion, as seen through the mainstream lens, at best was curiously observed or remarked upon; Orientalist in tone, attention was paid to the loud, lurid, and ‘very different’ cultural aspects of Asians as ‘immigrant others’.” (2010:139). However, by the 1960s the BBC had started to develop lifestyle programmes aimed at British Asians, and by the 1980s, programmes were being made which saw British Asians as a permanent presence and advocated multiculturalism in Britain. Fashion played an important role in these programmes. By the 1990s, British Asian magazines such as *Asiana* were mimicking mainstream glossy fashion magazines; and the mainstream media began covering and promoting South Asian dress styles. Media figures were increasingly seen wearing saris and designs by British Asian designers. British Asian musicians such as Talwin Singh and Punjabi MC were making it in to the charts. British Asian fashion became incorporated into wider economies of style; as Dudrah writes, “British Asian Fashion now circulates globally and in turn is infused and reinvigorated with style statements from elsewhere” (2010: 144). At the same time, the media consumption of British Asians was also being transformed. As Brown writes, “An explosion in modern technologies of communication has transformed the experience of South Asians living in the diaspora in the later twentieth century, compared with the isolation of older diaspora communities from the subcontinent” (2006: 169). Thus, by the 1990s young British South Asians could access new and fast moving fashion imagery through their TVs and magazines. As viewers of these media forms they could re-imagine these images and recreate them in their own ways.

This leads us to a third emphasis in work on British Asian fashion: stylization. In discussing diaspora studies earlier, I laid out how a major concern has been the production of ‘hybridized’ cultural forms as part of diasporic creativity and identity practice. Given its representational prominence and widespread mediation, fashion has played a vital role in such developments for British Asians. Bhachu (2004a), for example, pursues this analysis in relation to the ‘shalwar kameez’ and what she terms the ‘cultural narratives of the suit’. Here she discusses the re-appropriation of the suit or shalwar-kameez as one expressive form of an emergent, defiant, dynamic Punjabi British youth culture, seen also in the development of the UK Bhangra music scene:

“It is the music, bhangra dance music in particular, that connected young Asians with their clothes and their language, in a heightening of cultural awareness on

their terms. These dialogically produced aesthetics are the very stuff of diasporas. The continual negotiation of sensibilities and expressions affirm the identities of diasporic Asians.” (2004a:23).

Bhachu discusses how influences on culture for these young people came from home and outside, a mingling of many British cultures, coming together to create new creative expressions, from Punjabi Punks to the fusion of Asian and Black British music. Seeing the Punjabi suit as a powerful and empowering dress form, Bhachu interprets it as “contesting British sartorial hegemonies” and as reflecting “the material and symbolic economies of global, national and local class styles” (Bhachu 2004:42b). She argues that cultural commodities such as the suit are part of a “diasporic aesthetic” which is at once part of global production networks and yet deeply rooted in the local and everyday. The suit as cultural artefact needs to be seen in a situated, placed manner, which considers the migration histories behind its wearing in Britain but also realises its current symbolic and political dimensions (2004:46b). In particular, for Bhachu, the promotion of South Asian fashions and their wearing in new British spaces opens up the possibility for “projecting a multiplicity of identities in negotiating new consumptions and cultural styles and new ethnicities” (Bhachu 2004:42b).

Dwyer’s work takes forward this agenda through comparison of the range of stylizations developed within the field of British Asian fashion design and retail. In Dwyer and Jackson (2003) she compares and contrasts the (related) labels of East and Anokhi. These are two fashion retailers in the UK who have a shared history of production in India. East, however, markets itself as a mainstream chain selling an ethnically diverse and “individually” designed product, whilst Anokhi has a more ambivalent relationship with the mainstream and wishes to sell an “Indian aesthetic” and maintain traditional hand blocking techniques (2003:271). Each business thus has a different relationship to the commodification of ‘South Asianness’, and this is enacted through the styling of the clothes themselves. Dwyer and Crang (2002) examine the case study of Ghulam Sakina, the label set up by British Asian designer Liaqat Rasul. Liaqat designs his clothes in the UK then has them manufactured in India for sale back in the UK. Dwyer and Crang use his case study to reflect on “the commerce in multicultural and the multicultural character of commerce” (2002:417). Liaqat was brought up in Wales; educated in the UK; undertook part of his training in Delhi, where he worked with Ritu Kumar and was influenced by her concerns for

incorporating craft traditions within contemporary fashion; before launching Ghulam Sakina and undertaking other projects, such as working for Anokhi as a designer. Dwyer and Crang argue that Liaqat's designs illustrate that the commodification of culture does not necessarily "result in the production of superficial, thin and bland ethnic differentiations" (2002:427). Instead it reveals a sense of the transnational and diasporic as a creative field, one where traditional practices are worked with in innovative ways to create new aesthetics.

Such creative re-workings have been pursued too in arenas that move beyond the commercial fashion business. Of note here are two projects – the *British Sari Story* and *Stitch* – run by Bridging Arts, an arts organisation "tackling social issues through art and art-related activities" (Roberts 2010:47). In an essay by Bridging Arts Director Susan Roberts, she describes how the *British Sari Story* began as a competition where entrants suggested a sari design to show something of life in Britain. The idea was to have patterns on a sari which showed British regionality, just as patterns on a sari in India might display Indian regionality. Amongst the winners were: Nilesh Mistry, who created a sari for London with a tube map motif, displayed in imperial purple, red and fusing into a rangoli pattern on the pallu; Fatema Khatoon Hossain, who designed a sari around the dandelions she saw growing in her garden, very British flowers but also picked and blown at so as to make a wish, and thus symbolic of movement and aspirations too; Shilpa Rajan, who drew a motif of alphonso mangos, responding to their annual appearance outside the grocers of Wembley as summer approaches; and Miranda Hicks, a textile design student from the University of Falmouth, who created a Cornish seascape sari, with ice cream cones and seagulls. *Stitch* took forward the interest in creative practice and textile traditions, and aimed at getting Muslim women to "express themselves creatively" (2010: 51) through creating and displaying their embroidery work. Both projects enabled people to link their creative skills to ideas of identity, place and culture.

British Asian Fashion and Dress

I now turn to work on the consumption of British Asian fashion and to existing research that attends in more depth to practices of British Asian dress. On the whole work takes three main forms: consideration of the markets for British Asian fashions; accounts of diasporic South Asian

identity politics as manifest through dress; and analysis of the negotiated performance of self through dress practices, where work on Muslim dress and veiling has been particularly noteworthy.

There is a comparative absence of work that explores the consumption of fashion as dress for British Asians. One notable exception is the study by Jackson, Thomas and Dwyer (2007) on the consumption of transnational fashion in London and Mumbai. In this paper, Jackson, Thomas and Dwyer discuss focus group research they conducted in both cities. This paper demonstrates the need to examine ideas of globalization, modernity and consumer culture through discussion with consumers themselves. They argue that transnational fashion consumption needs to be seen through specific localized consumption cultures. Transnational fashion, they suggest, should not be framed in terms of its origins, but instead in terms of how it is “appropriated and used” (2007: 922). In the focus group discussions they conducted with consumers, it was not where or how fashions emerged that was of key significance, but rather how they were used in specific local contexts. More generally, the paper shows how there are “multiple modernities” (2007:922) at work between the two locales of Mumbai and London, “challenging any fixing of binaries of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ or ‘East’ and ‘West’” (2007:922). There was no simple relationship observed between a modern dress practice in London and a traditional dress practice in Mumbai. Instead, ideas of modernity and tradition with regards to clothing were at times similarly experienced (in terms of ideas of modesty for example) and at times reflected on in different ways depending on local, situationally specific engagements with dress. The research thus also found that the globalization of fashion need not erase local differences. Local contexts created unique and new engagements with transnational fashions, dependant on the locally and culturally specific demands each consumer faced. The focus group discussions reported on by Jackson, Thomas and Dwyer suggested that studying fashion design or retail alone left out the crucial process of how clothes were taken from retail areas and used as a situated dress practice by consumers. It is also the argument of this thesis that looking at the situated, bodily practices of dress gives rooms for discussion of transnational lives and identities.

Other considerations of British Asian fashion and design also inevitably consider questions of dress, in so far as they recognise the important role of fashion consumers. Thus, as we saw above, for writers such as Bhachu, the British Asian fashion economy has emerged in

conjunction with a desire by British Asians to reclaim and re-appropriate South Asian dress. Bhachu (2004a and b) discusses, for example, the re-engagement with the Punjabi suit by young British Asians as one form of affirmative cultural expression. Through clothing, young diasporic Punjabi women worked through new identities. Clothing was the link between their imaginative expression of self and their very real everyday lives, all played out on their bodies. Bakirathi Mani also sees new dress forms – such as “kurtas worn over khakis, and dupattas veiling tank tops” -- as a “performance of ethnic identity” (2004:117). For Mani, such improvisational innovative expressions question the “the salience of fixed ethnic and national identities inscribed on to prediscursive biological entities” (2004:117). In bringing together literatures on embodiment and diaspora, dress for Mani is not just about gendered or racialised ideas of what is normal, instead it is a process of “active engagement and re-engagement of performing bodies” (2004:124) which creates ‘new’ styles of normal even when established styles are used. The political implications of such ‘new normals’ are ambivalent, she suggests. On the one hand, perhaps the visibility of the clothing practices of diasporic South Asians just helps to construct a new hegemonic idea of South Asia which resonates with “white Orientalist commodity chic” (2004:130). Alternatively, by looking at these new dress forms, perhaps one can see a method used by South Asian Diasporas to confront the “narrative paradigms of multicultural states” (2004:130).

Questions of identity politics and dress recur elsewhere, often framed around questions of belonging and diasporic cartographies of inclusion and exclusion. Whilst set in the Canadian rather than British national context, Amita Handa’s book *Of Silk Saris and Mini-Skirts: South Asian Girls Walk the Tightrope of Culture* (2003) is notable for portraying a common line of argumentation. The book focuses on identity construction by teenage girls of South Asian descent in Toronto, drawing on both interviews and her own autobiography. Handa too argues that, “Ethnic identities, far from being natural or fixed, can also be seen as political articulations” (2003:6). She sees culture as fluid and constantly being remade, and yet also regulated and territorialized so that cultural creativity is enacted in relation to strong senses of what might be right and wrong in particular times and places. For Handa, South Asian women’s identity is the subject of discourse from both within the South Asian diasporic community and from exclusionary ‘national’ politics and cultures. Her account is less celebratory than that of Bhachu, for example. Dress, for Handa, has been a fraught practice. She presents young women grappling with pulls from all sides. On the one hand were the urges of familial life that wished for cultural preservation; on the other was

the pull of media and mainstream culture. The fear of transgressing expectation is performed on these women's bodies: from wearing make up whilst out and scrubbing it off before seeing family members; to changing outfits in bushes to hide their different dressed selves from the 'wrong' audience. In the context of Toronto, she also argues that diasporic cultural experiences cannot be reduced to a 'clash of cultures', as the two cultures she operated within were not equally weighted. Canadian mainstream culture was seen to be "a more acceptable ethnic/cultural identity in the Canadian context than, in this case, South Asian" (2003:7). Overall, Handa describes the experience of being South Asian, female and Canadian as a 'shrinking', a loss of her voice, as her outer appearance and identity again and again were questioned and excluded.

Whilst framed around a (perhaps overly simplistic) dualism (Canadian or South Asian; mini-skirts or saris), Handa's analysis also alerts us to the situated conduct of identity. Raghuram (2004) too highlights this contextuality. For example, she comments on how South Asian dress is often limited to the ceremonial or special occasion, especially for men. For Raghuram, this highlights the "performative aspect of culture, the importance of dressing up, of knowing the appropriate social codes and of recognizing the historically and spatially dynamic nature of these codes" (2004:76). Fashion's consumption is both "temporal" and spatialised (2004:76). These geographies of dress are inflected by changes in economic status. Raghuram discusses how South Asians are gaining professional jobs and this is leading to them joining certain expected clothing strategies. Whilst classed, these strategies also have racialised and gendered meanings. For Raghuram, such forms of clothing consumption do not just illustrate a person's class, but also become a method through which new status is aimed for and negotiated. She also considers the choice of clothing worn to different retail areas. She observes that South Asians may wear South Asian clothes to a South Asian shopping area whilst wearing Western clothes to a 'mainstream' shopping centre. She wonders what precipitated this? Was it racist comments given to people transgressing these consumption practices? South Asian retail spaces can be seen as celebratory of diasporic achievement, but perhaps we need to remember that they sprang from exclusions elsewhere; "Inclusionary and exclusionary processes are simultaneously juxtaposed in the creation of specialist retail centres." (2004:79). For Raghuram, spaces become encoded with racialized meanings and dress practices negotiate that terrain.

Dwyer's research into young British Muslim women also explores the ways in which bodies are differently marked in different spaces. She identifies dress as one form of bodily marker and through discussion with 49 school girls in Hertfordshire examines how dress can be used to create "alternative femininities" (1999b:5). The dress identities she explores are doubly contested. From within the family, western clothes are associated with permissive behaviour and rebelliousness, whilst outside the home social expectations see 'eastern clothing' as exhibiting (at different times) narratives of tradition, oppression, or alternatively coolness and individuality. Muslim's women's dress has been especially focused upon by the media and Dwyer does not underplay the importance of this coverage and its stereotyping in the imaginations of the women's dress practices. She does, however, highlight other influences too, more grounded in their everyday lives. Interviewing at two different schools, it is apparent that class too has a significance on their appearance. Such classed clothing practices are enacted through more immediate concerns with peer review and immediate social networks. School based identities do not conform to the ideas of either familial groups or wider society; instead school is a place where new identities are experimented with. "This suggests that while school might be a site for the experimentation of identity for young women, the resultant identities are not necessarily 'Western' and secular ones" (1999a:148). Dwyer also discusses how imaginary spaces were thought about when dressing. What would one wear at university, or in the workplace perhaps? As Dwyer states, "The possibility of multiple subjectivities warn against any straightforward reading of identities from the body" (1999b: 21). These young women might create new selves at school; and then dress differently again in the home and in public space. Differing clothing on the body for different places offers new possibilities to create contextually sensitive expressions of self. Dwyer's work reinforces arguments from fashion studies that identity is constructed through experimentation with dress. But it goes further and shows how place is at the centre of this experimentation. The dressed habitus is developed through an understanding of what is appropriate where. Place is worked with to create new, imaginative displays of identity through dress.

In her book *Visibly Muslim* (2010), Emma Tarlo examines further how Muslims in Britain are expressing both faith and self through new forms of dress. Writing in the context of intensified public discourses and indeed Islamophobia post 9/11, within which Islamic dress in Britain has been placed at the forefront of national imaginings of 'otherness', Tarlo's analysis has three

elements that I find especially valuable. First, she contests essentialised accounts of fashion styles and associated identities. Islamic dress is not uniform, but shaped by a dynamic field of Islamic fashion as well as by the distinctive dress practices of consumers. Her discussion of the great variety of these fashions of the headscarf is interesting to note in that regard. Second, Tarlo's analysis develops existing accounts of the spatialisation of dress through emphasising the two-way relations between clothes and place. In the chapter entitled 'Geographies of Hijab', she echoes Dwyer and Raghuram in recognising the contextually specific nature of dress. She uses the example of how a Niqab would be received as 'out of the ordinary' if worn in a suburb such as Hampstead or Highgate, whilst she says that in Stamford Hill religious affiliations are expected to be displayed through dress by Hasidic Jewish and Muslim women. The rules of "social behaviour in a multicultural city with a heterogeneous population are by no means clear-cut" (Tarlo 2010:68), however. Movements by individuals across the spaces of the city mean that there is a "considerable degree of diversity concerning the expression and interpretation of appropriate bodily idiom" (2010:68). Spatialised cultures or fashion landscapes effect our everyday engagement with dress; but our dress and embodied presence also animates those landscapes. Tarlo argues that urban geographies of dress are not permanent but changeable as different groups interact with places and each other. "People move about the city, both individually and collectively, passing through the urban landscape and visually modifying it in the process" (2010:45). People morph the urban fashionscape as they go about their everyday lives, using the tube, going to school, shops, workplaces and such.

Third, Tarlo frames her analysis of these geographies in relation to the wider 'metamorphic' effects the hijab can have (see also Tarlo 2007a). For the women she spoke to, wearing the hijab, for perhaps the first time, felt like a transformative event, which altered their relationship to themselves and the spatial environments they encountered. In part, she recognises this through a biographical approach, relating such dress decisions not just to the public discourses surrounding Islamic identity in the UK and elsewhere, but to personal relationships, with significant others and with one's self. She shows how wider political movements and ideas are of deep significance in the decisions women make regarding dress (in this case to wear or not to wear the hijab), but also how these cannot be seen in isolation from their personal lives and experiences. The use of multiple case studies in her work serves to illustrate how biographically specific each experience of hijab wearing was to each woman. As Tarlo puts it:

“In highlighting the role of trans-cultural encounters in encouraging the spread of hijab in London, my aim is not to reject existing research on the politics of post-colonial resistance and the spread of global religious movements, but rather to suggest that the individual actions of women who choose to take up the hijab cannot be fully explained without also giving weight to details of personal biographic experience and the particularities of living in a trans-cultural city.” (2007a: 153/154)

Elsewhere, Tarlo (2007b) further develops this notion of ‘sartorial biographies’. Writing about three famous British Muslim women – the textile artist Rezia Wahid, the comedienne Shazia Mirza and the councillor and advisor on Muslim affairs Humera Khan – she examines how their clothing choices speak of cosmopolitan lives, where ideas of religion, politics and fashion work in connected ways. Tarlo argues that looking at the individual stories or biographies of dress for these women opens up discussion, and contests polar oppositions of Islamic dress and Western dress, or Eastern fashion and Western fashion. However, Tarlo cautions against only locating dress in relation to the self. She also examines the affects of dress on others and on the spaces one inhabits. As she puts it:

“What all of these examples also demonstrate is the extent to which however personal is a woman’s decision to adopt hijab, it is always caught up in a broad field of social relationships and discourses which both shape and are shaped by it. Ultimately, the possibility of personal transformation offered by hijab cannot be divorced from the transformation of possibilities produced by hijab as it imposes a certain way of looking and way of being in the city.” (2007b:154)

Tarlo’s approach to Islamic dress is, then, both biographical and geographical.

British Asian Fashion: Conclusions

Whilst not voluminous, there is now a developing body of research on British Asian fashion that brings together insights from diaspora and fashion studies, sometimes more, sometimes less explicitly. Existing research has shown how British Asian fashion spaces have been created and have enabled the articulation of new hybrid styles and new identities. British Asian entrepreneurs

and new South Asian media forms have created engagements with fashion based on transnational as well as local networks and have forged new fashion cultures and landscapes in British cities. Whilst the preponderance of research has been on clothing design and provision, work has also been undertaken on fashion consumption and dress. This work has in the main focused on young consumers of fashion and on 'second generation' diasporic cultures, often in the 1990s. Also, in the context of the currents of public discourse, focused on contentious aspects of dress, such as visible forms of Muslim identity. The most interesting work here recognises how dress is political, personal and spatial, part of a journeying through everyday life and its sartorial landscapes. This thesis develops that concern with how fashion cultures are consumed and experienced in everyday British Asian life. Conceptually, it takes forward the biographical and geographical orientations that have, for example, recently been promoted by Tarlo. Substantively, it moves beyond a focus on religious dress and on the youthful 'second generation' cultures of the 1990s.

Conclusion

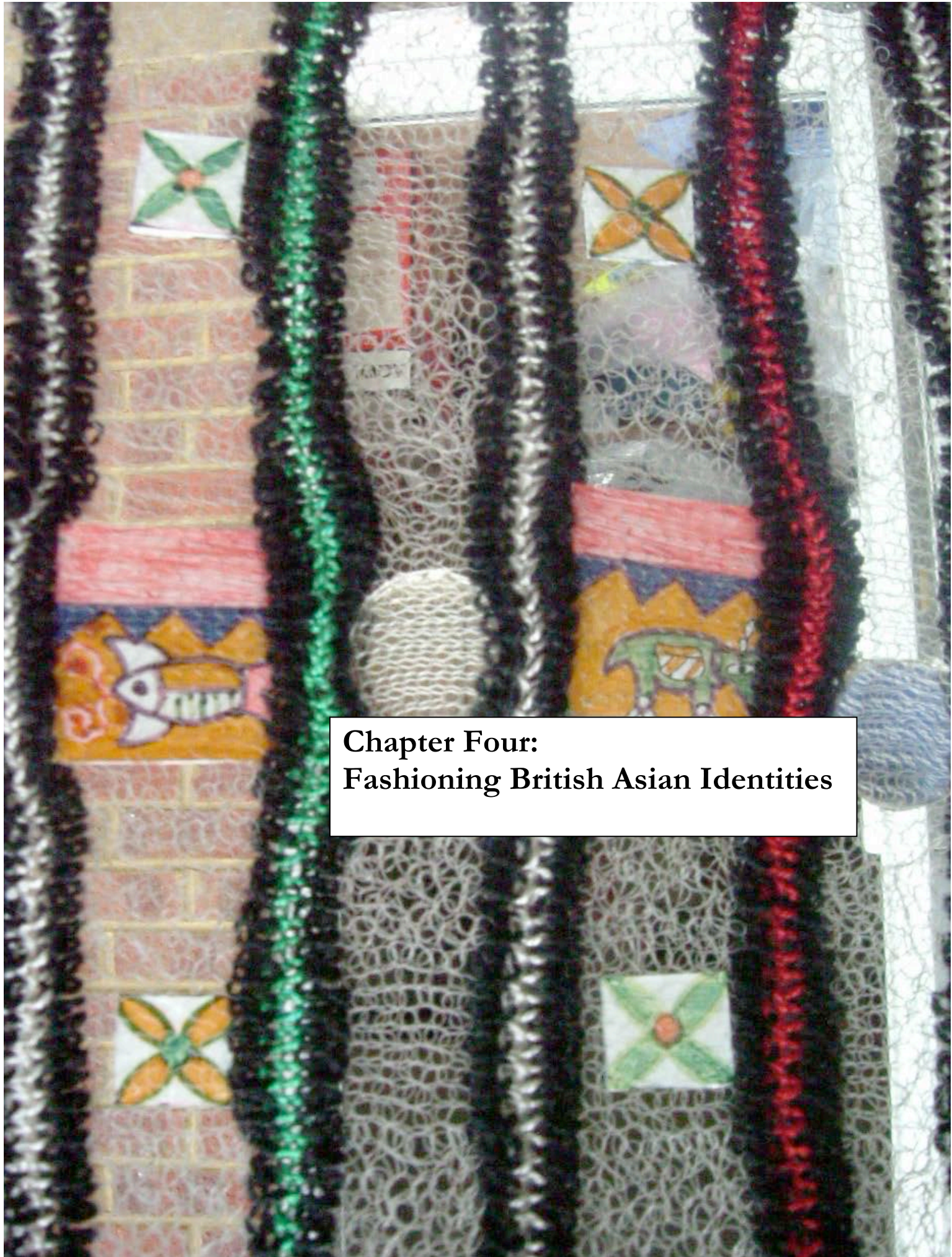
In this contextual review I have shown how the thesis's focus on British Asian women's experiences of dress aesthetics extends research in both diaspora and fashion studies, as well as advancing existing studies of British Asian fashion more specifically. To summarise, I argued that diaspora studies explore the cultural consequences of modern mass migrations and mobilities. Central are the politics of identity and belonging, played out in relation to the complexity of contemporary cultural spaces. Diaspora studies have highlighted both creative cultural productions and the cosmopolitan competencies deployed in navigating this terrain. Fashion studies have also focused on questions of identity and selfhood, increasingly framing fashion as a technology of self-constitution, symptomatic of modern self-reflexivity rather than being a 'superficial' concern. In making such arguments, fashion studies have moved to centre practices of dress (and 'getting dressed') and to recognise their role in embodied selfhood. They have also understood clothing as an important genre of material culture, illustrative of how objects and materials play an important role in human, social life. And they have taken what I termed a 'geographical turn' in the emphasis placed on both 'local' contextuality and 'global' circulations. In reviewing both these fields I have identified a number of common concerns: identity; gender

and embodiment; material culture; and, importantly, the geographies of our cultural lives. Further, my argument has been that both fields have much to gain through being brought together. The emergent geographical emphases of fashion studies benefit from the nuanced understanding of cultural locations in diaspora thought, as well as being enriched by a substantive shift towards diasporic identities. Diaspora studies can profit, I argue, from the focus of fashion studies on relating subjectivities, bodies, socialities, materialities and spaces.

Of course, this thesis is not the first research to bring these bodies of work together. In the third part of this review chapter I considered existing work on British Asian fashion in particular. In outline, I argued that this thesis's focus on women's testimonies about their dress biographies, wardrobe collections and aesthetic agency complements past research that considered the production and marketing of 'South Asian' fashions and textiles in Britain, in part through a more sustained analysis of the consumption and use of styles and materials. It also develops past research on dress practices through a broadening of focus beyond preoccupations with youthful life stages and religious, particularly Muslim, dress codes. It shares with past work a concern with dress as a form of 'practical aesthetics' (Thrift 2008: 10; see also Postrel 2003). Here, the aesthetics of dress are treated not as a superficial luxury but a fundamental form of material engagement, communication and self-fashioning. Thus Woodward (2007) talks of the personal aesthetics developed in front of the wardrobe; Bhachu (2004a) develops the idea of 'aesthetic communities' where individuals speak of collective identities through their clothes as well as asserting individuality and unique styles; and Mercer (2004:8) highlights the "aesthetic agency" enacted through fashion choices.

This thesis thus draws from the literatures of diaspora studies, fashion studies, and British Asian fashion spaces in presenting testimony that weaves together questions about personal dress decisions, issues of collective identities, matters of cultural politics, as well as expressions of cultural creativity. Throughout, my account is developed in relation to personal, place sensitive stories which bring back to these theories the unique, textured experience of life in British Asian diasporic fashion space. As outlined in Chapter One, I do so through four views upon my subject matter. First, in Chapter Four, I consider the role of dress in inhabiting what is termed 'British Asian fashion space' and ideas of British Asian identity. Second, in Chapter Five, I then examine how dress functions as a technology of diasporic selfhood, focusing on the practice of dress

choices both in everyday life and in significant ceremonies such as weddings. Third, in Chapter Six, I focus on the interrelated materialities and memories of dress, considering both the collections of clothing held within women's wardrobes and their embodied wear. Fourth, in Chapter Seven, I foreground the relations between dress and place, focusing on both the general contextuality of dress practices and the navigations of London's fashion scenes by the women researched. Overall, informed by the literatures reviewed above, my concern is with dress as a material practice that both allows and demands a contextually sensitive objectification of diasporic selves, social relations and sensibilities.



**Chapter Four:
Fashioning British Asian Identities**

CHAPTER FOUR:

Fashioning British Asian Identities

Introduction

As detailed in Chapter Three, it is now widely recognised that there is a relationship between dress and our conception of self; or to put it more prosaically, that the act of dressing is intrinsically linked to the question of ‘Is this me?’. At the same time, these relations between dress and selfhood can be conceived in differing ways. In this chapter, I focus on the relations between dress and self in terms of public discourses of identity; specifically, I consider the fashioning of British Asian women’s identities. I draw on the testimonies of my research subjects, a group of women introduced in Chapter One and Two. As explained there, these women lived in London, or in one case had just moved away. They have in common a familial biography of migration from South Asia to the UK, though in some cases this was via East Africa, and for some it was during their own lifetimes whilst for others it was only their parents or grandparents who undertook the journey. For all of them the idea of a South Asian ancestry or heritage seemed vital and alive, informing their thoughts on identity. In consequence, the women also shared a broad acceptance of the term ‘British Asian’ as in some way representative of their identity, though the nuances of this term varied significantly for them.

In exploring the dynamics of identity associated with the British Asian, I deploy the analysis of ‘diaspora’ culture and space developed in Chapter Three. I argued there that diaspora refers to more than the dispersal of a people or culture. The best scholarship in the field, I suggested, understands diasporic culture much more dynamically, as an arena through which politics of identity and belonging play out. More narrowly, this suggests that ‘diasporic dress’ is not reducible to the spatial dispersal or diffusion of dress forms attached to particular cultures. ‘Indian’ culture is not simply diffused to the UK and its presence there represented by, say, the sari. ‘Western’ culture is not simply diffused globally and its presence represented by the masculine tailored suit. Rather, dress is bound up with processes of creative production and consumption that fashion forms of diasporic identity and belonging. Past research on British

Asian fashion designers and retailing has shown fashion and dress play an important role in the wider dynamics of British Asian identity (notably Bhachu 2004a; for a full review see Chapter Three). To adapt Brah's (1996) rubric, one might say, then, that there exists a 'British Asian Fashion Space', a 'diaspora space' through which new forms of identity can be made and through which normative nationalised forms of belonging might be destabilised. Rather than focusing on its commercial protagonists, this chapter extends existing literatures by approaching that space from the perspective of the ordinary women who inhabit it as 'consumers' and wearers of clothes.

The chapter is structured in three main parts. I first look at how the women I researched relate to the general ideas of British Asian identity and a British Asian fashion space. The general lines of argumentation are twofold: to recognise 'British Asian' as a (variably) imagined space of identity; and to move beyond somewhat gestural proclamations of the British Asian as a 'hybrid' culture, by considering how these women variably framed the cultural mixings within British Asian fashion space. In the second part of the chapter I focus specifically on gender. I report on how the women saw British Asian fashion space as gendered in important ways, such that for women it both imposed dress expectations but also opened up new possibilities for creative dressing that were less apparent for men. Whilst all these arguments are woven through testimony from the women I worked with, in the last part of the chapter I present four longer narratives that speak in more detail about the various ways in which British Asian fashion space is inhabited. Focused on the "aesthetic agency" (Mercer 2004:8) and cosmopolitan competencies (Vertovec 2010) of women within this space, these stories illustrate the complex 'intersectional' identities being expressed through engagements with British Asian fashion.

As indicated in the previous sentence, running through this chapter's account of British Asian identity is a more general approach to identity, concerned with its 'intersectionality'. Let me elaborate on this approach as a final point of introduction. For the women I interviewed, 'British Asian' was an identity position that they both recognised and engaged with in the act of dressing. However, patently, this idea of being a British Asian was not the only cardinal point by which they navigated their identity. Being a woman, a mother, being a certain age, being a professional, belonging to a particular community... all of these and more weave their way through their narratives of dress and identity. Each of these facets of identity operated to create a compound

idea of self. There are times when these women communicated that being British Asian was particularly significant to them, whilst at other times other dimensions of selfhood were of primary significance. Moreover, the women's narratives highlight the extent to which these various aspects of identity are mutually constitutive, intersecting with each other so that one aspect of identity, such as gender, was influenced by many others such as religion, ethnicity or age (and vice versa). The idea of 'intersectional identities' has been coined to express this multiplicity to identity, emphasising both the situational and relational variability in how our identities are framed, and the need to study the varying dimensions of identity in conjunction rather than separately (for examples, see Brah and Phoenix 2004, Phoenix and Pattynama 2006, Verloo 2006, Ludvig 2006, Buitelaar 2006, and Valentine 2007). Ann Phoenix and Pamela Pattynama, for example, argue that recognising the intersectionality of identities offers a:

“richer and more complex ontology than approaches that attempt to reduce people to one category at a time. It also points to the need for multiplex epistemologies. In particular, it indicates that fruitful knowledge production must treat social positions as relational. Intersectionality is thus useful as a handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it.” (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006: 187).

This chapter considers my respondents' relationships to identity through such an intersectional lens. As others have noted, such a lens has particular pertinence in recognising the experiences of British Asian women and countering their marginalisation within both feminist and diasporic commentaries:

“There has been a gradual recognition of the inadequacy of analysing various social divisions, but especially race and gender, as separate, internally homogeneous, social categories resulting in the marginalization of the specific effects of these, especially on women of colour.” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 206).

The testimonies represented in this chapter take forward the recognition of the role of fashion in forging visible forms of British Asian identity by considering the multiple ways in which this identity or diaspora space is inhabited. I do not presume a shared British Asian identity, in the

sense of an undifferentiated collective, as the basis for that inhabitation. As Brah puts it: “All diasporic journeys are composite in another sense too. They are embarked upon, lived and re-lived through multiple modalities: modalities, for example, of gender, ‘race’, class, religion, language and generation. As such, all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even as they are implicated in the construction of a common ‘we’” (1996:183). For my research participants, the term ‘British Asian’ was one people recognised, indeed identified with, but it could also be troubling and of variable importance, not always at the forefront of people’s minds. This categorisation certainly did not convey all aspects of their identity; nor did it elucidate the specific and varied migration histories of the people I interviewed. For example, whilst Asian was acceptable as a generic term, in many cases other senses of communal belonging were seen as more significant or appropriate in describing an identity; the women described themselves as Indian, Kenyan, Muslim, Gujarati or Punjabi and so forth. Overall, then, my approach is to frame the ‘British Asian’ as a cultural space, imaginatively and materially produced in part through fashion cultures, that women of ‘South Asian descent’ variably engaged with, including through dress practices.

British Asian Fashion Space

Let me start with how my participants viewed the idea of British Asian identity, British Asian fashions, and their relationship. The women interviewed all considered themselves to ‘be’ (in some sense) British Asian. Whether they celebrated their dress practices, or only very reluctantly played any part in fashion systems, each also recognised that the clothes they wore related to this British Asian identification. Each had a story about the negotiation of identity through dress to relate to me. In interviews, I asked the women whether over the course of their lives they had perceived a British Asian identity emerging in terms of fashion and clothing. We also discussed more generally what terms such as ‘Asian’, ‘South Asian’ and ‘British Asian’ meant to them.

In the course of our conversations, the reflections offered on the term ‘British Asian’ are varied and complex. Amrita gives some sense of the terrain covered and the different opinions and experiences possible within it when she reflects that:

“There has been a lot of discussion around what do you call yourself. Do you call yourself British Asian, do you call yourself Indian, Asian, Pakistani? You have got to think that I am living in Britain and I am Asian. This is also my country as well as India. I think that there is an identity. But whether that is mixed or separate is not defined yet. But I think that there is a lot more awareness around now.”
(Amrita)

As Amrita suggests, the prominence given to ideas of the British Asian do not equate to their singular conception. Charanjit, for instance, says that she uses the terms British Asian, South Asian and Asian “all the time” (Charanjit), but goes on to add that this is a little worrying as she never quite understands what exactly it is to which she is referring. Her narratives of dress, however, begin to map out the identity space she perceives. They make a useful starting point for our discussion.

With regards to fashion, Charanjit recognises a fusion of styles into ‘British Asian’ fashions or aesthetics. For her, direct engagement with that fashion space is comparatively new. Others, she feels, may have experienced a fashion of this type for years, but for her this look developed when she moved from Nottingham to London. She discusses how in London there were many more ‘Asians’ in her local area and how local fashion retailing had many more references to South Asia than anywhere else she had ever lived. Moreover, Charanjit perceives a broader shift in British High Street fashion retailing, where styles that are ‘Asian influenced’ have become more prominent. In sum, Charanjit suggests that over her adult life, a British Asian quality to fashion space has become more prominent and more pertinent to her own practices of dress:

“But if you go into the local shopping area, [of Ilford], there’s loads of different Asians of different backgrounds. A lot of them are wearing [Punjabi] suits. A lot of the younger people are wearing suits and they’re much more fashionable type suits as well, so there is a kind of different atmosphere whereas I was brought up in an area in Nottingham where everyone wore English clothes and you wouldn’t have gone out in Asian clothes that much. Or you might just try it, whereas now you can wear tops with jeans and you can wear the Indian shoes with jeans and so [...] you don’t think about it as much I don’t think. I think there’s much more [availability and so you can take] probably more of a casual approach [...] So I think in that sense it’s become a bit more, well it feels much more natural as well. It doesn’t feel like you’re forcing it. I think also, [...] there was a time, a [...] few years ago, when a lot of Asian fabrics [...], that flimsy sort of printed silky type stuff, [were in the high street shops] and even now it’s used quite a lot in a lot of the shops I think. So there [are British Asian fashions available] even though they’re probably not considered to be so, you know influenced by Asian styles, I

think a lot of things you buy, you think oh I could wear that as an Indian thing. And actually there's one dress that I wore the other day, out with my friends and [I was saying to them] 'Oh you know I bought this from Zara' and [...] actually I've been thinking I might just get a pink pyjama made with it because it's the sort of thing I could wear to an Indian thing..." (Charanjit)

Charanjit's reflections highlight the emergence, in her eyes, of a British Asian fashion space constituted through localized geographies of retailing and dress within the UK. In London, ethnicised areas of the city are providing garments of South Asian styles that signal fashionability rather than just tradition. Furthermore, High Street shops are providing cuts and fabrics that suggest South Asian influences. Together, these trends make South Asian identifications through fashion visible within British urban space. In Charanjit's phrasing, the Asian becomes more 'casual' and 'natural'; a judgement that in my interpretation attempts to describe how Asian styles and identities have, for her, become more at home within (some) British spaces, less strongly marked as foreign to them. Asian styles, once perhaps worn in the home or for special occasions, are now combined with jeans and tailored clothing for more everyday public fashions. For Charanjit, it is the lived experience of everyday life that informs her relationship to clothing; and it is in the everyday spaces of British life that a British Asian fashion space is constituted, encountered and related to an understanding of identity.

Hema similarly located British Asian fashion space within the dynamics of British culture. Her testimony also echoed Charanjit's sense of historical change but brought forward racist antagonisms within that narrative. For Hema, the emergence of a mainstream expression of British Asian style is a new development. She comments on this as she reflects on the influences on her daughter's Indian clothing choices. For her daughter, mixing dress cultures is normal; for Hema it was innovative; but for Hema's mother dress was the cause of friction and acrimony as the presence of Indian styles in British public space could be met with hostility. Saira too comments on the power of broader cultural dynamics of Britishness to impact on the shape of British Asian fashion space. For her, it is contemporary discourses about Muslim identities and currents of Islamophobia that have impacted on her thinking about dress and identity. Since '9/11' and '7/7', it was her Muslim identity that had been brought to the fore, whilst the Asian aspect of her seemed to be situated in the past before these events:

“I think because of [...] current affairs [...] I have found myself in recent years, probably for the last sort of eight or nine years defining myself much more as British Muslim rather than British Asian. Whereas [...] I remember [...] it was 1997 when there was the like [...] fifty years of independence of India and all that and I felt very Brit Asian and I used to, you know, go to [...] this club night that Talvin Singh used to put on and listen to all his, you know, Brit Asian music and be like oh this is so cool. But now I think as a Muslim I feel very defined by that and less so by being Asian because the focus, everybody else, you know external focus is very much on me being a Muslim rather than being Asian so I actually feel less Asian in a way and more Muslim just because I feel [it is] not being imposed on me but you know, anything I’m ever asked about is never about being Asian. I mean sometimes it’s about you know India or Pakistan, but it’s very much about being Muslim [...] in recent years [...] and that’s caused me to [...] educate myself or heighten my own awareness of what it means to be Muslim just because I have so many questions being sort of directed at me.” (Saira)

Saira related this interrogative culture to the prominence of discussions over Muslim’s women’s dress:

“I’m not a fan of the Niqab which is like the full sort of facial covering. I don’t really think that’s actually Islamic and [...] I would question why women would want to wear that. But I am a huge fan of the Hijab you know. I think you know for a lot of people I know it’s incredibly liberating but having said that, both of those things, the Niqab and the Hijab I would defend anybody’s right to wear it or not wear it. It has to be an individual choice [...] but if they don’t want to wear then I would defend their right not to wear it. That has to come from within and I find it really frustrating, when people talk about [the Niqab and the Hijab] it’s so fetishized, isn’t it? You know it’s Muslim women’s dress. It’s like people are so obsessed by it and [...] I think it seems to people that oh all the Muslim women, they’re wearing [veils], you know they’re wearing these headscarves and Hijabs but the actual percentage of women who wear Niqab is like something like point two percent or something...” (Saira)

For others, British Asian fashion space is somewhat differently mapped and located. For Shobha, for example, it is the transnational geographies of biography and heritage that bring this space into being, prompted by localized impulses to find an individual style and to develop distinctive aesthetics. She begins her interview by saying that she grew up wanting to be “English” (Shobha). It was only when she went to St Martins College in London that she realised that she had this ‘lovely’ history behind her and considered using it to mark her individuality:

“What I’d say, I was brought up Indian in England and I kind of grew up thinking, wanting to be English. I wasn’t Indian at all, you know.... And it’s only because when I went to Art School I thought, ‘Wow’, you know, I’ve got this lovely kind of culture and everything behind me and that’s when I started looking at Indian art and Indian textiles and things. And, I kind of, had never even been to India because I’m actually from Kenya.” (Shobha)

So, in the space of a few minutes at the beginning of her interview, Shobha explores the complex nature of migration and identity. Her narrative flits around, perhaps, because her identity flits between Kenyan, Indian and English. For her, the idea of a British Asian fashion space is about a diasporic cultural heritage, albeit one that came alive for her through the localised space of art college and its emphases on aesthetic quality and individual expression.

Jasminder, too, emphasises how transnational identities informed her journey through British Asian fashion space:

“I think it comes back to being a British Indian. When you are in India you want to be known as an Indian. You don’t want to be known as a British Indian. You want to be an Indian, you want to wear dress the way they do. Whereas I suppose here, you do want to dress in some ways the same as they do, as people do here, yet you still want to keep your identity”. (Jasminder)

When asked about ‘British Asian’ as a concept, she says that “Yes, that sums it up” (Jasminder) but interestingly changes the term when responding to me to ‘British Indian’ (Jasminder). She also says that the way she dresses in different styles, “western” and “Indian” (Jasminder), reflects a duality to her identity. When in India she wants to be known as an Indian, to fit in, and her clothes reflect that. When in the UK her clothes again are chosen to reflect her sense of self as being both British and being of Indian descent.

For Jasminder, in comparison to Charanjit for example, the places and contexts of British public spaces were of lesser importance in accessing or choosing not to access the Asian part of her sartorial identity, but this reflected the different local geographies of her upbringing in the UK:

“I don’t think it’s like that any more, because of the way fashion has changed, and because of the influence Indian things have, you know you’ll see people wear Indian shoes [...] you see a lot of English girls wearing them and you’ll see them in shops such as Faith, and the sequins about are quite Indian, the bags in

Accessories are quite Indian. So a lot of the Indian influence is there and that's come over time, I don't think people are embarrassed to wear it [Asian fashions]. Maybe back in the days they would have thought 'oh I wouldn't wear it out'. But it all depends on the environment you lived in. Because I lived in quite an Indian environment, I have always had my friendship circle as Indian. Coming from London it has never been an issue for me." (Jasminder)

The variegated nature of British Asian fashion space is a recurrent theme in the narratives. One aspect of this, as Jasminder illustrates, is the contextually specific nature of dress practices. We dress in relation to where we are; our senses of identity are contextually framed. Preeti spoke to this issue. In the workplace she wears the same styles as everyone else in her office. South Asian styles are kept for special occasions. Like Jasminder, she practices the British Asian less as a constant 'fusion' or mixture and more as a difference that plays out across the contexts of everyday life. Perhaps one aspect of identity can be displayed through dress at one time, and another aspect of identity at another time:

"I think that perhaps if I was going to a friend's house I would not wear anything Indian. If it was something like Christmas or something where the whole family are together I wouldn't wear Indian. If it was an Indian specific occasion, so say Diwali, something religious, a wedding, a party, where you are actually going out I would wear Indian then. It depends on the crowd. It depends on is it less formal, more formal." (Preeti)

For Preeti, Asian fashion is kept for the special occasion and for events where 'Indianness' is being ceremonially performed. In most contexts of her life, she uses British tailored fashions to articulate her sense of self.

Other testimony emphasised a less dualistic notion of the British Asian. Rejona, for example, is wary of the equation of British Asian style with distinctive Asian dress forms becoming present within the UK. For her, there are more complex dynamics at play here:

"I don't think it's even a fashion. It's just, it's like a state of mind, isn't it? It's the way that an Asian person will incorporate their Asian-ness [laughs] into their dresses. It's not even about Asian, British Asian is pretty you know, indigenised into British [fashion], it could be the other way round it could be putting a bit of Britishness into something quite South Asian..." (Rejona)

For Saira, British childhood images are apparent in one of her favourite garments. Speaking of a Salwar Khameez, and its silvery colour, it is the iconography of CS Lewis that resonates as she speaks fondly of how it reminds her of ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe’ (see figure 1).

“it’s a really unusual colour because it’s, it’s kind of grey silver [...] and I just think it looks quite sort of wintry [...] and it’s so bizarre but it kind of reminds of like The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe [laughs]” (Saira)

Figure 1: Saira’s silvery Shalwar Khameez, reminding her of The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe.





Riza is also resistant to separating out the Asian and the British into distinct parts of herself. As she puts it, she sees herself as always ‘two things’:

“I just identify myself as British Asian [...] because I was born here and to say I was Asian could mean possibly that I was born somewhere else so that’s why I just get the British part into it. But [...] I mean I think it really is very much of your identity because [...], to me it means yes I’ve been brought up here but I am still linked, got some other links, cultural links to me as well [through my Bangladeshi family heritage] and I’m two things, you know. I’m definitely, I definitely am two things” (Riza)

These two things are not to be separated. For Riza, British Asian fashion space is characterised by mixture, fusion but above all creativity. The two things that she is are not fixed or fixing parts of her identity; they are generators of the capacity to be many things. She creates an identity for herself through dress that cannot be reduced to an identifiable location. She describes how this is an active construction of self, one that she is proud to display not least because it refuses a simple cultural location, making her hard ‘to place’:

“ I’m Asian but I’m like you know, I’m a forward thinking one and [...], I do think about the future and I do think about [...] my identity in the future and obviously with I have a much more easier life now than say our parents used to have so we’ve kind of got more choices and opportunities and so I don’t think

we should waste those. And I think we should just be pushing ourselves and I'm certainly pushing myself [...] I don't want to be stereotyped so I want people to wonder because people [...] regularly ask me where I'm from because people can't place me." (Riza)

For Riza, a diasporic fashion space is one that resists fixing cultural cartographies and disrupts established identity positions.

In conclusion, let me summarise what I have been arguing in relation to these accounts. First, public discourses of British Asian identity were on the whole seen as relevant to my participants' lives and to their practices of dress. Crucially, though, this identity was not presented as something fixed or singular, but more as a space that was both dynamic (spatially and historically) and variably understood and inhabited. Second, part of this variation was associated with how the 'Asianess' of this space was imagined and located. This was apparent both 'sociologically' (with narratives ranging across ethnic, national, diasporic and religious identifications), 'geographically' (with emphasis on both local contexts of diaspora culture in the UK and on transnational borrowings) and 'temporally' (sometimes a matter of 'heritage', sometimes of 'innovation', sometimes a combination of these, as in Shobha's identification of textile heritage as a way to make a novel, creative identity for herself). A recurrent theme of the narratives was how this diaspora space needs situating, chiming with the arguments of Knott who in looking at ethnographic work on diaspora (e.g. Metcalf 1996, Rai and Reeves 2008, McKittrick and Woods 2007) highlights how "diasporic communities, cultures and identities localize... [as well as] continu[ing] to respond to global processes" (2010:82). Third, also variable was how the hybridity of this British Asian space was imagined. Emphases on dualities of identity, and on having different identities that were performed in contextually sensitive or determined ways, were joined by senses of blurring, of that duality being called into question, of identities that resisted placing and location.

Finally, the narratives have very interesting reflections on how the 'Britishness' of British Asian fashion space was experienced. At times the narratives highlighted how fashions and dress practices both impacted on and drew from wider senses of Britishness. One of the debates left unresolved in competing accounts of the cultural significance of fashions for things Asian within early twenty-first century British culture (e.g. Dwyer and Crang 2002, Hutnyk 2000) was the potential for such fashions to reconfigure the qualities of vernacular British material culture. A

feature of many of the accounts from my participants was their sense that South Asian dress forms, materials and styles had come, in some contexts, to be mundane parts of British cultural landscapes. The specificity of contexts mattered here, for sure, whether those be particular urban neighbourhoods and cities, the normative coding of spaces of everyday life (as when work or professional identities were expected to be associated with ‘British’ dress), or the demographic markets of particular High Street brands with South Asian influences; but, with that proviso, the sense was that Britishness itself was being changed in ways that affected women’s own senses of comfort and belonging. To quote Mica Nava, there is evidence in these testimonies for “the affective elements in cosmopolitanism: of emotions and imaginaries, of empathy and desire, of the visceral” (Nava 2007:135). However, these affective elements are not always associated with senses of inclusion and belonging to a multicultural Britishness. As Saira’s discussion of her Muslim identity suggested, they can also involve the fashion space one inhabits being shaped by interrogations and otherness. British Asian fashion space plays out the wider contrasts of diasporic identity politics in its capacities both to transform and to be regulated by imaginations of Britishness.

Gender and British Asian Fashion

British Asian fashion space is gendered, something reflected on by my research participants as they talked about their own experiences, those of mothers and daughters, and those of fathers, brothers, partners and sons. In Chapter Three I outlined how existing scholarship has explored the relations between gender and diaspora in general (e.g. Al-Ali 2010, Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005) and women’s roles in British Asian fashion more specifically (notably Bhachu 2004a). In relation to the narratives collected here, two sets of arguments can be distilled that have particular purchase. These operate in parallel, but are not synonymous. First, two distinct roles for women and their dress practices can be discerned. On the one hand, women can be cast as representatives of tradition and heritage; Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk talk through “the way in which women become the carriers of the cultural symbolism that marks out the boundaries of the diasporic group” (2005:51). On the other hand, women have also been understood as entrepreneurial innovators within British Asian fashion space, developing “negotiative aesthetics” that reflect how “[w]hen you do not have classificatory systems and vocabularies of command,

your strength lies in your ability to improvise” (Bhachu 2004:3a). Second, there are also two rather different sensibilities attached to the association of femininity with dress. On the one hand, there is a sense of responsibility, burden even, to represent desired cultural attributes and values in one’s appearance or to fashion acceptable personae. And, on the other hand, there is some sense of opportunity, to explore identity through dressing and the making of one’s ‘second skin’. In our conversations, these rather different emphases were both apparent.

It was understandable that most emphasis was placed on women’s own experiences of dress and British Asian femininity, but we also talked about the translations of male opinions of dress on to women’s bodies, and their perceptions of men’s experiences of dress. With regard to the last, Hema captured much of the discussion when she said, about British Asian men, “they haven’t had the pressure, [but] they haven’t had the choice” (Hema). For her, boys and young men had a doubly different experience in British Asian cultures of fashion. They were not subjected to surveillance in the same way, but they also were denied the opportunities to explore identity through South Asian dress. We chatted about possible changes to this over the last decade or so, with an increase in South Asian fashions aimed at men. Male fashions for weddings, for example, have come to the fore. Kurtas, Sherwanis and such are all now seen at Asian weddings, whereas previous male generations wore lounge suits. This shift in practice, Hema noted, was apparent in generational differences in dress at weddings; older relatives still wearing lounge suits whilst younger men wear South Asian styles. There is evidence here, then, for some shifting in diasporic identity, in the development of dress styles that are more assertive and less focused on assimilation. Generally, though, apart from in such ceremonial dress the women continued to see important differences in men’s and women’s relations to British Asian fashion space.

Through family memories, the women related such differences to histories of settlement and livelihood in the UK. A frequent comment was that whilst British Asian men, upon migration to Britain, altered their dress practices to enable participation in work places and social lives, many British Asian women did not. Women were often tasked with the re-establishment of home making practices from the homeland, and in doing so become entangled with both practices of cultural memory and distinguishing one’s ethnicity, nationality or religion. Satinder, for instance, tells me her memories of how British climates and social dress norms were not accommodated in the dress practices of her female forbears. She discusses how Sikh men who came over to the UK

for economic opportunities cut their hair, to “fit in” (Satinder). They abandoned their kurtas for shirts. Their whole dress practice changed to fit in with British sartorial norms. These attempts to create an identity suitable for the workplace did not extend to women. In her opinion, women’s dress remained emblematic of a society British Asians wished to foster, one that remained linked to a pre-migration life. Expectations for women to dress ‘traditionally’ were not without contention. Hema remembers her mother encountering resistance from her father when she adopted the ‘beehive’ hairstyle in the 1960s, whilst both Amrita’s and Preeti’s mothers abandoned the sari in favour of western tailored clothing in the workplace. Women had to deal with, but could also work through, male resistance to change and adaptation of dress practices. Important here was the (dynamic) gendered character of participation in paid work.

Mary provides testimony on other ways in which gendered relationships to the public and private spheres had influence. She speaks of how in her family changes in male and female attire began before migrations to the UK took place. Colonial culture in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) had already impacted. She tells me how her Grandfather wore a full suit, waistcoat, tie and top hat on the upper half of his body, whilst his lower half was clothed in a sarong. This reflected his desire to show that he had engaged with colonial systems and was educated, but that he still respected his Sri Lankan heritage. She says that her husband also follows sartorial norms shaped by Sri Lanka’s colonial past. He will dress in a sarong in the house but would never go outside or answer the front door wearing it, preferring to change into trousers, which for her speaks to British colonial influence on Sri Lanka and its impact on attitudes towards Asian and Western garments.

The impact for women of tradition and dress being interwoven in South Asian fashions is one Barnali explores. She sees girls as being encouraged to uphold traditions through their dress choices. Whilst tradition plays a part in the upbringing of both boys and girls in British Asian lives, boys she feels are just expected to carry on the family name, whilst girls are taught how to dress, how to pray, do pujas. She thinks perhaps that dressing up little girls is a fun experience for the parents too. The enjoyment and pleasure of wearing South Asian clothes began early for her, and she relates this to a wider visibility given to women’s dress as a form of familial and cultural representation:

“There’s a lot of importance placed on boys because they carry on the family name and so in that case aren’t you carrying on the tradition? Should you not know about the pujas that you do and just things, bits and pieces. Why the girl?”

But maybe it's because people look at girls, don't they? Look at the daughter and they like, they want to say oh she looks so pretty or she looks so lovely and boys, you don't really [laughs]...look at boys really, you know, do you that much? 'Oh he looks very handsome' or anything like that. But it's the girls who are the focus and I suppose, I suppose you want your daughter to make you proud. You know, she like represents, almost represents your family much more than boys do, so that, in that, it's weird isn't it. So our culture's quite strange in such an importance placed on boys but then with things like this it's always the girls that are encouraged to look good." (Barnali)

Saira too recalls this from her childhood. Her early recollections of South Asian dress remind her of how being seen to be a good, modest girl was of great significance. She remembers the social mortification of being considered wayward and how this was associated with being too modern in one's dress. Dress was directly linked to ideas of feminine morality, monitored in her experience by older women. For Saira, there was a sense here of having to live up to South Asian dress and its embodiments of patriarchal assumptions. Dress here was not a material form that simply serves the wearer but something we can be placed in the service of, and interrogated by. In looking to evoke the dynamic relations between feminine selfhood and the sari in India, Banerjee and Miller speak of "a continued engagement, a conversation, between a woman and her garment" (2003:27). For Saira, as she entered adulthood dress forced an intimate conversation about gender, sexuality and modesty.

The sense that dress involved a surveillance of one's identity, by oneself as well as others, co-existed in our conversations with a different emphasis on the potential for clothing to make and extend the self. Riza expressed this when she spoke about how instead of feeling she *should* wear South Asian clothing she felt that she *could* wear South Asian clothing. Whilst she does recall as a child that other families she knew enforced gendered dress codes, her family did not insist that she wore Salwar Khameezes or head-scarves when she left the house. She thinks that perhaps it is because there were not many male influences in her household. More generally, she feels fashion cultures provide her with a vibrant field to engage in, and contrasts this with the restricted wardrobe available to men:

"Men's Asian clothes [are] just plain, [men], don't have [the] choice of colour, [...] textures and the embroidery stuff [that women have] and western men's clothes are awful as well. I just think, they've just got it really bad [laughs]. Really, I'd just hate to be a man." (Riza)

For Riza, then, the gendering of British Asian fashion space is framed less in terms of propriety and cultural authority than it is in terms of differing sensoria and engagements with material vibrancy. For her, the sensations of fabric are denied to male consumers: its varieties (in texture and embroidery); its intensities of colour; its pleasures of pattern. In my interpretation, Riza speaks here not just of personal pleasures but also of their implication in the broader social cartographies of gendered identity.

In conclusion, the narratives of dress produced with my participants suggest that British Asian fashion space was gendered in two respects. First, the space itself was gendered, shaped by expectations about the relations between men, women and British Asian identity making. The women felt a “pressure” (Hema), as Hema phrased it, to embody socially acceptable diasporic identities that could represent cultural heritage in new contexts. At the same time, they were also conscious of how women had developed fashion economies in ways that provided dress resources upon which to draw, such that women also had ‘choices’, as Hema and Riza put it. These pressures and choices played out through gendered relations of visibility, in which women’s dressed appearance was felt both to be noticed and to matter. This leads to a second way in which British Asian fashion space is seen as gendered; not just in its production but in how it is inhabited. In our conversations, the view that men and women experienced British Asian fashion space differently was clear. The women, whether wearers of South Asian dress forms or not, did observe that they had in this genre of dress more choice and availability than their male counterparts. Men seemed to be marginalised within this space, except for some instances such as weddings where more choice was becoming gradually available to them. Expectations of dress for boys and girls were narrated as different from childhood. Women found their positioning within gender relations in British Asian Fashion space to be both an imposition of responsibility for cultural custodianship but also as an opportunity for cultural choice, creativity and enjoyment. To say that what men wore was less culturally regulated would be inaccurate; but with the exception of ceremonial dress, for men dress was used to foreground other aspects of identity (workplace identities, youthfulness, modernity) and to background the South Asian dimension. For women, such ‘back-grounding’ was also discussed (e.g. in relation to Mothers being fashionable, in relation to professional identities) but a stronger emphasis was placed on intersecting one’s ‘Asianess’ with other identity and dress dynamics. How and where this was done varied of course. If, as Bhachu (2004a and b), Dwyer (2004) and others have

argued, British Asian women have actively made British Asian fashion space, then they have also actively engaged with it as consumers too (Raghuram 2004). It is to those active and varied inhabitations of British Asian fashion space that I now turn more directly.

Inhabiting British Asian Fashion Space

Jackson, Crang and Dwyer (2004) have argued that transnational spaces are ‘multiply inhabited’. In this final section of the chapter I want to pursue that assertion in relation to British Asian fashion space. More specifically, I want to do that in two ways. First, I want to emphasise the distinctive individual relations to British Asian fashion space of the women I interviewed. As one would expect, all had distinctive biographies, differing senses of style, and different relations to dress. It is important to remember that people are individuals and not just representatives of sociologically recognised populations or cultural groups. My project chimes with Avtar Brah when she writes: “My aim has been continually to deconstruct the idea of ‘Asian woman’, exposing it as a heterogeneous and contested category even as I analyse the practice of ‘Asian women’ as historically produced and embodied subjects.” (1996:13). But my argument here is not simply to assert the diversity of individual life experiences and responses against a social essentialism; it is also to see how that diversity works through a variety of routes within transnational space, characterised both by distinctive local contexts and differing transnational connections. In other words, I am suggesting that the multiple inhabitation of transnational space can be theorised, in part, in terms of the distinctive geographies of people’s life paths through it.

Second, I also want to draw out something of the agency of that inhabitation. In part this involves taking seriously Kobena Mercer’s notion of “aesthetic agency” (2004:8), emphasising how British Asian women help to fashion British Asian styles and thereby to inhabit the cultural visibility of their own embodiment. However, in so doing I am conscious of the need to counter any tendency to privilege the aesthetically adventurous. I do this by lending equal weight to ideas of ‘diasporic cosmopolitanism’ (Vertovec 2010). I discussed these in some detail in Chapter Three. To recap, this notion stresses how diasporic subjects develop analytic, emotional, imaginative and behavioural competencies in navigating cultural differences. My argument in Chapter Three was that it usefully attunes us to how inhabiting diaspora space is a matter of both

practical accomplishment and embodied dispositions. In the narratives that follow, stories tell of how personal styles developed in a transnational fashion space. Many influences, such as learned behaviours from childhood, economic constraints, diasporic histories and popular culture, work simultaneously. The women speak of how dress involved forms of what we might call ‘material cosmopolitanism’. The cultural value of this cosmopolitanism varies: at times, signalling a status in navigating fashion scenes and in styling an aesthetically impressive self; at others, being more oriented to the practical conduct of one’s life.

In order to develop these assertions this part of the chapter adopts a life story style. Rather than integrating quotations and insights from the range of my interviewees into a thematic narrative, as I have to date, I present extracts from four life stories focused on the inhabitation of British Asian fashion space. In so doing I am also able to express more strongly the intersectionality of these women’s identities. None of the stories have a single ‘argument’ that they support, but particular emphases can be discerned and by way of introduction let me outline those now. Shobha’s story describes how accessing the multiple cultures of our pasts can create cultural capital and ‘aesthetic agency’. In a discussion of sari wearing, it also emphasises how dress practices are shaped by feelings about imagined identity ideals, emotional experiences and practical requirements. We see how one biography can shape both engagement with South Asian forms in one sphere of life, here creative practice, and in another facet of life, here everyday life, lead to their marginalisation. Mary’s story has a practical emphasis, as she talks of how aesthetic agency is negotiated through more mundane requirements such as practicality, body image and comfort. In her account, the imagined, creative self meets the everyday, practical self and creates new engagements with dress. Jasminder’s story develops discussion of how the ‘material cosmopolitanism’ I talked of earlier is achieved through competencies in assessing social contexts and one’s place within them. This story serves to illustrate how diasporic identities can be understood not so much in terms of dispossession and marginalisation but as forms of cosmopolitanism that both rely on and create a sense of multicultural competency and capital. Finally, Charanjit’s story reflects on how this ‘material cosmopolitanism’ is bound up with an intersectional and multi-cultural idea of the self, which creates and transcends notions of the hybridization of the British and the Asian. All four stories speak of a British Asian fashion space that is not solely situated around the idea of the ‘British Asian’ and instead is inhabited in ways that illustrate the intersectionality of identity.

Shobha

Shobha is a lady in her forties who lives in North West London. Her narrative describes her engagement with South Asian textiles and dress throughout her life. She describes herself as an Indian brought up in England but says she grew up wanting to be English. At home her parents insisted on the maintenance of 'Indian' ways of life. The language, food and cultural commodities engaged with in the home were Gujarati. Outside, her life revolved around engagement with English cultural commodities and it was these that represented the worlds to which she aspired. Shobha wanted to identify with her English life and her parents wanted her to grow up with a keen knowledge of her Gujarati heritage. As a child she learned competencies in "code switching and cultural navigation" (Ballard 1994:30) to cope with this duality. She had never visited India during her childhood because, as she puts it, "I'm actually from Kenya" (Shobha). Her family migrated over to the UK in 1973 and she has spent the majority of her life in the UK.

However, India was to take on renewed significance as a "spatial resource" (Ma Mung 2004) as she entered adulthood, allowing her to develop a distinctive positioning for herself within her creative professional milieu. Shobha is a textile artist, educated in textiles at Central St Martins Art School in London. It was only when she went to art school that she says she started thinking about Indian textiles and cultural products and in particular how they contributed to her sense of self. Shobha explains that when she began art school she realised that Indian culture, and in particular Indian textiles, could be felt not as the burden of an inherited imagined culture, but as a resource which she could use to articulate herself as an artist and create for herself a unique aesthetic. During her degree this inspired her to take some time off and go to India for 6 months. The impact of this journey at a pivotal time in her life was profound. Since then, she says, all of her artwork has Indian imagery and fabrics as its inspirational source. Her degree show at CSM featured a mix of Indian imagery and fabrics as its focal point, and that focus continued in her Masters at the Royal College of Art. Figure 2 is an example of Shobha's textile artworks which have Indian imagery and fabrics as an inspirational source.

Nonetheless, developing her artistic self through Indian fabrics and dress has not heralded a major change in her choice of everyday dress. Interestingly she says that her everyday dress is not greatly influenced by Indian styles and is predominantly centred on western tailored clothing. She sees this as better expressing her everyday embodied identity more accurately than South Asian garments. We talk about this some more in relation to sari wearing. Shobha describes how she has a wedding to attend in the following week. She says she is determined this time to wear a sari. Often she thinks about the sari but then, with some regret, opts for the easier option of a Salwar Khameez suit. On a recent trip to India she even had some new sari blouses made to enable her to feel more comfortable in the sari; however she feels this has not happened and familiar feelings of discomfort begin to spring in her mind when thinking of which garment to choose. “It’s just not me” (Shobha), she says, when thinking about the sari. She says she feels “restricted in it” (Shobha) even though she considers that at the wedding she will for the most part be sitting down.

As we talk we explore more about Shobha’s ambivalent relationship to the sari. It seems there are a number of factors in her decision to wear or not wear Indian clothing. Firstly, she is motivated to rebel against gendered assumptions of what Indian women should wear. She describes being dressed up as a ‘Barbie’ doll when getting married. The practices of display associated with gendered notions of femininity do not appeal to her. She laughs that it was bad enough that her name was being taken from her, but to lose her comfort in her embodiment (by being dressed up by others) was the last straw:

“When I first got married, I got loads of saris, and I kind of felt I had to wear them and I felt, hey my name was taken away, you know, my identity and now my clothes [laughs]. And my parents didn’t ever tell me what to wear you know; they didn’t actually tell me what to wear; but it still felt as if I had to behave in that, not bride, but whatever they call them, Barbie kind of way, you know?” (Shobha)

Figure 2: example from Shobha's textiles.



Whilst this comment is made with humour, it perhaps highlights that for some actively positioning themselves against wearing certain Indian dress forms enables them to connect to ideas of feminism and to resist gender stereotypes. Or at least it allows them to connect with other aspects of their identity that resonate more strongly to them, such as being an independent, educated woman. For Shobha, it is not that Indian dress is inherently less progressive than ‘western’ garments. Rather, it is the context in which she encounters the sari that makes it problematic, a context in which (for her) the sari becomes a material means to constitute women (and her own self) as visible and decorative representations of a culture.

Also impacting on her use of dress are more emotional biographical factors. Saris are associated with loss and mourning for Shobha, in part through the death of her mother. Her mother wore saris all the time. Twenty years ago, around the time of Shobha’s wedding, her mother died of breast cancer. Saris still remind Shobha of her mother and of the happier times that they spent together before, as she puts it, her family’s “bubble burst” (Shobha). There were times in her life when the sari was reflective of her sense of identity. In her teenage years she attended Gujarati

social occasions and loved wearing the sari at them. She would ring around her cousins and friends, find out what they were wearing and actively engage with the latest fashions. However the death of her mother created a rupture with this dress practice and her adolescent experience of family.

The third reason for Shobha's clothing choices is related to everyday demands that many women across the country might also feel impacting on their wardrobe decisions: a lack of time and energy. Now she has three daughters, she says, and by the time she has got them ready for the day she hardly has the will or time to devote to her own look. Becoming a mother herself prioritises looking after her daughters rather than spending time in front of the mirror. She chooses quick, easy clothing that enables her to dress quickly but also to feel good in her clothes. Comfort and ease are for Shobha associated with 'British' clothing. This is not a function of some essential material quality; a sari might have the same comfortable feel for someone who wore it more often. But for Shobha, tailored clothing allows her to walk and sit without thinking about the garment she is wearing, and escapes the emotional resonances that the sari has for her.

Mary

Mary is a lady in her fifties. She is medically trained but at present works as a textile artist in London. She has had much success with her artwork made of Indian textiles and using Indian textile techniques, and has been widely exhibited. I met Mary in London in the summer of 2008. She took the time to talk to me about her relationship with dress and how this developed over the course of her life. Mary lives in London with her husband and two teenage daughters. She was born in Sri Lanka, moving to London with her parents at the age of 3. She later returned to Sri Lanka as a teenager where she trained in medicine before marrying her husband and returning to the UK. Mary's relationship to dress and textiles developed hand in hand with her transnational life and its movements between London and Sri Lanka. Her narrative gravitates between the Hampstead of her childhood, the Sri Lanka of her teenage self and the London suburbs of her adult life. Mary's life and dress practices have developed and changed as her interaction with her environment has developed and changed. Her experience of dress is set in

the context of the historical relations between London and Sri Lanka as well as the personal relations she has with these two real and imagined locations.

Meeting Mary you find she has an energy and spark that surrounds her. I found her apparently conservative dress to be somewhat misleading, or at least to hide a more rebellious relationship to the world that she performs through her clothes. In conversation, a picture emerges. Never wanting to conform exactly to expectations, Mary's whole bodily practice has developed in relation to a determination to assert 'Mary'. It is this urge to express herself, combined with an acknowledgement of the lived reality of dressing, that powers Mary's inhabitation of British Asian fashion space. Whilst a desire to appear 'individual' is important when dressing, of greater import to Mary is the capacity for clothes to facilitate the practical performance of her self. Creating a look that enables her to function effectively in everyday life is at the forefront of her mind, albeit in relation to what she takes to be her idiosyncratic bodily hexis:

“I think it's also my height. And I think if I wear a short skirt people see me as a child rather than as a mature woman. And I don't walk with any grace and [...] I never cross my legs and sit like a lady. I always sit like a child. I've always been told off about this and people have said you can't and [that] you have no kind of body language that says I'm a person in authority. I'm very childlike in that sense. I think it's like with the way I dress that I kind of try to assert some sort of authority and say I'm in charge. I mean my children [...] say 'When are you gonna grow up mummy?' [laughs]” (Mary)

She says that as she is short in height her need to stand out in clothes is greater. She jokes that people tend not to notice that she is there so she tries to establish a look in clothes that sets her apart. She is, in her mind, a 'tom-boy' (Mary). She spent her formative years choosing trousers and culottes over dresses and feminised clothing. She remembers travelling to college in Sri Lanka in trousers on her bike, feeling as if she was cycling her way free of social expectations. She is, as she puts it, a 'free spirit' (Mary), who has always wished to express that in her dress. She speaks warmly of how her husband has always encouraged her in this freedom of expression.

Her earliest memories of dress coincide with her parents moving to London when she was three years old. Mary's father was an academic and moved to London with his wife and only child. She remembers arriving in London and moving into one room in Hampstead. Finances were tight for her parents and she wore many clothes sent for her from Sri Lanka. Her aunts back there were

professional seamstresses and so created for her a wonderful wardrobe of smock dresses, highly decorated and sometimes bejewelled, “really over the top dresses that no [laughs] child in England would ever wear” (Mary). Her mother, on the other hand, would not stitch at all. The youngest of ten children, she had been a concert pianist and so “none of the sisters allowed her to even hold a needle” (Mary). The rest of Mary’s wardrobe came from whatever her mother could obtain in Hampstead. She remembers that when she was about twelve years old the parcels of dresses from Sri Lanka stopped coming. Once back in Sri Lanka, and in a conscious appreciation of her aunts’ skills, Mary took up sewing classes and became proficient in dress-making. She began to make for her mother sari blouses and other such items; she comments, “it was almost like a role reversal, so I used to create my own clothes” (Mary).

Mary’s relationship with clothing developed further during her time in medical school in Sri Lanka. For the first two years any clothing was permitted. For the final three years, during the clinical practice she had to wear a sari. In Sri Lanka, to denote authority women would always wear a sari. She reflects that her mother always wore a sari outside of the home when she wanted to create the right impression, for example when she taught. She bought the fabrics for her saris and stitched up the blouses. She says that this self-provisioning was due in part to Sri Lanka’s political economy at the time; the socialist government had reduced foreign imports and because of this ready made clothes were unavailable to her. After her marriage she and her husband returned to London. This movement in her life also altered her dress practices. The blouses she had worn in Sri Lanka had been cut small to display a westernised fashion; once residing in the UK these blouses were not practical, partly because of the cold weather, partly because finances meant she was no longer driven but rather took public transport. Consequently, Mary abandoned the sari and donned western tailored clothing.

Practicality was key here. As an extreme example, she outlines how when she was undertaking her PhD in London her husband took up a post at the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth (as they were not at the time British citizens, his work opportunities were constrained). Mary therefore had “to travel from beyond Portsmouth into London on a daily basis Monday to Friday” (Mary). Mary’s journey involved driving to the ferry, a ferry crossing to Portsmouth (which was open air not “lovely cruise liners” (Mary), as she puts it), then a train journey to London, followed by the underground. At her destination her clothes were covered by a white lab coat. She says that at

this time she has no idea how she even managed to get dressed in the morning! Her dress practice revolved around established patterns which facilitated this life style. “I don’t even think I wore skirts then. It was just trousers because it was so cold, you know, travelling on an open-air ferry.” (Mary). The only time she adapted this look was for presentations and public speaking when she felt that her self needed to be clothed in different styles, not entirely designed for comfort and ease when travelling. These clothes spoke more to the person she wished to project to the audience: professional, knowledgeable and authoritative. If the sari communicated this in her Sri Lankan medical school, in London it was western tailored dress. What remained constant was Mary’s concern with finding forms of dress that allowed her self-expression. Rather than being locked into an opposition between an authentic expressive culture and an inauthentic assimilation into expected norms in the UK, Mary’s dress biography speaks more subtly about the relations between self-expression and social conformity through clothes. For Mary, some degree of social conformity facilitated self-expression, both communicatively and through allowing the practical conduct of her life.

Jasminder

Jasminder is a woman in her thirties who had lived her whole life near Heathrow in London before recently moving to Bristol. For her too, London was a vital backdrop to her life and this change of location is described with a sense of regret. She misses the diasporic spaces of London where she could readily access cultural commodities from British and South Asian cultures. Indeed, Jasminder’s look does seem to have evolved through engagement with cultural networks operating at a transnational level, including the frequent visits and interactions she had with India as a child. She takes elements from different sources to create a successful whole. Bhachu talks of how “diasporic inheritance as members of a multiply migrant community whose aesthetics are both improvisational and collaborative” gives British Asian entrepreneurial women a “cultural advantage” (2004:5a). In the case of Jasminder I would like to consider how a consumer, engaging with a transnational fashion space also used these key advantages in creating a niche for herself through her dress practice.

Jasminder grew up in a close-knit family of Punjabi origin. She speaks fondly of being the eldest female child in this family and describes how she was often dressed up in Indian clothing. Her early memories and experiences of wearing Indian clothing have normalised this dress practice. Unlike many of the women I interviewed, Jasminder does not necessarily reserve Indian clothing for occasional use. She uses it throughout the spaces of her life, albeit to different degrees. Going back to her childhood, she describes how many women in her household wore South Asian clothing on a daily basis. Her Aunts would make her Indian outfits because at the time (in the 1980s) Jasminder says that places like Southall and Green Street did not provide ready-made children's clothing. Living in an area with many other South Asian migrants meant that there were numerous weddings and occasions where Indian clothing was deemed appropriate. So, Western clothing and Indian clothing were both considered by Jasminder in terms of the fashion space she inhabited and her presentation of self. Her interest in fashion was developed by and in relation to her Aunts and other female family members. They were fashionable women themselves, taking a keen interest in what was being worn around them. Frequent trips to India meant that they kept in touch with fashion circuits there too. Jasminder began seeing transnational fashions as something surrounding her from an early age.

Now in her adult life, Jasminder continues this interest, but says that she tries to “cross-over” the genres. She often wears Indian clothing with western garments as well as wearing her saris with western style blouses and cuts. Fashion for Jasminder is not restricted to national boundaries, nor has it ever been. Her look is developed through a set of transnational relations developed by her diasporic family history. Each style speaks to the other. Fashions from both the UK and India work simultaneously and are consumed in conjunction with each other. A halter neck blouse on a sari is worn for an Asian oriented occasion, whilst a kurta is worn with jeans for everyday life in the UK. The appropriateness of a garment is intrinsically linked to occasion for Jasminder. Her inhabitation of this British Asian fashion space is a self-conscious and well thought out act. Years of observation have enabled her to successfully navigate this space. She knows which garment works where and when. Jasminder uses the British Asian fashion economy in the UK to create a look for her that works at many times in her daily life. If she buys a sari, she has the blouse tailored in two ways. One is a traditional style sari blouse, appropriate for wearing to the temple and to family gatherings. One is in a ‘western’ style cut, which she feels more reflects her own fashionable tastes. For Jasminder, dress involves the competent presentation of self, developed

through knowledge both of the fashion space and the social contexts in which clothes will be worn. In Jasminder's narrative, diasporic cultural competence is in part achieved through self-conscious dress practices. In my interpretation, Jasminder seems to indicate that her wardrobe is crafted to provide a means to express herself. Within this wardrobe are garments which display her idea of self to the world and which are designed to get her in to spaces and places that she wants entrance in to, both professional and social. Clothes don't simply come with such powers: Jasminder emphasises how garments have multiple uses and can be adapted in different ways according to the occasion to which she is wearing them; and explains that she buys clothes with an eye on such this mutability and on potential occasions for their use.

Illustratively, she describes to me the thoughts that go into her purchase of a sari. She thinks firstly about the occasion for which she is buying it. She also wants to follow the latest fashions, and to be seen as someone for whom designer garments are economically accessible. In this sense she wants to align her dressed self with certain idealisations of her self that she has, both in her own eyes and in the eyes of others. She wants to be seen as successful and fashionable. The success of the garment is not just limited to these two factors however. Also running through her mind is how 'individual' she will look in this garment. She wants to fit in on one level, but also assert her individuality on another. Jasminder recently wore a sari to an English wedding. She describes the decision behind wearing the sari in detail. Jasminder expresses how she felt it made her look elegant. In this context Jasminder is not conforming in some respects to accepted dress norms for an English wedding. She is asserting her individuality. She says that wearing this garment in this context elicited many favourable comments from other guests; they too felt she looked elegant. In this context, Jasminder wants to stand out, to be noticed and to look good. This is her measure of success. When asked where she would not wear South Asian clothing, she suggests in the context of the coffee shop in which we have met. Outside the context of smart dress for a ceremonial occasion, a sari would not work in the same way. In the context of everyday British public life, such as a coffee shop, the combination of fitting in and standing out is better achieved by the use of mainstream British fashion, perhaps accessorised with Indian style jewellery. On occasions, this accessorising might be taken further, for example in the wearing of kurta tops worn with jeans, adding individuality to an item of clothing (blue denim jeans) renowned for their ubiquity and ordinariness (Miller and Woodward, 2012). In the

everyday, Jasminder both conforms to the fashion of any other young professional woman in Britain, but she also twists this look with hints to her diasporic heritage.

In dressing Jasminder presents to the world an image of herself she wishes to display. She is an attractive, professional woman whose career has resulted in affluence and success. She wishes to communicate this to her audience. She also wants to communicate that she is a British Asian, i.e. someone who has transnational and multiple cultural centres. This aspect of her identity is, in the context of her wider project of self-presentation, framed in terms of the cultural capital of cosmopolitanism. For Jasminder, the transnational is recast not as a migrant but as a cosmopolitan, a high status look that reflects her successful negotiation of fashion spaces.

Charanjit

Charanjit is a British Asian woman in her forties. She lives with her husband and young son in Ilford. Charanjit is very much aware of the British Asian fashion scene and how it impacts on British Asian women's development of identity. Having met her through work, I went to her house in the summer of 2008 to discuss her own ideas of dress, identity and how these two had played a part in developing her own style. She has worked for various museums and charities in London, including working with British Asian women. She also runs events which bring her in to contact with people from the British Asian music scene.

Charanjit described to me her fashion consumption biography. Charanjit grew up in Nottingham. Charanjit's family are Sikh, having migrated here from Punjab to work in the textile industry. She tells me that her childhood dress practices exhibited a dualism between home and school life. At home her dress was broken up into appropriate clothing for family life, for the temple, for meeting other Asian family members and friends. However, as she reached adolescence and adulthood, the main influences on the development of her own style or sense of personal fashion were from outside of the home. Indian clothes were relegated to familial domestic space and for familial events where she felt it was appropriate to wear them. Figure 3 gives examples of Punjabi suits Charanjit has worn over the years. For example, Charanjit says that the Punjabi suit did not contribute to the development of her own personal style, but was a type of garment worn for

others and to conform to certain expectations. She always resisted attempts by her family to make her wear Punjabi suits; during this period she describes herself as quite 'anti-suit'. She did not wish to become identified in terms of the cultures associated with South Asian dress; the Punjabi suit for her represented diasporic cultures that took her away from what was her imagined space of belonging. Fashion systems and her imagined possible selves were, to her, located outside of the home and developed in relation to musical and cultural influences from the wider society in which she grew up. Her interest in 'fashion', she says, started at secondary school, but was not centred on her peer group. She says that few if any of her class-mates really had a great interest in fashion as she recognised it. So if 'fashion' or being 'fashionable' did not happen in the home, and it did not stem from interaction at school, then where did it emanate from?

For Charanjit, music and its mediation was her main guide in developing her style. Like teenagers across the UK at the time, punk and post-punk bands shot through Charanjit's world, offering up new forms of dress and exhibitions of personal creativity. Charanjit describes how "punk had just finished" (Charanjit) and how there was a real moment of excitement or atmosphere in the teenage scene in Nottingham. Musical acts such as Boy George, Culture Club, Siouxsie Sioux and the Banshees all inspired her in her dress practices. She would watch their music videos and replicate the fashions she saw there. What was in many ways her conformity to teenage culture of the time was felt by Charanjit as a means to express difference; as Wilson puts it, "Mass fashion, which becomes a form of popular aesthetics, can often be successful in helping individuals to express and define their individuality. The modernist aesthetic of fashion may also be used to express group and, especially in recent years, counter-cultural solidarity" (1985:12). In her biographical conversation with me, Charanjit narrates her engagement with a form of dress rebellion, designed on the one hand to assert individuality but also on the other to express a group affiliation, a group not from the home, or from mainstream society, but from the margins and youth culture.

Figure3: Examples from Charanjit's South Asian clothes





Whilst focused on cultural creativity emanating outside the home, Charanjit's youthful fashioning of her self was also being facilitated in the home, not so much stylistically as practically, by using the home-stitching economies associated with South Asian diasporic communities in Britain. Her mother, being a seamstress, helped her to create her 'youth culture' outfits. Whilst she began by emphasising to me how separate home and public life were in her fashion biography, on reflection she realised that the two did merge. Her mother, having access to Indian fabrics, would incorporate them into the designs that she and Charanjit worked on. Thus, the first fusions of Indian and British styles began for Charanjit in the home production of clothes copying the styles of early 1980s pop videos. Later in her teenage life, new members of the family came over from India bringing with them ideas of a fashion circuit in operation in India. These early excitements over fashion and the new inspiration from India would be influential in developing Charanjit's look in her twenties, when at Fashion College she used both Indian and British influences to develop her collection. She found that her inspiration took her towards tailored garments with Indian fabrics sewn in to the design.

The above extracts from Charanjit's, Jasminder's, Mary's and Shobha's biographical dress stories speak of women inhabiting British Asian fashion space in distinctive ways. They did not dress in the same styles; fashion played somewhat different roles in their lives; they had distinctively different biographies and those differences were important for their dress practices past and present. They do not add up to some composite figure, 'the British Asian woman'. Nonetheless, there are similar dynamics at play, which reflect wider ideas on both fashion and on diasporic identities. For instance, one theme that runs through all the narratives concerns the dual urges people have to look individual in their clothes as well as in some way to comply with accepted cultures of fashion. For all four women whose testimonies are offered here, that dynamic played in relation to cultural contexts that might be characterised as British (though their Britishness was not necessarily prominent) as well as their diasporic histories (which also played out through the vernacular landscapes of family and relations). In consequence, in various ways, Shobha, Mary, Jasminder and Charanjit, all express individuality in part through how they blend British and South Asian styles, through how they fashion 'British Asian' styles.

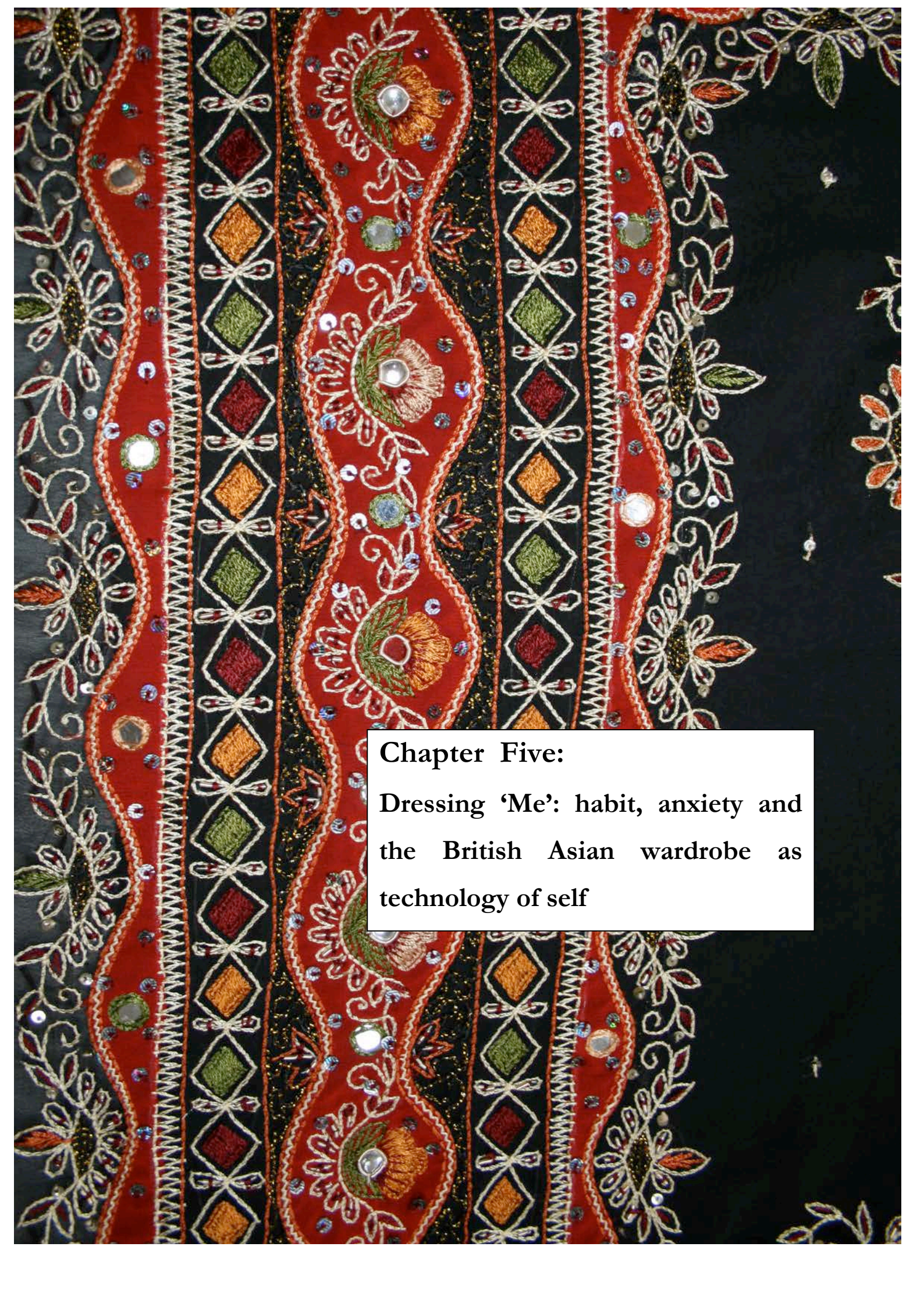
Conclusion

So, in conclusion, perhaps it is time to return to the question 'Is this Me?' as asked by women when dressing. The narratives presented here perhaps serve to further the question rather than to codify an answer. 'Me', or the self expressed through dressing, seems to change and morph depending on whom, when and where we are. This chapter explored the complexities of the fashioned 'Me' in relation to public discourses of British Asian identity. It presented British Asian women as irreducible to a singular 'British Asian Woman' and with identities implicated in the intersection of multiple dimensions of social differentiation. I have sought to indicate my arguments in introducing and concluding the various parts of the chapter, but let me reiterate some key points in conclusion.

The account offered here builds on a number of arguments previously developed in Chapter Three. These include: diaspora culture is not best conceived as part of a demographic group but in relation to dynamic spaces in which processes of identity and belonging are reconfigured away from purely national frames; and that clothing helps to constitute embodied selves. These two

starting points were developed here into an account of 'British Asian fashion space', a diaspora culture associated with the identity politics of dress. My substantive goal was to extend existing accounts of how such a space, and its dress forms, have been produced, by focusing on everyday practices of fashionable consumption. My account developed three main sets of arguments. First, I explored how British Asian fashion space was not a singular cultural form, but dynamic both spatially and historically. Its imagination varied, and those variations mattered for the identity practices being undertaken. Labels such as 'cultural hybridity' capture something of this space, but my account progressed into seeing the multiple ways in which such hybridity might be constructed. Second, I examined the gendering of British Asian fashion space and how its emphasis on the visible appearance of women was experienced by my research participants as both a pressure and a source of choice and pleasure. Third, I drew out some of the textured ways in which British Asian fashion space is actively inhabited. As well as reiterating the diverse biographies and routes that British Asian women pursue, I also emphasised the varying kinds of aesthetic agency and cosmopolitan competencies that characterise this active 'inhabitation'.

If British Asian fashion space enables an articulation of identity through dress, the fashioning of British Asian identities, it is because of complex life long engagements. It is inflected by established social engagements that people (women, in this case) have to dress. It is reworked and maintained through new experiences and ideas that keep this relationship between individual, dress and display alive and vital. Women, through engagement with dress in this fashion space, have created dress forms that signify their multiple intersecting selves: mother, professional, woman, Londoner, British Asian and so forth. Dress is managed through sartorial competencies that allow engagement with these identities effectively in British social life. It is this combination of a public fashion space and its personal inhabitations that, for these women, culturally map diasporic and post-colonial politics in to formulations and expressions of identity.



Chapter Five:

Dressing 'Me': habit, anxiety and the British Asian wardrobe as technology of self

CHAPTER FIVE:

Dressing 'Me': habit, anxiety and the British Asian wardrobe as technology of self

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I focussed on the relations between dress and self in terms of public discourses of identity; specifically, I considered the fashioning of British Asian women's identities in relation to what I termed 'British Asian fashion space'. I concluded by narrating biographical fashion stories that pointed to women's active inhabitation of this space and to the complex, intersectional identities that are at play here. I now progress my account of that inhabitation by moving away from a direct focus on British Asian identity and towards women's more intimate, embodied relations with their clothes. In other words, having thought about how dress can enable us to discuss intersecting identities and cultural competencies within a British Asian fashion space, I want to return back to the question we ask when dressing: "Is this me?" I want to approach women's life stories of dress from a complementary perspective to that of public discourses of identity: their own senses of selfhood and the role of dress within these. In so doing, I am not seeking to negate wider discourses, fashion economies or ideas of identity. We have agency and individuality when we dress, but we also operate inside a host of socially motivated and influenced expectations or norms. Rather, my aim is to develop a stronger sense of how women learn and develop an appropriate dress practice; the possibility for such learning to be both a form of cultural competence but also an arena for anxiety; and of how, in consequence, women's wardrobes work as material resources that, to adapt Craik's (1994) phrase, comprise a 'technology of the diasporic self'.

This means that the chapter works principally through three concepts that I introduced in Chapter Three in my analysis of the geographies of fashion and dress. The first of these concerns dress's relationship to what Bourdieu terms the 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1992). For Craik (1994) we produce dressed, embodied selves in part through tacit understandings of, and feelings about, what it is appropriate for us to wear and what our selfhood comprises. Diasporic cultures ask provocative questions in relation to this idea of a habitus that structures dress practices.

Diasporic geographies trouble the idea of clearly demarcated boundaries to our lived cultures and emphasise the possibility of ‘dispositions’ and ‘classification schemes’ being opened up to greater scrutiny and to change. Transnational networks enable the habitus to exist in the everyday but to be influenced from far and wide. Diasporic cultural histories emphasise new cultural influences and newly reflexive engagements with cultural traditions. Diasporic politics emphasise how dress is not simply communicative of ethnic identity (Eicher 1995) but operates in a complex field of cross-cultural communication and miscommunication. In other words, diaspora spaces suggest that our habits of dress may be forged through cultural cartographies more complex, dynamic and contested than the sociology of the French class system that Bourdieu’s account in part draws upon (Bourdieu 1984).

In part to recognise this, I complement my interest in ‘habit’ with a focus on ‘anxiety’, an emotional state posited as central to the inhabitation of fashion systems by Clarke and Miller (2002). In this important article, they argue that the fluxes and liquidities of the modern world mean that we have to invent ourselves, to fashion who we are and present that to others and to ourselves. The predominant experience of this self-fashioning, they suggest, is anxiety. They emphasise the concern for fashioning selves that gain social approval. For Clarke and Miller, we are endlessly anxious about how we are presenting ourselves and we inhabit fashion systems that both promote and promise to salve that anxiety. This argument takes on additional resonances in the context of complex, contested diasporic habituses and dress practices. It is part of a wider emphasis placed on dress as “an active process” (Craik 1994:1), whereby we dynamically use our dress practices both in an act of communication directed out to the world around us and in an act of self-constitution, in which draw the world into our very embodiment. Dressing ourselves is a constitutive act, not the covering of authentic selfhood under an outer layer of adornment (Miller 2010).

Finally, in this chapter I engage with the idea of a ‘wardrobe moment’ as a way to access these dynamics of self-constitution. To recap, Woodward argues that the “wardrobe moment” (2007:3), when we confront our clothing collections and decide what to wear, is “an act of identity construction, as choosing what to wear is an act of ‘surfacing’, ‘presenting’ and drawing in aspects of the self and relationships” (2007:7). In turn, our wardrobes, in the sense of our collections of clothes, are resources that we develop and use to support those acts of identity

construction. They facilitate our self-realization through their mediation of ‘internal’ desires and imaginations and ‘external’ receptions and social judgements. They set out some of the potentials for, and limits upon, our making of multiple selves for multiple contexts (Guy, Green and Banim 2001). To focus on ‘the wardrobe’ positions dress in relation to biographies, social relationships and the spaces of everyday life as well as public circuits of fashion culture, all of these being brought together (sometimes successfully, sometimes not) in our “personal aesthetics” (Woodward 2007: 67).

Substantively, the chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, I present three stories in which three women (Satinder, Amrita and Saira) talk of how they learned dress practices, their clothing tastes, and the cultural judgements they see as regulating these. Here, then, I try to tease out some aspects of a diasporic dress habitus. Secondly, in order to develop an understanding of how this habitus hinges on the articulation of one’s own imaginations of self and social judgements thereof, I turn to an occasion that many of the women framed as generating a heightened awareness of dress, selfhood and social judgements: weddings. Thirdly, since to be able to perform and display identity a collection of clothes is needed, in the last part of the chapter I turn my attention to the wardrobe. Here I focus more on mundane, everyday dress decisions, drawing out how the wardrobe represents within it something of the spatialities of everyday life for my participants.

Dress Biographies and the Diasporic Habitus

The Habitus

Many of the women I interviewed discussed the idea of how they ‘knew’ what was appropriate and what was not appropriate to wear. They discussed this but often could not put their finger on exactly how they ‘knew’ this. It was a subtle knowledge developed over a lifetime of observation, intuition and instruction. They ‘knew’ when to wear an Indian garment to show respect and when to wear a sari to suggest sensuality. They knew where a suit would work and where a kurta would make them stand out or perhaps present a casual fusion look in their attire. They ‘knew’ how to present their identity through clothes. This developed and complex technology seemed fascinating to me. For Entwistle, everyday dress “is a practical negotiation between the fashion

system as a structured system, the social conditions of everyday life such as class, gender and the like as well as the 'rules' or norms governing particular social situations." (2000:37). As I outlined in Chapter Three, she discusses how "a sociology of dress as situated bodily practice" (Entwistle 2000:39) is needed to consider how we learn how to dress. In particular Bourdieu and his conception of the 'habitus' is considered particularly pertinent as it sees dress "as the outcome of situated bodily practices" (Entwistle 2000:38).

Entwistle describes the work of Bourdieu as a means by which we can further develop an understanding of the body, society and dress. Dressing is a means by which we express the demands of society alongside our own personal tastes and preferences. Bourdieu's theory centres this relationship; refusing to prioritise the importance of social influences over personal agency, "instead it drives a steady course between determinism and voluntarism" (Entwistle 2000:38). The 'habitus' for Bourdieu is "a system of durable, transposable dispositions" (1994:95 – taken from Entwistle 2000:36) "that are produced by the particular conditions of a class grouping" (Entwistle 2000:36). Through the habitus, people relate to their social circumstances through embodiment. For example, Entwistle talks about tastes in relation to the habitus. Tastes are learned, acquired and used to facilitate our life in a particular class of society, or perhaps in one we aspire to participate in. "Once acquired, the *habitus* enables the generation of practices that are constantly adaptable to the conditions it meets" (Entwistle 2000:37). Entwistle discusses how the 'habitus' can be seen as "a durable and transposable set of dispositions that allows some sense of agency" (2000:37); in relation to dress, she suggest that the notion frames dress as a method by which we attempt to negotiate the social influences placed upon us with our own personal choices and preferences. In the end we decide what it is we want to wear, but it is in relation to a set of influences we learn and internalise throughout our lives.

Entwistle's perspective is of significance in the discussion of diasporic dress. Dress can be seen to be something that becomes habitual, normalised, part of culturally structured appropriate tastes. It is also part of our bodily adjustments and ways of being. In the context of the British Asian fashion space discussed in Chapter Three, and more generally in terms of diaspora space, particular issues may be added. Diasporic subjects have an even more complex set of social influences in their habitus to engage with and to learn from, their cultural milieu is a varied source from which they might learn these dress habits. The differences between home and public

space may at times be more profound, and the learning of different spaces in everyday life may create a heightened awareness of what others around them expect and see when they present their selves. Drawing back to the cosmopolitan competencies described in Chapter Three, perhaps the culturally varied elements of the British Asian habitus create a competency in managing ideas of difference and identity through dress in public and home spaces. In this section I wish to consider firstly how we learn these dress expectations, the anxiety as well as the enjoyment that these illicit, and then how we learn a technique for effectively functioning in our diasporic 'habitus' through dress.

Being Satinder

I met Satinder for our discussion at the V&A. We met through Charanjit and I did not know what she would look like as I waited for her at the museum's entrance hall. Many women walked past that to me looked like potential candidates for 'being' Satinder. I studied their clothes, jewellery, haircuts, make up and so on for clues as to who they might be. As I waited, I asked myself what was it about certain women that struck me as being in this group of potential Satinders. Well, my first assumption was that Satinder would look Asian. My second was that she would be younger than forty and smartly dressed. I knew in advance that Satinder worked in the media in London, so I imagined a smart and fashionably dressed woman coming to meet me. I remember seeing one woman in particular in the entrance hall who looked as if she was from South Asia, but I 'ruled her out' on the grounds that her clothes showed (in my viewing) that she lived or had lived recently in South Asia. She was not in my glancing opinion a 'British Asian'. I was making assumptions based on what I thought I knew when I saw certain dress practices and styles. As Entwistle states, "clothing does more than simply draw attention to the body and emphasize bodily signs of difference. It works to imbue the body with significance, adding layers of cultural meanings, which, because they are so close to the body, are mistaken as natural. It is therefore the case that items of clothing do not neutrally reveal the body, but embellish it." (2000:141). Absorbed in my thoughts, I had not really considered how many embellishments I saw when looking out at people. Satinder's arrival took me by surprise. The first thing that struck me when I saw her was not in fact her clothes. It was her bright smile. Satinder had a very friendly demeanour and I instantly warmed to her. Our following discussion was very enjoyable.

However these first few moments made me think...who could be Satinder? Who in fact was Satinder and who did she visualise herself to be when she dressed? How did Satinder learn how to dress 'Me' to illicit the correct responses from those around her? Indeed, how did she develop her own personal aesthetics so clothing became an effective strategy or cultural competency with which she met the demands of her own and others' past and present ideas of self?

Satinder seems from the outset of her narrative to have mixed feelings on these subjects: at times she comes across as at one with diasporan expectations of dress, and at other times she describes an uneasy relationship with her self as expressed through clothes. In terms of the sorts of public discourses of identity that I considered in the previous chapter, she associates with the notion of British Asian and casts it in terms of being 'half and half'. The maths are complicated here; in her mind, this is not to reduce any part of her identity. She is, she argues, no less Indian than her Grandmother who grew up in Punjab just because she grew up in Kent. As she puts it, when she looks in the mirror she is not going to see a "white" (Satinder) face . She is in her very body Indian. She proudly displays this through her engagement with Indian ways of dressing. She is equally English and feels this just as strongly. The self within is a mix of Indian and English, perhaps "fifty fifty" (Satinder) as she puts it. To show her Indian heritage she turns to dress. It is this reason that motivates her engagement with Indian clothing. The dress practices she has learned are presented as a way to display both a British and South Asian identity and to be effective in all the different spaces her diasporan life has brought her into contact with.

One aspect of dress Satinder and I talked about was concerned with how she learned when and where Punjabi styles could and would be appropriate. This she narrates, as many do, as a journey of discovery assisted by other female family members. She also discusses this as a journey of negotiation, of struggling to find a way through familial expectations and her own sense of dressing 'Me'. This journey was pivotal in the construction of her own personal aesthetics. Satinder comments on how she sees Indian families holding on to their roots through encouraging ways of life they experienced in India rather than embracing new ways of life in the UK. She fought against that way of seeing her self.

"India's probably more forward thinking than we are over here now, because we're being held back by these old traditional sentimentalities from the sixties and seventies. It's ridiculous; it's a snapshot, isn't it. You try to kind of hold on to that

[way of life] because you almost feel that you might lose your identity if you do which is an absolute, and it really makes me angry. It really gets my goat because I find with my parents as well they're very much like that. They've got this snapshot in their head of how things should be and they're just so anti change and stuff. It's really funny though how it effects you. I'm very proud to be Indian and very proud of my roots. I can speak fluent Punjabi; I want to keep hold of my roots. I absolutely adore spending time with my granddad and hearing his stories and stuff. My grandma's passed away now. I'm very comfortable with my Indian identity. But at the same time I won't say that I'm not British because I blatantly am. And [this is shown through] my work, half of my friends [are white British], do you know what I mean? My school, everything informs that. And so I'm just as proud of being British as I am of being Asian. But neither of the sides should negate the other whereas the whole kind of perception that you get from your parents is [...] that your Indian side comes first. And you're like, no actually one side comes first sometimes and the other side comes first other times, because I'm fifty fifty...." (Satinder)

The idea of creating and displaying identity through her clothes was one Satinder grappled with from a young age. Her migration history is one which started with her Grandfather. He migrated to the UK from the Punjab when his son, Satinder's father, was eleven. Her father was subsequently educated here and her mother came over from Punjab to marry him. She feels that her parents at times understood the pulls upon her to dress in a manner different to them but also were reluctant to admit new styles into the home. As a young girl she was not allowed to wear skirts as showing her lower legs and knees was thought of as immodest. Later, jeans were worn, perhaps as a compromise, but throughout her childhood if any Asian guests came to the house Satinder and her sisters were expected to change into Punjabi clothes to show respect for their guests. At times this expectation seemed oppressive but now in retrospect Satinder realises that respectful dress is perhaps something she is happy to engage with. It is a side to her upbringing and sartorial education which she looks upon sympathetically. The history of migration in her family made her parents and grandparents react in particular ways towards her dress practices. This was a result of their experiences; they, like many others, had to cope with new and perhaps challenging situations upon arrival in the UK. Preserving their culture for their children through, amongst other things, the encouragement of certain dress practices ultimately helped Satinder keep her Punjabi side a lively and vital presence within her habitus. Satinder dressed to please others at times. At these times, the 'me' was framed as a 'familial me' that in turn was a 'Punjabi me'.

Satinder's childhood involved learning that this 'Punjabi me' needed to be carefully considered and might not yield value in other contexts. When asked where or when she would wear South Asian clothing, she provides a number of thoughts. She links South Asian clothing to spaces where it would be deemed appropriate and comments on how at school she learned the reactions of others when they were, in other's opinions, inappropriately worn:

“ If I was going to the temple with my family on Sunday, then obviously it's absolutely fine, or it's New Year's and we're going to the temple. You know it's more when you're dressing up for things like a wedding or a party. Even like an English party, I wouldn't feel funny wearing a sari because I just think that's absolutely fine. But, if I was going to work then [laughs] then I'd think [not]. There were some kids at school that we always used to feel sorry for, who had to come in shalwar khameez and you used to think poor thing because everybody else wore [western clothes], I went to school where we didn't have uniform but everybody else would just be in jeans. It's just about fitting in when you're young as well and about having some kind of homogenised identity at that point. And you just don't have that at school, like especially if you're wearing a shalwar khameez and your hair is plaited anyway like down to the floor. I used to always feel sorry for [those children], so yeah I would've felt awkward if I had, you know been made to wear a shalwar khameez to school.” (Satinder)

Satinder's acceptance of South Asian dress forms into her everyday wardrobe as an adult perhaps shows a reconciliation between the push and pulls she experienced from 'both cultures' as a child. Now she loves clothes and following fashion from both the British mainstream fashion system and from British Asian or Indian fashion systems. She relishes the chance to buy and wear clothes and enjoys the additional consumer resources her diasporic culture gives her. Her use of clothes in an expressive manner is one she has created in reference to all the cultural influences through her life. It is the sum of these experiences which now allow her to display an identity which reflects her wholly. As Craik argues “Techniques of fashioning the body are a visible and primary denotative form of *acculturation*, that is to say, we use the way we wear our bodies to present ourselves to our social environment, mapping out our codes of conduct through our fashion behaviour. Our habitus of clothing creates a 'face' which positively constructs an identity rather than disguising a 'natural' body or 'real' identity.” (1994:4/5). Satinder has negotiated and learned a way to express the rich complexity of her self through clothes.

In her adult dress, she is confident, on occasions, to present herself more strongly in terms of her Punjabi heritage, and enjoys the emotional senses of connection that this can achieve. She

expresses some knowledge of Punjabi dress, rather than viewing this as in any way injurious to her cultural capital:

“I guess shalwar khameez are traditionally more Punjabi but [...] I think there’s a difference in the types, in the styles. I think you can tell if you’re, like I’ve just been to a Gujarati wedding at the weekend and their style of saris, obviously they traditionally wear more sari anyway but their entire style of saris is very different, so you could tell which is the Punjabi sari and which was the Gujarati one... I think [...] Gujarati saris are more kind of patterned. They have a lot, kind of going on. But the colours are quite muted whereas like Punjabi saris are very bright and, maybe not so much detail. There will be more diamante or something on them, I don’t know, maybe they’re richer and that’s maybe historical because obviously Punjab’s always been a richer part of India than Gujarat. But I’m not sure whether that relates.” (Satinder)

Satinder has a personal aesthetic that works in the British Asian context and in her daily life in British public space. She makes distinctions between contexts when choosing what to wear, and in particular distances the dressing of a British Asian self from the cultures of her professional environment:

“I wouldn’t go to an interview wearing a shalwar khameez or a lengha [...] I think to be fair, Indian dress is much more accepted now so I probably would wear a [Kurta] top to a party or [...], I’d wear my Indian dress to an English friend’s wedding so you know that’s fine. But at the end of the day all clothes do at the end of the day have their place, don’t they? You wouldn’t turn up at work in sparkly spangly lengha...going, ‘Hi, everybody’, when you go to work. It’s part of society isn’t it? It denotes [...] what you’re actually doing, your activity that you’re doing. And that denotes what you’re going to wear at the end of the day.” (Satinder)

Whilst in part she frames separation in relation to the ‘acceptance’ of South Asian dress more generally within British culture, in large part the issue here is one about prioritising professional identity by focusing on its widely accepted dress codes. Ethnicity is clearly an issue here, but subject to a wider logic whereby the professional embodies their profession and their work. More generally, Satinder thinks about the social influences upon her when dressing, and she reflects on the places and spaces she inhabits when dressing. She feels that wearing any outfit from any culture also has something to do with personal confidence. If you are confident you can bend the rules of socially prescribed dress forms and create new engagements with dress in public space.

“I think whatever you wear has a lot to do with confidence as well. Because obviously, if I was wearing Indian clothes and I was sort of shrinking away then maybe people would look a bit more and you’d feel a bit more vulnerable to be fair. But if I’ve worn anything [South Asian], I’d wear it with pride and as long as obviously I’m not going to an interview or to work and I was wearing Indian clothes, and if I was just walking down the road or getting on the tube to go through somewhere where nobody else would be wearing Indian clothes, I’d be fine. Because at the end of the day it’s my right to express my own identity and you know, do that through my clothing so, in that sense I wouldn’t feel, I don’t, I’d never feel uncomfortable [wearing South Asian clothing].” (Satinder)

Satinder’s narration of self emphasises how choosing to wear or not to wear South Asian clothing in her daily life is not a defensive or negative decision:

“Like I said, for me, it’s more about if I’m obviously at work you don’t wear things that aren’t appropriate and you wear things where they’re appropriate but that doesn’t necessarily mean that [...] that Indian clothes are bad, or they’re wrong or you shouldn’t be wearing them.” (Satinder)

Clearly, one could reflect on the broader politics that shape British landscapes of appropriate attire, but for Satinder that would be to miss the significance of her competency in judging contexts and of her “fifty fifty” (Satinder) identity. She reflects that not wearing South Asian dress does not mean that she holds it as a less significant form of dress. However, there are other influences in her life that hold equal resonance. She is a media professional who lives in London. The spaces and places she inhabits are varied and multiple. To create an effective strategy to negotiate these through dress requires varied and multiple dress forms to be accessed.

Craik argues that “the habitus occupied by the body imposes expectations, conventions and skills as being essential for operating in specific technically organised environments” (1994:4). We learn how to dress the ‘Me’ through a life time of bodily observances and education. In the diasporic context, the habitus is shaped by transnational relations, local preferences, familial expectations, professional status, friendship networks, all involved in the development of a personal aesthetic. It is central to Satinder’s sense of self that she has learned an effective practice of dress which she uses to enable her life and to present a stylish and fashionable expression of ‘Me’.

“...when someone looks at you they are automatically thinking something [about you] – just from the way you are dressed. They won’t think about your personality or the way you are unless you start talking to them and have a conversation. That first impression is always from the way you dress, unfortunately.” (Amrita)

In this second dress story I want to turn our attention more directly to the question of how the gaze of others has an effect on our experience of culture through dress. How does the gaze of others come into our own appreciation of what we can and cannot wear? What about the moments when we are not successful with clothing, when we feel the gaze of others not supporting our dressing decisions, but instead we feel the gaze of others to be critical of them? Entwistle (2000) and Woodward (2007) both talk about how one’s sense of self is developed in part through the unease felt when the gaze of others falls upon us. The moments when we fail to wear the right thing are acutely remembered, imprinted into our consciousness. An outfit or look can lose its appeal or cease to be comfortable to wear if we find ourselves unpleasantly standing out. This concern with being ‘out of place’ or negatively judged are heightened in the ambivalent experience of diasporic cultures. One might frame this as a consequence of the need to manage dress across more complex cultural landscapes; one might also signal the importance of racism in attuning people to the possibility of negative judgement based on appearance. No matter, it interests me how the gaze of the ‘other’ impacts on to a self whose identity is fluid, morphing and multiple.

Amrita is a woman in her twenties. She lives in North West London and works in Victoria in a HR department. She lives with her mother, father and older sister. Her mother migrated to the UK from Punjab and her father from the hill station of Nenetal. She was a friendly, bubbly person, instantly likeable I thought. When we first met, she was smartly dressed in an outfit befitting her office workplace. She was neatly groomed, carried a smart handbag and wore fashionable looking shoes. In the crowd milling around Victoria on a weekday lunchtime, her dress practice to me seemed successful. She looked like she ‘fitted in’. The reason I mention this is because when interviewed about her clothing practices, and in particular her clothing practices in relation to Indian clothing, Amrita presents a tale of being watched and watching. From the outset of her narrative she talks in terms of how she imagines herself to be perceived. Whilst I thought she looked effortlessly part of the crowd, after speaking to her it was revealed that this

dress practice was well crafted, thought through and informed by many experiences from her childhood to the present day. Woodward quotes Miller as saying that “the creating of identity involves considering the self in an external form” (Miller 1987 - Woodward 2007:83). In this ‘material culture’ perspective, the act of dressing is quite such a powerful practice of identity creation because it involves regarding the self in the mirror as if from outside. It is not just that clothes become external objects through which we can gaze upon ourselves; we look at our own bodies in that way too. In thinking about dress, women consider how others see them “as measured through wider body ideals or normative ideas of what is appropriate to the social occasion” (Woodward 2007:83). Sometimes this negotiation of self and other’s perceptions through clothing is successful; sometimes we fall short of our own expectations. The act of looking into a mirror “therefore is a marriage of the intimate and the generic”, as women consider themselves in relation to these social expectations. The gaze being used here is not homogenous, instead it is “constructed, dependent upon women, location and occasion” (Woodward 2007:84). Here I would perhaps consider that when we consider the gaze, in our homes, when dressing, we are in fact involved in considering how to effectively perform our identities in relation to the gaze of others.

In conversation, Amrita describes to me how she wears Indian clothing and how she wears everyday clothing. The two styles are separate and distinct for her in terms of dress practice. Her dressing decisions are informed by a variety of knowledges gained throughout her life. Perceptions of others seem to be a primary instrument in focusing her mind on what she will and will not wear. She begins by telling me that she is yet to wear a sari. She has tried on a sari “just for fun” (Amrita) but has not worn it outside of the home. She is still young and as such Salwar suits are more fitting for her. She says she tends to wear suits or lengha depending on the occasion. Lenghas being the more ornamental garment, are perhaps more suited for weddings of relations and family; suits can be ornamental but can also be dressed down for religious events or other special occasions. I asked Amrita why these garments are not chosen on an everyday basis. She says this is a result of “the environment we have been brought up in” (Amrita). She goes on to say that she would not wear her suit to “Tesco” (Amrita) for example, and laughs at how inappropriate and ridiculous this idea is. A variety of thoughts tumble out after this exchange. As she speaks, she thinks that others do in fact wear suits and saris into public spaces of this nature and states that she is of course “not against it” (Amrita); it just doesn’t feel right for her. In fact,

she responds that whenever she has worn a suit out in public space she has been surprised by the amount of people who comment positively on her clothing choice. Reflecting on why, then, she viewed suit-wearing in Tesco as an odd idea, she suggests that it is a “cultural and environmental thing” (Amrita). In London, unlike India, the sari and the suit are not the “norm” but the exception. The person who wears them stands out from the crowd; in the context of everyday spaces where anonymity is the cultural norm this becomes negatively framed, such that they do not fit in. Craik (1994) argues that the physical body is culturally trained to be acceptable in various circumstances. Acquiring the knowledge of how to correctly present the body is part of the “‘habitus’ – simultaneously a set of habits and a space inhabited, as a way of being in the world” (1994:4). We learn ‘these ways of being’ through our interactions between our dressed bodies and the cultures around us. For Craik, fashion and dress are about the creation of technologies which enable our bodies to be acceptable through our dress choices.

Amrita’s initial contact with Indian clothes and clothing cultures came from her mother and sisters. Born in the UK, Amrita says that most of her family are still in India in the Punjab and in the hill station of Nenetal. Her narrative of Indian clothing cultures is narrated with a mixture of excitement, enthusiasm and nostalgia. Wearing Indian clothes for her brings back memories of happy times. She has predominantly worn them for family weddings, religious events and each event reminds her of a happy time spent with her family. That is not to say that as a child she always preferred wearing a suit. Her mother would encourage her to wear one and she would often refuse. Now she says the tables have turned and she looks for opportunities to wear them. She reflects that this is both due to changes in society (with Indian clothes becoming more visible in mainstream culture and perhaps, as such, more accepted) but also due to her own preferences. Over time a greater acceptance into mainstream fashion space has been visible and Amrita has been affected by this change.

She spent many summers of her childhood with family in India. Her uncle runs a fabric and clothing shop in India. Through contact with him Amrita finds herself in an enviable position for many; she has ready access to the latest tailoring and fashion styles from India. She phones her uncle, describes a design she likes and a suit arrives two to three days later by courier. This access is thought of as fortunate by those around her. As I listen to her, I myself become somewhat wistful. Realising that this relationship with Indian fashions puts her at a social advantage has

fuelled Amrita's enjoyment of Indian garments. She says she enjoys designing new looks and asking her uncle to stitch them up. Amrita says she prefers the experience of shopping in India, where shops are more attentive and clothes are altered to fit the wearer. In a shop in India, for example, Amrita applauds that one can discuss how you want your "chunni" (Amrita); how the back should be cut, whether there will be sleeves. Amrita feels that at British Asian events it would not be appropriate to wear the same garment repeatedly. As these garments can only be worn once or twice paying prices for tailoring in Southall or Wembley is not economically sensible, so she feels it is better to buy multiple salwar khameezes on visits to India. When she goes to India she has each of her salwar khameezes made up with two different salwar styles.

"Well when I go to India, especially as my Uncle has got the shop what I tend to do is (he has already made a lot) so I choose something and then I say I want it changed. What I also like doing is, we get fabric and you know to sew into a suit. I say I want my back like this and a different bottom. Like last time I went, I brought 3 suits and I brought both a churidar and a patiala salwar with it. Like the patiala salwar is more casual and churidar you can wear with heels. But if you are going to a religious function you can't sit on the floor with a churidar and you might want to wear flat shoes". (Amrita)

She has even contemplated opening a shop in Southall to further this interest. "I went through this phase of wanting a shop in Southall. I have an image of the shop I want – it would just be like India, I know how people would be served. But I think the market, the rent and things...." (Amrita). The reality of a retail business would perhaps not be practical for her, but she is still excited by the idea. She enjoys this active participation in the tailoring of her own clothes. When she wears garments sourced in this way, she is displaying to the world a number of facets of her personality that she is pleased with and that she hopes will draw positive appreciation. Firstly, they represent her creativity; she is proud of the looks she creates and feels successful when wearing them. Secondly, they present her advantageous position in relation to Indian fashions. For British Asian women interested in fashion this access to a transnational network of design and dress-making is notable and valued. Finally, in interpreting her conversation on this topic with me, I feel there is also a strong sense of affection and emotion attached to these garments. She wears on her body her relationship to India and her family. These clothes have been developed through her family's contact with Indian clothing cultures. They are a bodily reflection of the social networks she has inhabited since being a child. When she is seen in them the gaze of others feels appreciative and positive to her. She enjoys this gaze and works with it to create

social success. Here, Amrita has created a positive advantage for herself through dress in relations to her diasporan heritage.

The gaze of others around her has also influenced her relationship with clothing in more subtle and possibly uncomfortable ways. Amrita mentions fitting in as an urge she wishes to fulfil through clothing. This urge developed on the margins of her consciousness and insinuated its way into her clothing strategies over many years. She tells me of how she became aware as a child what was and what was not acceptable to wear at school. One example Amrita gives is how she observed the dress practices of another girl in her year at 6th form. Amrita thinks that this girl had just migrated to the UK “from Pakistan or somewhere”; whilst her recollection of the girl herself is vague, it is her dress practices which are firmly imprinted on her mind. She reflects that she imagines that her family were not open minded about western garments and as such stopped the girl from wearing the school uniform and instead insisted she wore suits to school. This act of dressing set her apart from the crowd to the extent that people at school avoided talking to her. Amrita found this a repellent attitude and tried to get to know this girl and found her to be “really nice, she was just like everyone” (Amrita). In this powerful memory, Amrita has come to see clothes not only a means for successful self-creation but also as a barrier, attracting forms of social judgement that prevent a proper understanding of the self. The idea that others are put off engaging with a person because of their clothes is one that Amrita comes back to during the interview. She says that she would not be embarrassed contravening convention and wearing what she wanted, but she does check out what others are wearing to events before proceeding. If going to an Indian event she would prefer Indian clothes. Before wearing Indian clothes to a more British event she would consult with a friend or relative as to what they were wearing so she was not alone in her dress practice. “I think that there are always some occasions where you think ‘oh my god will everyone be wearing English outfits? So it always helps to talk to someone else about it, so you are both wearing the same” (Amrita).

She thinks about what others will think when dressing. This comes into her mind when she looks in the mirror or in her wardrobe. It is of course not her only thought, but it is one which she is reflexive about. In her last job some women used to come into the office wearing Suits and Saris during Diwali and Eid. She says the reception to this was mixed. Some people thought it looked nice whilst others questioned the appropriateness of this garment in the workplace. The thought

of these peoples' gaze focused upon her makes her reticent to wear Indian clothes to office parties, although she acknowledges that others do and moreover thinks that they look good when they do. She gives more thought about the gaze of others when dressing for the work environment. When I ask why, she says it is "because at a family function everyone knows you, whereas at work you are always trying to give a good impression. It's a whole different way of thinking".

For special occasions in her life, when unusual dress practices are required, Amrita recounts how she will take her time, thinking through every aspect of her dress from jewellery to shoes. She does not give so much thought to this on an everyday basis. For everyday wear, more important are the ingrained social norms of clothing that come instantly to her mind, and thus the process of constructing outfits is rather different. It focuses less on specific imagined others and their gazes; at a very basic level with fitting in with the place and environment she will be occupying, through the selection of genres of items that are uncontroversial and widely accepted; and then with best comporting these in practice and in relation to her own body.

Thus, in our conversations Amrita highlights a number of factors that inform her decisions in the act of dressing. A recurrent theme was the imagined gaze of others. When thinking about fashions, we often consider what people will think if we wear a certain style. This is one manifestation of how in dress our agency is bound up with wider social and cultural structures. To dress is to perform ourselves for audiences and our own imaginations of them. As Craik writes: "Clothing does a good deal more than simply clad the body for warmth, modesty or comfort. Codes of dress are technical devices which articulate the relationship between a particular body and its lived milieu, the space occupied by bodies and constituted by bodily actions. In other words, clothes construct a personal *habitus*." (1994:4). For Amrita, transgressions of these normative structures are shied away from. She prefers to fit in, look good, be fashionable but within the constraints of a set of expectations that she has learned through a lifetime of interactions with others.

Anxiety - Saira

“I think it’s [...] growing up in a Muslim, [...] Urdu speaking family, [...] you very much have certain outfits for certain occasions, you know, so I was definitely kind of taught or advised by mum that say, for example, [...] we’re going to [...] a wedding and you should be wearing this and it’s all these kind of sort of rules and sort of traditions and if you’re unmarried then you should be dressed a bit like this, if you’re married you should be dressed a bit like that, and if you’re from this part of India then you should be wearing these kind of clothes.” (Saira)

Learning dress practices is not always an easy process. Awkwardness and anxiety can also frame these matters. Saira too felt she had learned an appropriate dress technique in her life, but this was a journey that was slow in its development and not without its pitfalls. As I have previously outlined, Clarke and Miller (2002) are among those to emphasise how women’s clothing choices are very much keyed into wider social contexts through real and imagined feelings of “social pressure primarily as a form of anxiety over potential social embarrassment”. This fear of failure through our dress choices means to Clarke and Miller “that it is above all anxiety that determines what people actually wear” (2002:192). Here, I want to take that notion of anxiety in order to highlight how habituated forms of dress are not always seamlessly undertaken without concerns about their normality or reception. At the same time, I also want to soften Clarke and Miller’s somewhat stringent claims that women are in a constant sense of anxiety about what to wear. Rather, I want to explore how habit and anxiety might interrelate in crafting the personal aesthetics of diasporic dress.

Saira’s narrative describes how her childhood was one where she wore ‘English’ clothes outside of the home and ‘Pakistani’ clothes within it. This duality is associated for her with feelings of awkwardness and anxiety. She says that neither dressed persona looked or felt quite right nor was entirely successful. She recalls the mortification of tripping on a salwar at a wedding, painfully highlighting to her how she could not carry this look off. How the “salwar would be too long, or too loose and it would [...] yeah I just have so many kind of memories of, you know, being at a function feeling incredibly uncomfortable because something was slipping somewhere” (Saira). She also recalls that at school whilst her clothes were worn with the idea of fitting in, as a child of Pakistani origin she never felt that she quite achieved this:

“ I think [...] for our generation often, you know, being the only Asian in the class and stuff like that, [it] would be quite embarrassing if your mum [...] turned up to pick you up from school wearing [...] shalwar khameez and I suppose even

though maybe when I see people wearing shalwar khameez just out shopping, it's, it seems slightly out of place. I think that's because of those experiences. Yeah, those sort of kind of feelings of slight embarrassment [...] when I was quite young [...] because it comes from insecurity and wanting to belong and wanting not to be different.” (Saira)

After her school years, creating a wardrobe of ‘fusion’ clothing enabled her to feel confident and successful with her clothes. Saira tells me how, as a teenager in the 1990s, a significant influence on her identity was the idea of Brit-Asian popular culture. She reflects that the celebrations in London of Fifty Years since Indian Independence also had a profound effect on her idea of identity. At that time, there were cultural forms, notably for Saira club nights and art exhibitions, that created something of a ‘scene’, all engaging with the idea of British and Asian culture in the UK working out a uniquely British identity. She remembers being at University and listening to Nitin Sawhney, Talvin Singh and others. She reflects that at this time she worked her look to suit the events that she was attending within this scene. She developed a new wardrobe, fusing elements from earlier outfits, to create a look which spoke to her newly forming idea of self. Bringing elements from her Salwar Khameezes with her western jeans and trousers together fashioned what she felt was a look that could celebrate both ideas of Britishness and Asianess, without underplaying or prioritising either.

Adaptation and thought went into this development of her own aesthetic and each outfit she wears today is worn with consideration to the event she is participating in. Saira describes how she wears more or less Asian clothing depending on the occasion. However, she says, sometimes whether you successfully stand out as individual or fit in with the crowd is beyond one's control. She feels that others have the power to assert their opinion on to her, regardless of how she has considered her dress. This sense that others can intrude in to her sartorial space is associated with a sense of anxiety. As a child she felt different at school because of the opinion of others. As I discussed briefly in Chapter Four, later in her life she has felt that the conception of self that she developed (of being a contemporary fusion of the British and Asian) has become less significant to others and to herself, because of the predominance of debates over Islam, British Muslims and the visibility of Muslim women via dress practices such as veiling (see also Tarlo 2010). As an adult, over the last decade the media discussions of Britishness and Islam post 9/11 left her feeling bracketed into a group identity that previously had not been at the forefront of her thoughts; she is now a British Muslim. She feels that this has had a deep mark on the

development of her look. She considers that the Hijab is a garment that aids people to develop confident looks in their milieu. She describes herself as a “huge fan of the Hijab” (Saira), arguing that it is a “liberating” (Saira) garment. However she understands that for many this garment creates anxiety, both for the wearer and those around them. These anxious, affective exchanges (see also Tarlo 2007) have led her to understand the ‘habitus’ of dress as a place where we learn dress expectations through our own somewhat anxious understanding of the anxieties of others. These anxious exchanges are keyed into, and shape, wider political relations. She suggests that the identity position of a British Muslim woman adds to senses of discomfort, antagonism even, in these exchanges:

“Because people find it [...] intimidating or antisocial or a sign of separation, but then again [...] I think you know lots of people wear things that other people might find offensive or unacceptable, inappropriate, you know. I mean it’s like I’d feel quite uncomfortable if someone was wearing something with their cleavage hanging out or when guys wear, like, really kind of tight trousers where you can see everything. I mean, I don’t really feel uncomfortable but [...] what I’m trying to say is that we have our likes and dislikes and we all have our [tastes and] something which we think ‘oh [...] god’[laughs]” (Saira)

Our bodily encounters in space are regulated and observed through our choice of dress, choices which can lead to anxiety and misunderstandings. Saira’s account also gives an indication of the different wider cultural environments we find ourselves in, and how these influence our experience of our habitus. For Saira, these ranged from school space, home space, music cultures and political cultures. In each environment dress practices are observed and monitored, but in differing manners, with differing outcomes. We adapt and change our looks to negotiate these environments. Through her adult techniques in choosing clothes, Saira feels that she has the skills and materials to assert herself, saying to the world, this is me. But, equally, she recognises that such assertions are met by, and take on significance through, the gaze of others. Those gazes are not in her control and are shaped by wider forces. This lends a certain anxiety to her habitus of dress.

Weddings

The self we create through our dress practices is a jumbled amalgamation of all that we are, have been and hope to be. We are accepting, and simultaneously rejecting, of fashions and styles in the development of our dress practice. The emotions dressing presents are complex and deep rooted. One might suggest, that for many women this is never more so than at one's wedding. Certainly, wedding stories were an important component of the dress testimonies I constructed with my research participants. In this next section, then, I want to focus in on this somewhat exceptional occasion, not least because is in its very extraordinariness it manifests in heightened form dynamics with a wider presence.

The women to whom I spoke expressed a complicated set of emotions accompanying the choosing and wearing of their wedding clothes. Figure 4 gives some examples of the ornate and beautiful saris and lenghas chosen by the women interviewed for their wedding days. On one hand, they spoke of happiness, enjoyment of the accumulation of jewellery and clothes, successful experiences of display and adornment. On the other hand, they talked of nervousness, anxiety, the imagined gaze of others piercing deep into their consciousness. If ever Clarke and Miller's (2002) emphasis on the anxiety provoked by social judgements rang

Figure 4: Wedding Saris and Lenghas





true to my participants it was probably for those who talked about their wedding days. At this moment, expectations of dress were high and the possibility of failure great. People wanted to dress for their families, conform to religious and regional expectations, but also to strike out and express themselves fully. This difficult relationship reveals in a particular moment how contradictory the self that we display through dress can be.

Weddings have a huge cultural and commercial presence within media forms aimed at British Asians (see also Dudrah 2010). Today one can access in the UK magazines such as 'Asiana', 'Asiana Wedding', 'Asian Woman', 'Asian Man', 'Asian Bride', 'Asian Groom & Man', 'Asian Fashion', 'Asian Home & Style', 'Eastern Eye Bollywood', 'Eastern Eye Occasions', whilst satellite providers broadcast channels such as 'Zee TV', 'B4U', 'Sony Net Asia', and 'Max' into homes in the UK. Weddings feature prominently. In their pages or on their advert breaks are many advertisements for companies providing wedding services. Fashions aimed at brides and grooms, jewellers providing ornate designs for wedding jewellery, function halls equipped to deal with the needs of a British Asian wedding, and caterers who provide banquets of South Asian cuisine for guests; all these and more make up the British Asian wedding economy. British Asian weddings are a celebration of families' expectations and a culmination of much preparation and thought. Guest lists can be extremely large at these events. So it is perhaps understandable that the significance attached to dress and the presentation of self is even more acutely felt when it comes to weddings. Weddings bring together the roles that dress has in fostering not only self-identity but also social relations and emotions. In the following narration, I weave together extracts from my participants' wedding stories in order to draw out a number of themes, including the significance of weddings and the subsequent anxieties surrounding them, the involvement of wedding clothes in the idea of 'tradition', and the links between wedding clothes and familial networks and relationships.

Let me start by returning to my conversations with Saira. She described the process of choosing her wedding clothes as fraught. She was editing a magazine at the time, working late to meet deadlines. She had only managed to secure two weeks off from work, one before the wedding and one after. Therefore her wedding clothes were arranged for her with great assistance from her mother and sister. They went shopping in Green Street in Newham, but there was nothing of sufficient quality at a reasonable price which she liked enough to buy. So her mother suggested

that their relatives in Pakistan have the clothes made up. Saira advised on colour, fabric, and the embroidery styles that were acceptable to her, but did not see the garment until it arrived at her house by courier. As the parcel arrived Saira realised that in the box lay all her aspirations for her wedding 'look'. The possibility of the contents of this parcel not living up to her expectations was unbearable. This moment of anticipation was followed by a moment of disappointment when all her hopes and dreams of her wedding clothes remained unfulfilled by this particular garment: "Actually, the funny thing was I remember when I first opened it up [...] I wasn't happy with it and I can't remember why I felt [that], [...] I think it was more sort of scary and made it so real that [...] it's going to happen. I remember [...] my mum being really worried because I was like, I don't think I like it" (Saira). In retrospect she reflects that these clothes became the objectification of all her anxiety and nervousness surrounding her wedding. By rejecting these clothes she was distancing herself from the event itself. Later, nearer the wedding date, she reconciled herself to the garment and came to think of it as beautiful, indeed breathtaking. The garment took on a meaning reflective of her ideal of self on her wedding day. By accepting the garment she accepted herself as a bride. The clothes became her presentation of self in this role to herself. She had been a difficult audience. She now opens the same box where her wedding clothes have been carefully stored by her mother, and finds herself thinking of sartorial success not failure. She now wonders how she ever saw things differently.

Interestingly, it seems that men in the British Asian wedding can opt to wear South Asian garments or not. Satinder reflects that at a recent wedding of a friend the bride was drowned in voluminous garments chosen for her to reflect a traditional Punjabi look. The bride herself confided that she viewed it as a garment that needed to be worn rather than wanted to be worn. The groom, however, was teased as he wore western tailored clothing. Satinder joked with him that he should have to wear something he had not chosen too:

"You know my friends just got married at the weekend and it was so funny [...] We turned up the next day just to say goodbye to them and stuff and he [the groom] was just in a t-shirt and his jeans and his wife, she was in a proper Punjabi dress. And we were just laughing because we'd never seen her in Punjabi dress properly. And she [said] my mum said this is the last time you're going to see the family. It's nice to wear a Punjabi dress. And it's almost like a kind of respect, isn't it?" (Satinder)

The wedding, then, is also an occasion when others present themselves on your body. The bride in this instance was projecting the beliefs and traditions of her family rather than presenting her own personal taste in clothes. Weddings illustrate how our own dress can in part be a material means of constituting social relationships.

Not all the women I interviewed married British Asians and in such cases the social relationships being fostered had distinctive qualities. You may recall that Hema is a woman of Indian Gujarati descent. She married a white British man. Yet her wedding clothes were reflective of a set of traditions from Gujarat. Her husband wanted to express his acceptance and appreciation of this culture of weddings by carrying on traditions from Gujarat. “My husband’s English but at the time [of our wedding] we couldn’t find anything [South Asian] for him at all, so in the end we had something tailor made for him because we had the Indian wedding as well, the Hindu ceremony and because of that [...] he himself wanted to wear the Indian suit [...] So we had a sherwani made for him” (Hema). He also brought her all the saris and effects a bride would expect to receive from her new husband’s family. Through this suite of wedding clothes, Hema and her husband worked towards successfully upholding a set of traditions and ensuring they were not marginalised by his different ethnicity. By wearing Gujarati clothes she expressed her urge to maintain links to this culture of clothing but also to include her husband into this set of traditions. Figure 5 shows the beautifully embroidered wedding clothes Hema wore at her wedding.

Shashi enjoyed her wedding and its dress practices. She jokes: “[I] want to get married again and get a whole new set of outfits; same person though, you know” (Shashi). Her marriage and the surrounding events were associated with great shopping trips and an opportunity to present herself through dress. She was also able to objectify social relations of particular poignancy:

“I was given on my wedding day the sari which I changed into before I went to my in-laws’ house. It was not one I was going to wear, but one I had draped on. It was my Mother-In-Law’s and there is also jewellery to go with it. It was [originally] her mother-in-law’s and she was given it at that time as well. Sort of a family heirloom.” (Shashi)

By wearing this sari, Shashi was connected into a female lineage in her new family.

Figure 5: Hema's wedding sari



For Divya too one of the strongest memories of her wedding related dress to family relations. Divya was the first person from her family to be married in the UK. The family had migrated from Kenya via India to the UK and Divya's wedding, as the first in the UK, was a big event for all family and friends. She remembers it as something of a blur of sartorial activity: dressing, redressing, endless presentations of self in clothes throughout the wedding weekend. The memory though that remains most poignant for her is of her "gurrchoroo" (Divya) sari. This is a sari given to the bride by her maternal uncle to be worn on her wedding day.

"When I got married my mum's brother, that side of the family, has to provide the wedding sari and [showing garment] this was the one that they gave. So, I mean, I have worn it a few times, you know, in the wedding, and I wore it at my sister's wedding. That's another one that I wouldn't give away..."(Divya)

In Gujarat the tradition is for this to be a white sari. Divya was living in the UK, her Uncle was in India. The effort her Uncle went to sending over a sari from India at the time was especially emotive for Divya. This garment linked her into to her family extended across the world. By wearing this garment on her wedding day she presented to the assembled audience a presentation not only of her self but also of her socially connected familial self. She linked back into ties which the experience of migration might have severed.

Charanjit too narrates how her wedding was a time when dress was of particular significance in bringing her family together. Her wedding story started years before the actual event. On a shopping trip to India when Charanjit was in her late teens, she went with her mother to the bazaars and bought saris. This was the first time her mother had offered her the opportunity and Charanjit remembers relishing it:

"I had a whole load of beautiful saris that my mother bought me when I was eighteen, when we were in India together. And at the time, when you're eighteen, that was obviously the plan that in another few years, you know, [you will] be getting married so my mother was the kind of person who loved to start collecting things before hand". (Charanjit)

Figure 6: Charanjit wedding saris brought in India



They bought a selection of heavily embroidered saris (see figure 6), all intended for Charanjit to wear at her wedding, an event that Charanjit's mother anticipated would occur in the next few years. In fact, Charanjit did not marry until she was thirty-five, and her wedding was not in the Sikh Punjabi tradition her mother had imagined. Yet she still wore the saris. She reflects that she wanted to make her mother happy. Things had not worked out the way her mother had imagined, but by wearing saris from her trousseau she hoped that perhaps her mother would gain some appreciation that it was not her intent to disappoint. By wearing these saris she was again showing her mother her love and gratitude, acknowledging the special relationship between them.

The wedding stories I was told speak to dress as the objectification of aspects of diasporic life. By way of conclusion, I will thematise three aspects in particular: identities; relations; and sensibilities. Firstly, then, wedding dress can be seen as the objectification of diasporic identities. In this regard, its meanings span the realms of public identity discourse, of socially recognised identity roles (such as wife, daughter-in-law and so on), and of personal expression (where the wedding is an occasion where one's personal aesthetics are centred and judged). It is, perhaps, in the conjunction of these various aspects of identity that wedding dress becomes both particularly intimidating and rewarding, though in much more muted ways we can see their combination in practices of dress more generally. Secondly, weddings are also shaped by and constitutive of diasporic social relations. Wedding dresses are tied into a complex set of familial networks and emotional relationships. They speak to the power of clothes, as material objects, to play a role in making social relationships. Weddings highlight the role of such social relations within dress practices more broadly. Finally, the discussions we had of wedding dresses highlighted various diasporic 'sensibilities', by which I mean the sorts of feelings that circulate around and through diasporic dress practices. The stories told range across feelings from anxiety and discomfort to pride and tender appreciation. Diasporic dress does not just sit on our bodies; it is part of how we feel (about) the world.

Wardrobes

Having focused on the extraordinary occasion of the wedding, I want now to turn more directly to the everyday decisions people are making when dressing. My access point is 'the wardrobe'. The one aspect of dressing each woman I interviewed had in common was that it was a decision making process each involved themselves in daily. Everyday clothes were thrown on, deliberated over and decided upon before that day's look was created. Sometimes this process was deeply reflexive and at other times it was engaged with as part of an established routine, concerned mainly with speed and ease. As I discussed in Chapter Three, a number of authors have sought to investigate this 'wardrobe moment' as a way to consider the cultural dynamics of dress (notably Guy, Green and Banim 2001 and Woodward 2007). They argue this allows us to delve beyond the look displayed in public, to re-enter the private sphere, and to see what is happening behind the scenes. In so doing so, greater light is shone on the anxieties and ambivalences that dressing presents (Woodward 2007:32). In some ways, then, a focus on the wardrobe has a similar aim as my previous focus on weddings. If the latter looks to open up reflection on practices of dress by focusing on an extraordinary occasion, the former does so by attention to the mundane.

In the discussion that follows I 'unpack' the wardrobe in two ways. I start with an extended dress story drawn from my conversations with Divya. This ranges across a number of issues, but in particular illustrates how the wardrobe is a material form that organises clothes into arrays that facilitate the competent and habitual dressing for a range of different occasions and spaces. Then, I take out (and try on?) some wider implications of this account in a discussion focused on 'mapping' wardrobes in terms of the geographies manifest in their material organisation. Designated areas within the actual space used to house clothes were reflective of areas of life for which the women wished to create a successful look (see figure 7 for a photographic example of the wardrobes of the women I interviewed). The boundaries of these spaces were fluid and moved as clothes moved from one area to another, just as the facets of their identity moved with them. These collections of garments, and their ability to morph and change presentations of self, were in essence technologies of a diasporic self. Wardrobes were assembled and stored to help facilitate dress practices learned in the habitus. I should say that wardrobes, including Divya's, also provoke other powerful reflections: on the material archives of clothes that we possess and the forms of memory work that these can do; and on the relations between our (changing) bodies and our clothes. However, I will delay turning to these issues more directly until Chapter Six.

Figure 7: Wardrobes



Divya's wardrobe

Here is the story of Divya's wardrobe. The first time I met Divya was at the library where she works. Our discussion was conducted in a nearby café and then at a later date in her home. Divya is a lady in her fifties. Born in Kenya she migrated to the UK in 1971 via India as a teenager. She is married with two daughters, who are both at university. Divya lives in Ilford with her husband and mother-in-law. Divya is a very pretty lady, petite and well groomed. Her dress both in saris and in British clothes looked very neat and smart each time I met her. It seemed to me that she took pride in her appearance.

As we are talking I get Divya to describe to me a normal day's dressing choices. She will get up, dress for work, come home, change into a sari, if she then decides to go out she may change back into tailored clothing, or she might change into gardening clothes to go out and do some

gardening or sometimes she might decide instead to remain in her sari if the gardening won't take too long. She says that at home she prefers to wear her sari or, if she thinks she might get unduly dirty, older tops and trousers that are no longer suitable for the workplace. Home space, for Divya, is associated with comfort and ease of dress (see also Jayne and Ferencuhova in press). However the presence of another into the home can inflect this. For family and friends, visiting her house, the sari is a comfortable dress with a more dignified look, she feels. Each day presents a new set of permutations of dress. Each style she inhabits she is generally comfortable with. Each style is also meticulously thought out and developed to enable her to adjust her look throughout the day. In the extract below she chats as she shows me some of her clothes:

“Well, I've got some saris stacked up right, there must be about that much, about that much [gesturing with arms], all stacked up in there. And I've got some tucked in bags which I know I'm not going to wear them. I've given so many away now. Then on one side I've got all my blouses, next side I've got all my skirts, trousers and skirts on this side. I have got a few, you know, those trousers and tops that the Punjabi people wear? [...] I never used to wear them before in home but now that I've got them I do sort of wear them occasionally you know, at home, but I don't go shopping in them. I would change [for that]. So, I've got a few of those which are there. [In terms of British clothes]... most of them are for work [...]. I have got clothes for work separate to the ones that I might go shopping in. I think it's just a, you know, there are certain, say for example, trousers or skirts which I may have worn before to work or you know, when they were brand new, but then now they're a little bit old and you don't want to wear them into work so they would be my maybe shopping or you know, just walking clothes or things like [that] [...] I've got home wear saris separate to the ones I go for outside as well, like if I was going to weddings or visiting my parents then that's different as well. I've got [this space] for home saris. They're different; otherwise you ruin the others, don't you? It's like, if I go to work I'll get changed. I don't want to wear that in the house. I don't think certain clothes... I wouldn't just go for shopping or you know I've got my gardening trousers different. Or if I'm just wearing, say [it is a] nice day and I'm wearing this [sari] I'll just go in the garden ...well this is old now. This is so old now, I mean I wear it at home now. It all depends, I mean this [showing garment] I've washed in the washing machine so much and it still looks the same. But obviously this type [points to ornamented sari] you can't wear in the house even though it might get old because it's got embroidery... and you can't keep washing it. It all depends on the material as well, doesn't it? Then [in the wardrobe] I've got like the silk or the heavy ones altogether. Then like I've got a pile where I've got ones for if I'm visiting my parents or you know, like a bit more plainer ones. They're altogether because I haven't got a cupboard where I can hang them all. I haven't got enough space so I have to fold them and I have to stack them in those different categories and I try [to] cover them with material so the dust doesn't get in them,

but you can buy these bags now where you can put saris in as well... when I went to India, yeah. But it's just too much bother, isn't it?" (Divya)

Divya has set up in her wardrobe, in her personal space, a method or technique for successfully formulating and structuring her display of self. The question 'Is this me?' is answered here with 'Yes, this is me, at this moment, in this place'. Her storing of clothes maps out a range of clothing types for a range of 'Divyas'. Divya's wardrobe is practical, but also functions as memorial; it is very much socially tied in, allowing Divya to express respect for others; and it is very much a personal space, distinctively and uniquely hers and a resource for her own feelings of dignity and comfort. Divya's wardrobe reflects the compartmentalisation she has applied to the various spaces of her life. She has developed her wardrobe with regard for types of situation, creating a dress practice that is not only appropriate but successful and enabling. The development of a series of complementary but separate wardrobes within her overall clothing collection was motivated by an urge to 'fit into' the various roles she inhabited in her life. Here clothes are a method by which she can accommodate the roles she expects to perform in her daily life. Her wardrobe is a means to navigate the geographies and places she recognises in her life (more generally, for the seminal account on the relations between place, judgements of what is appropriate, and feelings of being 'in' and 'out of place see Cresswell 1996).

Her early years were spent in Kenya, where she remembers wearing skirts and tops. She recalls her early negotiations with her parents to allow her to wear long skirts, fashionable at the time but frowned upon by her family. Divya describes that as the eldest daughter in her family she has always been the one expected to uphold family traditions, including through dress:

Figure 8: Examples from Divya's clothes



“If we went to a wedding... because being the eldest daughter, I did wear saris. And when we went to like Navratri, you know the nine days festival, I wore saris then. Any special occasion really. I’ve think I’ve grown up with wearing them.” (Divya)

The experience of migration was a pivotal moment in Divya’s dress practices. Arriving in Britain, Divya had a desire to access and embrace British society fully. The way she imagined she could do this was to adopt British dress practices into her own wardrobe. Over the years she has kept up with British fashions, apparent in that part of her wardrobe dedicated to British tailored clothing. These clothes are the literal bodily expression of her philosophy of ‘fitting in’.

“I didn’t want to stand out if I wore my sari. I wanted to be part of everything, you know. And so I think that’s stuck with me, even now. I mean there are people who wear their own, you know clothes, but I’ve never felt right wearing saris to work.” (Divya)

The length of time she has engaged with this style has meant that now whilst she sees that others wear and use Indian clothing in areas of life such as the workplace, she cannot see herself doing that. She says she feels happy that others feel comfortable doing so but for her the workplace is equated with western tailored garments. When she leaves work dressed in British tailored clothing she feels the eyes of others upon her. She in fact reveals that at times she feels nervous that someone from her Indian community will see her in these clothes. If a person whom she normally meets in her home space saw her in her workplace clothes she would feel this to be a transgression of her appropriate wardrobe techniques.

Once back in the home, she feels that her success with saris is considerable. Divya has worn saris in the home all her married life. Figure 8 shows some examples of Divya’s saris. At first this was out of respect for her father-in-law and mother-in-law, then later the practice became established. Divya has always dressed to engage with and perhaps please others. That is not to say dressing is not something she undertakes for her self. Her pleasure in dressing is evident when we talk through the saris she has kept throughout her life. You may recall our discussion of her “gurrchoroo” (Divya) that she received from her Uncle for her wedding, mentioned above. This lays in a set of saris that she has not been able to throw out or pass on to another. She hopes that with time her daughters will take these saris as their own. Alongside areas of clothes that have

been worn sufficiently to have moved from being work clothes to being leisure wear, such garments speak to the ongoing ‘social lives of things’ (Appadurai 1986) found in the wardrobe. As Banim and Guy put it, “In this sense the keeping of no-longer-worn clothes reveals that clothes have ‘lives’ that extend them beyond the structural and meaning systems of the fashion industry” (2001:204). As Gregson (2007) has shown, we don’t simply buy clothes, we live with them through practices of acquisition, washing, repair, storage and (in some cases) discarding.

Divya has many different saris for different occasions. Explaining the criteria, she reflects on one particular sari. It is silk so can be worn for special occasions. The motifs on it are small; not being overly ornamented means it can be worn to the wedding of a friend, but not a close relation where much more ornamentation would be called for. This sari, she tells me, is also perfect for evenings out, dinner parties and such. This garment is an important ‘fail safe’ of this part of her wardrobe. Another sari she describes is one she bought from a travelling salesman, the first she bought upon arriving in the UK. It is slightly see through; she giggles that she does not know how she wore it back then. She would not feel comfortable wearing it now, it feels too young. Every time she sees it, memories come flooding back, reigniting for her the excitement of her youth.

“It was my first sari that I bought after we came here. I don’t know if I mentioned but when we came there weren’t many sari shops around and this person, he came to our house, he had a suitcase full of saris, this was the first one I bought. So, I think in those days [laughs] they wore this type, the whole sari is that sort of embroidery, and it’s chiffon. So I don’t think I’d ever you know [get rid of it], I’d pass it on to my daughter because I think it was the first one that I bought here and I really liked it at the time. I was young, and you know when you first see something [you love it] And I wore it so much...”(Divya)

The day after our first interview Divya was going to have tea at the Ritz with some work colleagues. The group had been discussing what to wear. The Ritz is not a venue Divya ordinarily inhabits; the trip was a sociable, collective treat. What to wear was not an easy matter. Going to the Ritz was exciting and glamorous; but practically it meant travelling to the other side of London. The choice of this venue made the group examine their ideas of what was or was not appropriate to wear. All seemed to agree that occasional wear, something not worn everyday, would be a correct strategy. Discussing what this should be Divya describes that one of her colleague suggested wearing “kurti” (Divya) tops. To this Divya responded that if the colleague

was comfortable wearing that then she should. Divya however would not be. She thinks she will wear a top and trousers, “a little smarter” than her normal work attire.

“I think it depends where I’m going [...] Say, like tomorrow, there’s about five ladies who have to go the Ritz for tea. So one of them said, ‘Oh what are you going to wear?’ so I said I’ll probably wear trousers and you know, a top or so she said, ‘Oh I’m going to change, why don’t we wear Kurti? You know those tops...I said, ‘Well it’s up to you, if you’ll feel comfy wearing that’ but I’ll just wear, you know, probably a little bit smarter than what I normally do at work so, I just would feel comfortable wearing that when I go there. If that’s what they want to wear then it’s their choice.” (Divya)

She says that it is the travelling there that makes her reluctant to wear Indian clothes. She has a dread of saris getting caught in train doors and hindering her otherwise stress free journey to the venue. Even when Divya was asked to come to an event at the Army and Navy Museum to help women try on saris, she preferred to take her sari with her and put it on at the venue. Travelling about London to Divya is a practical process, moving, dynamic. To facilitate her access and journey through the city she prefers not to wear Indian clothing, perhaps for ease and comfort, and perhaps also motivated as she put it an urge to “adapt to the environment” (Divya). This environment might not only be physical; it is also a social environment where tailored clothing are more suggestive of fitting in than Indian clothes perhaps? The reverse is also true for venues where Indian clothes are perhaps the norm. She does not want to be “the odd one out” (Divya) here either. Visiting the temple or an Indian function makes her want to wear a sari: “Say you’re going to the temple, I would want to wear a sari [...] Otherwise you’d be the odd one out. But I mean I have seen people like I mentioned [at] temple, people do go in trousers, [on their way] to work they might just want to go in to pray” (Divya). She does, then, see some people at the temple wearing western tailored clothing, but for her this is not a preferred, appropriate dress practice for the environment.

Other considerations that come into Divya’s world when thinking about dressing will be recognisable to many of us. When I ask Divya about how her look has changed over the years it is not fashion that comes to her mind. It is her weight (more generally see Colls 2004, 2006). This, she says, has increased over the years. “I know I’ve put on weight. I haven’t got a waist left anymore [laughs]. I used to wear, when I used to wear skirts I always used to wear belts in the waist and it was the fashion. And now I can’t wear them which upsets me [laughs]” (Divya). One

of the attractions and comforts of a sari, for Divya, is that “you can get away with it, you see” (Divya). The sari does not engender the same bodily anxiety for Divya. The draping and fall of the material covers up any areas that Divya may feel are not acceptable. “That’s the beauty of it” (Divya), she laughs. Divya is a slim built lady in my opinion, in no ways over-weight. It is the imagined appropriateness of the body and of the garments we dress it in which seems to determine this reaction to clothes.

At their wardrobes, women create outfits that are expressions of who they wish to present at a particular time and place. Their clothes not only are an expression of self in the present, they reflect their journey with clothes through their lives and speak of aspirations for future selves they wish to present. As Divya’s discussion of her saris illustrates, investigating the wardrobe allows access to the implication of dress in a range of issues, from social to familial and bodily concerns. Focusing on the wardrobe also shows how women manage to create dress habits materially and practically. Notwithstanding the lines of questioning and self-reflection that I introduced, for the most part we want getting dressed to be a relatively simple task. As Woodward comments: “On a daily basis, as women rush out to work or to pick up their children, they have neither the time nor the desire for dressing to be an existential crisis; as one woman stated to me, she just wanted to be able to ‘be’” (Woodward 2007:135). Divya has developed an appropriate look for many arenas, looks which provide her with the means of being competent in each arena of her life. Woodward coins the phrase ‘habitual clothing’ (following from the work of Mauss 1973) to talk about forms of dress where there is no great debate about its choice. The ‘right’ clothing is already established for the related social situation, so it can be picked out of the wardrobe and worn with comparative ease. “Having different sets of clothing allows women to enact [different] social roles”, says Woodward (2007:135). This use of habitual clothing is of course not without agency and individuality. “A crucial part of this process of self-creation involves a creative interplay between habitual and non-habitual clothing; women may be both conformist and regress to safety, yet simultaneously creatively inject themselves into this interplay as they may critique their conformist selves through clothing” (Woodward 2007:151). Divya’s wardrobe functions effectively as a ‘tool-kit’ and she uses it to present her self in the everyday settings of her life with ease and enjoyment.

Geographies of the Wardrobe

In the following section I am going to dwell further on a thematic that runs through Divya's story: how the geographies of my participants' lived dress practices were objectified in the arrangement and spatial organisation of their wardrobe (the 'geographies' of the wardrobe). Let me elaborate, weaving together testimony from a number of the women to whom I spoke.

Like Divya, Barnali also uses her wardrobe as a practical tool to organise her clothes in relation to the norms of different times and places in her life. The wardrobe is an enabling tool for her. At her finger tips lies a method of effectively negotiating the many situations her life throws at her. She can open it and access appropriate clothing for a range of situations. Her wardrobe is divided into two areas: 'British' and 'Indian'. Both of these areas have 'everyday' parts and 'dressy' parts.

“Looking at my wardrobe, it's probably set out into quite a distinct Western and non-Western... and within the Western is just a mixture of work clothes [...], and these [gesturing] are just my everyday clothes or my nice going out clothes. But my Indian clothes are also divided up into everyday type clothes, because having been to India so many times I need everyday wear, just what girls would wear just, 'girls' or women, what they would wear on a day to day basis. I've got shalwar khameezs like that”. (Barnali)

In the Indian section there are the heavily ornamented clothes that she keeps for parties and special occasions; and more modest, less 'dressy' garments that she can easily access and put on if a family member comes round to her house and she feels it would be more appropriate to be seen wearing Indian clothing. Her wardrobe's British part has everyday work and home wear. She equally needs 'Western' clothes for work and socialising. She also has an auxiliary wardrobe at her parent's house. Like many of the women I interviewed, the practice of collecting Indian clothing had begun early in her teenage years. She has kept most of these garments, as they have always been the same size. The style may not be to her taste now but they are stored as ever possible for re-use. The presence of this 'storage wardrobe' at her parents' home also keeps links with them and with memories of her childhood.

For Saira the wardrobe is even more spatially distinct in this division between her own and parental space. Her clothes for daily life are stored in her home. However her South Asian ceremonial or occasional clothes are stored at her Mother's house.

“Most of my sort of South Asian clothes, apart from the ones that are like everyday [clothes] that I wear at home which are very few and probably a bit tatty, you know, apart [from them], you know the rest of them, they’re all here at my mum’s house so to be honest [...] me and my sister will kind of share clothes as well and some times even my mum’s worn them, so the act of choosing what to wear is, it’s quite a sort of [...] deliberate act whereby [...] more often than not my mum’s suggesting, ‘Well why don’t you wear that?’ or you know, ‘For the whatever, for this occasion, why don’t you wear that.’ So even after all these years, my mum’s still directing me in terms of what to wear!” (Barnali)

This arrangement is enabling in terms of practical space issues, but it works in other ways too. By storing most of her South Asian clothes at her mother’s house she can access familial advice and help. Her mother, sister and herself are the same dress size, so they share a communal wardrobe for special events that require South Asian dress. They advise each other on what to wear and their mother looks after each garment whilst not worn. Thus, Saira’s split wardrobe materialises her access to family support networks that aid her more ceremonial dress decisions.

For others, the imaginative and practical divisions within wardrobes between ‘Indian’ and ‘Western’ were less clearly defined. For example, when showing how their wardrobes were arranged, both Hema and Shashi said that they found it difficult to discuss which clothes were Indian and which were Western as both could be adapted and used in different contexts. As Hema put it:

“[In my wardrobe] there are so many fabrics that might crossover, the designs that crossover this way and you know it’s neither Indian, it’s neither European I mean I admittedly I have some [Punjabi] suits hanging around. Which I think that’s what takes up space in my wardrobe [laughs]. And I have one outfit which is a, which is like a, it’s a top and a long skirt with slits up to here [gesturing ...] The fabric is Indian, or it is, it’s a sort of type of silk, and the workmanship is, you know bead and things, sequins and it’s on Organza [...] It’s got trousers underneath it [...] because the saris don’t sit in the wardrobe [they are in suitcases]”. (Hema)

Shashi too refers to how the division is in part logistical, reflecting the different forms of storage appropriate and available for different garment types.

“Mine [my saris] are all in suitcases which are in the wardrobe and they’re in these cases as well. These sari cases. I would say I have fifty percent of this Indian wear

and the rest is Asian plus shawls. [...] I bought quite a few of those [Kurta] tops as well which are great in nice warm weather [...] I've got so many saris and Indian clothes, so many. And I have the most wardrobe space! It's in both...children's rooms, in my room, everywhere." (Shashi)

I have been suggesting, then, that wardrobes can act as material technologies. Others have explored the geographies of the wardrobe in terms of the temporalities of collecting and ridding that characterise our collections of clothes (notably see Gregson 2007), and I will return to that issue in Chapter Six. Here, though, I have complemented this approach by emphasizing how wardrobes are logistical and symbolic material forms. They objectify women's imaginations of their sartorial cartographies in their categorizations of their collections and, in so doing, facilitate the habitual practice of dress.

Conclusion

We attempt through our dress to present an expression of who we think we are, who we aspire to be and who we think others will appreciate. If we are communicating our 'selves' through our clothes we have to learn this technique through the course of our lives, in the formation of our 'habitus'. We have to learn how to interpret the gaze or expectations of others in order to communicate back to them. We may not wish to reciprocate their ideas but none the less we are drawn in to a set of communications with others through dress (Bernard 1996, Eichner 1995). We have to develop a wardrobe to enable us to present ourselves to the world. We also have to consider that how we wish to present ourselves will never be entirely successful as our presentations can be misinterpreted by others.

The act of dressing the 'Me' was a learned practice, developed to create effective dress strategies in everyday worlds. The habitus was here seen to be developed by the gaze of others, experiences of anxiety and also the influence of families and the social world around us. It reinforced bodily behaviours and expectations considered to be the norm in the diasporic cultures that these women inhabited. Upon their bodies, they lived out their habitus and the experience of being British Asian women. Through dress the women here interviewed not only attempted to articulate who they wanted to be or to present, but they also spoke of who they had once been,

and indeed who they wished to be in the future. Dress for some operated as a biography of their lives, informed by their friends, families, colleagues as much as by the media or fashion.

In the testimonies presented above I considered not only the biographical development of the habitus of dress practice (building on the discussion begun in Chapter Four on the inhabitation of British Asian fashion space) but I also examined its articulation in both extraordinary and mundane contexts. Weddings provided my access point to the former, opening up a series of accounts about how dress involves skilled but anxious negotiations of the selves we would like to be with the selves that others (wish to) picture us as. Wardrobes were my way into ordinary dress practice. Our collections of clothes, I suggested, can embody in their very organisation how we imagine the contexts of our everyday lives and act as tools to habituate our navigation of those landscapes. Of course, there is more to say about the wardrobes and the materials that reside within them. I therefore now turn, in Chapter Six, to consider more directly the im/material geographies of the wardrobe, examining how for British Asian women clothes can act as material artefacts of memory as well as forms of embodiment through wear.



**Chapter Six:
Dress, Materialities and Memories**

CHAPTER SIX:

Dress, Materialities and Memories

Introduction

Up until this point, I have examined my research participants' experiences of South Asian dress aesthetics through two lenses: in Chapter Four, the public discourses of identity around British Asian women; and in Chapter Five, the practice of choosing what to wear. I now look at things from a slightly different perspective, focused on some of the material agencies of dress. Specifically, the aim of this chapter is to consider the relationship of dress and its materiality to memories and bodies. Thus the chapter is split into two discussions: the first looks at dress in wardrobes as archives and collections, exploring the memory work done by clothing; the second examines the role of dress in material experiences of embodiment. I take these two foci informed by wider approaches that insist on the heterogeneity of materiality (e.g. Anderson and Wylie 2009, Miller 2005b). My deliberate intention is to range across both the seemingly ephemeral (memory) and the fleshy (bodies), to show the material agency of South Asian clothing in both. Generally, the chapter aims to expand wider work on the material cultures of clothing (Kuchler and Miller 2005) by presenting testimony from a group of women whose engagement with cloth and textiles sits in a diasporan context, a context in which the everyday experiences of dress and the accumulation of material culture works in relation to the distinctive relationships between the presence and absence of South Asian cultures in the UK. As I argued in Chapter Three, when outlining wider work on material cultures of diaspora, the study of clothing as material artefact is especially pertinent here given its implication in processes of cultural memory (Tolia-Kelly 2004).

Cultural Geography's renewed interest in material culture has been widely promoted, reviewed and critically engaged over the last decade or so (e.g. Jackson 2000, Crang 2005, Anderson and Wylie 2009). A number of theoretical influences have driven this interest, inflecting Cultural Geography's 'material turn' in distinctive ways. Of particular import has been work in the interdisciplinary field of 'material culture studies'. Generally, the notion of material culture looks to move beyond a perceived preoccupation with "images, talk and text" (Dant 1999:1) in cultural

studies. As part of a wider concern for the ‘more than human’ constitution of our worlds, analysts of material culture argue that “society cannot be grasped independently of its material stuff” (Dant 1999:2). Most commonly this recognition of material stuff has been focused on objects, examining how they are “not just representations, but also have a physical presence in the world which has material consequence” (Dant 1999:1/2). Central to this ‘material consequence’ is the capacity for things to ‘objectify’ social relations, ideologies and identities. As Miller and Woodward (2012) phrase it: “The definition of contemporary material studies is that we need to be at least as concerned with how objects make people as with how people make objects” (2012:19). In Cultural Geography, this emphasis on the material objectification of the social has been joined by what Anderson and Wylie term an ‘affective materialism’ (2009:319). Here, the emphasis is on the material forces or intensities of the world. Material culture, they suggest, does not just reside in objects but in our own, fleshy, sensual inhabitation of the material world.

Clothing, clearly matters to us in ways that range across such approaches: as objects that we can possess and exchange; as ‘second-skins’ that are vital to our embodiment; as textiles that we sense, through sight and touch in particular. Sherry Turkle has coined a notion that, perhaps, acts as a useful bridge across theories of objectification and affect, in her collection of stories about ‘evocative objects’ (Turkle 2007). Her emphasis on the ‘evocative’ power of objects is designed to foreground the emotive and thoughtful nature of material culture. As she puts it:

“We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences. We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought. The notion of evocative objects brings together these two less familiar ideas, underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things. We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with.” (Turkle 2007:5)

There are many reasons why an object may be evocative. It is notable, though, that in offering some answers to this question Turkle highlights a number of issues that are central to clothing cultures and appear in the testimonies presented here. She organises her stories around themes such as ‘discipline and desire’, ‘history and exchange’, ‘memory and mourning’, ‘transition and passage’, and the ‘meditative’ provocations of ‘uncanny’ objects. All of these will resonate with my participants’ accounts of how South Asian clothing matters to them; indeed, as a reader you

may have a sense of how many of them have already been working through the stories presented in previous chapters. Clothes are cultural artefacts with their own agency. Dress has certain ‘affordances’ that shape both our social landscapes and our individual subjectivities. The material qualities of clothing – in particular their apprehension through touch and sight – gives them the capacity to become meaningful; in Miller’s words, it is the “sensual and the aesthetic – what cloth feels and looks like – [that] is [one] source of its capacity to objectify myth, cosmology and also morality, power and values” (2005a:1). Clothing presents a particularly powerful case of how materials are part of the very fabric of emotional, imaginative and fleshy lives.

As I said, in this chapter I want to pursue the evocative nature of South Asian clothes for British Asian women in two principal directions. The first part of the chapter deals with the relations between clothes and memory. In Chapter Five I discussed ‘wardrobes’ as collections of clothing that were imagined, organised and used in the practice of getting dressed. Now, I want to revisit the wardrobe but in order to emphasise its role as a personal ‘archive’, a storehouse of memories. I start with a number of testimonies on the ‘temporalities’ of wardrobe collections, noting how concerns with clothing circulation (the processes of purchase and disposal emphasised by Gregson and Beale 2004 and Gregson 2007) are accompanied by dynamics of archiving, conservation and memory work. I flesh out these suggestions through the narratives of two women, Barnali and Charanjit, discussing items of clothing in their wardrobes that resonate with memories and evoke special relationships in their lives. These garments are not just indicators of identity or materials for the practice of dress (though they are these too); they are evocative objects that provoke strong feelings and thoughts from their keepers. As Kuchler writes, anticipating Turkle’s approach: “No longer can we regard things as passive receptacles of discursive thought; rather, as we have indeed long suspected, thought can conduct itself in things, and things can be thought-like.” (Kuchler 2005b:225). These garments evoked thoughts and feelings of a loved one, of a presentation of self on a special occasion, or perhaps a sense of how one used to be. The wardrobe here becomes an archive for memories. These are intimate and personal, but they speak too of larger cultural networks and social identifications. They become a form of heritage, accessed and kept alive when looked at or worn. For the South Asian diaspora in Britain, I suggest, sometimes the memory role of South Asian dress is more important than the dress forms worn in everyday life.

The second part of the chapter comes out of the wardrobe to focus on embodied experiences of South Asian dress forms and their materiality. In the area of material culture studies there seems to have been a split in the categorisation of artefacts. On one side sat the products of cognitive endeavour: art, sculpture, religious iconography. On the other, sat the everyday products of daily life, regardless of how beautifully crafted and cared for they may have been. Guiding this divide was a latent opposition between materials of the mind and materials of the body, between culture and nature. Clothing and textiles problematise this split. They are meaningful expressions of the human imagination and creativity; but they are also of the body, intimately worn. They ‘touch us’ physically as well as emotionally. I explore this combination through a substantive focus on my participants’ experiences of wearing South Asian clothes, drawing out the pleasures and challenges of these dressed embodiments. I consider too how such wearing allows embodied forms of memory work and engagements with cultural heritage.

Material Memories

The Wardrobe as Archive

A number of writers have explored how wardrobes are characterized by distinctive rhythms or temporalities. In Geography, emphasis has been placed on the circulations of clothing through households via processes of acquisition, washing, storage, and various sorts of disposal (from consigning to the bin, to recycling, to gifting and swapping maternity wear) (Gregson 2007, Gregson and Beale 2004). In her study of the ‘wardrobe moment’ when women decide what to wear, the anthropologist Sophie Woodward considers the biographical nature of clothing collections. The “long-term relationship” women had to their clothes enabled them to look at past selves in the wardrobe (Woodward 2007:65). Clothing collections present a biography, albeit one that “differs from conventional narrative forms” (Woodward 2007:65) in so far as a garment has the ever-present possibility of being picked from the past and made present again, if selected and worn.

Here I want to extend such insights by thinking about wardrobes as store-houses of memories and engagements with heritage. A frequent topic of conversation with my research participants was how long clothes were kept and for what reasons they might be ‘archived’. For example, Satinder was laughing with me about the size of her wardrobe and how underlying this was a mismatch between the temporalities of fashion and of clothing meaning. You may recall that Satinder is a fashionable young woman. She wears beautiful garments and likes following the latest trends. She accumulates large amounts of clothing, not least, she says, because on the British Asian fashion circuit you cannot wear the same thing twice. She struggles, however, to divest herself of clothes at the same rate because of the personal memories they hold: “There’s nothing special about the garment apart from the memories you’ve attached to it” (Satinder). Her collection of fashionable items turns into a collection of mementos housed in her wardrobe.

For Shobha, giving old clothes away would be like giving part of herself away. Here she is thinking in particular about South Asian clothes that she no longer wears, but nonetheless values: “things I’ve kind of kept from the seventies that [are] never going to fit me and don’t fit me, you know, my children are probably not ever going wear them or anything, but [...] if I throw that away I’m throwing away a part of me.” (Shobha). To dispose of these clothes would be to lose a link to that time of her life and to lose the capacity to generate the emotions that surface when she occasionally gets out and considers them. Getting rid of them would be an emotionally charged act, involving a rupture from her past. This is not a distancing that she wants to make. Charanjit too sees her wardrobe contents as evoking her biography, but for her the difficulty of disposing of many of these items is less personal and more based in her respect for the wider cultural history that they represent:

“It’s funny because I’ve got stuff in there that I’ll never wear again, that I really want to get rid of, you know suits from the seventies and eighties which even to fold them up and put them away there’s no room to be honest so they are just really taking up space. I’d rather just keep things that I wear now, that I haven’t just got round to putting them away or getting rid of them. We really do need to have a clear out now, and thinking I need to go and take these to Oxfam and get rid of them and maybe I might need them but maybe if there’s some sort of exhibition around Asian fashion this will reflect what was fashionable at a time even if I don’t like it [laughs] I’ve still got a symbol of that. So there’s a little part of me that’s, because I work in a museum I think as well that has that thing that [...] to get rid of it would be a tragedy because then I’d have to go round researching and finding all this again. Even though they’re mine I don’t

particularly want them and I have thought of giving them to the Museum of London where I used to work because now my colleague in the costume department always said, 'Why don't you donate them all here?' But I just have never got round to it ..." (Charanjit)

The relations between personal memory, collective senses of cultural heritage and forms of material culture have generated much discussion across the human sciences over the last two decades. Rowlands discusses ideas of "heritage, tradition and cultural memory" (2002: 105). Heritage, he suggests, is no longer the exclusive remit of museums and their collections but the everyday property of individuals. Ideas of belonging, cultural experiences and knowledges are becoming part of the domain of popular culture. He explicitly notes that in Europe to discuss ideas of heritage involves recognizing "the heritage of the diaspora of the global experience of migration and the desire for homeland" (Rowlands 2002: 113). It was Maurice Halbwachs (1992) who penned the seminal account of what he termed 'collective memory'. It was his argument that memory is not a purely personal, psychological phenomenon, but can also be social, binding people together into shared senses of belonging and heritage. In Pierre Nora's influential theorization, in modern societies the nature of this collective memory is transformed (Nora 1989). The 'pure memory' of traditional societies, enacted through inherited modes of life, bodily conduct and environments ('milieux de mémoires') has been transformed into the archives and memorials of modern societies ('lieux de mémoires') that stage more self-conscious, institutionalised forms of social remembrance. As the comments from Shobha and Charanjit quoted above illustrate, the status of personal clothing collections is interesting in this regard. It seems these clothes have the capacity to evoke memories at different levels, ranging from the personal, to the inter-generational, to collective ideas of cultural heritage.

Memory in all these forms is a creative process. Lane states that there is "something curious about the relationships between remembering, forgetting and the material traces of the past" (2004:19/20). He understands the relation of memory and material culture as one where individuals plot or create imagined pasts for themselves and their communities through their associations with artefacts. Tolia-Kelly (2004) develops this argument through the notion of 're-memory', in her study of artefacts that materialise South Asian diasporic heritage in British Asian homes. Focusing on domestic objects ranging from shrines to wall decorations, she argues that:

“Solid materials are charged with memories that activate common connections to pre-migratory landscapes and environments. These memories signify geographical nodes of connection which shape and shift contemporary social geographies in Britain, post-migration.... Precipitates of re-memory allow us to view, imagine and connect with this dynamic postcolonial consciousness, dialectically formed through memories of these other worlds and pasts, as they are figured within Britain.” (Tolia-Kelly 2004: 314/315/327)

In Chapter Five I cast wardrobes and their collections of garments as practical technologies for the making of situationally attuned diasporic selves. Now, I want to turn to the symbolic import of these collections, relating this symbolic power to the evocation of memory and heritage, as discussed above. I will do so through two extended narratives. In the first, Barnali and I talk about her trousseau, a collection of clothing that she acquired at the time of her wedding. Here a dress collection becomes an archive of memories, reflecting the social relations she finds herself involved in. In particular this collection speaks of her relationship to her mother, husband, friends and other relatives; and in so doing it also presents the wider social relations these relationships work within, such as ethnicity, nationality and religion. In the second, I am talking with Charanjit. I introduced Charanjit to the reader in Chapter Four in an extended discussion focused the development of her dress practice in relation to the musical cultures of her youth. In this second extended narrative, I reflect further on how her relationship to dress was deeply linked to her relationship with her late mother and the role of her clothing collection in maintaining that connection. Charanjit’s account also gives a powerful sense of the agency she detects in clothes and textiles. For Charanjit, Indian textiles are resonant and embedded with meaning and power, so much so that they elicit responses in her not simply due to the memories that they transmit but also because of their material complexity, which lets them bear the weight of memories and meanings and enables them to be constituted as “special objects”.

Barnali

I met Barnali in the summer of 2008. I was introduced to her through Saira. Barnali was kind enough to take an afternoon off work to meet with me. This generosity of spirit and hospitality

pervaded our encounter. She was warm and inviting as a host (I met up with her at her house in Staines) and generous as a narrator of clothing stories. Both Barnali and I were pregnant at the time and our discussion moved in and out of mutually interesting themes of comfort in clothes, especially maternity clothing, the feel and idea of clothing, and of course shopping for such clothing. Her narrative returned frequently to certain ideas. She felt strongly about her identity in clothing as a British, Indian, Bengali, Hindu woman. She described stories about her encounters with clothing but again and again her wedding trousseau came to the fore. Looking back at this discussion, and thinking about the clothing she showed me, her wedding clothes had become an archive, collected, loved and symbolising significant relationships.

Like many British Asian women, Barnali had more than one wedding day and more than one wedding garment. In the UK there was a civil service, for which she wore an ivory coloured lengha (chosen with her friends and in a colour guided by British wedding norms); then there was a Hindu wedding in Calcutta, for which her mother gifted her a red sari; then also a later reception event for family and friends in the UK, at which she wore an orange-red lengha bought whilst in Calcutta. Our conversation begins with the sari from the ceremony in Calcutta. This is the piece that seems of most significance to her. It is taken out from storage and put on display (draped over Barnali's sofa) during the course of our conversation. It is an impressive object. An air of significance surrounds it. It is heavy, evidently expensive, highly ornamented. It demands appreciation. I feel nervous touching it in case I make a mark. The fabric is a soft and fine silk; the sari was made in Benares, the centre of silk craftsmanship in North India. There is a structural gold thread design that has been beautifully crafted. All these elements speak loudly to an audience that this is a special object. And that is just what it says to me...

Barnali is not unaware of how this sari impresses itself upon others, but other things matters more to her. For a start, as a sari it speaks of a feminine adult skill and status located within a particular cultural heritage. She tells me how it is the custom for Bengali women over a certain age to wear saris to social gatherings rather than salwar khameezes. She speaks of the appreciation one receives from others when a sari is worn and she remembers warmly the encouragement she received at social gatherings when she, as a girl, began to wear them. She is proud of how she became accomplished in their wear. More specifically, this sari was worn at her wedding in Calcutta. The location of its wearing is significant. Barnali's parents migrated to the

UK from Calcutta and during her childhood she went back to the city regularly. She thinks of Calcutta as a second home, a place to which she feels attached because it is attached to her transnational idea of self. Engaging with the norms and social expectations of clothing in Calcutta is deeply important to her. The wedding in Calcutta was a chance for her husband, to meet her Indian family and to experience life in this second familial home. By marrying her in Calcutta, and in this sari, her husband embraced a side to her that was not to the fore in their lives together in London. This mattered greatly to Barnali. The wedding sari not only evokes the relationship that she was forging with her husband but also how this relationship involved her Bengali self, indeed the very city of Calcutta, the place where she had spent her school holidays and that she so loves. She recalls how the relations the sari forged into Bengali heritage were in the end subject to some mild contention on the day. The sari was so exquisite that on the wedding day Barnali and her relatives decided that she should wear the pallu (the end of the sari draped over the shoulder; the part with the greatest embroidery or adornment) not on her back as is the custom in Calcutta, but on her front to create the best visual display of the garment (see figure 9 for photographic illustration of this pallu). Her father commented that this was not right; it was not Bengali to wear a sari with the pallu at the front. Barnali talks about how she had to assure him that she did feel that she was Bengali and that she was respectful of this heritage. The sari also means a great deal to Barnali because it what evokes about her relationship with her mother. Her mother chose this sari, a gift Barnali cherishes. The gifting was reciprocal. By allowing her mother to choose her outfit for a ceremony marking departure from her childhood dependence, Barnali gave her mother the agency to remain involved in her life decisions. In this garment she sees a lifetime of love from and for her mother and a symbol that her mother remains a major figure in her life even after her marriage.

Figure 9: Barnali's wedding sari



The tradition in Calcutta is for brides to wear bright red saris, red being symbolic of the transformation in personhood from single to married woman. The symbolism here is associated with a material force. Bayley describes how in India “cloth as a transactional medium was conceived as a unique conveyer of spirit and substance, holy strengthening, or polluting.” (1986:287). The materiality of different fabrics signifies different powers and properties. To wear a cloth is to become its properties. By wearing the red sari, Barnali takes on married personhood through her very body. A bright red sari cannot be worn again, so powerfully is it placed within this moment of transformation. Once worn and never to be worn again. Barnali’s mother tried to avoid this restriction by buying the sari in a darker shade of red than usual, but Barnali is still reluctant to wear it again. What if people thought it was her wedding sari? What would they think? That she still saw herself as a bride, befitting of high levels of ornamentation? Would they think her vain? These concerns ensure the sari remains in storage, but for Barnali it was not just the sari but the whole ritual of dressing that transformed her on her wedding day. The jewellery, the veil, the white crown; all played their part in the feeling of being changed into another state.

“It’s not just the sari [...] it’s the veil that you have over you and it’s just *everything* I suppose. It is the entire ensemble, not just one garment really. I *could* wear that sari on it’s own and I would feel special and feel that it is beautiful and that it is a lovely [sari] but to feel like a bride I think you need [to wear] everything.”
(Barnali)

If these acts of wearing were transformative for her they also transformed the clothes that she wore. This dark red sari ceased to be just an expensive, well-crafted piece of fabric and became a material repository of memory, an item with a biography of its own. It is now treated with reverence, kept for imagined moments in the future when Barnali might get it out and look at it, touch the fabric, drape it on herself perhaps, or maybe show it to future generations. Barnali stores the sari carefully. At Christmas her husband received a bath robe as a present; its sturdy packaging now ensures that no dust or damage can weaken the sari’s material powers.

Woodward has argued more generally that our clothes manifest our relationships to others: “Through the clothing in the wardrobe, women negotiate their sense of self, their individuality and their autonomy, yet also their continued dependence and connection to family members and loved ones.” (Woodward 2007:101). Through dressing in particular ways we develop and foster relationships: with mothers, sisters, partners, friends and colleagues. I want now to focus on some of the testimony from Charanjit that focuses on her relationship with her mother. When talking to Charanjit about her dress practices and items in her wardrobe, it is the voice of another that comes through again and again: her mother. The narration is affectionate but with some sadness, given Charanjit’s mother is no longer alive. Their relationship is now memorialised and remembered through Charanjit’s clothes and our discussions of them.

Charanjit begins with a description of how her mother made her feel loved and accepted when she wore Indian clothes. It was obvious to Charanjit that it gave her mother great pleasure to see her daughter, born and raised in England, wearing Indian garments. She never applied pressure but Charanjit remembers how her eyes “just lit up” (Charanjit) when she saw Charanjit in a Punjabi suit. For Charanjit wearing the suit became associated with ideas of maternal love, pride and a special bond between two women. Her mother was a seamstress and so made many of Charanjit’s clothes for her. By agreeing to wear a handmade suit Charanjit expressed back love and gratitude to her mother. Even as a child, dressing was a way to engage with and develop her relationship with her mother.

“There was a little glow on my mum’s face. I don’t know, she used to tend to look really proud whenever I wore an Indian outfit and I used to love that actually, you know. She’d always say you look so nice in a shalwar khameez, you look so nice in a sari. Partly to encourage me to wear it [laughs]” (Charanjit)

Charanjit loved fashions and being fashionable from an early age. Her mother supported this enthusiasm. Through her Charanjit learnt about sewing, pattern cutting and how to make the styles and fashions which appealed to her. Indulgent of these early experiments in fashion, Charanjit’s mother never stopped her wearing unusual styles within their Punjabi household. Whilst she did encounter resistance from her brothers, her mother found the new post-punk fashions that Charanjit brought into the home fascinating. They went on trips together to fabric

markets. That was, as Charanjit puts it, “their thing”. They would browse, select fabrics, come home and adapt them.

Through these early experiences Charanjit learnt a range of skills and interests that were to be reflected in her career. At university she studied Fashion and Design. In these studies, her project work began to explore the potential for combining Indian and English influences in her work: “That was one of the, I suppose, my selling points was that I used to be able to get hold of really nice fabrics...”(Charanjit). Figure 10 shows an example of a garment she made at university, which combines a western tailored jacket with Indian fabric embellishments on the shoulders. She remarks that her mother found this a strange thing to undertake at university. Dress making as a university course did not seem right; it was a skill learned at home. Anyhow, the development of her skills meant that now Charanjit could come home and offer her mother advice: ways of putting a dart in to cut a pattern using new techniques. They shared time together: reading fashion magazines, shopping together, dressing for weddings. She reflects that she does not know where these skills will go now. She has no daughter of her own. Those shared experiences will not be replicated in her own household.

“That whole relationship with my mum and the clothing and the fact that she [...] thought it was funny that I did a degree in fashion and pattern cutting. She thought that you don’t usually go to university to learn that, but she also did quite like the fact that I learnt new things and I sometimes would say to her, ‘Well, you know, if you want to put a dart here why don’t you do it like this?’ and she would then start asking me for tips whereas in the past I’d asked her for tips.”
(Charanjit)

Figure 10: Charanjit clothes made as part of her degree



She tells me that every so often her mother would have a tidy up of her wardrobe, inside of which lay a trunk. Charanjit thinks it might be the one brought with her from India on her initial

migration journey. In this trunk were clothes she stored for anticipated future events. Some were made up garments; many were suit materials awaiting construction. These clothes were kept by her mother for gifting as well as for future family use. The process of tidying up the trunk is one Charanjit remembers vividly. They would get all the clothes out, look through them, reflect on their intended use and then put them back. Her sister would also be present. Charanjit never wanted her suit materials made up, whilst her sister always did. Her sister was more actively engaged in following British Asian fashions and as such always wanted a newly designed and tailored Punjabi suit. Together we reflect on how this trunk stored memories, expectations and hopes. Charanjit feels that her mother invested so much in her. The time she spent teaching her about fabrics and sewing stays with her still. Charanjit too has her collection of materials and garments and memories.

Figure 11: Charanjit Mother's clothes



“I don’t know if it’s the same with English clothes. I mean I suppose you keep certain clothes because they have the particular memory of what you wore at a particular time, but I do think with Indian textiles and saris and things, they kind of become a life of their own...because of the fabric being so ... the textile itself is such a kind of special object.” (Charanjit)

This idea of a “special object” perhaps has resonance with Gell’s idea of a “technology of enchantment” (1998:74). He suggests that decoration and pattern are vital to our understanding of the powers of an object. The example he gives is of a child’s bedclothes, which are seen as more attractive to sleep in by the child if they are ornamented with motifs such as “spaceships, dinosaurs” and so on (1998:74). The garment then has an enhanced function; it is more likely to

provide a warm comfortable sleep environment for the child than a plain undecorated cloth. Gell argues:

“The decoration of objects is a component of a social technology, which I have elsewhere called the technology of enchantment... This psychological technology encourages and sustains the motivations necessitated by social life. The world is filled with decorated objects because decoration is often essential to the psychological functionality of artefacts, which cannot be dissociated from the other types of functionality they possess, notably their practical, or social functionality.” (1998:74).

The decoration of these fabrics, their design, touch, styles all continue to enchant Charanjit. Their appearance cannot be disassociated from their power and function, their capacity to serve as a memorial to a diasporic life, to the relations between women in one diasporic family who lived through the experience of migration and transferred these experiences into an emotional relationship to dress and textiles.

When her mother passed away Charanjit brought back all her mothers' clothes to her home. Some went to her Aunts, some to her sister. She says her husband was quite surprised with her bringing back all these bags full of clothes. She could not bear to be parted from them. The fact that her mother made them herself made them all the more poignant. Many of them were made up from fabrics they had chosen together on their trips to the shops. She did not want to put them in the loft as they might get musty and damaged, but there was no other option for the majority. She showed me the ones that she kept out of the loft, in her own wardrobe. Figure 11 shows some of the fabrics kept by Charanjit which her mother had skilfully embroidered. There is one piece that astonishes me for how much patience and expertise must have been involved in its creation. Charanjit says how she imagines that she might adapt these garments, making them into something of her own, continuing to work with her mother through fabric. She never gets round to doing it. If truth be told, she is somewhat torn between wanting to preserve them as they are and wanting to wear them herself. Both motivations are drawn from an urge to memorialise her mother through her clothes. She wonders whether by adapting them and re-wearing them on her own body she might not be even more powerfully reminded of the intimate experience of her mother.

Talking through her wardrobe, it is clear that Charanjit's fashion style and sense of appropriate dress practices were developed alongside the development of her relationships with significant people in her life, in particular her mother. Within her wardrobe many garments now act as an archive and memorial of that relationship. What is more, they continue to enact it. Kuchler argues that there has traditionally been a reticence in material culture studies to acknowledge the part visual culture and art play in the production of social relations. Working with the theories of Gell (1998), Kuchler explores "a theory of objectification that is not about meaning and communication, but about doing, and not about persons, but about material entities that motivate inferences and responses or interpretations" (2002:10). Visual artefacts are not just signifiers of thoughts but surfaces with animation and agency. I think these ideas have purchase in thinking about Charanjit's wardrobe and its garments. Here we see Indian textiles that also have an agency in them; "special objects" that can enchant, that have the ability to capture and change our thinking and feelings about the world around us. Charanjit's clothing archive is a vibrant site of memory.

Materials and Bodies

In the second part of the chapter I want to move out of the wardrobe to consider the role of South Asian dress textiles in the material process of embodiment. Substantively, my focus will be on my participants' experiences of wearing South Asian clothes through narratives that draw out the pleasures and challenges of their wear. We will begin with another extended narrative portrait, in this case of Hema. A composite narrative follows, concluding in a discussion of how the wearing of South Asian dress forms embodies forms of memory work and engagements with cultural heritage.

Hema

Hema is a lady in her forties. She lives in North West London with her husband and two children. She is a friendly, vivacious lady. I met her twice at her home where our discussion ranged from the experience of dress to advice on mothering. She was warm and welcoming.

Talking to her about the intimate relationship she has to dress was fascinating. In the narrative presented here I focus especially on her relationship to the sari. It serves to illustrate how for her developing into an adult, a woman, was about an embodied relationship to dress; and how the South Asian garments she wore linked her body into collective memories and material cultures of heritage.

“Have you come across a Millens sari shop? [When] I was eighteen, it was my Saturday job in Southall, and it was brilliant because it really made me appreciate the sari because my uniform was a sari so I had to wear a sari. It was one colour. It [...] had a border all the way round saying Millens and I used to feel really sexy [laughs] and I used to go on the bus to work, catch the bus to work and it used to feel really nice having to wear [this sari]. I was really, really slim as well so it made a difference how you carried saris [...] I learnt to dress people in saris. Learnt [...] how to kind of show them off properly and [...] for me it was like a real celebration of something that’s part of my heritage [...] so I really learnt to enjoy the garment and [...] I’ve continued to do so, but [I no longer have] as many places to wear [a sari]. But at the time [...], you know, you could wear [...] a sari [in public] [...] and you could find people [who] would shout out abuse. You know some people might not and some people might, you might get an opposite reaction but that was always a threat in the background. But now it doesn’t feel as bad you know, it feels very comfortable to [wear a sari] walking down the street [...] you know, there’s nothing stopping us...” (Hema)

Dress is about embodiment. As Entwistle phrases it: “Dress involves practical actions directed by the body upon the body, resulting in ways of being and ways of dressing, for example ways of walking to accommodate high heels, ways of breathing to accommodate a corset, ways of bending in a short skirt and so on.” (2000:38). As Banerjee and Miller (2003) have explored in the Indian context, the sari performs a very different embodiment than that of most tailored women’s clothes. In the above extract, Hema talks about her lived, bodily experience of wearing a sari when she was eighteen to her first Saturday job. The sari here is a garment with agency of its own that in turn gives agency and vitality to the body. In part, it enables a bodily experience of Indianness to be accessed. By wearing this garment Hema links herself back into a history of feminine sartorial styles enjoyed by her maternal forebears. The garment transforms her in her own eyes and those of others. It is also a sensual experience. Hema recalls the sari as celebratory, empowering and to be enjoyed. She remembers being young, slim and how wearing the sari with its associated bodily exposure made her feel ‘sexy’. In a later discussion she states that she never moved on to wearing the sari “full time”; but whenever she has worn it, her bodily adjustments for it have created a feeling of pleasure and sensuality.

“I think whenever I have worn a sari it’s always made me feel, personally, just made me feel really good so, because it makes me feel taller and makes me feel elegant, which I don’t think these [western] clothes make me feel that [way] and I think it effects your posture, the way you stand and I think it just makes you feel like you, you command some notice [from others]” (Hema)

This ‘notice’ can vary in tone. Remembering her journey to Millens, Hema enjoys again the feeling of attractiveness, basking in the appreciation she received. Lurking, however at the back of this experience was the threat of hostility and aggression. The intermittent nature of these verbal attacks was in itself troubling. She wasn’t sure how her embodiment would be received. As Entwistle discusses, “bodies are potentially disruptive. Conventions of dress attempt to transform flesh into something recognizable and meaningful to a culture; a body that does not conform, that transgresses such cultural codes, is likely to cause offence and outrage and be met with scorn or incredulity” (2000:8). On the one hand, the sari transformed her body into a manifestation of beauty and charm and elegance; but it might also make her an object of censure and antagonism, failing in the “appropriate bodily idiom” (Tarlo 2010) for her environment. Pride in her connection to tradition and cultural heritage through the sari were haunted by the potential for this culture to be excluded.

Hema relates her dress practices to her childhood spent partly in India and partly in London. She arrived in London at the age of 9 months, then went back to India from the age of ten to fifteen where she studied at a boarding school. “Because I lived in India as well. I went back as a teen, when I was [...] ten and I was there until I was fifteen so I went to boarding school [...] the idea was that as a girl you were going [...] have a cultural education” (Hema). One aspect of dressing Hema mentions early in our discussion is how she learned not to show her upper arms. Dress became related to modesty for her from an early age. “I’m the generation that they [said] ‘cover your arms up’ and things like that” (Hema). The ‘they’ in her mind relates to family members who had an educational role in relation to dress. She says this idea of modesty pervades into all aspects of dressing. “Even the Western clothes [...] I’m careful about how [I] wear what I’m wearing”. (Hema) This is related to ideas of respectability as displayed through dress. At a young age, Hema perceived that “[In] good families, the girls did not show their upper arms, all this sort of stuff” (Hema). In this sense, through adopting what she felt was an appropriate clothing practice she also felt she was linking in to the ‘cultural education’ her parents had hoped for her

in India. For Hema, the preservation of a sense of 'Indianness' and its associated heritages became linked to adopting certain bodily engagements with clothing and materiality. This relationship with clothing affected her choices for all garments in her life, Western and South Asian.

The enactment of cultural heritage through the preservation of clothing strategies was one her mother also had to grapple with. Brought up in Gujarat her mother had married her father and migrated to London when Hema was nine months old. Arriving in the UK she tried a number of strategies to accommodate the dual concerns of maintaining Indian clothing in the UK and surviving the winter. "I can remember my mum and dad having issues around you know, clothes were a big issue with them." (Hema). Hema says her mother was "quite liberal" (Hema), always allowing Hema to wear sleeveless clothes and other garments which at the time were not thought of as appropriate for young Indian girls in the UK. For her own garments, she tried putting long johns, leggings, socks and knitted tops with the sari but hated these compromises. So she changed her clothing choices and began wearing western clothes:

"My mum was like, 'No it's perfectly fine, it's nothing revealing', you know. It's still very modest but it suits the environment and it was less cold because when [Indian women in the UK] wore saris [...] they were having to put leggings on and [...] long johns [...] and then socks and my mum was one of those who liked the sari [to] be elegant. You don't mess with it. You put socks on, it looks silly".
(Hema)

So Hema's mother turned to western tailored garments. Not the Indian mother and wife, but the fashionable international woman came to the fore. Hema describes with a certain pride how her mother wore a beehive and slacks during her childhood. Her mother wanted to follow British trends too, wearing crew necks, sleeveless tops, wide-bottomed trousers "like in *The Avengers*... you know?". (Hema) This glamorous figure appears to have imprinted upon Hema in a way that means that the maintaining of heritages through textiles is complex. The heritage Hema sees in South Asian clothing is one of glamorous femininity, an experience she returned to as an eighteen year old enjoying the sari for the first time.

Hema's daughter's embodied relationship with South Asian clothing is equally complex. In principle she loves Indian clothing and actively engages with Indian textiles and fashions. On a

recent visit to India her relatives wished to give her her own Salwar Khameez as a gift. Hema was delighted to find her daughter loved this idea and said to them “Dress me” (Hema). In fact she organised the tailoring of her own Salwar Khameez to her own specifications. Hema was impressed by her eye for fabric, colour and fashions. Her daughter is only twelve years old. Hema says her daughter thinks Indian clothes are “gorgeous” (Hema), “but there’s very much appropriateness to where they should be worn” (Hema). She would not wear them meeting her friends, but would wear a kurta over jeans or a salwar khameez to go and see Hema’s father. Her embodied relationship to South Asian clothing operates in relation to her lived experience of place. Nonetheless, Hema feels her daughter has grown up free from the nervousness she felt when wearing Indian clothes in London. Times have changed, she says; no longer is Indian clothing on the margins, it is everywhere, in mainstream fashions, on the High Street. Acceptance of this and of Indian Diasporas, now British Asians, means that her daughter’s experience of Indian clothing has differed from her own and her mother’s. However the theme of embodied heritage remains one that pervades all their engagements.

For Entwistle, “the study of dress as situated practice requires moving between, on the one hand, the discursive and representational aspects of dress and the way the body / dress is caught up in relations of power, and on the other, the embodied experience of dress and the use of dress as a means by which individuals orientate themselves to the social world.” (2000:38). This general argument can be applied to thinking about South Asian dress and its forms of collective memory. Hema’s discussion moves between the embodied feelings of wearing dress and the discursive elements of its materiality. Her narrative treats South Asian dress forms like the sari as both a part of codified cultural heritage and a form of embodied memory, accessed and transmitted through the act of dressing and wearing clothes. “I think [my taste for Gujarati clothing] that’s just cultural, you know it’s kind of been absorbed into [laughs] my skin so to speak” (Hema).

Embodied experiences of South Asian clothing

I now turn to some other accounts of the experiences of wearing South Asian dress forms. There is some discussion of suits and of head coverings and scarves, but in particular ‘the sari’ played a strong role in these conversations. In their book on ‘The Sari’, Banerjee and Miller (2003) discuss

the idea that the sari is a garment women live up to. They adjust their bodies for it. It both disciplines and empowers them. In the British context, I would like to consider how this garment becomes a test of competency: rewarding, but also a challenge, provoking anxiety. In this way, engagements with aspects of heritage are mediated through embodied practice.

For some, the experience is narrated as a successful relationship. Satinder wears highly fashionable South Asian clothing. It speaks of her as a successful career woman. She looks stylish and beautiful. “I wear a whole range of things. So I wear shalwar khameez, which is like trousers and a long top, or I’d wear a sari which is traditional dress, or I’d wear lengha which is like a skirt and a top. I guess shalwar khameez are traditionally more Punjabi.” (Satinder). She keeps up with fashions but adapts styles to ensure she looks individual in the crowd. Proud of her roots which link her back to India, and in particular of being a Punjabi, she wears this sentiment on her body. Fashionable cuts and designs ensure this connection to her cultural heritage feels right on her body. She has two favourite outfits that are South Asian:

“I’ve kind of got two [favourite South Asian items of clothing]. I’ve got this orange lengha that I just wore to my friend’s wedding at the weekend. And it’s just beautiful. It’s just, it’s really, fits me really like well and kind of just off the shoulders. Kind of a little lengha top and it’s got diamante embroidery around the rims and little diamante bits all the way, like speckled all the way through on the skirt and it’s like a fish tail skirt. So it flares out at the bottom and there’s like that much [gestures] embroidery at the bottom so that all kind of like spirals upwards. But it just looks really beautiful when you put it on. And the other one is, I have got a yellow, like a bought yellow sari. And that again has got a diamante kind of border which is about that thick [gestures] around the edges and, there’s not very much else happening in it, and it’s just got two straps for the top. And it’s just quite simple but it looks really good when you put it on. You know, I guess clothes are more about how you feel when you put them on.” (Satinder)

Satinder enjoys a stylish embodied relationship with her South Asian clothes.

Preeti speaks of the sari as enabling too. She says that she wears both saris and lenghas, depending on the occasion she is going to. However it is the sari she prefers:

“In terms of what I would wear I would prefer to wear saris. Only because I just find them a bit more elegant than Indian [Punjabi] suits. I do wear Indian suits, I also wear Indian lenghas, it depends on whose wedding it is if you like, or where I

am going, how close the relationship is. But generally I tend to wear saris.”
(Preeti)

She reflects that the Asian fashion economy is faster than the British mainstream one. A style in fashion a month ago may no longer be the thing to be seen in today. When she was younger she wore the suit and kept up with cuts and trends, but since she has adopted the sari as her main garment of choice for British Asian events she finds herself freed up from the fashion circuit. The sari is an eternally fashionable garment. It can be dressed up or down. Blouse styles and cuts can be updated and the sari draped in different ways but the fabric itself remains fashionable. It also makes Preeti feel elegant. She stands tall in it, holds herself with grace.

“I think when we were younger it was more about keeping up with the trends and wearing the Indian suits. I think as you get older you can wear saris in so many different ways, it can look so elegant, with saris the simpler the better, the more elegant it looks. You can dress it up with jewellery. So I think now I would prefer to wear a sari, it is less hassle. You can wear any sari and you can look really glamorous. I just prefer it, I think it looks nicer, more graceful and you hold yourself better.... You have to have great posture [when wearing the sari], or you have to try to (laughs). It’s always a bit like balancing books all the time. It looks and you feel better in a sari [if you have good posture].” (Preeti)

In the rather different context of combining a sense of contemporary fashion with clothing in accordance with their Islamic faith, Jamila and Rejona also convey successful empowering embodiments. Speaking within a focus group, they talk about how they wear head coverings in accordance with their Islamic faith. To them, dressing fashionably and dressing with head coverings worked hand in hand in the creation of a range of personal aesthetics. Increasingly, they said, the cultural economies of fashion supported such practice (see also Moors 2013 and Lewis 2013a), though their own looks were less directed by the intermediating work of fashion providers:

Jamila: “We do wear the sari, we do wear, [Punjabi] suits and things like that and even occasionally you know the western kind of prom dress it doesn’t really matter to us, and we normally keep the scarf on and it’s not a big problem to us and we just kind of adapt and it doesn’t really get in the way and I guess there are some people out there ... I mean I do like to I do cover myself up so it’s not really a big issue for me so...”

Rejona: “...I was just going to say you know how people ... I don’t ... I just personally wear a black scarf myself, whereas there are some people who match

the scarf with the colour of the outfit they're wearing or the colour bag they're wearing, it's so you know, it's so accessible these days that it shouldn't be a problem. If you want to keep your scarf on you can, you can match it, you can keep it separate, you can make it stand out, make it, you know, if you're dressing for an occasion get a more glitzy, a more done up scarf, you know it's not really a problem I don't think. I personally don't wear the long *Jilbab*. I don't think I'd ever wear that. I keep the religion in certain ways and I just bring the fashion in other ways. Like I'm wearing skinny jeans which probably wouldn't be seen as that religious ... And my arms aren't covered either [laughs] but I've got my scarf on so yeah it's different for everyone I think."

Shashi discussed the Sari. She judges the sari a wonderful garment to wear on occasion. Echoing Preeti's comments, Shashi will update a sari with new blouses, cut in new and different ways to give an old sari a new look (See Figure 12 for examples of the new look blouses worn with an older sari). She comments about an acquaintance who wore a sari to a film event in Cannes so that she stood out. Shashi appreciates this advantageous use of cultural otherness. She discusses her experience when, as part of a wider cultural arts project, she decided to change her sari wearing from the occasional to the everyday:

"Well, it was originally to do with this debate we were going to have, the [Sari Story] discussion, so I thought, well I am not a person who wears a sari everyday, there will be people there who do wear it, [so] let me have a go. And I was very excited by it. I love wearing a sari, but I don't have enough opportunity I feel to wear it, and it gave me an excuse to wear it in the supermarket, wear it anywhere. And I really enjoyed it, I loved it. I got such positive feedback. Even if someone did not actually, verbally say something to me, they were smiling. I did get a few looks as I guess you would but nothing negative, in fact it even made me feel better. It was November when I did it, so it was very cold but I adapted it with my polo neck and boots. I think I mentioned this earlier, and I made sure the sari was not one of my best silks or something, something that could be thrown in to the washing machine!" (Sashi)

Figure 12: Shashi's adaptations and fusions one sari worn with different blouses



Others had more mixed emotions about the sari and other forms of South Asian dress. Much of this ambivalence came from a sense that these garments could be hard to live up to, to carry off and to embody successfully.

Here is Charanjit:

“I think you just do feel so much more elegant, don’t you, and you have to walk differently [laughs] you have to kind of sit differently. I feel very clumsy I have to say. I do remember the first time I wore a sari, well the first few times I wore a sari because it happened more than once, but there was first my cousin’s wedding in Glasgow and [...] we’d travelled overnight there ... [when] we got there, we had all slept on the floor, got up in the morning and everybody got ready and it was absolutely freezing. No-one was really interested in helping me and I was quite young at the time but I did put the sari on and I remember sitting down and the whole thing had come off in the temple and then when we had to get up they [the family] had to come and stand round me [laughs] and my mum was saying, ‘I knew you were not ready to wear a sari, you can’t keep it on’. I said, ‘Well it’s your fault it wasn’t tied on properly, it wouldn’t all fall off at all [if tied on with help]’. Then also then when my sister got married that’s when I wore kind of saris as well. And again [the saris were] really all over the place. If you look at the old videos of them I look like a complete mess really. My hair was all over the place and the sari was kind of faffing around and falling [off].” (Charanjit)

You may recall from an earlier story Saira recounting how these sartorial mishaps are not limited to the sari, as she remembered the embarrassment of tripping up over her salwar khameez and the time it took for her to master the dupatta scarf with her suits:

“When I was younger I remember, it would just always be some problem, you know, like the dupatta would be slipping off [...] South Asian clothes have always a bit of an ordeal to be honest. Whereas now, you know, you’re just more mature and sort of kind of feel more, yeah more confident in what I’m doing [laughs]” (Saira)

What does a textile become when it is worn? Can it be seen as separate from the body of the wearer? The British Asian women interviewed here are using textiles on their bodies to communicate multiple ideas of identity and self. Looking at material culture and material agencies provides a means of understanding the visual and material significance of clothing for these women. Specifically, wearing South Asian clothing is a material means of doing memory work with the body. Sometimes this work is successful and embodied performance connects well with

the forms of heritage such dress materialises. Sometimes less so; the body and the clothing do not work well together and enact a discomfoting disconnection. Audiences and the gazes of others play a powerful role in the pleasures and anxieties surrounding this embodied performance. In talking to me about their clothes and dress practices, my research participants wove together personal and collective memories, showing how the body itself can be a site of memory.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have been presenting my research participants' experiences of South Asian clothes and clothing textiles as 'evocative objects' in the sense posited by Sherry Turkle; "physical objects that engender intimacy" (Turkle 2007:323). My specific focus was on the relations between such clothing and practices of memory. I pursued this in relation to two different 'sites'. First, I looked at wardrobes and their 'archiving' of some clothing items. I argued that personal and collective layers of memory were overlain in these collections. Second, I looked at the body and the wearing of South Asian clothes. I suggested that sometimes successfully, sometimes less so, the body could perform memory and heritage. In both the wardrobe and on the body there is an interesting slippage, to use Nora's (1989) terms, between the modern emphasis on institutionalised and reflexive 'sites of memory' and less institutionalised 'milieux'. Whilst others (notably Tolia-Kelly 2004) have framed British South Asian material culture as a 'buffer' through which to resist senses of exclusion from British national space, in the testimonies offered to me a much stronger theme was the potential power of materials to connect. Material memories connected together bodies, personal biography, relations with loved ones and broader cartographies of cultural heritage. The accounts offered by these British Asian women highlighted the capacity for clothes to objectify social relations, including some of the most meaningful in our lives. Talking about these clothes was to talk about loving relationships with mothers, the hopes of parents, senses of our own life courses, all interwoven with broader ideas of collective identity and heritage. Also apparent was the materiality of these materials, the affective power of their colours, textures, ornamentation, relationship to our bodies. I discussed how 'special objects' had particular power, in part through their role in our lives but also in part through their sensible material qualities. Whether in wardrobes, carefully stored, or on the body,

proudly worn, South Asian clothing had the capacity to do memory work for these British Asian women.



**Chapter Seven:
Placing Diasporic Dress –
Contexts and Scenes**

CHAPTER SEVEN:

Placing Diasporic Dress: Contexts and Scenes

Introduction

The relations between dress and place have been a recurring theme running through the narratives of preceding chapters. In Chapter Four, for example, I argued that my research participants' engagements with public discourses of identity as British Asian women were shaped by variable imaginations and inhabitations of 'British Asian fashion space'. In Chapter Five, when thinking about these women's wardrobes as 'technologies of the diasporic self', I emphasised the contextually sensitive nature of dress choices, sometimes materialised in the organisation of wardrobes into types of clothes appropriate for different occasions and situations. In Chapter Six I explored different sites and milieux of memory associated with South Asian clothes in London. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, for a study emanating from the disciplinary context of Cultural Geography, issues of place, context and situation have received consistent attention. However, in this final substantive chapter I want to foreground some aspects of place and context more determinedly. I would like to ask how place and context are implicated in the dress practices of the women I interviewed.

In presenting an answer to that question, the chapter has two main foci. First, I consider the contextually specific nature of dress practices. Drawing conceptually on Cresswell's seminal account of what it means to be 'in and out of place' (Cresswell 1996) I present testimony about the role of dress in 'fitting in', 'standing out' and both responding to and reshaping the geographies of public space. Second, I reflect on the geographies of South Asian fashion scenes within London and the dynamic processes of what we might call 'the London look' (Breward 2004). Here, I complement accounts of the importance of South Asian retail areas in London (such as Southall, Wembley, Whitechapel, and Green St in Newham) to the women interviewed with an extended portrait of Jamila and Rejona and the sartorial landscapes of their lives in Camden. Substantively, some new testimony is introduced, for example from Jamila and Rejona and from Riza, but on occasions I also reflect back on narrative already presented. When doing

this, I seek to avoid undue repetition, but also to maintain a sense of my participants' voices, overall, this chapter is moving me towards concluding the thesis.

Contexts: Dressing In and Out of Place

“We exist in and are surrounded by places – centres of meaning. Places are neither totally material nor completely mental; they are combinations of the material and the mental and cannot be reduced to either. A church, for instance, is a place. It is neither just a particular material artefact, nor just a set of religious ideas; it is always both. Places are duplicitous in that they cannot be reduced to the concrete or the “merely ideological”; rather they display an uneasy and fluid tension between them.” (Cresswell 1996: 13)

Cresswell's conception of place as both mental and material is a useful way of thinking about the inhabitation of British Asian fashion space. His argument is that places materialise ways of thinking, that this is a politically charged process, and that these politics play out through social cartographies of inclusion and exclusion. The everyday phrase about someone or something 'being out of place' is indicative: “When an expression such as ‘out of place’ is used it is impossible to clearly demarcate whether social or geographical place is denoted – place always means both” (Cresswell 1996:11). Geographers have argued more generally that “society produces space and space reproduces society” (Cresswell 1996:12), but Cresswell's particular emphasis is on how the often tacit norms about what is appropriate to particular places and times is central to this relationship. For Cresswell, then, places are defined by the behaviours which are expected to happen in them and by the people and things which are seen as belonging there. Equally, places are therefore defined by exclusions: by the behaviours that are prohibited within them, by the people and things cast as out of place. The power of these normative framings of place is indicated by the kinds of emotions that their disruption can cause: disgust for example. Matter out of place is cast as ‘dirt’, ‘polluting’ the ‘purifications of space’ that give the world its ordered being (see also Sibley 1995 for a stronger account of the psychoanalytic underpinnings of this argument).

On the other hand, Cresswell argues that because of its normative character, place also offers a resource for contestation and change through acts of ‘transgression’. By being or doing things out of place, the normally tacit and unexamined expectations that structure our social worlds are

brought into the light and opened up for scrutiny. As Cresswell puts it: “The labelling of actions as inappropriate in the context of a particular place serves as evidence for the always already existing normative geography. In other words, transgressive acts prompt reactions that reveal that which was previously considered natural and commonsense” (1996:10). For example, as queer activist groups such as Act Up made manifest in their organised kiss-ins, it may only be when we see same sex intimacy in public (the holding of hands, a kiss) that we reflect on how heteronormative is the space that we inhabit.

If, then, “expectations about behaviour in place are important components in the construction, maintenance, and evolution of ideological values” (Cresswell 1996:4), it follows that dress and its geographies intervene in this wider field of place and its politics. As Elizabeth Wilson (1985) has argued, dress and fashion are often driven by dual impulses: to conform and to stand out. In what follows I examine the implications of this for my participants’ research practices, presenting testimony on ‘fitting in’, ‘standing out’ and relations between dress and public space in London.

‘Fitting In’

Below I will look at testimony from three women – Preeti, Divya, and Satinder – who in differing ways consider themselves to have developed successful dress practices for the places and contexts that they find themselves in. As I also discussed in Chapter Four, part of this success is about modulating dress such that one ‘fits in’ to a range of places and social contexts.

One particularly significant context in that regard for nearly all the women interviewed was the workplace. Preeti, reflecting on the clothes she wears to work, describes how the different sections of her wardrobe are separate and distinct. South Asian clothing is appropriate for certain times in her life and at other times other dress strategies are appropriate. Her work clothes, for example, are not influenced by South Asian dress forms and are instead referenced by western professional sartorial expectations. When asked how Indian clothes impacted on her professional identity, Preeti, replied: “I just treat the different styles as totally separate. I have completely separate clothing for everything. I have a work wardrobe where I don’t think [South Asian clothing] impacts in any way.” (Preeti). Working in a corporate environment, Preeti has

developed a wardrobe that is appropriate for this context and its dress codes. “I wouldn’t wear Indian clothing to work only because of what I do [...] In a professional environment you need to be in professional clothing, professional dress. So I would rather keep it separate. In fact you actually look forward to dressing up when the occasion comes if you don’t wear it everyday.” (Preeti). Work clothes for Preeti are not South Asian, they are western tailored garments. Entwistle considers the sartorial norms of workplace clothes for women in contemporary Britain:

“Significantly, women’s adoptions of tailored clothes has to do with the orientations of women’s bodies to the context of the male workplace and its *habitus* which designates the suit as the standard ‘uniform’. In this environment, the suit works to obscure the male body, hiding its sexed features, as Collier (1998) has argued. Women’s movement into this sphere, as secretaries and later as professionals, required them to adopt a similar need for a uniform to designate them as workers and thus as public as opposed to private figures.” (2000:37).

For British Asian women, the professional workplace is associated with dress norms that doubly structure what it means to ‘fit in’. The tailored suit not only covers up gender and sexuality, it also serves to cover up ethnicity. South Asian dress is not considered suitable for this environment. It is out of the expected norms of dress and therefore not permissible. However, like many other women, by separating out everyday work wear and clothes for special occasions, Preeti keeps her interest and enjoyment of special (in this case South Asian) clothing alive and vital.

This distinction between everyday and special occasional wear is a strategy deployed by a number of the women spoken to in these interviews with regards to South Asian clothing. This separation of clothing strategies negotiates and enables participation for these women in different areas of life. Divya jokingly refers to her wardrobe as harbouring her “split personalities” (Divya). As we saw earlier in the thesis, for work she wears trousers and western tailored tops but at home she changes into Indian clothing. She finds both comfortable and both to be an expression of her self, or of her different selves at different times in her daily life. She feels that her ease with this split stems from when she first arrived in Britain and wanted to be fully able to access fully British work and social spaces:

“I think when we first came here there weren’t many Asian people here. And obviously I did not want to stand out if I wore my sari. I wanted to be part of everything, you know. And so I think that’s stuck with me, even now. I mean

there are people who wear their own [South Asian] clothes, but I've never felt right wearing saris to work." (Divya)

Cresswell argues that: "One way to illustrate the relation between place and behaviour is to look at those behaviours that are judged as inappropriate in a particular location – literally as actions out of place" (1996:10). Upon arrival in the UK, Divya observed the relationship between her new place of residence and dress practices. She adjusted her dress techniques to enable her to work with these new expectations of behaviour as part of wider project of including herself within British society and in particular its spaces of work and sociality. Divya adjusted her dress practices so as to be appropriately dressed in the new contexts of her settlement in London.

Such adjustments are not necessarily experienced as constraining or exclusionary. As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, the capacity to judge clothing appropriate to a range of contexts is associated with both sartorial and cosmopolitan competence. Satinder expresses this particularly strongly. Her frustrations lie with those who frame her as only being able to inhabit one fashion space or another; her pride is in her ability to succeed sartorially in a range of contexts. Satinder is very proud, she says, of her Punjabi roots. She is fluent in Punjabi and has a very enjoyable relationship to Asian clothing. She is also British. Her dress practice developed through her life has informed her idea of Britishness in different contexts from her school life to her work place. You may recall from Chapter Five Satinder talking about the different contexts within which she considers different clothing strategies to be appropriate:

"If I was going to the temple with my family on Sunday then obviously it's absolutely fine [to wear South Asian clothing] or it's New Year's and we're going to the temple. You know it's more when you're dressing up for things like a wedding or a party. Even like an English party, I wouldn't feel funny wearing like a sari because I just think that's absolutely fine. But, if I was going to work [laughs] then I'd think [whether South Asian clothing was appropriate]." (Satinder)

She loves dressing up, looking good and takes pleasure in the act of dressing. For her all the multiple fashion networks she interacts with to create her look are beneficial to her as they enable her to present her different aspects of self in different contexts. From Punjabi suits for family events to Western tailored clothing for her professional life: "But at the end of the day all clothes do have their place, don't they? You wouldn't turn up at work you know, in sparkly

spangly lengha...” (Satinder). Each style reflects different facets of her life. She is comfortable with inhabiting British Asian Fashion space in different ways at in different contexts. None of these styles negates the other; in fact each adds to and enhances the development of her self. “It’s part of society isn’t it? It denotes like your, what you’re actually doing, your activity that you’re doing. And that denotes what you’re going to wear at the end of the day” (Satinder). Being contextually aware of dress and ‘fitting in’ to different situations for Satinder is an enabling inhabitation of British Asian fashion space. Her desire is to be notable not because she fails to conform, but because she dresses appropriately with particular skill and style.

Satinder talks about wanting to ‘fit in’ through her dress, all dress to her ‘has its place’. However whilst she wants to fit in, more significantly she wants to look good. It is a combination of looking good and fitting in which enables her to develop a diasporic dress practice suitable for the places and contexts of her life. For Preeti, like Satinder, one area of her life not suitable for South Asian clothing is the workplace. Preeti has developed separate wardrobes which enable her to inhabit different places and contexts successfully. For Divya, upon arrival into the UK, she developed a new style, to help her to ‘fit in’. She did not want to ‘miss out’ and so she changed her dress practice to enable her to participate in public spaces. For each woman, the relationship between place and appropriate clothing has created new diasporic engagements with dress.

‘Standing Out’

Of course not all contextualised dress practices speak of ‘fitting in’. We might also be a participant in a context such as the workplace, but choose to transgress sartorial norms. Riza was a research participant who had a strong sense of the potential to resist norms and to transgress. From the outset of my interview with Riza she described to me how London is the stage upon which she has lived out her dress practices. She is the youngest of three sisters; the eldest was born in Bangladesh whilst she and her middle sister were born in London. She moved to Brighton briefly as a student but since then has lived in London and thinks that she probably always will as she “loves it” (Riza). Riza now lives in Greenwich. She is a freelance writer and artist. She makes textile jewellery and customises clothes, as well as working with fabric on canvas.

Riza's experience of expressing herself through dress began early. As the youngest of three sisters she wore a selection of 'hand me downs', and was influenced by her sisters' style. At school she remembers the uniform being so strict that she felt oppressed by it. She hated having her dress regulated. From an early age she has felt clothing choices are expressive of her sense of self. Being hemmed in at school felt claustrophobic to her. Riza broke out of her clothing boundaries when she went to Sixth Form College in East London. Riza grew up in Enfield in North East London. The change in the area of London that she inhabited every day strengthened both her confidence and ability to stand out and be noticed because of her clothes. This is a sartorial project that has continued throughout her adult life since. Her main aim, she tells me, is to add colour to an otherwise dull scheme of dress practices. In putting Riza's testimony and look into words, the black ink on white paper of this thesis seems deeply unsatisfactory. I can only attempt to describe the vivid world of clothes she has created. Her flat is an assertion of textures, fabrics and colours. At her Sixth Form College the majority of students were of South Asian origin and most of them wore South Asian clothing on a daily basis. Riza stood out in her choice of western garments and her eclectic arrangements of colours and styles. A tutor at the college remarked that she was "not from round here" (Riza), and as such should contact a friend of his and get a summer job in Soho at his production company. Again this change of location for Riza fostered a new chapter in her experience of clothing. In Soho she describes encountering "psychedelic clothes shops" (Riza), buying florescent pink and vividly patterned clothes. She was intrigued by this space. The mix of office workers, media types, tourists all added to the different clothing styles available to observe and to be influenced by. Whilst she asserts that she always makes sure she has something South Asian on her at all times, she creatively constructs her garments to resist any one categorisation of clothing. Her reluctance to conform to clothing expectations exists in both everyday life and special occasions. For an Asian wedding she says she would "leave it to the other girls" (Riza) to really dress up and display certain expected Asian fashions. Instead she chooses to mix something Asian with something visibly western, so again she stands out from the crowd. She prefers, she says, to have a large number of clothes in her wardrobe rather than a few quality pieces. This vast array of garments enables her to create her own look rather than to be dressed by others. In fact, she says, she never wears the same outfit twice as each day she crafts a new, unique outfit from her wardrobe.

Figure 13: Cross over purchases: An 'Indian' looking skirt brought from a high street store



Riza sometimes buys fabric from a cheap shop in South East London and then takes it to Green Street to be tailored into a dress or some such. The cost of tailoring in Green Street can be as low

as £15 for a dress. Utilising the different areas of London she creates a dress economy for herself which fits into her lifestyle. She also will buy an Asian looking garment from a high street shop to add to her wardrobe as a cross over purchase (for an example see figure 13). Shopping for a recent Bollywood event at the O2 Arena she was left with a dilemma. Asian clothes, she says, are expensive, a couple of hundred pounds for an outfit. This is a price that she would never dream of paying for a western piece, but with Asian garments cheaper priced garments just “don’t fit right” (Riza) and the materials are not as nice. She feels it is more of an investment. So she began shopping for the right outfit in Green Street. However on this occasion Green Street (which is nearer to her home) did not provide any outfits of interest. So she went to Southall. Riza says she prefers the shopping space of Southall as she can get lost in the bazaar style shopping arcades. The outfit she chose was wonderfully bright, colourful and sequined (see figure 14). It felt right for her to wear to this event; she could stand out and yet fit in. Her choice of garment was South Asian but the style and cut was very different and hopefully unique. Creating a dress practice for Riza is intrinsically linked to the spaces and places of London. Whilst the spaces of Southall and Green Street are described as familiar, indeed almost comforting in their ability to enable her to create her look, there are other spaces she describes as “not feeling right” (Riza) for her. “I’m obviously not a really wealthy Asian person with glossy hair” (Riza), she says, and as such boutiques, department stores and so on do not provide what she feels is a welcoming environment.

Figure 14: Riza's outfit brought from Southall



Riza's insistence on individuality in her dress has not always allowed her access into areas of life that she wished to pursue. Her career at the civil service was difficult not least, she says, because she could not bring herself to follow the normative dress codes. In the past she has tried to break in to journalism, but again found her herself out of place in an office of "blonde girls" (Riza), as she puts it. Here she purposely crafted outfits comprised of western style clothes alone, but her assemblages were still notably different to the kind of office wear adopted by the other women. Later, when working at an Asian magazine she again felt that the culture of dress was not for her. The colleagues she encountered she describes as being "really skinny" and wearing only "black clothes" (Riza), another sartorial culture she could not and did not want to fit in to. If, as Clarke and Miller (2002) argue, many of us dress in order to minimise risks of social embarrassment, then our clothing choices are governed by a minimisation of risk and a strong impulse to conformity. The expression of this may vary, depending on context. It is as true of stylish, high price, fashionable dress 'in black' as it is of the widespread adoption of jeans and blue denim as a safe sartorial option. Riza struggled with the idea of constraining herself in relation to placed dress norms. For her, to shape her appearance in this way would have been to reduce her capacity to express herself.

Riza's testimony reveals that her urge to be expressive with her clothing has resulted in successes but also in compromises in her life. Place mattered to her dress practices. London and its localities shaped her dress history. But place's normative qualities sat uneasily with Riza's style. Riza's vibrancy and creativity was transgressive. This was not always an easy space to inhabit. As Cresswell puts it, transgressions and transgressives often provoke hostility because "Transgressions appear to be "against nature"; they disrupt the patterns and processes of normality and offend the subtle myths of consensus" (1996:26). Certainly, Riza provokes us to think about that normality. Listening to this narrative, and the other narratives presented above, we might ask who owns and has access to British social space? Where and how are we allowed in? To some, Asian clothes do not lend themselves to a professional identity. To others, Asian clothes allow access to familial or religious spaces. Dress here is partly political, shaped by and intervening in matters of race and identity. But it is also deeply personal. In our everyday navigations of our wardrobes we both confront wider political landscapes and, at the same time, domesticate that wider world of style and fashion, reworking it into something contextually specific, personal and our own.

Dress and Public Spaces

In relation to the hijab, Tarlo argues that “feelings or emotions associated with dress often have a significant impact on people’s relationship to public space” (2010:63). In the conversations I had with my research participants this relationship was cast in two ways. On the one hand, the women were responsive to the character of public spaces, their perceived norms, and moments when they had felt sartorially judged and policed. On the other hand, the women were also clear that public spaces were not unchanging and indeed that their own and other British Asian women’s presence within them was a source of their mutability.

For Amrita, these ‘two-way’ relations were apparent in the emotional ambivalence of her response to a discussion of norms with regard to wearing South Asian dress forms in mundane, ordinary public spaces.

“I just think [our dress choices are informed by] the environment we have been brought up in. I mean, I would not go to Tesco in my suit or sari or anything if you know what I mean, it just does not feel right. I don’t have anything against it – it just does not feel right. I always think of [dressing in Asian clothes] as something to be proud of – I am not embarrassed by it or anything. So, I am always surprised when you do wear it [how] so many people ask you, people from other cultures who don’t know about it so much, they ask you about it.” (Amrita)

Here we see a sense of what is ‘right’ subtly differentiated from a sense of what is ‘shameful’ (in terms of embarrassment and pride) and from social responses (where interest about South Asian dress is the most frequent response to its presence). Whilst Amrita clearly has a strong sense of what is ‘in and out of place’, the emotional and social cartographies she describes here are subtler than that simple binary allows. Perhaps this reflects too how the norms of public space are neither static nor unaffected by our own presence. As Tarlo states, the geography of the city morphs and changes, indeed “the rules of social behaviour in a multicultural city with a heterogeneous population are by no means clear-cut.” (2010:68). At times certain dress practices seems appropriate in a place, at others they change and so other fashions become appropriate: “Particular norms prevail in particular spaces but the movement of individuals across spaces lends a considerable degree of diversity concerning the expression and interpretation of an appropriate bodily idiom” (2010:68).

In an earlier portrait, this was something we heard Charanjit reflecting upon in terms of her own geographies of migration within the UK, from Nottingham to London.

“If you go into the local shopping area [in London], there are loads of different Asians of different backgrounds. A lot of them are wearing [Punjabi] suits. A lot of the younger people are wearing [Punjabi] suits and they’re much more fashionable, so there is a kind of different atmosphere, whereas I was brought up in an area in Nottingham where everyone wore English clothes and you wouldn’t have gone out in Asian clothes that much. Or you might just try it, whereas now you can wear tops with jeans and you can wear Indian shoes with jeans and so you don’t think about it as much. I think there’s much more of a casual approach or I feel that I can wear some of my Asian clothes with other clothes as it will look quite nice [...] so I think in that sense, well, it feels much more natural as well.” (Charanjit)

This is not just a matter of Ilford being different to Nottingham, though it is about that; it is also about the capacity for British Asian people, varied embodied presences, and the circulation of South Asian materials to change the context, to change what is assumed as the norm.

Figure 15: Shashi’s tartan blouse worn with a sari for a fusion of styles



In other cases, this active intervention into the norms of public space was more immediate. Let me take just one example, a story told to me by two women who knew each other but whom I interviewed at two different times. Shashi and Shobha both live in an area of London called Ickenham. Around the time of the interviews there had been a festival in Ickenham in which they had been involved. There had been a procession and both had been on a float. They had both been asked to wear clothing representing their cultural heritage. Their responses to this request were not identical. Shashi borrowed her son's St George's flag that he had as an England football fan, and sewed in on to the pallu of a red sari. She wore this to reflect the crossings of both sides of her identity, English and Indian, a carefully considered display of self, assertive and proud. Shashi has also worn a tartan blouse with a sari on other occasions to again show this crossing of both sides of her identity (Figure 15 shows this tartan blouse). Shobha also asserted herself through dress. However she rejected a sari in favour of a salwar khameez. Her reasoning for this was partly for ease, the thought of 'managing' a sari alarmed her, but also to show an adaptation of self perhaps. She met her Indian and English sides in this garment. With its similarity to western cuts it reflected the person brought up in the UK, a British woman, whilst at the same time it clearly displayed her Indian heritage. Both women displayed seemingly similar identities in different ways. Each became part of the dress identities displayed at this festival in London that in turn made some impact upon the normative perceptions of dressed selves on display in the city. London is changed by its people and their dress, as well as presenting geographies of dress to which they accommodate. As Dwyer writes, "Thinking about fashion cities in the context of transnational fashion cultures illustrates the need to go beyond thinking about cities either as bounded spaces or as spaces with fixed identities." (2006:233).

Even when dress practice is mapped across contexts with their own established norms, each individual brings their own tastes, preferences and nuanced approach to style. Each expression of self is not only context specific, but subtle and personal. Individual agency cannot be negated in this understanding of the relationship between place and learned dress behaviours. The testimonies presented in this thesis speak to how the women I interviewed used their South Asian dress heritage in their everyday lives to create new British Asian identities which worked for them across the places and spaces of London. Does this testimony primarily indicate a blurring of identities and an attempt at a rather homogenous British middle class look, with a twist of Asian thrown in for good measure? I think perhaps not. In my reading, the testimonies

gathered represent much more subtle and sensitive expressions of self. Each individual is working within British Asian fashion space, where the sartorial norms across space are changing and morphed by their presence. Can we therefore at once display difference and fit in? Perhaps in London we can? The diversity of the looks created by my participants reflects not only the diverse backgrounds and personalities of the people interviewed but also the diversity of the city they inhabited.

Scenes: London Looks and British Asian Dress

In the second part of this chapter, I want to turn to the London context of the research more directly. I would like to think about how being in London has gone hand in hand with the development of the sorts of individual dress engagements with place discussed previously. In terms of fashion, London has long been notable for its cultural hybridity. As Christopher Breward phrases it, ‘the London Look’ has long been shaped by “diverse ethnic communities” and the “resulting fusion of traditions and styles – based on ideas of trade, exchange, travel and sometimes conflict – has been a constant theme in London fashion, producing both an excitingly performative sense of London style at different moments and a strong rejoinder to any description of fashion which limits itself to fixed notions of location, history, culture and identity.” (2004:13). For Danny Miller (2009), the impact of such diversity goes further still; London is a city characterised by its ability to be both somewhere and anywhere. To explore the complex cultural geographies of London is beyond the scope of this thesis and it is not a task that I attempt here. Rather, my aim is more modest. Generally, I want to contextualise the narratives presented so far with account of their urban contexts. Specifically, I want to examine accounts of the importance to dress experiences of South Asian retail areas in London (such as Southall, Wembley, Whitechapel, and Green St in Newham) and complement that with an extended portrait from Jamila and Rejona of the ‘non-Asian’ sartorial landscapes of their lives in Camden.

South Asian London

It would not be possible to view the fashion cultures inhabited and developed by the women I interviewed without thinking about historical associations between London and South Asia. The impact of Empire on the very fabric of London has been widely written about (e.g. Driver and Gilbert 1999). Such historical scholarship has highlighted how India was ‘brought back home’ and incorporated into the life and structure of the city. Work in textile and fashion history has likewise looked at the influence of Indian styles and fabrics on British fashions since early contact began. Whilst the term is historically specific, ‘British Asian style’ is not without historical precedent and could be applied to long histories of connection implicating both London and the sub-continent (Breward, Crang and Crill 2010). Histories ranging from Chintz (Crill 2008) to twentieth century bohemians and hippies (Ashmore 2006, 2010) have explored the presence and translation of Indian materials and styles into British and London’s fashion cultures. The cosmopolitan character of London has long been central to its identity. Hutnyk sees British culture more generally as fundamentally forged through its colonial, postcolonial and global relations: “tea, coffee, sugar, chocolate, rock and roll, potatoes, *Neighbours*, jazz clubs, balti restaurants, critical writing..., skill at cricket, etc. – are all derivative of other places” (Hutnyk 2000:214). Places such as the locales of London mentioned by the women I interviewed are of course connected to other places in many ways. As Brah states: “Diasporic identities are at once local and global. They are networks of transnational identifications encompassing ‘imagined’ and ‘encountered’ communities” (1996:196). Looking at these women’s experiences of dress in London in isolation would of course prove problematic, as the fashion culture we are discussing here is a diasporic one created and maintained by transnational relations (as more fully discussed in Chapter Three). The connections London has to South Asia operate on many levels. They are material and emotional. They involve travel and family relations. They are mediated (Dudrah 2010).

Within London, dress practices can be related to emergent and dynamic geographies of clothing retail. New economies began to emerge, centred around areas such as Southall and Wembley high streets. New methods of selling were established, including travelling sari salesmen: “It begins with the first entrepreneurs of the post-war migrant generation, selling rolls of fabric door to door or via market stalls, followed by pioneering women selling ‘suitcase collections’ or ready

made suits imported from India out of garages or back bedrooms” (Dwyer 2010a:150). Divya recalls buying some of her first saris from a door to door salesman:

“(showing garment) I think it was the first one [Sari] that I bought here [in the UK] and I really liked it at the time. I was young, and you know when you first see something [you like it]. And I wore it so much [...] we came in seventy-one but I can’t remember it might be a couple of years after. I’m not sure. Within that period in the seventies, well he came round to our house with a suitcase full and maybe there might have been one or two shops on, because we had just come [to the UK] we didn’t know where to go but I remember buying this one and there was another red one which I’ve got as well [from the door to door salesman], probably bought at the same time, chiffon.” (Divya)

“By the mid-1960s and later, boosted by the arrival of Asian refugees from Uganda and Kenya, fashion retailers were becoming established in emergent Asian neighbourhoods.” (Dwyer 2010a:150). Shops in Southall were redesigned to look more like Indian bazaars. It is a material environment developed and altered to fit the mental associations its consumers have with retail spaces. As Dwyer states “The history of British post-war settlement in Britain could be told through an account of the changing fortunes of the British Asian fashion retailing sector” (2010a:150). A new set of spatial resources developed and were utilised. Fashion here can be seen to have played an active and dynamic part in creating the spatial landscape of London. Areas such as Southall and Wembley served a community and became vital and vibrant fashion centres.

The women I interviewed described to me a relationship with these South Asian areas of London. For some they were central to their lives and an active resource. For others they dipped in and out, using the areas when it suited them. Their thoughts on the areas of London with concentrations of South Asian fashion shops were varied. For some it had always been part of their idea of a home in London. Jasminder grew up near by Southall. She has always used the high street’s resources. Having now moved to Bristol, there is a sense of loss. She only now realises how much she used the area and its methods for tying oneself in to a transnational fashion culture. Others too feel that popping into the shops in South Asian areas of London is a positive advantage. Shashi, for example, updates her style by buying new sari blouses and creating new looks from the relatively inexpensive shops of Wembley. An older sari is reinvented with the use of a new up to date blouse. Shobha also expresses how going to Wembley, eating the food, buying the clothes is like “recharging her cultural batteries”:

“Well last week I was teaching in Wembley, [at] a primary school and it was fantastic. Even in break time I’d just go to the shop and there would be all this Gujarati stuff everywhere and people speaking [Gujarati], and I just felt [pause] you know every now and then you need a little kind of boost of your own, you know, what you’re really made of and it was so lovely I kind of came away with my batteries all recharged.” (Shobha)

The very fabric of areas like Wembley or Southall is something a number of the women commented on. Riza said how she enjoyed this environment with its bazaar style shops. Traditional British shop fronts have been opened up to create smaller shops with alleyways running between them, similar to bazaars found in South Asia. She says this is an inspiring environment that she enjoys getting ‘lost’ in. Hema too remarked on the changes to Southall High Street over the years. It is now a safer environment, more vibrant, richer perhaps. Saira also feels that Green Street in Newham is now a fun, dynamic fashion area which she enjoys accessing, so much so she took her white British girlfriends there shopping in the run up to her wedding.

“I do like going to Green Street, just because there’s so much variety and there’s like, and I think yeah Green Street for me is quite, I have kind of have really positive memories of shopping there because when I got married I took quite a lot of my non-Asian friends there to get outfits, and they all found something that they really liked so I thought that was just really positive and really nice...”. (Saira)

My respondents recognised the distinctive, London-specific qualities to these spaces. Whilst cast as South Asian, what they sell has significant differences from Indian or Pakistani fashion scenes. Southall is a materialization of British Asian fashion space, distinctive in its facilitation of British, London looks. Preeti comments on the response to Southall of a visiting Indian relative:

“Recently we just had relatives over from India and she – my cousin-in-law – I think she is at a University which deals with fashion. So we were walking down Southall Broadway and she would say ‘oh that’s so old’ or ‘we have moved on from there’. So that was quite interesting, I think we are quite far behind India. Even through we think we are not and when we go to India we can’t find the designs we are looking for as the designs are so far forward there. It is really

weird because when I did go to India I just have to accept that the kind of things I want to buy I cannot find there, I can only find them here.” (Preeti)

Different retail areas are plugged into different transnational networks and cultures. Barnali prefers the shopping areas of Tooting as they are more ‘Bengali’ or more ‘Hindu’ than the other areas of London.

“We’re a very small minority because we’re Hindu Bengalis, so you get Bangladeshis for example who are Muslims and they’ve got a huge community here but we as a community are quite small. We tend to have settled around sort of South London so there’s an area called Tooting and Tooting has a bit of everything but I think more so to our tastes because there are quite a few sari shops there and the types of saris that we would buy. And also other items as well. I’ve bought various outfits from there in the past. Really nice outfits. But I’ve also, because we don’t live that far away from Southall, we’ve been to Southall a few times as well and I’ve bought outfits there. But yes they, that is a very Punjabi dominated area and the style, the clothes and things are exactly the type of things they would wear. And the same, I’ve been to Wembley, and I found exactly the same thing to the point of even the saris, the type of materials and designs that Gujarati women would wear but we probably wouldn’t wear as much.” (Barnali)

For others the blurring of the mainstream high street and the South Asian high street has created even more conveniences for them and enabled them to maintain their individual British Asian styles closer to home. Charanjit described how she wears a dress from the High Street retailer Zara which to her looks just like a Khameez top. She also wears Khameez tops from shops on Green Street in Newham, which look to her just like a western style dress. This blurring has enabled people to dip in and out of the South Asian high street. As Dwyer puts it: “Successive generations have transformed British Asian style through engagement with the fashion industries of the subcontinent and through fusion with more mainstream British fashion” (Dwyer 2010a:159).

Jamila and Rejona: Camden Women

I first met Jamila and Rejona at the Victoria and Albert Museum. A day had been organised where women of South Asian descent came to the V&A, engaged with the South Asian textile collection and participated in a focus group event to talk about their experience of South Asian clothing. I later met them for further discussion of their dress practices. Jamila and Rejona are sisters in their late teens. Jamila was at University and Rejona was just in the process of completing her A-Levels and applying for University places. They both seemed clever and articulate young women. I enjoyed meeting them immensely. Their testimony opened up a discussion of how place and displacement created a set of circumstances by which they mapped their life and looks. They were the two youngest women I interviewed. Here were stories from two people who had grown up in a different era to myself. For them, satellite TV and international media influences were always available and part of normal life. Also they grew up in a time where South Asian fashion influences were increasingly becoming part of mainstream British fashion cultures. Born in the late 80s and early 90s the millennial 'Indian summers' of interest to fashion journalism were part of their lived childhood experiences. The testimony they gave spoke of what it was like to grow up inside British Asian fashion space not in its formative years, but when it was established and had national presence.

However, their narratives were also highly localised. As the discussion developed, it became apparent that for them fashion emanated not only from the wider international world but also from more localised and personal sources. From the outset these women made clear that whilst they were many other things, they were very much Londoners. And not only Londoners, but women from Camden and Kings Cross. Descriptions of growing up in Camden, and working out a sartorial identity with this area very much in mind, predominated: "Well we were born here. Me and my sisters, we were all born here, just down the road actually." (Rejona) Rejona was born at University College, not far from where we are sitting talking. Jamila and Rejona are third generation British Asians. Jamila and Rejona's Grandfather migrated here in the 1950s. He worked here alone from a few years and then brought over from Bangladesh the rest of his family, including their mother, uncle and aunt.

When asked about their use of South Asian clothing, they describe it as occasional. They say they don't get much chance to wear it in their "day to day" (Rejona) lives and instead wear it only when they know others will also be wearing it because it is 'nice' to do so. When asked for more detail on the garments they choose, they say that they wear "traditional" (Jamila) clothes, such as the salwar khameez. They don't wear the sari as they worry about tripping up and how they might manage the garment. They comment on Shashi, another one of my interviewees who also came to the day at the V&A. She is a particularly elegant sari wearer and looked great at the V&A wearing a green sari with a combat style jacket. Her look struck Jamila and Rejona as particularly successful. They mention the way she walks and looks in the sari. If they could also carry it off like that they would, but for now they choose the comfort and ease of the salwar khameez. Its trousers and tops are nearer to the western garments they choose for their "day to day" (Rejona) lives and so are easier to move between. As previously discussed in Chapter Six, they both wear head-coverings as part of their expression of the Islamic faith.

The spaces of London are not uniform for Jamila and Rejona. There are the familiar local areas of Camden; there is the West End; and then there are other areas further away, shopping areas, work areas. Also for them the distinction between home and outside is articulated through dress too. In the home they say they were 'Asian' clothes or 'lounge wear' or as Rejona describes it "Asian Lounge wear" (Rejona). Rejona says to her sister that she wears more Asian clothes in the home than she does herself. Jamila agrees. She might in the summer go out of the home in a kurta or kaftan, but it would be very "westernised" (Jamila) as she puts it. After this discussion of the home their thoughts naturally turns towards what is worn outside the home. As Jamila puts it, she would try to mix up the genres but would never wear a salwar khameez outside of the home unless it was a special occasion where everyone else would be wearing South Asian clothing. They consider that if they had been brought up in an "Asian area" (Rejona) they might have felt more at ease wearing their Asian clothing in public. Rejona adds that she does not see anything wrong with wearing South Asian clothing outside of the home but it is just not the way they have been brought up. Jamila offers some thoughts on why this might be. They have, as she puts it, been brought up in a 'predominantly' white area since they were young. As such they got used to wearing the clothing norms they saw around them, and so are more comfortable wearing these styles. Importantly, these norms were also reproduced by their parents when they were growing up. Their parents bought them western outfits and so they learned that this was the norm for

dress worn outside of the house. I wondered if this was deliberate on their parents' part, reflecting a cultural positioning of their children. Rejona and Jamila felt more prosaic reasons lay behind it. They lived near a Woolworths on Camden High Street, or if they wanted something nicer they could easily shop at John Lewis or Debenhams in Oxford Street. Getting to and from South Asian areas such as Green Street or Whitechapel was a much bigger exercise for them. They were Camden girls.

South Asian clothes featured in their wardrobes as special items for specific occasions. They discussed their favourite outfits. Jamila's is a lavender coloured salwar khameez from Wembley. She brought it for her Aunt's wedding and she likes it the best of her South Asian clothes because it brings back memories of that special day. She remembers the trip to Wembley, visiting a relative, and then going shopping. The whole experience from shopping in Wembley, to dressing in Camden and to wearing it at her Aunt's wedding took her across London and set the stage for her relationship with this outfit. Rejona also has a favoured outfit. This one was bought from her father's cousin's shop in Whitechapel. It has no sentimental memories associated with it as such. She likes it because it is a striking design. It is turquoise and has embroidery all over the salwar (the trouser part); in this it is quite unusual, as it is normally the khameez that has the detailed work. The fabric is Georgette and it 'elongates' the body, as she puts it. Rejona says she is quite short and so needs this visual feature in her clothes. She is also quite slim and I would imagine the cut and material flatters this too. Both garments are described to me as special and unusual. The effort and journeys made to purchase them adds to their value. Rejona's outfit was bought for Eid. She says that every year they used to go with their Dad to buy a new outfit for Eid. She says they generally went to Whitechapel or Bethnal Green. They never, as she puts it, "went the whole nine yards to Green Street" (Rejona).

Now they are older they travel further in London. Their family has also spread a little, so they make more visits to other parts of the city to visit relatives whereas before only a special event such as Ramadan or a family wedding would warrant such a trip. Rejona also points to how Camden and the West End have changed. She says that "you can go for the authentic stuff and go to like Ealing or Green Street but you could also go like for the Westernised, customised type thing, from [...] Monsoon or Accessorise" (Rejona). Rejona wore some 'Indian' slippers to the

V&A bought from the market in Camden. Now they are old enough to shop on the internet they also see this as a potential resource:

“I mean if you see something you like in a movie, in a movie you can just go actually can go on the internet and say I want this one and [they will] send it to you. So things like you’ve got movies and everything and it’s all connected together. You can easily get what you want these days really.” (Jamila)

The development of a look that is both British and South Asian is a distinct development in which London as a backdrop has played a vital part. It features not only through its renowned areas of South Asian fashion retailing but also through more diffuse cultures of British Asian hybridity and translations. If one wanted a symbol of the London fashion scene inhabited, and the London looks crafted, by Rejona and Jamila, then Indian slippers from Camden Market worn to the V&A might just do.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have fore-grounded issues of context, place and location that have recurred throughout previous discussions. My aim was not repeat arguments nor to make this ‘the geography’ chapter of the thesis. I had two more specific arguments that I was seeking to develop. First, I suggested that we need to understand the contextually specific nature of dress practices. Drawing conceptually on Cresswell’s account of the normative quality of place (Cresswell 1996), I framed women’s experiences of South Asian dress aesthetics in London as revolving around dynamics of ‘fitting in’ and ‘standing out’. I also argued that there are geographies of dress in the city that involve both responding to and reshaping the variegated public spaces. Second, I wanted to look more specifically at the setting of this research, and the testimonies it generated, in London. In the context of London’s long-standing connective ‘global senses of place’, and existing work on its South Asian transnational communities more specifically, I argued for combining attention to the city’s South Asian clothing retail areas with recognition of more diffuse transnational currents rippling through High Streets and markets.



**Chapter Eight:
Conclusion**

CHAPTER EIGHT:

Conclusions

Introduction

This thesis has been concerned with dress: the lived embodied relationships that people have to fashion and to clothes. It has explored how in the development of dress aesthetics (the personal and collective looks that we fashion through the clothes we value, wear and comport) we fashion relations to ourselves, others, places and society at large. Specifically, I have sought to look at the experiences of women of South Asian descent as they developed their dress aesthetics in London. This diasporic relationship to dress is not always an easy one. A person's relation to dress can be awkward, uneasy and at times downright difficult. Many economic, social, biographical and cultural influences work away on the relationship. Slowly and carefully we carve out a path through them, towards a look or looks that are our own. Clothes and dressing in them is a mundane, daily task. We all dress our bodies in clothes. Dress is a common starting point for discussions of the 'me'. But dress is also remarkable. It is a crucial part of how we mark out exceptional events and personae. Clothes and dress fabrics have the potential to fascinate and enchant us, as well as to disturb and trouble. How we dress reveals fascinating stories of self and society. It has been the contention of this thesis that through dress we can gain new insights on diasporic cultural lives. The testimonies of sartorial biographies and geographies that my research participants were generous enough to construct with me open up dynamics of identity, aesthetic agency, cosmopolitanism, memory and relatedness, amongst much else.

I present the conclusions to the thesis in two parts. I start by codifying the principal arguments that it has developed with reference to matters of approach. I then turn more directly to the four research aims set out in Chapter One, reflecting on key insights for each in turn.

Approaches

This thesis has argued for dialogue between understandings of dress and diaspora, from the disciplinary perspective of Cultural Geography. Let me now elaborate on the rationale for suggesting this broader intellectual agenda.

My starting point is that a renewed interest in dress is part of what I termed a 'geographical turn' in fashion studies. This 'turn' is marked by a concern for addressing fashion not just as a closed off economic and aesthetic system but as socio-spatially located practices. The reinvigoration of research on dress has generated a number of interrelated currents of work, focusing on issues such as the everyday negotiations of wardrobes as we decide what to wear, the role of clothes in the performance of embodied subjectivities, and the material presences and effects of clothes. Personal experiences and agencies have been brought back into the picture. This emergent field is marked by the potential for rich understanding of the nuanced relations between subjectivities, bodies, socialities, materials and spaces. It is my hope that this thesis has illustrated some of what is achievable in that regard. It develops an approach to dress as a form of 'practical aesthetics' (Thrift 2008: 10); not a superficial luxury or vanity but a fundamental form of material engagement, communication and self-fashioning. These dress aesthetics are 'personal' (Woodward 2007), undertaken in front of the wardrobe and mirror; but also creative forms of agency (Mercer 2004) that fashion styles and social relations that are potentially community making (Bhachu 2004a).

These dress aesthetics matter to diaspora cultures. This thesis has advanced a wider argument that resists understanding diaspora cultures as properties of identifiable migrant peoples and diaspora aesthetics as expressions of these ethnic cultures. Diaspora aesthetics, I have suggested, are practices through which complex processes of identity, belonging and relationality are expressed and negotiated. Those processes are also bound up with questions of what Avtar Brah termed 'diaspora space' (Brah 1996). My investigation of diasporic dress aesthetics sought to work with this notion of diaspora space by exploring on the one hand the complexity and multiplicity of diasporic cultural locations and, on the other, specific sites, places and spatial practices. In parallel, I sought to develop an account of diasporic material culture that both recognised the importance of specific, recognisable, 'real' material objects, and was open to the complex materialities in which clothing is implicated. More straightforwardly, I posited a value in

focusing on dress in terms of its capacity to ‘ground’ diaspora dynamics in everyday practices, materials and stories. For that reason, the thesis was built around the testimonies of the women who were kind enough to share their dress aesthetics with me. The textual styles that I used attempted to allow their voices and stories to be heard. This approach is open to criticism, perhaps: that the data constructed is not comprehensively digested analytically; that the different voices composed are not made to cohere; that the detailed description overwhelms a search for generalizable patterns. But I judge the advantages to outweigh any such dangers: the commitment to give time and space for women’s testimonies about their own lives to be made and read; the positioning of the researcher as interlocutor rather than seer-like interpreter; the capacity to address the wider social dimensions of diasporic dress aesthetics without reducing individuals’ dress experiences to data typical of a designated group. Through listening to the stories of the women interviewed, experiences of dress in British Asian fashion space come to the fore. Their testimony articulated how they saw their relationship to dress and how it had developed in this fashion space.

That is not to say, of course, that this testimony covered all of the voices and stories of British Asian fashion and dress in London (let alone in the UK). It is important to reiterate the empirical limits of this study. Whilst clearly varied in many ways, the voices presented are those of the group of British Asian women that I recruited to the study. I explained that recruitment process in Chapter Two. The setting of the study in London is a notable limit. So too is how many of these women showed an interest in dress and in creating for themselves an aesthetic agency through dress. Indeed, as the narratives presented in Chapters Four to Seven illustrate, these women had a comparatively strong ability to deploy aesthetic agency. They could adapt and adopt dress strategies in a way other British Asian women may find harder. Therefore their testimony does not, perhaps, speak about how aesthetic agency can be restrained or curtailed as strongly as other groups of participants and settings might have done.

An obvious issue here is the role of societal racisms in limiting dress choices and / or impacting on senses of the dressed self. My respondents did at times talk about contexts of racism, as when, for example, speaking of sari-wearing as something exceptional, a temporary reworking of space and its sartorial norms. However, stories of racist hostility or racist judgements of British South Asian bodies and dress did not emerge as a dominant theme in the research. This may be the case

for a number of reasons. Firstly, the ladies I interviewed seemed to have a level of cosmopolitan ease with their dress, which afforded a strong discussion of the positive elements of their diasporic dress practices. They were mostly (though not all) uninvolved in public religious dress practices that might bring them into daily conflict with others in the places and spaces of London. Where this was raised as an issue (e.g. in relation to Islamophobia), I of course reported and analysed it, but it is fair to say that for the most part the wearing of South Asian dress in London was framed by my informants as a means to express their diasporic selves, and in many cases as an enjoyable, fashionable, affirming experience. Secondly, there is also perhaps a limitation to the semi-structured interview technique in that people might speak only in public repertoires. In other words, echoing their dress practices, the testimonies I constructed with the women might be seen as articulating a public self-presentation. The degree to which this was the case varied, I think. Some women did talk about what I would consider to be very intimate issues. Nonetheless, I accept that my interview based methodology, with its emphasis on testimony, might diminish discussion of topics seen as painful, especially given that I did not actively ask for, say, experiences of racism and its relationship to dress practices. This leads me to the final reason, which is perhaps because my own interviews and aims were shaped by an urge to present and construct a positive space for the discussion of diasporic dress. In formulating my thesis aims, I did not intend to shy away from issues of social context and judgement, as my foci on dress and public discourses of identity (aim one) and dress and contextually modulated practice (aim four) demonstrate. Nonetheless, I did want to foreground the aesthetic agency and cosmopolitan competencies of the women to whom I spoke, not least in order to show that the sorts of agencies attributed by past studies to the diasporic designers and makers of South Asian dress forms might be extended to women consumers. In a context marked by wider racisms, I take such an affirmative approach to be a valid path through the politics of diasporic marginalisation. A strength of the thesis, in my view, is that it shows how dressing in diaspora space can create engagements that express transnational, intersecting identities and create a form of aesthetic agency. However, other studies with different emphases might more fully relate that agency to forms of social hostility or social differences in cultural capital; and further study is needed on the wider range of aesthetic agencies no doubt present across the diverse British Asian population.

As I discussed in Chapter Three, and mentioned above, this research's focus on diasporic South Asian dress aesthetics in London builds on existing work focused in particular on British Asian

fashion. Here, the thesis makes some specific substantive contributions. Existing research had shown how British Asian fashion spaces have been created and have enabled the articulation of new hybrid styles and new identities. It had examined how British Asian entrepreneurs and new South Asian media forms have created engagements with fashion based on transnational as well as local networks and have forged new fashion cultures and landscapes in British cities. With its focus on dress, this thesis helps to extend the preponderant attention given to fashion, clothing design and retail and media provision (e.g. Bhachu 2004a and b, Dudrah 2010, Dwyer 2004, 2010). In terms of existing research on British Asian fashion consumption and dress, outstanding work has considered some contentious aspects of dress, such as visible forms of Muslim identity (most recently, Tarlo 2007, 2010). My own work took much from work such as Tarlo's: a recognition that dress is political, personal and spatial, part of a journeying through everyday life and its sartorial landscapes; and also an interest in sartorial biographies and geographies. Substantively, though, this thesis has deliberately moved beyond a focus on religious dress to open up a wider range of issues and participants. I suggested in Chapter Three that work by Jackson, Thomas and Dwyer (2007) is also notable for discussing how transnational fashions are consumed in both London and Mumbai. They argue that transnational fashion consumption needs to be seen through specific localized consumption cultures. Transnational fashion, they suggest, should not be framed in terms of its origins, but instead in terms of how it is "appropriated and used" (2007: 922). The focus group discussions reported on by Jackson, Thomas and Dwyer suggested that studying fashion design or retail alone left out the crucial process of how clothes were taken from retail areas and used as a situated dress practice by consumers. It is also the argument of this thesis that looking at the situated, bodily practices of dress gives room for discussion of transnational lives and identities. I have sought to advance this area of research by presenting an in-depth discussion of these issues using 'dress-story' testimony from individual women. This has allowed me to set out in more depth how South Asian dress aesthetics were used by my respondents. Echoing Jackson, Thomas and Dwyer's arguments on the importance of local consumer cultures, the local context and place based practices of dress came to the fore in my discussions (most explicitly in Chapter Seven). London was always a backdrop for these discussions, and more generally the situated nature of dress in British Asian fashion space a consistent theme. Overall, I see the thesis as having developed the insights and agenda set out by Jackson, Thomas and Dwyer as it moves on from a focus on how commercial

fashions are appropriated and into the wider terrain of how diasporic lives are made in conjunction with the material cultures of dress.

In so doing, the thesis also builds on the work of others considering the relations between material culture and diasporic experience. In Chapter Three I highlighted the work of Tolia-Kelly (2004) in particular, and her study of domestic decoration and diasporic memory. Tolia-Kelly argues that diasporic memory is complex, and performed through material forms. In focusing on dress, the thesis was able to develop insights from her work. Memory in the context of diasporic dress also operates on multiple levels, both personal and collective, biographical and re-memorising. Dress is particularly interesting in this regard as it presents interlinked geographies of memory across both wardrobe and body (see the discussion below, on the third aim of the thesis, for a more detailed summary of my argument in Chapter Six). I emphasised the capacity of clothes to 'connect' and the importance to many of my respondents of personal dress 'archives'. Across the thesis, I showed how the memory work done by clothes was related to other material geographies, notably those of everyday wear and domestic practices of accommodation (e.g. available space for storage). The wardrobe was both archive and practical resource, placing clothes' 'memory work' in relation to the everyday 'wardrobe moments' about what to wear for particular events and contexts. The thesis has suggested, then, that the wardrobe is a site of diasporic material culture at least as important and rich as the domestic interiors and shrines studied by Tolia-Kelly (2004).

Thus, as noted above, the thesis looked to develop existing work on British-Asian diasporic experience through an engagement with wider currents of research on wardrobes and dress. Obviously, in so doing it attends to issues that are in no way unique to British Asian women. The 'wardrobe moment', embodied self-fashioning through clothes, the power of clothes to evoke and connect, the gifting of clothes across generations, the adjustment of clothing choices for particular contexts, the framing of dress in relation to varied fashion scenes: in all these respects and more, British Asian women are patently not alone. My argument has not been, then, that there is something essentially British Asian or indeed diasporic about the broad contours I have drawn on the cultural geographies of dress. Rather, the thesis has sought to tease out the personal experiences of my informants, and to relate these in part to how dress can play a distinctive role in their diasporic contexts. For instance, many women may inherit family clothes, and it is likely

most women have emotionally charged feelings about their mothers that may be evoked by such a material collection; but knowing this should not deny recognition that a diasporic identity may inflect such common experiences in distinctive ways. These familial relations are charged with diasporic energies. For example, in some cases the styles of garments kept from a loved one were different to the styles of garments they wore themselves, in ways that went beyond changing fashions from past to present. The migrations undertaken had created disjunctures in dress practices across generations that had a distinctively diasporic charge. Or, one might point to how in a diasporic context personal archives / collections become collective re-memories in ways that may be less common in non-diasporic families.

In thinking about identity we often have to chart a course between an 'essentialisation' that reifies difference and a 'universalisation' that either refuses difference altogether or reduces it to a banal 'individualism'. My navigation of this terrain was aided by current theories of intersectional identities (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006) that examine the multiple positions we inhabit in daily life. My approach was to recognise diasporic identity as (variably) relevant to the women with whom I spoke whilst not reducing them to it. This leads me on elaborate on how I feel this thesis creates greater room for discussion on many aspects of dressing which are not specific to diasporic women. Dressing is something we all engage with on a daily basis, regardless of our specific and intersecting identities. There is much in this thesis that I hope will be of value and interest to a range of researchers considering dress. This includes the memory charge of clothes and the relations between clothing spaces and established ideas about memory sites (Nora 1989). The capacity for clothing to work as 'evocative objects' (Turkle 2007) is discussed in this thesis and ripe for further conceptual and empirical development. These ideas should not be limited to one group of women. Whilst work on household practices of object divestment has emphasised the emotional aspects of this process (e.g. Gregson 2007), it has said less about the potential cognitive value of personal clothing collections. The role of dress as a technology of self is also an area of research looked into by many theorists, as I discussed in Chapter Three. Entwistle (2000) and Craik (1994) draw on the work of Bourdieu to suggest we learn how to dress through tacit knowledge and 'situated bodily practice' (Entwistle 2000: 39). I suggested that in the diasporic context these ideas are developed; British Asian women have a more complex set of social situations to negotiate and learn from. More generally, Geographers have conducted comparatively little research on the relations between dress and the normative geographies of

place (Cresswell 1996). Given the importance of dress to social dynamics of both normalization and transgression, a wider range of geographical studies on dress and place would be most welcome. I also argued for bringing into dialogue work on dress and the habitus with ideas of ‘cosmopolitan competence’ (Vertovec 2010) and a modern ‘anxiety’ about having to style oneself (Clarke and Miller 2002). This conjunction could, in my view, be of value in any number of substantive contexts: from work on femininity and embodiment (cf. Colls 2004, 2006), to research on professional and workplace dress, to explorations of clothing and cross-cultural exchange (cf. Breward, Crang and Crill 2010).

Aims

The overall objective of the research, then, was to explore the diasporic fashion space created in London from a particular perspective, namely the experiences of South Asian dress aesthetics for women of South Asian descent. More specifically, the research was directed at four principal research aims, each developing a particular ‘lens’ or ‘window’ through which to view these experiences.

The first research aim was to understand how these dress aesthetics relate to public discourses of identity, particularly with regard to British Asian women. This aim was addressed most directly in Chapter Four but resonated elsewhere. The general conclusion that might be drawn is that dress was certainly related to matters of identity by the research participants; but this was not a relation whereby identity positions determined dress aesthetics; rather, one where dress aesthetics facilitated imaginative and material engagements with questions of identity. Six more specific insights can also be drawn out. First, I argued that these identity dynamics played out within a distinctive form of diaspora space, ‘British Asian fashion space’, the genesis of which previous research has documented. The gathered testimony emphasised how public discourses of British Asian identity were for the most part seen as relevant to my participants’ lives and to their practices of dress. Crucially, though, this identity was not presented as something fixed or singular, but more as a space that was both dynamic (spatially and historically) and variably understood and inhabited. Second, I argued that part of this variation was associated with how this space was imagined; in other words, its constitution as an ‘imaginative geography’. There

were a number of elements to this imagination. For example I traced out how its 'Asianness' was variously imagined: 'sociologically' (with narratives ranging across ethnic, national, diasporic and religious identifications), 'geographically' (with emphasis on both local contexts of diaspora culture in the UK and on transnational borrowings) and 'temporally' (sometimes the Asian was a matter of 'heritage', sometimes of 'innovation', sometimes a combination of these).

Third, I looked to move beyond the somewhat tautological understanding of the British-Asian as a hybrid identity. It was notable how variable was the understanding of this hybridity. For example, emphases on dualities of identity were matched by senses of identity that emphasised blurring, of that duality being called into question, of identities that resisted placing and location. Fourth, I examined the gendering of British Asian fashion space. I concluded that its emphasis on the visible appearance of women was experienced by my research participants ambivalently, as both a pressure and a source of choice and pleasure. Fifth, the distinctive positionings of women and men with regard to British Asian fashion space was part of a wider argument that I developed, namely that this space was variably 'inhabited'. At its simplest this was a call to recognise and respect the varied biographies and dress aesthetics of British Asian women. But I also sought to show how such diversity works through a variety of routes within this diaspora space, characterised both by distinctive local contexts and differing transnational connections. The multiple inhabitation of British Asian fashion space can be theorised, in part, in terms of the distinctive geographies of people's life paths through it. I also sought to explore just how such inhabitations were undertaken. Here, for example, I drew on established accounts of cosmopolitanism as competencies (Vertovec 2010) to capture the emphasis placed by my informants on the skilled management of dress to suit varying contexts and audiences.

Finally, I argued that the narratives generated in the research suggested two distinctive ways in which the 'Britishness' of British Asian fashion space was experienced. On the one hand, the narratives highlighted how fashions and dress practices could transform wider senses of Britishness. A feature of many of the accounts from my participants was their sense that South Asian dress forms, materials and styles had come, in some contexts, to be mundane parts of British cultural landscapes. This had important implications for how they sensed cartographies of cultural inclusion. On the other hand, there was also evidence of how British Asian fashion space

could itself be reshaped by wider discourses about Britishness and its Others, most obviously through currents of Islamophobia.

The second research aim involved looking at dress in more practical terms, as a technology of the embodied self. It sought to understand dress as a bodily technique through which the selves of British Asian women were presented and constituted. Three key findings emerged here. First, whilst public discourses of identity mattered within British Asian fashion space they were not all that mattered and often they mattered only in conjunction with other aspects of self-hood. In part, then, the findings of the research endorsed an ‘intersectional’ approach to identity (Valentine 2007), in which multiple dimensions are not only recognised but recognised as being mutually constitutive. Ethnicity, gender, class, age, sexuality... all of these and more mattered. But this argument goes somewhat further, in displacing the focus on public discourses of identity in favour of much more personal dilemmas over making an acceptable ‘Me’ through dress. The imagined question in front of the mirror to which I repeatedly returned – ‘Is this me?’ – was never fully answered in terms of those dimensions of identity, no matter how intersectional their conception.

Second, shaping the practical accomplishment of dress were two paired dynamics. On the one hand was power of habit, of the ‘habitus’, with its tacit knowledges about what clothes are right and where and when. On the other hand, was the force of anxiety, the sense that we must perform our embodied selves through the gazes and expectations of others, and that we are always vulnerable to misinterpretation or harsh judgement. The act of dressing the ‘Me’ was a learned practice, developed to create effective dress strategies in everyday worlds. The habitus was here seen to be developed by the gaze of others, experiences of anxiety and also the influence of families and the social world around us. It reinforced bodily behaviours and expectations considered to be the norm in the diasporic cultures that these women inhabited. It was comparatively rare, though apparent, for someone to resist strongly the normative framings of dress. Third, I argued that sketching out the ‘geographies of a wardrobe’ was a way to gain sight of the habitus of dress. The testimonies provided, and the time spent ‘in the wardrobe’ gaining them, spoke of how collections of clothes can embody in their very organisation how we imagine the contexts of our everyday lives and thus act as tools to habituate our navigation of those landscapes.

The third research aim looked at dress in terms of its material agencies. Here, I sought to consider the potential for clothing to be an ‘evocative object’ (Turkle 2007), provocative of both emotion and thought. This aim was pursued in most depth in Chapter Six, but the discussion of wedding dress in Chapter Five also worked over some of these issues. My findings here can be summarised as threefold. First, it was clear that some of the South Asian clothes and clothing textiles held by my research participants could certainly be afforded that status of ‘evocative objects’ in the sense proposed by Sherry Turkle. The processes whereby this came to be, and the precise nature of the evocation, varied, as one might expect. A recurrent theme, though, was the capacity for clothing to be charged with social relations of gifting and exchange. Second, it was also apparent how wardrobes could act as meaningful ‘archives’ for some of their clothing items. I argued that personal and collective layers of memory were overlain in these collections. Third, I also concluded that the embodied wearing of South Asian clothes could (sometimes successfully, sometimes less so) perform memory and heritage. These material memories were seen to connect together bodies, personal biography, relations with loved ones and broader cartographies of cultural heritage. The accounts offered by these British Asian women highlighted the capacity for clothes to objectify social relations, including some of the most meaningful in our lives. Talking about these clothes was to talk about loving relationships with mothers, the hopes of parents, senses of our own life courses, all interwoven with broader ideas of collective identity and heritage. Also apparent was the materiality of these materials, the affective power of ‘special objects’ through their colours, textures, ornamentation, and relationship to bodies. Whether in wardrobes, carefully stored, or on the body, proudly worn, South Asian clothing had the capacity to do memory work for these British Asian women.

The fourth and final research aim was to understand how dress is both shaped by and reactive to places and their normative cultural framings. This aim was addressed most directly in Chapter Seven, but resonated across the other chapters too. Two main arguments were developed. First, and drawing on Tim Cresswell’s (1996) theorisation of place as a normative frame, I argued that women’s experiences of South Asian dress aesthetics in London often revolved around dynamics of ‘fitting in’ and ‘standing out’. The discussion in Chapter Seven tended to cast these as alternative options, but also raised the view that some forms of dress practice define success as combining the two. Second, I mapped out some of the more detailed contours of British Asian

fashion space in London, showing both the role of the city's South Asian clothing retail areas and the need to recognise more diffuse transnational currents rippling through a wider array of High Streets and markets.

The thesis in an orange lengha

I have come back to where I started. To the beautiful orange lengha that made Satinder *feel* dress as an embodied socio-spatially situated experience. As Satinder articulated, "I guess clothes are more about how you feel when you put them on" (Satinder). I believe she is right. Dress not only helps us meet the habitual demands of our everyday existence but also the demands of the fleshy, socialised body. In this thesis, we have been reflecting on everyday lives lived in the context and cultures of global mobilities and migrations. The orange lengha and its counterparts in our wardrobes enable us to 'feel' the world around us, help us personalise it, even objectify our discomfort with it. Through these wardrobes we create and display collections of dress that express the self and communicate with the wider world that *this is me*. The dress stories heard here are cosmopolitan and transnational, but also personal, emotional and individual. It is by focusing on dress we can develop understandings of this subtle and nuanced relationship between our bodies, subjectivities, material culture and diaspora space.

Appendix A

Interviewees

- Amrita** Is a lady in her 20s. She lives in London and is of Indian, Punjabi, Sikh origin. She works in HR. I met her for an interview over lunch on the 13/06/08. We spent an hour and a half together.
- Barnali** Is a lady in her 30s. She lives in London and is of Indian, Bengali, Hindu origin. She works in an international firm and raises her child. I met her at her house for the afternoon on 06/08/08 for 3 hours. Our discussion covered both stages of the interview process.
- Charanjit** Is a lady in her 40s. She lives in London and is of Indian, Punjabi, Sikh origin. She works in Museums. We worked together on the fashioning Diaspora Space Project. We met twice at her house, for interviews, firstly on 04/07/08 and then on 19/09/08. On both occasions we spent the afternoon together, for approximately 3 hours each time. Our discussion covered both stages of the interview process.
- Divya** Is a lady in her 50s. She lives in London and is of Kenyan Gujarati origin. She works as a librarian. We met twice, firstly on 15/07/08 for a couple of hours in a café in Ilford. We then met at her house on 22/09/08 in the afternoon for about 3 hours. Our discussion covered both stages of the interview process.
- Hema** Is a lady in her 40s. She lives in London and is of Indian Gujarati Hindu origin. She studied fashion at University. She is a former social worker and now raises her children. I met her twice at her house on 30/07/08 and 24/09/08. I spent a couple of hours with her the first time and an afternoon of about 4 hours with her the second time where her friend Shashi was also present. Our discussion covered both stages of the interview process.
- Jamila** Is a lady in her late teens. She lives in London and is of Bangladeshi, Muslim origin. She is a student. I met her with her sister Rejona on 16/09/08 for a couple of hours in a café in London. I had previously met her at a focus group discussion I was running at the V&A Museum on 18/08/08. Jamila and Rejona are the only participants from the focus groups whose discussion I refer to in the thesis. At our second meeting, the discussion progressed to cover both stages of the interview process.
- Jasminder** Is a lady in her 30s. She lives in Bristol and is of Indian, Punjabi, Sikh origin. She works in IT. I met her on 07/05/08 for a couple of hours in the afternoon in a café in Bristol.

- Mary** Is a lady in her 50s. She lives in Surrey and is of Sri Lankan, Christian origin. She is an artist. I met Mary on the 06/10/08 for a couple of hours at a café in London. Our discussion covered both stages of the interview process.
- Preeti** Is a lady in her 30s. She lives in Essex and is of Indian Punjabi Hindu origin. She works in London as a Lawyer. I met her for an interview over lunch on the 03/07/08. We spent an hour together.
- Riza** Is a lady in her 20s. She lives in London and is of Bangladeshi, Muslim origin. She is a textile artist. I met her at her flat in London on 25/09/08 for 3 hours around lunchtime. Our discussion covered both stages of the interview process.
- Rejona** Is in her late teens. She lives in London and is of Bangladeshi, Muslim origin. She is a student. I met her with her sister Jamila on 16/09/08 for a couple of hours in a café in London. I had previously met her at a focus group discussion I was running at the V&A Museum on 18/08/08. Jamila and Rejona are the only participants from the focus groups whose discussion I refer to in the thesis. At our second meeting, the discussion progressed to cover both stages of the interview process.
- Saira** Is a lady in her 30s. She lives in London and is of Pakistani, Muslim origin. She works as a journalist. We went to University together and have known each other for many years. I met with her at her Mother's house on 04/10/08. The interview lasted for around 4 hours over lunchtime; during this time both stages of the interview process were conducted.
- Shashi** Is a lady in her 40s. She lives in London and is of Indian Punjabi Hindu origin. She is involved in charity work as well as looking after her children. I first met Shashi at the Bridging arts panel discussion. She also attended the V&A's focus group day on 18/08/08. I met with Shashi twice on 22/04/08 and on 24/09/08. The first meeting was for a couple of hours and took place at the V&A. The second meeting was an afternoon at her friend Hema's house and lasted about 4 hours. Our discussion covered both stages of the interview process.
- Satinder** Is a lady in her 20s. She lives in London and is of Indian, Punjabi, Sikh origin. She works in the media. I met at her at the V&A café for a couple of hours on 18/09/08. Our discussion covered both stages of the interview process.
- Shivani** Is a lady in her 30s. She is a PhD student researching the dress practices of the ladies listed here. She is of Indian, Hindu origin. She lives in Bristol and spent the summer of 2008 travelling to London to meet and talk to these ladies.
- Shobha** Is a lady in her 40s. She lives in London and is of Kenyan Gujarati Hindu origin. She is a textile artist and raises her children. We met at her house on 16/07/08 for about 3 hours; during this time both stages of the interview process were conducted.

Appendix B

Interview Schedules

First Stage for Interviews

In Bold are the general areas of enquiry followed by a description of themes to be discussed and possible questions to ask in relation to these themes:

Initial questions:

What is the interviewee's migration history? How long have they lived in Britain? Do they wear South Asian clothing? Do they wear Indian clothing? Which garments and styles do they wear? And which would they not consider as appropriate to them?

Possible questions: Tell me about your family background. Tell me about your favourite outfit. Tell me about your favourite Indian outfit. Tell me about a place you would feel comfortable wearing this. Tell me about a place you would not feel comfortable wearing this outfit. Has your migration history changed your perceptions of South Asian dress?

How do consumers relate to the wider discourse surrounding South Asian fashions?

What do people see as the main issues surrounding the use of South Asian textiles? How do ideas of availability, access work here? Do people find South Asian clothing effective as a form of clothing in Britain? What issues of cost are involved?

Possible questions: Do you have any thoughts to share on why people wear or do not wear South Asian textiles in Britain? Do you think they are readily available, and where from? What would

you think a reasonable price for an outfit is? Would that cost depend upon the occasion? How does your experience differ to those of your mother or sister?

How do consumers relate to the provisioning of ‘South Asian’ clothing textiles within London’s fashion spaces?

How do consumers access and purchase them? What factors mitigate their access to these spaces? Where are their preferred spaces? Do shoppers find ethnicity, class, regionalism a factor in accessing this space? What are the generational preferences? Do they use the same spaces as their mothers, daughters etc.?

Possible questions: Where do you go to buy Indian textiles? Who do you go with? Do other members of your family wear them too? What are their opinions? Do you think they might be interested in talking to me about this too? How have your uses and ideas surrounding Indian textiles changed through the course of your life? Do you ever make clothes in the home?

How do consumers use these clothing textiles after purchase, and how do these uses vary?

In which contexts does the consumer wear South Asian clothing? When and how are they worn? How are choices of ‘South Asian’ clothing made in different contexts for example Home space vs. Public space? In which spaces are Indian clothing worn and in which spaces is it not worn? How does the perceived audience for these clothing practices effect people’s decisions? How do they feel when people look at them wearing South Asian clothing? Are there contexts in which their use is particularly significant? In what ways are the uses of South Asian clothing textiles regulated by senses of appropriateness? How do people see gender at work here?

Possible questions: Tell me about an occasion where you wore Indian clothing and it worked. How did you feel? Does the fact you are a woman enable you to wear these clothes. Were there times when you did not want to wear Indian clothes? How do you think people see you when you wear these textiles? What did you wear at your wedding? What did friends / family wear?

How does dressing in South Asian clothing textiles operate as a ‘technology of self’?

Do people see themselves as communicating an identity through their clothing? How does this differ in different garments? Are they attempting collective / individual identities to be communicated? Does their age and life stage change this? Has this changed through the course of their lives?

Possible questions: What is your look? How has this changed over time?

How are South Asian dress forms worn and embodied in Britain?

How do people feel their experiences change whilst wearing South Asian dress? What bodily adjustments are required? How are the meanings and materialities of these textiles interrelated, and in what ways do they stand for or create the ‘South Asian’? Do people relate to these ideas of South Asian collective identity? Who do they see themselves as?

Possible questions: Do you see a British / Indian / Asian identity emerging? What does South Asian mean to you? What does British Asian mean to you? What are your experiences of wearing South Asian dress? How do you feel when you wear South Asian clothes? Do you feel wearing South Asian clothes is different to wearing western clothes? Do you see yourself as communicating an identity through this clothing? How does this differ in different garments? Are you attempting collective / individual identities to be communicated? Has your age and life stage changed this?

How are ideas of memory and creativity articulated through South Asian dress?

How does South Asian dress constitute forms of memory and how do these relate the personal and historical? Has your migration history changed your perceptions of Indian dress? How does South Asian dress constitute forms of creativity and innovation? How are these forms of memory and creativity related? Also, does gifting have a significant role in their engagement with South Asian dress?

Possible questions: Have you inherited any Indian textiles? Tell me about a gift of Indian textiles which you have received? Do you wear gifted clothing or clothing other people have chosen? Are any of the garments you wear where you have made at home? How does your experience of garments like this differ to those of your mother or sister?

Questions relating to ideas of Gender:

How do people see ideas of gender impacting on their use of South Asian dress? What do they perceive to be the differences between male and female use of South Asian dress in Britain?

Possible questions: In what ways are the uses of South Asian clothing textiles regulated by senses of gender appropriateness? How do you see gender at work here? Does the fact you are a woman enable you to wear these clothes. Is there greater pressure on you to wear Indian clothes?

Second Stage for Interviews

Questions in relations to specific garments:

Talk me through these garments.

When did you acquire them?

How did you acquire them?

Do you remember where you brought this / or where it was brought for you? Does this change your relationship to the garment? What motivated you to buy this? Has your opinion of the garment changed since you brought it? Would you buy it again?

Why have you kept them?

Has your use of South Asian clothes changed during your life? Has migration impacted on your use of clothes?

How do you think people perceive you when you wear this?

What do you think you are trying to say to your audience when you wear this?

Where would you wear this? Why? Where would you not wear this? Can you tell me a story about when you wore this?

Glossary

- **Bibi** – name given to older Punjabi ladies
- **Blouse** – Top worn under Sari
- **Chunni** – Scarf worn with Salwar Khameez
- **Churidar pyjama** – a type of tight fitting trouser worn with Salwar Khameez
- **Dupatta** - Scarf worn with Salwar Khameez or Lengha
- **Gilab** – Long coat
- **Hijab** – head scarf
- **Lengha** - South Asian outfit consisting of a top, scarf and skirt
- **Niqab** – Full facially covering garment
- **Patiala trousers or pyjamas** – a type of voluminous trouser worn with Salwar Khameez
- **Petticoat** – draw string skirt worn under Sari
- **Pujas** – prayers
- **Pyjamas** – another name for the Salwar part of the Salwar Khameez
- **Sherwani** – Suit top and pyjama bottom worn by men
- **Salwar Khameez** – South Asian outfit consisting of a Kurta top, scarf and drawstring trousers
- **Sari** – South Asian dress consisting of one piece of fabric, worn with blouse and petticoat

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