fractured corner of Britain. Racial and cultural difference was a potent discourse through which material factors such as poverty, lack of education, limited opportunity and unemployment could be interpreted and conclusions drawn. It is clear there was a perceived bias in the allocation of resources—housing, social services, infrastructural investment—towards the Asian communities on the part of the "white" communities in some highly depressed areas of Oldham; it is also equally clear that a new generation of Asian yout

different ways contribute to a critique of the facile rhetoric of normalisation that underlies the dominant definition of "multiculturalism." Instead, the conference—and this collection—asked delegates to think through the reality of cultural difference by using the alternative metaphor of "braiding." The threads of cultural difference are here seen not as parallel lines evolving separately but are brought together into a new entity in which juxtaposition, contact and contamination produces a new narrative that is different from a mere sum of its constituent parts.

In some ways, as Peter Childs reminds us, the braiding of "Britain" is particularly apposite because "Britishness" has always been a "hyphenated" identity—an identity in which difference has always been present. Drawing on the highly influential work of Linda Colley, he reminds us that the term "Britain" was not only predicated on the difference between what was seen as the Protestant Isles and its Other—namely Catholic France—in the eighteenth century, but it was also invented to accommodate cultural differences within the state itself. Occupying as it did a liminal space in the discourses of statehood that constituted it—the contrary pulls of the less culturally determined notion of "kingdom" on the one hand, and the more culturally particularist ideas of "nation" on the other—it is perhaps unsurprising that Britain could only make sense in terms of the compounds suggest by the hyphen: English-British; Scottish-British; Welsh-British. On the other hand, as the Scots and Welsh would no doubt point out, the signifier "Britain" has always had the potential to de-hyphenate, to subsume cultural difference into the "norm" of the majority: Britain was (and still remains), in the eyes of many, co-terminous with "Englishness." This de-hyphenation finds its contemporary echo in the rhetoric of normalisation voiced by, amongst others, the "Home" Secretary.

Mike Wayne offers a salutary reminder that the pressures that effect the (re)formation of identi

of the diasporisation of Britain. Indeed, it is one of the ironies of this process that notions of "home" for immigrant communities are often embedded in discourses of cultural identity that only make sense "abroad" —in this case, Britain. In other words, other than on the cricket pitch, the term West Indies made sense for immigrants from the Caribbean only once they left and arrived in "Old Brit'n," as Selvon called it. This in turn reflects back upon how existing colonial discourses on racial and cultural

strands to the braiding of Britain—though, of course, the last of these being British is hotly contested and problematic.

Amanda Griffin's socio-cultural analysis of the Manx Music Festival demonstrates how a Manx identity has been fostered by the annual repetition of the event. Its origins and subsequent development also illustrate, however, that for all its Manx-ness, it is embedded in the wider cultural terrain of British and European culture. A product of processes of Anglicisation in the Victorian period, it has also attracted criticism from those who see it as not being sufficiently "authentic" because it does not include "traditional" Manx culture. Once again, the question of tradition and authenticity makes itself felt as the boundaries of centre and periphery are negotiated and re-negotiated. Interestingly, Griffin also notes the impact of what may be termed the "Manx diaspora" in the shape of the migrant Manx community of Cleveland, Ohio. The involvement of the Cleveland Manx in the Manx Music Festival and the construction of a modern Manx identity therefore offers suggestive parallels with the way other communities have constructed notions of "home" *in absentia*.

Hugh O'Donnell's fascinating comparison of three minority-language soap operas in Scotland, Ireland and the Basque Country also allows us to consider the whole question of "minority-ness" and the politics of language and identity. This resonates significantly when juxtaposed to the proposed English-language classes for new immigrants. The absence of dedicated institutional frameworks such as a Gaelic-language channel in Scotland and the lack of a political project in which the maintenance of the Gaelic language is an important aspect are just two of the reasons why the soap

addressed a “Gaelic-speaking island identity [for which] Edinburgh was as far away mentally as London.” The dangers of cultural isolationism because of wistful dreams

silences and suppressions *within* English from the point of view of gender. It seems that there is a strategic awareness on Ní Dhomhnaill's part that the issue of language in relation to what Atfield calls "dual colonialism" is what demands most attention. Identifying Irish itself with femininity, Ní Dhomhnaill is perhaps enacting in her poetry a "dual resistance:" to colonialism and patriarchy.

Finally, it is a great pleasure to be able to conclude with an essay by the great Guyanese writer Wilson Harris. Harris's essay, "The Theatre of the Arts," occupies the "sensitive" boundary between criticism and creativity, "fact" and "fiction," argument and speculation. Such layered boundaries create a challenging text. Harris's plea for a gnostic "theatre of the arts" may not suit or appeal to all tastes, but his attempt to question the "fixity" of absolute categories of space and culture does possess certain affinities to new thinking and theorising on notions such as "diaspora" and "diaspora space" (as conceived by Avtar Brah); to Gilroy's move from "rooted" to "routed" identities; and the flux that processes of displacement (whether voluntary or involuntary) impose upon identities, cultures and environments. From the point of view of a moving world—a world constantly on the move, be it peoples, ideas, labour, or capital: a movement that is, perhaps, the fundamental characteristic of that latest phase in capitalist modernity which we now term "globalisation" —Harris's speculations on the "measurelessness," as he puts it, of such processes perhaps does

Waithe who gave an unforgettable performance. The conference's evening programmes of readings by a wide range of poets and novelists from many different British communities played an important part in establishing its ethos. One of the organisers' intentions was to breach the barriers which tend to be erected between British cultures of ancient origin and those of more recent presence in these islands, by juxtaposing contributions on, and from, both. The Welsh poet Iwan Llwyd, whose work (arising from the conference) is included in *EnterText* 1.2, reminded delegates of the diversity of language practice within Britain by reading his poems first in Welsh and then in English. It is therefore also central to the commemorative concept of this issue of *EnterText* that the academic papers are interwoven with new work from some of the participating writers, Bernardine Evaristo, Grace Nichols, Romesh Gunesekera, John Agard and E. A. Markham. One of the latter's poems offers a telling response to the events of 11 September, while another is presented not only in English, but translated into five European languages—a reminder of the braiding of Britishness with Europeanness, and of our interconnections throughout the wider global linguistic communities. Also we are pleased to publish a new short story by Aamer Hussein, and an extract, about growing up in Guyana in the 1920s, from the autobiography of Cécile Nobrega, a work-in-progress which was inspired by her participation in the British Braids conference.

I would like to conclude this introduction by returning to the metaphor of the braid. Many of the essays in this collection take a materialist perspective to the study of culture. "Braiding" as it is presented here is not just about the threading together of culture, but also about the threading of these cultures through the social, economic, and political fields within which they operate. Returning once again to the Home Secretary's intervention, the terms of the debate which have surrounded it have led to

thinking. It also involves posing the right set of questions, setting the terms of debate in such a way as to be able to focus on them.

## Notes

[1] *The Guardian*, 10 December 2001.
[2] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* ((2.an