‘We should be united’: deploying verbatim methods in poetry to (re)present expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community in the 2011 Birmingham riots

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‘We should be united’: Deploying Verbatim Methods in Poetry to (Re)present Expressions of Identity and Ideas of Imagined Community in the 2011 Birmingham Riots

by

Sophie-Louise Hyde

Doctoral Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

14 October 2016

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Abstract

Despite ‘the upsurge in fact-based and verbatim theatre in recent years’ (Fogarth and Megson 2009: 1), engagement with the form as a technique equally suitable for poetry has been especially limited. This thesis examines the deployment of verbatim methods in a series of poems which constitute the creative element, written in order to (re)present expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community during the 2011 riots in Birmingham.

Located in the context of this particular disorder, *United We Stand* explores both individual and group experiences of the events that took place in Birmingham. The series of verbatim poems draws on data extracted from 25 semi-structured, life-story interviews with participants who lived or worked in the city during these incidents. In doing so, both the thesis and the creative practice that informs it critique Benedict Anderson’s earlier model of the nation as an ‘imagined community’ (1983; 1991; 2006).

While quantitative network analysis is deployed to establish the ‘ties’ between media channels and ordinary citizens that were maintained online through social networking, creative and reported responses published by these same media sources are analysed in relation to ‘national’ narrative conventions (Billig 2001; Mihelj 2011). This demonstrates that new and popular media played a significant role in (re)presenting imagined communities in this setting. By providing evidence for the existence of these shifting imagined communities across various geographical, social and cultural scales, the thesis suggests that Anderson’s decision to focus on the nation is problematic. It argues that his framework is partial and that a new definition of imagined community as both *fluid* and *emergent* is necessary.

Literary context for the thesis is found in the origins and developments of verbatim; exploring early documentary theatre practice and contemporary verbatim productions by Richard Norton-Taylor, Alecky Blythe, and Gillian Slovo. Through an analysis of Bhanu Kapil Rider’s *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (2001), the thesis illustrates how existing poets have organised comparable methods in their own work. This culminates in a demonstration of practice as research by producing a ground-breaking body of work: *United We Stand* is a series of poems crafted through the deployment of verbatim methods.

The thesis demonstrates that deploying verbatim methods in poetry is suitable for (re)presenting expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community in this context. By transforming the voices of ordinary people of Birmingham, *United We Stand* reflects the media narratives that precede it: the poems are a direct engagement with the same fluid and emergent imagined communities that they argue existed. More importantly, though, this
thesis goes beyond contemporary techniques of verbatim and establishes the evolutionary nature of it as a poetic practice. The combination of verbatim methods and visual-digital tools that I deploy throughout *United We Stand* results in a new creative process which I have termed ‘Digital Poetic Mimesis’.

**Keywords:** Belonging and exclusion, Birmingham riots 2011, creative practice, digital poetics, documentary theatre, expressions of identity, imagined community, the media, (re)presentations, verbatim methods.
Acknowledgements

This thesis came into its own during a conversation about communities, ‘imagined’ or otherwise, in 2013. As a result of this and my introduction to the work of Benedict Anderson, it seems only fitting that I should acknowledge a community of my own. A group of people, who, in one way or another, have inspired me and helped to shape the pages that lie before you.

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To those involved in the Gendered Lives, Modern and Contemporary and LUNN research groups, thank you for allowing me to share aspects of my research with you through papers and presentations.

I’d like to say a very special thank you to all of the participants and to West Midlands’ Police for taking part in and endorsing this research project. Your enthusiasm to be involved was so reassuring and your insights and experiences provided me with a real understanding of these events. Thanks to each and every one of you, United We Stand is now real and I only hope that you feel I have done your words justice.

I’d also like to thank some important members of my PhD cohort. Whether across campus (Clare, Romanda), beyond Loughborough (Meera), or within the department (fellow English and Creative Writing PGRs), it has been an absolute pleasure to discuss our research informally and to be around people who completely understand where this path can take us sometimes.
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**Declaration**

Three poems from the creative work, which forms part of this thesis, have been selected for publication throughout this process. The following poems have now been published, individually, in webzines or online in Creative Writing journals. They are:


**Certificate of Originality**

This is to certify that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis, that the original work is my own except as specified in acknowledgements or in footnotes, and that neither the thesis nor the original work therein has been submitted to this or any other institution for a degree.

**Author:** Sophie-Louise Hyde

**Title:** ‘We should be united’: Deploying Verbatim Methods in Poetry to (Re)present Expressions of Identity and Ideas of Imagined Community in the 2011 Birmingham Riots.

**Signed:**

**Date:** 14/10/2016
Introduction

‘This isn’t about Mark, / it never was.’¹

On Thursday 4th August 2011, Mark Duggan was shot by a police officer in the London borough of Tottenham.² Protests within the capital captured the attention of millions as they caught sight of the rioting and violent behaviours that were being displayed as responses were reported on the evening news. Before long, the civil disorder spread across the country, erupting in various boroughs and towns including Croydon, Lewisham, Manchester and Liverpool. Birmingham suffered millions of pounds’ worth of criminal damage to its businesses, and a hit-and-run incident resulted in the deaths of three young men – Haroon Jahan, Shazad Ali and Abdul Musavir – who stood to protect shop and street.³

One of the most influential studies to be conducted as a direct result of the disorder in 2011 was published in a collaboration between the Guardian newspaper and the London School of Economics. In a forty-page report, Reading the Riots: Investigating England’s Summer of Disorder considered the situation in early August to be ‘the worst bout of civil unrest in a generation’.⁴ Though much was said about these incidents in the immediate aftermath of the disorder, according to this study ‘a number of very significant gaps in public understanding of the events remained’.⁵ Reading the Riots aimed to understand ‘what drew people out on to the streets for the nights in August’ because they maintained that ‘we knew little about the rioters’.⁶ The first phase of the study involved confidential, qualitative interviews with 270 people who were directly involved in the riots in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Salford, Liverpool and Nottingham – in order to understand who was involved and what their motivations were. A data set of 2.5m tweets was analysed in an attempt to

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¹ This line is taken from the poem ‘Mark’, in United We Stand (see Chapter Four, p.177), ll.17-8.
⁵ Reading the Riots, p.1.
⁶ Reading the Riots, p.1.
consider the role of social media during the disorder. This study has influenced my own research because its methods are comparable to those I deploy throughout this thesis (see Notes on Research Methods, p.6). Findings from Reading the Riots drew a number of conclusions, including: ‘Facebook and Twitter were not used in any significant way by the rioters’. Reasons such as ‘opportunism’, tuition fee rises, closure of youth services, and other perceived social and economic injustices – in particular, anger over the shooting of Mark Duggan – were recalled by interviewees as motivations for taking part in the disorder. Most worrying, though, is the fact that over one-third of those interviewed (35%) said they would get involved in this type of disorder again if it occurred, while 63% believed similar incidents would happen again within three years.

Like Reading the Riots, this thesis aims to understand more about what the civil disorder in Birmingham in 2011 meant to the people involved. While the earlier study appears to focus on the incidents in London – 69% of individuals interviewed were located in the capital city in comparison to 31% which included all other places affected by the disorder – I argue that this thesis helps to redress the balance. Taking a different geocentric approach as its point of departure, the thesis shifts its focus to Birmingham. In doing so, it extends Helen F. Wilson’s argument that the city is of increased importance. Wilson maintains that Birmingham is ‘a place of national significance’. Upholding that it is capable of challenging state powers as a result of its own ‘local sentiments’ and urban ‘forms of belonging’, she establishes Birmingham as a model for the multicultural, urban nation. This raises a key question about ‘the relationship between the city and the nation’ and ‘how the two might coexist’ in this particular setting. It is this relationship between the urban-locale (of Birmingham) and the nation (Britain) that the thesis is particularly interested in.

At this point, it is important to understand why I discuss my study of the disorder in Birmingham in the way that I do throughout this thesis. While Reading the Riots is quick to describe the situation and those individuals involved as ‘riots’ and ‘rioters’, I have avoided these terms where possible. In order to evade a label that might imply that the individuals involved in this disorder were inherently ‘bad’ people, I attempt to remove the possibility of

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7 Reading the Riots, p.4.
8 Reading the Riots, p.5.
9 Reading the Riots, p.5.
11 Wilson, p.588.
12 Wilson, p.589.
13 Wilson, p.588.
14 Reading the Riots, p.1.
imposing a negative value judgement upon them; referring to the events in 2011 as a period of disorder. I do not label the individuals who were directly involved as ‘rioters’, but, instead, pay close attention to the behaviours and actions displayed by them as citizens and ‘key [social] actors’ in Birmingham. Describing the situation and those individuals in this way is appropriate because this thesis is interested in more than the people who were directly involved in the disorder. It explores the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that were in existence in Birmingham in light of this particular situation. The individuals who displayed rioting and looting behaviours are only one part of a much larger complex. It is this complex – and the negotiations between fellow-members of the various imagined communities within it – that this thesis focuses on. It demonstrates that Birmingham, as a location that was affected by this disorder in 2011, should be considered in its own right. Furthermore, the conclusions made in this thesis can be applied to many other situations of conflict in various locations. These include the ‘Black Lives Matter’ protests earlier this year. This is not only because ‘those involved in the riots came from a cross-section of local [and other] communities’, but because, in this situation, social and geographical differences must be taken into account. This thesis has found that motivations for the disorder that occurred in Birmingham were fundamentally different to those recognised in London. The incidents in Birmingham were frequently identified as moments of ‘opportunism’ and the ‘[a]nger over the police shooting of Mark Duggan’ – as well as the recognition that the events in Birmingham were connected to the shooting – are almost missing entirely.

A Plural Definition of Imagined Community

By (re)presenting the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that were in existence during the disorder in Birmingham through a series of verbatim poems, this thesis critiques Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation as an ‘imagined community’.

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15 Sabina Mihelj recognises that ordinary people are positioned as ‘key actors’ by the media and journalists. See Table 5.1 in ‘Media Nations at War’, in Media Nations: Communicating Belonging and Exclusion in the Modern World (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.95-118 (p.102).
18 Reading the Riots, p.4.
19 Reading the Riots, p.5.
20 Anderson, p.3.
Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (2006), Anderson makes three important cases for the nation as an imagined community and, though I contend that these remain relevant to the context of this thesis, I argue that his explanation is partial. He proposes that the nation is ‘imagined’ because fellow-members often recognise themselves in connection to one another as a direct result of this form of belonging, even if they have never met or heard of each other.21 He pays close attention to the ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ which exists within the nation; suggesting that it results in the social construct being imagined as a ‘community’.22 In positing this definition of the nation, Anderson recognises that it is ‘limited’.23 He claims that each nation has ‘finite, if elastic’ boundaries that distinguish it from other nations.24 It is this idea of fluidity and the blurring of these boundaries that the thesis takes forward in the new social and technological context of the disorder in Birmingham in 2011.

As well as suggesting that Anderson’s explanation of the nation as an imagined community is problematic, this thesis posits a plural definition of the concept of imagined community that is both fluid and emergent in character. In doing so, it makes two key points. The first is that imagined communities during this disorder in Birmingham existed across various social and geographical scales. These scales might have been based on religious or cultural identity markers or have existed in relation to the local neighbourhood, the nation, or the world. Additionally, imagined communities were often formed on a temporary basis in this situation; as ‘micro-imagined wispy’ communities that merged for the purpose of the action only to disband as soon as it was over.25 In order to provide evidence for these two significant arguments, the thesis considers a wide range of theoretical perspectives that are relevant to the concept of imagined community, and, more importantly, that are applicable in this contemporary setting. Key frameworks of nationalism including Michael Billig’s Banal Nationalism (1991), Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss’s ‘Everyday Nationhood’ (2008),

21 Anderson, p.6.  
22 Anderson, p.7.  
23 Anderson, p.7.  
and Sabina Mihelj’s *Media Nations* (2011) are analysed in this instance. Like this thesis, each of these models takes their point of departure from Anderson’s argument that

‘[t]he general growth in literacy, commerce, industry, communications and state machineries that marked the nineteenth century created powerful new impulses for vernacular linguistic unification within each dynastic realm.’

These frameworks examine the nation as a discursive construct. This is particularly important in relation to this research because it is centred on the expressions of identity that imply the existence of various ideas of imagined community during the disorder in Birmingham.

Billig places a significant emphasis on the nation ‘here’ in the centre (of Britain). He argues that the nation is a discursive construct and that the use of ‘small words’ ‘flag[s] the homeland daily’. These ‘small words’ are particularly important in relation to the patterns of words and phrasing that I deploy throughout *United We Stand*. Fox and Miller-Idriss, in comparison, consider the role of the ordinary person as an ‘active participant in the […] reproduction of the nation’. Whereas Billig and Mihelj study the role of the media in reproducing the nation – whether through ‘small words’ or significant changes in narrative convention – Fox and Miller-Idriss identify the ways in which ordinary people are engaging with the nation and, thus, reproduce it on a daily basis in the context of their everyday lives. This thesis recognises that these frameworks of nationalism – along with Anderson’s concept of the nation as an imagined community – are relevant to the plural definition it posits. Specifically, this applies to the role of the media and the ordinary citizen who is positioned as the ‘key actor’ by journalists to assist in this reproduction. It also determines that other levels of community were in existence during the disorder in Birmingham. Recognising the relevance of various geographical and social spaces such as Ahmed’s ‘imagined space of the neighbourhood’ and Appadurai’s ‘virtual neighborhoods’, the thesis demonstrates that imagined communities were also in existence on local and global scales during this

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28 Billig, p.6.
29 Billig, p.6.
30 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.538.
31 Mihelj, p.102.
disorder. The rise in the ‘virtual neighborhood’, which is globally accessible as a direct result of advances in electronic communication technologies, illustrates that, while imagined communities do exist, they are more fluid than Anderson’s definition of the nation first suggested. During the disorder in Birmingham in 2011, I claim that these communities were able to coexist on the local streets of the city centre and in an online, virtual world simultaneously. United We Stand – as the creative intervention that forms part of this thesis – contributes by (re)presenting the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that I argue were in existence during the disorder in Birmingham. The verbatim methods deployed throughout the collection of poems allow the poet to directly engage with the communities that are under investigation in this thesis through a new and innovative form. The series of verbatim poems in United We Stand encourages the reader to consider expressions of identity and ideas of community during situations of conflict – explicitly the negotiations between them – in more detail.

Notes on Research Methods

While ‘the upsurge in fact-based and verbatim theatre in recent years has attracted a voluminous amount of coverage’, engagement with verbatim as a method that is appropriate for deployment in poetry has been especially limited. In order to address this problem, the thesis deploys verbatim methods in poetry for the purpose of (re)presenting expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that I argue were in existence during the disorder in Birmingham. Through a combination of qualitative methods and quantitative analysis, the research behind the creative practice takes a mixed methodological approach which is threefold. This approach includes semi-structured, life-story interviews which are conducted

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35 Detailed explanations of the verbatim and digital methods deployed throughout the creative practice, and which make up United We Stand, are given in Chapter Three of the thesis (pp.99-144). Other themes, genres and methods that have influenced the creative practice (including observation, ethnography, and writing the landscape) are discussed throughout Chapter Five (pp.194-250). This is not the first time I have deployed verbatim methods in poetry. As part of my study for a Masters in Creative Writing, I crafted and published a verbatim poem on the topic of the 1984-5 Miners’ Strikes. This poem is called Soup Kitchen Solidarity and extracts from it are presented in Sophie-Louise Hyde, ‘Using Verbatim in Poetry’, Writing in Education, 66 (York: NAWE, 2015), pp.56-9.
with a clustered sample of twenty-five participants (see Appendix Four). It also comprises of an in-depth analysis of reported, creative and contemporary responses that were published online on social media platforms or through popular media channels during the disorder in 2011 (see Chapter Two). This mixed methods approach is particularly suited to the research and the creative practice that informs it because verbatim methods in theatre are recognised for their frequent use of interview techniques. As Derek Paget identifies, playwrights of documentary and verbatim theatre often use a tape recorder for the purpose of preserving credibility in their own work. He argues that verbatim theatre owes the recording device for its ‘present health and exciting potential’. For this reason, I maintain that semi-structured, life-story interviews – much like those directed by the playwrights who have preceded this study – remain the most suitable qualitative method when deploying verbatim methods in poetry.

According to Steven K. Tagg,

‘...many of the more recent studies suggest that effective use of life stories is more likely when a researcher can combine control over the interpretability of life story research with respect for the difficulty of the interviewer’.  

By ensuring that these interviews are semi-structured, ‘some conceptual control’ is maintained. ‘The range of structures for life story collection and collation is restricted and, this way, the primary researcher avoids being faced “with reams of indecipherable protocols”’ (see Appendix Three for thematic interview protocol). These semi-structured, life-story

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37 Paget, p.317.  
38 Paget, p.317.  
39 Playwright Alecky Blythe, whose verbatim production London Road is discussed in detail in Chapter Three of this thesis, also conducted these kinds of life-story interviews as research for a documentary based on the study Reading the Riots in 2011. The film, which was due to be broadcast on BBC2 at 9pm on Monday 23rd July 2014, was a dramatisation based on the verbatim transcripts of the confidential interviews conducted with 270 ‘rioters’. Just hours before the film was due to air, a court order from a judge prevented it from being shown. See Paul Lewis, ‘Court order prevents BBC from broadcasting film about riots’, Guardian (2014) <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/jul/19/court-order-bans-bbc-film-riots> [accessed on Saturday 24 September 2016].  
41 Tagg, p.164.  
42 Tagg, p.164.
interviews are not only relevant to the creative method of verbatim and vice versa, but they – along with the reported and contemporary responses that were published online on Twitter or ‘found’ in various news reports – fulfil two main aims of this research. The first of these aims is to deploy verbatim methods for the purpose of (re)presenting the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that were in existence during the disorder in Birmingham. By conducting these interviews and accessing various reported and contemporary responses that were published online and in the media, the primary researcher directly engages with the fluid and emergent imagined communities that are under investigation throughout this thesis (see Chapter One). My decision to access two pre-existing data sets facilitates further understanding of the media’s role in the formation of imagined communities. By including the data from Twitter, I assess the argument that online social networks influenced the existence of imagined communities that were fluid and emergent in character during the disorder in Birmingham.43

Before I move to acknowledge the various research methods and limitations of this study in more detail, it is important that I make a comment on the impact of my own presence on the creative practice. In his article ‘On Ethnographic Authority’, which was published in 1983, James Clifford recognised that ‘[t]he predominant mode of modern fieldwork authority is signaled’ by the researcher’s own presence: ‘“You are there, because I was there”‘; the real line of work for the researcher-turned author is that of transcription (into narrative) rather than origination, and this is much the ‘real line of work’ that is presented in this thesis.44 Since the late twentieth century, this idea of ‘ethnographic realism’ has been called into question because ‘the West can no longer present itself as the unique purveyor of anthropological knowledge about others’ – people were beginning to realise that Western cultural norms were being imposed on these ideas – thus, a more nuanced concept of ‘reflexive ethnography’ was born.45 Throughout this particular case study, I argue that I am attempting to emulate a mode of reflexive ethnography; one that is committed to recording and replicating voice(s) – albeit in a new and original form. The study’s creative outcome in

45 Clifford, p.119.
*United We Stand* (see Chapter Four) replicates emotion, word frequency and context in order to obtain a sense of that which Clifford terms ‘ethnographic authority’. However, it simultaneously raises awareness, both politically and explicitly, of the poet’s own involvement at every stage of the creative research process. Responsible for the collection and analysis of data, as well as the transcription and transformation of it into digital and verbatim poetry, the role of the poet is to speak for those who, in this particular case of the 2011 riots in Birmingham, did not have access or were unable to write and publish their own voices through print media. Consequently, this research is able to test Anderson’s concept of the ‘imagined community’ beyond this context; producing material that is the result of both the poet’s personal subjectivity and various communities’ own reflections of themselves at the time. From an ideological standpoint, I argue that both the methodology deployed through this thesis and the creative output in *United We Stand* (see Chapter Four) implicitly make the case that poetry, as an art form, is capable of (re)presenting these previously marginalised voices. Moreover, this (re)presentation is a positive intervention that works to heal communities in the aftermath of traumatic events.

**Data Collection**

To collect the raw material that was required for this series of verbatim poems, several semi-structured, life-story interviews were conducted with a clustered sample of twenty-five participants. Following an application to Loughborough University's Ethical Clearance Subcommittee to obtain full ethical clearance, participants were accessed through the advertisement of this opportunity using two posters as recruitment materials (see Appendix One). These posters provided the public with information about the research, including the criteria that needed to be met for them to take part in the study. The opportunity was advertised to potential participants through *Call for Participants* – the 'first and largest open platform' for research – as well as through various public networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Academia.edu and LinkedIn. The posters were disseminated to writing groups and those interested in poetry across the Midlands, but, most importantly, they were distributed to various groups in Birmingham that might find the study of personal interest. The posters were sent to members of Writing East Midlands, Writing West Midlands, The Nishkam Centre

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46 Clifford, p.118. For an understanding of 'reflexive ethnography', see also Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (University of California Press, 2010).
(which is based on Soho Road in Birmingham), and to officers of West Midlands' Police force via their own research team.

Public locations in Birmingham were used to host the interviews. These included Perry Barr Police Station, The Nishkam Centre, Coffee Republic and The Priory Rooms on Upper Bull Street. Each interview lasted between thirty minutes and one hour in length, though this was dependent on how long each participant wished to talk about their experiences for. Interviews were recorded on a mobile device and the process of ‘hot transcription’ was deployed.48 ‘This involved producing the typed version as soon as possible after the interview, usually without using a tape recorder’.49 However, for the purpose of the research question and this study’s subsequent aims – deploying verbatim methods in poetry to (re)present expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that existed in Birmingham at this time – a tape recorder was used. Questions were open-ended to allow each participant to express as much or as little about their experience as they wished to disclose. The interviewer grouped the areas of discussion in relation to ‘three remembered entities at the lowest level: events, actions and places’.50 This was managed by preparing the open-ended questions in advance of the fieldwork taking place. Each interview began with the primary researcher asking the participants a little about themselves: ‘What do you do, work or studies? Where are you from? Why did you want to get involved in this research project?’ in order to build a rapport with them. This ensured that the participant was comfortable during the interview, before the questions moved to deal with more sensitive subject matter. The interviews closed with the primary researcher offering the participant the opportunity to add anything more to their response: ‘Would you like to add anything else before we close the interview?’ (See Appendix Three).

Though the supplementary data sets were already in existence, the primary researcher was responsible for gathering the relevant raw material from these for the purpose of textual analysis as part of the study. Criteria – including the time and date of publication and the theme upon which each response was published (e.g. #Birminghamriots on Twitter) – was applied to the data which had been recorded and archived by the different media platforms (see Chapter Two, pp.83-96). By applying these conditions to the reported and contemporary responses, the primary researcher accessed the most immediate and relevant responses to the disorder in Birmingham. The data collected according to these criteria was stored in two

48 Tagg, p.175.
49 Tagg, p.175.
50 Tagg, p.165.
ways: on a private, password-protected workspace (electronic format) and in a secure, lockable cabinet (print format). Both of which only the primary researcher had access to. The primary researcher ensured that all data collected remained accurate even as they attempted to edit the life-story testimonies into poetic form. By storing the data files in this way, the primary researcher has complied with the Data Protection Act (1998) and has used the material fairly, lawfully and for the stated purposes of this study. In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998), the data has been securely archived until October 2026. On this date, all data will be removed and destroyed with immediate effect. Not only will the data be kept safe and secure as highlighted above, but it will not be transferred outside of the UK under any circumstances without the correct protection.

The data was coded according to the following categorisations: date and time, which online user or media channel it was published by, or what kind of tweet it is. This was dependent on whether it was a retweet, a quoted tweet, or a direct conversation between two users. A total of 1,772 tweets were randomly sampled from the first hour of each day between Sunday 7th August and Monday 15th August 2011 – during the peak of the disorder in Birmingham. This data was stored electronically on a matrix which was coded according to the use of the hashtag #Birminghamriots, the types of tweets that were published, and whether an individual user or media organisation was responsible for its publication (see Appendix Five). 51 Various media reports, which were printed in newspapers or broadcast on television at the time, were accessed online via websites and YouTube, and the relevant material from these was gathered according to the date and time that each reported response was published in 2011. For the purpose of this study, only those reported responses that were published in the first forty-eight hours after the hit-and-run incident in Winson Green (between Wednesday 10th August and Friday 12th August 2011) were collected. This is because responses published by the media and on Twitter during this time were intense and numerous. Collecting the responses in this way enabled the primary researcher to access the immediate responses that were published after this event for the purpose of crafting the verbatim poems. Like the data gathered from Twitter, this was also stored securely with copies of the raw material stored in an electronic filing system. To ensure the safety and security of all data collected, the primary researcher guaranteed the use of both firewalls and virus-checking software on all computers used in relation to the data. They also confirmed

51 When searching for material on Twitter, I also used variations of the spelling #Birminghamriots that included #Brumriots and #Bhamriots. In addition, advanced search criteria were deployed to determine the locations of individuals publishing online.
that the computer systems were set up to receive automatic updates. Passwords for data files made them private and encrypted any personal information that was held electronically. The data collected was regularly backed-up and the primary researcher was responsible for shredding all confidential paper waste. They also regularly checked and guaranteed the physical security of the premises that any lockable filing cabinet was stored in.

Selecting Participants

Participant selection for this study was based upon a set of criteria that was outlined from the start of advertising the research. The clustered sample of twenty-five participants were all living and working in Birmingham during the disorder in 2011. Due to the sensitive nature of the topics covered throughout the life-story interviews, participants were all aged eighteen and over. To prevent the social, emotional and psychological distress to participants wherever possible, they were invited to attend and take part in the study on an overt, voluntary basis. The interviews lasted no longer than one hour and each participant only attended once. Participants were made fully aware that the research had received full ethical clearance and the posters advertising the study asked them to contact the primary researcher directly if they were interested in taking part. Once selected, participants were sent additional information regarding the life-story interview. This included the date, time and location of the interview. They were informed of all aims and objectives of the study, as well as what was expected of them, from the beginning of the research. The primary researcher sent each participant a comprehensive information sheet and an informed consent form (see Appendix Two). These were to be read and signed by each participant to confirm their part in the study. The informed consent form reminded participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and participants were told of the primary researcher’s obligation to report any information regarding criminal activity that had not yet been disclosed to the necessary authorities. Once data collection was complete, the primary researcher reviewed all interview transcripts to ensure that any information relating to criminal activity was reported. The disclosure of information was completely at the participants’ own discretion; they did not have to answer anything that they felt uncomfortable with and they were able to ask the primary researcher to pause or stop the questions at any time throughout the interview. If any participant asked for their material to be removed from the study, it was withdrawn and destroyed in line with the Data Protection Act (1998).
Confidentiality was safeguarded as all data collected was stored securely in a private place that only the primary researcher had access to. Anonymity was kept as participants were not named when the data files were stored, nor will they be when the data is published or printed in future. Only in the exceptional case that a participant wishes to be credited and named in the publication(s) and gives informed permission for their anonymity to be broken (by signing a consent form) will this be the case.

Accessing the participant sample was straightforward because volunteers who met the criteria contacted the primary researcher to express their interest. However, some participants were more difficult to access. Those individuals who were directly involved in displays of rioting and looting behaviours may not have wished to disclose that they were involved in the incidents for fear of being judged by the interviewer. Thus, they may have chosen not to take part. To overcome these problems, the primary researcher was based in public locations in central Birmingham for a fortnight during the weeks that marked the four-year anniversary of the disorder. An analysis of immediate responses published on Twitter was included within the research in order to access responses that may have been published online by these types of participants. Although the statistics published in Reading the Riots suggest that females are harder to access, or were not involved in these incidents, the participant sample in this study was gender-balanced. Age ranges and identity markers varied though, in order to ensure that the research captured a variety of experiences from a range of people who lived or worked in Birmingham at the time of the disorder. This mixed methods approach not only resulted in 1,772 tweets and seven source texts (five reported and two creative responses) being analysed, but it also meant that a total of twenty-five voices, plus those that were present in the texts considered above, were transformed and (re)presented in United We Stand in order to demonstrate that fluid and emergent imagined communities existed in this context.

**Analysing the Data**

To analyse the raw material gathered, key theoretical frameworks of nationalism (Anderson; Billig; Mihelj), globalisation (Appadurai) and the locale (Ahmed; Fine and Scott; Wilson) were applied to the three data sets of contemporary responses that were collected: from Twitter, from the various media channels, and from participants’ interview testimonies. By applying these theoretical perspectives to each data set, the primary researcher looked for evidence of national deixis, ‘key actors’ that had been used for the purpose of promoting this national sentiment, and specific cases which suggested that Anderson’s idea of the national
imagined community was in existence. Textual analysis software (TAPoRware) was used to establish patterns of word frequency and the context of the ‘small words’ that I argue are deployed by ordinary citizens as ‘key [social] actors’ in the media to express feelings of identity in this context.52 By running each data set through this textual analysis software, the primary researcher was able to identify the important relationships between particular words and emotions when expressed. I argue that these words and emotions can be recognised as reproductions of imagined communities that are both fluid and emergent in character. The expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that were established from this analysis were then (re)presented throughout the series of verbatim poems that forms the creative section of this thesis. Thus, the verbatim poems in United We Stand demonstrate a direct engagement with these imagined communities (see Chapter Four). As well as considering word frequency, context, and the relationships between several different phrases, the data sampled from Twitter was coded according to the kinds of responses that were being expressed within each tweet and the type of tweets that were being published online. By coding the responses published on Twitter in this way, the thesis establishes if an important relationship exists between the popular media channels and the platforms’ everyday users online. Quantitative network analysis was applied in order to determine the significance of these connections; to measure what is known as ‘social degree’.53 This enabled the primary researcher to recognise Twitter as a host of several, emerging imagined communities that existed on a virtual level during the disorder in Birmingham.54

**Limitations**

The main risks and discomforts to participants throughout this study included emotional, social and psychological distress which could occur as a result of the sensitive subject matter covered throughout the life-story interviews. As a political, social and cultural matter that affected and involved many different individuals, the disorder in Birmingham saw businesses ruined, families torn apart, cultures split, and even violence and death. For this reason, it was


53 Ruth and Sebastian E. Ahnert describe social network analysis as: ‘[T]he application of mathematical and computational techniques developed by scientists working in the field of complex networks to the arts and humanities is a relatively recent development, and one that is gaining increasing traction, offering as it does both technical tools and a sense of contemporaneity in a world now dominated by social networking platforms.’ See ‘Protestant Letter Networks in the Reign of Mary I: A Quantitative Approach’, *ELH*, 82, 1 (2015), 1-33, in *Project Muse* <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/576384/pdf> [accessed on Wednesday 15th July 2015] (p.2).

54 For a full explanation of ‘Twitter as an Online Imagined Community?’, see Chapter Two, pp.84-97.
important that the primary researcher and the participants were fully aware of the emotional discomfort that might occur during the recalling of memories, feelings, events and emotions linked to the disorder. To ensure that participants were not in any danger from one another, they were interviewed on different days and times depending on their experiences. The recruitment materials requested that participants who were interested in taking part in the study sent the primary researcher a few sentences of explanation about their experiences of the disorder, along with their contact details. The primary researcher then ensured that the sample was split into smaller groups appropriately and this evaded any dangerous or distressing confrontations between participants and their peers within the community.

The main risks to the primary researcher included putting oneself in the way of danger. To avoid these potential risks, the primary researcher was never completely alone at any one time with a sensitive or vulnerable participant. As some of the participants involved in this study were potentially involved in criminal activity, the primary researcher had to be fully aware of these characters and remain vigilant so that they were never alone with them. The primary researcher was also at risk of becoming emotionally or psychologically distressed at the sensitive nature of the topics being discussed throughout this study and the life-stories that the participants recalled. However, they were aware of the local, professional services that they could talk to in order to alleviate this discomfort if necessary.

Other measures were also put in place to address the risks to the primary researcher within this study. Firstly, the primary researcher conducted all life-story interviews in neutral areas. By conducting the interviews in a neutral location in Birmingham, members of the host organisation or the general public were around at the times when the interviews took place. This meant that the primary researcher was never fully alone with the participants. Additionally, the primary researcher developed a specific procedure for accounting for their whereabouts and preventing these risks to themselves. They alerted another responsible adult as to their whereabouts at all times when conducting the interviews. In this case, a responsible adult was presented with a weekly schedule for the interviews one week prior to them happening and the primary researcher regularly checked in with the responsible adult before and after each life-story interview. The responsible adult also made themselves aware of the geographical location of all interviews (e.g. where the host organisation was in Birmingham) in case their presence was needed.
Deploying Verbatim Methods to (Re)present Ideas of Imagined Community

In order to address the questions and aims that I have outlined throughout this introduction, Chapter One begins by identifying the key theoretical frameworks that are pertinent to this research. It examines Anderson’s model of the nation as an imagined community in order to demonstrate that it remains relevant to the disorder in Birmingham. The chapter also pays close attention to other theories of nationalism. These have developed since Anderson’s work and include Billig’s theory of *Banal Nationalism* (1991), Fox and Miller-Idriss’s model of ‘Everyday Nationhood’ (2008) and Mihelj’s concept of *Media Nations* (2011) (see Chapter One). However, I argue that this focus on the nation is problematic. In the case of the disorder in Birmingham in 2011, sub-national disruptions – as well as examples of supranationalism – gave rise to community groups that were ‘imagined’ into existence across a variety of social and geographical scales. These imagined communities were not synonymous with the nation, but existed on a smaller-scale in the ‘imagined space of the neighbourhood’ or transgressed national boundaries. While local and urban forms of belonging were also relative to expressions of religious and cultural identity, significant advances in electronic communication technologies enabled ordinary citizens to respond to the events of this disorder immediately. This led to the development of ‘virtual neighborhoods’ that were globally accessible. Through an analysis of several examples as evidence, Chapter One recognises that imagined communities in this context should be explained as both fluid and emergent in character. Thus, this chapter argues that Anderson’s model is partial and it posits a definition of imagined community that is pluralistic.

The second chapter develops this argument further by demonstrating that increased access to various modes of communication had a significant impact on the development of imagined communities in this context. It acknowledges the fluid and emergent forms of belonging that have developed socially in this setting in response to recent advances in technology. These include both ‘micro-imagined wispy’ and virtual groupings, and the ‘imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’. By analysing a number of relevant reported, creative and contemporary responses to these events in Birmingham, this chapter provides

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55 Anderson, p.3.
56 Ahmed, p.28.
57 Appadurai, p.199.
58 Anderson, pp.77-8.
59 See Fine and Scott.
evidence for the fundamental relationship *between* this complex layering of communities and the various modes of print and electronic communication that (re)presented them. The analysis focuses on the deployment of internal and external focalisation, the use of national deixis, and journalists’ decisions to position ordinary individuals as ‘key actors’ throughout various news reports.\(^60\) Mihelj claims that national unity is fostered in situations of conflict and this remains relevant here.\(^61\) However, this chapter contends that similar ‘modes of reporting’ can also be recognised in crisis situations that occur *within* a single nation-state. Examinations of reports published by a combination of partisan, private and public media outlets (including BBC News online, *The Birmingham Mail* and Sangat TV) pay close attention to sports teams as symbols of national identity and analyse the constant interweaving of messages that stress ‘the real United Kingdom’ while alluding to cultural and religious identities simultaneously.\(^62\) Through the addition of quantitative network analysis, this chapter establishes significant ‘ties’ between a number of these important media channels (‘sources’) and individual users (‘nodes’) on Twitter.\(^63\) I argue that the relationship *between* these users and coexisting sources on the platform illustrates that Twitter hosted and developed a complicated set of imagined communities online during the disorder. My examination of two poetic responses by Carol Ann Duffy and Roy McFarlane, which were also published by these media channels, recognises that a combination of literary techniques and narrative conventions were deployed throughout.\(^64\) This final analysis informs the series of verbatim poems in relation to their (re)presentations of expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community in this context. The verbatim poems that are presented in Chapter Four build on these two creative responses by considering fluid and emergent imagined communities at length and addressing missing voices that are not (re)presented in the texts. Additionally, this analysis signals *United We Stand’s* obligation to reflect the multifaceted nature of community specifically.

\(^{60}\) Mihelj, p.102.

\(^{61}\) Mihelj, p.96.

\(^{62}\) Sangat Television, *Sangat TV at Dudley Road, Birmingham with Upinder Randhawa (10 August 2011)* [YouTube video], Sangat TV, Friday 12 August 2011 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyjakyedfDU] [accessed on Monday 9 May 2016].

\(^{63}\) Ahnert, p.2.

Chapter Three examines the deployment of verbatim methods in both theatre and poetry in order to understand how and why these methods are appropriate for crafting a series of poems that demonstrates practice as research. Arguing for the resilience of verbatim, the chapter first considers the origins and developments of these methods in theatre. Examining two examples of the ‘Living Newspaper’, the chapter acknowledges that both documentary and verbatim methods were, and often still are, well suited to dealing with socially- and politically-charged events. However, this chapter also turns its attention to poetics. Analysing three contemporary verbatim scripts in Richard Norton-Taylor’s *The Colour of Justice* (1999), Alecky Blythe’s *London Road* (2011) and Gillian Slovo’s *The Riots* (2011), Chapter Three considers how verbatim methods are evolving as a result of the digital age. It pays close attention to the spatial and temporal dimensions of the characters and events as they are (re)presented throughout these plays. In doing so, the chapter demonstrates an awareness of the common censures that surround verbatim methods; specifically, the ethical (re)presentations of trauma and questions surrounding the writer as editor. Through its examination of the literary techniques arranged in these scripts and a consideration of the transformation of voice(s) in Bhanu Kapil Rider’s *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (2001), Chapter Three advances towards an understanding of how both playwrights and poets deploy verbatim methods for specific effect within their writing. In this case, (re)presenting expressions of personal identity and scales of community in order to promote agency among the ordinary people involved in the creation of their work.

The fourth chapter of this thesis presents the reader with the creative intervention that demonstrates practice as research. However, before I can provide an explanation of the series of poems, it is important to clarify why I have chosen to structure the thesis in a way that does not introduce the reader to *United We Stand* until this chapter. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the research is cumulative: it results in the main creative outcome and significant contributions to knowledge, but it does so as a direct consequence of the research process. In its current structure, the thesis reflects this process and my research journey. Furthermore, although this research forms the basis of my study towards a PhD in English and Creative Writing specifically, the end product has developed considerably. The thesis is interdisciplinary in nature: it not only focuses on the new and innovative poetic practice that

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it establishes, but it also demonstrates to the reader that deploying creative methods in social research can add implicit value to a project. As such, this thesis is not only part-creative but is, in a way, an intervention into research methodology in the Social Sciences. I would argue that I have structured it in a way that highlights this interdisciplinarity.

*United We Stand* (see Chapter Four) is a series of thirty-one poems which have been crafted through the deployment of verbatim methods. Split into six parts, these poems explore the chronology of the events in Birmingham (‘Monday’, ‘Tuesday’ and ‘Wednesday’) and the effect that this disorder had on the various communities that were ‘imagined’ into existence both during and after the events had happened (‘Aftermath’, ‘United’, ‘Four Years On’). The series deploys a combination of interview testimonies from ordinary citizens (see Appendix Four), ‘found’ materials taken from relevant media sources, and many visual-digital techniques which illustrate the key words and emotions that were expressed in response to the disorder in the city in 2011. As a result, *United We Stand* is able to (re)present the various expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that I posit throughout this thesis.

At this point, it is important to understand how the individual pieces of writing were developed and why the series of verbatim poems has been crafted in this way. Chapter Five begins with a detailed examination of the traditional ‘cut-ups’ method which was recognised by theatre practitioners John W. Casson and Ewan MacColl. The chapter analyses my editorial decision to deploy ‘found’ materials throughout several examples in *United We Stand* – in order to indicate that the press and popular media played a vital role in the reproduction of imagined communities during this disorder in Birmingham. Like Blythe in *London Road* (see Chapter Three, pp.118-25), I advance these traditional methods digitally. Through a detailed discussion of several examples, this chapter reflects upon the deployment of a combination of verbatim and digital methods in order to demonstrate how these poems (re)present expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community in a new way entirely. From stanzas that total 140-characters each to (re)present the tweets that were published during the disorder, to a new kind of digital-verbatim method that I have termed ‘Deferred Dadaism’, Chapter Five focuses on how a poet can advance these verbatim methods and create credible examples of visual-digital poetry. The chapter concludes by paying close

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69 Casson, pp.107-22.

70 ‘Deferred Dadaism’ refers to the seemingly illogical method of fragmentation of the words from participants’ interviews by JanusNode. This is similar to the work characteristic of ‘Dadaism’ as ‘an early 20th century
attention to some of the other methods, genres and themes that have influenced *United We Stand* and my own creative practice throughout this research. These include Radical Landscape Poetry and additional methods such as ‘Gleaning’. The chapter highlights how these influences have enabled me to expand the range and context of *United We Stand* as a whole collection. Throughout the series, I place a significant emphasis on the locale of Birmingham and on advances in electronic communication technologies (e.g. Twitter) in order to demonstrate that an important link between local, national and global scales of community existed in 2011.

Through an engagement with the urban cityscape, the nation, and the ‘virtual neighborhood’ in *United We Stand*, I determine that an amalgamation of verbatim and digital methods is appropriate for deployment in poetry in this context. Together, these methods result in a new creative practice (‘Digital Poetic Mimesis’) which enables the poet to (re)present and engage with the fluid and emergent imagined communities that inhabited this landscape, the disorder and, now, this thesis simultaneously.

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movement in art, literature, music, and film, active most notably in Europe and the United States, repudiating and mocking artistic and social conventions and emphasizing the illogical and absurd’. See ‘Dadaism n. adj.’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2016) [http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/35036262?redirectedFrom=dadaism#eid] [accessed on Friday 12 August 2016]. The fragmentation has subsequently been edited in order to ensure that the creative outputs (verbatim poems) are credible. Thus, I have termed this particular creative process, ‘Deferred Dadaism’, to account for all stages of the creative method throughout this thesis.

PART ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Chapter One: Models of Identity and the Relevance of Imagined Community

Introduction: Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*

In the revised edition of his influential book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2006), Benedict Anderson argues for the continued importance of the nation to be recognised. He claims that the ‘end of the era of nationalism […] is not remotely in sight’ because it is ‘the most universally legitimate value in political life’.¹ The idea of ‘nation-ness’ he argues for here remains relevant to the British nation which is under investigation throughout this thesis. One only has to consider the referenda on Scottish independence and Britain’s belonging to the European Union that have taken place over the last three years to see that Anderson’s acknowledgement of ‘“sub”-nationalisms’ – and examples of the supranational – remain very much in evidence.² According to Anderson, these ‘“sub”-nationalisms’ challenge the consolidation of their older counterparts and ‘dream of shredding this sub-ness one happy day’.³ The Scottish referendum in 2014 saw Scotland dream of becoming separate from Britain, though this is yet to happen.⁴ While the most recent and controversial referendum led to the decision by British people to leave the European Union in order to be ‘independent’ and ‘take control’ of their own nation.⁵ In the specific setting of this thesis – the events of civil disorder in Birmingham in 2011 – I argue that similar ‘“sub”-nationalisms’ exist. This particular disorder occurred in the shadow of the police shooting of Mark Duggan on Thursday 4th August that year, which in itself led to rioting and looting behaviours being displayed in and across various London boroughs including Enfield, Croydon and Clapham.⁶ The disorder then spread to many other cities in Britain, including Birmingham. The latter metropolitan area is fundamental to the thesis and

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² Anderson, p.3.
³ Anderson, p.3.
⁵ Numerous reports are still being published in the aftermath of the EU referendum results. These include, Brian Wheeler and Alex Hunt, ‘Brexit: All you need to know about the UK leaving the EU’, *BBC News* (2016) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-32810887> [accessed on Monday 25 July 2016].
its main argument. It is important to note that many of these incidents were often categorised as distinctly belonging to England as a country; referred to as ‘English-‘, ‘London-‘ or ‘Birmingham riots’ rather than ‘British’. This distanced the disorder from other countries that constitute Britain as a nation-state and, as such, Anderson’s idea of ‘“sub”-nationalisms’ is relevant to the classifications that were in existence during this period of disorder. While this is the case, I argue that his focus on the nation here is problematic. Sub-national disruptions gave rise to community groups that were ‘imagined’ on a variety of levels in this context. These imagined communities were not synonymous with the nation, but existed on a smaller-scale in ‘the imagined space of the neighbourhood’. They existed beyond national boundaries as well, in global and virtual communities formed as a direct result of significant advances in technology.

It is important to consider Anderson’s quadripartite definition of the nation as an imagined community and how it is relevant to the specifics of this thesis: to expressions of identity and forms of belonging in existence during the disorder in Birmingham. Prior to Anderson’s model, many scholars claimed that the nation was a difficult concept to define. Hugh Seton-Watson argued that ‘no “scientific definition” of the nation [could] be devised’ (Nations and States), while ‘[t]he theory of nationalism represent[ed] Marxism’s greatest failure’ according to Tom Nairn in The Break-up of Britain. Marxism refused to consider the nation at any great length and Nairn compared its ‘same essential ambiguity’ to the individual’s ‘descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness’. While I do not wish to completely disregard these reactions to the question of nationalism per se – because there is something of value in Seton-Watson’s claim that ‘a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form’ one – for the purpose of this thesis, neither of these responses have provided reason enough for the formation of the nation as an important phenomenon. Anderson answered this difficulty by proposing his own definition of ‘nation-ness, as […] cultural artefacts of a particular kind’. He identified specific objects in ‘Census, Map, Museum’ that he argued played a significant role in

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7 See map image and caption in ‘England riots: Maps and timeline’.  
8 An example of this categorisation can be identified in the publication of ‘England riots: Maps and timeline’ by BBC News online on Monday 15th August 2011.  
10 Hugh Seton-Watson and Tom Nairn as cited in Anderson, p.3.  
11 Tom Nairn as cited in Anderson, pp.3-4.  
13 Anderson, p.4.
defining the nation. These artefacts corresponded to people or members of the nation (‘Census’), to geographical locations or physical boundaries (‘Map’) and to how nations have come ‘into historical being’ (‘Museum’). Not only do these articles help to define the nation, but I argue that they also (re)present it through written word and concrete or visual image. This (re)presentation of ‘nation-ness’ is something that the thesis is particularly concerned with. Anderson argued that shared languages and advances in print-capitalism played a vital role in our understanding of the nation as an imagined community in the mid-nineteenth-century, and evidence presented throughout this thesis demonstrates how various media sources continued to (re)present the nation in their reported responses to the disorder in Birmingham (see Chapter Two). Through its analysis of immediate reported, creative and contemporary responses published by the media and in literature, this thesis interrogates Anderson’s claim that language is vital to an understanding of the nation as an imagined community. However, in this case, ongoing developments in language and increased access to new modes of communication were crucial to the formation of fluid and emergent communities which were ‘imagined’ into existence during the disorder in the city.

Anderson’s definition of the nation establishes it as imagined because

‘members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’

This idea is particularly relevant to the disorder in Birmingham in 2011 because, as I mentioned earlier, the incidents geographically dispersed (see page 21). Individuals participating in rioting and looting behaviours, as well as those who considered this behaviour to be inexcusable, lived on different streets, across various boroughs, counties and cities. They often did not ‘know’, ‘meet’ or ‘hear’ of ‘fellow-members’. Yet, the events of this disorder still motivated many individuals and groups to come together in Birmingham as

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15 ‘…how [nations] have come into historical being’ is a key consideration of Anderson’s text. See ‘Introduction’, p.4.
17 Anderson, p.6.
19 Anderson, p.6.
a result of their shared membership of the national imagined community. Ordinary citizens came together physically to clean up the city’s streets through organised neighbourhood events, while Twitter users motivated by the incidents in Birmingham supported one another virtually by warning each other about occurrences as they were happening. Anderson proposes that ‘all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined’ and I would stress that there is sufficient evidence to support the existence of this particular imagining in this context. Shared membership of this imagined community was symbolised by groups including the English Defence League during the disorder in 2011. According to an article published by The Guardian on Thursday 11th August that year, members of this group ‘jump[ed] on the bandwagon’ in order to be recognised as the ‘self-appointed protectors of the [national] community’ in this situation (see Chapter Two, p.72-3). This illustrates an imagined form of belonging because, like those who participated in the rioting and looting behaviours in 2011, members of the English Defence League also live(d) in various places across Britain. They do not know every other member of their imagined community in person, but come together through organised events and the group’s presence online because they share a common purpose. Members of this community, which is recognised as being built around strong national values because of their decision to ‘lead and inspire in the struggle against global Islamification’, claim to ‘respect English tradition’ by being ‘proud of England’s culture’ and through their expectations that ‘migrants to the UK […] live in harmony with English culture’.21

Anderson also claimed that the nation was limited as a direct result of the boundaries that constitute it. He suggested that ‘even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations’.22 While such predetermined borders of these sub-national communities remained intact during the period of civil disorder in Birmingham, I maintain that the limitations Anderson recognised in his explanation were particularly changeable in this instance. Margins were not only determined by physical and geographical location, but social mobility and progressions in technology led to flexible boundaries that worked within and across counties, cities and nations in this context. The display of rioting and looting behaviours by individuals in different geographical locations across Britain (London, Birmingham and Liverpool, for

22 Anderson, p.7.
example) led to the development of a collective identity that transgressed these geographical boundaries. This collective (‘the rioters’) became recognised as ‘the stranger’ (‘enemy’) within the nation and, as a result, members of this group in Birmingham were also positioned outside of ‘the imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’. This ‘recognition’ of the stranger, Sara Ahmed contends, ‘is a means by which inhabitable or bounded spaces are produced […] not simply as the place or locality of residences, but as the very living form of a community’ (see pages 48-52 of this chapter). Progressions in technology, such as the invention of the Internet and social media platforms as modes of communication, enabled individuals dwelling outside of Britain in 2011 to access information about these incidents immediately. Writing on Wednesday 10th August as events unfolded, Olivia Lang paid significant attention to ‘the global reaction’ to the ‘England riots’. The tagline of her article, which was categorised as relevant to the ‘World’ by BBC News online, read:

‘The riots in British cities have unsurprisingly dominated headlines in domestic papers. But there has also been extensive coverage overseas. So what does the rest of the world make of the unrest?’

Critics from America, Iran and China passed comment on ‘yobbery’, ‘the restraint shown by British police’ and the state of Western democracy, while Twitter hashtags such as #Birminghamriots encouraged global and virtual networks that were motivated by these events in particular (see Chapter Two, pp.84-97).

The final part of Anderson’s definition argues that the nation is imagined as a community because

‘regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible […] for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings’.

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24 Ahmed, p.22.
26 Olivia Lang (para. 1 of 40).
27 See Olivia Lang, ‘England riots: The global reaction’.
28 Anderson, p.7.
Numerous examples of this ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ that Anderson recognised are
evident during the events of civil disorder in Birmingham in 2011. Many individuals
motivated by the #Birminghamriots used Twitter as a platform upon which to engage with the
fellow-members of their online imagined community. They warned their fellow-members of
incidents occurring in close proximity to them in order to keep them safe. For example:
“@___: West Midlands Police confirm that Handsworth Police Station IS on fire.
#Birminghamriots” 29 People encouraged fellow-members to come together and
support one another in rectifying the damage to the city through organised ‘community clean-
’up’ and discussion events. One Twitter user commented: ‘Let’s get Birmingham residents
pulling together! This is OUR city. #birminghamriots #riotcleanup #birmingham Please RT’,
while another indicated that a clean-up operation had been arranged for ‘Wednesday 10am at
the bull’ and claimed that people would go ‘where we’re needed’. 30 This display of
community spirit and ‘horizontal comradeship’, to borrow Anderson’s phrase, was not only
visible online. Individuals and groups of ‘fellow-members’ came together and maintained a
physical presence on the streets of Birmingham, too. This togetherness prevailed in the
localised setting of Dudley Road (Winson Green) on Wednesday 10th August. Members of the
Asian community in Birmingham came together in this moment to support one another and
 guard each other’s properties, businesses and places of worship, regardless of their religious
differences. 31 However, on the night in question, three young men – known locally as Haroon
Jahan, Shazad Ali and Abdul Musavir – were killed in a hit-and-run incident while they were
among others defending a Jet petrol station. 32 Despite suggestions of threats to properties and
people in this instance, the three men opted to position themselves in the line of fire for the
benefit of their community as a whole. I argue that this is not only a demonstration of the
‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ that Anderson has suggested is a cause for considering the
nation as an imagined community, but it also highlights that a willingness to die for these
imaginings is relevant. Not only to the concept of nationalism, but to specific events such as

29 This tweet was published on Monday 8th August 2011. It was extracted from Twitter (2015)
<https://twitter.com> [accessed on Thursday 6 August 2015] using the advanced search system and criteria that
included: #Birminghamriots Additional note: Twitter names have been blanked for the purpose of preserving
anonymity.
30 This tweet was published on Tuesday 9th August 2011. It was also extracted from Twitter (2015)
<https://twitter.com> [accessed on Thursday 6 August 2015].
31 See Anon., ‘Birmingham Riots: Muslims and Sikhs guard each other’s places of worship in show of unity’,
sikhs-guard-159529> [accessed on Monday 25 July 2016].
21 April 2015].
this one during the disorder in Birmingham. Though this incident does appear symbolic of Anderson’s national imagined community at first glance, I argue that the ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ performed here by the boys and their fellow-members was not purely a symbol of ‘nation-ness’. The community spirit displayed in this particular situation was also an expression of cultural identity which has come to exist in Britain as an indirect consequence of colonialism.\(^{33}\) As John S. Saul recalls,

> ‘Asian traders have faced up-hill struggles against the competition of well-established alien trading communities (for example, Asians in East Africa) and as a result also have taken shape gradually as a coherent class fraction.’\(^{34}\)

These tensions, relating to both ethnicity and class, have since been transferred to Britain with relationships between British Asians and those belonging to the African Caribbean diaspora being strained in Birmingham (see Chapter Two, ‘A Model for the Nation: Birmingham’s Ethnic History’, pp.64-6). This begins to highlight that people’s expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community are particularly complex in the context of this disorder in 2011.

Anderson argues that communities should be distinguished ‘by the style in which they are imagined’.\(^{35}\) However, as this introduction has begun to demonstrate, community groups during the disorder in Birmingham were often ‘imagined’ into existence on a variety of scales relating to geographical location and social and cultural identification. While a national ‘we’ reinforced the sharp division between nation and enemy – in this case, between the nation and those individuals participating in behaviours of rioting and looting – local and urban forms of belonging related to expressions of religious and cultural identity.\(^{36}\) Social media platforms, including Twitter, were used to respond to events with immediacy and this led to the

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33 Examples of this colonialism in Africa can be found in Giles Mohan and Tunde Zack-Williams, *The Politics of Transition in Africa: State, Democracy and Economic Development* (Sheffield: ROAPE, 2004).


35 Anderson, p.6.

36 The deployment of a national ‘we’ to reinforce these sharp divisions between ‘us’ and a ‘them’, between nation and enemy, is recognised by Sabina Mihelj in her chapter ‘Media Nations at War’, in *Media Nations: Communicating Belonging and Exclusion in the Modern World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.95-118 (p.96). I return to examine this sharp division and its relevance to (re)presentations of national imagined community during the disorder in Birmingham in more detail in Chapter Two of the thesis.
development of ‘virtual neighborhoods’ that were globally accessible. Throughout this thesis, I theorise that Anderson’s work remains relevant to the twenty-first century and to the civil disorder in Birmingham specifically. His model acknowledged a range of possible reasons for the creation of the national imagined community; the strength of his work that remains a limitation of the explanations offered by other scholars mentioned earlier. The thesis pays significant attention to the importance of language and communication in the formation of this kind of grouping. However, by demonstrating that these communities were ‘imagined’ into existence in relation to age, ethnicity and religion, and across the various scales (local; urban; global) that I recognise throughout this chapter, the thesis critiques Anderson’s framework by arguing that it is partial. The creative (re)presentation of these fluctuating scales throughout United We Stand (see Chapter Four) heuristically demarcates the communities that were in existence during the disorder in Birmingham in 2011.

**Key Frameworks of Nationalism**

Having laid the foundations of this thesis by positing Anderson’s model of imagined community as central to it, I suggest that it is also important for this first chapter to consider a number of relevant theories that have since developed or interrogated his work. These models are specific to the nation, the neighbourhood and the world, and demonstrate that ideas of community have always been connected to various social and geographical scales. The chapter reflects on other key frameworks of nationalism that are particularly pertinent to both Anderson’s model of imagined community and to the arguments made throughout this thesis in relation to the setting of Birmingham. These include Michael Billig’s proposition of the nation as a discursive construct (Banal Nationalism, 1995) and the research agenda of ‘Everyday Nationhood’ put forward by Fox and Miller-Idriss. Billig focuses on the reproduction of ‘established nations of the West’ and seeks to resituate nationalism ‘here’ in the centre (of Britain). He argues for ‘a whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits,
representations and practices [that are] reproduced in a banally mundane way'. Fox and Miller-Idriss’s model, on the other hand, moves beyond the nation ‘as a cultural construct of collective belonging realized and legitimated through institutional and discursive practices’ to examine which of these representations ordinary people are engaging with on a daily basis. They take the discursive construct of the nation one step further to ‘shed light [from below] on some of the ways in which ordinary people are active participants in the [...] reproduction of the nation’.

Both theories question what the nation is and how it is ‘imagined’ into existence (as Anderson proposed) in the form of a community. As a discursive construct that ‘flag[s] the homeland daily’, the nation leads individuals to either ‘engage and enact (or ignore and deflect) [...] nationalism in the varied contexts of their everyday lives’. Relating this idea of the everyday to the disorder in Birmingham, I argue that the city’s significant history of ethnic tensions (see Chapter Two, p.64) has led to behaviours such as rioting, looting and protesting being considered part of the ‘everyday’ experience for many of its residents. The nation is often flagged during these events and one participant, who was interviewed as part of this study, reflected on the fact that ‘things have been [...] going not so well for a while’. She explained:

‘in town when they’re happening is not nice, yeah n’ they have like, they do a lot of protests and marches about how states are in other countries n’ how people are being treated in other countries, but they do the marches in Birmingham. [T]hey literally take up, they stand so they don’t just walk through, they make like a wall n’ then walk through so you can’t go anywhere; you have to like walk where they’re going. You can’t really get through or around them; they walk in such a way you can’t move. So, yeah I think it’d been kicking off quite a while beforehand’ (see Appendix Four, Interview One).

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41 Billig, p.6.
42 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.536.
43 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.538.
44 The fifth chapter of Billig’s text is titled ‘Flagging the Homeland Daily’ and examines the ‘banal flagging’ of nationhood in ‘our’ newspapers, specifically ‘the left-of-centre sophisticated press’ that is The Guardian (see Banal Nationalism, pp.93-127). The Guardian’s reported responses to the disorder in Birmingham in 2011 are also a focus of this thesis (see Chapter Two, pp.67-71 for a detailed analysis). Fox and Miller-Idriss, in comparison, focus their research agenda on the ‘various contexts of [...] everyday life’ that see individuals engaging (or not engaging) with nationalism (see ‘Everyday Nationhood’, p.537). By reading the media examples that I have analysed in the next chapter of this thesis, I argue that ordinary people in Birmingham continued to engage with the nation in this way during the disorder in 2011.
45 See Appendix Four for examples from this interview transcript.
This demonstrates that behaviours that challenge the status quo – specifically protests and marches, or even riotous acts like those performed in 2011 – are considered an ‘everyday’ experience for some ordinary citizens in Birmingham. The participant in question appears to understand, to an extent, why the disorder started in the city following the situation in London. She suggests here that this is because these kinds of incidents were frequent in the city previously and this implies that there are residents in Birmingham who may not have been surprised by the events that took place in early August.

What followed these events was a continual display of other routine or ‘everyday’ behaviours, including ordinary people (like the participant interviewed above) reading or engaging with media reports and broadcasts about these incidents. For example:

‘London had a lot of attention like on our regional news they would say things were bad in Birmingham, they would compare it to London n’ say how it was on a larger scale, that things were more violent n’ stuff; they tried to make it like Birmingham wasn’t that big of a deal’ (see Appendix Four, Interview One).

The thesis argues that reported responses, like those that this participant recalls above, also served as a reminder of the nation. The media continued to ‘flag’ the nation through repeated references to ‘London’ as England’s capital city.46 Journalists positioned ordinary citizens as ‘key actors’ throughout these same responses to promote national unity among their readers. I argue that individuals’ interactions with these media responses resulted in the existence of national imaginings that led to the creation of an ‘imagined political community’ (see Chapter Two).47 United We Stand – as the creative intervention that forms the fourth chapter of this thesis – (re)presents these expressions of national identity and the existence of communities across various social and geographical scales through a series of verbatim poems. Billig’s theory of ‘Banal Nationalism’, which acknowledges the ‘continual “flagging” or reminding of nationhood’ in established states like Britain, is particularly important to this research because United We Stand becomes yet another reminder of the nation in this context.48 By (re)presenting expressions of national identity (‘out of respect / for saving our country’, ‘10th August 2011’, ll.13-4) and this idea of fluid scales of imagined community (from ‘Ferguson

47 Anderson, p.6.
48 Billig, p.8.
to Birmingham’, ‘A Hand’s worth’, ll.43-4) through a new and original practice, the creative response encourages a new ‘imagined community of [its own] readers’.\(^{49}\) It not only (re)presents the imagined communities that existed in this context, but it also demonstrates a direct engagement with the very communities it is exploring.

**Banal Nationalism**

Billig’s theory is centred on the key idea that the nation is a discursive construct and can be (re)presented in a variety of ways on a daily basis: through the ‘small words’ of ‘homeland deixis’ that are broadcast nationally by politicians, throughout newspapers, and ‘inscribed in the sports pages’.\(^{50}\) He calls for nationalism to be considered less as an ‘intermittent mood’ and more as an ever-present ‘endemic condition’.\(^{51}\) During the disorder in Birmingham, I argue that the nation was prevalent just as Billig advocates. This is because there is a wide range of evidence to suggest that expressions of national identity and the idea of the nation as an imagined community were (re)presented through reported, creative and contemporary responses that were published by various media sources and across social networking sites during this situation. One online user comments: ‘I can’t believe what I’m watching on BBC news! What’s happening to our country! #londonriots #birminghamriots’ and this chapter returns to these (re)presentations of the nation shortly.\(^{52}\) Billig’s suggestion that nationalism is ‘comfortably wrapped around social movements, which seek to re-draw existing territorial boundaries, and which, thereby, threaten the existing national status quo’ is relevant here.\(^{53}\) I argue that it is possible to consider the civil disorder in Birmingham (and across Britain) as an example of this type of ‘social movement’. Though displays of rioting and looting behaviours in this context were more extreme – because these actions caused millions of pounds’ worth of criminal damage and led to the deaths of three ordinary citizens in Birmingham – the individuals that were responsible for it can be recognised as sharing a

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\(^{49}\) The line ‘out of respect / for not saving our country’ is taken from ‘10\(^{th}\) August 2011’, in *United We Stand* (see Chapter Four, p.165), while these references from ‘Ferguson to Birmingham’ can be recognised in ‘A Hand’s worth’, in *United We Stand* (see Chapter Four, p.172).

\(^{50}\) Billig, p.6.

\(^{51}\) Billig, p.6.

\(^{52}\) This tweet was published on Monday 8\(^{th}\) August 2011. It was also extracted from Twitter (2015) <https://twitter.com> [accessed on Thursday 6 August 2015].

\(^{53}\) Billig, p.6.
common purpose. They were attempting to challenge the ‘national status quo’ that Billig refers to. People behaving in this way maintained that their actions were symbolic of a message to two national institutions: the police and the government, who, they say, were oppressing them. This social movement is relative to nationalism because, as a result, the ‘we’ of the nation deliberately chooses to reposition those responsible for this behaviour over ‘there’. The group of individuals who were attempting to challenge the status quo became a national ‘problem’ and, thus, they were excluded from the imagined community that Anderson theorises. The collective in question became recognised as ‘the stranger’ on this occasion, to borrow Ahmed’s classification, and this reinforced the strong sense of belonging to the nation that ‘we’ (as the rest of Britain) felt in this context. I argue that this raises an important question relative to those individuals who are recognised as a national problem in this setting. Other people who consider themselves to belong to far-right groups (the English Defence League, for example), and who have been acknowledged previously for behaving in similar ways, are identified as ‘fellow-members’ of the national imagined community during the disorder in Birmingham. This highlights the intricate nature of the concept of imagined community which Billig claims is formed as a direct result of the nation being a discursive construct. The scholar confirms that ‘one needs to look for reasons why people in the contemporary world do not forget their nationality’, and, in the case of the disorder in Birmingham in 2011, this chapter would argue that Billig certainly has a point.

As Anderson acknowledges the significance of language, so, too, does Billig. Though this idea of language being crucial to the basis of the nation is not a new one: ‘Herder and Fichte were declaring that the basis of a nation, and indeed its genius, lay in its language’ as early as the eighteenth century. It is ‘natural’ to assume that language is important because, if individuals cannot communicate with one another, ‘how can they share a common identity, sense of heritage, or feeling of community?’ In the case of the Birmingham disorder in 2011 the national imagined community is evident, but I argue that language actually serves to

55 An example of this supposed oppression by the police and government as one reason for this rioting and looting behaviour is expressed in Gillian Slovo’s verbatim production, The Riots, which explores the disorder across the UK in 2011. See The Riots (London: Oberon, 2011), p.27. A detailed discussion of this verbatim play can be found on pages 125-34 of Chapter Three in this thesis.
56 Billig, p.6.
57 Billig, p.6.
complicate its existence. During these incidents, the Asian community in Birmingham maintained a strong and important presence. A guerrilla television channel, Sangat TV, which was set up by a small network of individuals belonging to the Sikh faith, became extremely popular for its broadcasts (see Chapter Two, pp.82-4). These broadcasts demonstrate the complex nature of national identity in this context. In some reports, members of the Asian community are identified as speaking the English language. They are able to communicate with other members of the nation and are recognised as ‘fellow-members’ of the national imagined community because they play a vital role in spreading the message of ‘the real United Kingdom’ to the rest of the world. However, in other broadcasts, members of the Asian community choose to talk to Sangat TV’s journalists in a language that they share. This immediately excludes the English-speaking audience member from that community grouping, which, I argue, is situated below the nation, because they cannot understand what is being said. The individuals in question are not identifying with the nation, but they recognise themselves and their community according to their ethnic background and cultural traditions. As John Edwards has suggested: ‘language is still commonly taken to be the central pillar of ethnic identity’. In this situation, I maintain that language plays a role in demonstrating that expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community exist across fluid scales during the disorder in Birmingham. These individuals negotiate numerous versions of identity and community in this setting and language allows them to switch or ‘jump scale’ between them. Billig argues that we cannot just assume that those ‘who speak the same language will wish to form national groupings’ and, in the context of this thesis, his desire to question ‘the very concepts which seem real to us’ is relevant. This thesis considers these ideas of national identity and imagined community by assessing the role of language; explicitly the ways in which ‘small words’ and phrases were deployed in reported, creative and contemporary responses to reproduce the nation and remind readers of its existence during the disorder in Birmingham.

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60 Sangat Television, Sangat TV at Dudley Road, Birmingham with Upinder Randhawa (10 August 2011) [YouTube video], Sangat TV, Friday 12 August 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjjakycdfDU> [accessed on Monday 9 May 2016].


62 Lasse Koefoed and Kirsten Simonsen draw attention to life as an ‘internal stranger’ in the city, the nation and other formations in their article, ‘(Re)scaling Identities’. Though their research draws on citizens in Copenhagen that are of a Pakistani origin, the study employs similar ideas of estrangement and identification to those that I recognise throughout this thesis, in order to recognise that individuals can ‘jump scale’ and search for alternative spaces of identity that are not synonymous with the nation. See ‘(Re)scaling Identities: Embodied Others and Alternative Spaces of Identification’, Ethnicities, 12, 5 (2012), 623-42, in Sage Publications <http://etn.sagepub.com/content/12/5/623.full.pdf+html> [accessed on Tuesday 2 August 2016].

63 Billig, p.15.
Billig’s approach ‘puts the psychological focus back on “us”’ (on Britain).\textsuperscript{64} In 1994, Gillett and Harré suggested that ‘emotions, such as anger, fear or happiness, involve judgements as well as outward social acts’, and, in the case of the disorder in Birmingham, this is true.\textsuperscript{65} For Billig, this includes emotions of national loyalty that depend upon the ‘judgements, shared beliefs, or representations of nationhood’ that he posits; ‘expressed by […] complex patterns of discourse, which themselves are part of wider historical processes’.\textsuperscript{66} When examining the responses of individuals who experienced the disorder in Birmingham – whether in the form of interview testimony (see Appendix Four) or online Twitter replies (see Chapter Two, pp.84-97) – emotional responses were taken into consideration for the purpose of upholding credibility throughout \textit{United We Stand}. This demonstrated that many of the responses evoked fear and anger and these emotions were centred on judgements relating to the outward social acts of rioting and looting in this context. Numerous replies by ordinary people appeared to display a sense of loyalty to the nation. For example, one interviewee told me that ‘the people who were involved in these acts got completely shunned’ at college. She explained:

‘[T]hey didn’t care about who it affected or what they did, just as long as they went n’ had fun […] a lot of bragging goin’ on: “oh, I smashed a window today” and everyone was like “Congratulations… twat”.’ (See Appendix Four, Interview One).

The individual responsible for the damage that was caused as part of this incident (smashing a window) was excluded from their usual community of fellow college students. This exclusion led to a sharp division between an ‘us’ and ‘them’ (as ‘the stranger’/other) that, in turn, illustrated the existence of a national imagined community in this context. The participant and her college friends may not have known all of their fellow-members whose businesses or properties had been affected by these kinds of behaviours in the city but they empathised with them. By shunning the person that had caused this kind of damage to their fellow-members’ property in Birmingham, the participant and her friends evoked a sense of the ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ that Anderson argued was present in this type of imagined community.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{64} Billig, p.17.
\textsuperscript{65} Gillett and Harré as cited in Billig, p.18.
\textsuperscript{66} Billig, p.18.
\textsuperscript{67} Anderson, p.7.
In addition to this, representatives from West Midlands’ Police discussed how the atmosphere at work changed for them during these incidents. It encouraged a sense of camaraderie between fellow-members of the organisation because they had come together for a common purpose in this instance. They explained:

‘…it was a real sorta strange atmosphere, urm, for a start everyone was happy to be at work which is unheard […] but it was this sort of like camaraderie y’know? Everyone sort of had a sense of purpose at work and it was, it was a really nice feeling’ (see Appendix Four, Interview Two).

The idea of the nation depicted throughout these emotional responses continually reflects the ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ that Anderson claimed was essential to the process of imagining the nation as a community (see pages 22-32 of this chapter). Billig uses the example of war to illustrate that this loyalty or ‘comradeship’ exists in Western nation-states and that it comes, directly, from the citizens:

‘When it comes to war, the rulers of the state do not depend on the cooperation of feudal barons. Armies are raised directly from the people who are urged to fight for their nation.’

Though it was not a conflict on the same scale as a war between nations, the disorder in Birmingham led to similar patterns of comradeship being exhibited within Britain:

‘[W]hen the shops were being boarded up, windows being fixed, then you’d get the cleaning squads coming along with mops, buckets and brooms; “BROOM ARMY” like! […] [T]hat was reassuring to see, whereas some people in those groups probably wouldn’t talk to each other on a daily basis. But, they had a common purpose’ (see Appendix Four, Interview Three).

This example from an interview held with a male participant provides a strong case for comradeship because, like members of West Midlands’ Police force, residents in the city

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68 Billig, p.21.
came together with a common purpose. This time that purpose was to clean-up and ‘fix’ the
damage to businesses and properties in Birmingham.

In contrast to these responses from interview participants, individuals online felt the
need to display their emotions during this particular disorder through the deployment of
expletives. Tweets posted in the immediate aftermath of the incidents in Birmingham
included direct references to the nation: ‘Come on Great Britain, you’re fucking better than
this #birminghamriots #londonriots’ and numerous invectives were used to highlight a sense
of anger and judgement: “We are getting our taxes back” what a pile of shit non of these
twats pay fucking taxes. I do so fucking stop now! #birminghamriots Cunts’ [SIC].69 This
display (re)presented the idea of the nation through the deployment of ‘small words’ (‘we’
and ‘our’) and, like the earlier examples taken from interview testimonies, these responses
continued to construct boundaries between an ‘us’ and ‘them’. Displays of emotion were
relative to anger, sadness, shock and fear, with another Twitter user commenting: ‘I can’t
even think of anything to say now. This is terrifying. What’s happening to our country
=( #Birminghamriots #Londonriots’.70

Although these responses suggest that a sense of national identity and the idea of
imagined community were in existence in this particular setting, other reactions appear to
complicate this. A number of Twitter users avoid displays of national loyalty in favour of
locating their replies a little closer to home; the urban cityscape of Birmingham is the focal
point. One user comments: ‘fucking hell, apparently it’s starting to get violent in Birmingham
now… #birminghamriots’, while a second person pays close attention to the influence of
‘Channel 847’ (Sangat TV) arguing that ‘birmingham will fight back’.71 As a result, I agree
with Billig that the nation, as a discursive construct, is problematic.72 The nation is not the
only level upon which identities and communities can be ‘imagined’ into existence.
Communities were ‘imagined’ on a variety of geographical (local; urban; global), social
(virtual) and cultural (ethnic and religious) scales in this context. Thus, Anderson’s model of
the imagined community – as a concept that is distinctly relevant to a national framework –

69 This tweet was published on Monday 8th August 2011. It was also extracted from Twitter (2015)
<https://twitter.com> [accessed on Thursday 6 August 2015]. Note that the spelling of ‘non’ (as present within
this tweet) is actually incorrect here. This particular reference is to the word ‘none’. I have chosen not to correct
this, so that it is representative of and authentic to the original tweet which this particular user had chosen to
publish.
70 This tweet was published on Monday 8th August 2011. It was also extracted from Twitter (2015)
<https://twitter.com> [accessed on Thursday 6 August 2015].
71 This tweet was published on Tuesday 9th August 2011. It was also extracted from Twitter (2015)
<https://twitter.com> [accessed on Thursday 6 August 2015].
72 Billig, p.25.
must be assessed. Billig begins to acknowledge this when he argues that, although ‘[n]ations may be imagined communities’, this pattern of imagining the nation in terms of differences in language is simplistic.73

Before identifying other models of community that are also relevant to the disorder in Birmingham, it is important that this chapter understands the ‘familiar habits of language’ that Billig identifies as ‘drawing out the nationalist assumptions within [its] conventional usage’.74 The scholar focuses on the ‘small words’, which ‘offer constant, but barely conscious, reminders of the homeland, making “our” national identity unforgettable’.75 These ‘small words’ include the pronouns (‘I’, ‘we’, ‘they’) that Georgia Gould suggests tell us a lot about a young person’s feelings of identity in Britain.76 These are the phrases that I consider throughout my own analysis of the reported, creative and contemporary responses that were published in this particular setting (see Chapter Two). Billig paid close attention to the media in his influential text because he argued that ‘the deixis of homeland is embedded in the very fabric of […] newspapers’.77 This is relevant to the thesis because it suggests that the media – specifically newspaper articles and television broadcasts – continued to play a vital role in the existence of emergent imagined communities during the events in Birmingham. Billig’s examination of a day’s worth of examples on Monday 28th June 1993 demonstrated that a ‘complex deixis of homeland’ was (re)presented throughout various newspapers’ reports.78 This deixis highlighted that ‘there are enemies abroad, who threaten to extinguish the light unto the nation’.79 Yet, even more crucial in regard to this research is the ‘anger against the enemies within – those who […] abandon “our” heritage, those who […] bring shame upon “us”’.80 I argue that ‘these internal enemies’ include those individuals exhibiting rioting and looting behaviours in the streets of Birmingham.81 In particular, ‘the bombing of Baghdad was a story which flagged nationhood in a direct manner’ on the day in question in Billig’s study, and, like the reports published following the Birmingham disorder in 2011, ‘the papers […] covering the story of the attack, gave particular prominence to British dimensions’.82

Newspapers including The Daily Mail ‘conveyed an image of Britain at the head of the

73 Billig, p.35.  
74 Billig, p.94.  
75 Billig, p.93.  
77 Billig, p.94.  
78 Billig, pp.95-110.  
81 Billig, p.101.  
82 Billig, p.112.
international chorus’, while other articles featured in *The Times* placed significant emphasis on ‘the plight of three British citizens imprisoned in Iraq’. Similar standing is given to the nation in the coverage published online and in print by newspapers in August 2011 (see Chapter Two).

Although Billig’s study into the media’s deixis offered a significant development in regards to understanding the existence of the national imagined community, his examination was limited to the routine (banal) reminders of nationhood. It did not consider the important difference between this and periods of ‘hot’ nationalism, which Sabina Mihelj referred to as moments of national celebration or conflict. Mihelj attempted to advance these ideas in her consideration of nationalism as ‘episodic’. Although her study moved away from Britain (as the nation-state central to my own research), its relevance to this thesis is its focus on (re)presentations of the nation in situations of conflict. In particular, I suggest that the civil disorder in Birmingham in 2011 is an example of this. Mihelj’s model examines the media’s role in reproducing the national imaginings that Anderson proposed led to the formation of community groups, thus it is important to my own readings of the reported, creative and contemporary responses published during the events in Birmingham (see Chapter Two). The thesis is predominantly interested in the comparisons that Mihelj made between the media’s deployment of narrative conventions day-to-day and the changes that were applied to these in crisis situations (see Chapter Two, pp.65-7). These are of particular significance when considering the intervention and creation of the verbatim poems that I (re)present in *United We Stand* (Chapter Four). I have carefully considered and replicated, where relevant, the same narrative conventions that Mihelj recognises in order to promote and complicate messages of national unity throughout the series of verbatim poetry. By applying Mihelj’s framework to these responses published during the disorder in Birmingham, I understand how the media reproduced expressions of national identity and encouraged the formation of the national imagined community in this setting. In crafting this series of verbatim poetry, I have responded to a number of individual experiences about the disorder in Birmingham; intervening in the original interview testimonies to collate, edit and transform them into a new, overall narrative. This example of creative practice works to critique Anderson’s model of imagined community by highlighting that this form of belonging existed across

83 Billig, p.112.
84 Mihelj, ‘Media Nations at War’, p.96.
85 Mihelj, p.97.
86 See Table 5.1 as presented by Mihelj, pp.101-2.
87 For a full explanation of the deployment of verbatim methods in poetry, see Chapter Three.
fluid scales, whether geographical, social, or cultural, during this disorder in Birmingham. Mihelj argued that ‘it is only in such moments’ – in occasions of conflict including these events in 2011 – that nations become ‘what they are assumed to be’: ‘imagined communities that manage to capture the hearts and minds of the masses’. By highlighting which narrative conventions are changed in responses to these moments of crisis, her model provides me with a way in which to begin (re)presenting the idea of fluid and emergent imagined communities.

Despite a range of evidence – presented by Billig, Mihelj and, now, this thesis – to suggest that a national deixis exists and is (re)presented by the media, the very idea of this remains problematic. As Chapter Two demonstrates, ‘“we”’ is not always the speaker and their listeners. Billig argues that this ‘“we”’ may also incorporate ‘the party, the nation, all reasonable people and various other combinations’ and I suggest that these ‘various other combinations’ are inclusive of members of the local neighbourhood, the urban cityscape and the twittersphere in this context. “We”’ does not always mean those audience members who are ‘physically present’; they can also be ‘imagined’ as both Anderson and Billig have contended previously. Key actors deployed in the reports that I consider throughout the second chapter of this thesis have been positioned to address a whole host of people. These include other journalists and actors, individuals belonging to local neighbourhood communities (situated in Birmingham), and ‘fellow-members’ of the national imagined community in Britain who are reading the pages of their newspaper and watching television broadcasts from the comfort of their own living space. Although ‘the little words can flag this homeland and, in flagging it, make the homeland homely’, I maintain that these ‘little words’ also signify expressions of identity (cultural and religious) and ideas of community (whether local, global or virtual) that are not synonymous with the nation. Billig’s references to the home suggest that ‘…all inhabited space “bears the essence of the notion of home”’. He explains:

‘The national space most notably bears this trace, being imagined as a homely space, cosy within its borders, secure against the dangerous outside world. And “we” the nation within the homeland can so easily imagine “ourselves” as some sort of family’.  

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88 Mihelj, p.98.  
89 Billig, p.106.  
90 Billig, p.106.  
91 Billig, p.106.  
92 Billig, p.106.  
94 Billig, p.109.
His argument about the nation as a ‘homely space’ is relevant here because it demonstrates that national imaginings are flagged and, thus, Anderson’s national imagined community comes into existence. However, as this thesis establishes later, references to the home space also complicate this idea of nationalism. Allusions to this domestic setting can be deployed to acknowledge the complex relationship between the local or urban ‘home’ and the nation as ‘homeland’ (see Chapter Three, pp.125-34). By applying these developments of Anderson’s model by Billig and Mihelj to the context of the disorder in Birmingham, this thesis examines the presence of nationalism in its chosen reported, creative and contemporary examples. It provides evidence for the reproduction of the British nation, in order to argue that these relevant layers of community – whether on a local, national or global scale – are ‘imagined’ into existence through the reader’s engagement with similar methods of mass communication. 

The Nation in the Everyday

Developing these models of ‘hot’ and ‘banal nationalism’ further, Fox and Miller-Idriss propose an agenda that begins to acknowledge the ways in which ‘ordinary people engage and enact (or ignore and deflect) nationhood’ in the everyday. This framework highlights that ordinary people are also ‘active participants’ in the ‘reproduction of the nation’. This is particularly relevant to the thesis in its chosen setting of the disorder in Birmingham because ordinary citizens were deployed as ‘key actors’ by media journalists in a bid to promote a sense of national identity among audience members (see Chapter Two). The creative intervention that informs this research deploys verbatim methods in order to give both voice and agency back to the ordinary members of the public who experienced the disorder in the city. United We Stand is a prime example of an engagement with this framework in a contemporary setting; through the original and innovative medium of verbatim poetry. Fox and Miller-Idriss criticise previous scholars for focusing on ‘the important role elites play in articulating and propagating visions of the nation’ and I contend that the media examples studied by Billig and Mihelj, which preceded this model of the everyday, should also fall under this elite classification. What is needed for understanding these expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that were in existence during this disorder in

95 Anderson, p.6.
96 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.537.
97 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.538.
98 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.538.
Birmingham is a mixed methods approach. One that considers both the role of the elite – modes of communication inclusive of contemporary media and literature examples as continued illustrations of the advances in print (and electronic) capitalism – and the part of ordinary citizens in the ‘varied contexts of their everyday lives’. This thesis provides the reader with just that; an examination of the roles of both the elite and the ordinary in order to demonstrate the complex nature of imagined communities in this particular context. Through an analysis of the responses published by a range of private, public or partisan media (for example, BBC News online and The Guardian), the thesis examines the role of the elite (see Chapter Two). It also considers the part of the ‘everyday’ citizen as a ‘key actor’ deployed to promote a sense of national unity and consciousness throughout the media’s coverage. The creative practice (in Chapter Four) takes this examination of the elite and the ordinary one step further; combining the media’s role in reminding its readers of the nation with the testimonies from ordinary citizens in interview. United We Stand not only (re)presents the idea of the national imagined community; it also pushes the boundaries of our understandings of it. The poems illustrate that this kind of community existed on a smaller-scale than the nation in this context – because ‘“sub”-nationalisms’ were present in the local-urban space of Birmingham – and that supranational communities were also ‘imagined’ online on social networking platforms (including Twitter) during the disorder.

Before examining these important examples of mass media, creative literature and the series of verbatim poems that form a significant part of the research, this chapter must consider the everyday model and how it is relevant to the thesis in more detail. Fox and Miller-Idriss propose a four-part examination of the ways in which nationhood is reproduced in the everyday. These include ‘talking the nation’, which establishes nationalism as a discursive construct just as Billing previously suggested, ‘choosing the nation’, ‘performing the nation’ and ‘consuming the nation’. The conversations, performances and consumption of the nation by people in the everyday are what this chapter focuses on. In their discussions relating to these conversations about the nation, Fox and Miller-Idriss acknowledge other work that has ‘begun asking ordinary people what the nation means to them’. They explain that by

99 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.537.
100 Fox and Miller-Idriss, pp.537-8.
101 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.539.
‘[u]sing qualitative interviewing techniques, researchers are beginning to capture ordinary people’s previously unrecorded articulations of the nation, national identity and national belonging’.\(^{102}\)

This idea of capturing people’s thoughts and conversations about national identity and belonging remains particularly relevant to the (re)presentations depicted throughout this thesis. This is because the poetry series presented in the fourth chapter of this thesis is crafted through the deployment of verbatim methods, which, like many of the previous studies in this field, use qualitative research interviews for the purpose of accessing raw material for creative practice. Semi-structured, life-story interviews were held with a clustered sample of twenty-five participants in order to access this raw material. These interviews were based on protocol that considered the role of the media in questions like: ‘In your opinion, was the media coverage of the events in your area good enough?’ and the individuals’ everyday experiences of the disorder in Birmingham through questions such as: ‘How else did the riots affect you?’ (See Appendix Three).\(^{103}\) This enabled the primary researcher to access a wide range of individual articulations relative to feelings of identity and belonging and I argue that these demonstrate that Anderson’s idea of imagined community remains relevant in this instance. These expressions are (re)presented through the series of verbatim poems that constitutes United We Stand.

A prime example of an articulation by an ordinary citizen that reproduces nationhood in this context is (re)presented in the poem, ‘10\(^{th}\) August 2011’ (see Chapter Four, p.165).\(^{104}\) This particular narrative is centred on the hit-and-run incident which occurred in the Winson Green area of Birmingham on the date in the poem’s title. It situates the localised episode in the wider context of the nation through the arrangement of many ‘small words’ that Billig recognised were constitutive of a national deixis.\(^{105}\) Feelings of respect towards the families of Haroon Jahan, Shazad Ali and Abdul Musavir are echoed throughout the text and phrases, including ‘our country’ (l.14) and ‘trending in the UK’ (l.19), which are employed to expose the feelings of national identity and belonging that were evident in individuals’ responses to the interview questions asked of them. The line ‘Tariq Jahan deserves an OBE’ (l.15) – which is inclusive of the reference to the award of ‘Officer of (the Order of) the British Empire’ as a form of national recognition from the British monarchy – along with the commendation for

\(^{102}\) Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.539.

\(^{103}\) Appendix Three provides an example of the interview protocol used throughout this thesis.

\(^{104}\) Subsequent references to this poem will be given as line numbers in parentheses in the body of this chapter.

\(^{105}\) Billig, p.93.
his knighthood which follows on lines 16-7, serves to reinforce the idea of everyday nationhood in this context. Earlier

‘[d]iscourse analytical approaches to the study of nationalism […] draw attention to the ways in which nationhood can also be creatively and self-consciously deployed and manipulated by ordinary people’.106

My own creative intervention is an essential example of this deployment and manipulation. I take on the role of poet and editor here in order to ‘creatively and self-consciously […] draw attention’ to expressions of national identity and ideas of belonging to the nation that are articulated by the everyday citizen during the disorder in Birmingham.

Fox and Miller-Idriss argue that the ‘collective performance of national symbols’ heightens cohesion within the nation-state.107 I contend that their idea of ‘performing the nation’ is also relevant to the disorder in Birmingham in 2011. Although this situation did not lead to a literal waving of the Union Jack as a celebratory occasion might, I maintain that it still resulted in a significant ‘flagging’ of British identity. The incidents did not rely on ‘flags, anthems, statues and landmarks’ as traditional national symbols, but sporting moments that occurred while behaviours of rioting and looting were displayed in the city ‘capture[d] the (national) imagination and […] passions of the masses’.108 A Third Test match which was scheduled at Edgbaston between England and India went ahead despite these events in Birmingham. Fans continued to ‘display their loyalties to their team’ becoming ‘the physical embodiment of the nation’ momentarily (see Chapter Two, pp.73-9).109 Hobsbawm rightly noted that ‘[t]he imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people’ in football, and, in the case of this disorder in Birmingham twenty years later, I suggest that sports fans still had a part to play in ‘performing the nation’; even if, this time, the sporting situation was different.110

Fox and Miller-Idriss also place a significant emphasis on the ordinary citizen as ‘consumer’.111 Moores had previously alluded to the ‘key role’ that ‘state-run media’ (for example, the BBC) play ‘in the production […] and the dissemination of national ideas’, while Billig argued that ordinary people act as ‘creative producers’ of the nation ‘through

106 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.539.
107 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.545.
108 Fox and Miller-Idriss, pp.545-7.
109 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.547.
110 Hobsbawm as cited in Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.547.
111 Fox and Miller-Idriss, pp.550-6.
everyday acts of consumption”. This idea is one that the thesis is particularly concerned with; in the ordinary person’s consumption of reported and creative responses published during the disorder in Birmingham. I maintain that it is through the everyday citizen’s engagement with a variety of media sources that fluid and emergent versions of imagined community are encouraged into existence. While ‘the media […] can be nationally consumed even when they’re not national in scope, content and format’ (see Chapter Two), the latter half of this thesis argues that creative literature, specifically verbatim poetry, is suited to the task of (re)presenting these ideas (see Part Two: Creative Intervention). Fox and Miller-Idriss identify that ‘consumption doesn’t only occur at the cash register’ because both ‘[l]iterary figures that may be cherished as national treasures’ – and the school curriculum through which these authors and their works are studied – emphasise this shared sense of national belonging. This supports Anderson’s earlier notion that advances in print-capitalism – in particular increased access to modes of communication such as the mass media and literature – were crucial in understanding the existence of the national imagined community. However, in the case of Birmingham in 2011, my argument is no longer limited to an imagined community that is formed at the national level. It extends way beyond (and beneath) that to suggest that continual advances in technology, which have since expanded the ordinary citizen’s access to include new, electronic modes of communication, now lead to people ‘consuming [and performing] the nation’, the neighbourhood and the world simultaneously. These communities are also ‘imagined’ into existence in relation to age, ethnicity and religion.

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112 Moores and Billig as cited in Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.550.
113 Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.553.
114 Fox and Miller-Idriss, pp.551-2.
The Importance of Locale

Birmingham as a Model for the Urban Nation?

It is important to acknowledge the significance of locale; explicitly the urban landscape and the neighbourhood as two settings in which communities were also ‘imagined’ into existence in this particular context.\textsuperscript{115} This chapter considers the city of Birmingham to be an example of this urban landscape and questions why this location is important to study; both in relation to the disorder in 2011 and in connection to my argument that Anderson’s model is partial because communities were ‘imagined’ into existence across fluid scales in this setting.\textsuperscript{116} To contemplate the relevance of Birmingham in relation to the above conditions, this chapter turns to Helen F. Wilson’s recent article, ‘An Urban Laboratory for the Multicultural Nation?’\textsuperscript{117} She classifies Birmingham as a ‘plural city’; one that ‘actively work[s] to shape, challenge or re-write understandings of the nation’ that have preceded her own framework.\textsuperscript{118} Wilson argues for a dual characterisation of Birmingham. She claims that it is still ‘a place of national [multicultural] significance’, but suggests that the city is also capable of challenging state power as a result of its own ‘local sentiments’ and urban ‘forms of belonging’.\textsuperscript{119} Like this thesis, Wilson’s article appears to argue that Anderson’s model is partial. She raises significant questions about ‘the relationship between the city [as urban setting] and the nation’, as well as ‘how the two might coexist’.\textsuperscript{120} Wilson hypothesises that localised feelings of belonging lead to ‘new social imaginaries’ and, in doing so, she begins to acknowledge the intricacy of this particular relationship between the urban and the nation that she is theorising.\textsuperscript{121} It is a similar complexity between neighbourhood, city, and nation that this thesis explores; in its examination and poetic (re)presentation of expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community during the disorder in Birmingham.

Most relevant to the premise presented throughout this thesis is Wilson’s decision to include the events of the disorder in Birmingham in her argument. She considers the role of Tariq Jahan during these incidents and recognises, as this research does, that the father’s plea ‘was addressed to the local community’, but, ‘was, at the same time, incorporated into a

\textsuperscript{115} Anderson, p.6.
\textsuperscript{116} Anderson, p.6.
\textsuperscript{118} Wilson, pp.587-8
\textsuperscript{119} Wilson, pp.588-90.
\textsuperscript{120} Wilson, p.588.
\textsuperscript{121} Wilson, p.586.
wider narrative of national pride’. Similar to my own argument in the second chapter of this thesis, Wilson understands that the local, urban setting of this disorder plays a vital role. She writes:

‘This local tragedy and the community response to it were deployed as a means to reproduce national discourses of resilience, pride and solidarity at a time when riots were taking place up and down the country.’

Wilson identifies that these sentiments (re)present the ‘ordinary member as the nation’s embodiment’. Jahan’s call for ‘the unification of a local community’ was elevated ‘in a much wider appeal for national belonging’, and, in addition to this, Wilson recognises that Carol Ann Duffy repositions Winson Green as an ‘inner city area of high ethnic minority […] at the heart of [the nation’s] spatial representation’. This, along with her readings of coverage by The Birmingham Mail, allows Wilson to present her readers with ‘a complex and radical example of the city’s “contingency” and the challenge that such moments of unrest and conflict present to the anticipatory logics of preparedness’. Wilson uses the example of the disorder in 2011 to argue that ‘a variety of urban and national imaginaries’ were evoked in Birmingham in this context and this ‘demonstrate[s] how diverse actors use the city as a reference point for pursuing both urban and national agendas’.

Wilson’s article begins to indicate that previous models of national identity, including Anderson’s theory of the nation as an imagined community, are partial; they cannot solely be applied to the study of a culturally-diverse, contemporary landscape like the city of Birmingham. She recognises that the nation is no longer the only significant social space in our quest for identity and belonging. Despite her essay acting as a validation for my own decision to centre this thesis on the disorder in Birmingham, I suggest that Wilson’s examination of this situation does not go far enough. Her article only pays attention to a tiny amount of the reported, creative and contemporary responses that were published during these events within the city. Though she does begin to acknowledge that the media (in her

122 Wilson, p.597.
123 Wilson, p.597.
124 Wilson, p.597. As mentioned previously, an earlier model by Mihelj in 2011 considered how these national embodiments were achieved through changes to narrative conventions in the media’s coverage of similar crisis situations. See Mihelj, pp.101-2.
125 Wilson, p.597. A more detailed analysis of these expressions of identity and ideas of community in Duffy’s ‘Birmingham for Tariq Jahan’ is presented in Chapter Two of this thesis, see pp.79-82.
126 Wilson, p.598.
127 Own emphasis added. Wilson, p.599.
references to *The Birmingham Mail*) and other ‘national leaders’ played a crucial role in the reproduction of emergent identities and communities, Wilson does not consider a wide enough range of examples or demonstrate *how* these leaders were promoting such ideas of belonging in this context.  

By concentrating a section (‘United Birmingham’) of her paper on the role of these ‘national leaders’, specifically Cameron, Miliband and Duffy (as national Poet Laureate at the time), Wilson does not contemplate the ways in which ordinary citizens reproduced these sentiments in the everyday during the disorder. In comparison, this thesis does focus on the role of the everyday person. Through a mixed methods approach that incorporates semi-structured, life-story interviews with twenty-five participants (see Appendix Four), and a detailed textual analysis of the responses published on Twitter between Sunday 7th August and Monday 15th August 2011, this thesis considers the role of modes of mass communication and the everyday individual in promoting these expressions of identity. This examination – and the creative (re)presentation of these ideas that follows in *United We Stand* – is a direct engagement *with* the fluid and emergent imagined communities in question. The verbatim poems serve to interrogate Anderson’s theory in relation to this disorder in Birmingham.

**The ‘Imagined [Community] of the Neighbourhood’**

Although her article recognises ‘national discourses of resilience, pride and solidarity’, which scholars including Anderson, Billig and Mihelj have previously suggested promote a division between the national imagined community (‘us’) and ‘the stranger’ (‘them’), Wilson also acknowledges ‘an explicitly urban form of solidarity’ in Birmingham that complicates matters. She identifies communities that were ‘imagined’ into existence during this disorder in relation to the urban social space explicitly. Under the banner *United Birmingham: One City, One Voice for Peace*, both a rally and coalition of faith groups in the local Summerfield Park symbolised this togetherness. Wilson argues that these campaigns were not only ‘deployed to prevent reprisal attacks’ but that they were a conscious attempt ‘to include the rioters’ in this narrative of belonging. I argue that this sense of inclusion is a

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128 Wilson, p.597.
129 Fox and Miller-Idriss have previously proposed a research agenda that considers the ways in which these ordinary citizens reproduce and repromote the nation in the contexts of their everyday lives. See ‘The Nation in the Everyday’ on pages 41-6 of this chapter for a detailed explanation of this.
130 Wilson, p.597.
131 Anderson, p.6.
132 Wilson, p.597.
one-off. Those individuals that were considered to be displaying rioting and looting behaviours throughout the city were often excluded from these narratives; re-positioned as ‘the stranger neighbour’. Ahmed argues, ‘Strangers are not simply those who are not known in this dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, already recognised as not belonging, as being out of place’. These processes of exclusion (or ‘estrangement’) that Ahmed has acknowledged lead to the creation of a community that is ‘imagined’, like the example of ‘urban solidarity’ mentioned above, in a localised setting. These processes give rise to that which Ahmed identifies as the ‘imagined space of the neighbourhood’. However, I argue that this social space is transformed to incorporate the ‘imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’ simultaneously.

In the media narrative published by Thomas Byrne as part of Redbrick student newspaper’s coverage in 2011, similar attachments to this localised, urban setting were displayed. Byrne’s article is located in the city and I argue that his report is an expression of his own identity, which was relative to Birmingham specifically. He voices feeling both ‘disturb[ed] and downright disgrace[d]’ at the events that have taken place within the city during previous nights in August. His affiliation to the city becomes clear because he alludes to the fact that he has ‘been a citizen of Birmingham for his whole life’ in the first paragraph of his report. Highlighting that he has lived there for ‘almost twenty years’, this early reference to himself as a resident demonstrates that the young journalist feels he has a right to comment on the situation at hand. He categorises himself as belonging to Birmingham from the beginning of the narrative before proceeding to distinguish his self from those ‘other’ individuals outside of the city who have actively participated in behaviours of rioting and looting. He names four individuals that have allowed themselves to ‘indulge in such thuggish acts’ and whom, he argues, were considered to be ‘respected members of their community’. The deployment of the phrase ‘their community’ situates these individuals outside of Byrne’s own form of belonging. It illustrates the sharp division between an ‘us’ and ‘them’ that many of the scholars of nationalism whose work I have explored previously

133 Ahmed, pp.36-7.
134 Ahmed, p.21.
135 For a detailed explanation of these processes of estrangement, which have recently been acknowledged and developed in studies by Lasse and Simonsen, see ‘(Re)scaling Identities’, pp.628-32.
136 Ahmed, p.28.
138 Byrne (para. 1 of 9).
139 Byrne (para. 4 of 9)
140 Own emphasis added. Byrne (para. 4 of 9)
have argued is present. In the case of this particular narrative, I argue that this distinction is no longer limited to the national imagined community and those excluded from it. The nation is still in existence in Byrne’s coverage because he acknowledges that ordinary people have caused criminal damage both within and outside of the city and, at times, he does position Birmingham in the wider context of ‘our society’. However, his primary concern always returns to the urban landscape: ‘On Wednesday night, the streets of Birmingham were significantly calmer than the previous two’.

While Byrne’s narrative indicates that there is a wider national community in existence during this disorder, I argue that his deep sense of attachment to Birmingham as a city suggests that communities in existence in this situation were ‘imagined’ on a variety of levels. Individuals displaying behaviours of rioting and looting were recognised by Byrne as ‘the stranger’ in this context. For Ahmed, ‘the very act through which the subject differentiates between others is the moment that the subject comes to inhabit or dwell in the world.’ Byrne’s own sense of identity and his decision to reposition those who did not belong shaped the very social space of the city in which he lived. By positioning those who had rioted outside of his own local community, ‘forms of social exclusion are [...] revealed’. Byrne ‘looks out for [...] those who are uncommon, or those who are “out of place”’ in both the city and its wider context. I argue that this complicates Anderson’s idea of the national imagined community further. Ahmed proposes that social exclusion gives rise to the ‘imagined space of the neighbourhood’ which I recognise as being the local-urban setting of Birmingham in this context. However, I suggest that this particular social space is also transformed into the ‘imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’. This imagined community is formed through the kinds of processes (of recognition and exclusion) that Ahmed highlights.

This complexity and similar levels of social exclusion relative to the disorder in Birmingham are (re)presented throughout several verbatim poems in United We Stand (Chapter Four). These ideas are most obvious in the scatter-graph poem, ‘The Takeover’

141 Byrne (para. 6-7 of 9).
142 Byrne (para. 9 of 9).
143 Anderson, p.6.
145 Ahmed, p.29. ‘Mason (2000, p. 175) states that the very idea of a global community faces an initial challenge “in the form of the thesis that a community, by its very nature, requires ‘outsiders,’ i.e., some who do not belong to it.”’ See Mason as cited in Roland Robertson, ‘Global Connectivity and Global Consciousness’, American Behavioral Scientist, 55, 10 (2011), 1336-45, in Sage Publications <http://abs.sagepub.com/content/55/10/1336.full.pdf+html> [accessed on Tuesday 8 July 2014], p. 1340.
146 Ahmed, p.29.
147 Ahmed, p.28.
(p.183), which serves to interrogate Anderson’s model of imagined community.\textsuperscript{148} The poem (re)presents the complicated relationship between the local (Birmingham) and the national in this context. This is made clear to the reader as a result of my decision to present this particular poem in the form of a scatter-graph and map. The coordinates of places affected by the events in Birmingham are plotted onto the map and the key to the scatter-graph is then developed into a poem. This poem demonstrates that a wide range of complicated opinions and expressions of identity were in existence during the disorder in the city. Sharp divisions between those participating in the rioting and looting and other members of local neighbourhood communities – faith groups and ordinary citizens in Birmingham, as well as on-the-ground members of the West Midlands Police force – are symbolised through phrases including: ‘\textbf{1.} Don’t blur their faces. They deserve to pay…’ (l.1). Variations of the word ‘they’ are deployed to highlight that those individuals displaying these kinds of behaviours are nameless ‘strangers’ who are considered to not belong to the communities already in existence in Birmingham as a result of their actions. This is further reinforced in later lines through the repetition of these variations: in line eight’s allusions to ‘their idol, their YouTube clip, and music videos’ as the motivations and inspirations behind these particular behaviours. Additional phrases such as ‘bad lads’ (l.4) emphasise that these everyday individuals became strangers following their participation in the disorder. Elijah Anderson suggests: ‘residents are concerned about the strangers with whom they share the public space, including […] anonymous black youths’ and, in this instance, the collective identity of those actively contributing to these behaviours appears to be synonymous with the ‘anonymous black youths’ Anderson recognises as strangers here.\textsuperscript{149} This explicitly relates to the creation and existence of imagined communities in this context because, by recognising this collective identity as ‘the stranger’ or as ‘anonymous black youths’ during the disorder, the sharp division between an ‘us’ and ‘them’ is reproduced. Though, this time, it is relative to ethnicity and appears to reflect Birmingham’s history of tensions that I mentioned earlier (see pages 64-6). This distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ automatically constructs an ‘imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’ which, I argue, is also an example of “sub”-nationalism in this setting.\textsuperscript{150}

Numerous other poems created as part of United We Stand pay close attention to this sense of social exclusion with references to those individuals displaying rioting and looting

\textsuperscript{148} Subsequent references to this poem will be given as line numbers in parentheses in the body of this chapter.
\textsuperscript{149} Elijah Anderson as cited in Ahmed, p.22.
\textsuperscript{150} Ahmed, p.28.
behaviours classifying them as ‘mere animals’ (l.31) (see ‘10th August 2011’, p.165), ‘nameless hoods’ (l.16) (see ‘The Commute’, p.157), and ‘the enemy’ (l.2) (see ‘The Big Guns: a mixed narrative’, p.159). Juxtapositions between these words and other determiners throughout the poems, including ‘us’ and ‘we’, are arranged to signify the intricate interactions that were occurring between fluid and emergent communities that were ‘imagined’ into existence during this situation. In the earlier half of ‘The Takeover’, ‘we’ is deployed to distinguish the narrative of local West Midlands Police officers:

‘2. “It was a snowball, wasn’t it?” We could’ve gone onto Twitter and said

3. “Officers are already positioned on New Street”. High Street, Bristol Street, Tallyho;

4. policing locally…’ (ll.2-4).

However, this ‘we’ is relocated in the latter parts of the poem to incorporate ‘fellow-members’ of the national imagined community that Anderson argued for: ‘9. “If some men can show so much hate, think how much love we can show together”.’ (l.9). Ahmed contended: ‘The knowing again of strangers as the danger of the unknown is a means by which the “we” of the community is established, enforced and legitimised’. Yet, I argue that this “‘we’” is symbolic of local neighbourhoods (Lozells; Handsworth; Winson Green), the city (Birmingham) and the nation (UK) simultaneously.

‘Micro-Imagined Wispy’ Communities

Continuing with the significance of the localised setting for a moment, Gary Fine and Lisa-Jo van de Scott have developed Anderson’s theory to consider the emergence of ‘micro-imagined wispy’ communities. Similar to some of the arguments that this chapter has made thus far, they contend that ‘wispy’ communities exist below the level of nations. This particular form of belonging refers to a ‘distinctive […] local affiliation that underscores both

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151 Ahmed, p.37.
the communal features of occasions and their evanescent quality. A ‘wispy’ community is formed when relationships are frequent and highly intensified. Ties tend to slip away ‘into latent memory’ and are only available for retrieval at a later date. Through the American example of a long weekend ‘in a hotel in Louisville’, Fine and Scott provide evidence for the existence of the ‘wispy’ community by arguing that The Big Lebowski fans have ‘imagined’ this form of belonging based on their specific, temporary setting:

‘They have become, briefly, a wispy community: tight-knit, but quickly unravelling once they exit the parking lot. In their shared focal commitment (Collins 1981; Stebbins, 1979), these fans have created an “imagined community”’. Applying this explanation to the disorder in Birmingham, I argue that this situation also led to the emergence of similar ‘micro-imagined’ groups. Cricket fans ‘gathered’ at Edgbaston to see the test match against India despite the disorder that erupted throughout the city. This not only promoted a sense of national identity, but it also emphasised the ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community that was based on the spatial and temporal contexts that the sports fans found themselves in. Fine and Scott ‘refer to social ties that exist within […] worlds of action that are temporary’ and I contend that the shared common purpose, which was displayed by those individuals who participated in the rioting and looting behaviours over that week in August, is also a prime example of this ‘temporary action’. This participation led to the formation of a second ‘wispy’ community because these ordinary members were excluded from their other groupings as a result of their behaviour. Appearing ‘at moments “where the action [wa]s”’, the relationships between those people ‘rioting’ in the city disintegrated after the event or ‘brief gathering’ had finished. Fine and Scott pay close attention to the ‘creation and consequence’ of these weaker ties throughout their article and I argue that the disorder in Birmingham led to those participating in these kinds of behaviours forming a ‘cultural tribe’ that could act out certain emergent identities.

153 Fine and Scott, p.1.
154 Fine and Scott, p.1.
155 Fine and Scott, pp.1-2.
157 Fine and Scott, p.1.
158 Fine and Scott, p.3.
159 This idea of the collective identity as a ‘tribe’ was proposed by Michel Maffesoli, in The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society (London: Sage, 1996).
According to Fine and Scott,

‘[p]eople assemble because they expect festivals of fun, and later dissipate, returning to routine worlds without expecting that long-term relations or commitments will have developed […] The paradox […] is that participants rely upon others for their active networks. For a bounded time, interaction and identification can be intense and desired, but later participants exit, not assuming continuing contact’.160

When considering the disorder in Birmingham in its wider context, it is possible to argue that the situation was more than just a ‘brief’ event. The partial definition of a ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community does not serve to fully explain the expressions of identity and forms of belonging that existed in this context. Like Anderson’s model of the national imagined community, this framework must also be developed because ties extended far enough that they simultaneously encouraged ‘fellow-members’, who were living miles away in other regions (Manchester, Nottingham and Leicester, for example), to display similar behaviours in their own local settings.161 As Fine and Scott acknowledge, ‘[t]ime transforms events into gatherings […] allowing for the development of social connections’.162 I suggest that the ‘micro-imagined wispy’ group does exist, however it interacts with the national imagined community that Anderson argues for in this context. This highlights the complex nature of ideas of imagined community during the disorder in Birmingham.

The intricate nature of these imagined communities – specifically the relationships that can exist between them – is acknowledged in Fine and Scott’s article when they allude to previous studies that have examined ‘the development of online communities’ in order to support their own argument.163 They contend that ‘the relationship between space and community’ has become even more important because ‘it is now possible to affiliate with others without ever having been physically co-present’.164 This is particularly relevant to the situation in Birmingham. Not only because certain ‘wispy’ groups and collective identities vanished within a week of the events starting, but because shared emotional responses and everyday language deployed throughout media responses and across social networking sites reproduced communities that were ‘imagined’ into existence across local, national and online

160 Fine and Scott, pp.8-9.
161 Anderson, pp.6-7.
162 Fine and Scott, p.9.
163 Fine and Scott, p.5.
164 Fine and Scott, p.5
settings simultaneously. Fine and Scott maintain that it is through the ‘emotional ties to local communities and lived worlds’ explicitly that these ‘broader affiliations become possible. The language deployed by journalists throughout the newspaper reports published during the situation in Birmingham reproduced this complex. *The Guardian*’s coverage of the cricket fans who set out to ‘prove life can go on as normal’ despite the disorder placed a significant emphasis on the local, ‘micro-imagined’ community that emerged for the duration of the match at Edgbaston. Sporting scenarios like this one are *usually* recognised as symbols of national identity. The newspaper report promotes this when the journalist (re)presents the sharp narrative division between ‘us’ (the fans) and ‘them’ (the individuals contributing to the rioting and looting): ‘they’re definitely not going to ruin our day!’ The emphasis that Fine and Scott place on space and time throughout their article is echoed throughout this media coverage. They recognise the connection between the ‘micro-imagined wispy’ group and the ‘jargon or fanzines’ that were specific to them. Implications of the vernacular in expressions of identity are considered throughout this study of Birmingham.

‘Police Action from a Smartphone’ in *United We Stand* (re)presents the shared emotional responses that were in existence both online and in physically-present communities during the disorder (see Chapter Four, p.153), while a second poem, ‘Precautions’, pays close attention to the everyday language that evokes these common feelings of humour: ‘I was told I should have looted one. Thanks. #ILoveMyFriends’, and anger: ‘FUCKING LEDGENDS CALLING FOR CALM, FUCKING SPANNER UP THE #BNP’S ARSE [SIC].’

Fine and Scott argue that the ‘fun’ and entertainment value provided by the ‘wispy’ community’ is partly the cause of this kind of group formation in the first place. Scott suggests that ‘[f]un alone is the approved reason for [participating]’ in these ‘micro-groups’.

However, this is particularly controversial in light of the behaviours and damage to property that occurred during the disorder in Birmingham.

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165 Anderson, p.6.
166 Fine and Scott, p.2.
167 See the headlines in ‘Birmingham Riots: Cricket fans prove life can go on as normal’.
168 ‘Birmingham Riots: Cricket fans prove life can go on as normal’ (para. 3 of 13).
169 See ‘Precautions’, in *United We Stand* (Chapter Four of this thesis), p.171. Note that the spelling of ‘LEDGENDS’ (as present within this tweet) is actually incorrect here. I have chosen not to correct this so that it is representative of and authentic to the original tweet which this particular user had chosen to publish.
170 Fine and Scott, p.4.
‘In contrast to “serious” activities, one can rightly complain about those […] that do not provide immediate pleasure, justifying withdrawal […], such communities provide real pleasure and even some measure of identity….’ 171

Despite this controversy, I am inclined to agree with this statement to some extent. This is because descriptions of the events in this particular city have since been explained as ‘opportunistic’ or ‘copycat’, which suggests a ‘surplus of fun’ was ‘embedded in the memories of participants [those who joined forces to ‘riot’ in Birmingham], creating shareable stories’.172 One participant explained that friends of hers ‘liked the rioting n’ all that stuff’. She continued:

‘… they absolutely loved it. They got quite a buzz from it, they didn’t care about who it affected or what they did, just as long as they went out n’ had fun and got what they wanted. Yeah, it’s a lot of bragging goin’ on “oh, I smashed a window today” (see Appendix Four, Interview One).

Fine and Scott argue that ‘the glasses of participants become rose-colored as they view their world from within the transitory wispy community’ and this appears to be the case for those individuals sharing a common purpose to participate in these kinds of behaviours in Birmingham.173

While it may be possible that these individuals joined this particular ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community for – what Fine and Scott would describe as – ‘entertainment value’, this idea is difficult to comprehend in the wake of ‘the image of […] that road when like it had all like the flowers and stuff and then like the three guys being killed’ (see Appendix Four, Interview Four). ‘Most wispy communities […] are entered into voluntarily and based on interests selected in adolescence or adulthood’, yet the ‘shareable stories’ that have developed as a result of the events in Birmingham (and across Britain) are not ‘fun’ for the families and friends of those seriously injured or killed in these incidents. What is important is not only the recognition of what happened, but why it occurred for so many individuals and how ‘groups contribute[d] to the establishments of [these] identities and cultures’.174 Anderson’s

171 Fine and Scott, p.4.
172 Fine and Scott, p.5.
173 Fine and Scott, p.5.
174 Fine and Scott, p.6.
theory of imagined community, and the models that have since developed or challenged this, sustain their relevance to this situation because:

‘[t]hese communities are simultaneously imagined and material, even if they are explicitly temporary. The gatherings make latent identities manifest and powerful for the moment, underlining the commonalities that bind groups together, as exemplified in the momentary solidity of their social relations. The power of group dynamics makes these social relations real as the group pushes participants to establish a fleeting social structure and culture. The gathering provides moments and memories to which participants refer with the understanding that others will recognise the reference, a criterion for a group culture (Fine, 1979).’

The ‘brief gathering[s]’ during the disorder in 2011 encouraged individuals involved to develop ties and recognise that the ‘power of emotion […] create[s] affiliation’. Thus, the challenge arises when one examines the crowd that is already composed of ‘micro-groups’ and focuses the individual’s attention on their own personal identification within those groups. Through online, social networking, these groups can be, to borrow Anderson’s phrase, recognised as examples of ‘“sub”-nationalisms’. This ‘bottom-up’ theory means that for ‘the duration of the occasion participants may establish intimate, intense relationships, even if no expectation exists that the community will last’. I argue that this is particularly relevant to some of the fluid and emergent communities that were in existence during these events in Birmingham.

‘Virtual Neighborhoods’, Global World

As well as the local and ‘wispy’ communities relative to Birmingham that this chapter has discussed, interactions between the national and the global are also important in the context of this thesis. Roland Robertson argues that an examination of this particular connection is crucial because globalisation is the science of considering (from an external focal point) ‘the

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175 Fine and Scott, pp.13-4.
176 Fine and Scott, p.13.
177 Anderson, p.3.
178 Fine and Scott, p.10.
world in which we live’. While Robertson acknowledges that Anderson ‘emphasize[d] the significance of “horizontal” communication as a basis on which national sentiments arise’, he maintains that this exact model of imagined community is limited. It does not pay enough attention to the ‘ubiquity of “community”’. Robertson contends that Anderson’s framework should have acknowledged, in significant detail, how the concept of community has come to exist in the world and I am inclined to agree that Anderson’s theory does not go far enough. ‘The dominant strand’ of Anderson’s argument suggested that it was ‘through extensive “networking”, often across long distances,’ that national sentiments were created. However, Anderson fails to place a significant emphasis on these networks as being global in character: they worked ‘across long distances’, and, as a result, Robertson argues that nationalism is ‘an ingredient of globalization’.

‘There are a number of basic ways in which one can consider the world as a whole. I have previously described these in terms of what I have called the global field, although only some of these invoke the concept of community […] The latter consists in the following: nation-states, individual selves, the system of nations (or international relations) and humanity’.

He contests that the connections that exist between the individual, the nation and the world need to be synthesised because ‘each of these components can be employed as ways, individually or in combination, of considering the world as a whole’. Robertson does not reject the idea of the national imagined community, but he does criticise Anderson’s theory for being partial. This thesis, on the other hand, considers the omnipresence of community and how different iterations of community were in existence across various social and geographical scales from the local to the global during the disorder in Birmingham. In light of

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180 Robertson, ‘Global Connectivity and Global Consciousness’, p.1337.
181 Robertson, p.1338. Though the significance of such ‘extensive “networking”’ has since resulted in the development of Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), which demonstrates relational ties within a network, this approach does not tend to explain why or how a network is formed because it is considered to be a method, rather than a theory. As such, Anderson’s model of imagined community and relative theories specific to cultural anthropology and social science make up the theoretical framework for this thesis. A similar approach to ANT (Quantitative Network Analysis) is deployed in part of this thesis (see Chapter Two), but this is only to illustrate that particular types of networks were in existence on Twitter during the disorder in 2011. For a full explanation of Actor-Network-Theory, see Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
182 Robertson, p.1339.
183 Robertson, p.1341.
184 Robertson, p.1341.
the expressions of national identity that were shared on a global scale as a direct result of the advances in electronic communication technologies – for example, ‘You’re taking the “Great” out of Great Britain’ – I argue that this relationship between nationalism and globalisation is particularly relevant to our understanding of the communities that existed in Birmingham. The interactions between these different communities, which were formed on a variety of levels in this setting, need to be acknowledged. This supports Robertson’s contestation because it claims that Anderson’s idea of the national imagined community is a small, but significant, part of a much larger complex.

In his more recent work, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has also focused on this concept of globalisation in relation to its significant effects on our daily life. Specifically, he argues that globalisation should be recognised as a process rather than a ‘solid’ model; a ‘great transformation’ that affects various elements including state structures and cultural production, he terms this process ‘liquid modernity’ because it pays closer attention to the constant flux and mobility we now identify in contemporary society. Much like the main arguments that I present throughout this thesis – in relation to community, identity and belonging – Bauman contends that we are ‘project[ed] into a world in which everything is elusive’. He calls for a ‘patient and ongoing examination of […] how individuals are “placed” within’ that world, relative to our own self-identity and relationships with others. Similar to Robertson and the work of this thesis, Bauman understands the part that national identity plays within this much larger, complex process. He claims that ‘other, “smaller” identities were encouraged and/or obliged to seek endorsement-followed-by-protection from state-authorized offices’. However, as a result of these ‘liquid modern times’, Bauman also acknowledges that our identities and communities have become harder to define: ‘we act as “tourists” in search of multiple but fleeting social experiences’ and, in the case of this thesis, those ‘fleeting social experiences’ happen to be the events of the disorder in Birmingham in 2011.

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185 This tweet was published on Monday 8th August 2011. It was also extracted from Twitter (2015) <https://twitter.com> [accessed on Thursday 6 August 2015].
188 Bauman, ‘Introduction’, p.3.
189 Bauman, ‘Introduction’, p.3.
190 Bauman, Identity, p. 22.
Also relevant to my hypothesis is Andrew Mason’s statement in *Community, Solidarity and Belonging* that: ‘imagined communities are real enough’. However, he suggests that they are principally dependent upon a number of people ‘conceiving themselves as related to one another’. Although he is determined to examine ‘the concept of “community”’, Mason discovers that ‘giving an analysis to community in general’ is difficult. This is similar to my own argument made earlier in this chapter that Anderson’s idea of imagined community is partial. Mason recognises this when he establishes that ‘communities can be of different kinds’ and ‘exist on different levels’. He situates his own explanation of community somewhere *between* the local, the national and the global, while Robertson understands that the ‘“real” circumstance is that one cannot “imagine” a locality or a place in the absence of imagining a context in which the locality or the place is situated’. Engaging in this continued debate about the future of the nation-state, Arjun Appadurai concerns himself with the complexities of these ideas of community; ‘what locality might mean in a situation where the nation-state faces particular sorts of transnational destabilization’. He argues that, like the nation or the world, the neighbourhood is a ‘coherent social formation’, and I maintain that this is relevant to the specific confines of my own work throughout this thesis. He suggests that neighbourhoods are a robust example of a practical community arrangement and this argument holds validity here because the ‘arrangement’ of the neighbourhood is considered in both spatial and temporal terms as highlighted by my earlier analysis. Appadurai goes beyond the measure of geographical proximity when he acknowledges the changing state of the neighbourhood in contemporary society. It is this oscillation that my examination and the creative (re)presentations offered throughout this thesis are particularly concerned with. Appadurai claims that:

‘[i]n many societies, boundaries are zones of danger requiring special ritual maintenance; in other sorts of societies, social relations are inherently fissive, creating a persistent tendency for some neighborhoods to dissolve. In yet other situations,

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193 Mason, p.39.
194 Mason, p.1.
196 Robertson, p.1339.
197 Appadurai, p.178.
198 Appadurai, p.199.
ecology and technology dictate that houses and inhabited spaces are forever shifting, thus contributing an endemic sense of anxiety and instability to social life.  

Speaking firmly of the ecological and technological advances that dictate the shift in neighbourhoods as they are geographically measured, for example as ‘houses and inhabited spaces’, Appadurai is quick to acknowledge that a community is not always ‘imagined’ in relation to its physical dimensions. Instead, ‘neighborhoods […] are situated communities characterized by their actuality, whether spatial or virtual’. This is also true of the emergent communities that were ‘imagined’ into existence on Twitter during the disorder in Birmingham (see Chapter Two, pp.84-97). What makes Appadurai’s theory important in relation to the regional context considered here is his recognition of the virtual actuality of neighbourhoods in a modern day environment. By addressing the role of the mass media, in particular its ‘electronic forms’, Appadurai clearly identifies that expansion is underway; the physically neighbouring communities that were once in existence are now engaging in computer-generated conversations and ‘networks’. To quote Appadurai: ‘[f]ax machines, electronic mail, and other forms of computer-mediated communication have created new possibilities for transnational forms of communication’ that frame the neighbourhood in both national and global contexts simultaneously. These modes of electronic communication – specifically popular social networking sites such as Twitter – are of particular interest to my study because of this. ‘No longer bounded by territory, but by these large international computer networks’, I argue that these ‘virtual neighborhoods’ can be considered an example of an imagined community in this context.  

Despite these theories of globalisation suggesting that the nation-state is ‘struggling’ or ‘failing’ somewhat, a wide range of evidence, which has been examined and (re)presented creatively throughout this thesis, demonstrates that the national imagined community is still in existence in the context of the disorder in Birmingham. Robertson contends that

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199 Appadurai, p.179.  
200 Appadurai, p.179.  
201 Appadurai, p.179.  
202 Anderson, p.6.  
203 Appadurai, p.194. In The World is Flat, Thomas L. Friedman argues that ‘this “flattening” of the world […] can be a force for good – for business, the environment and people everywhere’. See the back cover of The World is Flat: The Globalized World in the Twenty-First Century (London: Penguin, 2006).  
204 Appadurai, p.195.
‘the world can be imagined as consisting of a series of societies, a large number of individuals, relations between societies, and humanity as a species. Each of these imaginative – or imaginary – orientations is plausible in principle, although some people, or some groups of people, will be disposed to favour one orientation over another’.205

Anderson positions himself as a scholar who is ‘disposed to favour’ the nation-state, or the world as ‘a series of [national] societies, over any other alignment. There is nothing wrong with this. It is not to say that the alternative theoretical underpinnings do not have significant merit, just that, in this particular setting, I argue that the global is secondary in significance to the national. As Robertson recently stated in a presentation at Loughborough University, ‘Anyone who thinks the nation-state is in decline and set to disappear is crazy; the strength of the nation-state does, and will, still live on’.206

**Conclusion: Fluid and Emergent *Imagined Communities***

In addition to the critique of Anderson’s model as partial that I have posited throughout this chapter, this thesis argues that imagined communities were in a constant state of flux during the disorder in Birmingham in 2011. The evidence presented throughout this chapter so far suggests that communities were ‘imagined’ into existence in this context in relation to various scales (geographical or otherwise) that were *not* synonymous with the nation. Members of these fluid imagined communities, which existed in Birmingham across local and global scales, were ‘fellow-members’ of other communities concurrently. These forms of belonging were aligned in relation to one another in order to interact and, as a result, I argue that the national imagined community is only one part of a much bigger and more complicated picture in this instance. The thesis opts for a more nuanced definition of imagined community, both in terms of the events that happened in Birmingham and in relation to contemporary society as a whole. Communities in existence during this period of civil disorder in the city need to be explained as both fluid and emergent, thus a synthesis is necessary. Throughout this thesis, then, I posit a definition of imagined community that is pluralistic in nature.

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205 Robertson, p.1341.
Chapter Two: Creative and Reported (Re)presentations of Imagined Community during the Birmingham Riots

Introduction

‘…the new media of mass communication, including, in particular, newspapers and novels, also promoted the creation of imagined communities of readers, who, although never meeting in person, felt they all belong to the same national community.’¹

For Anderson, the key to understanding the existence of the national imagined community lay in the advances of print-capitalism in mid-nineteenth-century Europe and, more specifically, in shared languages among individuals.² As I discussed in the previous chapter, this argument surrounding shared languages and increased access to various modes of communication remains relevant to this research. Yet, these advances that Anderson recognised have since moved into a new social and technological context two hundred years later; one where electronic modes of communication have become the norm. As a result, this chapter argues that the national imagined community was in existence during the disorder in Birmingham in 2011. However, it proposes that individuals positioned themselves in relation to fluid and emergent models of imagined community simultaneously. Through an engagement with the responses published during this disorder – printed in newspapers including The Birmingham Mail and by the BBC News online, broadcast via guerrilla television channels, and circulated on electronic forms of communication such as Twitter – individuals began to identify themselves as belonging to complex constellations of community. These included both nationally imagined and ‘micro-imagined wispy’ groupings and the ‘imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’.³ By interacting with one another about the events in their area,

² Anderson notes the significance of print-language on numerous occasions throughout Imagined Communities. Examples of this can be found in his discussions of ‘powerful impulses for vernacular linguistic unification (pp.77-8); ‘Print-language is what invents nationalism…’ (p.134); and ‘the primordialness of languages…’ (p.144). See Benedict Anderson, ‘Old Languages, New Models’, ‘The Last Wave’, and ‘Patriotism and Racism’, in Imagined Communities, revised edition (London: Verso, 2006), pp.67-82, pp.113-40, and pp.141-55.
³ The concept of the ‘imagined space of the neighbourhood’ is taken from Sara Ahmed’s chapter on ‘Recognising Strangers’, in Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.21-37 (p.28). Whereas the ‘wispy, imagined micro-community’ is the main focus of Gary Fine and
ordinary citizens were able to raise awareness of potential dangers: ‘Police station on fire in #Birminghamriots and encourage one another to ‘come out, shop and support all the businesses that have suffered’.4 By analysing a number of relevant reported, creative and contemporary responses to the events in Birmingham in 2011, this chapter provides evidence for the fundamental relationship between various modes of communication (in print and digital form) and the complex scales of imagined communities that existed in this context.

A Model for the Nation: Birmingham’s Ethnic History

Returning to Wilson’s article for a moment, I contend that her decision to focus on Birmingham is understandable when we consider the recurring ‘cultural clashes’ that have affected the city over the past four decades.5 A history of ethnic tensions between the African-Caribbean and British Asian communities led to a series of events in Handsworth being recorded following three days of rioting in July 1981, while similar incidents of civil disorder occurred in the Lozells area of Birmingham as recently as October 2005.6 Considered to be ‘copycat riots’, the incidents in 1981 happened just a few months after the Brixton riots in April of the same year.7 These events appeared to reproduce similar tensions between the police and ‘anonymous black youths’ in Birmingham when a ‘locally known police Superintendent’ attempted to ‘dispel rumours of an impending National Front march’.8 In addition to this, ‘inner-city Birmingham [would soon be] alight’ again in September 1985 when two brothers, Kassamali (aged 38) and Amirali Moledina (aged 44), died after their post office was set ablaze.9 Looters appeared to be out in force with one police record confirming

Lisa-Jo van de Scott’s article, ‘Wispy Communities: Transient Gatherings and Imagined Micro-Communities’, American Behavioral Scientist, XX, X (2011), 1-17, in Sage Publications
<http://abs.sagepub.com/content/55/10/1319.abstract> [accessed on Tuesday 8 July 2014].

4 These quotations are taken from the open-source data available on the social media platform Twitter. By following advanced search systems, I located tweets between the dates of Monday 8 August 2011 – Friday 12 August 2011 and used the hashtag ‘#birminghamriots’ and/or the location of ‘Birmingham, England. A full list of these tweets can be found using the URL: ‘#birminghamriots’. Twitter (2006) <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23birminghamriots%20lang%3Aen&src=typd> [accessed on Monday 20 April 2015].


7 Waddington, p.91.

8 Waddington, p.91.

a man shouting: ‘I’m shopping early for Christmas’. Similar to the disorder in 2011, causes reported included: ‘massive social deprivation, inadequate housing, unsuccessful education, mass unemployment and racial discrimination’. On the other hand, the incidents of October 2005 occurred after ‘allegations that a black teenage girl had been gang-raped by Asian men in a beauty shop near to the Lozells area’. Although the disorder in 2011 began in London following the police shooting of Mark Duggan, what followed in Birmingham was considered to be ‘opportunistic’. The Barton Arms pub shooting raised concerns ‘that some of the seemingly random violence and looting was conducted by organised criminal gangs’. These gangs included both the Johnsons and the Burger Bar Boys who were well-known across the city as a result of previous cultural clashes and criminal encounters. Along with Wilson’s decision to position Birmingham at the fore of her article, I argue that my choice to focus the thesis – and the creative intervention that informs it – on the city in this context is appropriate because this history of tension (relating to cultural and ethnic identities) has continued to increase anxiety among residents.

Wilson’s article places a significant emphasis on Birmingham and the disorder in 2011 in order to comment on the relationship between the nation and the city. However, I argue that her paper is located at the very beginning of this debate. There is room for more analysis of these events in Birmingham to shed light on this discussion; interrogating Anderson’s model of imagined community and other forms of belonging, as well as understanding the media’s role in (re)presenting these expressions of identity. This chapter uses both quantitative models of social networks and qualitative methods of textual analysis to examine a number of reported, creative and contemporary responses that were published in this context. It focuses on ‘the new media of mass communication’; namely the responses

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10 ‘From the Archives: Police parking ticket sowed seeds for riots’ (para. 6 of 14).
11 ‘From the Archives: Police parking ticket sowed seeds for riots’ (para. 8 of 14).
15 Through a close reading of relevant narratives, Wilson argues that ‘new social imaginaries’ (specifically new relations between the urban city and the nation) are in existence in the context of the civil disorder in Birmingham in 2011.
16 Anderson, p.6.
17 Ruth and Sebastian E. Ahnert describe social network analysis as: ‘[T]he application of mathematical and computational techniques developed by scientists working in the field of complex networks to the arts and humanities is a relatively recent development, and one that is gaining increasing traction, offering as it does both technical tools and a sense of contemporaneity in a world now dominated by social networking platforms.’ See
of newspaper articles and television broadcasts as individuals engaged with them through the immediacy of Twitter.\(^\text{18}\) Quantitative network analysis (explained on pages 84-97 of this chapter) establishes a connection between those individuals who were active on Twitter and a number of media channels (including the BBC News online, *The Guardian* and Sangat TV) that were responding to the events of the disorder. By identifying that a relationship between Twitter users and these media channels *did exist* online, this quantitative method determines which responses should be the focus of this chapter. Through a close reading of these responses, the chapter identifies distinct changes within each narrative in accordance with Mihelj’s ‘modes of reporting’ and demonstrates that popular media channels (re)presented the national ‘we’ in their coverage of the events in Birmingham.\(^\text{19}\) However, these responses also began to suggest other ways of living together, supporting Wilson’s theory, and I argue that this validates the complex nature of expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that I argue for in this context.

**Britain as a Media Nation**

In *Media, State and Nation*, Philip Schlesinger questions the ‘widely assumed role of mass communication in the construction of cultural identities’ with increased scepticism.\(^\text{20}\) Like Anderson, he acknowledges that the ‘media *must* be important’ because of its prevalence in society, yet he identifies that this significance might begin to surface ‘in different ways' dependent on the circumstances of a given situation.\(^\text{21}\) Schlesinger considers the circumstances of political ‘violence’ and ‘terrorism’, arguing that they are rooted in the complex modes of communication between the state and various other constructs. He addresses the involvement of the media with collective identities, including those which transcend the boundaries of the state.\(^\text{22}\) Throughout this thesis, I situate the circumstance of political ‘violence’ that Schlesinger recognises in the context of the disorder in Birmingham in 2011. Schlesinger argues that:

\(^{18}\) Mihelj, p.22.

\(^{19}\) Mihelj, ‘Media Nations at War’, pp.101-2.


\(^{21}\) Schlesinger, p.138.

‘although we need to locate nationally bounded communicative competences in an institutional framework with much greater care, it is important not to dismiss the role of social communication in the construction of national identities’. 23

He continues by saying that the problem lies in ‘how to locate [collective identity], and in what analytical framework’. 24 Since this consideration of the media in relation to identity, Mihelj has examined the media’s influence ‘in defence of the national culture’. 25 She presents her readers with a model that endeavours to explain the discursive differences between routine media reportage during the mundane or ‘everyday’ and the accounts bestowed upon us during moments of extremity; namely in celebration or crisis. 26 She comments on the impact that these distinctions have on our personal and individual beliefs regarding ‘nationhood’, while contending that most examples of the modern media ‘reinforce us in our beliefs that there must be something fundamentally different and irrational’ in those countries consistently at war; particularly when placed in juxtaposition to the British nation. 27 However, this remains problematic in the context of the 2011 disorder in Birmingham because expressions of identity, whether individual or collective, are pluralistic. Processes of identification can have many influential sources that are not only synonymous with the media or national identity explicitly, and this means that media engagement might not be the same for all parties involved. The key to Mihelj’s model is the idea that the media ‘performs [and reproduces] the nation’ through the reported responses that it publishes in the immediate aftermath of a crisis situation. 28 Mihelj considers how media sources do this in their reports and, though her argument relates to the media’s influence when nations are ‘at war’ or in crisis with one another, I argue that her model raises a significant question relating to the impact of such distinctions when a moment of crisis occurs within the boundaries of a single nation-state.

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23 Schlesinger, p.158.
24 Schlesinger, p.158.
26 Mihelj, p.96. In 2008, Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss published an article that aimed to ‘develop a research agenda for examining the actual practices through which ordinary people engage and enact […] nationhood and nationalism in the varied contexts of their everyday lives’ and studies into ‘everyday nationhood’ are ongoing. See ‘Everyday Nationhood’, Ethnicities, 8, 4 (2008), 536-76, in Sage Publications <http://etn.sagepub.com/content/8/4/536> [accessed on Monday 18 July 2016] (p.537).
27 Mihelj, p.95.
28 Fox and Miller-Idriss propose that this ‘performance’ of the nation is one way in which ordinary citizens are active participants in the reproduction of nationhood within the contexts of their everyday lives. See ‘Everyday Nationhood’, pp.545-9.
Despite her focus on national and international media coverage, Mihelj’s model remains relevant to Britain during the disorder in Birmingham in 2011. Specifically, in relation to this chapter’s consideration of the media narratives that were published in response to these events. Throughout her selected case studies of reports relating to the Yugoslavian wars and the 9/11 attacks in 2001, Mihelj asserts that ‘media narratives become structured around sharp divisions of “us” and “them”’.\(^\text{29}\) She suggests that ‘when faced with a sudden conflict or catastrophe […] every nation tends to fall prey to similar shifts in collective imagination’.\(^\text{30}\) I argue that Britain was no different during the disorder in Birmingham. Through the (re)presentation of this ‘us’ and ‘them’, reported, creative and contemporary responses to the incidents in Birmingham promoted forms of belonging with national frames of reference including Anderson’s notion of the imagined community. These narratives repositioned the rioter as ‘the stranger’ in this context because his or her behaviour began to contaminate the social space of neighbourhood, city and nation simultaneously; becoming ‘a threat to both property and person’.\(^\text{31}\) Within the urban landscape of Birmingham, I argue that the rioters became recognised as the ‘anonymous black youths’ that Elijah Anderson distinguishes.\(^\text{32}\) They became that which Sara Ahmed terms ‘the stranger neighbour’ in this context and ‘the “we” of the [national imagined] community is […] legitimated’ as a result.\(^\text{33}\) Much like the changes in narrative that Mihelj recognises throughout her own research, the responses analysed in this chapter embrace fluctuations including:


\begin{verbatim}
‘1. Frequent use of national deixis, used to refer to both the journalists and the audience as members of the same national community; used to foster national unity;
2. Frequent first person narration from the point of view of the national “we”, including a rise in the use of internal and external focalisation; [and]
3. Nations and/or representations sharing the same opinions; the national “we” (embracing the journalists and their addressees) as one of these actors’.
\end{verbatim}

\(^{29}\) Mihelj, p.96.
\(^{30}\) Mihelj, p.96.
\(^{31}\) Elijah Anderson as cited in Ahmed, p.22.
\(^{32}\) Anderson as cited in Ahmed, p.22.
\(^{33}\) Ahmed, pp.36-7.
\(^{34}\) See ‘Table 5.1’ in Mihelj, pp.101-2.
Creative and Reported (Re)presentations of Imagined Community

Through an analysis of the following reported, creative and contemporary responses to the disorder in Birmingham, this chapter provides evidence for the relationship between print and digital modes of communication and the models of community that I considered in Chapter One.  

It concentrates on the narrative focalisation that is (re)presented in various news reports, published by partisan, private and public media, including those by the BBC News online, printed in newspapers (The Birmingham Mail, The Guardian and Redbrick student newspaper), and broadcast via the guerrilla television channel, Sangat TV. A close reading of two creative responses by English poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy (‘Birmingham for Tariq Jahan’, 2011) and Birmingham-based poet Roy McFarlane (‘Saving our Sons’, 2011), which were published online via these media channels, examines the narrative conventions deployed in poetry on this subject. The chapter considers these examples in order to support Anderson’s notion that print-capitalism, language and communication were, and still are, vital to our understanding of how imagined communities are formed. The chapter argues that it is through an engagement with these advances in print-capitalism and shared language – specifically reader interaction with the responses made available through literary, print and electronic modes of communication – that these fluid and emergent imagined communities were born.

BBC News and The Guardian

Written in response to both the hit-and-run incident in Winson Green and to other events that took place in the city, various articles published online and in print by the BBC News and The Guardian (re)presented their narratives so that ‘nationhood’ took precedence. In an article titled ‘England riots: pressure to scrap police cuts as Birmingham mourns its dead’, journalists working for The Guardian purposefully chose to position the nation at the fore of

35 Although I am aware of the vast range of media articles, blog posts and other commentaries that have been published in response to these events, it is important to emphasise at this point that I have chosen to focus, specifically, on those examples that I feel contextualise the creative inquiry to be presented as part of this thesis.

the piece and the article’s headline is an immediate illustration of this. The disorder in Birmingham is considered in the wider, national context of the ‘English riots’ and the article reinforces a similar national ‘we’ to that which Mihelj recognises in her ‘modes of reporting’. Throughout the rest of the coverage, reporters argue that David Cameron is under pressure as the cabinet maintains that he must ‘rethink the coalition’s policing cuts in the wake of the deaths of the three young Birmingham men’: Haroon Jahan, Shazad Ali and Abdul Musavir. The hit-and-run incident that took place in Winson Green takes centre-stage in the government’s debate about wider, national issues. The Police Federation warn ‘of a “catastrophe” [in England] if similar riots erupt after the cuts are introduced’ and these changes in narrative perspective – to a national ‘we’ – continue throughout the remainder of the article.


Figure 1: Tariq Jahan is repositioned as a ‘key actor’.

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38 See headlines of ‘England riots: pressure to scrap police cuts as Birmingham mourns its dead’.
39 Wintour et al. (para. 1-2 of 41).
Mihelj’s argument that ‘nations and/or representatives sharing the same opinions’ in media reports during times of crisis are repositioned as ‘key actors’ is particularly relevant. I emphasise that this article, and the journalists responsible for writing it, have chosen to situate Tariq Jahan – father of hit-and-run victim, Haroon – as one of these actors within their narrative (see Figure 1). The moment of dialogue (re)presented here is a prime example of this. It reads: ‘[i]n a message to the local community, he implored: “Today we stand here to plead with all the youth to remain calm, for our communities to stand united”.’ At this point, journalists working for The Guardian choose to frame the pronoun ‘we’ in a national, rather than local context. Though it is possible that Jahan was addressing a different collective identity, his words are (re)presented to address both the journalists and their readers simultaneously in the specific framework of this narrative. The determiner ‘our’ as it is spoken later on within Jahan’s message also reinforces this national narrative perspective. At the hands of the journalists working for The Guardian, he becomes a ‘key actor’ for the nation and all shared opinions relative to a national imagined community.

The national ‘we’ is reinforced again by the generational reference to ‘all the youth’ as it is (re)presented in this quotation. As previously mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Birmingham has a significant history of cultural clashes and ethnic tensions that remain relevant to this thesis. These past incidents have raised concerns for many residents who – to deploy Elijah Anderson’s categorisation – now consider ‘anonymous black youths’ to be a threat to both themselves and the social space they inhabit. In perceiving a threat from the youth, residents differentiate between themselves and those they perceive to be ‘unsafe’ so the youth become recognised as ‘the stranger’. In the context of this media narrative, reports suggest that the estranged youth were responsible for the disorder in the city. Recognised and (re)presented as ‘all the youth’ in this particular response, I argue that those engaged in the behaviours of rioting and looting in Birmingham are excluded from the community of residents who constitute the safe social space. Subsequently, the distinction between ‘them’ (as ‘the stranger’/rioter) and ‘us’ (as the national imagined community) is reinforced.

In comparison with the narrative discussed above, a number of reports published by the BBC News online are close in content to those featured in The Guardian’s coverage. In reports including ‘Birmingham deaths: Praise for Tariq Jahan’s pleas for calm’, details of the
father’s ‘[p]owerful and generous’ message remain the focal point and the narratives continue
to promote the existence of a national imagined community in this context.44 This is
reinforced when the reporters behind the news story choose to relocate Chief Constable Chris
Sim as a second ‘key actor’ in their narrative. Sim says:

‘But I think most of us would see that the intervention he felt able to make […] was a
decisive intervention in terms of Birmingham not suffering tension and violence
between communities.’45

Sim’s comments, like Jahan’s message that is (re)presented before them, are another example
of this national narrative perspective depicted in the media’s responses to these events in
Birmingham. I argue that Sim is repositioned to occupy the same imagined community as
Haroon’s father at this point. The two may not know one another or have ever met in person,
but Sim has an awareness of Jahan’s plea and this reinforces their common affiliation to the
nation.46 This form of belonging is further endorsed in the (re)presentation of the word ‘us’ in
this narrative. A prime example of national deixis at this point, ‘us’ determines that an
imagined community is in existence during the events in Birmingham and that Sim, Jahan,
the reporters, and their readers all occupy a place within this same social space.

Throughout several of the reports published by the BBC News online and The
Guardian, shared membership of this national imagined community is symbolised by groups
including the English Defence League and by the urban metropolis of London as the nation’s
capital.47 In The Guardian report ‘UK riots: the key facts and figures’, journalists list the
arrests made during the disorder and choose to place significant emphasis on London.
Categorisations are purposefully made to distinguish between ‘London arrests on Monday
night: 310’, ‘People charged in London so far: 1,032’ and a ‘Breakdown of night two’s
London Arrests’ dependent on age.48 These are positioned in direct contrast to one, stand-
alone classification that (re)presents the number of ‘Arrests in Birmingham, Salford and West

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-14488901> [accessed on Tuesday 21 April 2015] (para. 6
of 17).
45 ‘Birmingham deaths: Praise for Tariq Jahan’s plea for calm’ (para. 10 of 17).
46 Anderson, p.6.
47 Wintour et al. (para. 23-4 of 41).
48 Simon Rogers and Lisa Evans, ‘UK riots: the key facts and figures, Guardian (2011)
April 2015] (para. 3-10 of 28).
Bromwich’ totalling 218 individuals.\textsuperscript{49} London – as England’s capital city and, therefore, a representation of the nation – takes priority over other areas of the country in this particular narrative. This (re)presentation of an existing national imagined community is continued throughout the report as it examines the deployment of ‘Emergency Services’ during the disorder and the ‘On the Ground’ costs to England as a whole.\textsuperscript{50}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{Cricket fans ‘prove life can go on as normal’ amidst the civil disorder in Birmingham.\textsuperscript{51}}
\end{figure}

\textit{Birmingham Mail and Redbrick}

Continuing with this line of enquiry, it seems appropriate that this chapter should turn to a comparison of the news reports published by regionally-based media sources including \textit{The Birmingham Mail} and \textit{Redbrick}. Throughout the coverage offered to readers by both newspapers, there is a range of evidence to support Wilson’s argument that Birmingham is the ideal model of a metropolis that promotes ‘new social imaginaries’ (social-urban spaces of belonging), while simultaneously (re)presenting the ‘multicultural nation’.\textsuperscript{52} In an article featured on \textit{The Birmingham Mail}’s website on Thursday 11\textsuperscript{th} August 2011, journalists

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{49} Rogers and Evans (para. 7 of 28).
\textsuperscript{50} Rogers and Evans (para. 11-6 of 28).
\textsuperscript{52} Wilson, p.587.
\end{flushleft}
emphasise the decision of England’s cricket fans to ‘prove life can go on as normal’ amidst the civil disorder (see Figure 2). The cricket fans are repositioned in opposition to those individuals who are participating in the rioting and looting, and who subsequently become ‘the stranger neighbour’ in this context. This demonstrates the sharp narrative division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ that Mihelj recognises. The quotations deployed in this article include comments from match supporters that reinforce this common membership to a national imagined community. One fan says: ‘By not calling off the cricket, we get the chance to tell rioters that they’re not working, they’re not scaring us and they’re definitely not going to ruin our day!’ The ‘we’ (re)presented to The Birmingham Mail’s readers in this instance is an expression of national identity, similar to the deixis that is deployed in articles published by both the BBC News online and The Guardian. These divisions are made sharper as a direct result of the juxtaposition between this national ‘we’, which constitutes the cricket fans and reporters from The Birmingham Mail, and the ‘they’ that includes the individuals who are directly involved.

Journalists writing for The Birmingham Mail reposition the cricket fans as their ‘key actors’ within this particular narrative. In a similar manner to the everyday, ordinary people (Jahan and Sim) that I have already identified as actors in the coverage discussed earlier, the cricket fans in this response are also (re)presented as key figures who share the same, national opinion as the journalists. A ‘frequent use of national deixis’ by the reporters situates the cricket fans, journalists and their readers within the same national imagined community. Each actor’s dialogue is deployed in the coverage to ‘foster national unity’ among The Birmingham Mail’s readers and this is implied in the structural decisions – specifically the narrative order – of the report itself. The tagline places significance on ‘England’s barmy army’ of supporters, reading: ‘CRICKET fans, including England’s barmy army, ignored the city’s disorder problems to see their heroes take on India in the Third Test at Edgbaston’s plush new cricket ground’ and I argue that this also reduces the significance of the India team’s fans.

The promotion of national identity here is particularly interesting when considered in light of ‘the cricket test’. Commenting in 1990, Lord Norman Tebbit (then MP) suggested that ‘immigrants and their children could not show loyalty to Britain until they supported the

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54 Mihelj, p.96.
55 ‘Birmingham Riots: Cricket fans prove life can go on as normal’ (para. 3 of 13).
56 ‘Birmingham Riots: Cricket fans prove life can go on as normal’ (para. 1 of 13).
England team at cricket’. Speaking in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, the politician claimed:

‘A large proportion of Britain’s Asian population fail to pass the cricket test. Which side do they cheer for? It’s an interesting test. Are you still harking back to where you came from or where you are?’

I argue that *The Birmingham Mail*’s response places a similar emphasis on cricket as a symbol of national identity, but also as a symbol of ethnic identity. The conscious expectation that fans at these matches will support England’s cricket team because it is a characterisation of the nation is (re)presented in the newspaper’s reference to the team as ‘their [the fans’] heroes.’ In his 2004 article titled ‘Tebbit’s Cricket Loyalty Test Hit for Six’, John Carvel points out that ‘[a] majority of black and Asian people in Britain [now] see themselves as British’ anyway. ‘[A]ccording to the first official figures on national identity’, which were published by the Office of National Statistics seven years prior to the disorder in Birmingham, ‘[f]our out of every five people from the black Caribbean community living in Britain described their national identity as British, English…’ while ‘[t]hree-quarters of the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities identified themselves in the same way’. Although supporting the nation’s cricket team is proposed as an expression of national identity in the narrative I have presented here, Carvel’s article suggests that ethnic minorities living in Britain (and across Birmingham) were already considering themselves members of a national imagined community before the disorder took place. Thus, ‘the cricket test’ is meaningless.

It remains impossible to ignore that this media narrative also places a significant emphasis on the local-urban space of Birmingham simultaneously. As the second city (both literally and figuratively) in which this disorder took place, Birmingham becomes the focal point of many of the narratives that were published in response to them. *The Birmingham Mail*’s headline: ‘Birmingham Riots: Cricket fans prove life can go on as normal’ is a prime example of this. The title indicates that these particular issues not only relate to the wider context of the nation, but to the city as an urban social space at the same time. This supports

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58 Carvel (para. 3 of 12).
59 Carvel (para. 4 of 12).
60 ‘Birmingham Riots: Cricket fans prove life can go on as normal’ (para. 1 of 13).
61 Carvel (para. 1 of 12).
62 Carvel (para. 1-2 of 12).
63 ‘Birmingham Riots: Cricket fans prove life can go on as normal’ (para. 1 of 13).
Wilson’s argument that Birmingham has become an ideal model for the existence of ‘new social imaginaries’. This becomes evident in the cricket fans’ desire to ‘divorce the match from what is going on in the country’, thus situating it in the local setting of Edgbaston. The fans’ affiliation to both local neighbourhood and urban cityscape maintains a presence throughout this sporting situation which would (usually) actively encourage individuals to occupy their place within a national imagined community by supporting the country’s team. I argue that expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community (re)presented by the media are not only limited to the national imagination that Mihelj recognises in situations of war and conflict. Though there is a vast amount of evidence within these reported responses to suggest Mihelj’s argument is relevant to the narratives published during this disorder, articles such as this one begin to advocate the need for an understanding of imagined communities as fluid and emergent in this setting. It is the relationship between these different forms of belonging (national imagined community; the urban cityscape and the ‘imagined space of the neighbourhood’) and how they all interact with one another during this situation that is of the utmost importance.

I also suggest that the idea of a ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community is (re)presented in *The Birmingham Mail*’s response. Fluid and unfixed in comparison to the ‘finite, if elastic’ boundaries of Anderson’s model, the ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community refers to ‘social ties that exist within evanescent, limited micro-publics’. This form of belonging depends entirely on a temporary ‘gathering’ or event; ‘[i]n such communities relations are frequently intense, but after their conclusion relations slip back into latent memory’. Although this narrative (re)presents the idea of fans wanting to distinguish the cricket match from the disorder going on around them, I argue that they can only do so for the duration of the match itself. This means that spatial and temporal dimensions become significant to our understanding of imagined community in this context, and to the relationship between these emergent forms of belonging that I am positing. The gathering of cricket fans at England’s Third Test match against India is an example of a ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community because, after the match is finished, this form of belonging ceases to exist in favour of other expressions of character. For British Asians in Birmingham, this might include performing

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64 Wilson, p.597.
65 ‘Birmingham Riots: Cricket fans prove life can go on as normal’ (para. 9 of 13).
66 Fine and Scott, p.1.
67 Fine and Scott, p.1.
68 Fine and Scott, p.3.
religious customs such as praying at a place of worship or the cultural traditions of going home to eat Asian cuisine with family members.69

Similar complexities are revealed when comparing the articles above with coverage (re)presented in Redbrick student newspaper. Situated somewhere between a form of guerrilla media because it was written by students, but also influenced by an academic institution because of its base at the University of Birmingham, this might appear unsurprising. In ‘Birmingham riots: socio-economic hardship is no excuse’, student reporter Thomas Byrne immediately positions himself as one of the key actors in his own coverage.70 His personal thoughts are offered to Redbrick’s readers as shared sentiments and the repeated use of ‘I’ throughout the article demonstrates a conscious use of both ‘internal and external focalisation’ – similar to that which Mihelj recognises in her model. The deployment of first-person narration in Byrne’s response means that he distances himself from individuals displaying behaviours of rioting and looting. He positions them as ‘the stranger’ in this instance and becomes the ‘heroic citizen’ who calls them out for exclusion.71 This becomes obvious from the beginning of his narrative:

‘I have been a citizen of Birmingham my whole life, and after living in this city for almost 20 years, I can honestly say that I have never witnessed scenes as disturbing and downright disgraceful as those that occurred on Monday and Tuesday night.’72

Referring to himself as an individual entity here, the student writer (re)presents the distinction between an ‘us’ (the ‘we’ that he as an ‘I’ identifies with) and a ‘them’ (‘the stranger’).73

Such sharp divisions are detected again when Byrne argues that there are no excuses for this kind of behaviour:

‘There are those that attempt to justify the reckless actions of the rioters, arguing that the socio-economic struggles of the working classes lead to them loot and cause

69 Being a British Asian in Birmingham during these events of civil disorder continued to offer its own complexities as many residents negotiated a dual-community. At times, this form of belonging was constitutive of the national imagined community and characterised by British identity, while Asian culture or religious faiths associated with an Asian identity (Sikhism, Islam, Hinduism) were characterised as more significant at other moments. For example in protecting each other’s property during the days leading up to the hit-and-run incident in Winson Green on Wednesday 10th August 2011.

70 Byrne, ‘Birmingham riots: socio-economic hardship is no excuse’.

71 Ahmed, p.31.

72 Byrne (para. 1 of 9).

73 Ahmed, p.31.
criminal damage, as they are frustrated and angry at the lack of opportunities that are available to them. However, such arguments of justification are simply redundant.74

By repeatedly deploying a combination of internal and external focalisation from the point of view of the ‘we’, Byrne first appears to be suggesting that the national imagined community exists in this context as he is able to (re)present the ‘us’ and ‘them’ division that Mihelj argues is present in similar situations. However, I argue that there is evidence throughout his response to suggest that this distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is active on a smaller scale than the nation in this context. Like The Birmingham Mail’s reported response that I analysed previously, Byrne places a significant emphasis on ‘this city’ throughout his narrative when he chooses to name ‘Birmingham’ and alludes to the urban social space specifically. It is possible that the importance placed on the urban landscape in this context reflects the fact that these particular newspaper organisations (The Birmingham Mail and Redbrick) are based within the city. The journalist’s response seems to move away from the expected national imagination that Mihelj argues is usually (re)presented in media narratives, towards an ‘us’ and ‘them’ that is relocated within the modern cityscape.75 Byrne excludes ‘the rioters’ in order to ‘allow the definition and policing of the “we” of the good [city] neighbourhood’ in Birmingham.76 The ‘we’ that Byrne deploys here is also inflected by class. There is an indication that he is talking to the middle class about the working class here and this demonstrates that communities are also configured, in part, by class distinctions.77 This further complicates matters and highlights that a plural definition of imagined community is necessary when analysing these fluid expressions of identity and forms of belonging during the disorder in 2011.

74 Byrne (para. 2 of 9).
75 Though it is possible that this may be a consequence of the fact that Mihelj’s model centres on situations of conflict between different nations, the context of this research focuses on civil disorder (as an example of conflict) within a single nation-state.
76 Ahmed, p.29.
77 Though I do not have time in the thesis to discuss the relationship between class and community at length, I am aware that such a connection does exist and is still discussed in detail within academia. Most recently, Mae Shaw and Marjorie Mayo have attempted to ‘explore how an understanding of social class can offer ways forward in the face of increasing social polarisation’ in their new book, Class, Inequality and Community Development (Bristol: Policy, 2016).
‘Birmingham for Tariq Jahan’ and ‘Saving our Sons’

When transforming the voices of my individual participants into an original series of verbatim poems (see *United We Stand*, Chapter Four), the creative outcome should be conclusive in its efforts to locate, and indeed demonstrate, the multifaceted layers of community that existed in the context of this disorder. I need to have an awareness of other poets’ responses to these events in the city and understand that these creative (re)presentations are important. For this reason, the chapter moves to discuss Duffy’s ‘Birmingham for Tariq Jahan’ and McFarlane’s ‘Saving our Sons’ (both published in 2011). As two creative responses written in the aftermath of the disorder in Birmingham, these poems are particularly relevant because they were published via the media channels that I have previously examined as part of this chapter. My analysis continues to use Mihelj’s ‘modes of reporting’ and the sharp division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (that excludes ‘the rioter’ and repositions ‘them’ as ‘the stranger’) to read these poems and establish the ideas of imagined community that are (re)presented in them.

Beginning with an analysis of ‘Saving Our Sons’, the ‘imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’ is (re)presented throughout McFarlane’s text as he chooses pronouns carefully to embody the urban and the local. In stanza two of his response, McFarlane deploys the determiner ‘our’ to (re)present the urban space of Birmingham as ‘our city’ (l.10). Detailed references to these localised forms of belonging are made throughout the text when he alludes to the hit-and-run incident. He writes: ‘A father desperately tries to save the life of his son / and others brutally mowed down on a bloody street’ (ll.5-6). Although these allusions suggest that the poet acknowledges that ideas of imagined community are fluid in the context of this disorder, I argue that an attachment to the nation is also (re)presented throughout McFarlane’s poem. There is a blurring of the ‘finite, if elastic’ boundaries that Anderson first argued established this form of belonging from another. The reader is left unsure about whether the ‘sons’ the father is hoping to save are situated in Birmingham’s urban cityscape or outside of it in the wider context of the British nation. The determiner ‘our’ is positioned differently at the outset of the text referring to the wider, national community of ‘our society’ (l.3). Further evidence for this is found throughout lines three and

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78 Carol Ann Duffy, ‘Birmingham for Tariq Jahan’, *Guardian* (2011) and Roy McFarlane, ‘Saving our Sons’, *Birmingham City Council* (2011). Subsequent references to these texts will be given as line numbers in parentheses in the body of this chapter.

79 It is possible that this attachment to the local and urban reflects the fact that McFarlane held the position of Birmingham Poet Laureate in 2010-11 (during the events of the riots in the city). Roy McFarlane, ‘Saving our Sons’, *Birmingham City Council* (2011).

80 Anderson, p.7.
four of the poem when McFarlane alludes to ‘our society’ as being ‘pregnant with the malaise / of injustice, poverty and hopelessness’.

The image of pregnancy as it is depicted throughout ‘Saving our Sons’ is particularly interesting when considered in relation to this chapter’s study of how the national imagined community is (re)presented. The picture of a pregnant mother is adopted in fifteen out of the thirty-two lines of McFarlane’s poem as he progresses from ‘the caesarean which has ripped open / the belly of our society pregnant’ (ll.2-3) to ‘a mother in labour’ (l.30) and ‘the re-birth of hope and charity / that will hopefully save our sons’ (ll.31-2). This depiction of pregnancy and motherhood – as McFarlane (re)presents it in his creative response – becomes vital to our understanding of (re)presentations of national imagined community in the context of Birmingham in 2011. Motherhood – accepted as the presupposed, dominant role of the woman in patriarchal society – connotes the natural (biological) gendered characteristics of what it means to be female. Nira Yuval-Davis comments: ‘It seems that in this discourse of biology/identity some parts of the body are more directly linked than others’ leading to the debate of ‘women as wombs’.81 Women adopt the role of ‘biological reproducer’ and ‘cultural reproducer’ of ‘the nation’ in this sense.82 The maternal image (re)presented throughout ‘Saving our Sons’ symbolises nature and the mother Earth. This further embodies the idea of one’s home country or heritage. Thus, by exemplifying both mother Earth and the idea of one’s heritage in his depiction of motherhood, I argue that McFarlane’s poem is an expression of national identity. ‘Saving our Sons’ alludes specifically to the English identity and is a (re)presentation of the national imagined community that existed during the disorder in Birmingham.

When considering McFarlane’s ‘Saving our Sons’ and Duffy’s ‘Birmingham for Tariq Jahan’ in relation to these events, a number of binaries begin to surface. These include the maternal image vs. patriarchy; mother Earth vs. the Holy Father and the British Nation vs. Religion. Yet, I argue that the situation is more complex than these simple binaries would have us believe. The previous chapter’s interrogation of theoretical models of community, along with the analysis of both reported, creative and contemporary responses presented here – and the examination of verbatim methods deployed in theatre and poetry that follows (see Chapter Three) – clearly demonstrates that the situation needs to be understood and expressed in a way that pays significant attention to this complexity. An explanation of these intricate

82 Yuval-Davis, p.37.
expressions of identity and the ideas of imagined community that they (re)present is uncovered when comparing both poetic responses in this chapter.

In contrast to the expressions of national identity and an obfuscation of the boundaries associated with it that are depicted throughout McFarlane’s poem, Duffy’s text (re)presents a community that is ‘imagined’ into existence in relation to expressions of religious and cultural identity. Evidence of this can be found in her poem as she chooses to include intercultural references to ‘the evening prayers at the mosque’ (l.1), ‘a hafiz’ (l.7), ‘a devout man’ (l.9) and ‘the entire Koran’ (l.8). The relationship between nation, religion and culture is present in ‘Birmingham for Tariq Jahan’, but dissolves as Duffy alternates between expressions of religious identity and allusions to the ‘imagined community’ of the neighbourhood’ in her text. For example:

‘After the evening prayers at the mosque,
came the looters in masks,
and you three stood,
beloved in your neighbourhood,
brave, bright, brothers,
to be who you were –’ (ll.1-6).

This exchange is reinforced throughout Duffy’s poem when she refers to a specific street within England and localises it: ‘I think we all should kneel/ on that English street’ (ll.12-13).

Similar to the choices made by McFarlane in ‘Saving our Sons’ though, Duffy also places significant emphasis on the national imagined community in her poem. She deploys the pronoun ‘we’ in the line ‘I think we all should kneel’ (l.12) to (re)present a sense of national identity. I suggest that this may explain why The Guardian chose to publish Duffy’s poem online as part of their response to these events. She situates the local street in Birmingham in the wider context of the country: ‘that English street’ (l.13) and this suggests that she is relocating it within the nation simultaneously. This is reinforced in her choice to

83 This idea of community as relative to expressions of religious and cultural identity is (re)presented similarly in Bhanu Kapil Rider’s prose-poetry in The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers (Berkeley, CA: Kelsey St. Press, 2001). For a detailed examination of this poetry, see Chapter Three, pp.135-42.

84 Own emphasis added.
name the country, but leave the street itself nameless.\textsuperscript{85} I argue that Duffy continues to highlight that both expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community are multifaceted in this context. By (re)presenting the street in Birmingham as ‘English’, Duffy distinguishes the country (England) from the nation (of Britain) and any other, smaller-scale forms of belonging that were in existence. By separating it from other countries that constitute the nation, Duffy expresses that this particular conflict is relevant to the single and specific location of England. This demonstrates that both national identity and Anderson’s concept of imagined community are difficult phenomena to establish. By identifying that these expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community are complex, I have determined that the creative intervention, crafted as part of this thesis (see Chapter Four), should be definitive in its efforts to both discover and illustrate such intricacies. Having read these earlier creative responses in light of the relevant theoretical frameworks outlined in the previous chapter, I have considered creative (re)presentations of these ideas of community. I now have a clear understanding of how these can be arranged alongside verbatim methods to (re)present similar ideas within my own work.

\textbf{Sangat TV}

This chapter also examines the guerrilla media coverage presented by Asian television network, Sangat TV. It analyses the content from two video clips that were made available via the Sangat Television channel on YouTube. The first of these broadcasts totals 12 minutes and 45 seconds in length and was filmed on Wednesday 10\textsuperscript{th} August 2011 at Dudley Road. Interviewer Harjap Singh Bhangal is in attendance at the vigil being held at the Jet forecourt just hours after the hit-and-run incident has taken place.\textsuperscript{86} The journalist talks to a number of individuals about what has happened on the road that evening and, as members of the television network’s audience, we are immediately able to identify that the individuals presented to us on-screen stand together as a community. However, on this occasion, their

\textsuperscript{85} Just as ‘in order to be a person, which involves being a discernible object and the member of a community, it is necessary that the person is named, and therefore determined’, Duffy’s decision to leave the street nameless in this instance undermines the determination of the street as a perceptible and locatable object. As a nameless street, it has no perceived language of meaning on a local level and, as a result, cannot be identified as a member (object) belonging to the local community. Instead, its only language reference is to the country it is found in (‘England’) and so its identity is shifted to the national level. See M.D. Tschaepe, ‘Halo of Identity: The Significance of First Names and Naming’, \textit{Janus Head: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenological Psychology, and the Arts}, 6, 1 (2003), 67-78, in \textit{Janus Head} \texttt{<http://www.janushead.org/6-1/Tschaepe.pdf>} [accessed on Thursday 16 July 2015], p.76.

\textsuperscript{86} Sangat Television, \textit{Sangat TV at Dudley Road, Birmingham with Harjap Singh Bhangal (10 August 2011)} [YouTube video], Sangat TV, Friday 12 August 2011 \texttt{<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deN1cM_vymU>} [accessed on Monday 9 May 2016].
feelings of belonging centre on an Asian identity rather than on the idea of the national imagined community. The ‘key actors’ in this particular clip do not appear to (re)present the views of the nation. Their anger points towards both the police and the government – perhaps even more so than towards those individuals who have taken part in the act of rioting. This supports the chapter’s argument that expressions of identity and models of imagined community are more complicated in this context. As the video begins, one man comments:

‘They’re just toys, man. What’s the point in having them, right? They, they’re the ones who are negligent and they’re as much to blame as the rest, y’know what I mean, as the guys who done it’ (0.08 – 0.17 seconds).  

The ‘key actor’ challenges the national ‘we’ that Mihelj proposes becomes the narrative perspective of all media journalists in a moment of crisis. As an alternative, the ‘we’ deployed in this video by Sangat TV moves away from the nation towards a form of belonging that is characterised by Asian identity and specific religious faiths, including Sikhism and Islam, that are associated with it. This is reinforced later in the video report when Bhangal talks to a second man among a larger group of individuals on-screen. The male in question places blame on the police when he suggests that ‘they escalated it’ and ‘brought it to our community’ (from 2.12-2.15 minutes), thus the challenge to Anderson’s model of the nation as an imagined community becomes apparent. The interviewee on camera chooses to disassociate himself and his ‘brothers and sisters’ from the police and their actions during the civil unrest through his use of the determiner ‘our’ here. By separating his community from others that include the police and the government, this ‘key actor’ fails to (re)promote a sense of national belonging. His frequent use of the phrase ‘brothers and sisters’ (at 2.31 and 3.02-3.05 minutes) throughout the media report implies that he is referring to the ‘fellow-members’ of his own community on both a geographical (Smethwick and the surrounding areas) and cultural level. This moment presents the viewer with a fracturing of the relationship between the nation and the state because it demonstrates that there has been a significant breakdown between the public and state representatives in the police and the government.

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87 Sangat Television, Sangat TV at Dudley Road, Birmingham with Harjap Singh Bhangal (10 August 2011).
88 Sangat TV at Dudley Road, Birmingham with Harjap Singh Bhangal (10 August 2011).
89 Sangat TV at Dudley Road, Birmingham with Harjap Singh Bhangal (10 August 2011).
In comparison, the second video report from the Asian television network, which also covers the aftermath of the hit-and-run incident, seems to encourage the development of a national imagined community in this setting. Rather than attempting to challenge or re-work these forms of belonging as the first broadcast does, journalist Upinder Randhawa and his interviewees are positioned as ‘key actors’ that (re)present a national media narrative. They insist upon a message for the world that promotes ‘people coming together’ from every race in a bid to ‘keep law and order.’\textsuperscript{90} I argue that this is an attempt to mend the broken relationship between state and nation and between the local and the national. The idea of the national imagined community is reinforced by the images of the crowds on camera. Individuals have come together for the peace march in memory of the three boys who died and it is instantly clear from the on-screen images that these people are not all members of the Asian community in Birmingham. White British people, representatives from the German media, and members of the local police force stand alongside many other community groups as Randhawa continues to promote a national dialogue. The journalist can be heard referring to the community and country within one single sentence and he places no blame on institutions such as the police. Instead, he congratulates them for their presence at the vigil on Dudley Road: ‘Well done to obviously the police’ (9.15-9.18 minutes). In doing so, the journalist blurs the sharp divisions between the ‘us’ of the Asian community and ‘them’ of the government and police that the first broadcast appeared to be endorsing.\textsuperscript{91} Randhawa re-aligns these boundaries to resemble those that Mihelj proposes; an ‘us’ and ‘them’ that determines the dichotomy between the nation and its enemy in this instance. Positioning himself as a ‘key actor’ in this context, Randhawa promotes a shared, national opinion as he encourages everyone to stand together and show the rest of the world ‘the real United Kingdom’ (6.04-6.07 minutes).\textsuperscript{92}

Twitter as an Online Imagined Community?

Much of this chapter has focused on the intricate expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that were (re)presented in various reported, creative and contemporary responses published by institutional and guerilla media channels. However, in an era when

\textsuperscript{90} Sangat Television, \textit{Sangat TV at Dudley Road, Birmingham with Upinder Randhawa (10 August 2011)} [YouTube video], Sangat TV, Friday 12 August 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjjakycdfDU> [accessed on Monday 9 May 2016].

\textsuperscript{91} Sangat Television, \textit{Sangat TV at Dudley Road, Birmingham with Upinder Randhawa (10 August 2011)}.\textsuperscript{92} Sangat TV at Dudley Road, Birmingham with Upinder Randhawa (10 August 2011).
mistrust in the mainstream media and national journalism is rife, I argue that an engagement with ever-expanding, digital communication technologies (specifically, social networking sites) complicates these forms of belonging even further. ‘[Ne]w forms of electronically mediated communication’, such as those mentioned above,

‘are beginning to create virtual neighborhoods, no longer bounded by territory, passports, taxes, elections, and other conventional political diacritics, but by access to both the software and hardware that are required to connect to these large international computer networks.’

This growth in connectivity ‘illuminates the power of large-scale, imagined life possibilities over specific life trajectories’, thus ‘virtual neighborhoods’ form and become a simultaneous cause (and direct consequence) of the reflexive global consciousness of network members. Roland Robertson contends that ‘one cannot “imagine” a locality […] in the absence of imagining a context in which […] the place is situated’, while Appadurai acknowledges that a community need not always be identified in terms of its physical dimensions.

Neighbourhoods are situated communities characterised by their actuality and this can be spatial or virtual. In this instance, I argue that virtual imagined communities were also in existence during the disorder in Birmingham in 2011. Communities were not only ‘imagined’ as a result of geographical or national ties and physical boundaries. From ‘a people with shared interests or goals for whom electronic communication is a primary form of interaction’ to those ‘unique in that most of their content is member-generated’, these emergent communities allowed members to feel part of a larger social group; a global network (see Appendix Six). This chapter examines Twitter as an example of online imagined community and a facilitator of these global, virtual networks in this context.

95 Robertson, p.1339. See also Appadurai, p.194.
96 Own emphasis added. Appadurai, p.189.
97 Anderson, p.6.
Before this chapter begins its comprehensive analysis of Twitter and its users’ interactions during the disorder, it is important to acknowledge the academic investigations into social media usage in similar contexts which have preceded this study. Lucy Bennett (2012) explores the ‘collision of social media and television’ as powerful influencers over ‘the ways in which audience and programmes engage with each other’.99 Examining member usage on Twitter during the live debate of Channel 4’s programme *Street Riots: The Live Debate* in 2011, Bennett analysed a database of tweets archived using software ‘TwapperKeeper’ (now HootSuite Archives) and established a variety of trends: ‘viewers frequently posted tweets discussing issues […] offering their opinions, ideas and solutions’ and became ‘an extended part of the “live” studio audience’ as a direct result of the electronic ties of communication available.100 Bennett’s study is of particular interest to this chapter as the existing relationship she establishes here, between the media and its audience, is one that this thesis investigates. Her examination of Twitter usage – highlighting a “‘collective intelligence’” where ‘the social process of acquiring knowledge is dynamic and participatory’ (Jenkins, 2006) – recognises the role of social media in actively ‘recreating a pseudo “group-viewing”’.101 This “‘group-viewing”’ alludes to an alliance much stronger in force; an emergent imagined community in which ‘the use of hashtags and retweets suggests that although users aren’t directly interacting with specific individuals, they want to be part of a larger group’ (Wohn and Na, 2011).102 The ‘larger group’ at work here is one of global as well as virtual proportions. A network of people that is ‘imagined’ into existence in the context of *Street Riots: The Live Debate* and courtesy of Twitter.103

In the same year, Marc Cheong, Sid Ray and David Green (2012) investigated the ‘social dimensions of the 2011 riots’.104 Hoping to gain better insight into ‘intents,
information-sharing behavior, and demographics of both the rioters and observers’, they observed ‘both the user and message domains on Twitter’ and drew comparisons between the virtual and ‘real-world happenings’. The study discovered a correspondence between riot events and tweets: both were ‘concentrated around the most-affected areas: London, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool, Manchester, and Leeds’. Their research detected ‘friend-to-follower ratios’ and the influences of users among their peers on the platform. Findings demonstrate that those users with larger ratios tended to be ‘high-profile Twitter users’ in categories including, but not limited to ‘celebrities; news sources and media organizations; academics; politicians’ and accounts specifically ‘created in response to the riots’. Their study is particularly relevant to this chapter because it clarifies those ‘news sources and media organizations’ that played a crucial role in the interactions between members of virtual communities in existence on Twitter. These sources are relative to the disorder in Birmingham explicitly and the responses by these sources have been examined throughout this chapter.

Cheong et al. also consider the relevance of Emma Tonkin, Dr Heather D. Pfeiffer and Greg Tourte’s examination which is of a similar nature to their own research. They establish Twitter’s role in relation to the disorder in London through a detailed examination of the tweets composed during these events. However, in this case, domains are excluded. In ‘looking [just] at tweets’, they decipher whether such communication ‘influenced individuals towards new concepts or […] represented confirmation of existing beliefs’. By evaluating a wide dataset of 450,000 tweets, containing the hashtags ‘#londonriots’ or ‘#riotscleanup’, Tonkin et al. identify a number of trends that confirmed ‘little evidence for the use of Twitter to organise large-scale malicious activity’. Established conclusions included that ‘off-topic’ tweets would die out on their own. Most significant to this thesis, tweets and/or hashtags that were created or supported by ‘popular or news-worthy people’ were more widely promoted because ‘[p]eople support, retweet, tweets that support their beliefs’. With no evidence to suggest that Twitter was used to “encourage violence” and substantial

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105 Cheong et al., p.915.
106 Cheong et al., p.917.
107 Cheong et al., pp.918-9.
110 See Tonkin et al. (slide 12-9 of 19).
111 See Tonkin et al. (slide 12-9 of 19). See also Cheong et al., p.916.
outcomes that recognise both personal support and global information-sharing as key functions of the social networking platform, Tonkin et al.’s research leaves an opening for further enquiry into what this online distribution of knowledge and, indeed, these digital levels of care produce.\textsuperscript{112}

There is a fundamental flaw across all three of these studies in relation to the ideas of imagined community that were in existence on Twitter. In all three investigations, the scholars have chosen to make the events of the disorder in London their focal point. While it is important to establish and examine the incidents as they happened in the capital, the decision to do so highlights a major criticism of Nationalism scholarship and of Anderson’s framework. The three studies are geocentric; working under the assumption that the disorder in London (including the Twitter users within the capital’s network) should be positioned in a place of superiority above the other events and social groups across England that experienced them. In order to explore the polygonal nature of the concept of community, whether imagined or otherwise, I argue that we must move away from London as the capital to expressions of identity that are on a smaller-scale than the nation. This is one of the reasons for my focus on Birmingham throughout this thesis. Supporting Wilson’s theory that ‘new social imaginaries’ are in existence within the city, this research carries the inherent implication that Birmingham is significant because it is a model for the intricate nature of expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community in this particular context.

My hypothesis is that Twitter becomes an example of an online imagined community in this context. As a platform that 'hosts sets of interlinked "personal communities"', it provides us with immediate and real-time access to the responses posted by individuals during the disorder in Birmingham.\textsuperscript{113} Gruzd et al. contended that studying the social media platform – as an ‘asymmetric microblogging service’ – would prove useful and it certainly does in this instance.\textsuperscript{114} It permits a greater understanding of 'how people use communication technologies to form new social connections and maintain existing ones'.\textsuperscript{115} However, Gruzd et al. also argued that because 'Twitter interactions are asymptotically J-curved' – some tweets lurk in the realms of cyberspace while others are only tweeted intermittently – the platform could not be considered a community when based on the traditional definition coined by

\textsuperscript{112} Cheong et al., p.915. See fn. 4: W. L. Adams, ““Were Twitter or Blackberrys used to Fan Flames of London’s Riots?””, \textit{Time Magazine} (2011), no pagination given.

\textsuperscript{113} Anatoliy Gruzd, Barry Wellman and Yuri Takhteyev, 'Imagining Twitter as an Imagined Community', \textit{American Behavioral Scientist}, 55, 10 (2011), 1294-1318, \textit{in Sage Publications} <http://abs.sagepub.com/content/55/10/1294> [accessed on Tuesday 8 July 2014], p.1296.

\textsuperscript{114} Gruzd et al., p.1294.

\textsuperscript{115} Gruzd et al., p.1294.
Wellman and Leighton. For them, community exists 'as a spatially compact set of people with a high frequency of interaction, interconnections, and a sense of solidarity.' For the purpose of this chapter, I argue that Twitter should be recognised as an example of an online imagined community. Specifically when considered in the context of the civil disorder in Birmingham. Gruzd et al. propose a set of key questions on which to base our considerations regarding the platform and its networks forming these emergent, virtual communities. It is to these questions that this chapter now turns.

The first question: 'Do they consist of tweeps (Twitter users) who see each other regularly, intermittently, or latently?' is more difficult to determine. This is because one would have to speak with the individuals’ active on Twitter at the time of the incidents in order to identify these digital levels of connection. However, as Anderson contends, it is not fundamental for members to see one another in person; community ‘is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them’ and I argue that it is possible for forms of belonging online to develop in a similar manner. Of the four enquiries offered by Gruzd et al. in their study, three seem to hold particular relevance to the responses published on Twitter during the disorder in Birmingham. These include:

- ‘Do they consist of interconnected clusters of persons who are sources or followers of each other?
- Do they cluster by focus?
- Does information diffuse among these networks, using the Twitter facility of retweeting a source's message?’

Put simply, the answer to all three of these questions is yes. In my examination of a ‘cluster by focus’, an advanced search on the platform determined that Twitter users were connecting with one another according to the same motivation. The deployment of the hashtag #Birminghamriots demonstrated that the events occurring in and around the city were an

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116 Wellman and Leighton as cited in Gruzd et al., p.1296.
117 Gruzd et al., p.1296.
118 Anderson, p.6.
119 Gruzd et al., p.1296.
120 At this stage, it is important to note that my examination of Twitter, as an example of an online imagined community in this context, identified a clustered sample of 1,772 tweets that were published within the first hour of each day from Sunday 7th August to Monday 15th August 2011 – when events in Birmingham peaked.
essential provocation for many individuals online. Tweets were clustered together as a consequence of people including this hashtag in their responses.

Furthermore, I argue that both individual users publishing their comments and the tweets that they were posting could be sub-clustered according to additional similarities and drives within this original grouping. For example, in the mention of other significant locations affected, such as ‘Erdington Highstreet’, ‘HANSWORTH’ and ‘Smethwick’:

e.g. ‘POLICE STATION IN HANSWORTH ON FIRE #Birminghamriots’ [SIC],

and

‘womens networking hub (wnhuk) 3-6 thurs y the riots happened tking place in Smethwick 4 women & young ppl please RT or DM 4 further details #riots #birminghamriots’ [SIC].

This second example from Twitter complicates these clusters further because it sets itself and the location of Smethwick in a national context suggesting that the women’s networking hub is representative of the nation because of the use of ‘UK’ within the organisation’s title: ‘(wnhuk)’.

A sub-cluster could also be formed in relation to the particular emotions that were evoked within the users’ tweets – as a direct result of their linguistic choices when verbalising their thoughts and opinions on the platform. Through textual analysis of the words and phrases, punctuation and other devices used within each tweet, I determine that a variety of emotions, including anger, humour, fear or worry, disappointment and sadness were often (re)presented in a number of the comments published on Twitter during these events. Take the following tweet as an example:

‘I am close to Erdington Highstreet, where there has been another riot. Wish it would stop! Pretty scared to be honest! #birminghamriots’.

121 All tweets analysed deployed this particular hashtag, but my consideration of them was not limited to those published in Birmingham. Tweets posted from IP addresses outside of the city, but still interested in the events of the #Birminghamriots were also extracted.

122 Note that the spelling of ‘HANSWORTH’ (as present within this tweet) is actually incorrect here. This particular district of Birmingham is spelt ‘Handsworth’. I have chosen not to correct this so that it is representative of and authentic to the original tweet which this particular user had chosen to publish.
This user has chosen to communicate his or her feelings of worry and fear through the use of phrases including: ‘Wish it would stop!’ and ‘**Pretty scared** if I’m honest!’. Not only does the use of ‘Pretty scared’ make it immediately obvious to anyone else reading this user’s tweet that there is an indication of these emotions within this example, but the user’s decision to deploy exclamation marks at these moments suggests a heightened level of urgency to these emotions in this context. This is not really surprising when we consider that the user is letting others know about what he or she has just witnessed on the high street of the area northeast of Birmingham city centre.

On the subject of letting others know, this chapter returns to the questions that Gruzd et al. posited in relation to Twitter as an example of online imagined community. Having already established that its users and their tweets can be ‘clustered by focus’ in this particular context, I argue that it is possible for Twitter to be considered as a facilitator of these virtual imagined communities that are emergent in character. This is not a direct result of the platform’s asymmetries. Just as Anderson suggested that the ‘image of their communion’ lived within the mind of each nation-member, I propose that Twitter only becomes an example of online imagined community when its active users interact with one another. As such, it is important to identify whether these individuals were integrated on more significant levels. Did these users ‘consist of interconnected clusters of persons who are sources or followers of each other’? Did the tweets these users published lurk in the twittersphere, collected only under the guise of the #Birminghamriots or is the level of social connection between users stronger because they purposefully chose to follow one another and see each other’s posts? Finally, did the information about the events of the disorder in Birmingham in 2011 ‘diffuse among these networks, using the Twitter facility of retweeting a source’s message’? A response to these enquiries can be demonstrated through this chapter’s own model of ‘social degree’, which has been developed using quantitative network analysis. Deploying similar statistical methods to those used in this approach (see ‘Notes on Research Methods’, p.6) the research determines the existence of important connections and interactions (‘social degree’) between individual users and relevant media organisations as the ‘sources’ (or ‘hubs’) on Twitter during this disorder.

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123 Anderson, p.6.
124 Gruzd et al., p.1296.
125 Gruzd et al., p.1296.
126 According to *Orgnet* in their introduction to Quantitative Network Analysis, the concept of social degree measures ‘the number of direct connections a node has’. In the case of this chapter, social degree refers to the number of these connections that each media ‘source’ (analysed earlier) has on Twitter. In order to help us
In order to understand how the term ‘social degree’ is applied in the specific context of this research, it is helpful to consider Ruth and Sebastian E. Ahnert’s previous work on ‘Protestant Letter Networks in the Reign of Mary I’. Though neither the subject matter nor historical context of their project are related to my study of Twitter, the quantitative approach that the scholars used to establish if the letter networks existed is relevant and the method becomes a natural part of this research. Quantitative network analysis allowed them ‘to visually map the social network implicated in th[e] body of surviving correspondence, and to measure the relative centrality of each of its members using a range of different mathematical tools.’

The network is the ‘set of relationships between objects or entities’ and the researchers were able to identify ‘the entire Protestant community’ that was associated with the collection of letters they were studying. The connections between members of this group became known as ‘edges’ or ‘ties’, while the individuals themselves were quantified as ‘nodes’. Nodes with numerous significant connections were named ‘hubs’ and considered ‘an extremely important component’ of the network. It is this idea of ‘hubs’ (or ‘sources’ as I refer to them) that my model of ‘social degree’ in relation to Twitter is most concerned with.

The most significant example of an ‘interconnected clusters of persons’ who become sources on Twitter in the aftermath of the disorder in Birmingham are the media. Particularly when considered in relation to this chapter’s central argument that newspaper reports (both in print and online), television broadcasts, and responses published on social networking sites continually (re)presented the idea of national imagined community in their coverage. However, they also demonstrated that other expressions of identity and forms of belonging were in existence in Birmingham by alluding to ‘the imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’ and ‘micro-imagined wispy’ or virtual communities. As each active user following an individual media channel’s account on Twitter retweeted, quoted or shared their understand the role of these media sources in expressions of identity and ideas of community during the disorder in Birmingham. ‘Social Network Analysis: An Introduction’, Orgnet (2013) <http://orgnet.com/sna.html> [accessed on Saturday 16 July 2016].

127 See fn. 17 of this chapter.
128 Ahnert, p.3.
129 Ahnert, p.3.
130 Ahnert, p.4.
131 Ahnert, p.6.
source’s message with their own followers, the media’s carefully-selected, ‘key’ information was disseminated among the organisation’s global networks and beyond them. The media is a prime example of the powerful cluster of interconnected sources that Gruzd et al. referred to. In its many forms already considered in this chapter (BBC News online, The Guardian, The Birmingham Mail, Redbrick student newspaper and Sangat TV), I argue that the media was able to engage with and influence countless followers during the disorder in Birmingham.

To calculate the various connections between these media ‘sources’ and other Twitter users online at this time, a clustered sample of 1,772 tweets, which were published during the first hour of everyday between Sunday 7th and Monday 15th August 2011 – when the situation in Birmingham was at its peak – were gathered. These were transferred to a database in order to be read. The data recorded at this point included the date on which each tweet was published, any indication of emotion present in the language of each response, significant locations in Birmingham that were mentioned repeatedly throughout the tweets and which media organisations were involved in this activity online. Once the media channels that formed part of this network had been identified, the social degree between them and other Twitter users each day was recorded in a matrix (see Appendix Five). UCINET software was used to visualise the existence of these connections and to determine that the news organisations were indeed the sources in this network (see Appendix Six). The relationships between these sources and other ‘nodes’ (Twitter users) in the network were categorised dependent on whether social degree was symbolised by a retweet, shared visuals (images, videos, maps) or direct conversations (for example: @bbcwm someone’s been attacked in Hurst Street now apparently? Got saved by a passing car #birminghamriots). This determined which media sources had stronger ‘ties’ and, thus, the most impact on their followers in regards to expressions of identity and belonging during these events.

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132 This tweet was published on Monday 8th August 2011. It was extracted from Twitter (2015) <https://twitter.com> [accessed on Thursday 6 August 2015] using the advanced search system and criteria that included: #Birminghamriots.
Figure 3: Measurements of social degree (relational ‘ties’) on Twitter: BBC News, The Guardian and The Birmingham Mail.

Figure 4: Measurements of social degree (relational ‘ties’) on Twitter: BBC News, The Guardian, The Birmingham Mail, and Sangat TV.
The media organisations that maintained the strongest ties and highest level of social degree across the week included BBC News online and *The Guardian* newspaper, hence the decision to analyse their reportage in relation to these expressions of identity and ideas of community earlier in this chapter. On the morning of Thursday 11th August 2011, both sources recorded high social degree values of 514 (5.18%) and 509 (5.10%), while local newspapers including *The Birmingham Mail* held weaker connections (see Figure 3).

Institutional media channels continued to score highly in terms of social degree and maintained their status as sources in the network as individual journalists that worked for them also became online sources for information. Accounts representing @CharlotteITV and @SteveClampITV were connected with on a conversational level on the platform and the information (re)presented by these accounts was shared among active followers who considered it dependable. One user quotes:

“@CharlotteITV: £14,000 worth of property incl mobiles, electrical equipment & clothes recovered by West Mids Police #birminghamriots” 😊.”

As a result of these patterns, it is possible to argue that affiliations to the nation appear stronger at this particular moment during the disorder in Birmingham. The social degree values and stronger ‘ties’ maintained by BBC News online and *The Guardian* begin to provide empirical evidence for this chapter’s argument that a national imagined community was in existence – albeit in modern forms – during the disorder in the city. However, these expressions of identity and forms of belonging were complicated by an interaction with Twitter’s emergent, virtual communities as well. An engagement with these media sources and the information they provided as ‘interconnected clusters of persons’ online had a significant impact on the existence of these forms of belonging. This chapter’s earlier analysis of the reported responses published by these organisations demonstrates how they continually (re)presented the nation throughout their narratives. Yet, various media sources also illustrated that ideas of imagined community were complex in this context and the rise of Sangat TV’s appeal during the events that unfolded continued to demonstrate this.

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133 This tweet was published on Thursday 11th August 2011. It was extracted from Twitter (2015) <https://twitter.com/> [accessed on Thursday 6 August 2015] using the advanced search system and criteria that included: #Birminghamriots.

134 ‘A four-man operation in a makeshift newsroom in Edgbaston, Birmingham’, Sangat TV’s guerrilla journalism, which was shot using a handheld camera, climbed the ranks during the unrest in Birmingham in 2011. It was re-broadcast by the bigger media giants, including the BBC and CNN, and considered ‘captivating’
Sangat TV became one of the most popular media sources to be engaged with by active Twitter users in the immediate aftermath of the hit-and-run incident on Dudley Road. Its reported responses have proved increasingly important to this chapter’s analysis as a result (see pp.82-4 of this chapter). As an institution that (re)presented the idea of a national imagined community consistently throughout its coverage, BBC News online maintained strong ‘ties’ and high values of social degree. However, the trends that emerged following the vehicle incident suggested a move to expressions of identity and forms of belonging that were reliant on more than this national framework. Increases in the social degree attributed to Sangat TV and the Twitter profile of the organisation’s journalist, Upinder Randhawa, seem to support Wilson’s argument that Birmingham – as a multicultural city – was also a place in which ‘new social imaginaries’ came to exist in this context. Sangat TV’s ‘ties’ became stronger than those held by any other media source acknowledged previously in this chapter and Upinder Randhawa scaled new heights in terms of his connections online. His Twitter account achieved a social degree value that was +16 points higher than the BBC News online at this point (see Figure 4). As a result, I argue that forms of belonging were also centred on Asian identity in this instance. Sangat TV is an Asian television network and the faces of its broadcasts during these events were also recognised as belonging to this cultural classification. Thus, it would be fair to argue that this particular form of identity was (re)presented alongside attachments to the nation. It may also be the case that this unconventional guerrilla media – defined by its Asian identity – (re)promoted the sentiment of togetherness in the information it provided to users active on Twitter. In an article published by The Guardian in 2011, the community leader behind the channel confirmed that the organisation’s primary mission was to

‘…spread peace, defend our faiths and educate people […] It’s about informing people and then all joining together against the criminal element. The whole community can outnumber any bad or evil – even if the gangsters outnumber the police. You can only win people with love.’


Wilson p.597.

Halliday (para. 6 of 7).
It is possible to identify the channel’s guerrilla tactics as being defined by this particular religious faith and the Asian identity that Attwal and his fellow Sangat Trust directors wish to defend throughout their reportage. This becomes more likely to be the case as the leader reaffirms that the television network has ‘done coverage before but only [of] small events in the local Sikh community’. An analysis of Sangat TV’s television broadcasts in the earlier sections of this chapter, and a consideration of its ‘ties’ and ‘social degree’, are also significant when constituting an understanding of the intricate expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that existed during the disorder in Birmingham. Quantitative network analysis has enabled this chapter to establish that virtual imagined communities emerged online and that relationships were formed between them in this context. As such, I argue that Twitter became an example of online imagined community because it facilitated virtual and global networks that (re)presented ideas of national and local community in the aftermath of these events.

In Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that the existence of the national imagined community lies in the advances of print-capitalism. This is relevant to the context of this research and contemporary forms of belonging, though the modes of communication Anderson refers to (print literature and newspapers, for example) have since advanced to include electronic devices and social media platforms. Much of the evidence examined in this chapter has illustrated that a national imagined community was in existence in Britain during the disorder in 2011. However, this chapter has also recognised emerging expressions of identity and new forms of belonging that were (re)presented simultaneously throughout these events. As a result, I argue that a comprehensive understanding must consider the multifaceted nature of imagined community and identity explicitly.

My analysis of the reported responses published by media organisations including BBC News online, The Guardian and The Birmingham Mail demonstrates that media narratives (re)present the national imagined community in their coverage of crisis situations. Concentrating on the national deixis that was deployed throughout various news reports, this chapter supports Mihelj’s claim that national unity is fostered in situations of conflict and celebration. However, the chapter also contends that similar ‘modes of reporting’ are

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137 Halliday (para. 4 of 7).
138 Halliday (para. 3 of 7).
recognised in crisis situations that occur within a single nation-state. The chapter has considered journalists’ strategic decisions to deploy ordinary individuals including Tariq Jahan and Chris Sim as ‘key actors’ who (re)present shared opinion in their articles, in order to encourage readers that they, too, belong to this national imagined community. An examination of reports published by The Birmingham Mail and Redbrick pay close attention to sports teams and their fans as symbols of national identity in this context, before moving to a discussion of other forms of belonging that include the local ‘imagined community’ of the neighbourhood and examples of ‘micro-imagined wispy’ communities. A detailed examination of two television broadcasts by Sangat TV highlights their constant interweaving of messages relative to ‘the real United Kingdom’ (as nation) and allusions to an Asian cultural-religious identity. This continues to demonstrate the complex nature of expressions of identity and ideas of community in this context.

Quantitative network analysis has enabled this chapter to establish significant ‘ties’ between a number of these important media channels on Twitter and other individual users on the platform. Focusing on those news organisations that this chapter has taken the time to read closely, it determines that the various expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community (re)presented by them were also in existence virtually during the disorder in Birmingham. Through users’ engagement with these coexisting news sources on the platform – that is through quoting, sharing and retweeting each other’s words, media articles and images or video clips like those examined throughout this chapter – Twitter continues to host and develop a complicated set of imagined communities online. In turn, I argue that the networking site becomes its own example of online imagined community. However, it moves beyond forms of belonging that are reliant on a national framework. Twitter hosts virtual and global networks in which ‘new social imaginaries’, to borrow Wilson’s phrase, come to manifest. The real-time responses of individuals and the media published online during the disorder in Birmingham are an explicit demonstration of this.

By considering the two poetic responses, this chapter demonstrates that expressions of identity and forms of belonging are more complicated than Anderson’s definition first suggested. Though his notion that print-capitalism, language and communication were vital to our understanding of how imagined communities formed is still applicable today, this chapter argues that Anderson’s model can be developed to acknowledge other contemporary forms of belonging and advance towards an understanding of the significant relationships between them. Having examined the narrative conventions that were deployed throughout the two poems, I recognise the intricacy that exists in determining identity and community during
the disorder in Birmingham. I understand that my own creative intervention in *United We Stand* needs to reflect this multifaceted nature of imagined community, and, in appreciating this, the thesis moves to a consideration of verbatim methods as an appropriate tool to deploy for this purpose.
Chapter Three: (Re)promote, (Re)perform, (Re)present: Deploying Verbatim Methods in Theatre and Poetry

Introduction

‘It is a mystery to me that verbatim is considered a restrictive way of writing. I absolutely disagree. The bricks may be the same but the structure you build with them, the house you build with them, is entirely and totally idiosyncratic.’¹

While ‘the upsurge in fact-based and verbatim theatre in recent years has attracted a voluminous amount of coverage’, both scholarly and within the Arts, engagement with verbatim as a method that is appropriate for deployment in poetry has been especially limited.² Verbatim poetry takes it approach to finding material from the techniques of verbatim theatre, which, Derek Paget identifies, ‘employs (largely or exclusively) tape-recorded material from the “real-life” originals’ of its characters and events.³ Throughout this chapter, a detailed examination of the literary techniques used in theatre practice will determine that verbatim is an appropriate method to be deployed; both in terms of the subject matter which informs the creative section of this thesis and in the construction of a new and original series of verbatim poems. As expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community have already been considered in relation to the disorder in Birmingham (see Chapter One), this chapter turns its attention away from the socio-political significance of the events in question. Having previously analysed a variety of reported, creative and contemporary responses in order to understand the media’s role in community- and nation-building (see Chapter Two), this chapter places its emphasis on poetics. It considers the origins and developments of verbatim; exploring the methods deployed in early documentary theatre practice (Unity Theatre and Theatre Union) and contemporary verbatim productions.

by Richard Norton-Taylor (The Colour of Justice, 1999), Alecky Blythe (London Road, 2011) and Gillian Slovo (The Riots, 2011). By acknowledging the history of documentary and verbatim theatre, as well as the works that have influenced these genres – for example, Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger’s Radio Ballads and the creation and existence of amateur groups such as Banner Theatre – this chapter moves beyond ‘agit-prop’ and advances towards an understanding of how playwrights and poets deploy verbatim methods within their writing. It considers how verbatim methods are evolving as a direct result of the digital age and, using specific examples from the plays mentioned above, the chapter analyses the spatial and temporal dimensions of the (re)presentations of characters and events. It examines narrative focalisation in order to demonstrate that verbatim methods can be deployed to transform voice(s) and encourage agency among ordinary people. This informs our understanding of identification and how these processes form fluid or emergent imagined communities. The chapter demonstrates awareness of the current critical debate and common censures that surround the techniques of verbatim; namely its ethical limitations relative to (re)presentations of trauma, source material and authorship versus ownership. An analysis of Bhanu Kapil Rider’s The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers (2001) illustrates how existing poets have deployed similar methods in their own work. The chapter considers the arrangement of literary techniques (rhyme; assonance; refrain) and how methods of verbatim are deployed to (re)present a variety of personal identities in poetry. By recognising the theatrical stage as the space in which these particular techniques first originated, arguments for ‘the predominance and [effective] resilience of verbatim’ as an appropriate creative method for crafting the series of poems remain the primary focus of this chapter.

Before this chapter can begin to engage with examples of verbatim theatre, it is important to understand what this particular theatrical endeavour involves and how it began. The term ‘verbatim’ refers to ‘the origins of the text spoken [with]in the play’. The words of
real people are recorded and transcribed during a research-led interview process in order to provide the playwright, or, in this case, the poet, with a collection of raw material. This material is then ‘edited, arranged or re-contextualised […] for dramatic presentation’ and the creative output has ‘a geographical as well as an emotional and psychological shape’. Poets deploying verbatim methods in their own texts revise the raw material to draw attention to particular patterns of sound and imagery. The poet transforms voice(s) in this way because they are unable to position the actor as a tool in their printed text. Instead, the material is rearranged in poetry to form novel, innovative shapes on the page and distinctive deviations from the initial narrative order are introduced. Though verbatim playwrights make similar editorial decisions in order to achieve particular effects, the actor plays a vital role in ensuring that this is accomplished during the performance. As such, ‘verbatim is not a form’; a means rather than an end, it has previously been known to describe those plays that (re)present characters who already exist in the real world. These particular individuals exist off-stage, as well as being (re)presented on it, and ‘the words th[e]se people are shown to be speaking are indeed their own’.

Verbatim theatre is often identified as being ‘better suited to the task of dealing with serious subject matter’. A number of plays crafted using these methods have been instrumental in engaging with politically- or socially-charged events and Blythe’s London Road is a prime example. The play (re)presents the true-life experiences of residents living on London Road in Ipswich in 2006 when five female prostitutes were murdered. For years, these neighbours have struggled with the soliciting and curb-crawling that has frequently affected their street and the comment below from ‘Julie’ clearly demonstrates this:

‘JULIE. […] We got a lot of bad press erm when it was all goin’ on sayin’ sort ‘Lon – London Road was a prostitute area’ an’ so forth like that and we jus’ got absolutely cheesed off with it as a – as a community it is – it’s not nice bein’ labelled.’

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9 For a full explanation of the research methodology that informed this particular study, see Notes on Research Methods, p.6.
11 For an example of Bhanu Kapil Rider’s work, which I will return to later during my analysis of ‘Deploying Verbatim Methods in Poetry’, see The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers.
13 Hammond and Steward, p.10.
14 Hammond and Steward, p.11.
15 Blythe, p.6. Subsequent references to this text will be given in parentheses in the body of this chapter.
Blythe places this local neighbourhood community at the heart of her production. The playwright highlights her desire for verbatim theatre to uncover something different about or to promote action from the individuals and groups affected by these incidents. ‘Blythe’s plays are even more accessible to the public’ because ordinary people can be in them; ‘verbatim theatre is a remarkably democratic medium’ because the ‘audiences are often actively engaged in dialogue as citizens and [as] putative participants [with]in the public sphere.’ In its (re)presentation of these controversial events – for example, the murders in London Road or the civil disorder (re)performed in The Riots – verbatim theatre occupies a position somewhere between other genres of performance and the work of journalism narratives. The boundaries between theatre and journalism become blurred because, while some journalists alter their narrative conventions and frequently use deictic expressions to ‘foster national unity’ (see Chapter Two, pp.66-8), verbatim theatre productions are understood by their audiences to be ‘accurate source[s] of information’. They achieve something worthy, according to David Hare: ‘do[ing] what journalism fails to do […]’, wanting to create something in the space between what the audience is feeling and what’s going on on stage.

The Origins of Verbatim: Documentary Theatre

Before this chapter can move forward and argue that deploying verbatim methods in poetry is appropriate in this context, it is important to consider the evolution of this kind of writing. In the early twentieth century, theoretical socialist Bertolt Brecht began writing ‘the most innovative’ of dramatic texts known as the Lehrstücke. Described as ‘therapeutic sound poems’ by Andrzej Wirth and Marta Ulvaeus in their essay ‘The Lehrstück as Performance’, these particular texts – including The Measures Taken which was first produced in 1930 –

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16 Hammond and Steward, p.12. See also Fogarth and Megson, p.2.
17 Hammond and Steward, p.10.
18 Hare cited in Hammond and Steward, pp.59-62.
19 At this point within the chapter and, indeed, the entire thesis, it is important to understand and acknowledge that politics was a key underlying factor in both documentary and verbatim theatre practice; in order to ascertain how and why this research moves beyond and away from political agenda.
focused, explicitly, on the experience of teaching and learning through performance.\(^\text{21}\) Composed as a ‘montage of diverse elements’, including ‘chorus, quoted dialogue, quoted movements and situations, the Lehrstücke began to pave the way for a forward-looking theatrical practice that no longer saw the audience as passive spectators, but instead identified them as active participants.\(^\text{22}\) With the intention for performances which were based ‘on the principle that the moral and political lessons contained in them [could] be best taught by participation in the actual production’, Brecht’s Lehrstücke marked the earliest indication of what we recognise today as the deployment of documentary and verbatim methods on stage.\(^\text{23}\) Through this successful attempt to break down the barriers between actors and audience members, Brecht’s focus was on learning, rather than the finished performance. In some ways, this overlaps with the methodology that I have deployed throughout this thesis, as well as the social and political implications of my work here. However, it is also important to acknowledge that my creative output in United We Stand diverts away from this ideology in some respects: a finished piece of work is crafted for a readership that does not intervene in the text in the same way that audience members might have intervened in Brecht’s Lehrstücke as part of its creation.

It is also important to acknowledge the work of Charles Parker as a significant influence on the development of documentary and verbatim theatre and, thus, relevant to the methodology I deploy throughout this thesis. In particular, the series of radio programmes that he produced in collaboration with Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger titled Radio Ballads, and the creation of Banner Theatre, are crucial to our understanding of contemporary examples of the documentary, and to the development of my own work throughout this thesis.\(^\text{24}\) Parker became ‘convinced that he could combine tape recorder and radio into art form’ and achieved exactly that by emulating ‘some of the techniques of the pioneering documentary film-makers during the twentieth century.\(^\text{25}\) He argued:

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\(^{21}\) The project itself believed in ‘two utopian concepts […]: the theatre as metatheatre [and] society without classes’. See Wirth and Ulvaeus, p.113. See also Bertolt Brecht, *The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke* (London: Bloomsbury, 1955).

\(^{22}\) Wirth and Ulvaeus, p.114.


'the documentary idea of Grierson and Rothe is valid for the radio feature, [...] “creative editing” can apply to sound actuality; [...] the function of the documentary should be the interpretation of society to itself.'

Many of these same principles still apply to documentary and verbatim plays being performed in the new millennium (see Alecky Blythe’s London Road, pp.118-25). Explicitly, his idea of applying “creative editing” for the purpose of achieving actuality in the sound of his radio ballads is particularly relevant to the act of “creative editing” that I, as a poet, deploy throughout United We Stand in Chapter Four of this thesis. Like Parker, the concept of ‘actuality’ is particularly important to my own creative output because I aim to achieve a certain level of authenticity in the series of poems in order to demonstrate that those individuals who were ‘unheard’ during the riots in Birmingham have something important to say about their experience of these events. Comparatively, meeting MacColl and Seeger meant for Parker that the three practitioners were able to make ‘listener and programme-maker alike realise that “ordinary” people [could] tell extraordinary stories’.

This is also a key hypothesis of this thesis and the creative intervention, United We Stand, which features within it (Chapter Four). From this enthusiasm for ‘radical community theatre’ and radio documentary, Parker, along with friends, accidentally invented Banner Theatre.

At this point, it is crucial to note that, as Parker was creating Banner Theatre, a second development in the related field of History was becoming equally important. ‘New Oral History’ was resurfacing in the late 1960s and ‘70s with works such as Paul Thompson’s The Voice of the Past and the Oral History journal, which was first produced in 1971, taking centre stage. Following a conference at the British Institute of Recorded Sound in 1973, the Oral History Society was established and John Saville was named the first chairperson of the group. In Amateur Historian in as early as 1957, Laurence Dopson had contended that the ‘collection of information from old people’ was an ‘essential process in compiling local history’ and, now, it seemed as though historians were standing up and paying close attention

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to this idea.  

By the 1970s and ‘80s, oral historians – as they were now recognised – were exploring ‘the historical construction of identities’. This is particularly relevant to the work presented in this thesis as it attempts to do something similar; using participants’ memories and experiences of historical events for the purpose of understanding how community identities were constructed during the riots in Birmingham in 2011. Explicitly, oral historians were focusing on combining ‘history from below’ with the aim of ‘providing a voice for those who would otherwise’, according to Sheila Rowbotham, ‘be “hidden from history”’.  

By the 1980s, key projects in this academic field relating, specifically, to the history of ethnic minority groups had advanced. The Heritage Lottery Fund had given money for a project titled the ‘Black Minority Ethnic Experience’ based in Wolverhampton, while the ‘Birmingham Black Oral History Project Archive’ has since been established for the purpose of storing upwards of 20 years’ worth of recorded material. These developments in Oral History are important to the work of this thesis and its understanding of contemporary documentary and verbatim methods because the discipline’s focus is on ‘recording, archiving and understanding narrated memories’. This is similar to a number of the main aims of this research project; not to mention that some of these history projects were also conducted in the chosen geographical location for my own work; in Birmingham.

Based in Birmingham, Banner Theatre developed a practice that combined methods taken from the production of Radio Ballads with visual stimuli in order to ‘summon the audience up onto the stage’. Although it took a while for the socialist theatre group behind the Company ‘to get Charles’s persistent point about actuality, about using the words of real people and not constructing their words for them’, they eventually developed Saltley Gate – a play which ‘set the pattern for the typical Banner show’ using interview testimony that Parker had already accessed. While United We Stand does not encourage the reader to intervene in the text in the same way that Banner Theatre’s productions summon audience members to be involved in its performance, just as Brecht’s did, the methodology that I deploy throughout the series of poems presented in Chapter Four is similar to that deployed by the theatre company here. In particular, I combine interview testimony with visual images

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33 Sheila Rowbotham, Hidden from History: 300 years of Women’s Oppression and the Fight against it (London, Pluto Classics, 1973).
36 ‘From Ballads to Banners’, p. 232.
37 ‘From Ballads to Banners’, p. 231.
in the form of pie-charts and scatter-graphs (see ‘The Takeover’, p.183) and these form part of a groundbreaking body of work that demonstrates how communities existed during the riots in Birmingham in 2011. Like Brecht’s *Lehrstücke*, Parker and company’s *Radio Ballads*, and the two examples of documentary theatre that this chapter begins its analysis with, the individuals behind Banner Theatre established ‘a genuinely democratic culture that focused on ordinary people’s experiences’, which is much like the focus of the creative output in the thesis.  

The work of Banner Theatre also contained elements of ‘the early agitprop’, which was pioneered by Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood, and it is to an example of this documentary theatre that this chapter turns next.  

Moving to an examination of two examples of documentary theatre, specifically the politically-driven work of Unity Theatre (Busmen, 1938) and Theatre Union (Last Edition, 1940), this chapter now studies two examples of the genre – in the form of the ‘Living Newspaper’ – in order to comprehend how it worked. An understanding of this particular method from documentary theatre determines that verbatim has developed as a direct result of the documented. This raises a number of ethical questions about this genre of theatre and issues relative to authorship and authentic (re)presentations of trauma are returned to later in the chapter. This analysis results in a precise appreciation for *how* and *why* these documentary and verbatim methods are idiosyncratic.

Documentary theatre refers to the earlier plays and performances of groups, including Unity Theatre (previously known as Merseyside Left Theatre) and Ewan MacColl’s Theatre Union, which were based on “the indexical traces of the presence of a real past” and considered to exist in a variety of printed and electronic documents. This form – similar to the verbatim methods that are a consequence of it – relied, principally, on the use of ‘primary source material’; that is, the ‘painstaking, protracted, and scrupulous use of historic

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40 In his article, John W. Casson comments on the history of the living newspaper as ‘a concept which spread to left-wing groups internationally’. It ‘practised “lit-montage”, i.e. the scripts were cut-ups, principally of material from papers and magazines. […] Living Newspapers kept their illiterate audiences in touch with the issues of the day’. For a full explanation, see ‘Living Newspaper: Theatre and Therapy’, *The Drama Review*, 44, 2 (2000), 107-22, in Project Muse <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/33003/summary> [accessed on Tuesday 22 March 2016].
41 For an example of criticism relative to (re)presentations of Trauma within Verbatim Theatre, see Amanda Stuart Fisher, ‘Trauma, Authenticity and the Limits of Verbatim’, *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 16, 1 (2011), 112-22, in Taylor and Francis <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13528165.2011.561683> [accessed on Tuesday 19 November 2013], which I will return to later in this chapter.
This ‘whole tradition of documentary’, which Cheeseman – with his ‘unique vision of the role of theatre in the community’ – and many of his contemporaries in the 1930s were following, was supplementary to a number of pivotal works. Namely, the efforts of Scottish-born ‘father of the documentary’ John Grierson; Phillip Donellan, a pioneer of television that ‘give a voice to ordinary people’; and BBC Radio producer, Charles Parker, who specialised in both documentary radio and theatre as discussed on pages 103-4 of this chapter. Whether sourcing their ‘facts’ from newspapers, judicial proceedings or other important artefacts, the power of these documentary performances depended, chiefly, on ‘the control of the documents’; how they were carefully selected and handled by these skilled craftsmen, known, today, as the instigators of documentary theatre. As a result of their early work in the first half of the twentieth century, the documentary form – comparable to the verbatim plays that followed – ‘has always been, and [still] remains, a powerful tool for polemic (passionate argument) and advocacy’.

**Unity Theatre (1938)**

Situated in Merseyside, Liverpool, Unity Theatre made a number of contributions to the political and socialist actions of the 1930s. ‘[F]rom the Popular Front… to war and peace’, their work – in connection with ‘the struggles against fascism and in support of Spanish democracy’ – resulted in the theatre group becoming a substantial part of the Labour Movement’s history within their region. Armed with a primary purpose that was ‘to foster and further the art of drama in accordance with the principle that true art, by effectively and truthfully interpreting life as experienced by the majority of the

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43 Cheeseman as cited in Paget, p.318.
45 Cheeseman as cited in Paget, p. 318. Predating the history of verbatim theatre back to late eighteenth century Germany in Sturm and Drang (Storm and Stress), Ulrike Garde, Meg Mumford and Caroline Wake consider the history of these methods to include docudrama, the political theatre of Erwin Piscator, Living Newspapers and other, interwar forms like those performed by Unity Theatre and Theatre Union. It is with the latter than this chapter begins. See ‘A Short History of Verbatim Theatre’, in *Verbatim: Staging Memory and Community* (Strawberry Hills, NSW: Currency, 2010), pp.9-17.
46 Reinelt, p.7.
people, can move the people to work for the betterment of society (Chambers, 1989, p.19).^{49} this particular theatre group became an iconic symbol for unity; an amalgamation between intellectuals (the bourgeoisie) and the working classes that flourished to form an example of “‘Proletarian Art’”.^{50} This art form ‘[was] used as a weapon in the class struggle’ and Unity Theatre emphasised that a ‘real talent and understanding of the arts’ thrived among their ‘talks, discussions and poetry readings’.^{51} Thus, a policy for a theatre that sat, resolutely, on the left was born.

Documented by Dawson in his record, *Left Theatre: Merseyside Unity Theatre*, the policy highlighted a number of definitive points that are still of relevance today. Most provocative was the decision to recognise the theatre as a political platform and not just a theatre stage.^{52} Favouring truth, ‘which was masked by the ruling class and its cultural outsiders’, Unity Theatre identified itself as ‘belonging to a particular (working) class’.^{53} The collective purposefully experimented with ‘two main documentary forms […] the living newspaper (drawing on contemporary events) and historical drama’ in the formation of their work because their message, and where they communicated it, ‘demand[ed] new forms’.^{54} These innovative methods of documentary theatre would speak ‘a different language in a different voice to a different audience’ allowing Unity Theatre to ‘respond to the changing political scene’.^{55} By presenting plays with three fundamental objectives in mind, Unity Theatre captured its working classes *en masse* in a bid to ‘serv[e] the labour movement’ and the community.^{56} It is to one performance in particular – *Living Newspaper No. 1: Busmen* (1938) – that this chapter now turns; as a leading example of Unity Theatre’s reliance on the document to establish record and achieve these purposes.

Unity Theatre used ‘two expelled bus workers’ leaders’ (Bert Papworth and Bill Jones) as their muse for *Busmen*. Maintaining and exercising a new kind of control over the

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50 Eric Heffer, MP, ‘Foreword’ (no pagination given).
51 Eric Heffer, MP, ‘Foreword’ (no pagination given).
53 Chambers, p.39.
54 Chambers, p.40.
55 Chambers, p.39. See also Dawson, ‘Preface’ in *Left Theatre: Merseyside Unity Theatre – A Documentary Record* (no pagination given).
56 Dawson, ‘Preface’ (no pagination given).
raw material that was to be the inspiration behind this particular performance, the two workers were asked to assist the theatre company in the authentication of their scripts by providing insider knowledge and confirming dialogue.\(^5^7\) A form of ‘drama-documentary’ that was shaped in response to the strike of London’s busmen, this production appealed to the working classes because of its allegiance to the truth. Documents including transcripts from various hearings about the strike were employed to verify the facts and the play took the form of the ‘living newspaper’. ‘[A]n innovative theatrical technique which had made politics possible on the commercial stage’, the living newspaper became known to the public for its ability to draw on these socio-political events (much like the newspapers still in circulation today).\(^5^8\)

As Don Watson acknowledges in his 1981 article, ‘Busmen: Documentary and British Political Theatre in the 1930s’, the play opens with ‘The Voice’ of the Living Newspaper listing the strikes that were to take place in 1937 through a loudspeaker.\(^5^9\) A parliamentary debate is then (re)presented on the stage and actors involved in the performance quote ‘the actual speeches of MPs and ministers’, while ‘The Voice’ continues to interrupt and provide the audience with vital information.\(^6^0\) This includes details of financial profits – in the form of statistical data visualised on screen using a projector – and the names of all other companies that were likely to be affected by the decision.\(^6^1\) The moment of Jack and Arthur’s discussion about the latter’s new route and timesheet (evidenced below) demonstrates this choice – to position ‘The Voice’ as an off-stage narrator while, simultaneously, depicting it as an omnipresent focalisation:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Jack:} What’s up?
\textbf{Arthur:} My new time sheet.
\textbf{Jack:} What’s your route?
\textbf{Arthur:} East Ham to Ladbroke Grove. Running time cut again.
\textbf{Jack:} Your name’s not on the payroll as Arthur.
\textbf{Arthur:} What is it then?
\end{quote}

\(^5^7\) Chambers, p.41.
\(^5^9\) Watson, p.342.
\(^6^0\) Watson, p.342.
\(^6^1\) This method of including visual stimuli – in this case, statistical data which is made available ‘on screen using a projector’ -- is similar to the technique incorporated by Charles Parker in both Radio Ballads and the productions written and performed by Banner Theatre (see pp.103-5 of this chapter).
Jack: Malcolm Campbell.

(Voice of Living Newspaper: Mileage increased 5-10%. Number of miles travelled increases by 7000 over the previous year. Wages of drivers £4 2s. a week. Chairman of Board's part-time wage £240 a week.)  

With a legitimacy coming from behind-the-scenes, in Papworth and Jones’s validation of the written and, even, the visual representations (e.g. ‘The Voice’ as an off-stage reporter and details of costumes and props), the accuracy of the particulars that appeared among the other, partly, fictionalised accounts on stage embodied the essential foundations of the production: to avoid ‘art for art’s sake’.  

‘Authenticity was achieved in a myriad of ways, especially in cultural nuance, through voice, gesture, stance, clothing and set design’ and it was often the case that the implementation of primary materials would serve to counter speculative assumptions made, publicly, in other written articles at the time: ‘We stuck all sorts of bits in with scissors and paste […] and I went home and edited it’ (Chambers, 1989, p.143).  

Theatre Union (1940)

Also fundamental to the upsurge of documentary-based performance – as an omnipotent entity that encouraged equality and class consciousness – was the contribution from further east of the Mersey. Founded in 1936, Theatre Union was the brain-child of Labour activist, actor and playwright Ewan MacColl and his partner Joan Littlewood. Based in the city of Manchester, this particular theatre production company was the husband and wife’s working involvement in ‘the forces of democracy’. Writing in their manifesto, MacColl comments:

‘We live in times of great social upheaval; faced with an ever-increasing danger of war and fascism, the democratic people of the world have been forced into action.

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62 Watson, p.342.
63 Chambers, p.39.
64 Chambers, pp.41-9. With no stage upon which to visualise gesture, clothing or set design, I argue that this authenticity cannot be achieved in the same way when writing poetry (see pages 134-42 of this chapter).
Their struggle for peace and progress manifests itself in many forms and not the least important of these is the drama.67

Similar to the aforementioned Unity Theatre and Charles Parker’s Banner Theatre in Birmingham, this group aimed to present to the ‘widest possible public’; to those subdivisions of the [Manchester] community that were ‘starved theatrically’, marginalised and unable to access the theatre as a result of their financial or social status.68 Specialising in plays of explicit social significance, Theatre Union often appealed to both ‘Trade Unions and […] all parties engaged in the struggle for peace and progress’.69 They endeavoured to raise funds for medical aid and the Spanish people through plays such as Lope de Vega’s Fuente Ovejuna (The Sheep-Well).70 ‘[A]ttuned to the genesis of zhivayagazeta’ (the living newspaper) in revolutionary Russia, as well as developments of the form in both American theatre and the works of their British contemporaries, Theatre Union began depending on these new methods.71 ‘[W]e hadn’t seen any scripts’, MacColl comments in 1973, before later admitting: ‘“We were being very eclectic – testing things out, seeing if they worked” (MacColl, 1985, p.243).72 The company’s later production, Last Edition: A Living Newspaper Dealing with Events from 1934-1940 is this chapter’s second, palpable example of documentary theatre and the experimentation of the living newspaper.

In the same way that the former example from Busmen demonstrated the effect of ‘The Voice’ as an invisible (off-stage) raconteur, the narrative perspectives deployed throughout Theatre Union’s Last Edition work to the same avail: demonstrating how institutionalised newspapers are instrumental in determining the perceptions of the privileged.73 During one particular scene within the production, Last Edition ‘cites and samples’ a long list of establishment newspapers and makes visible to the working classes the role of this mode of communication in promoting such opinions.74 When “‘two fashionable

67 See ‘Manifesto’ (para. 1 of 3).
68 See ‘Manifesto’ (para. 2 of 3).
69 See ‘Manifesto’ (para. 3 of 3).
70 See ‘Manifesto’ (para. 3 of 3) and ‘Theatre Union’, Working Class Movement Library (WCML) (para. 13 of 37).
72 Harker, p.25.
73 In his 1934 essay, “The Author as Producer”, Walter Benjamin described the form of the contemporary newspaper as “an arena of… literary confusion” […] What Benjamin called the newspaper’s “unselective assimilation of facts” (p.90), Last Edition presents as the ruling class’s inability to grasp social totality, to feel the rhythm of history, or to make connections between disparate phenomena.”, as cited in Harker, pp.26-7.
women” find themselves uncomfortably close to the House of Commons during the explosive culmination of the 1934 Hunger March’, they “‘see’ the hunger marches through the prism of the dominant press’. As a result of reading the newspaper to avoid witnessing the masses and their chants, the women comment: “‘Oh my dear, these rough men. Whatever is the country coming to?’” (p.16)’. I argue that they appear to side, subconsciously, with the powers that be and become members of a national imagined community in this context. It is possible to argue that Theatre Union’s message to its audience here about ‘the dominant press’ is similar to points put forward by Mihelj in Media Nations (see Chapter Two, pp.66-9). Mihelj suggests that ‘media narratives become structured around sharp divisions between “us” and “them”’ in situations of ‘sudden conflict or catastrophe’. I argue that these sharp divisions are (re)presented by Theatre Union in order to demonstrate that such partitions do occur, both in media narratives and throughout society. By positioning the women as they do in this instance – distancing themselves from those marching – Theatre Union deploys the living newspaper as a documentary method in order to (re)perform this same “us” and “them” dichotomy on-stage. The division is located between the fortunate, fashionable women and the disadvantaged protestors, rather than between the bus workers and Board Committee as in Unity Theatre’s production. The (re)performance of this promotes a sense of national identity and explores the idea of imagined community through documentary methods. In turn, how and why the boundaries between theatre and journalism are blurred becomes clear.

Both Unity Theatre and Theatre Union, just like the contemporary Banner Theatre based in the West Midlands, were companies of amateur status and their positions,

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78 Mihelj presents this ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the context of one nation being at war with another. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I argue that these changes she identifies in media narratives are also relevant in the context of one, singular nation; when conflict occurs between two distinct groups (or communities) within that one nation.
79 Such divisions – (re)presented on-stage in performance and off-stage in the scripts that have gone before the performances – simultaneously epitomise the Bourdieusian concept of ‘cultural capital’. Referring to the collection of symbolic elements, including clothing, belongings and credentials relative to education and wealth (for example, the ‘fashionable women’s clothes in Last Edition), Bourdieu argued that sharing similar forms of this cultural capital often led to a sense of collective identity (community) in ‘a people like us’. However, this collective identity subsequently led to social inequality and exclusion for those outside of it. See Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’, in The Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, ed. by John G. Richardson (New York, NY: Greenwood, 1986), pp.241-58.
paradoxically, became a great ‘source of marginal cultural power’ for them. Writing in *Illusion and Reality* in 1937, poet Christopher Caudwell suggested that

‘The task of the proletariat is just as much to integrate this ideological confusion and raise it to a new level of consciousness, as it is to integrate the economic confusion and raise it to a new level of production’,

and all three theatre groups produced plays with this advancement in mind. The form of the living newspaper in these works by Unity Theatre and Theatre Union, specifically, enables reality to be ‘reconstructed, critiqued and improved’ in the companies’ commitments to ‘challeng[e] the dominant media’s construction of the real’. It is possible to contend that these two examples of documentary theatre – in particular, the living newspapers they crafted – attempt to challenge the apparent agendas of Nationalism that were presented by popular media at this time. ‘The implication of the term Living Newspaper was that the official print media was inert, moribund or already dead’ when this was not the case. Institutionalised media was very much alive; with *some* newspapers being motivated by a schema to *(re)*promote national identity and, in turn, the divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ that Mihelj has recognised. *Busmen* and *Last Edition* highlight the existence of these divisions and simultaneously respond to ‘the hidden mediations of the establishment’. This resolve – to depict the role of the media, and the advantaged few responsible for it, in their constitution of the real – is one that this thesis returns to later; in its evaluation of verbatim as an appropriate method through which to craft poetic narratives (see Chapter Five). Through the deployment of verbatim methods, *United We Stand* *(re)*presents expressions of identity and the forms of belonging (local, national and ‘wispy’) that were in existence during the disorder in Birmingham. It demonstrates how language and modes of communication simultaneously promoted and challenged the nation. *United We Stand* becomes its own example of this; transforming voice(s) in order to encourage agency among ordinary people in its own context.

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80 Harker, p.25.  
81 Harker, p.28.  
82 Harker, p.31.  
84 Mihelj, p.96.  
Contemporary Verbatim Theatre: Three Examples

Although Reinelt’s description of documentary theatre suggests that it is difficult to establish – with ‘no fixed inventory of techniques’ or particular list of concerns – the examples I have evidenced above suggest otherwise.86 I argue that both documentary and verbatim theatre productions are identifiable because they manage politically-driven subjects, including strikes, protests and marches. Documentary and verbatim playwrights handle these topics through the deployment of specific methods; the ‘cut-ups’ technique that Casson recognises in his article is often arranged in the production of Living Newspapers such as those presented earlier (see fn.18). In his 1987 article, Paget considers this ‘latest manifestation of documentary theatre’ through interviews with those involved in the ‘development of [such a] distinctive form’.87 Focusing on the advances of the method, he distinguishes that this particular type of theatre owes its ‘present health and exciting potential’ to the portable tape recorder.88 It was, and still is, resolutely dependent on the recording of interviews and transcription of eye-witness testimonies with real people. As a result, ‘what you hear spoken’ during a contemporary verbatim performance are the ‘authentic and unaltered’ perspectives of real-life people.89 This means that contemporary verbatim performances are driven by and conducted in a research-led context. Whether this is the institutionalised racism and corruption by police during The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry – as presented by Norton-Taylor in The Colour of Justice – or events affecting both individuals and communities of a particular region – such as the murders of the prostitutes on London Road or the disorder taking place on the streets of Tottenham during The Riots – verbatim theatre continues to be instrumental in our engagement with socio-political issues.90 No longer motivated by the ‘differences’ between audience and actor, these performances highlight the significance of community; a ‘collective method’ which removes these differences because ‘[t]he

86 Bill Nichols as cited in Reinelt, p.7.
87 Paget, p.317.
88 Paget, p.317. The ‘present health and exciting potential’ of documentary and verbatim theatre that Paget recognises here relates to the form’s position and reputation during the 1980s – when this article was first written and published. Not the first time that the tape recorder has been recognised for its potential, Alan Lomax acknowledged that this ‘portable recording machine […] provided [him and his father] with the first breakthrough’ during their ‘personal attempts […] to record the way the black laborers of the Delta saw their situation […] by making it possible to record and play back music in remote areas, away from electrical sources, [the tape recorder] gave a voice to the voiceless’. See Alan Lomax, ‘Preface’, in The Land Where the Blues Began (New York, NY: New Press, 1993), pp.ix-xv (pp.x-xi).
89 Reinelt, p.13.
90 Norton-Taylor’s The Colour of Justice (1999), Blythe’s London Road (2011) and Slovo’s The Riots (2011) have all (re)presented similarly-charged topics reportedly relating to race, gender or terrorism. The most relevant to this thesis is Slovo’s play on the civil disorder that took place in Tottenham in 2011.
documentary is not in the object’. In its place, ‘the relationship between the object, its mediators and its audiences’ becomes the dominant factor and this characteristic of contemporary verbatim theatre is one that I return to when I discuss the method’s credibility later in this chapter.

Although it has been important to acknowledge the history of the genre and understand the agendas of the previously-mentioned productions by Unity Theatre and Theatre Union, this chapter turns to an examination of the methods of contemporary verbatim and to a consideration of poetics; specifically, the literary techniques which assist in the effectiveness of these methods. In order to understand how and why these methods of verbatim are a suitable approach with which to (re)present expressions of identity, the chapter focuses on the playwrights’ formal experiment to deploy them within their creative work. Although the subject matters explored within each of the following examples might offer readers an insight into the schemas that lie beneath contemporary verbatim performances, this chapter takes a different direction in its analysis of them. It considers the playwrights’ ‘strategic editorial choices’ relative to spatial (geographical) and temporal (chronological) (re)presentations of characters and events, as well as taking into account the arrangement of literary techniques within each production’s script. The chapter examines narrative focalisation by placing specific emphasis on the effective transformation of voice(s). An analysis of these plays demonstrates awareness of the ethical issues that surround verbatim methods – specifically, the playwrights’ knowledge and communication of traumatic experiences in these cases. It considers how methods of verbatim are continually evolving in the digital age by examining Blythe’s recorded-delivery technique during rehearsals for London Road. With an emphasis on expressions of identity, community ‘groups [and] areas of influence’, this chapter recognises the various shared methods deployed by these playwrights when creating their scripts ‘in verbatim’ and how each writer continues to develop their own methods of verbatim within their creative practice. This informs my understanding of how these contemporary verbatim methods have previously been deployed.

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91 Reinelt, p.7.
92 Reinelt, p.7. Own emphasis added.
94 Weiss as cited in Megson, p. 200. While the performance element of verbatim theatre is acknowledged and considered here, emphasis is placed on the script because the poetry series that follows (see Chapter Four) can only deploy verbatim methods for textual effect.
in theatre to (re)present a variety of identities and fluid or emergent imagined communities, whether national, local or cultural.

**The Colour of Justice (1999)**

Norton-Taylor’s *The Colour of Justice: Based on the transcripts of The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* is an examination that ‘consisted of 69 days of public hearings’ following the investigation by police into Lawrence’s murder in 1993.\(^95\) In the ‘Editor’s Note’ of his published script, the playwright acknowledges that as little as ‘less than one percent’ of the ‘eleven thousand pages’ from the transcripts are actually included (p.7). Recognising that the writer must ‘make brutal choices about which witnesses and exchanges to include’ (p.7), Norton-Taylor establishes that these editorial decisions are key when deploying methods of verbatim in theatre.\(^96\) The role of the writer as editor in this instance raises ethical questions relating to authorship and the (re)presentation of both character and experience. In *The Colour of Justice*, this ethical issue becomes relevant to Norton-Taylor’s attempt to communicate the traumatic experiences relative to and in the aftermath of Stephen Lawrence’s death throughout both his script and the on-stage performance that follows.

Articles including Amanda Stuart Fisher’s ‘Trauma, Authenticity and the Limits of Verbatim’ (2011) have debated this ethical question regarding verbatim (re)presentations of trauma at length.\(^97\) Stuart Fisher argues that to suggest the ‘authenticity of verbatim theatre that deals with trauma can be explained simply’, by levels of truthfulness, is to ‘overlook the problem trauma presents’.\(^98\) It actually ‘places limitations on [verbatim] theatre’s capacity to respond authentically to real stories of trauma’.\(^99\) Stuart Fisher’s argument holds validity here, because trauma (according to Psychoanalysis) refers, specifically, to ‘[a] psychic injury […] caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed’

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\(^95\) Norton-Taylor, ‘Editor’s Note’, in *The Colour of Justice: Based on the transcripts of The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* (London: Oberon, 1999), pp.7-8 (p.7). Subsequent references to this text will be given in parentheses in the body of this chapter.

\(^96\) More comments on the significance of these editorial decisions can be found during the detailed analysis of Blythe’s *London Road* (see pages 118-25 of this chapter).

\(^97\) Stuart Fisher, p.112. It is important to acknowledge the wide variety of work that has already been published on the representations of trauma; not only within Literature, but in fields including Clinical Psychology, see Rachel E. Goldsmith and Michelle Satterlee, ‘Representations of Trauma in Clinical Psychology and Fiction’, *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 5:2 (2004), 35-59, in Taylor and Francis <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1300/J229v05n02_03> [accessed on Monday 4 July 2016], and History, see Deborah Jenson, *Trauma and its Representations: The Social Life of Mimesis in Post-Revolutionary France* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins, 2001).

\(^98\) Stuart Fisher, pp.112-3.

\(^99\) Stuart Fisher, p.112.
It is intangible; incomprehensible to anyone including even the individual who experiences it as a result of the memory’s decision to repress it. Yet, the testimonies and transcripts that Norton-Taylor chooses to embrace are the ‘most telling exchanges’ of all (p.7). Reflecting ‘police incompetence, conscious or unconscious racism and stereotyping, and even the hint of corruption’ (p.8), the transcripts, which are deployed as part of the verbatim method, provide the playwright with the raw material necessary to capture something of these personal tensions. Norton-Taylor moves one step closer to (re)presenting trauma by choosing to pay close attention to the traumatic experiences that Lawrence’s family were subjected to everyday throughout the inquiry. On pages 102-3 of the play’s script – during the ‘evidence of Mr Ilsley, formerly Detective Chief Superintende[nt], 2-4 June 1998’ (p.102) – counsellor Edmund Lawson is questioning Ilsley about the day he met with Doreen and Neville Lawrence (Stephen’s parents). During this scene, the inquiry revisits the moment in which Mrs Lawrence hands Mr Ilsley a potential suspects list, which he subsequently ‘screw[s] up’ (p.102). Norton-Taylor frames the scene so that it is centred on the highly-charged, emotional responses of Mrs Lawrence in this instance. The (re)presentation of this moment during the inquiry reads as follows in his script:

‘LAWSON: And you know that Mrs Lawrence, in particular, was distressed because you appeared, in effect, to scumble it up as if you were going to throw it away?
ILSLEY: That’s correct, sir, yes.
LAWSON: She said, having handed the note to you, she saw you fold the paper up so small she found it shocking. In fact, the original note is available. Can you take it please (Handed). It does bear the signs of having been folded and folded and folded again into a tiny piece of paper?
ILSLEY: Yes, sir, it does. […]
LAWSON: It appeared that you were not treating it seriously from what she could see?
ILSLEY: No, I dispute this. I think Mrs Lawrence has said that I screwed it up. I didn’t screw it up. I folded it. Why I folded it like that, I don’t know, but it went straight into the system.

101 An incorrect spelling (‘Superintended’) was spotted in the print edition of The Colour of Justice (1999). For the purpose of this analysis, I have corrected it to read ‘Superintende[nt]’ throughout.
LAWSON: What Mrs Lawrence said is: “He rolled the piece of paper up in a ball in his hand. I was shocked by what I saw.”

ILSLEY: I didn’t do that, sir.

LAWSON: But you did fold it up?

ILSLEY: I did fold it, absolutely, sir.’ (p.103)

Like Blythe’s *London Road*, which is centred on a neighbourhood community *ex post facto*, *The Colour of Justice* also focuses on the aftermath of a traumatic experience following the death of Stephen Lawrence. Norton-Taylor deploys repetition throughout his script in order to emphasise important patterns of sound and to position the emotional responses from Mrs Lawrence in this moment at the forefront of his text. He embraces words such as ‘distressed’ and ‘shocked’ (p.103), repeating them on a number of occasions and as variations (‘shocking’) across a single page. This highlights the significance of this particular incident during the aftermath of her son’s death leaving Mrs Lawrence feeling emotionally negative. Consistent repetition of the phrases ‘scrumple it up’, ‘fold the paper up’, ‘folded and folded and folded again’ and ‘screw it up’ (also on page 103) reinforce this wrong-doing on Mr Ilsley’s part by implying that he was ‘going to throw [the list] away’. This not only indicates that the ‘Superintende[nt]’ had purposefully planned to be ‘dismissive of th[e] information’ given to him by Lawrence’s mother, but the emphasis placed on Mrs Lawrence’s emotions here (through repetition) signifies that the incident was a traumatic experience for her. This is then reinforced by Norton-Taylor’s decision to include the fact that a complaint was filed by Mr and Mrs Lawrence in response to the incident (p.105).

Although Norton-Taylor’s (re)presentation of this moment during the inquiry repositions it as a crucial incident in uncovering the truth behind the possible incompetence and corruption by police following Stephen’s death, it remains impossible for the trauma experienced by Lawrence’s parents and family to be made ‘knowable’ in this text. Norton-Taylor’s conscious edits to the raw material extracted from the original transcripts and testimonies do allow him to step closer to trauma in a sense; exposing this particular incident for the traumatic experience that it was. However, it is the *experience* associated with trauma,  

102 An examination of emotional responses can be recognised in poems, including ‘Police Action from a Smart Phone’, (re)presented in *United We Stand* (see Chapter Four, p.153).

103 Stuart Fisher, p.113. Despite arguing that the traumatic experience is both transparent and communicable in this context, Stuart Fisher’s criticism relating to authentic representations of trauma in verbatim theatre is still relevant here. Although Norton-Taylor manages to (re)present the trauma that Mrs Lawrence experiences in a way that is both clear and easy for his audience (or readers) to understand, they still cannot know the trauma that his character is experiencing because they are not her and will not have experienced it in the same way she has.
not the psychic injury itself, that Norton-Taylor makes ‘transparent [and] even communicable’ throughout his script. Through a combination of literary techniques (including repetition) and verbatim methods, the playwright successfully demonstrates that it is possible to communicate traumatic experiences through theatre. While these experiences can be portrayed authentically, trauma itself cannot. The relevance of Stuart Fisher’s argument in this case can also be applied to Blythe’s *London Road*. The playwright distances her play, and the characters (re)presented within it, from the traumatic experience of the murders, choosing to pay close attention to the community spirit prevailing in the neighbourhood. It might be fair to suggest that Blythe does this because of the ethical limitations surrounding traumatic experiences. Either way, her editorial decision to turn away from the issue of (re)presenting such events, in favour of celebrating the local community, is an important choice that this chapter examines.

**London Road (2011)**

‘Documenting the events of 2006, when the quiet, rural town of Ipswich was shattered by the discovery of the bodies of five women’, *London Road* was hailed ‘[g]enuinely groundbreaking’ in reviews by *Time Out*. Although the play was clearly inspired by the socially-charged events (the five murders) that stimulated its production, I argue that Blythe goes beyond these incidents and captures ‘raw humanity […] in music[al]’ form in both script and performance. A ‘raw humanity’ and a direction that is most relevant when considering the work of this thesis in its own enquiry. In a bid to explore the ‘wider communit[ies] in the lives of those on the periphery’, Blythe discusses the key ‘groups [and] areas of influence’ that encouraged her to approach this play ‘in verbatim’ in the introduction to her script. She suggests that ‘[i]t was not what was mainly being reported in the media about the victims or the possible suspects’ that caused her to pay attention to Ipswich, but ‘the ripples it created in the wider community…’ that she wanted to explore. As such, I argue that Blythe

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104 Stuart Fisher, p.113.
106 *Time Out* review quotation, ‘London Road’, *National Theatre* (2016). The significance of the national media having not reported what Blythe refers to as this particular ‘final’ and ‘important’ chapter in her production of *London Road* is also, in part, the reasoning behind my own focus on the community ‘togetherness’ in Birmingham during the riots of 2011.
108 ‘Events of this proportion take hold in all sorts of areas outside the lead story, and that is what I wanted to explore.’ Blythe, p. vii.
positions the neighbourhood community at the centre of her script.\textsuperscript{109} Similar to those neighbourhood communities that I uncover in Birmingham throughout \textit{United We Stand} (see ‘Forecourt’, in Chapter Four, p.167), the residents of \textit{London Road} ‘come together and set up a series of events […] in order to try and heal’ the street and their community.\textsuperscript{110} For Blythe, this togetherness and the people’s responses to the murders were of paramount importance and similar ideas of community – the nationally-imagined and ‘micro-imagined wispy’ communities, and the local neighbourhood – inspire the creation of \textit{United We Stand}.\textsuperscript{111} In the case of \textit{London Road} and the creative intervention that forms part of this thesis, the people’s story had to be (re)presented, whether on-stage or on-the-page, because ‘the national media had not reported th[e] final and [most] important chapter’ of it.\textsuperscript{112}

As Act One of Blythe’s play begins, members of the audience find themselves located in a ‘\textit{Church hall just off London Road}’ (p.5). The readers (and subsequently Blythe’s audience members) are introduced to RON during an ‘\textit{audio recording}’ of his ‘\textit{opening speech}’ at a local Neighbourhood Watch meeting; identified as a direct result of the opening song: ‘\textit{Neighbourhood Watch AGM}’.\textsuperscript{113}

\begin{quote}
\textit{RON. Good evening. (Beat.) Welcome. (Beat.) This really is our first AGM after we reconstituted in 2006 and then all the awful events happened and we became stronger an’ stronger. Erm (Beat.) aft’ so after our er reconstitution we made a lot – we made a lot of progress in regenerating this street. We’ve put new signs up, thanks to Ken. Hope-hopefully the problem with the girls has disappeared. We don’t see them now.’}
\end{quote}

(p.5).

The playwright edits the interview testimony of the ‘“real-life” original’ Ron, ensuring that every individual trait of his personal speech and vernacular is maintained throughout the text using verbatim methods. In a similar manner to Slovo’s production of \textit{The Riots} (see pp.125-34 of this chapter), ‘[e]very cough, stutter and hesitation is reproduced’ in order to emphasise

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\textsuperscript{110} Blythe, p.vii. This idea of a community coming together to ‘set up a series of events […] in order to try and heal’ itself is also relevant in the context of the UK Riots in Birmingham in 2011. Similar community spirits are demonstrated through the visual poem, ‘Community Clean-Ups According to Twitter’ (see Chapter Four, p.184 of this thesis).
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\textsuperscript{111} For a detailed explanation of the national ‘imagined’ community (Anderson, 2006) and more recent developments of ‘wisy’ (local) communities (Fine and Scott, 2011), see Chapter One of this thesis.
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\textsuperscript{112} Blythe, p.vii.
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\textsuperscript{113} Blythe, p.vii.
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the play’s credibility with regards to the truth. To replicate this, Blythe deploys verbatim methods that include additional electronic devices in the performance. On top of the already-crucial tape recorder that Paget suggests is vital to the interview process, this ‘recorded-delivery’ combines the ‘journalistic technique of interviewing her subjects with the art of reproducing their words accurately in performance’ and was, originally, devised and deployed by Anna Deavere Smith. Just like Smith, Blythe recognises the benefits of being able to (re)present the stories and experiences of a community and I argue that the series of verbatim poems presented in United We Stand is developed from the same precedent. As a contemporary example of ‘recorded-delivery’, London Road is about ‘going into a community of some sort and recording conversations with people’ (Introduction, p.v).

In an explanation of how she devises her own version of this ‘recorded-delivery’ method, Blythe argues that the fact ‘the actors do not see the text’ is crucial (p.v). The ‘edited recordings are played live to actors’ using headphones and this happens both off-stage (when rehearsing from the script) and on-stage during the live performance. I argue that this ‘recorded-delivery’ method creates its own ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community in the theatre. Located within the specific spatial and temporal confines of the performance, bonds between the subject (interviewee) and mediator (actor) are ‘imagined’ into existence; first as a result of Blythe’s edits to the raw material extracted from the subject’s narrative and, then, in her subsequent decision to deploy the actors on-stage for a performance of the script. These bonds are strengthened by the audio recordings because the actors feel as if they know and identify with the ““real-life” originals that Blythe interviewed as a result of the act of listening. Whether lone words, complex phrases or small hesitations, the repetition of these recorded characteristics helps the actor to ‘remain accurate to the original’ version of what they are hearing (p.vi). Blythe suggests that the desire to achieve this accuracy is why

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114 Blythe, p.vii.
116 It is significant to note that both Smith and Slovo deploy verbatim methods in creative works that explore events of civil disorder in both the US (Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992) and the UK (The Riots, 2011). This demonstrates that the deployment of verbatim methods is appropriate in my examination of the civil disorder that occurred during the UK riots in Birmingham in 2011
London Road was crafted using verbatim methods in the first place. I argue that this deployment of verbatim methods in Blythe’s play enables her to achieve more than just accuracy. She (re)presents ‘the concern with safety among residents’ in the aftermath of the Ipswich murders and London Road places an emphasis on ‘the imagined space of the neighbourhood’ as a zone in which the production of community can occur.119

Before I examine the (re)presentation of this community in London Road in detail, it is important to consider the verbatim method of ‘recorded-delivery’ in the Marxist sense. According to Paget, the deployment of verbatim methods means that playwrights are able to ‘offer actors a greater share in the means of production’.120 Yet, I argue that this is not strictly true here. Asking the actors to listen to the edited recordings through headphones – both off-stage in rehearsals and on-stage during live performances – ‘recorded-delivery’ risks turning the actors into mere imitators of the original people they are listening to. Through the monotonous repetition of recorded characteristics (hesitations and utterances, for example) in the script and subsequent recordings, the actors are expected to ‘remain accurate to the original’ testimonies (p.vi). They are only permitted to imitate the interviewees, rather than creatively responding to their testimonies. Blythe’s ‘recorded-delivery’ output in the production of London Road is a little more complex though, because, during the rehearsals for a performance at the National Theatre, actors were unable to use their electronic headsets.121 In order to get around this restriction – because Blythe’s output relied increasingly on the audio playback of her edited script through these electronic headsets – the playwright kept her own headphones on. Listening to the original testimonies as she had (re)presented them in her script, Blythe would request that the actors rehearse their lines until they successfully mirrored the edited recording as she could hear it through her headset. At first, the removal of the actors’ headphones seems to suggest that they might be offered ‘a greater share’ in the means of Blythe’s production, but this turns out not to be the case.122 By requesting that her actors repeat their lines until they have mirrored the script as she can hear it, Blythe reduces the actors to mere imitators on-stage. This verbatim method of ‘recorded-delivery’ appears to be somewhat reductionist in its approach. Yet, by removing the entity of the actor and deploying verbatim methods in creative work that is for the page, United We Stand avoids this limitation.

119 Ahmed, p.28.
120 Paget, p.318.
122 Paget, p.318.
Literary techniques are crucial to Blythe’s (re)presentation of the neighbourhood community in this context. Repetition is deployed throughout the script in order to emphasise key sounds and evoke a lyrical quality in the words of the real-life originals. As early as page nine, Blythe’s readers are presented with a song – ‘London Road in Bloom’. Within the lyrics, a variety of words and phrases are repeated in order to place emphasis on specific patterns of sound. For example, ‘hanging basket(s)’ recurs three times, while ‘hanging’ appears separately on four occasions and variations of ‘basket’ are repeated on six occasions:

*Song – ‘London Road in Bloom’*

ALFIE. Marigolds, petunias. We got up there, we got busy Lizzies, hangin’ geraniums alright – / see the hangin’ lobelias, petunias in the basket – hanging basket. That’s a fuschia.
DODGE. / There’s all sorts in that basket anyway.’
JAN. Err there is a special name I just call them lilies. They’re a lily type. There is a special name. An’ for the first time this year I’ve got a couple of erm baskets.
TERRY. Hangin’ baskets, variegated ivy in there which makes a nice show. Then you’ve got err these sky blue whatever they are ve- ve- ber la la. That’s err little purple ones.
HELEN. Rhubarb, the old-fashioned margarites, the daisies.
GORDON. The roses have done really well this year.
HELEN. Gave an extra point for havin’ basil on the windowsill didn’t she. / Ha haha.
GORDON. / Yeah.

These repetitions feature across the song which is only nine script-lines in length and, as a result, the words appear spatially compressed. This calls into question Blythe’s editorial decision to (re)present the characters and community events in her text with specific, and often altered, spatial and temporal dimensions in mind. Blythe continues to repeat these key sounds in the song through the deployment of rhyme. The assonance in the vowel sound ‘a’ is (re)presented in the line: ‘hangin’ baskets in this back garden’ (p.9) and Blythe’s decision to include and duplicate the ‘-ias’ suffix that features in a variety of the flower’s names: ‘Begonias, petunias […]’ That’s a fuschia’ (p.9) expresses a lyrical quality. The lines here
become appropriate to set to music and allow for poetics to feature within both script and performance. By intentionally drawing the readers’ attention to this particular horticultural competition through the lyrical quality of the song, Blythe demonstrates her desire to make ‘the inhabitants of London Road, once part of Ipswich’s red light district and, crucially, the street where the murderer […] had lived’ the centre of her play’s world. Her editorial decision to repeat the song as the reprise at the end of Act Two (pp. 78-9) reinforces the point that music and verbatim are deployed in order to ‘echo the shared sentiments and hidden worry that lingered throughout the town’. I argue that this song, crafted using both verbatim methods and literary techniques, highlights the significance of the ‘London Road in Bloom’ competition as an event that is symbolic of ‘the heart and soul of the community.’

Blythe concentrates on the ‘community’s attempts to rejuvenate the area’ and confirms that the verbatim production of London Road is not about Steve Wright: ‘Wright and the women he killed do not appear on stage’. The drama shifts to focus on ‘a caring community and a safe one’, which is signified by ‘good neighbourliness’ and established as a direct result of the recognition of Steve Wright as ‘the dangerous stranger’ in this context.

Much of Act One illustrates this relationship ‘between safety […], a discourse of good neighbourliness (looking out for each other) and the production of community as purified space’ in the first instance. RON’s welcoming speech places a significant emphasis on the community’s togetherness; they have grown ‘stronger an’ stronger’ after ‘a lot of progress in regenerating th[e] street’ and JUULIE turns the members’ attentions to upcoming events in the area. She addresses the gardening contest as she tells residents to ‘get thinkin’ about yerr gardens, yer designs, hangin’ baskets an’ so forth’ (JULIE, p.6). Across the space of a single page, Blythe’s readers and her audience are made fully aware of the fact that the prostitutes and their consequent homicides will not be at the heart of this performance. The playwright has not only emphasised the importance of the local neighbourhood community in this instance – with regards to ‘the quiz night’ and ‘fish ’n’ chip shupper’ (p.6) – but, on the first page of her script, the incidents involving the prostitutes remain nameless. Referred to only in vague mentions to ‘the awful events’ (p.5), the murders become the back-story behind

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123 Costa (para. 3 of 11).
124 Blythe, p.vi.
125 Ahmed, p.29.
126 Costa (para. 3 of 11). See also Ahmed, p.35.
128 Ahmed, p.28.
129 At this point, I refer to the members of both Blythe’s National Theatre audience and the real-life members of the ‘Neighbourhood Watch AGM’ on London Road, Ipswich.
the important regeneration of this community. This is further reinforced when RON refers to
the victims as ‘the problem’ or ‘the girls’ on a number of occasions throughout his opening
speech (p.5). This conscious decision by Blythe – to open the play after the events of the
murders and to relocate the residents of London Road to the foreground – reestablishes the
fact that her own interruption and reconstruction of the original interview testimonies (with
regards to chronology, perspective, spatiality and temporality) is vital to the readers’
interpretation of the play. Recognition of these choices is crucial in uncovering the
playwright’s desire to (re)present the ‘safe [neighbourhood] community’ here, and this is not
only created in the relationship between the on-stage actors and the audience at the National
Theatre.130 By performing ‘every hesitation, deviation and repetition’ – for example, the
words and experiences of their real-life counterparts ‘from a sequence of ums to the incessant
interjection of "you know"’ – the actors become the tool through which this community is
‘imagined’ into existence between both members of the audience, readers of Blythe’s script,
and the “real-life” originals of [these] characters and events’.131 Blythe’s comment that the
story is ‘about how the community have, through what’s happened, pulled together’ could not
be more relevant here, and the deployment of verbatim methods becomes the means for
exactly this end.132 Blythe’s ability – to convey this message and to (re)present the ‘imagined
space of the neighbourhood’ surreptitiously in this context – is a crucial skill here. London
Road demonstrates that this skill is not lost among the pages of real-life testimony. The
playwright comments: ‘It’s about England now and how there is a yearning for community,
however dissipated and fragmented modern society has made us be.’133 By editing the words
of the original interviews in the ways that I have detailed above, Blythe gives herself ‘more
power to shape the words emotionally and narratively’.134 It is on this power to ‘bring out the
inferred, and amplify a point through repetition’ that this chapter is focused.135 It returns to
these deliberate decisions in its forthcoming discussions regarding the deployment of
verbatim methods in poetry; specifically how these methods can help the poet to (re)present
expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community away from the theatre’s stage.

130 Ahmed, p.28.
131 Costa (para.5 of 11). See also Paget, p.317.
132 Costa (para.11 of 11).
133 Blythe, p.vi.
134 Blythe, p.vi.
135 Blythe, p.vi.
The Riots (2011)

Before this chapter moves to discuss how verbatim methods can be deployed in poetry, it is important to consider Slovo’s production of The Riots as the most relevant in terms of subject matter. Written in response to the events of the disorder in 2011, Slovo’s drama exposes the stories and experiences of a number of individuals in verbatim:

’an account of how trouble first arose in Tottenham and then spread, told through the voices of rioters, police officers, victims, politicians and even […] those who observed first hand and from afar.’ 136

As the only play to unearth individual testimony relating to the incidents of 2011, while simultaneously intervening in these narratives to transform voice(s) using verbatim methods, it is unsurprising that The Riots is this chapter’s final example in my study of contemporary verbatim theatre. By analysing the play, in written form, this chapter explores the verbatim methods deployed by Slovo and how they enable her to deal appropriately with the subject of this disorder throughout her production.

A way into understanding the deployment of these verbatim methods in Slovo’s production of The Riots would be through a brief inspection of the commentary between journalist Esther Addley and the playwright herself. Published by The Guardian in November 2011, Addley highlights how Slovo ‘hired a researcher’ to help her gain access to the potentially unobtainable participants she hoped to talk to; ‘it takes quite a long time to find the story within the subject, but once you’ve found it things move remarkably quickly’. 137 By interviewing ‘community leaders in Tottenham’ and ‘Mohamed Hammoudan who lived above Carpetright’, Slovo obtained access to a significant amount of testimony from a variety of people and the problem would no longer be in reaching enough participants, but ‘in some cases, critically, persuading them to talk’. 138 Seen as ‘an effective way in which to “give voice” to those who would otherwise remain unheard’, the verbatim testimony is (re)presented as part of Slovo’s script and I argue that this reflects the range of communities that individuals considered themselves to be a part of at any one time during the disorder in

137 Addley (para. 7 of 13). See also Hammond and Steward, p.49.
138 Addley (para. 6 of 13).
The unseen processes of recording, transcribing and transforming these testimonies into verbatim theatre begin to touch upon this: ‘The difficulty in finding rioters voices is reflected on the stage, where the characters appear as shadowy figures’. Even the playwright herself is aware of this discrepancy: “It’s a visual representation of the fact that we are all living in the same country,” says Slovo, “and yet their lives do not intersect with ours”.

In *Wasted*, Georgia Gould focuses on the interactions between young people and the communities existing around them. She provides evidence in the form of both qualitative and statistical data to highlight that ‘without first noticing we have been pulled apart from one another and from communities over the last third century’. In particular, qualitative research for the Youth Citizenship Commission in 2008 identified how most of the young people in Britain engaged with the world:

‘First as individuals in isolation from others (me), second with friends and family (we), third by engaging with the community (us) and forth by engaging with formal institutions (them).’

Gould suggests that an individual’s interpretation of a particular pronoun can resolve our understanding of their position in the world relative to the forms of belonging that exist around them. I argue that it does offer an insight into how some young people in Birmingham (those participating in rioting and looting behaviours, for example) may have been situated during the disorder in 2011: ‘for most young people (thirteen to twenty-five years old) the “us” of community didn’t exist’. For these individuals, their engagement in this kind of behaviour results in being recognised as ‘the stranger’. Elijah Anderson confirms that ‘the production of safe spaces [communities] that have value or “ideal characters” involves the expulsion of unliked and undesirable “characters”’. In essence, I argue that those displaying these behaviours become ‘the stranger’, not just ‘on the basis of how they

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140 Addley (para. 12 of 13)
141 Addley (para. 12 of 13).
143 Gould, p.118.
144 Ahmed, pp.36-7.
145 Elijah Anderson as cited in Ahmed, p.27.
“appear” but on the basis of how they act. This differentiation encourages the formation and existence of the ‘imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’ (in Birmingham) and the nation in this context. Slovo’s arrangement of pronouns (re)presents a similar relationship in *The Riots*.

Many of the narratives (re)presented by Slovo in *The Riots* are told from the first-person perspective; occurring on an individual level in order to situate the individual involved in these behaviours ‘in isolation from others’ (see Figure 5). As early as page 7, one young person comments: ‘I was on Twitter at the time and my trend was on London and I seen everybody talkin’ ‘bout Mark Duggan got shot’. At this moment, the secluded ‘(me)’ is embodied as an ‘I’ and this functions to imply that the individual in question has been excluded from the communities in existence around him/her. Such (re)presentations by Slovo serve to support Gould’s argument that younger people are often left feeling omitted from the same communities. This is unsurprising when we consider Elijah Anderson’s concern that residents are more worried about ‘the strangers with whom they share the public space, including […] anonymous black youths’ and the fact that these same, ‘strange’ ‘anonymous black youths’ became the face of the disorder – both in Birmingham and across the country – following the death of Mark Duggan.

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148 Ahmed, p.28.
149 Gould, p.118.
150 Gould, p.118.
The frequency with which these pronouns (as embodied expressions of identity) are deployed by Slovo throughout *The Riots* demonstrates that an ‘us’ and ‘them’ does begin to exist in this context. This further supports Mihelj’s assertion that this sharp division is present in situations of conflict. However, the distinction between an ‘us’ and ‘them’ becomes more complex because it demonstrates a sense of belonging and exclusion that is relevant to both age and ethnicity. I argue that this is not only relevant in relation to the disorder in Tottenham as (re)presented in Slovo’s play, but it is also pertinent to the situation in Birmingham as *United We Stand* demonstrates next. This idea is reinforced in the frequency with which ‘I’ is deployed (on 421 occasions) by varying characters throughout Slovo’s script (see Figure 6). The individuals displaying behaviours of rioting and looting are repositioned to ‘prepare […] to survive’ for themselves against the toughest conditions of society, and, ‘as individuals

**Figure 5:** A demonstration of the word frequency of particular pronouns deployed throughout *The Riots*. 
pursuing their own interests’ in this sense, their actions have a detrimental effect on ‘the system as a whole’. 151

Figure 6: ‘I’ is deployed on 421 occasions by varying characters throughout Slovo’s script.

Developing this analysis further, I maintain that it is vital to understand the individual before we can begin to locate the community that they consider themselves to be a part of; ‘any attempt to create a new sense of social cohesion has to start from the recognition that individualisation, diversity and scepticism are written into our culture’. 152 I argue that the ‘us’ in Slovo’s narrative also alludes, on a number of occasions, to those displaying rioting and looting behaviours as a collective identity. Attempting to ‘survive’ in this context, they opt to engage within their own ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community. In this context, the ‘wispy’ community, which is formed on the basis that it is emergent and temporary, includes other individuals like them who are looting and vandalising property in the streets. 153 The individuals’ decision to behave in this way and become part of this collective identity is

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151 In his chapter ‘The Problem of Cooperation’, Robert Axelrod questions ‘under what conditions will cooperation emerge in a world […]’ where people ‘tend to look after themselves and their own first’. To understand this individualisation, see The Evolution of Cooperation (Middlesex: Penguin, 1984), pp.3-26 (p.6).
153 For a full explanation of why the ‘micro-imagined, wispy’ community is relevant in this context, see Chapter One, pp.52-7. See also Fine and Scott, p.3.
(re)presented later in Slovo’s play. These individuals come together for a common purpose as they stand against the ‘them’ that they consider to be inclusive of formal organisations and institutions; the police and the government ‘who’ve been oppressing us’ (p.27). This expression of identity, and the ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community that forms on the basis of their need for survival, is constantly reinforced throughout Slovo’s play. ‘[T]hey’ and ‘you’ are deployed on 47 and 42 more occasions than the ‘we’ that constitutes a national imagined community and is deployed on 161 occasions throughout the text. I suggest that this ‘us’ and ‘them’ division is ubiquitously (re)presented throughout Slovo’s play. However, the pronouns used to express this and other forms of identity are not simply distinguishing between those belonging to the national imagined community and those who are excluded. This suggests that expressions of identity and forms of belonging were more complex during the disorder in 2011.

Returning to Mihelj’s contention that ‘editors and journalists […] adopt a patriotic stance and organize their narratives around the conflict between […] “our nation” and its enemies’, I argue that this distinction is not only (re)presented in reported responses by the media. Creative responses to similar situations of conflict also (re)present this division and Slovo’s play is a prime example of this. The character of Leroy Logan remarks: ‘We always have that summer madness in August, we always have that peak where young people invariably get restless, they get bored’ (p.57). I suggest that this ‘we’ – repeated twice in close proximity to itself in the opening of this short monologue – places a significant emphasis on the institution (the police) that protects the national community in this situation. As Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police at the time, Logan is (re)presented throughout Slovo’s script as a ‘key actor’ who embodies the national imagined community. This authenticates Mihelj’s comparisons between ‘modes of reporting’ in periods of ‘banal’ (everyday) and ‘hot’ (extraordinary, celebratory or catastrophic) nationalism that suggest the national imagined community is (re)presented as the most significant. Slovo positions the national ‘we’ at the fore of her script and deploys key figures such as Logan to both reemphasise and embody this particular form of belonging. The Riots as text, and the subsequent transformation of the script into performance, demonstrates the complex nature of imagined communities in this context through the deployment of verbatim methods. Slovo’s

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154 This is similar to the sharp distinction made between members of the Asian community and the police and government that is (re)presented by Sangat TV in their broadcasts during the situation in Birmingham in 2011. See Chapter Two, pp.82-4.
155 Own emphasis added.
156 See Chapter One, pp.29-34 for an explanation of these concepts.
play illustrates that it is important to acknowledge various expressions of identity and forms of belonging, including those associated with religious and cultural identity, the nation, and the local or urban neighbourhood.

Slovo continues to intertwine narrative perspectives in her play in order to (re)present challenges to the idea of the national imagined community. Verbatim methods allow her to preserve the pronouns in their original form, meaning that Slovo is able to alternate between both second- and third-person accounts in addition to the first-person narratives this chapter has already discussed. In doing so, the playwright locates each of her characters within their chosen community setting. Consider an example of the pronoun ‘we’ – as it is presented on numerous occasions earlier in the play – to depict the local neighbourhood community of Mark Duggan’s family and friends:

‘There’d been this um misinformation put out that there’d been some kind of shootout that immediately concerned the community because um we know that Mark wasn’t of that ilk.’ (p.8).

‘We had some really hastily prepared banners and we strolled to the police station. We didn’t march and make noise or anything, and why I say it was tongue in cheek was because we agreed that the women of the group […] were going to go into the police station…’ (pp.8-9).157

There is a direct contrast here between the ‘we’ used to illustrate a community of the family, friends and neighbours of Mark Duggan from Broadwater Farm and the national ‘we’ deployed in the later discourse of Act Two by Superintendent Leroy Logan. Slovo’s (re)presentation of this local ‘gathering’ constitutes a ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community much like the temporary collective identity formed by those displaying anti-social behaviours that this chapter recognised earlier. It contests Mihelj’s national narrative conventions framework in favour of Arjun Appadurai’s ‘implosion of neighbourhoods as coherent social formations’ (see Chapter One, pp.57-62).158 In particular, the anthropologist acknowledges the creation of the local community as

157 Own emphasis added.
‘a process that is fundamentally opposed to the imaginary of the nation-state, where neighbourhoods are designed to be instances and exemplars of a generalizable mode of belonging to a wider territorial imaginary’. 159

This ‘wider territorial imaginary’ is on a smaller-scale than the nation and, in the case of Slovo’s script and the disorder in 2011, Appadurai’s argument has validity. The local neighbourhood of Broadwater Farm, epitomised by characters including grassroots leader Stafford Scott and Pastor Nims Obunge, is (re)presented as irrepressible in the aftermath of Duggan’s shooting. Appadurai recognises that the locale is constantly fragile ‘when neighborhoods are subject to the context-producing drives […] of the modern nation-state’, however, in transforming the voice(s) of those involved in the disorder in 2011, Slovo not only provides her readers with expressions of national identity. 160 She preserves the strong presence of a local neighbourhood community which is (re)performed on-stage and (re)presented off it. As such, I contend that ‘the long-term interaction of neighborhoods’ at work in Slovo’s The Riots does, to quote Appadurai, allow us to understand the ‘complex hierarchical relations’ of community. 161

Taking the character of Mohamed Hammoudan as a further case in point here, the text illustrates the transition between his own identity formation and simultaneous community affiliations. When the reader first meets Mohamed, he is returning from ‘Ramadan round erm yer Mum’s house’ (p.18). Slovo immediately (re)presents his religious identification by purposefully choosing to position his memory of returning from his Mother’s house during the ‘ninth month of the year in the Islamic calendar’ (OED) at the fore of her play in this moment. 162 This highlights Mohamed’s affiliation to his religious faith (Islam) and the communal group that he unites with, while simultaneously appearing to separate him (in some ways) from other ideas of imagined community. This sense of separation in Mohamed’s expression of identification with Islam is reinforced in Slovo’s script when the character is unable to correctly refer to the scarves wrapped around people’s heads during the fire evacuation (p.20). Although the individuals in his apartment block are most likely wearing the fabrics to protect themselves from smoke inhalation and further damage to their bodies, Mohamed assumes that these scarves are those ‘kinda Palestinian-sty-style heads – erm

159 Appadurai, p.191.
160 Appadurai, p.198.
161 Appadurai, p.198.
masks on or w – scarves wrapped round their faces’ (p.20). His strong attachment to the religious faith of Islam means that he labels the scarves incorrectly because he is unaware of (and estranged from) the cultural name given to the shawls that are often worn by individuals from Palestine.163

Alongside the expressions of identity relative to the faith of Islam, Mohamed’s character is also (re)presented as occupying the liminal space between forms of belonging in Slovo’s script. This becomes clear in the moment when he wakes to discover that his apartment is on fire. His character says:

‘I could see my neighbour. I don’t know her name. There’s just a whole loada commotion, people knocking on the door, running up and down. And they were saying ‘Get out! Get out! There’s a fire!’ (p.20)

Mohamed’s character occupies the same domestic space (‘home’) as his neighbour, but admits that he does not ‘know her name’ (p.20). Although the female neighbour remaining nameless in this instance appears to be particularly interesting because –

‘[f]irst-naming […] performs a very special function within language use that implies dynamics of power and identity insofar as the first name not only grants one a specific identity as a language user, but also directs who the person is and will be through the names physiognomy and reference to the world’ – 164

I argue that the occupation of this shared domestic space is also an indication that Mohamed and his neighbour belong to the same ‘imagined space of the neighbourhood’ in this context.165 The community (re)presented here is symbolised by the home, in this case the shared apartment block in Slovo’s script, and this community is not imagined in relation to


165 Anderson, p.7.
the nation. Instead, it supports Appadurai’s contestation that neighbourhoods are not simply mini nation-states.166

By choosing to include this and other expressions of identity in *The Riots*, I contend that Slovo’s play is a prime example of a creative response that (re)presents the national imagined community through the deployment of verbatim methods. However, Mohamed and many others characters (re)presented throughout Slovo’s play are situated within the national imagined community and the local setting of the neighbourhood simultaneously. As such, I suggest that *The Riots* could be identified as an interrogation of Anderson’s limited definition of this particular form of belonging. Transgressing the boundaries between religious identity and the domestic home-space, the local neighbourhood and the wider nation, Slovo’s verbatim play serves to demonstrate the complex nature of expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community. It provides this chapter with the perfect example to demonstrate that the deployment of verbatim methods is appropriate for the purpose of (re)presenting these multifaceted ideas in the context of the 2011 disorder in Birmingham.

**Deploying Verbatim Methods in Poetry**

Returning to issues of authorship and to the writer as editor at this point, David Edgar confirms that ‘transcript-based performance requires its practitioners to make strategic editorial choices in the process of composition’.167 Edgar advocates that the calculated decisions made by the playwright are ‘fully implicated in the creation of theatrical meaning’ on the stage, however I would argue that the crucial difference for the dramatist is that they have a number of additional tools at their disposal.168 By ‘taking possession of their characters’, the playwright’s actors are positioned on stage as tools through which they are able to (re)present the selected, real-life stories featured in participants’ interview testimonies.169 The electronic headsets – which are used to replay the audio recordings to the actors in the rehearsals of Blythe’s *London Road* – and the actors are tools upon which the poet does not, usually, depend. Instead, the production of poetry which tries to offer a credible (re)presentation for emotional ‘narrative and dramatic effect’ relies on the poet’s own, individual execution.170 The poet has to concentrate on their own arrangement of

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166 Appadurai, p.191.
167 Edgar as cited in Megson, p.200.
168 Edgar as cited in Megson, p.200.
169 Hammond and Steward, p.55.
literary techniques within the text and on the subsequent effects that these techniques will have on their reader. Unlike the dramatist – who is able to use the actor and their chosen theatrical stage for added impact as visual stimuli – the poet’s illustrative aids are the images they conjure up between the words on the page. The poet relies on detailed and picturesque explorations of sounds (through the application of rhyme, repetition and other literary devices), structural experimentation, and unique changes in narrative direction in order to transform voice(s). Bhanu Kapil Rider’s prose-poetry is a prime example of this.\textsuperscript{171} She is able to layer multiple voices within one succinct volume of prose-poetry. Though the outcome on the page is different to that which is on stage, Kapil Rider’s poems in \textit{The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers} also ‘have a geographical as well as an emotional and psychological shape’.\textsuperscript{172} It is these poems that this chapter now explores. Paying close attention to the ethical issues surrounding the writer as editor and (re)presentations of trauma, the chapter identifies how Kapil Rider’s decisions relating to poetics have resulted in a collection of work that goes beyond national forms of belonging. It argues that Kapil Rider’s work is a major example of how verbatim methods can be deployed appropriately within poetic narratives. In particular, Kapil Rider’s collection lyrically (re)presents expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that are relative to gender, culture and religion.

\textit{The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers} (2001)

\textit{The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers} is Kapil Rider’s first collection of this kind of prose-poetry for which she travelled, interviewing a diverse sample of Indian women with a fixed selection of twelve questions, over the course of four years.\textsuperscript{173} Utilising a tape recorder – the tool to which Paget argues the verbatim genre ‘owes its present health and exciting potential’, Kapil Rider guaranteed anonymity and gave her subjects just thirty minutes to complete their responses to questions, including ‘2. Who are you and whom do you love?’ and ‘5. What is the shape of your body?’ (p.9). These queries – essentially concerned with the processes of identity and belonging, and touching upon the women’s own life experiences – were answered in all ‘their roughness and rawness’ at this point (p.6). Kapil Rider adapted verbatim methods, which were predicated upon the ‘subsequent transcription of interviews

\textsuperscript{171} The ideas presented here are taken from my own research paper entitled ‘Using Verbatim in Poetry’, published in Issue 67 of NAWE’s \textit{Writing in Education} magazine (York: National Association of Writers in Education, 2015), pp.56-9 (p.56).

\textsuperscript{172} Hammond and Steward, p.21.

\textsuperscript{173} Kapil Rider, ‘Introduction’, in \textit{The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers}, p.6. Subsequent references to this text will be given in parentheses in the body of this chapter.
with “ordinary” people’, from tape-to-page, arguing no attempts to ‘clean up’ the replies (pp.6-7). Embodying the role of the editor in this case, Kapil Rider blurs the boundaries between authorship and ownership, like most working verbatim playwrights who have preceded her. However, I propose that she also transgresses the confines of culture and literary practice, ‘coming to understand a border as a site of […] transformation’ within her work. It is unsurprising, then, that these transformations manifest themselves in her poetry. Not just in regards to subject matter – encompassing a variety of key themes including migration and travel, cultural differences and the concept of ‘poetic mapping’ – but in the way that she transgresses the boundaries of form and structure simultaneously. By analysing the ways in which Kapil Rider includes interview testimony and explores these topics throughout the collection, this chapter will present The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers as a primary example of the deployment of verbatim methods in creative practice. It will argue that Kapil Rider is able to produce a body of work that is ‘honest and swift […] uncensored by guilt’ (p.6). Adopting prose lines rather than conventional verse, the writer transforms both her own voice and the voice(s) of others, and gives the women (re)presented in her text their voice(s) back.

Born in England in 1968 to Indian parents, and immersed in the South Asian community of Greater London from early adolescence, Kapil Rider’s multi-cultural heritage positions her as someone who is undeniably acquainted with the ‘unresolved process[es] of placing […] oneself in the world’. Describing herself as a ‘British national of Punjabi origin who [now] lives in Colorado’, the ‘travell[s] between the countries of […] birth (England), ancestry (India), and residence (America)’ (p.7) have characterised Kapil Rider as ‘the [writer-]subject with the contours of a space of belonging’. It is unsurprising, with her

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174 Paget, p.317.
176 Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts recognise the significance of that which I call ‘poetic mapping’ here. In their discussions of ‘rural and urban landscape writing’, they celebrate the writing of these landscapes in poetry explicitly: ‘So much might depend on being able to see edgelands. Giving them a name might help, because up until now they have been without any signifier, an incomprehensible swathie we pass through without regarding; untranslated landscape. […] The trouble is, if we can’t see edgelands, we can’t imagine them, or allow them any kind of imaginative life.’ See their ‘Introduction’, in Edgelands: Journeys into England’s True Wilderness (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), pp.1-10 (p.5).
own ‘moves through the world…’ and a cross-cultural, transnational identity, that Kapil Rider’s personal interests, relative to her own sense of belonging – ‘I didn’t know where I was going’ (p.7) – should come to manifest themselves in this contemporary work of experimental prose-poetry.¹⁷⁹

Returning first to the role of the writer as editor and to (re)presentations of trauma, Kapil Rider introduces her readers to the experience of a lover leaving ‘[a] month from now’ in poem ‘2. Who are you and whom do you love?’ (p.14). She writes: ‘A week from now. Tomorrow. When he goes. The going. I’ll make crepes, walk by the river with the dog, float candles in a pudding basin; the usual’ (p.14). The seemingly mundane way in which Kapil Rider (re)presents this situation to her readers is significant to their understanding of both the poem and the deployment of verbatim methods within it. Similar to traditional poems, which employ linguistic techniques such as metaphor and simile to convey a person’s emotional response to trauma, Kapil Rider’s prose-poetry also relies on these literary techniques in order to capture emotion in her poem. This is demonstrated throughout the rest of the example:

‘He’s gone. Between our bodies: the sun at 5 a.m.; fifty-seven Herefords, and a Brahma bull that broke the river fence; four and a half thousand hummingbirds; a dying man; a man who is about to knock on the door of a woman with black eyes, to tell her that he loves her; the woman herself, who is drawing a bath […] Floating candles. The incommensurable distance. I forgot to memorize his face’ (p.14).

By deploying verbatim methods in her prose-poetry, Kapil Rider is able to portray this particular traumatic experience and the emotions that constitute it in a way that is considered to be true of everyday life. She (re)presents the mundane (the ‘real’) of ‘the sun at 5 a.m.’ and a ‘walk by the river with the dog’ (p.14), before positioning these moments in juxtaposition to the metaphors of ‘four and a half thousand hummingbirds; a dying man; a man who is about to knock on the door of a woman with black eyes’ (p.14) that suggest a raw sadness and mixture of emotions for the speaker within her text.

The structure and form of Kapil Rider’s poem adds to the authenticity of the everyday that is (re)presented here. Opting to arrange the text in short staccato clauses and sentences,
and displaying the poem in a paragraph like a list (with the punctuation of semi-colons to separate each object or moment), Kapil Rider highlights to her readers that she does not need to intervene as an individual voice in her text at this point. She transgresses the boundaries of poetic form here by interweaving the women’s voices within her text. By structuring the series of poems as paragraphs and prose sentences, rather than featuring line or stanza breaks, Kapil Rider deploys several voices in the same piece and takes on the role of the editor. In essence, she suggests that what is of importance in *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* is not who is saying what, but what is actually being said. Her broken sentence structure demonstrates to her readers that trauma – in contradiction to Stuart Fisher’s argument – can be portrayed through the art of “simple comprehension”.180 I argue that what Stuart Fisher regards as a weakness of the verbatim method – in its ‘appear[ance] to derive its status of authenticity from its faithful adherence to actuality and reality’ – can actually be considered its strength. It is this chapter’s assertion that Kapil Rider transgresses the boundaries of traditional poetic form through a combination of both the deployment of verbatim methods and her decision to (re)present her interviewees’ testimonies as prose-poetry rather than traditional verse. Her work can be seen as transgressive in relation to both form and structure, but it is the transformation of voice(s) throughout *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* that this chapter is particularly interested in. She maintains a close distance to the ‘real’ and the ‘everyday’ in her (re)presentation of the traumatic experience, and this highlights that verbatim poetry is not as radical or unethical a method as Stuart Fisher may have first believed. This is because it allows the poet to maintain a close proximity to authenticity.

By paying close attention to the cultural differences between the three countries in question (India, England and the United States), Kapil Rider’s poem: ‘47. Where did you come from / how did you arrive? (p.59) is a leading example of this investigation into ‘what it means to be a woman, and specifically, of being an Indian woman living in America’.181 Through a short description of the persona’s father and his experience during a ‘first night in England’ (p.59), the piece symbolises expressions of identification and explores ideas of belonging through Kapil Rider’s use of specific cultural references; namely, the visual and sensory images of food. Kapil Rider writes:

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180 Kapil Rider as cited in Sprague (para. 6 of 19).
181 Kapil Rider as cited in Sprague (para. 3 of 19).
‘His first night in England, his landlady, a Russian Jew, asks him if he’d like some Welsh Rarebit. My father hears “Rabbit”, and prepares himself for an exotic, hearty feast’ (ll.3-5, p.59).

This humorous moment within the text is significant to the reader’s understanding of the poem and to Kapil Rider’s considerations of cultural identity in this context. With these references to food – in particular, the confusion (both in subject matter and in sound-play) between ‘Rarebit’ (l.4) and ‘“Rabbit”’ (l.5) – the poet is able to place substantial weight on the relevant cultural differences between her poem’s character (‘father’) and those, including the ‘Russian Jew’ (l.3), that he comes into contact with. This idea of food as a cultural commodity is then further reinforced as the poem ends with the comment: ‘… my father is too embarrassed to bring up the subject of a main course’ (ll.8-9). It is the addition of this personal emotion (embarrassment) at the end of the poem that makes Kapil Rider’s point – one of placing one’s self in the world in relation to food or, more broadly, culture as we know it – effective. This humiliation is placed in juxtaposition to the comedy that exists, not only to encourage laughter from Kapil Rider’s readers, but as a direct result of the father’s own ignorance and lack of knowledge regarding the cultural differences – in this case the ‘Welsh Rarebit’ (l.4) – that are presented to him.

There are numerous other occasions throughout The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers where food and drink are (re)presented as an indication of identity and belonging. In poem ‘30. What are the consequences of silence? / What do you remember about the Earth?’ (p.42), Kapil Rider’s character explains: ‘They shared their milk with us; dri-milk, something I had never tasted before; this, sensual; acrid, like Russian egg-curd, but thin, watery’ (ll.10-12). Additionally, in ‘49. Who are you and whom do you love?’ (p.61), the poet appears to be distinguishing, clearly, between three separate cultural identities – ‘Southhall Broadway […] northwest London’, ‘northern California’ (l.1) – when she deploys the image of ‘drinking chai and eating chaat’ (l.2) to symbolise Asian identity. The language used by the Indian women – as the subjects in Kapil Rider’s research interviews – is

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182 The poems in United We Stand (see ‘Police Action from a Smart Phone’, Chapter Four, p.153) also explore emotion in order to make the expressions of identity that are presented throughout the series explicit and effective.

183 In 2008, Fox and Miller-Idriss discussed the ‘commodification of the nation’ and ‘consuming the nation’ as an everyday practice. They argued that food is one example of this commodification; ‘provid[ing] people with nationally marked (or markable) products for their national consumption needs’. See Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, ‘Everyday Nationhood’, Ethnicities, 8, 4 (2008), 536-76, in Sage Publications <http://etn.sagepub.com/content/8/4/536> [accessed on Monday 18 July 2016] (p.551).
(re)presented to demonstrate that being able to speak and understand this language suggests an individual’s identification with Asian culture. I argue that the text in question establishes that these national identities (of India, England and the United States) exist in order to undermine them. Kapil Rider places an emphasis on the travel between these nation-states and on the cultural experiences an individual might have while on such journeys. Through a combination of verbatim methods and literary techniques, the poet is able to echo this destabilisation of the nation in favour of other identity markers through both form and narrative structure. She deploys these verbatim methods in The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers in order to transform voice(s), including her own, within the series of prose-poetry.184 In doing so, these voices become disoriented and it is the reader’s task to distinguish between them and their relative expressions of identity. I argue that, for both Kapil Rider and the Indian women she interviewed, these expressions of identity appear to be located on a smaller-scale – constituted by gender, culture and religion, rather than the nation.

By presenting these cultural reference points as she has throughout The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers – transgressing the borders of the nation-state and the page boundaries of the collection itself – Kapil Rider appears to be offering a poetic map of identity. This is reinforced by the spatial and temporal dimensions of her text and the numerous cultural references to the ‘map’ and taking directions. Returning to poem ‘49’ (p.61) as an example here, the persona is referring to ‘Nine or ten years later’ (l.5) as time passes in that which Sara Ahmed terms ‘the inbetween space, the interval’ of the identities between which she finds herself shifting.185 This consideration of liminality relative to the process of self-positioning is then reemphasised in the second paragraph of the poem when the present tense is used to describe:

‘The distances between my body and the bodies of the ones I love: grow. They are limited by coasts. I have a few questions to ask, but I do not know how to break the growing silence. I breathe in the salty mist, walk back along the wild, shifting edge of everything’ (ll.9-12).

The use of the present tense here expresses a distance that is symbolised by the demarcated border (‘coasts’). These boundaries limit the narrator’s connection to those she loves, but she

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184 A layering of multiple voices similar to this is (re)presented in the United We Stand poetry series that follows this chapter (see Chapter Four, pp.145-94).
185 Ahmed, p.77.
recognises that she must move between them in an attempt to understand her own place. The space she occupies appears to be somewhere between where she currently is and the location of her loved ones. The final line of the poem implies that the persona’s place in this world is unfixed; she comes to understand these borders that appear to limit her as a ‘shifting edge’ (l.12), both fluid and variable. Therefore, I argue that this particular expression challenges the idea of a finite, national imagined community.\(^{186}\)

This concept of the poetic map is also demonstrated in earlier poems within *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*. In poem ‘19. And what would you say if you could?’ (p.31), the persona maps out the coordinates of the London Underground and its surrounding stations: ‘Underground, ANGEL […] EMBANKMENT: the stone stairwells of St. Paul’s […] on a Tuesday afternoon. PIMLICO: the doors hiss and clack’ (ll.11-14). At this point, Kapil Rider deploys verbatim methods and opts to pay close attention to the images of the London tube stations that her interviewees have alluded to. These are used to symbolise the city’s busy culture; the hustle-and-bustle and experiences of peak-time travel that commuters in London are able to relate to. She does this in a similar way to those earlier references to food that I have examined and, again, she appears to be challenging national identity here. Although these images allude to the nation’s capital (London), Kapil Rider’s choice to concentrate on inner-city travel in this poem expresses the significance of both cultural and urban identity over the wider ‘British’ community in this instance.

Alongside these images of London’s busy tube stations, cultural identity is expressed through a number of allusions to modern and contemporary artwork. The persona in poem ‘32.’ walks ‘south of the river […] to the Tate Gallery’ where ‘“The Lady of Shallot.” Oil. Waterhouse’ is hung up on the wall for all to see (p.44, ll.4-7). Furthermore, in poem ‘30. What are the consequences of silence? / What do you remember about the earth?’ and poem ‘23. How will you / have you prepare(d) for your death?’, Kapil Rider alludes to the literature studied as part of the education system when she edits the text to include: ‘A book, apparently there is a book…’ (p.42, l.1). She talks of ‘Scenes from the fairy-tales of Oscar Wilde’ (p.35, l.4). The poet is referring to a popular writer who regularly appears in the literary canon and on curricula of English Literature studies programmes and I argue that she chooses to include these intertextual references in order to position the Arts and Literature as another expression of cultural identity.\(^{187}\) At first, this emphasis on culture appears to be the poet’s way of

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\(^{186}\) Anderson, p.7.

\(^{187}\) By positioning these intertextual references as expressions of cultural identity, Kapil Rider inadvertently provides support for Anderson’s earlier argument that the ‘general growth in literacy [and] communications […]
distinguishing between the national identities that she and her interviewees consider relevant. However, the way in which Kapil Rider combines verbatim methods with the form and structure of prose-poetry blurs the boundaries between these and other identity markers. By positioning cultural reference points so close to one another on the page – normally in the space of one single poem or within the same clause of a sentence – Kapil Rider intertwines them throughout her text; instead choosing to concentrate on ‘the inbetween space’ that Sara Ahmed argues is located *between* these ideas of imagined community.\(^{188}\)

**Conclusion**

In my analysis of various examples throughout this chapter, I demonstrate how a combination of verbatim methods and literary techniques has previously been deployed appropriately in both theatre and poetry. Beginning with an understanding of the origins of documentary and verbatim theatre – specifically, two examples of the living newspaper as produced by Unity Theatre and Theatre Union – this chapter considers the impact of narrative focalisation (‘The Voice’ as an off-stage reporter) and the ‘role of the dominant press’ in (re)presentations of the ‘real’. It acknowledges that verbatim methods are well suited to handling serious and political subject matter, including police incompetence and corruption during The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry as depicted in *The Colour of Justice*. The chapter confirms my awareness of the ethical issues relating to verbatim methods; namely the limits associated with responding ‘authentically’ to trauma and the transformative role of the writer as editor in the deployment of these methods.

Focusing on poetics, I consider the use of literary techniques, including sound-play, repetition and rhyme throughout; in both the (re)presentations of Mrs Lawrence’s heightened emotions in Norton-Taylor’s production and in the lyrical quality of the songs included throughout Blythe’s *London Road*. This chapter emphasises Blythe’s decision to focus on ‘the imagined space of the neighbourhood’ after the murders of five prostitutes in Ipswich;

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\(^{188}\) Ahmed, p.77. Despite appearing to provide support for Fox and Miller-Idriss’s ‘Consuming the Nation’ framework, Kapil Rider’s intertextual references are juxtaposed to focus on the ‘inbetween space’ and I’d argue that this also works to challenges the idea that literature fosters a sense of national, specifically. Thus, Kapil Rider’s text demonstrates that expressions of identity are more complex than this.
examining how verbatim methods have continued to evolve as a result of technological advances (‘recorded-delivery’) and the impact that this has had on the actors’ role in the means of production. In my analysis of The Riots, I place a significant emphasis on the play’s subject matter in relation to that of this thesis. The only creative response to have deployed verbatim methods in theatre in order to explore the events of the disorder in 2011, Slovo’s play (re)presents individual and collective expressions of identity. I argue that these include an ‘us’ and ‘them’ narrative division that positions the individuals displaying behaviours of rioting and looting as ‘the stranger neighbour’, as well as religious references and characterisations of the nation. Through specific linguistic arrangements and contextualisations, The Riots uncovers the complex nature of expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community providing the chapter with a prime example relative to the disorder in Birmingham.

In examining Kapil Rider’s recent deployment of verbatim methods in prose-poetry, the chapter continues to explore key themes including migration and travel, cultural differences, and poetic mapping. Through a transformation of voice(s), I argue that the poet pays close attention to ‘the inbetween space’ in relation to identity, community and situating oneself in the world, and that these (re)presentations are echoed in both the poetic form and narrative structure of her collection. By transgressing the boundaries of subject matter, form and structure in this way, The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers illustrates how existing poets have deployed verbatim methods in their work and highlights the idiosyncratic nature of these methods as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (see page 99). Kapil Rider’s prose-poetry is comparable to the series of verbatim poems that I have crafted as part of this thesis. Throughout United We Stand, I deploy verbatim methods in order to (re)present individual expressions of identity during the disorder in Birmingham. Relative to a variety of markers, including gender, culture and religion, these expressions highlight the intricate relationships that exist between Anderson’s idea of the national imagined community and other local ‘wispy’ and virtual forms of belonging.

189 Ahmed, pp.36-7.
PART TWO: CREATIVE INTERVENTION
Chapter Four: *United We Stand*
## United We Stand

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Monday
**Birmingham: Upon Arrival**

White on sunburnt orange; barriers
restrict me, glistening.

On iron tracks,
rails mark the barren lands
of margins scored:
flashes of Nuneaton.

I walk past four lemon-coloured birds
and hear a ‘twit-twoo’
on my way:
*Short-Stay, Pick-up Point.*

The reflection of tarmac and
queues on queues of black taxis
mirror the wall beside me.

Blue sirens sing among
lines of traffic:
it looks like my ride is here –

the silver cuffs glisten as four men appear in uniform.
Rest Days

After two days sat at home
watching BBC News,
there’d been more rioting in London.

“I’m on my days off Sarge, do you need me to come in?”

Seeing officers I knew on the TV,
I could recognise the videos of
violence going viral online.

“I’m on my days off Sarge, do you need me to come in?”

Twitter and BBM fuel that ambition:
“By the Bullring at 5, let’s have a riot.”
It paints a bad picture of Birmingham.

We could’ve gone on Twitter:
“Public Order officers are already positioned”.
Instead, collar numbers paint the helmets of colleagues I joined the police with.

YouTube music videos;
YouTube video clips;
YouTube their idols, then
“Meet in Birmingham at 5pm, let’s have a riot.”

“I’m on my days off Sarge, do you need me to come in?”
On Monday Night

Smethwick, on Monday Night:
where a Sikh thanks @wmpolice for the retweet.

‘The UK’s first ornate temple’
was under threat at 12.45am,
after a peace rally in Winson Green.

Social media online, the spirit of people,
virtual or after is amazing. Digital
communities form lines across
t-shirts with it.

Videos going viral promoting a total mixture
of races, religious protests and marches,
of Blacks, of Asians, and Whites
on Monday night.

*

Smethwick, on Monday night:
Guru Nanak Gurdwara stands, and spirits sing.
Police Action from a Smartphone

And I want people locked up now!

GOD! I'd love to that for a job!

Smethwick, where a sikh temple was under threat at 12:45am.

a petrol bomb.

Worry 6.20%

Humour 19.28%

Tension 6.20%

Service to the public won't suffer.

Scared 13.95%
Glean One: Night at 12.45am

Green people, digital with it,
a total mixture, and marches,
of Whites
on Monday night.
Tuesday
The Square Root of Red

Squared: from Santander to Greggs’ air,
New Street has up flags that breeze steps again.

Opposite, Carphone Warehouse
blushes the burgundy reflection
of Birmingham.

Costa lovers at 1.02pm
are freeing The Piccadilly, and,

on Corporation Street,
the potato man still stands, surprised

as blood drips from his mouth.
The Commute

At 6 o’clock, I would usually run home from work at Waterlinks. Mum said, ‘Don’t’. ‘Don’t run home from work today’, but I still didn’t feel unsafe.

‘In a record-breaking 18 hours, Birmingham saw widespread violence and looting across the city.’

That day, it kicked off and I ran pretty fast.

‘Nick Robinson, 22, who works at Yenton pub in Erdington, told Redbrick how the police had shut down the pub early due to fears the violence would spread.’

6.30pm, and I took the bus home instead. Route 50 to Kings’ Heath with nothing really happening, except being held up by nameless hoods.

‘The rioters have systematically, with the help of instant messaging, targeted businesses in Birmingham, including Adidas, JD Sports and Maplin Electronics.’
By 7 o’clock, I would see gangs forming on Colmore Row.

The direct effect of Michael Brown in Ferguson.

As you walk down the street and it’s been torn apart by tensions in the community.

“Nicking stuff out of Jessops or Tesco, and smashing stuff willy-nilly.”

‘After another night of rioting in the city, the violence has spread into more districts of Birmingham: King’s Heath, Selly Oak, Harborne, Winson Green.’
The Big Guns: A Mixed Narrative

Religions that are watching TV move
towards ‘the enemy’.

America’s position is
not quite five
issues moved to campaigning.

‘Birmingham Lootings’ and a hero base
contribute to protest disadvantage.

Lost marches mean motivations snowball deeper, as
Birmingham pleads rioters at the Bullring.
Grand Victoria Square

and a smashed-in Santander,

the smell of cigarettes (and Greggs’ pasties)
don’t fill the empty air.

Seven steps, four feet

in brightly-coloured orange streaks,

and a camera sits

on all three feet; a tripod cascading

in the middle of New Street.

A pop-up gallery of Angel Arts

pulled down as

the Office Angels have stocked up

on job opportunities for all.

Behind me is Ethel Street.

The tree green of Subway flags

swimming in the breeze.

At Bennett’s Hill, a riot van sits.

Coloured in warm orange and bhoora rang brown,

the aroma of Chicken -

smothered in Tikka spice -

melts in my desiccated mouth.

The potato man still stands.
'I’VE BEEN ASSAULTED’ a bald man shouts at me among Tuesday’s busy crowds; blood drips from his mouth.

A PCSO attempts to calm him down as I continue to walk among designer brands: Carphone Warehouse, Primark, Pizza Hut, and the burgundy reflection of the official Aston Villa shop.

I take twelve more steps to find myself against a tree of handmade bouquets and Costa lovers.

“Welcome to The Coventry at 103.”
Glean Two: Night

It

marches

on:

Night.
Wednesday
The Brothers

A qualified police medic arrives on scene to several youths on a petrol forecourt:
Garage, petrol, garage, and
“My brother’s on the floor!”
“Help him, Help him!”

A qualified police medic on hands and knees rips the brother’s clothes off and performs CPR.
In full riot gear and on the side of Dudley Road, told to form running lines as crowds becomes hostile –

sheer carnage, ambulances, police officers, cars.

A qualified police medic, someone’s life in their hands, holds a stretcher; arms, flopping everywhere.
“Take it off mate” an officer asks to the brother stood in the dark mask –

‘Under section 60:
The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of ‘94 allows a police officer to stop and search a person without suspicion.’

sheer carnage, ambulances, police officers, cars.
Street steps to face tramlines beneath
Birmingham New Street.
Shut down because of fire, and
loads of smoke at the station -
not riot related.

At the scene of a cannabis farm that
the police have found,
it’s more like a ‘plant’.
People are getting silly now.

My heart goes out to

the families
in Winson Green, not out of
sympathy, but out of respect
for saving our country.
Tariq Jahan deserves an OBE, or
he should receive

a knighthood.

“Tariq Jahan is a very brave man”
is trending in the UK as the
Asian communities weigh up
how to react to those
who killed them.

Candles mark the spot.
Loads of police and the media
for three Muslims
who were looking after their own community;
human nature leading to –

**Murder.** A very brave man
has lost his son.
This is not human nature, but
the work of mere animals; to
commit a hit-and-run away! A
candle-

lit vigil marks the spot and
emotions run high, as
police are given extra time
to quiz the 32-year-old man accused of
murdering three men in

Birmingham.

An inquest is due to be opened tomorrow.
Forecourt

At night,
JET resembles a ghost town, but
tonight, several youths with masks on
mark the spot
for rows upon rows of carnations
to line Dudley Road
tomorrow.

“Take it off mate.”

I’m on my knees in full order gear,
while he stands, screaming at me.

“My brother’s on the floor, help him, help him!”

A stretcher holds the arms:
laid bare and flopping everywhere.

Forty tyres dressed in blue and white,
left their mark
at the forecourt
tonight.
“Are you that medic?”

I nod, surprised that there were no reprisals.
**I have so much respect for Tariq Jahan**

WHAT A LEGEND!

Tariq Jahan’s speech is unbelievable, and
makes an outward show of the ‘portrayed enemy’.
@Birminghammail links to other religions,
such a strong and unique presence.

Stop violence, please join us @
Dudley Road: lads had already been killed
because of community tension.

#walkamileinhershoes – mother, alone with baby
as ‘Riots shake British society’.

“Peepul blamin’ #grime music 4 riots”.

People said the Asian community were looking to fight the Black community.

“Power 2 da peepul an all that shiz.”

We should be united.

Brothers by ethnicity.

We are one soul, we have one voice: “peace!”,
one Asian male refers to another,
actually brothers -

“MashaAllah”.

I have so much respect for Tariq Jahan.
Glean Three: One Soul, One Voice

Such a strong and unique presence,

we should be united:

we are one soul.

People said the Asian community were looking to fight
because of community tension.

Stop violence, please join us @
we have one voice: “peace!”

I have so much respect for Tariq Jahan.
Aftermath
A Hand’s worth

Media community in threat,

virtual levels press

globally –
as Brown killed.

Only the bad engage it, so

the Media know – clip,

and there’s this YouTube video:

‘Hands up, don’t shoot!’

In Birmingham, the

result –

(the end music)
painted from Tourism

was at Temple.

Sikh levels

across

Global ambition – that across

virtual levels of

(Birmingham)

social 3, brutality –

killed.
On Soho Road, fingers smash windows.

The police
paint
  paint institutional
  reach
  (the end music)
with a Facebook idol: Brown
heightened at the hands of
Handsworth’s digital festival.

Shopkeepers scramble to save their produce.

On Soho Road, 30 pairs of hands
reach for the burnt-out Polo.

“It brings back bad memories.”

Black Facebook, and
  world racism news
  know
a
  global Michael
  Brown
appeal:

“Hands incident in Social Media!”
30 lads, hoods up, faces covered.

Ferguson to

Birmingham – local

negatives, local light.

‘Michael Brown, 2014;

Mark Duggan, 2011;

Handsworth, 1985.’

Virtual levels of

hands remember:

“Setting fire to an unmanned police station morons #Handsworth”.

Hands,

only everywhere.
Precautions
**Brotherhood**

Speech shows @Birminghammail

religion’s presence killed community tension.

Mother, alone with baby,

shakes British society.

Blame grime music 4 riots, then

look to fight the Black community, shiz.

*We should be united.*

Ethnicity, soul, peace to another,

killed community tension.

We’re actually brothers –

“MashaAllah”:

Tariq Jahan

speaks.
Glean Four: Shoot the Result

Worth in the press, globally,
so clip the *YouTube* video,
shoot the result:
music, Tourism, Temple.

Police paintings of institutional ends,
to a Facebook idol,
to Handsworth’s festival, and
the news knew a Michael Brown appeal:
killed.

Media to local light is
*Everywhere.*
(The end music?)

Shoot the result, and get
levels of brutality across Birmingham.
Interviewed

West Midlands’ Police have launched a murder enquiry, arrested one man in connection with the incident and recovered a vehicle nearby which will be examined by forensics experts.

They were standing on the side of the road, the car just drove.

I’ve got no words to describe what, why he was taken, why this has happened.

Mowed them down, ran them over.

People came out of prayer, they were protecting the area.

He had his whole life ahead of him.

My friends were targeted.

He was a very good lad, so it makes no sense -
Why are people behaving like this?

taking the lives of three innocent men.
United
Mark

Please ask for
this violence
to stop.

We never wanted this, nor
thought any of it would happen.

*This is about vandalism.*

If Labour politicians really believe that,
let’s have a list of the cuts
they think justify it.

We talk about cuts, but
most of them haven’t bitten yet.

Cuts don’t turn you into a thief
to the best of my knowledge.

*The whole world is looking.*

Stop this before
they bring in the Army.
This isn’t about Mark,
it never was.
The Takeover

Key

1. Don’t blur their faces. They deserve to pay, because

2. ‘It was a snowball, wasn’t it?’ We could’ve gone onto Twitter and said

3. ‘Officers are already positioned on New Street’. High Street, Bristol Street, Tallyho;

4. policing locally. Bad lads wanna be those gangsters in America.

5. ‘The end of the world as we know it is coming’.

6. BBM: ‘Let’s go Birmingham by the Bullring at 5 and have a riot’

7. because Ferguson in America, again, a black lad being shot by a police officer.

8. That’s their idol, their YouTube clip, and music videos.

9. “If some men can show so much hate, think how much love we can show together”.

10. Finally, justice is starting to take over.
Community Clean-Ups According to Twitter

- @my_builder will help you
- #riotcleanup
- Help 1%
- Riots 5%
- Social 5%
- Birmingham Against the Cuts: Enough is Enough
- This is untrue about Mosque.
- Stop the rumours and unboard our shops!
- Maybe now we can all move on.
- Malicious text message circulates

> “#wtfwasyouthinking when you looted the baguette shop next door to Mcdonalds?!”
Four Years On
Upper Bull Street

*Wednesday 12*th* August 2015*

Forty-four steps
from *The Priory Rooms*
to face roadworks, barriers and tramlines.

An abandoned shop ‘To Let’
beneath Colmore Gate;
Monty’s Sandwich bar is shut, and
shutters down at T S O.

Separated by One Central News –
agents; two spaces to place your bets:
Paddy Power has odds on number 7 –
and Coral battles it out against the odds on Bull Street.

Colmore Gate still glistens in grey, as
a Bobby on the Beat rides past on a bike.

Another casino lines the street and the sci-fi megastore is Forbidden –
Planet sat, conflicting William Hill.
North Western Arcade is a “safe haven” of organique shops, and boutiques, selling unique cards and gifts.

House of Fraser looks lost here. *Wrap chic.*

*Indian Burrito Co.* closed next to the pawnbroker as you exit to face Poundland and Martineau Place.

Thousands of feet are finding their way to a station that is ‘UNDER CONSTRUCTION’.

You’re back on the ‘DEMOLITION SITE’ at Upper Bull Street where I re-treat to the Point of the Temple Street or *Coffee Republic*?

A mug of No. 7, English Breakfast, helps me (and you) to take it all in.
One Good Thing

Me: One good thing that came from the riots?
You: No racial element.
Me: I’ve actually noticed this in Birmingham.

You: ‘dem homeless, deny access to benefits an’
what exactly do you tink ‘dem do?
Me: People who have religious conflict or
whatever have issues?

You: David Starkey is wrong
because we don’t really like each other.

FFS! If you don’t think there’s a deprived underclass,
you are going to create one by evicting people, just
as the media perceives:
“we’ll evict looters from council houses, says council chief”
because we don’t really like each other.

Me: I’ve actually noticed this in Birmingham.
Public Nation Issues

From America to Tallyho, religions that
    spread quickly. BBM and go!
From Tallyho to BBM, watching
    local police (this) as TV –
    lost.

From Hollywood to Birmingham
marches local, not just stationed
to National MD motivations,
    are positioned Centre to snowball,
    deeper.

*The local are lost* in ‘Public Nation issues’.

Birmingham pleads rioters,
glamorising in conflict outside ‘H n M’,
the Bullring.
From ‘Don’t’ to ‘Let’s’ and ECC,
as Birmingham perceives ‘the enemy’

at Digbeth. Father America
to committees positioned
in HS, not quite 5
PM to officers: ‘Public Nation issues’,
followed, moved outward
on New Street campaigning.

From National Hollywood with teams, we have Twitter: ‘Birmingham Lootings’ and
Bristol Policing at a hero base.
They’ve already noticed kind old Birmingham killing
contributed to ‘smash’ of disadvantage
preceding protests.

Well,
on Order have –

differences are had because of
‘Public Nation issues’.
Glean Five: Underclass

Me: And, Birmingham?

You: An’ dem do conflict or issues?

Wrong.

Underclass, just perceives, says council chief.

We really don’t like each other.
Glean Six: A Reflection

Pehla.

At home, BBC News on TV in London, then positioned – ‘the enemy’ is outside the Bullring.

‘I’m on my days off Sarge, do you need me to come in?’

Duja.

Fear spreads violence, but community spirits sing as ‘service to the public won’t suffer’:

Angels have stocked up for Costa lovers.

Tija.

A mixture of marches (and whites) at Waterlinks on Monday night.

I still didn’t feel unsafe.

Blood drips from his mouth to petrol forecourt.

Chautha.

‘My brother’s on the floor!’
The crowd becomes hostile.

JET becomes home
to rows upon rows
of flowers for the fallen.

*My heart goes out to the families.*

*Panjva.*

A man, Asian, lays bare one soul:
it’s time for the accused to face tomorrow.

A speech asks for the violence to stop.

“This isn’t about Mark, it never was.”

*Chhevan.*

No order?

*The potato man still stands.*

I nod, surprised that there were no reprisals.

*Satvan.*

Public Nation issues blush
the reflection of Birmingham.
Chapter Five: (Re)presenting Expressions of Identity and \textit{Fluid} and \textit{Emergent} Imagined Communities in \textit{United We Stand}

Introduction

There is still a need ‘to organise the material just as you organise the material as a playwright, to lead the audience in a certain way’ through it.\footnote{David Hare, ‘David Hare and Max Stafford-Clark’, in \textit{Verbatim Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre}, ed. by Will Hammond and Dan Steward (London: Oberon, 2008), pp.45-77 (p.59).}

After my examination of the deployment of verbatim methods in theatre and poetry (Chapter Three), and the series of poems that have followed in \textit{United We Stand}, it is important to understand how the individual pieces of writing were developed and why the series as a whole has been crafted in this way. \textit{United We Stand} depicts the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that I have previously argued were in existence during the disorder in Birmingham in 2011. The series of verbatim poems \textit{(re)presents} the complex nature of these ideas; demonstrating that imagined communities were in a constant state of flux in this situation and arguing for a definition of community that is pluralistic (see Chapter One, pp.57-63). The personal responses – obtained as a direct result of the semi-structured, life-story interviews that I conducted with twenty-five participants in August 2015 – provided me with the raw material needed to interpret and contest a detailed picture of individual and group experiences of events in the city.\footnote{For full details of these interviews and how they were conducted, see ‘Notes on Research Methods’ in the Introduction to the thesis, p.6. To read the interview protocol or any of the testimonies that were used as raw material for \textit{United We Stand}, see Appendix Three and Four.} \textit{United We Stand} not only \textit{(re)presents} these experiences through the innovative medium of verbatim poetry, but it simultaneously transforms the voice(s) of ordinary citizens as ‘key [social] actors’, while engaging with relevant expressions of identity whether based upon cultural or religious markers. The poems explore contemporary ideas that are relative to the concept of community as an ‘imagined’ phenomenon.\footnote{Benedict Anderson, ‘Introduction’, in \textit{Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism} (London: Verso, 2006), p.6.} These are particularly relevant to the
situation in Birmingham and to space, time and performativity. United We Stand confirms that communities in this context were ‘imagined’ into existence across various social and geographical scales that were not synonymous with the nation. Communities existed in Birmingham on local, national and global scales meaning that ordinary citizens were also ‘fellow-members’ of other groups concurrently. I argue that this existence on several scales gave rise to ‘the imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’, ‘micro-imagined wispy’ communities, and to global and virtual ties. As such, Anderson’s earlier model – which argued for a national imagined community that was ‘both inherently limited and sovereign’ – is partial. While some evidence for the reproduction of national identity during the disorder in Birmingham is (re)presented throughout United We Stand, fluid and emergent communities are also in existence and, therefore, these are (re)presented in the series. As a result, I maintain that a plural explanation, which acknowledges the multifaceted nature of imagined communities in contemporary society, is required. This accounts for those groups who are no longer reliant on the national framework that Anderson posits. While this chapter reflects on how United We Stand (re)presents this complexity, it also argues that the creative practice of deploying verbatim methods in poetry enables the researcher to directly engage with the relevant theoretical frameworks and the fluid and emergent imagined communities that are under investigation throughout this thesis.

4 Performativity has appeared again and again in scholarship on Nationlism. In 1991, Michael Billig argued that the nation is a discursive construct. Thus, the way we talk about it leads us to reproduce it. Since then, John E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss have taken this idea a step further and considered how the ordinary citizen talks about and performs the nation in their everyday life. See Chapter One, pp.29-46 for a detailed discussion of these frameworks and how the thesis is expanding on these notions.

5 Anderson, p.6.

6 Anderson, p.6.


8 Anderson, p.6.
In order to demonstrate how *United We Stand* simultaneously (re)presents and engages with this complex of communities, the chapter begins with a discussion of the deployment of traditional verbatim methods in poetry. Through a detailed examination of ‘Rest Days’ (p.150), ‘The Commute’ (p.157), and ‘Interviewed’ (p.178), this chapter considers the ‘cut-ups’ method that was recognised as being significant to both documentary and verbatim theatre practice by John W. Casson and Ewan MacColl. The chapter examines my editorial decision to deploy ‘found’ materials or ‘the documented’ throughout the second and third of these examples. These ‘documented’ responses are taken from various newspaper reports in order to indicate that the press and popular media played a vital role in the reproduction of these identities. Anderson argued that advances in print-capitalism – explicitly new modes of communication and the development of shared languages – led to the creation of national imagined communities in the mid-nineteenth-century. However, in the case of the disorder in Birmingham, I argue that similar advances in electronic communication technologies have resulted in the manifestation of imagined communities that are fluid and emergent in character (see Chapter Two). This is reflected in the arrangement of these ‘found’ and ‘documented’ materials throughout *United We Stand*.

Like Alecky Blythe in her 2011 production of *London Road* (see Chapter Three, pp.118-25), I have begun to advance these methods, digitally, for the purpose of my own creative practice. The method of Crowdsourced Poetry, which has been developed by contemporary practitioner Dan Simpson, is deployed in numerous poems throughout *United We Stand* in order to engage with the relevant community groups that were ‘imagined’ into existence across a variety of social and geographical scales in this context. These groupings were revealed online

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9 Subsequent references to specific poems from *United We Stand* will be given as page or line numbers in parentheses in the body of this chapter. See Chapter Three of the thesis for a more detailed explanation of this ‘cut-ups’ method as recognised by John W. Casson and Ewan MacColl, p.102; p.110.

10 According to Poets.Org, ‘found’ materials are usually taken from existing texts and refashioned, reordered and presented as poems. ‘The literary equivalent of a collage, found poetry is often made from newspaper articles, street signs, graffiti, speeches, letters, or even other poems.’ Thus, found poems are crafted from the ‘documented’ and some parts of the poems in *United We Stand* are also collaged in this way. See ‘Found Poem: Poetic Form’, Poets.Org (2016) <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/found-poem-poetic-form> [accessed on Monday 5 September 2016] (para. 1 of 7).


in the responses published by ordinary people on Twitter during the disorder. ‘10th August 2011’ (p.165) is written and structured in stanzas that total 140-characters each. By crafting them in this way, I reflect the restrictions that were placed on these responses when they were originally published on the social networking site five years ago.

The chapter introduces a new kind of digital-verbatim method in an explanation of the processes behind the poem ‘A Hand’s Worth’ (p.172), which I have coined ‘Deferred Dadaism’.14 Using a software tool known as JanusNode, both the responses to questions in interview and those published on Twitter are randomly fragmented by the program as part of this method. The fragments are then restructured and the raw material is edited by the poet in an attempt to highlight interesting and previously-unknown patterns of words and sounds.15 This has led to the creation of two, new verbatim poems. This focus on advancing such methods in the digital age concludes with the example of a visual-digital poem that is written in verbatim, but which (re)presents expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community in a different way entirely. ‘Precautions’ (p.175) is (re)presented in the form of a pie-chart poem, while ‘The Takeover’ (p.183) maps the coordinates of the locations affected by the disorder in Birmingham onto a scatter-graph. The key to the graph forms a verbatim poem that is made up of individual experiences and testimonies relative to incidents in the city. Textual analysis software (TAPoRware) is used to explore the frequency of key phrases that are repeatedly deployed throughout the various responses to this disorder in Birmingham.16 These key phrases and a number of significant emotional responses relating to expressions of identity are (re)presented accordingly in an attempt to create illustrative visual-digital poems.

The chapter concludes by paying attention to some of the other poetic influences on United We Stand and on my own creative practice throughout this process. While all thirty-one poems in the series are crafted through the deployment of verbatim or digital methods (or a

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14 This illogical fragmentation by JanusNode of the words from participants’ interviews is similar to the work characteristic of ‘Dadaism’ as ‘an early 20th century movement in art, literature, music, and film, active most notably in Europe and the United States, repudiating and mocking artistic and social conventions and emphasizing the illogical and absurd’. See ‘Dadaism n. adj.’, Oxford English Dictionary Online (2016) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/35036262?redirectedFrom=dadaism#eid> [accessed on Friday 12 August 2016].

15 This is the reason why I have termed this particular electronic process ‘Digital Dadaism’ throughout the chapter.

combination of both), I have also been influenced by supplementary genres, methods and themes when writing. Considering the influence of ‘Radical Landscape Poetry’ (Harriet Tarlo’s *The Ground Aslant*) and the process of ‘Gleaning’ (developed by Leicestershire-based poet Mark Goodwin), on a number of the verbatim poems, including ‘Upper Bull Street’ (p.186), ‘Grand Victoria Square’ (p.160), ‘One Good Thing’ (p.188) and ‘Glean Five: Underclass’ (p.191), this chapter highlights the processes by which I have been able to expand the range and context of the collection in its entirety.\(^{17}\) I place a significant emphasis on the locale of Birmingham in order to demonstrate that an important link between both local and national identities existed in this context. Through an engagement with the urban cityscape as landscape in these final examples, I argue that the amalgamation of these methods is appropriate. Together, they enable me to (re)present and directly *interact* with the imagined communities that inhabit this landscape simultaneously.

**Traditional Verbatim Methods**

Traditional techniques of verbatim – originating in theatre practice – often relied, exclusively, on ‘tape-recorded material from the “real-life” originals’ of characters and events (see Chapter Three, p.99).\(^{18}\) In order to inform the creative output of this thesis, interview testimonies were obtained from voluntary participants who were accessed during the early stages of the work’s development (see ‘Notes on Research Methods’, p.6). The responses presented by participants during the semi-structured, life-story interviews provided me with the raw material from which to craft the series of verbatim poems. However, when deploying these methods in order to (re)present and engage with the ideas of imagined community that existed during the disorder, I was not only acting as the primary researcher. Like Bhanu Kapil Rider in *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (see Chapter Three, pp.135-42), I transgressed the boundaries of the

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\(^{17}\) For an explanation and examples of ‘Radical Landscape Poetry’, see Harriet Tarlo, *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry* (Exeter: Shearsman, 2011). Examples of Mark Goodwin’s work can be found in Tarlo’s anthology, see ‘Mark Goodwin’, pp.148-56. For a detailed explanation of the ‘Gleaning’ method, that has also influenced the series of verbatim poetry, see fn.80 in this chapter.

traditional poet and embodied the role of ‘the editor’ throughout the creative practice. As a result of performing this role, it became vital to demonstrate that this skill was a direct consequence of restricting my own practice to include only original testimony. By carefully selecting and rearranging the words and phrases transcribed from the interview testimonies, I transformed the voice(s) of previously-unheard citizens in United We Stand. In line with Fox and Miller-Idriss’s concept of ‘Everyday Nationhood’, which ‘shed[s] light on some of the ways in which ordinary people are active participants in the […] reproduction of the nation’, the series of verbatim poems presented in this thesis demonstrates that ordinary people are ‘active participants’ in the reproduction of their own imagined communities in the context of their everyday lives. In the case of the disorder in Birmingham, I maintain that these communities are not limited to the nation. They exist across various social and geographical scales (local, global and virtual) and are fluid and emergent constructs. Thus, Anderson’s idea of the nation as an imagined community is partial. To demonstrate this complexity through a series of verbatim poems, I have continually explored word sounds, changed narrative direction and perspective, and carefully considered the implications of any decisions relating to chronology and structural order, which I will examine later in this chapter. These ‘strategic editorial choices’ in the process of composition’ became even more crucial when I deployed the conventional ‘cut-ups’ method, which was recognised by John W. Casson and Ewan MacColl (see Chapter Three, p.102-113), while simultaneously limiting the kinds of material I was working with.

This ‘cut-ups’ method is deployed in an attempt to produce a more reliable (re)presentation of the everyday experiences of ordinary citizens during the disorder in Birmingham. This method permits me, as the editor in this instance, to work only with the material uncovered by the fieldwork, and the methods taken from verbatim. By restricting my creative practice in this way, I am making the deliberate decision not to deploy my own

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20 This demonstrates that I am aware, both politically and ethically, of my role as the poet to speak for those who were unable to access the mediums (print media) through which to be heard. Specifically, I recognise the impact that my own subjectivity and control over the raw material has had on both the creative practice and its outcomes; with regards to the positive intervention of (re)presenting these voices for the purpose of healing community trauma. I would argue that this is a form of ‘reflexive ethnography’.
imagination in the same way that I would if I were working within the confines of my usual practice as a poet. For the most part, I am prohibited from altering the narratives to which I have been given access; avoiding the inclusion of incidents that did not occur, as well as any words that were not spoken during the real-life re-telling of these events in the interview process. Poet and critic, Kenneth Goldsmith terms these kinds of poetic practice, which make use of ‘cutting and pasting’ and ‘recycle’ other peoples’ words “uncreative” or conceptual writing’. In his book of the same name in 2011, the writer pays close attention to the work of Marjorie Perloff and her key concept of the ‘unoriginal genius’ as he begins to define what he means by the term “uncreative” in this context. By deploying this phrase and coinining the term ‘moving information’ in relation to her characterisation, Perloff posits that ‘today’s writer resembles more of a programmer than a tortured genius, brilliantly conceptualizing, constructing, executing, and maintain a writing machine’ and this is particularly relevant to my role as ‘the editor’ or ‘collagist’ throughout United We Stand. As a ‘realized writing practice’, Perloff’s concept embodies an ethos ‘where the construction or conception of a text is as important as what the text says or does’ and I argue that this is exactly the case for United We Stand because the ways in which I construct the text – and the methods that I deploy for this purpose – enable me, as the poet, to engage with the same imagined communities that the series of poems (re)presents. Editorial decisions relating to these “uncreative” methods of ‘cutting and pasting’ and ‘recycling’, as well as to narrative order and perspective, were instrumental in the transformation of these testimonies into a series of verbatim poems that would be desirable for a new, imagined community of readers. The following two examples – which were obtained from members of the West Midlands’ Police force during the fieldwork stages of this research – illustrate how the conceptual and structural choices that I have made work to shape each person’s experiences and

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26 Goldsmith, p. 2.
27 For an understanding of the term ‘intentional plagiarism’, see Goldsmith, p.2.

In my role as researcher, I argue that I had ‘ethnographical authority’ to make such decisions for the purpose of transforming the voice(s) of ordinary people (my participants) in Birmingham who could not access print media to speak for themselves. However, my role as the poet complicated this further because there was a level of personal subjectivity in play in relation to poetics and achieving particular effects in the poems themselves. In particular, I wanted to demonstrate that this intervention was positive in helping to heal members of the community following the traumatic events that took place in Birmingham in 2011.
form a poetic (re)presentation of the events in Birmingham. The first poetic (re)presentation that this chapter will discuss is titled ‘Rest Days’.  

**OFFICER ONE (PARTICIPANT ELEVEN):**

‘I got home, got up in the morning, had a few hours’ sleep, so got up to see on my TV there’d been more rioting in London. It was getting more serious now. Watching the TV footage […] [u]rm, first thing I did was phone up my planning department to say “I’m on my days off Sarge, do you need me to come in? […] I can see what’s happening on the telly, do you need me to come in?” and was told straight away, “No, No, there’s no requirement for you to come in”.’ (See Appendix Four, Interview Five).

**OFFICER TWO (PARTICIPANT TWELVE):**

‘Urm, much like Luke, I was on rest days when it all started urm and it was just the immense feeling of frustration sat at home watching the news urm and again, y’know, myself and my colleagues kept calling into work: “we’ll come in, why are you calling in people from Scotland when we’re y’know 5 miles up the road n’ we can come in and work”, and we were told “no, you’re not needed, stay at home but stay by your phone”, urm and after two days of just sat at home watching BBC News because we couldn’t go anywhere, there’d been more rioting in London. We were told to sit by our phones so you couldn’t really go out.’ (See Appendix Four, Interview Two).

The important editorial decisions made in relation to narrative order and perspective can be identified in a direct comparison of the extracts from Officers’ One and Two (presented above) and the opening stanza of ‘Rest Days’:

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28 ‘Notes on Research Methods’ can be found in the Introduction to this thesis, see pages 6 onwards. To comply with all ethical standards in relation to confidentiality and anonymity, names have been erased from the excerpts presented here.

29 See ‘Rest Days’ in Chapter Four: United We Stand, p.150. Subsequent references to this poem will be given as line numbers in the body of this chapter.
‘After two days sat at home
watching BBC News,
there’d been more rioting in London.

“I’m on my days off Sarge, do you need me to come in?” (ll.1-4).

Whereas these extracts are taken from the interview testimonies of two officers with very
different experiences of policing in Birmingham, and who were based in various locations across
the city, their explanations of the events that occurred in 2011 remain similar. This is one of the
reasons why it was appropriate for ‘Rest Days’ to take the shape of a single, poetic narrative
featuring several voices that (re)presented the same occupation in this context. ‘Rest Days’
document the beginning of the disorder in the city, and, unlike many of the other poems in the
series, it is told from the perspective of those officers who were deemed responsible for
controlling the rioting and looting behaviours. The text highlights the implications that the
scheduled ‘Rest Days’ had on Birmingham as the disorder began on Sunday 7th August. The key
message about these ‘Rest Days’ – in particular the notion that police officers on-the-ground
were consistently being told they were not needed in the first forty-eight hours of the disorder –
is reinforced by the (re)presentation of the question: ‘“I’m on my days off Sarge, do you need me
to come in?”’ (l.4). It is important to note, at this point, that I chose to (re)present this question in
italics for two main reasons: in order to illustrate that these words were actually spoken by the
officer when in conversation with his managing sergeant during the disorder in 2011. The use of
italics emphasises that this question is key in the poem’s consideration of these incidents as they
spread across Birmingham. Officers were unable to take control of the situation until permission
was granted by their senior sergeant and this led to the displayed behaviours seeming unruly.
Both the poetic devices and the ‘cut-ups’ method deployed throughout this piece are crucial for
depicting the officers’ experiences in ‘Rest Days’. The reader is invited to query the reasons
behind the officers’ ‘days off’ (l.4) during the first ‘two days’ (l.1) of the disorder. My decision to
situate this poem at the beginning of the series highlights that this choice to give the officers their
‘Rest Days’ had a significant impact on the events that followed during the disorder in
Birmingham.
The organised repetition of this question, which forms the refrain throughout the poem, is a significant rearrangement in ‘Rest Days’ because reports from various media channels, including Sangat TV (see Chapter Two) and The Daily Mail, suggested that some individuals were blaming police across the country for causing the incidents. In an article titled ‘Racial tensions reach boiling point in Birmingham as vigilantes arm themselves with baseball bats after deaths of three young Muslims’, shopkeeper Mazhar Iqbal accuse[s] the police of failing to protect Asian communities. In a comment that echoes the speeches made by a group of Asian men (re)presented as the ‘key actors’ in Sangat TV’s live coverage (see Chapter Two, pp.82-4), Mr Iqbal argues: ‘The police have done nothing. They care more about protecting electrical shops than us’. By carefully selecting and rearranging this question, I reposition it as the refrain in order to imply that this query is of particular importance when examining the actions of the police during the events in Birmingham. I indicate that there is a complex negotiation of identities at work for the members of West Midlands’ Police force. By paying close attention to their experiences, I reposition them as ordinary citizens within Birmingham, but this remains complicated by the fact that their day job recognises them as members of a state institution which should be protecting Britain’s national imagined community. This expectation that the police will protect the national imagined community is also depicted in Gillian Slovo’s verbatim production, The Riots – in her (re)presentation of the figure of Leroy Logan (see Chapter Three, p.125-34). Logan is presented as a ‘key actor’ who embodies this national imagined community throughout Slovo’s script, while, in comparison, the officers’ in ‘Rest Days’ are shown to feel similar emotions (such as anger and frustration) to many of the ordinary people also residing in Birmingham. The repetition of the question on four occasions throughout ‘Rest Days’ is

31 ‘Racial tensions reach boiling point in Birmingham’ (para. 5 of 41).
32 ‘Racial tensions reach boiling point in Birmingham’ (para. 6 of 41). By referring to ‘key actors’ here, I recognise (like Sabina Mihelj in Media Nations), that ordinary citizens were often positioned in the media as representatives of the national ‘we’. In this case though, Mr Iqbal is criticizing the state institution (the police) who should have been protecting the national imagined community. I argue that this complicates the ideas of imagined community that existed during the disorder in Birmingham. For a detailed understanding of the ‘key actor’, see Media Nations: Communicating Belonging and Exclusion in the Modern World (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.95-118 (pp.101-2).
33 Gillian Slovo, The Riots: from spoken evidence (London: Oberon, 2011). A detailed analysis of this verbatim production can be found in Chapter Three, see pp.125-34.
deployed to demonstrate that this frustration is building each time the officer has to ask the sergeant if he is needed. By placing this emphasis on the police officers’ perspectives right at the beginning of *United We Stand*, the poem demonstrates that both the relationships between state and nation, and between the nation and the everyday in a localised setting, remain relevant in this context.

As well as demonstrating that scales of identity and imagined community (local, national, and global) are significant on this occasion, *United We Stand* also attempts to be credible in its (re)presentations of the ordinary citizens’ experiences of the disorder in Birmingham. ‘The Commute’ (p.157) is a clear example of this effort to remain true to the ordinary persons’ interview testimonies. This poem (re)presents a worker’s everyday experience of commuting to and from Waterlinks in Birmingham City Centre amid the growing levels of damage and disorder throughout the city, hence the poem’s title.34 Describing the daily journey to and from the office during that week in August, the participant in question explains:

‘…I’d just arrived to work, um, and I would usually run home from work at Waterlinks coz I ran, like I run quite a lot so I used to run to work and run home, and I remember my Mum said, ‘Don’t. Don’t run home from work (laughs), don’t run home from work today’ and I was like ‘it’s fine’ […] I always felt safe wherever I am um, like I used to go, when I used to go out in Birmingham – I’d never tell my Mum this […], but I used to sometimes walk home like with friends […] but I still didn’t feel unsafe. […] I think the first day, that day it kicked off, I had to run to work. I started running home and […] it was quite scary um, I ran pretty fast that day (laughs)’. (See Appendix Four, Interview Six).

This attempt to remain true to the participant’s original retelling of her experience can be recognised when considering the poetic (re)presentation of her story in *United We Stand*:

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‘At 6 o’clock, I would usually
run home from work at Waterlinks.
Mum said, ‘Don’t’.
“Don’t run home from work today”, but
I still didn’t feel unsafe.

“In a record-breaking 18 hours, Birmingham saw widespread violence and looting
across the city.”

That day,
it kicked off and
I ran pretty fast.’ (ll.1-9).

Phrases including: ‘I would usually run home from work at Waterlinks’ (ll.1-2), and:
‘Mum said “Don’t. Don’t run home from work today”’ (ll.3-4) are retained for the purpose of
creating ‘an honest and swift text’ much like the verbatim prose-poems in Kapil Rider’s The
Vertical Interrogation of Strangers (see Chapter Three, pp.135-42). Similar to both Kapil Rider’s
collection and my earlier example, ‘Rest Days’, this poem was crafted by deploying traditional
verbatim methods, including the ‘cut-ups’ technique and the inclusion of additional ‘found’ (or
‘documented’) materials which were often taken from the media’s coverage of the incidents in
the city. Lines 6, 10-11, 16-17, and 24-25 are all quotations from newspaper articles, both
printed and online. For example, ‘Nick Robinson, 22, who works at Yenton pub in
Erdington, told Redbrick how the police had shut down the pub early due to fears the
violence would spread’ (ll.10-11) was ‘found’ in Redbrick’s live updates of the situation.
Lines such as this one are (re)presented in bold to reflect that they were originally featured in the
media’s responses to the disorder in 2011. The ‘cut-ups’ method is deployed in order to ensure

35 For an explanation of ‘Found’ poetry, which uses these ‘found’ or ‘documented’ materials, see fn. 10 in this
chapter.
36 These newspaper articles include live updates from The Birmingham Mail and Redbrick student newspaper. See
<http://www.redbrick.me/key_stories/live-birmingham-riots-2011/> [accessed on Tuesday 26 May 2016].
37 Hutchinson, ‘LIVE: Birmingham Riots 2011’.
that readers consider these poems to be a reliable source of information in their accounts of the incidents that took place in Birmingham. The ‘found’ materials, on the other hand, are included in order to imply that the media played a vital role in encouraging the expressions of identity and ideas of community that were ‘imagined’ into existence in this context. This combination of verbatim and ‘found’ methods distorts several different voices. Thus, through the poetic (re)presentation of ‘The Commute’, I transform the voice(s) of ordinary citizens and demonstrate that these traditional verbatim methods allow me to directly engage with the same imagined communities that I am arguing existed during the events in the city.

This desire for United We Stand to be considered more credible in its (re)presentations leads to an important ethical question being raised in relation to the limits of trauma, verbatim methods and authenticity. These issues have previously been debated at length by scholars including Amanda Stuart Fisher and Patrick Duggan.38 In ‘Others, Spectatorship, and the Ethics of Verbatim Performance’ (2013), Duggan ‘explore[s] the political and ethical implications of embodying the (verbatim) texts of others’.39 Locating his argument in theatre and performance specifically, Duggan suggests that the on-stage production

‘enters us (makers, thinkers, audiences) into an ethical relationship with the people in the theatre (audience and performers), the images presented and the concerns raised by those representations.’40

Although the relationship that Duggan refers to here is physical – because it is as an embodiment of the text on stage by performers, and it is an awareness of the concerns raised by such (re)presentations in the minds of an audience – his overall argument regarding the ethics of (re)presentations when crafted through the deployment of verbatim methods is particularly relevant to United We Stand. The series of verbatim poems invites its readers to enter into an

40 Duggan, p.147.
ethical relationship with the writer and the many, ordinary citizens who were residing in
Birmingham. Remaining inclusive of makers, thinkers and audience, I argue that the maker in
this series is the poet, while the thinker is the researcher – all of whom are one and the same
person. Thus, it is important to consider, as I have done in the Introduction to this thesis (pp.8-9)
and throughout this chapter, how the role of the poet and their own desire to transform voice(s)
for the purpose of examining identity and community will have affected the creative outcome
itself. The audience is made up of readers of the poetry series and, together, the poet, the
researcher, the ordinary citizens (of Birmingham), and these readers exist as a community that
has been ‘imagined’ as a result of this shared interaction with United We Stand. Through this
common experience (and purpose) of reading, editing, and interpreting the poems, and the events
that these (re)present, the makers, thinkers, citizens, and audience members of this community
are invited to subconsciously consider the ethical implications of a series of poems that deploys
verbatim methods. They must contemplate how verbatim methods are able to ‘authentically’
communicate trauma.

In ‘Trauma, Authenticity, and the Limits of Verbatim’, Fisher argues that it is not possible
to communicate trauma.41 She contends that to say ‘the authenticity of verbatim […] that deals
with trauma […] can be explained simply is to overlook the problem trauma presents’, and, as I
have previously discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, I agree with her here.42 Trauma is
intangible because it is a repressed psychic injury (see Chapter Three, pp.115-8), however that is
not to say that the verbatim methods deployed in United We Stand cannot pay attention to the
traumatic experiences of ordinary citizens during the disorder in Birmingham; indeed many
verbatim poems throughout the series place a significant emphasis on the disorder in
Birmingham as a sequence of traumatic experiences that resulted from the behaviours of rioting
and looting in this setting. This is one of the reasons why United We Stand is (re)presented in the
form of a series of verbatim poems. The most significant of all traumatic experiences to happen
during the disorder in Birmingham was the hit-and-run incident that killed three men on Dudley
Road on Wednesday 10th August 2011. This particular occasion is alluded to in a number of
poems throughout United We Stand, including ‘Interviewed’ (p.178), ‘10th August 2011’ (p.165),

41 Stuart Fisher, p. 112.
42 Stuart Fisher, p. 112.
and ‘Forecourt’ (p.167). While I will return to discuss the ‘10th August 2011’ in more detail later in this chapter, it is to the first of these three poems that this chapter now turns.

‘Interviewed’ pays close attention to the feelings and thoughts of Birmingham’s local community, which is ‘imagined’ into existence as a result of this particular incident. The combination of verbatim methods and ‘found’ materials that are deployed throughout the poem blur the multiple voices that are speaking about the hit-and-run. The poem opens with a snippet from a newspaper article that provides the latest update in West Midlands’ Police force’s investigation into the incident:

‘West Midlands Police have launched a murder enquiry, arrested one man in connection with the incident and recovered a vehicle nearby which will be examined by forensics experts.’ (ll.1-3).

Several voices are interspersed and appear to interrupt one another throughout the poem in order to be heard. For example, one speaker comments: ‘I’ve got no words to describe what,’ (l.6) before a second person interrupts with the line: ‘Mowed them down, ran them over’ (l.7). This effect is echoed in the structure and form of the poem, too. The lines are split and placed, strategically, on both the left- and right-hand sides of the page in order to indicate when a new voice has broken into the conversation. While the voice of each speaker can be read separately, if the poem is read vertically down the page, this transformation of voice(s) becomes more obvious throughout ‘Interviewed’ when the poem is read across the page:

‘People came out of prayer,
they were protecting the area.

He had his whole life ahead of him.

My friends were targeted.

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43 The hit-and-run incident is central to many other poems in the United We Stand series, including ‘The Brothers’ (p.164) and ‘I have so much respect for Tariq Jahan’ (p.169). Most of these poems are situation in ‘Wednesday’ (the third part of the series), which reflects the events that took place on Wednesday 10th August 2011 specifically.
44 Anderson, p.6.
He was a very good lad, so it makes no sense -

Why are people behaving like this?

taking the lives of three innocent men.’ (ll.10-16).

The poem’s form and structure allows for multiple voices to be (re)presented throughout ‘Interviewed’, however the ambiguity of this leaves the reader to interpret for themselves who is speaking and when they are doing so. By transforming the voice(s) of the ordinary citizens using a mixture of verbatim and ‘found’ methods, I transgress the boundaries of imagined communities in Birmingham. I place a significant emphasis on the local imagined community, rather than on the nation. I bring the voice(s) of the ordinary citizens together, thus highlighting the importance of ‘the imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’ in this context.45 Like Richard Norton-Taylor in The Colour of Justice (see Chapter Three, pp.115-8), I argue that ‘Interviewed’ is able to focus, explicitly, on the ‘traumatic’ experience of this hit-and-run incident.46 However, the impact that this event has had on friends, family, and neighbours of Haroon Jahan, Shazad Ali and Abdul Musavir is expressed in the poem through measured and articulate responses in this instance. For example: ‘He was a very good lad, so it makes no sense –/ Why are people behaving like this?’ (ll.14-5). Although trauma is not knowable or communicable, poems like ‘Interviewed’ demonstrate that traumatic experiences relative to a repressed psychic injury can be represented (albeit indirectly) in poetry.47 The traditional verbatim methods that I have discussed so far throughout this chapter provide creative practitioners with a way to capture these traumatic experiences and (re)present them. ‘10th August 2011’ provides the reader with a second example that expresses both shock and sadness in relation to this traumatic experience of the hit-and-run incident. It reads: ‘This is not human nature, but/ the work of mere animals; to/ commit a hit-and-run away!’ (ll.30-2)

45 Ahmed, p.28.
46 Richard Norton-Taylor, The Colour of Justice: Based on the transcripts of The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (London: Oberon, 1999). A detailed analysis of this verbatim production can be found in Chapter Three, see pp.115-8.
47 Stuart Fisher, p.112.
The ‘cut-ups’ method also enables me to accentuate patterns of sound and rhyme. ‘Rest Days’ is crafted through the combination of this traditional verbatim method and various explorations of sound. This amalgamation works to transform the previously-unheard voices from West Midlands’ Police force. As ‘Rest Days’ opens (see page 150), internal rhyme dominates. The patterns of sound in the internal rhyme of ‘two’ and ‘News’ (ll.1-2) highlight that this poem has something important to say about the start of the disorder in Birmingham. By juxtaposing ‘two days’ (l.1) and the ‘BBC News’ coverage (l.2) in the first two lines of the poem, I hint that temporality and performativity are two, key concepts relative to the existence of imagined communities in this context. On the surface, ‘Rest Days’ implies that these ‘two days’ are important as a period of time because it was during the initial forty-eight hours that the civil disorder began to spread into other towns and cities, including Birmingham. However, the poem pays close attention to something that I argue is more important than this fast reach. It highlights that this exact time period of ‘two days’ had a detrimental effect on the policing and overall control of the situation. The police officers depicted throughout the poem were left ‘sat at home’ (l.1). This inability to take action and manage the uprising in Birmingham was no choice or fault of theirs. It provoked feelings of anger and frustration, and these emotional responses are (re)presented throughout ‘Rest Days’ as officers sit ‘[s]eeing officers I knew on the TV’ (l.5). Emotional responses to the disorder in Birmingham are depicted in numerous other examples throughout United We Stand, including ‘Precautions’ (p.175). I return to this example and the significance of (re)presenting these emotional responses – in order to understand expressions of identity – later in this chapter.

By referencing ‘BBC News’ coverage at the outset of the text, I situate important media channels at the fore of ‘Rest Days’ and United We Stand simultaneously. This indicates that both new and popular media played a crucial part in (re)presenting the nation during the disorder in Birmingham. Similar to the (re)presentation of the national imagined community in the BBC’s news coverage at the time (see Chapter Two, pp.69-73), ‘Rest Days’ demonstrates that national identity remains relevant in this situation. This text, and the series of verbatim poems in its entirety, interrogates Anderson’s notion that the concept of an imagined community, which he

48 These ideas are considered in Chapter One of this thesis. See the detailed critique of previous scholarship on Nationalism as posited by Anderson (Imagined Communities, 2006), Billig (Banal Nationalism, 1991), and Fox and Miller-Idriss (‘Everyday Nationhood’, 2008).
49 See Mihelj ‘Media Nations at War’, pp.95-118.
argued was formed synonymously at the national level, is limited. Temporal dimensions are (re)presented throughout *United We Stand* to highlight that the communities ‘imagined’ into existence during this disorder were, in fact, fluid and emergent. These groups were often identified as ‘the imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’ as (re)presented in ‘The Takeover’ (p.183), or as global or ‘virtual neighborhoods’ which are depicted in various Twitter and visual-digital poems, including ‘A Hand’s Worth (p.172). Temporality as a key concept relative to these fluid and emergent communities is symbolised by frequent references to dates (‘10 August 2011’, p.163), days (‘Monday’, ‘Tuesday’, ‘Wednesday’), and times (‘At 6 o’clock…’ in ‘The Commute, l.1) that are deployed throughout *United We Stand*. These references illustrate that ‘micro-imagined wispy’ communities were also in existence during the disorder in Birmingham because, as Fine and Scott have previously argued, these communities are formed temporarily. In this case, shared membership of these ‘micro-imagined wispy’ communities collapsed as the disorder in Birmingham ground to a halt by the end of the second week in August. Thus, I argue that imagined communities in existence during this disorder were pluralistic. The media had a crucial impact on the temporary formation of these groups, and the final stanza in ‘Rest Days’ provides another clear example of how the media encouraged the existence of these fluid and emergent communities in Birmingham:

‘*YouTube* music videos;

*YouTube* video clips;

*YouTube* their idols, then

“Meet in Birmingham at 5pm, let’s have a riot.”

“I’m on my days off Sarge, do you need me to come in?” (ll. 15-19).

References to *YouTube* ‘music videos’ (l.15), ‘video clips’ (l.16), and ‘idols’ (l.17) indicate that advances in electronic communication technologies – specifically, the invention of the Internet –

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50 Anderson, p.7.
51 See my own argument and call for a pluralistic definition of the concept of imagined community in Chapter One, pp.57-63.
52 This idea of ‘the imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’ is taken from ‘the imagined space of the neighbourhood’ that Ahmed posits in *Strange Encounters*, p.28. For an explanation of global and ‘virtual neighborhoods’, see Appadurai, p.191.
53 Fine and Scott, p.1.
led to the formation of global and virtual networks online.\textsuperscript{54} These networks brought together various individuals in Birmingham who shared the common desire to participate in the rioting and looting behaviours across the city. As well as forming global and virtual networks in this instance, these ordinary citizens encouraged others to “Meet in Birmingham at 5pm to have a riot.” (l.18). I argue that this created an emergent ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community in this local setting.

As the reader reaches the end of ‘Rest Days’, I have ‘[led] the[m] a certain way’ through the officers’ experiences.\textsuperscript{55} I have transformed the voice(s) of previously-unheard police officers and those responsible for the rioting and looting in lines such as: “Meet in Birmingham at 5pm, let’s have a riot.” ‘Rest Days’ (re)presents the police officers’ overall message in regards to the blame placed upon them during the disorder in the city. The poem manipulates the reader and encourages them to consider the significance of the decisions made by the senior sergeant. The ‘cut-ups’ method is deployed in order to capture distinctive patterns of words and sounds, and poetic devices including alliteration, consonance, and assonance are organised to emphasise these unique patterns. These methods and devices are interspersed in order to shine a light on the fact that the Internet facilitated various modes of communication (Twitter and BBM) during the disorder in Birmingham.\textsuperscript{56} The lines: ‘videos of violence going viral online’ (ll. 6-7) deploys the identical sound of the consonant ‘v’ throughout, while the stanza (presented in full below) constantly moves between the softer and stricter vowel sounds produced by the letter ‘I’ and found in words including, ‘Seeing’ (l.5) and ‘recognise’ (l.6). The stanza reads:

\begin{quote}
‘Seeing officers I knew on the TV, and
I could recognise the videos of
violence going viral online’ (ll.5-7).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{54} For Thomas L. Friedman in \textit{The World is Flat}, this invention of the Internet is a positive advancement. He argues that ‘this “flattening” of the world’ is good for ‘people everywhere’. See \textit{The World is Flat: The Globalized World in the Twenty-First Century} (London: Penguin, 2006).

\textsuperscript{55} David Hare, ‘David Hare and Max Stafford-Clark’, p.59.

This repetition of sound through the implementation of devices including both imperfect and internal rhyme, alliteration, consonance and assonance, is continued throughout stanzas three and four to repeatedly highlight that the police officers were confronted with the difficulty of the Internet’s fast pace and the wide-spread nature of its different modes of communication. A significant emphasis is placed upon these advanced modes of communication as examples of key, online platforms that were wirelessly enabled and, thus, resulted in the widespread nature of the disorder. For example: ‘Twitter and BBM fuel that ambition’ (l.9) which ‘paints a bad picture of Birmingham’ (l.11). In this instance, the consonant ‘v’ sound has been replaced by a recurring stress on the sounds of letters ‘b’ and ‘p’. This ‘p’ sound is repeated again in stanza four in the line: ‘Public Order officers are already positioned’ (l.13). This time assonance is organised through the repeated vowel sound of the letter ‘o’, as well as the previously mentioned ‘I’. The weight placed on these words and sounds is particularly important. It is purposefully deployed to allude to the various kinds of imagined community that were in existence during the disorder in 2011. My decision to repeat the ‘b’ sound through the alliteration in stanza five is effective because words such as ‘BBM’ (l.9) are adjacent to the lines: ‘By the Bullring at 5…’ (l.10) and ‘It paints a bad picture of Birmingham’ (l.11). This indicates that connections to the global network (‘BBM’) and to the local neighbourhood – (re)presented by the image of ‘the Bullring’ in ‘Birmingham’ – also existed in this context. Thus, the use of poetic techniques reinforces the links that are being suggested between the different subjects of the poem.
Introducing the Digital

In addition to the deployment of traditional verbatim methods, I advance the techniques arranged in *United We Stand* to include digital tools and software such as Twitter, TAPoRware, and JanusNode.\(^{57}\) Just as Blythe used electronic headsets during her rehearsals for *London Road* (see Chapter Three, pp.118-25), I consider the significance of advances in electronic communication technologies. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson argues that advances in print-capitalism and shared languages, including the growing access to various printed modes of communication such as newspapers and literature, were the key to understanding the nation as an imagined community.\(^{58}\) In the case of the disorder in Birmingham though, more recent advances in communication technologies, such as the invention of the Internet and the rise of social networking platforms, have led to the existence of both fluid and emergent imagined communities in this context. Thus, the form and structure of many of the verbatim poems featured in *United We Stand* echoes the significance of this advancement. Returning to Goldsmith’s idea of “‘uncreative” writing’ again for a moment (see page 200), it is important to highlight that he and Perloff also recognised the importance of advances in technology on literature. Specifically, both Perloff’s concept of the ‘*unoriginal genius*’ and Goldsmith’s own notion of ‘conceptual writing’ refer, explicitly, to ‘changes brought on by technology and the Internet’.\(^{59}\) Goldsmith acknowledges that Perloff’s ‘updated notion of genius’ focuses, in particular, on ‘one’s mastery of information’ as it is presented to us online and our dissemination of this as writers is of equal significance.\(^{60}\) He focuses on the ways in which writers are now ‘tak[ing] their cues from the workings of technology and the Web’ in order to understand new ‘ways of constructing literature’ and I argue that this is exactly what I have done for many of the poems that constitute *United We Stand*.\(^{61}\) Several pieces have been crafted using raw material that was comprised of the immediate responses published online by Twitter users during the disorder, instead of the raw material that was taken from the interview testimonies.\(^{62}\) These poetic (re)presentations highlight that the online responses posted on Twitter remain significant.

\(^{57}\) See fn.14-16 of this chapter for more information about TAPoRware and JanusNode.

\(^{58}\) Anderson, ‘Old Languages, New Models’, pp. 77-8.

\(^{59}\) Goldsmith, p. 1.

\(^{60}\) Goldsmith, p. 1.

\(^{61}\) Goldsmith, p. 2.

\(^{62}\) These poems include ‘The Brothers’ (p.162) and ‘The Big Guns: A mixed narrative’ (p.157), in Chapter Four: *United We Stand* (pp.145-94 of this thesis).
because they develop our understanding of the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined
community that were in existence in Birmingham. Throughout the poem ‘10th August 2011’, I
edit this raw material and restrict each stanza to a total of 140-characters in an attempt to mirror
the controlled limitations of any Twitter responses that were published during these events. The
opening stanza of the poem clearly demonstrates this limit. It reads:

‘Street steps to face tramlines beneath
Birmingham New Street.
Shut down because of fire, and
loads of smoke at the station –
not riot related.’ (ll.1-5)

Similar to Slovo’s (re)presentation of a rolling Twitter feed on stage during the performance of
The Riots, this poem (re)presents a number of online responses that were published on the social
networking site by ordinary citizens. ‘10th August 2011’ places a significant emphasis on the
reports of ‘fire, and / loads of smoke at the station’ (ll.3-4) and ‘the scene of a cannabis farm that
/ the police have found,’ (l.6-7). Yet, both incidents are confirmed to be ‘not riot related’ (l.5).
The poem continues to display each stanza as a ‘tweet’ of 140-characters in order to remain true
to these original responses that were published online. The hit-and-run incident takes centre stage
as it also occurred on the day in question. This is illustrated in the lines ‘My heart goes out to /
the families’ (ll.10-11) and ‘Tariq Jahan deserves an OBE’ (l.15). The structure and form of the
poem remains consistent throughout, until the reader reaches the end of the text. The restriction
placed upon each stanza is then blurred in order to make way for the poem’s climax:

‘This is not human nature, but
the work of mere animals; to
commit a hit-and-run away! A
candle-
    lit vigil marks the spot and

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63 See ‘Police Action from a Smartphone’ (p.149) and ‘Community Clean-Ups According to Twitter’ (p.182), in
Chapter Four: United We Stand for two, visual-digital examples that demonstrate the importance of these advances
in electronic communication technologies.
emotions run high, as
police are given extra time
to quiz the 32-year-old man accused of
murdering three men in
Birmingham.’ (ll.30-9).

Here, the final stanza totals 150-characters in an attempt to break the structural
conventions that have been deployed throughout earlier parts of the poem. This permits these last
lines of the text to have a real impact upon the reader. As they reach this moment in ‘10th August
2011’, the poem is paying close attention to the ‘candle- / lit vigil (ll.33-34) and the ‘emotions’ of
other, ordinary citizens that ‘run high’ (l.35) in the immediate aftermath of the incident. By
breaking the pattern of the poem at this point, I demonstrate the severity of the situation to the
reader. The standalone line: ‘An inquest is due to be opened tomorrow’ (l.40), which concludes
the poem, adds to this effect. It implies that the situation is far from over, and the verbatim
poems that follow ‘10th August 2011’ in the series – for example, the police medic’s perspective
in ‘Forecourt’, (p.167), or the community spirit that is symbolised in ‘Glean Three: One Soul,
One Voice’, (p.170) – echo this sentiment because they continue to focus on the repercussions of
the hit-and-run.

As I have previously argued throughout Chapter One of this thesis, ‘10th August 2011’ is
a prime example of a poem that features various articulations which reproduce Anderson’s idea
of the nation as an imagined community.64 The localised hit-and-run incident that took place in
Winson Green is situated in the wider context of the nation as a direct result of the ‘small words’
which I deploy throughout.65 These words imply that the national deixis, which Mihelj
recognises in Media Nations, was also in existence at the time of this occurrence.66 As well as
being expressed by several media channels throughout their coverage of these events (see my
analysis in Chapter Two), I argue that feelings of national identity were also articulated by

64 Anderson, p.6.
65 In Banal Nationalism (1991), Billig argues that the nation is a discursive construct. He contends that it is
(re)produced in a variety of ways on a daily basis: through the ‘small words’ of ‘homeland deixis’ that are broadcast
nationally by politicians, throughout newspapers, and ‘inscribed in the sports pages’. See Chapter One, pp.32-41 of
this thesis for a detailed discussed of Billig’s work.
66 Mihelj’s study in Media Nations is relevant to this research because it focuses on the (re)presentations of national
identity by the media in situations of conflict. For a full explanation and demonstration of how Mihelj’s work is
relates to the disorder in Birmingham in 2011, see Chapter Two of the thesis.
ordinary people on this occasion. Lines including ‘for saving our country’ (l.14) and ‘“Tariq Jahan is a very brave man”’ is trending in the UK’ (ll.18-9) expose these feelings of national belonging throughout the poem. The second of these examples is (re)presented in bold because it was taken from a newspaper report published by The Mirror in the aftermath of the incident.67 This demonstrates that both the media and ordinary citizens (residing in and outside of Birmingham) were ‘active participants’ in the reproduction of this national identity.68 Thus, I argue that ‘10th August 2011’ supports Anderson’s theory that the nation can be identified as an imagined community.69 It highlights that this hypothesis is still relevant in the context of the disorder in Birmingham. However, the poem also illustrates that a significant relationship between the local (Winson Green, Birmingham) and the national (the UK) existed in this instance. This begins to imply that the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community formed during this situation were more complicated than Anderson’s initial definition of the concept had us believe.

‘10th August 2011’ demonstrates that these expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community were complex in a number of ways. My decision to deploy enjambment throughout each stanza serves to blur the boundaries between the beginning and end of each online response on Twitter as they are reflected throughout the poem. I argue that this illustrates that the boundaries between the various communities which were ‘imagined’ into existence in this context were also ambiguous. While there is evidence to suggest that expressions of national identity were reproduced during the disorder in the city, ‘10th August 2011’ alludes, explicitly, to the importance of local, neighbourhood communities and cultural identity markers in this instance. Stanza three places a significant emphasis on ‘the imagined community’ of the neighbourhood’ because ‘the families/ in Winson Green’ (ll.11-2), and the geographical location in which the hit-and-run occurred, are the focus at this point.70 The repetition of Birmingham at the beginning of the poem in ‘Birmingham New Street’ (l.2) – and, again, at the end of the text as ‘police are given extra time/ to quiz the 32-year-old man accused of/ murdering three men in/ Birmingham.’ (ll.37-40) – reinforces that the city is just as important as the nation on this

68 Fox and Miller Idriss, p.537.
69 Anderson, p.6.
70 Ahmed, p.28.
occasion. The poem alludes to those ‘Asian communities’ (l.20) who have come together as a result of the situation in order to consider ‘how to react to those/ who killed’ the three men on Dudley Road (ll.21-2). Here, the community group in question is recognised according to their culture, rather than in relation to the neighbourhood (Winson Green), city (Birmingham) or nation (UK) in which they live. This idea of the fluid imagined community – which I am positing and arguing existed across various social and geographical scales in this instance – is strengthened in the fifth stanza of the text when

‘Candles mark the spot.
Loads of police and the media
for three Muslims
who were looking after their own community;
human nature leading to –

**Murder.** (ll.23-28).

As well as indicating that other, local versions of an imagined community were in existence in this context, ‘10th August 2011’ implies that a religious community was formed as a direct result of the hit-and-run incident. The deployment of ‘small words’ such as ‘their own’ in line twenty-six of the poem suggests that the community the ‘three Muslims’ belonged to existed in accordance to a different set of identity markers than many of the other communities that have been exposed throughout this text so far. By (re)presenting these *fluid* imagined communities in a poem that is structured to reflect ‘tweets’ online, ‘10th August 2011’ pays close attention to the global and *virtual* ties that encouraged ordinary people to become ‘fellow-members’ of other communities concurrently during this disorder. Returning to my earlier argument that advances in electronic communication technologies had a fundamental impact on the formation of the fluid and *emergent* imagined communities, I maintain that this poem (re)presents this influence as a direct result of my editorial decision to structure the text in this way.

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71 Billig, p.6.
72 Anderson, p.6
Throughout this thesis, I have argued that Twitter should be recognised as an example of an online imagined community (see Chapter Two, pp.84-97) because it played host to a number of relevant, fluid (local, national, global) and emergent (cultural, religious and virtual) imagined communities during this disorder in Birmingham. Like ‘10th August 2011’, the following visual-digital example from United We Stand illustrates that electronic communication technologies played a vital role in hosting and encouraging the formation of various imagined communities in this context. The poem that I analyse next is titled ‘Precautions’ (p.175) and is a (re)presentation of specific words or emotional responses that, I argue, expressed identity and alluded to the kinds of imagined community that were in existence during the disorder. This (re)presentation is displayed in the form of a pie-chart poem (see Figure 7) in order to reflect that advances in digital technologies were crucial in developing an understanding of this situation. In order to appreciate how the poem remains true to the expressions of identity and ideas of community that were ‘imagined’ into existence on this occasion, the chapter must first outline the creative process behind this poem. Specifically, how I have used textual analysis software (TAPoRware) to determine the word frequency and emotional context of significant responses from ordinary people that were published online or expressed in interview testimony.73

TAPoRware is a piece of software that ‘enables users to perform text analysis’ on a variety of plain text files over the web.74 The tools available to users online allow them to ‘Count, sort and list words’ that are found in the source text according to a range of criteria, and these tools can also present the words in different orders.75 The software permits the user to ‘strip out’ or ‘clean-up’ any unnecessary words that are unlikely to add value to the analysis. These are known as ‘stop’ words and often include connectives and determiners such as ‘the’, ‘but’ or ‘and’.76 In the case of this research though, I opted to keep relevant ‘small words’ similar to those that Billig and Mihelj argue determine the reproduction of the nation (see Chapter One, pp.29-41). However, unlike Billig and Mihelj in their earlier research on Nationalism, I include these words during this process to consider how they (re)present the different kinds of imagined community that I am arguing existed during the disorder in Birmingham.77 These words included variations of ‘we’, ‘they’, ‘I’ and ‘you’. A second tool available online via TAPoRware is

74 TAPOR: Text Analysis Portal for Research (2016).
75 TAPOR: Text Analysis Portal for Research (2016).
76 TAPOR: Text Analysis Portal for Research (2016).
77 Billig, p.6. See also Mihelj, pp.101-2.
‘Concordance’.\textsuperscript{78} This allows the user to find a specific word or pattern anywhere in the initial text file and provides this word in its original context. Throughout the creative practice, which involved deploying verbatim methods in poetry specifically, I use TAPoRware to develop my own understanding of the most frequently used and relevant words that were published online or spoken by participants during the interview process. The ‘Concordance’ tool enabled me to recognise the context in which these words were spoken. Thus, I identify which emotions were evoked in each of the responses that I had access to.

\textsuperscript{78} TAPOR: Text Analysis Portal for Research (2016).
Figure 7: ‘Precautions’ taken from Chapter Four: *United We Stand*.

A visual-digital poem that (re)presents the feelings and emotions deployed throughout ordinary people’s responses to the disorder in Birmingham in 2011.
As this chapter’s example of a pie-chart poem, ‘Precautions’ (p.175) explores the dangers that existed during the disorder in Birmingham, as well as the subsequent precautions that various citizens, shops, and businesses took in order to prevent these dangers from happening to them. Using TAPoRware, I determined which emotions were expressed most frequently throughout the responses that I had access to. Thus, ‘Precautions’ is displayed as a poetic (re)presentation of these emotions (see Figure 7). Feelings were relative to humour, anger, fear (or worry), and tension in this context. Humour was depicted in 19.38% of the interview testimonies, while both fear and anger were expressed in 13.95% and in 11.63% of all responses. ‘Precautions’ not only (re)presents the statistical value of these emotions in order to understand the individual expressions of identity that were displayed during the disorder, but it also (re)presents these emotions through the written word. I argue that this combination of quantitative and qualitative data is what establishes ‘Precautions’ as a poetic (re)presentation that takes note of the significant advances in digital technologies. This is because I have made use of a digital software tool in my attempts to analyse the data found in my research. I (re)present this data in a visual-digital example which, I argue, also forms an interesting poem. Written statements – which connect to the feelings that were exhibited in these responses by ordinary citizens – are deployed throughout the poem. By including these, I am attempting to (re)present these emotional responses and the experiences of the ordinary people ‘in verbatim’ in new and innovative ways. When presented as text, the poem reads:

‘When complaining about laptop prices on #Facebook, I was told I should
have looted one. Thanks. #ILoveMyFriends
> Candles mark the spot where Haroon Jahan, 21
ARE FUCKING LEDGENDS CALLING FOR
CALM, FUCKING SPANNER UP THE
#BNP’s ARSE.
All this ‘tuff’ talk,
but prevention is better.
Yes, the Bullring closes
at 6; all precaution
again’. (ll.1-11).
By presenting ‘Precautions’ as a digital pie-chart, rather than as linear written text on the page, I (re)present the complex layers of words and emotions that constituted each individual’s response to the disorder in Birmingham. Similar to the transformation of voice(s) in verbatim works by Blythe, Slovo, and Kapil Rider that I analysed earlier (see Chapter Three), several voices are blurred in the space of a single poem here. I argue that this layering of words, emotions and voice(s) throughout the poem reflects the complex negotiations between various expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that were at work in this context. The written statements that I have carefully selected for inclusion in this poem place a significant emphasis on the imagined communities that existed across several social and geographical scales in 2011. My decision to include the hashtag symbol in ‘#Facebook (l.1) and ‘#ILoveMyFriends’ (l.2) manipulates the reader into recognising that these responses are connected to Twitter. This – plus the additional reference to Facebook – demonstrates that advances in electronic communication technologies, explicitly the rise of these social networking platforms, led to imagined communities emerging across global and virtual levels. The images of ‘candles’ that ‘mark the spot’ (l.3) and the ‘Bullring’ closing ‘at 6’ for ‘precaution’ (ll.9-11) are also important because they indicate that ‘fellow-members’ of Birmingham’s ‘imagined community of the neighbourhood’ came together to keep one another safe and pay respect to each other during these events.79 The importance of the locale is continually depicted throughout United We Stand with many other, visual-digital poems placing the city of Birmingham and this neighbourhood community at the centre of their (re)presentation. In the case of ‘The Takeover’ (see Figure 8), coordinates of important places that were affected by this disorder are ‘mapped’ onto a scatter-graph before written statements – much like those that are deployed in ‘Precautions’ – form the key to the ‘map’. This creates a new verbatim poem in the series. While Anderson’s definition of the nation as an imagined community described it as ‘limited’, I argue that my poetic (re)presentation of the anger at the ‘#BNP’ in lines 4-6 of ‘Precautions’ highlights that expressions of national identity were more complicated than Anderson’s explanation first suggested. Rather than celebrate national identity here, in relation to the ‘British National Party’ which claims to do exactly that, the ordinary citizen deploys various expletives (‘fucking’ and ‘arse’) to demonstrate that he/she condemns the party in the current situation. The intricate nature of community during this disorder calls for a creative practice that negotiates various methods in

79 Ahmed, p.28.
order to (re)present it truthfully. This is why I choose to present ‘Precautions’ and several other poems, including ‘Police Action from a Smartphone’ (p.153) and ‘Community Clean-Ups According to Twitter’ (p.184), in a similar way throughout *United We Stand*.

**Figure 8:** ‘The Takeover’ in Chapter Four: *United We Stand* (see p.181).

Coordinates of important places that were affected by the disorder in the city are ‘mapped’ onto a scatter-graph before written statements form the key to this ‘map’, and this subsequently creates a new verbatim poem.

Advancing these traditional verbatim methods, when crafting *United We Stand* to include the use of digital software tools, is not limited to pie-charts and scatter-graphs. A new digital-verbatim method, which I have termed ‘Deferred Dadaism’, is also deployed throughout the series. This method makes use of a second piece of software (JanusNode) to fragment the raw material from both participants’ responses to questions in interview and those immediately
published online by Twitter users. In this instance, JanusNode fragments a plain text file, which contains raw material from these data sets, in a way that appears somewhat illogical. I argue that this is similar to much of the work characteristic of the

‘early 20th century movement in art, literature, music, and film, active most notably in Europe and the United States, repudiating and mocking artistic and social conventions and emphasise the illogical and absurd’ (OED).

However, the fragmentations begin to highlight some interesting and previously-unrecognised patterns of words and sounds. The preparatory stage of this random methodology breaks the linearity and narrative of the raw material and allows me a new perspective on the poetry. This new perspective, I argue, begins to point to that which Veronica Forrest-Thompson labels ‘Poetic Artifice’ in her book of the same name. Writing in 1972, Forrest-Thompson calls for ‘a theory of the devices of artifice; such as apparently non-sensical imagery, logical discontinuity, [...] and unusual metrical and spatial organization...’ In order to understand how ‘A Hand’s worth’ (p.172) works – and to attribute meaning to the text itself – it is crucial for the reader to consider the poem’s ‘Artifice’; that is, to recognise that the ‘linguistics, stylistics and form’ are fundamental to one’s understanding of the poem. On first look, the poem’s fragmentated nature, relative to both its structure and language, suggests that ‘the formal devices and frameworks’ deployed throughout the text work to ‘transform the function and operations of language’ as we know it, ‘as it is used elsewhere’. In this case, I recognise new patterns and juxtapositions, and the fragmented outputs are then edited to form two original, digital-verbatim poems. This is the main reason behind my decision to refer to this poetic process as ‘Deferred Dadaism’. The first of these poems, ‘A Hand’s worth’, is the example upon which this this chapter focuses. After running my text file of raw material through TAPoRware (see Appendix Seven) and this

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82 See Veronica Forrest-Thompson, Poetic Artifice, ed. by Gareth Farmer (Bristol, Shearsman Books, 2016).
84 Farmer, ‘Re-introducing Poetic Artifice’, p. 15.
‘dadamying process’ on JanusNode, the software tool presented me with a new version of the text. The extract below is an example of this:

‘Media community in
   depending in online…
   Global all
   watch
   Tourism reach all form
   Videos
   that
   threat virtual levels press… globally… of digital festival

   was levels…
guys as
   “Hands incident in Social
   communities
   12.45am.
   Only bad engage it the bad all of
   result – Local/Religious/National world
   We
   shot Local/Religious/National from going
directly.
   Depending Smethwick, A local community… Handsworth result may Global form
   (online) and Facebook idol, Videos their
   media
   –
   and viral community… an online… and that’s this videos. Media know – clip,

   network? Communities lot shadow
   as time YouTube was a
   or global
Global
industry with than Global appeal
levels directly.
Going
National reach media… (online) of levels… shoot” promoting and a lads

Local negatives? The police
painting
painting
institutional
reach! – end
Brown killed England
only everywhere!? America, live as end of (online) live

“Hands
cities media
being guys decline the got Twitter Police digital
Viral
across as all
black Facebook, and
– world racism news. Saw
had coming…” to Facebook
Sikh levels painting from Tourism.’

This new, fragmentated version of the raw material was then edited in order to shape it, both
poetically and geographically. The first draft of the poem read as follows:

‘Media community in
threat, virtual levels press…
globally –
as Brown killed.
Only the bad engage it, so
the Media know – clip,
and there’s this YouTube video:
‘Hands up, don’t shoot!’

In Birmingham, the
result –
(the end music)
painted from Tourism
was at Temple;
Sikh levels
across
virtual levels of
Global ambition – that across
(Birmingham)
social 3, brutality –
killed.’ (ll.1-20).

When considering this draft version of ‘A Hand’s worth’ in more detail, the images (re)presented
to the reader in relation to the events that happened in Ferguson, and those that occurred at
‘Handsworth’s Digital Festival’ (l.27) during the disorder in 2011, were not clear. To borrow
Forrest-Thompson’s phrase, they were ‘non-sensical’. 86 For the purpose of this thesis, it was vital
to ensure that the reader would understand the references made to the places where similar
episodes of disorder have transpired. Thus, I edited this first draft to include several additional
images. These were constituted by more specific references to the incidents that took place
during the disorder in Birmingham; they were taken from various media reports about the events
in the city and were conveyed through ordinary, familiar language: ‘fingers smash windows’ on
Soho Road (l.21) and ‘Shopkeepers scramble to save their produce.’ (l.30). 87 As such, I argue

87 These phrases are taken from media articles including Anon., ‘Riots erupt in Birmingham: Police make 130
26 May 2015].
that my editorial decision here to include such explicit references (in the form of prose sentences from media reports) serves to complicate Forrest-Thompson’s argument for the significance of ‘Poetic Artifice’ somewhat. For the most part, ‘A Hand’s worth’s fragmented nature does ‘make strange’ and ‘defamiliarise’ ordinary language supporting Forrest-Thompson’s argument that ‘poetry is transformative of both language and the world’. Moreover, when considered in relation to United We Stand and the overall aims of this thesis, there is merit in Forrest-Thompson’s concept of ‘Artifice’ and its importance as I, too, have attempted to transform the voice(s) of previously-unheard participants through poetry here. I consider this to be a positive intervention and recognise that poetry, as an art form, is capable of doing this. However, I would argue that United We Stand in its entirety offers an alternative conceptualisation of Forrest-Thompson’s claim that ‘poetry is won through the patient decoding of artifice’. While I agree with her that it is (or else, some might question, why conduct this research), I am resolutely aware of United We Stand’s need for the reader to look beyond this notion of ‘Artifice’, too.

Keston Sutherland – in his article ‘Veronica Forrest-Thompson for Readers’ – contends that one’s interpretation of a text ‘immediately looks outside of Poetic Artifice’, thus

‘whatever discussion of poetic artifice may yet follow if the reading were extended has been already sabotaged by the prejudicial and preemptive attempt to establish a context for interpretation through appeal to external coordinates’.

To simplify this with regards to United We Stand, the series of digital and verbatim poems requires its reader to look beyond ‘Artifice’ to consider history and the world simultaneously as a direct result of my decision to focus the texts on the words of real life people and on real historical events of the past. The additional images and reference points, which are signified by ordinary language, help me to achieve a more cohesive narrative at key points throughout ‘A Hand’s worth’. I position the corresponding lines of the poem on the right-hand side of the page in order to demonstrate this. For example:

90 Keston Sutherland, p.9.
‘Sikh levels
across
Global ambition – that across
virtual levels of
    (Birmingham)
    social 3, brutality –
killed.

On Soho Road, fingers smash windows.

The police
paint
    paint institutional
    - reach
    (the end music)
with a Facebook idol: Brown
heightened at the hands of
Handsworth’s digital festival.

Shopkeepers scramble to save their produce.

On Soho Road, 30 pairs of hands
reach for the burnt-out Polo.

“It brings back bad memories”.
(II.14-33).

By introducing these new images, which are specific to the rioting and looting behaviours displayed in the city, this poem not only achieves a more narrative quality, but it is also given a geographical shape. The play on ‘Handsworth’ in the poem’s title reinforces this, as do the countless references to hands that are made throughout the text. The familiar place – the locale in this instance – is made strange as I encourage the reader to consider the value of ‘a hand’. This contemplation of the ‘hand’ is particularly relevant to the idea of imagined communities in this setting because giving someone ‘a hand’ usually refers to ‘fellow-members’ of a community pulling together in order to help one another. However, this poem relinquishes the comradeship
that Anderson argued was characteristic of the nation as an imagined community. Instead, the constant repetition of variations of ‘hand’ throughout ‘A Hand’s worth’, which includes lines such as ‘Hands up, don’t shoot!’ (l.8) and ’30 pairs of hands/ reach for the burnt-out Polo’ (ll.31-2), illustrate that these ‘hands incident[s]’ (l.41) are negative. This is reinforced by the line ‘local negatives, local light’ (ll.44-5) later in the poem. My decision to deploy the word ‘negatives’ at this moment is particularly interesting; it creates a double-meaning in this context. The reader can interpret the phrase to mean the negative portrayal of these ‘hands’. However, this word also alludes to film negatives in the context of taking a photograph. This is particularly relevant in relation to the fact that many of my editorial choices relative to ‘A Hand’s worth’ have involved (re)presenting images of the disorder through the written word.

Although the locale is positioned as the central focus of this poem, and this is symbolised, first and foremost, by the text’s title, I argue that ‘A Hand’s worth’ also focuses on the relationship between these local, neighbourhood communities and those that were ‘imagined’ into existence across global and virtual scales. As a direct result of the fragmentation by JanusNode, ‘A Hand’s worth’ preserves a compressed, staccato quality. This is maintained in order to echo the speed with which news published online about this disorder became history. The language (re)presented in the poem reads as a series of quick-fire, verbal ‘bullet-points’ and these reinforce this idea. The stress placed on the idea of imagined communities that were both fluid and emergent in character – and which began to exist across global and virtual platforms specifically – is emphasised in the lines: ‘virtual levels of/ hands remember’ (ll.49-50). This implies that the hands of ordinary people who were typing their responses online on various digital platforms, and as ‘fellow-members’ of these virtual communities, were vital to the spread of information relating to this disorder. The connections to

'Michael Brown, 2014;
Mark Duggan, 2011;
Handsworth, 1985.'
(ll.46-8)

91 Anderson, p.7.
continue to highlight that the media had a tendency to view these episodes of disorder in the same light, regardless of their geographical location. By connecting the incidents in 2011 to those that occurred in the suburb of Birmingham twenty-six years earlier, this poem illustrates that these incidents keep happening in the city, and that something must be done to understand why and how they occur if they are to stop. In essence, I argue that ‘A Hand’s worth’ not only pays attention to the media’s role in facilitating these imagined communities, both locally and online, but it simultaneously places significant weight on the relationship between ‘th[is] imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’ and the emerging global and virtual communities that began to exist in this context.

Arriving at One Soul: Chronology, Landscape, Community

The poet’s engagement with these fluid and emergent imagined communities is also demonstrated through a consideration of United We Stand as a whole. Examining the chronology of the series, this chapter argues that the poet’s position among these communities in Birmingham is made palpable by the ‘strategic editorial choices’ that have been made in relation to form and structure, narrative order and perspective, and explorations of sound.92 The verbatim poems in the series are bookended by my own voice as the speaker in order to highlight the significance of the poet’s subjectivity and how this can affect the creative outcome itself. I opted to include a (re)presentation of my own voice throughout United We Stand in order to demonstrate that I am aware, both politically and ethically, of how my own experiences of the city in 2015 have impacted upon this research and its outputs. This (re)presentation of my own voice also enabled me to reflect upon my own ‘ethnographical authority’, demonstrating this through the poetry directly. My voice first appears in the poem ‘Birmingham: Upon Arrival’ (p.149) and, again, in two of the poems towards the end of the series: ‘One Good Thing’ (p.190) and ‘Glean Five: Underclass’ (p.188).93 My personal impressions of Birmingham, and my experiences of the city and the imagined communities that existed there during the fieldwork

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92 David Edgar as cited in Chris Megson, p.196.
93 Subsequent references to specific poems from United We Stand will be given as page or line numbers in parentheses in the body of this chapter.
stages of the research, are exposed simultaneously. As a result, I argue that some of the poems in this series are semi-autobiographical. This complicates the question of authorship and ownership in relation to these poems that I have crafted from the raw material provided from the original interview testimonies. The opening poem, ‘Birmingham: Upon Arrival’, is this chapter’s first example of a text that features the poet’s voice.

This poem pays close attention to the important objects and images that are made visible to the speaker upon their arrival to the city. Allusions to ‘barriers / restricting us’ (ll.1-2), ‘queues upon queues of taxis’ (l.4) and the signs that mention the ‘Short-Stay, Pick-up Point’ (l.9) hint that the speaker has arrived at a busy place; I have arrived at Birmingham New Street. Recognised by the many references to forms of public transport, the notion of travel is reinforced here by the alliteration and sound-play in small words such as ‘tarmac’ (l.3) and ‘taxis’ (l.4). The editorial decision to maintain both short stanza and line lengths throughout the poem serves to quicken its pace and this reflects a sense of liveliness in the city. The repetition of key images including queues of taxis (l.4) and ‘lines of traffic’ (l.11) immediately demonstrates that Birmingham is a city characterised by its ‘hustle-and-bustle’ and this significant sense of upheaval. The final stanza, which places an emphasis on ‘Blue sirens’ that ‘sing among [these] lines of traffic:’ (ll.10-11), invites the reader to embark upon this exploration of Birmingham with the speaker. This is strengthened by the line: ‘it looks like my ride is here’ (l.12). The reader is invited to join the speaker on this journey through the city of Birmingham. The opening poem focuses, explicitly, on my arrival into the city, and the consistent mentions of travel also illustrate that I have crossed borders and experienced the ‘edgelands’ in order to join and engage with the imagined communities that are under investigation in this thesis.\footnote{It is important to note that, throughout this process, Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts’ \textit{Edgelands: Journeys into England’s True Wilderness} (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011) has influenced my thinking and this has subsequently impacted on the creative output.} However, even this interaction is complex because the fieldwork stage of the research took place four years after the initial events in Birmingham in 2011. Having said that, I chose to conduct the interviews during the anniversary of the disorder in the city in an attempt to access the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that were relevant to this situation (see ‘Notes on Research Methods’, p.6).\footnote{\textit{Edgelands: Journeys into England’s True Wilderness} (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011) has influenced my thinking and this has subsequently impacted on the creative output.}
As the reader reaches the end of *United We Stand*, the voice of the poet appears once more, only, this time, it is framed in dialogue. ‘One Good Thing’ (re)presents the situation of a research interview in which the speaker is questioning a participant about their experiences of the disorder. The voice of the interviewer (the poet) is made noticeable by the distinction between ‘Me’ (the interviewer/poet) and ‘You’ (the interviewee/participant). For example:

‘Me: One good thing that came from the riots?
You: No racial element.
Me: I’ve actually noticed this in Birmingham.’ (ll.1-3).

The dialogue and subsequent, sharp distinction between the two voices was introduced during the second phase of editing the series. The original draft of ‘One Good Thing’ was written as follows:

‘*One good thing that came from the riots?*
No racial element. And,
I’ve actually noticed this in Birmingham.
‘dem homeless, deny access to benefits an’
what exactly do you tink ‘dem do?
People who have religious conflict or
whatever, have issues?
David Starkey is wrong.’ (ll.1-8). ⁹⁶

This first version of the poem, although already written from the perspective of this participant, was not as effective in displaying that the original citizen was taking back their voice and achieving agency here. As a result, I made the decision to include the labels ‘Me’ and ‘You’ in order to establish and transform the different voices. The poem remains true to the interview processes that formed a crucial part of my research methodology (see ‘Notes on Research Methods’, p.6). ‘One Good Thing’ (re)presents the idea proposed by Fox and Miller-Idriss that

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⁹⁶ See Appendix Eight for the full draft version of this poem, ‘One Good Thing’.
ordinary people also ‘engage and enact (or ignore and deflect) nationhood’ in the everyday.\textsuperscript{97} It places significant emphasis on the resident’s experience of the disorder in Birmingham. By interviewing twenty-five ordinary people about the disorder in the city (see Appendix Three for interview protocol), I was able to access and understand the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that existed in Birmingham in 2011.

‘Glean Five: Underclass’ is located just two pages after ‘One Good Thing’ in the \textit{United We Stand} series and is arranged in this way to reaffirm the significance of the ordinary person as an active participant in the (re)performance and reproduction of expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community because it (re)presents this interview scenario. However, this version, which is ‘gleaned’ from ‘One Good Thing’, only includes one moment of dialogue from each voice:

‘Me: And Birmingham?’

\textbf{You: An’ ‘dem do conflict and issues?’} (ll.1-2).\textsuperscript{98}

At first, these questions and their ambiguity suggest that ‘Glean Five’ is a more confused and complex poem, particularly in relation to the many conflicts and issues regarding identity and community that ordinary people in Birmingham have faced. This ambiguity is further reinforced by the fact that the short poem takes up only a small proportion of the page and, thus, it is surrounded by vast, empty white space. Yet, as the reader reaches the final line: ‘We don’t really like each other.’ (l.5), it becomes clear that this poem is highlighting the distinctive differences that \textit{still} exist between the imagined communities in Birmingham four years after the disorder.

My editorial decision to include this shortened version of the text in the series is relevant because it illustrates that Anderson’s earlier definition of the nation as an imagined community that is\textsuperscript{97,98}

\textsuperscript{97} Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.537.

\textsuperscript{98} Like the earlier definitions of ‘gleaning’ that say it is: ‘To gather or pick up in small quantities; to scrape together’, this method in poetry refers to the ‘picking up’ of words from lines in a previously written poem and ‘scraping them together’ to form a new piece of creative work. See ‘gleaning 3a. transf. and fig.’ \textit{Oxford English Dictionary Online} (2016) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/78840?rskey=DkMJYv&result=2#eid2985376> [accessed on Friday 12 August 2016]. As well as ‘Glean Five’, there are various other poems in which this ‘gleaning’ method is deployed. These include ‘Glean One: Night at 12.45am’ (p.152), ‘Glean Two: Night’ (p.160), and ‘Glean Six: A Reflection’ (p.190). Though I do not have space in the thesis to discuss ‘gleaning’ in detail, it is important to recognise that this method has influenced my creative practice and enabled me to expand the range and context of \textit{United We Stand} as a whole.
‘both inherently limited and sovereign’ is partial.\textsuperscript{99} When considered in parallel to one another, the two poems highlight that expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community in this context were both fluid and emerging. ‘One Good Thing’ pays less attention to the ‘racial element’, despite being centred on the experiences of a member of the African-Caribbean community. On the other hand, ‘Glean Five’ dismisses the media’s perceptions, focusing on the divisions between the fluid community groups that still exist today. Yet, the groupings that this speaker is alluding to, whether imagined or otherwise, remain ambiguous.

Continuing with this discussion of ‘One Good Thing’ for a moment, it is important to establish how and why a number of poetic devices have been combined with other methods (verbatim and digital) and deployed throughout \textit{United We Stand} in order to achieve the effects detailed above. Questions in this poem are established by the use of appropriate punctuation and differentiated by the labels ‘Me’ and ‘You’, which I apply throughout to mirror the interview transcript. I argue that these questions immediately grasp the reader’s attention as indications of the important, socio-political issues that this poem examines. The line ‘Me: One good thing that came from the riots?’ (l.1) implies that this poem will consider the positive outcomes of the disorder in Birmingham. Yet, this raises a significant question in the reader’s mind relating to whether or not any positives can \textit{actually} be taken from this situation. The editorial decision to juxtapose small words (for example, ‘good’ and ‘riots’) in this question adds to this effect. As the reader reaches the final line of the first stanza, ‘Me: I’ve actually noticed this in Birmingham’ (l.3) – which reappears as the refrain at the end of the poem on line fifteen – repetition indicates that this line is of particular significance to the reader’s understanding of the text. The poem, and the interviewee who made it possible to craft this piece, reveal ‘one good thing’ about the disorder in Birmingham. They claim there was ‘No racial element’ (l.2) to it and the interviewer (in this case, myself as both researcher and poet) supports this argument by confirming that: ‘I’ve actually noticed this in Birmingham.’ (l.3; l.15).

The sharp distinction between these two voices (re)presented in ‘One Good Thing’ becomes clearer in the latter half of the poem. Stanzas two and three continue to reveal a layering of voice(s) that is similar to the transformation of various Indian women’s voice(s) (including her own) which are (re)presented throughout Bhanu Kapil Rider’s \textit{The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers}. In poem ‘17. How will you begin?’, the first voice depicted in Kapil Rider’s text

\textsuperscript{99} Anderson, p.6.
explores the afternoon at ‘2 p.m.’ during which ‘[t]he sides of my mouth taste of licorice […] I’m still wearing my pajamas’ (ll.1-2).\textsuperscript{100} While, in the prose paragraph that follows, a second speaker is made visible as quotation marks distinguish their conversation about a nightclub:

“‘Well, you go in, and if you get in before six o’clock, it’s free. After that, it’s ten bucks. There’s three stages. Front stage, back stage and The Jungle Gym. My arms are pretty strong so I do okay in The Jungle Gym. I don’t do lap dances, but I’m thinking, I can save $12,000 by June then take off. Maybe Santa Cruz. Maybe Chico.’” (ll.7-11).\textsuperscript{101}

Like Kapil Rider in poems ’30. What are the consequences of silence / What do you remember about the earth?’ or ‘86. And what would you say if you could?’, I pay close attention to specific differences in language, dialect and accent in ‘One Good Thing’.\textsuperscript{102} Phrases, including “dem homeless’ (l.4), and the question of ‘what exactly do you tink ‘dem do?’ (l.5), demonstrate that the participant being interviewed at this precise moment has a certain way of talking. Similar to the linguistic principles in many of Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze’s poems, including ‘Simple Tings’: ‘de simple tings of life, mi dear’ (l.1), the use of vernacular linguistic signifiers in “dem’ and ‘tink’ throughout ‘One Good Thing’ suggests that the dialect and accent being spoken here is representative of the African-Caribbean diaspora.\textsuperscript{103} Talking during a performance live at the Y Theatre, Breeze comments: ‘most of my poems, at some point, speak from the women of my community’ and, in the case of this poem and the context of the thesis entirely, the African-Caribbean diaspora is particularly relevant in Birmingham.\textsuperscript{104} As I mentioned earlier in Chapter Two (see page 64), ethnic and cultural tensions between members of the African-Caribbean community and British Asians in the city have continued to raise concerns. Leading to a number of similar episodes of disorder, the most recent situation – prior to the incidents in 2011 – occurred in October 2005 after ‘allegations that a black teenage girl had been gang-raped by

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{100} Kapil Rider, p.29. \\
\textsuperscript{101} Kapil Rider, p.29. \\
\textsuperscript{102} Kapil Rider, ’30. What are the consequences of silence / What do you remember about the earth?’, p.42, and ‘86. And what would you say if you could?’, pp.98-9. \\
\textsuperscript{103} Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze, ‘simple tings’, performed as part of \textit{BBC World Service: The Forum} (2013) \textless http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0169f2m\textgreater [accessed on Tuesday 16 August 2016]. \\
\textsuperscript{104} Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze reading in Neil Astley, \textit{Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze live at the Y} [YouTube video], Wednesday 4 May 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBT-2n05eD4> [accessed on Tuesday 16 August 2016].
\end{flushleft}
I argue that this (re)presentation of the African-Caribbean voice and vernacular throughout ‘One Good Thing’ indicates that this local community – formed in the city on the basis of precise, cultural identity markers – is of particular importance in this setting.

I have frequently alluded to the fact that those involved in the behaviours of rioting and looting in Birmingham were constantly recognised as ‘the stranger’ in the street and, on numerous occasions, this ‘strange(r)ness’ was associated with ‘anonymous black youths’ (see Chapter One, pp.48-52). This poem challenges the idea that this imagined community of people, who shared this common purpose in Birmingham, was determined by race, ethnicity, religion or class. I have argued that expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community in existence during this situation were complex, and the defiant argument that ‘No racial element’ (l.2) existed at the time supports this. Questions indicating that ‘People who have religious conflict or/ whatever have issues?’ (ll.6-7) are overturned as the interviewee quickly asserts that ‘David Starkey is wrong’ (ll.8-9) to claim that ‘whites have become black’ and that different local community groups do not really like one another. An amalgamation of linguistic signifiers and the carefully considered consonance in the repeated ‘d’ sound throughout ‘One Good Thing’ not only places important emphasis on the words that imply the speaker is of African-Caribbean descent (“dem’ and ‘an’”), but the unified sound formed as a result of this combination connects the denial of benefits on line four with the ‘deprived underclass’ (l.8) that ‘David Starkey’ recognises. Counsellor John Lines wants to evict these ordinary people from local housing (ll.11-3) and exclude them from the wider imagined community that is in existence in Birmingham. Poetic devices such as the repetition of the line ‘we don’t really like each other’ (l.9, l.14) demonstrates the unmistakable contrast between what people, like Starkey, are saying about these communities in Birmingham and what has actually occurred between them.

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106 Elijah Anderson as cited in Ahmed, p.22.
Specifically, how members of these imagined communities, which I argue fluctuate in this setting based on space, time and performance, actually feel in comparison.

As well as drawing attention to the intricacies surrounding expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community in this context, ‘One Good Thing’ acknowledges the media’s role in reproducing these communities during the disorder in Birmingham. This is evident in the final stanza of the poem when the interviewee begins to lose their temper at the thought of David Starkey’s comments in the press. The deployment of the acronym ‘FFS!’ at the start of line ten, combined with the exclamation mark, portrays this heightened, angry and emotional response because this abbreviation is recognised in everyday English vernacular as a signifier of the expletive: ‘For Fuck’s Sake!’. The use of this acronym highlights that the interviewee feels very strongly about the media’s perceptions during the disorder in 2011. This is reinforced when they place blame on the media and the government claiming: ‘you are going to create one [a ‘deprived underclass’] by evicting people’ (ll.10-12). Assonance – in the form of the repeated vowel sound ‘e’ – and variations of similar words throughout this stanza serve to emphasise this blame and anger again, through phrases including: ‘evicting’ (l.11) and ‘evict’ (l.13), ‘media perceives’ (l.12), ‘chief’ (l.13) and ‘each’ (l.14). As in the poem ‘Interviewed’, which I discussed on page 203 of this chapter, ‘found’ material such as the direct quotation from David Starkey: “we’ll evict looters from council houses, says council chief” (l.13) is deployed in this poem among the voice(s) of the interviewee (ordinary citizen) and the interviewer (poet) to confirm that the complexities stressed throughout this poem are credible.109 This method of using ‘found’ materials, whether from documented media or other, already-existing sources, is very similar to the arrangement of the raw materials from interviews which are deployed throughout this series of verbatim poetry.

The voice of the poet appears twice more throughout United We Stand; once during a visit to ‘Grand Victoria Square’ (p.160) and ‘Four Years On’ among the chaos and construction of ‘Upper Bull Street’ (p.186). Like ‘One Good Thing’, which (re)presented the interview processes that were necessary for this research project to take place in Birmingham, ‘Upper Bull Street’ alludes to a moment during this fieldwork when I (as the researcher and poet) meet with a participant at ‘Coffee Republic’ (l.27) for ‘A mug of No. 7, / English Breakfast’ (ll.28-9) and

109 See headlines in ‘Birmingham riots: We’ll evict looters from council houses, says council chief’, Birmingham Mail.
attempt ‘to take it all in’ (l.30). In comparison, ‘Grand Victoria Square’ marks my journey through the crowded streets of Birmingham past ‘the smell of cigarettes (and Gregg’s pasties)’ (l.2), ‘a riot van’ (l.16) and ‘the potato man’ selling ‘…Chicken – / smothered in Tikka spice –’ (ll.18-21). I argue that both poems are ethnographical because ‘walking is how the writing happens’. Each one places significant emphasis on the presence of my voice and body on the streets of Birmingham. Like Mark Dickinson suggests:

‘By being in the world, through an intimacy of thorough immersion, the poetry can radically re-engage with otherness and begin to propagate alternative ways of seeing and occupying place, or at the very least reminds us of the intimacy and otherness of our surroundings. Not by relocating the human body as central process, but as part of process of being within and with the world.’

‘[T]he lines of landscape / run through me’, only, this time, the ‘scape’ is no longer the ‘patterning of woods and plantations’, it is inner-city buildings and brand-names, the people and pop-ups in Birmingham.

In *The Ground Aslant*, Harriet Tarlo is predominantly associating these ideas of the body with poetry that ‘engages with place, locality and “nature”’. However, I argue that the openness of her categorisation which ‘does not dictate, circumscribe or limit the work over-much’ leaves this classification with sufficient room to encompass those texts that also engage with the cityscape. Zoë Skoulding’s ‘From Here’ discovers elements of landscape both in and outside of the city, deploying urban language to explain the essentials of her third stanza’s ‘perforated surface’, ‘hidden footfall’, and ‘habit’. Her work made it onto the pages of *The Ground Aslant* because it was considered to be ‘radical’ enough in its challenges to the conventions of earlier poetry featuring elements of nature and the pastoral. Meanwhile, Mark

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110 See Harriet Tarlo, ‘Introduction’, in *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry* (Exeter: Shearsman, 2011), pp.7-20 (p.16). Like the ‘gleaning’ method briefly noted in fn. 57 of this chapter, the genre of ‘Radical Landscape Poetry’ also had an important influence on my own creative practice when crafting this series. Again, this has allowed me to extend the range and context of *United We Stand*.


112 See reference to Zoë Skoulding by Tarlo, in ‘Introduction’, p.15. See also, p.10.

113 Tarlo, p.7.


115 Tarlo, p.7.
Goodwin’s poem ‘Rurban Membrane, A Sheffield Rim, North East’ also features in *The Ground Aslant* because it is a text that celebrates the city’s edge as somewhere between the rural and the urban (‘rurban’). It acknowledges the urban space as landscape.\(^{116}\) In *United We Stand*, both ‘Grand Victoria Square’ and ‘Upper Bull Street’ take this challenge one step further because they situate the poet among the fluid and emergent communities of Birmingham that Helen F. Wilson and this thesis have argued were ‘imagined’ into existence during the disorder in the city.\(^{117}\) The series of verbatim poems demonstrates that expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community were multifaceted in this context. I argue that these two poems write the ‘scape’ of the city and reinforce the same sense of upheaval that was identified on the streets of Birmingham four years after the disorder itself dissipated.

‘Grand Victoria Square’ is a narrative of the city because it marks out the route of my journey as I travel down the streets past important places that were affected by the events in Birmingham. These include ‘a smashed-in Santander’ (l.1), ‘Bennett’s Hill’ (l.16) and ‘the official Aston Villa shop’ (l.30). The poem indicates that this is a voyage of sorts in its repeated allusions to ‘steps’ and ‘feet’ throughout the thirty-four, freely-formed lines that constitute it. In the first stanza, ‘Seven steps and four feet’ position me in front of a camera which ‘sits / on all three feet’ and tripod legs of its own ‘cascading / in the middle of New Street.’ (ll.4-8). This idea of the journey is repeated in the latter part of the poem when

‘I continue to walk among designer brands:
Carphone Warehouse,
Primark,
Pizza Hut…’ (ll.26-9).

Finally, the poem concludes when I arrive at my destination. Taking

‘…twelve more steps to
find myself against a tree


of handmade bouquets and Costa lovers.

“Welcome to The Coventry at 103.” (ll.31-4).

I end up at the building society on New Street, only 0.3 miles and 6 minutes’ walk from where I began, according to Google Maps. With so much happening in-between, tranquility and menace are simultaneously present as the poem reaches its climax.

‘Upper Bull Street’ also (re)presents my experience and impressions of Birmingham city centre, only this time the date is clearly marked in the poem’s subtitle: ‘Wednesday 12th August 2016’. The title of the text illustrates that this poem is no longer about a journey across many streets as ‘Grand Victoria Square’ was. It is an exploration of one street in the city, and spatial and temporal dimensions are important again here. The speaker’s walk along this street is captured with references to ‘forty-four steps’ (l.1) and the idea of ‘re-treating’ as the reader reaches line twenty-five. In comparison to ‘Grand Victoria Square’, this second poem is more observational. Throughout every stanza except the last, second- or third-person perspectives are deployed in order to convey that the person has a sharp eye for the contrasting signs and sights they find in Birmingham. The distance between the speaker and this city as a place they have not inhabited before is maintained. This is illustrated by the ‘abandoned shop ‘To Let’ / beneath Colmore Gate’ (ll.4-5), while the same observation turns to watching human behaviour as the reader moves through the poem:

‘Indian Burrito Co. closed next to the
pawnbroker as you exit

to face Poundland and Martineau Place.’ (ll.19-21).

At this point, a different and more inclusive effect appears to be created with the pronoun ‘you’ in ‘you exit’ (l.20). There are implications throughout the poem that a kind of kaleidoscope of voices is in operation because the city advertiser also seems to be (re)presented in phrases including, ‘North Western Arcade is a “safe haven”’ (ll.16-17) and ‘Wrap chic.’ (l.18), which is written in italics to demonstrate that somebody else came up with this description of House of
Fraser. I deploy the first-person narrative once and this occurs at the very end of the text when ‘I re-treat/ to the Point of the Temple/ Street or Coffee Republic?’ (l.25-7). This is because the speaker (re)presented as the observer here is not particularly important. Instead, the structural decisions made in relation to the text’s layout echo the disparate and incoherent quality of this particular urban space and it is this (re)presentation of the cityscape that is key. Shops on ‘Upper Bull Street’ are situated (in real-life) alongside those that I have positioned them next to within this poem. A prime indication of this can be found in the third stanza of the text when

‘Separated by One Central News –
agents; two spaces to place your bets:
Paddy Power has odds on number 7 –
and Coral battles it out against the odds on Bull Street.’ (l.8-11).

Various literary techniques and poetic devices are deployed throughout the two texts to emphasise the specific interactions that I experience while walking and writing the cityscape. Structural decisions result in fifteen lines of ‘Grand Victoria Square’ being brought together, similar to a list, in the poem’s opening stanza. This works to (re)present the pathways that I have taken through the city centre and particular shops (‘Greggs’, l.2, or ‘Angel Arts’, l.9), banks, and streets mark the coordinates and my crossing over local boundaries. ‘There is a relationship between the spatial arrangement of the poem and the landscape’ explored within the city.118 This fifteen-line stanza results in a faster-pace throughout the first half of the text. It is possible to argue that this is representative of my own walking pace, because an individual’s strides can often be unpredictable. This randomness is reinforced in the arrangement of various full stops and other types of punctuation, and could be considered a move towards the ‘dadaism’ that features later within the series (see pages 214-32). Of the fifteen lines that open ‘Grand Victoria Square’, seven are end-stopped. Combinations of enjambment and shorter, staccato lines or monosyllabic words are organised to demonstrate this quick pace throughout. These ‘flowing lines free of punctuation’ are recognisable in the image of

118 Tarlo, p.9.
‘Seven steps, four feet
in brightly-coloured orange streaks,
and a camera sits
on all three feet; a tripod cascading
in the middle of New Street.’ (ll.4-8).  

These ‘free’ lines (re)present my own fluid movements within the city. Elements of sound-play, including rhyme and repetition, support these structural decisions that I have made to preserve the pace. Alliteration and consonance are organised in phrases such as ‘a smashed-in Santander’ (l.1) and ‘the smell of cigarettes’ (l.2) in order to ensure that the poem grasps the readers’ attention from the beginning. This opening stanza is bursting with examples of half-, internal, and end-rhyme to maintain the momentum. In six of the fifteen lines, imperfect end rhymes are positioned in the images of ‘(Greggs’ pasties)’ (l.2), ‘four feet’ (l.4), the ‘brightly-coloured orange streaks’ that follow on line five, and the breeze in which Subway’s flags are swimming in line fifteen.

Rhyme and other elements of sound-play are deployed throughout ‘Upper Bull Street’. Alliteration, assonance and consonance are employed to quicken the pace of the poem just as they were in ‘Grand Victoria Square’. This is maintained throughout the poem when ‘Forty-four steps / from The Priory Room’ lead the speaker ‘to face roadworks, barriers and tramlines’ (ll.1-3) until the reader reaches the end of the poem and finds that ‘Thousands of feet’ are still present (l.21). While similar ideas of walking and footfall are (re)presented in Skoulding’s ‘From Here’ – ‘you walk at the edge of land traffic’ (l.1) – I argue that the pace created by this sound-play in ‘Upper Bull Street’, combined with the repeated images of footsteps and travelling, symbolise the ‘hustle-and-bustle’ that is often associated with a busy cityscape like Birmingham. This sense of upheaval relative to the city is also (re)presented through the deployment of verbatim methods in Kapil Rider’s The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers. In poem ‘19. And what would you say if you could?’, the speaker is explaining what their experience of London’s Underground tube system is like. They comment:

119 Tarlo, p.9.
120 Skoulding, ‘from From Here’, in The Ground Aslant, p.133.
‘I keep forgetting to breathe. The eyes of the living, then, on the trains that stop at all points of a circle. The Circle Line. The Northern Line. Victoria. (The sequined bodice of a woman in the swinging aisle…’ (ll. 5-8).  

Kapil Rider’s text features short, staccato sentences or cuts longer lines into smaller fragments through the deployment of appropriate punctuation, in order to reinforce that the journey on the tube beneath Britain’s busiest city is considered to be commuters’ chaos. ‘Upper Bull Street’ offers similar clippings in lines including, ‘where I re-treat’ (l.25), and ‘English Breakfast’ (l.29) as it reaches its climax. This notion of upheaval is reinforced in the (re)presentation of particular words and phrases which are deployed throughout the poem to resemble street and road signs. Written in capital letters, with font presented to the reader in bold, these include ‘UNDER CONSTRUCTION’ (l.22) and ‘DEMOLITION SITE’ (l.24). These (re)presentations symbolise the signs that were put up on mental fences and found across ‘Upper Bull Street’ on my visit to the city in August 2015; in order to demarcate the barriers of construction sites around New Street station.

Both texts maintain a strong poetic quality, but ‘Grand Victoria Square’ retains the narrative edge because of the ‘strategic editorial decisions’ that I have made in the moments of its creation. Many of the other poems throughout United We Stand sustain this narrative quality as a direct result of being written using the deployment of verbatim methods. Unlike the poems that feature in The Ground Aslant – ‘work which resists narrative and realist conventions in poetry in favour of evolving techniques and structures which aim to create a truer reflection of reality itself’ – the pieces crafted to form United We Stand emphasise narrative and ‘the real’ in order to be considered true to the experiences, events and imagined communities that existed in Birmingham in 2011. I blend this stress on ‘the real’ with evolving verbatim and digital methods and experimental visualisations throughout. In ‘Grand Victoria Square’, the reader is taken into account because, although we meander here and there in our real-life journeys, this poem has a particular direction. It has a conventional beginning, middle and end. In order to achieve this narrative quality throughout the text, interruptions to and reconstructions of it were inevitable. Changes were made to an earlier draft of the poem to capture and pay close attention

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121 Kapil Rider, p.31.
122 Tarlo, p.11-2.
to the story: a re-ordering of the stanzas led to the final version. However, in the first draft, my arrival at *The Coventry* went something like this:

‘I take twelve more steps
and find myself, again,
against a tree of Costa Coffee lovers,
handmade bouquets, and
The Coventry at 102,
or is it three?’ (ll.17-22).¹²³

Now, the moment when I reach my destination provides closure in the poem’s finale:

‘I take twelve more steps to
find myself against a tree
of handmade bouquets and Costa lovers.

“Welcome to The Coventry at 103”’ (ll.31-4).

Edits made to ‘Upper Bull Street’ have led to the indication that this poem, like ‘One Good Thing’ and ‘Glean Five’, also captures a moment between the interviewer and the interviewee. This raises questions for the reader relating to the subject of the interview as the ‘you’ that the speaker keeps referring to. ‘Upper Bull Street’ goes outside to write the cityscape of Birmingham before returning, in the final stanza, to the moment of the interview in *Coffee Republic*. The stanza continues:

‘on the **DEMOLITION SITE**’ at Upper Bull Street
where I re-treat
to the Point of the Temple
Street or *Coffee Republic*?

¹²³ See Appendix Eight for the full draft version of this poem, ‘Grand Victoria Square’.
A mug of No. 7,
English Breakfast,
helps me (and you) to take it all in.’ (ll.24-30).

The faster pace of the poem and its subsequent (re)presentation of the upheaval in Birmingham is juxtaposed with the calmer setting of the café on Temple Street. This air of stillness is symbolised by the ‘mug of No. 7 / English Breakfast’ (ll.28-9) tea that helps both the participant and the researcher take the subject’s experiences of the disorder in Birmingham ‘all in’ (l.30).

Two key interruptions to the narrative provide crucial moments of climax in ‘Grand Victoria Square’. The first of these moments happens immediately after the opening stanza as a result of the standalone line: ‘At Bennett’s Hill, a riot van sits.’ (l.16). Originally this formed part of the first draft’s fifth stanza and was surrounded by city centre streets as they passed by The Piccadilly:

‘At Bennett’s Hill, a riot van sits
peacefully watching the streets pass by
The Piccadilly.’ (ll.23-5) (see Appendix Eight).

However, the newly-crafted interruption in this single line is more effective. It conjures up various questions in the readers’ minds and this throws them into disarray. They are unsure whether the speaker has journeyed into the past, returning to the scenes of 2011, or whether they remain in the present and have genuinely (and somewhat ironically) stumbled across the riot van sitting on the same streets four years after the disorder. Notions of the past and the present are explored to highlight the significance of temporality when considering expressions of identity and ideas of community, including ‘micro-imagined wispy’ gatherings, in this context. Images including the ‘smashed-in Santander’ on line one and those that follow this discussion reinforce this confusion.

A second disruption to the narrative reemphasises this. The speaker continues to walk along the streets of Birmingham and is experiencing ‘the aroma of Chicken –/ smothered in

124 For examples of these ‘micro-imagined, wispy’ communities in the context of the disorder in Birmingham in 2011, see my discussion in Chapter One, pp.50-5. Throughout this thesis, I extend Fine and Scott’s relatively new phenomenon to include communities in this local setting of Birmingham.
Tikka’ (ll.18-9), passing the nameless, yet recognisable potato man when the narrative flow of the journey is interrupted:

‘I’VE BEEN ASSAULTED’ a bald man shouts at me among Tuesday’s busy crowds; blood drips from his mouth.’ (ll.22-4).

Like the riot van that sits at Bennett’s Hill, this incident (re)presents the significance of temporality and presents the juxtaposition between the past and the present. It complicates the scenario in the city by becoming the poem’s prime example of my interaction with the people that belong to these imagined communities in Birmingham that I am assessing. This is signified by the change in narrative perspective in the latter half of the poem. From the moment the bald man interrupts my journey, ‘Grand Victoria Square’ is written in the first-person: ‘I continue to walk among designer brands’ (l.26). This adds a personal touch to the poem and implies that ‘I’, as both the researcher and poet in this instance, have been changed by what I have seen in the city. Differently to the deployment of this perspective throughout Gillian Slovo’s The Riots (see Chapter Three, pp.125-34) – which arranges the pronoun ‘I’ to distinguish between the collective identity of those participating in the acts of disorder and the other communities during the riots in Tottenham – this perspective is organised to place a significant emphasis on my engagement with these communities in ‘Grand Victoria Square’. I argue that my interactions with these ordinary people as ‘active participants’ in the fluid and emergent imagined communities under interrogation throughout this thesis are repeatedly marked throughout this poem. I sense the potato man’s offerings ‘Coloured in warm orange and bhoora rang brown’ (l.17), relate to the bald man ‘among Tuesday’s busy crowds’ (l.23), before, finally, I find myself ‘against a tree of […] Costa lovers’ (ll.32-3) and complete my day’s journey.

As the examples discussed throughout this chapter demonstrate, United We Stand (re)presents the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that were in existence during the disorder in Birmingham in 2011. The series of verbatim poems provides evidence for the formation of fluid and emergent imagined communities, which I have continually argued for

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125 An example of this first-person perspective can be found on page 7 of Slovo’s The Riots.
126 See Fox and Miller-Idriss, p.537.
throughout the thesis. This interrogates Anderson’s earlier definition of the nation as an imagined community. In the context of this research, I argue that imagined communities are not synonymous with the nation; they exist across various social and geographical scales and are in a constant state of flux. *United We Stand* illustrates the multifaceted nature of imagined communities throughout the series of thirty-one verbatim poems that form the creative section of this thesis. Furthermore, I argue that the deployment of verbatim and digital methods throughout the series achieves more than simply (re)presenting these fluid and emergent communities and ordinary people’s expressions of them. These creative methods allow the poet to directly interact with the imagined communities that inhabit the cityscape of Birmingham.
Concluding Remarks: Overall Contribution, Further Study, and the Future of United We Stand

To conclude this thesis, I offer some final remarks on my critique of the nation as an imagined community in connection to my argument that the deployment of verbatim methods in poetry is an appropriate creative practice through which to interrogate Benedict Anderson’s definition.¹ First and foremost, this thesis has demonstrated that digital and verbatim methods can be deployed in poetry in order to transform and (re)present the voice(s) of ordinary people. The digital-verbatim poem, as a new and innovative form, allows the poet to interact with the communities that are under investigation throughout this thesis. In Chapter Three, I analyse a number of contemporary verbatim theatre productions that have deployed similar methods to those which I arrange throughout United We Stand. I determine that verbatim and documentary methods were previously recognised as an appropriate tool for the playwright to assess identity, community and various socio-political events. In the case of Richard Norton-Taylor’s The Colour of Justice (1999), I consider the ethical issue of authentic representations of trauma; establishing that although trauma itself cannot be communicated, verbatim and documentary methods provide the playwright (or, in this case, the poet) with the tools to access the traumatic experiences that are associated with the repressed psychic injury.² My analysis of Alecky Blythe’s production of London Road highlights that verbatim methods – although often recognised as fitting approaches for the exploration of these key socio-political events – are not always deployed to focus on the incident in question. I argue that the formation and existence of ‘the imagined [community] of the neighbourhood’ – like those local, neighbourhood communities that I suggest existed in Birmingham during the disorder in 2011 – takes centre stage as a direct result of Blythe’s decision to deploy verbatim methods.³ Gillian Slovo’s play, on the other hand, with its focus on The Riots in Tottenham, illustrates that verbatim methods are appropriate for examining the disorder in Birmingham because it is the closest in terms of subject matter to the

case study of the thesis. I contend that, like many of the Twitter studies that preceded this thesis and are mentioned in Chapter Two (see pages 84-97), Slovo’s decision to centre her production on the incidents that took place in London is geocentric. The thesis redresses this balance by opting to focus on the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community that were in existence during the disorder in Birmingham specifically. My close reading of Bhanu Kapil Rider’s The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers (2001) has established her collection of prose-poetry as a creative example that has been crafted through the deployment of verbatim methods.\(^4\) This has led me to think about the method of verbatim at great length and determine that this method should be considered as appropriate for deploying in poetry. Her collection implies that explorations of identity and community are ongoing in literature, and I argue that deploying verbatim methods in poetry allows these themes to be considered and (re)presented in a ground-breaking body of work. Engagement with verbatim as a method that is appropriate for deployment in poetry has been especially limited until now, however this thesis attempts to close this gap. It focuses on the current opening in literature for a series of poetry to be published on the topic of the disorder in Birmingham in 2011.\(^5\) Through the series of verbatim and digital poems in United We Stand, Chapter Four (re)presents, and subsequently evaluates, the various scales of imagined community (local, national and global) that I contest are relevant in this particular context.

On the topic of the creative, reported and contemporary responses to the disorder that are examined throughout the thesis, I apply a number of key theoretical frameworks which have developed since, or previously critiqued, Anderson’s concept of the nation as an imagined community. Using these models to analyse the responses, I (re)present the expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community relative to this disorder appropriately through thirty-one verbatim poems. In Chapter One, I consider many of these frameworks at length: Michael

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\(^5\) Throughout this research, I have explored a number of avenues to establish if any poetry on the disorder in Birmingham has been published since it happened. While some poems have been published via YouTube channels, these tend to focus on the disorder in London. I have been unable to access any poems, other than those by Carol Ann Duffy and Roy MacFarlane analysed in Chapter Two of the thesis, on the disorder in Birmingham. Representatives from The Poetry Library have confirmed that it is unlikely I will find poems published on this topic according to their own records. An official report in 2012 was ‘slammed’ for including poems that were said to be ‘highlighting tensions between ethnic groups’, however both the report and the poems are no longer accessible. See Jonathan Walker, ‘Birmingham Riots: Official Report Slammed by City MP’, Birmingham Mail (2012) <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/birmingham-riots-official-report-slammed-181560> [accessed on Wednesday 7 October 2016].
Billig’s *Banal Nationalism*, Gary Fine and Lisa-Jo van de Scott’s ‘micro-imagined wispy’ community, and the rise of the ‘virtual neighborhood’ are all models that are particularly relevant to my argument that imagined communities existed on a variety of social and geographical scales in this context. Billig recognises the nation as a discursive construct, but argues that this is problematic. He suggests that the way we talk about the nation only serves to reproduce it. Yet, this idea of discussing or ‘talking the nation’ is pertinent to the thesis because it examines *how* identity and ideas of imagined community, national or otherwise, are expressed by examining and then (re)presenting them in *United We Stand*. Significant emphasis is placed on the relationship between communities that are ‘imagined’ into existence on local, national, and global levels throughout this thesis. While Anderson’s definition is relevant to this research, my decision to focus on the disorder in Birmingham brings his concept into a new social and technological context. I recognise that the locale of Birmingham – as a model for the ‘urban [multicultural] nation’ is of particular importance when considering what the disorder in 2011 meant for the individuals involved in or affected by it and, as a result, I argue that a number of other important models of community were also in existence during the disorder. I contend that Anderson’s previous explanation of the nation as an imagined community is partial and make a strong case for the existence of imagined communities on a variety of scales, positing a new definition of this idea that is pluralistic. Though the thesis does touch upon other identity markers including ethnicity, religion, and class – thus demonstrating an awareness of these markers as potential community constructs – I focus on the complexities of the relationships between local, national, and global levels of imagined community. To do this, I draw on Anderson’s definition of the nation, Robertson’s theory of ‘Global Consciousness’ (which contests that the nation is an ingredient of globalisation), and Helen F. Wilson’s examination of the link between the city and the nation which is specifically relevant to Birmingham (see Chapter One).

The thesis contends that advances in electronic communication technologies – for example, the invention of the Internet and social media platforms – gave rise to *emergent* communities that were ‘imagined’ into existence on virtual levels during the disorder in Birmingham. To demonstrate that these groupings were present in this context, I use quantitative network analysis to identify the social ‘ties’ between various media channels and ordinary

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Twitter users online (see Chapter Two, pp.84-97). This determines which reported, creative and contemporary responses are important, and these are included in my detailed analysis of several narratives in the second chapter of this thesis. By examining Twitter and the influence of various media channels as ‘key sources’ online during this disorder, I establish that the imagined communities that existed in this context were both fluid and emergent in character. The media narratives published in the aftermath of these events played an important role in reproducing these imagined communities in Birmingham in 2011. Mihelj recognises that significant changes are made to the narrative conventions deployed throughout media responses in order to ‘foster national unity’ during situations of conflict like this disorder. She argues that the media promotes a sharp division between ‘us’ (the nation) and ‘them’ (the perceived enemy) when nations are at war with one another.8 Yet, this thesis advocates that these changes to narrative conventions are also evident when a crisis situation occurs within a single nation-state. The disorder in Birmingham in 2011 is a prime case study for illustrating this.

Much of the focus on the advances in electronic communication technologies throughout this thesis is centred on Twitter. This is because previous studies that have examined the social media platform during the disorder in 2011 have established a number of interesting findings. When considering Twitter in relation to a television programme that was being broadcast about the disorder, Lucy Bennett established that ‘viewers frequently posted tweets discussing issues […] offering their opinions, ideas and solutions’ and became ‘an extended part of the “live” studio audience’ as a direct result of these electronic modes of communication now available.9 Many of these studies focus on London though, and, again, I argue that this is geocentric. To redress this balance, I carefully selected 1,772 tweets from a previously-existing dataset in order to argue that Twitter could be identified as an example of an online imagined community and a facilitator of virtual and global networks during the disorder in Birmingham. The idea of these virtual and global networks, which existed online, was then (re)presented in a number of visual-digital poems throughout United We Stand, including ‘10th August 2011’ (see p.165). In essence, I established a new form of ‘found’ poetry here that has been advanced to include platforms for

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digital text production. This visual-digital form is appropriate because the responses were published on a digital platform initially.

**Points for Further Study**

Continuing with the significance of advances in electronic communications technologies for a moment, it is important to discuss some of the key areas for further study that I have identified throughout the process of this research. Firstly, I suggest that it would be of particular value to analyse the contemporary responses that were published on other social networking platforms during the disorder in Birmingham. For the purpose of this thesis, I focus on the responses that were published on Twitter because this medium has previously been investigated by scholars in relation to the disorder in London. Twitter enables its users to respond to relevant socio-political events with immediacy, and factors including restrictions on the number of characters that a user can publish per tweet resulted in a wide range of interesting and emotive responses that could be used as the raw material for the verbatim and visual-digital poetry in *United We Stand*. Studies which explore the expressions of identity that were published on several, other social networking sites or messaging services, including Facebook and Blackberry Messenger (BBM), might lead to interesting comparisons between the findings that I have published in relation to Twitter throughout this thesis and those that are established in future research. These future studies will raise and answer a number of significant questions relative to modes of electronic communication and the different ideas of imagined community that are expressed throughout a variety of the responses published on these platforms. Unlike Twitter, which is now an openly-accessible platform for research purposes, past Facebook posts and responses sent via Blackberry’s instant messenger service might prove difficult to access. This is something that should be considered carefully before further research in relation to these online social networks is conducted.

Additionally, research in the field of cultural anthropology could be expanded in future to consider creative responses to fieldwork that are similar to those produced throughout this thesis. While the research conducted throughout this thesis is a small-scale, pilot study for the key purpose of examining the deployment of verbatim methods in poetry as an appropriate creative practice, research that aims to explore issues relating to identity and community in more detail
might want to consider a larger sample of participants. The clustered sample of twenty-five participants aged eighteen and over, who were living or working in Birmingham during the disorder in 2011, provided me, as the primary researcher and poet, with an appropriate amount of raw material to work with on this occasion. Additional data sets taken from Twitter and various media narratives also helped to address any important gaps relating to representation. Future research that analyses this kind of material might wish to access a wider range of data (or raw material) than those that I establish are appropriate for the aims and objectives of this thesis. Researchers may choose to focus on different cities and towns that were affected by the disorder in 2011, including Liverpool, Manchester and Nottingham, and compare findings from these locations to those already published in connection to London and (now) to Birmingham. Future research that interrogates theories of national identity and community or, more importantly, connections between various scales of the two, might also wish to consider more recent examples of “‘sub”-nationalism’ or the supranational as this thesis has demonstrated that these remain very much in evidence. In particular, the referendum on Scottish independence and Britain’s belonging to the European Union. The ‘Black Lives Matter’ campaign is another relevant case study for research in this area because it demonstrates that communities are ‘imagined’ into existence in relation to identity markers such as ethnicity.

The Future of United We Stand and Methods of (Re)presentation

I would like to end the thesis by commenting on the future of United We Stand as a ground-breaking collection of verbatim and visual-digital poems. As noted earlier in the ‘Declaration’ to this thesis (p.x), three poems that are included in the series have already been accepted and published online during the process of conducting this research. ‘On Monday Night’ and ‘10th August 2011’ were published by The Worcester Journal (based in Central Massachusetts) in March 2016, while ‘The Commute’ was recently featured in the highly-competitive webzine, Ink 10 Anderson, p.3.

Sweat and Tears, in August 2016. I am continuing to identify opportunities for publication, though up until now this has predominantly been centred around individual poems. I have submitted ‘The Brothers’ to a ‘Poetry and Politics’ competition which is being hosted by Holland Park Press, and ‘Glean Four: Shoot the Result’ was longlisted for Issue Eight of the poetry journal, Butcher’s Dog, in August.

Following the submission of the thesis, I will be pursuing the possibility of publishing the series of verbatim poems as a whole – either as a pamphlet or developing it further to form an entire poetry collection. I have started to identify relevant publishers that may be interested in United We Stand and these include both Five Leaves Press (based in Nottingham) and Nine Arches Press (who are based in the West Midlands). I am keen to develop my skills in reading and performing poetry and also want to ensure that, as a poet, I am engaging with the public wherever possible. As a direct result of this goal, I have been accepted to read a selection of poems from United We Stand at two national events in November. The first of these is the UK Young Artists’ National Festival, which will be held in Derby from Thursday 3rd November to Sunday 6th November 2016. The second is the National Association of Writers’ in Education’s annual Creative Writing Conference which takes place in Stratford-upon-Avon in November.

I have been involved in a number of key conversations with members of West Midlands’ Police Force and Birmingham-based poet, Helen Calcutt, regarding a possible collaboration that would see a reading of these poems informing discussions between both members of the public and officers from West Midlands’ Police. Following their participation in this research, representatives from West Midlands’ Police have evaluated the study and model confirming that the poems ‘were good’ and that ‘anybody who played some role in/experienced the riots would want to read poems about them.’ They added that they had ‘never seen any similar type of

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13 For examples of the poetry journal, Butcher’s Dog, see ‘Home’, Butcher’s Dog (2016) <http://www.butchersdogmagazine.com/> [accessed on Wednesday 7 September 2016].

14 Information regarding this conference can be found on ‘NAWE Conference 2016: Booking deadline 7th October’, NAWE (2016) <http://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/nawe-news/nawe-conference-2016-booking-deadline-7th-october.html> [accessed on Wednesday 7 September 2016]. I also presented academic papers on my research at this conference in both November 2014 and November 2015.

15 Participant Twelve, commenting on United We Stand as part of the evaluation process. This feedback was received from the participant via email on Sunday 24th July 2016 at 07.37am.
work. They are keen to bridge the gap between themselves and the public that has formed since the events in 2011 and I recognise that this kind of event as an outcome of my research has the potential for real social and cultural impact. Over the next twelve months, I will be identifying a number of relevant funding streams, including Arts Council England’s Grants for the Arts, in order to fund collaboration with a digital artist to produce a soundscape or an installation that could be opened and exhibited to the public, beginning in the West Midlands. If successful, I would like to tour the installation around other areas of the country that were affected by the disorder. This would allow me to actively engage and interact with those imagined communities that I argue existed in this setting and, thus, have examined throughout this thesis.

Finally, *United We Stand* demonstrates that the deployment of verbatim methods in poetry is appropriate – particularly for the purpose of (re)presenting expressions of identity and ideas of imagined community. Throughout this research, I have used the disorder in Birmingham in 2011 as my primary case study, however the methods and theories examined throughout this thesis could also be applied to other situations of conflict. As a result, the thesis provides poets with a new model and creative methodology with which to consider other types of social behaviour (or action) at length. As a result of this, I have begun to consider the evolutionary nature of the practice presented throughout this thesis as one that moves beyond the deployment of, solely, verbatim methods. *United We Stand* has expanded to combine techniques of verbatim with digital software tools to create a series of digital verbatim and visual-digital poems that examine community identity during the riots in Birmingham in 2011. At this point, I am working towards a new literary term and definition for this creative process. Although this is currently a work-in-progress, I am anticipating that the phrase I will coin will be ‘Digital Poetic Mimesis’. This will describe the creative practice as a mode of (re)presentation through digital poetics and the definition will be developed to consider this term and its meaning closely in relation to cultural mnemonics, individual memories and community experiences. Specifically, this term and its definition will be developed with the creative practice’s application to social research and fields of Anthropology and Cultural Memory in mind.

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16 Participant Twelve, commenting on *United We Stand* as part of the evaluation process.
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Do you have stories to share about the Riots in Birmingham in 2011?

Want your voice to be heard in a new and original way?

I am conducting research as part of my part-creative, Ph.D study in English Literature. Under the supervision of Dr. Kerry Featherstone, Lecturer in Creative Writing at Loughborough University, my research aims to pursue new experiences of the riots in order to create a new and original collection of poetry that will transform the voice of the Birmingham community!

We are looking for participants to take part in a local, community focus group (lasting a maximum of 1 hour), where you will engage in discussions with other members of the public and your community, in order to share stories and your thoughts about the event.

Following this, you will then be offered the chance to take part in an informal interview lasting no longer than 30 minutes. At this stage, participants will be asked to share, in more detail, their own experiences of the Birmingham riots.

Please note only a sample of participants will be selected for this interview stage.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you will have the right to withdraw from participating at any time throughout the research process. Any information shared with the researcher will be treated in the strictest of confidence and no findings that could identify any individual participant will be published. You may ask the researcher to move on, pause, or stop any questions at any time during the interview process.

We hope that this new work will provide a more representative picture of community experiences during the Birmingham riots in 2011.

If you are interested, please send your contact details and a few sentences about your experiences of the Birmingham riots (2011) to Sophie-Louise Hyde:

Telephone: (01509) 387107 or 07535537611
Email: s.hyde3@lboro.ac.uk.

This study has been given ethical clearance by Loughborough University's Ethical Clearance Committee. Participants may withdraw at any time. All information you choose to share will be kept strictly confidential.
Adult Participant Information Sheet

Primary Investigator:
Miss Sophie-Louise Hyde
John Hardie Building
School of the Arts, English and Drama
Loughborough University
Loughborough
LE11 3TU
s.hyde3@lboro.ac.uk
(01509) 222286

Investigator’s Supervisor:
Dr. Kerry Featherstone
Department of English and Drama,
Martin Hall, School of the Arts, English and Drama,
Loughborough University,
Loughborough,
LE11 3TU
k.featherstone@lboro.ac.uk

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of this study is to use a sample of first-hand accounts and witness testimony about the Birmingham riots in order to create a new collection of poetry. The interview material will be used to transform the voice of the Birmingham community by paying close and careful attention to the words of you, the participant. In particular, the poetry will narrate the story of the 2011 riots in Birmingham and, as such, this collection of poetry will reflect the voices and stories of you, as the participants, as told in this study.

Who is doing this research and why?
You are taking part in this study as a member of a mixed, varied group. Only a sample of participants from the community focus group will be selected for the one-to-one interview stage. All participants, including yourself, are over 18 years of age and have been involved in or affected by the Birmingham riots in some way; it may be that you were present at the time of an incident connected to this event or that a family member was affected in some way.
Time demands on you as an individual participant will be limited to one-hour participation in a community focus-group setting (split into groups based on your experiences), followed by an optional 30-minute interview session (one-on-one) with the primary investigator (Sophie-Louise Hyde). Only a sample of participants will be selected for the one-to-one interview. Your participation in both of these sessions will be completely your choice and on a voluntary basis. You may stop taking part and have the right to withdraw from the study at any time prior to its publication.

During the one-on-one interview session, you will be asked a series of questions by Sophie-Louise Hyde based on your experience of the Birmingham riots. During this interview process you may be audio- and/or video-recorded to help with the poetry writing at later stages. However, as soon as these recordings are no longer needed, they will be removed from the study and destroyed with immediate effect. If, at any stage of the study process, you wish to withdraw your data from this study, any recordings or paper-written documents based on your interview will be removed and destroyed immediately. You may also ask the interviewee (Sophie-Louise Hyde) to move on from a question, pause, or stop the questions completely, at any time, should you feel uncomfortable.

It is important for you to be aware that this topic, the Birmingham riots during 2011, is one of a sensitive nature and, as such, may result in you feeling distressed, angry, or upset. In the instance that you feel distress of this nature, please let Sophie-Louise know and she will terminate your interview until you feel that you are comfortable enough and happy to carry on with the discussion.

Conducting this research as the investigator will be Sophie-Louise Hyde, a poet, creative writer and research student at Loughborough University. The supervisor of this research project is Dr. Kerry Featherstone, a lecturer in Creative Writing at Loughborough University. This research project is supported and funded by Loughborough University and Lord Glendonbrook of the Glendonbrook Centre for Enterprise Education.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes, your taking part in this study will be kept 100% confidential and anonymous. All data taken from these interviews, including audio, video and paper recordings, will be stored privately, safely and securely where only Sophie-Louise Hyde and Dr. Kerry Featherstone have access to it when necessary.

Anonymity will be kept as participants will not be named when the data files are stored, either digitally or in physical paper-copy. Instead, interview folders and files will be stored by interview ‘Date’ and by ‘Number of Interview’. At this stage, your name will not be stored and your interview will be anonymised. This will then stay both confidential and anonymous even up to the stage of publication and beyond.

Only in the case where you, as a participant, wish to be credited and named in the publication, print, or performance showcase, created as a result of this study, and in giving your informed consent for this, will your name be published and anonymity no longer exist.

You have the right to withdraw yourself and your data from this study at any time during the research process and up until the end of the project (October 2016) when it is hoped that publication will have been achieved. At the stage of publication, it will no longer be possible for you to withdraw your data. However, all of your data will be kept anonymous throughout the publication stages too.
Upon completion of this study and my Ph.D. all information and data relevant to this study will no longer be needed. As a result, it will be removed and destroyed with immediate effect. All audio and video files will cease to exist and any paper copies will be shredded and destroyed.

Please note that the researcher is obliged to any information regarding your involvement in criminal activity to the appropriate person/s if it has not yet been dealt with by the Police/in a Court of Law. Activity of this nature, and discussed in these sessions, should be kept to that which has been dealt with already by the Police.

I have some more questions; who should I contact?

If you have any more questions, please contact Sophie-Louise Hyde on the details above. Alternatively, you can drop her an e-mail at: s.hyde3@lboro.ac.uk. She will be more than happy to answer these as best she can.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of this study will be used to produce a collection of poetry based on the subject of the 2011 riots in Birmingham. This collection will be anonymous and in-keeping with confidentiality unless a participant specifies that they would like to be credited for their part within it.

It is hoped that the poetry will be published into print, showcased as part of a digital Arts project and used in a performance-poetry event in the near future (2016-17).

What if I am not happy with how the research was conducted?

If you are not happy with how the research was conducted, please contact Mrs Jacqueline Green, the Secretary for the University’s Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee:

Postal Address: Mrs J.A Green, Research Office, Room 1.11, Hazlerigg Building, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, Loughborough, LE11 3TU
Tel: 01509 222423
Email: J.A.Green@lboro.ac.uk

The University also has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing(2).htm.
In Verbatim, Imagined Communities, Contemporary Settings: 
The Story of the Birmingham Riots

Informed Consent Form 
(to be completed after you have read the Participant Information Sheet)

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage, for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand that the researcher is obliged to report any information regarding my involvement in criminal activity to the appropriate person/s if it has not yet been dealt with by Police/In a Court of Law, and that activity discussed should be kept to that which has been dealt with.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to participate in this study.

Your full name: __________________________________________

Your signature: __________________________________________

Signature of investigator: __________________________________

Date: __________________________________________
In Verbatim, Imagined Communities, Contemporary Settings: The Story of the 2011 Riots in England

Thematic Interview Protocol

A. Participant’s Own Background

Tell me a little bit about yourself? What do you do, work or studies? Where are you from? Why did you want to get involved in this research project?

B. The Riots: Background

Can you remember where you were living at the time it happened? What was it like? Can you briefly describe the activities and events during that time?

C. Participant’s Personal Experiences of the Riots

Did you witness any riots activity? How would you describe the activity you witnessed? (Violent, tragic events etc.?)

How else did the riots affect you and your hometown/city?

What can you tell me about the community you lived in during the riots? Did it change? What can you tell me about the clean-ups that took place?

D. Participant’s Thoughts on the Riots

What did you think about the riots at the time? Did you have an opinion? Has your opinion changed since the riots happened (over the years)?

Was the media coverage of the events in your area good enough? What do you believe was the cause of the riots in Birmingham? (Justified by a cause? etc.)

Do you have any thoughts on the death of Mark Duggan? What about the media coverage of him and his death?

E. Participant’s Memories of the Riots

What would you describe as your most vivid memory of the riots? Would you like to add anything else before we close the interview?
Appendix Four: Example of Interview Transcripts

(Interview One, Participant Five, 09/10/2015, 09.52am)

C) Personal Experience of the Riots

Did you witness any riots activity? How would you describe the activity you witnessed?

How else did the riots affect you and your hometown/city?

What can you tell me about the community you lived in during the riots? Did it change?

Urm, yeah, coz of the people I went to college with I kind of knew both sides of it so I had some friends who were involved in the riots an’ then some friends that weren’t and it was affecting their families so like they weren’t leaving their houses, houses were being bricked an’ trashed, local shops had been broken into so like Grandparents and parents could just go out and go shopping, they had to go further out of their way n’ stuff. I, I just think it was quite selfish. Fair amount of people struggling through it. My other friends’ point of view who liked the rioting n’ all that stuff they absolutely loved it. They got quite a buzz from it, they didn’t care about who it affected or what they did, just as long as they went out n’ had fun and got what they wanted. Yeah, it’s a lot of bragging goin’ on “oh, I smashed a window today” and everyone was like “Congratulations… twat”.

Yeah, coz I was at college at the time so obviously you found that the people who were involved in it got completely shunned coz there was less of them an’ more of the people who were like affected. Like having (I don’t know) families like not, what’s the word? …affected by it and attacked or whatever so they got shunned. It created such a divide in my year group. Yeah n’ everyone was all gossiping and being extra bitchy an’ it was ridiculous. They definitely got shunned, I’m not friends with ’em no more (Laughs).

Urm, I think it kind of made people come together a bit more especially when it came to cleaning I up an’ sortin’ out whatever had got trashed an’ stuff. It made people a lot closer an’ obviously they clamped down really, really hard on the people that did like initiate the riots and looting. I think the majority of them have been arrested and fined, haven’t they? They clamped down quite quick but I think that kind of, initially people lost faith in like the police from letting it happen but then cos of how quickly they dealt with it after, I think it’s worked quite well.
D) Participant’s Thoughts on the Riots

Was the media coverage of the events in your area good enough?
No, I think London overshadowed it massively. London had a lot of attention like on our regional news they would say things were bad in Birmingham, they would compare it to London n’ say how it was on a larger scale that things were more violent n’ stuff; they tried to make it like Birmingham wasn’t that big of a deal but when y’know, just judging from what I’ve seen n’ stuff n’ from how long it took to clean up n’ restore shops n’ whatever, I think it was a lot bigger than what they made out.

What do you believe to be the cause of the riots in Birmingham?
I think they just played off what happened, like elsewhere, but I think things have been, I don’t know, going not so well for a while like fights breaking out on Broad Street n’ stuff like weeks before. Yeah, oh god being in town when they’re happening is not nice, yeah n’ they have like, they do a lot of protests and marches about how states are in other countries n’ how people are being treated in other countries but they do the marches in Birmingham. But they literally take up, they stand so they don’t just walk through, they make like a wall n’ then walk through so you can’t go anywhere; you have to like walk where they’re going. You can’t really get through or around them; they walk in such a way you can’t move. So, yeah I think it’d been kicking off quite a while beforehand.
A) The Riots: Background

Can you remember where you were living at the time it happened? What was it like? Can you briefly describe the activities and events during that time?

I’ve been in the police for 7 years, but 3 years’ service when the, er, when the riots started. I was working on the city centre response team so the ones that whizz around and answer all the 999 calls. Urm, much like Luke, I was on rest days when it all started urm and it was just the immense feeling of frustration sat at home watching the news urm and again, y’know, myself and my colleagues kept calling into work; ‘we’ll come in, why are you calling in people from Scotland when we’re y’know 5 miles up the road n’ we can come in and work’, and we were told ‘no, you’re not needed, stay at home but stay by your phone’, urm and after 2 days of just sat at home watching BBC news because we couldn’t go anywhere.

‘OK, your rest days are now cancelled, you’re in tomorrow and this is your shift pattern for the next 8 days’

…er and it was 12 hours on, 12 hours off, just for the next 8 days, and I think normally (in any other situation) police officers would have their hands in their head knowing that they’ve gotta go in for 8 days n work 12 hours a day but it was a sense of jubilation, excitement, y’know, that we’re actually gonna have a chance to go in and do something about this. And, I remember getting to work and it was a real, sorta strange atmosphere, urm, for a start everyone was happy to be at work which is unheard (laughs) but it was just this sort of like camaraderie y’know, everyone sort of had a sense of purpose to be at work and it was, it was a really nice feeling, urm, and, er, because we were a response team – there’s 5 response teams – we had our rest days cancelled so in effect you have 2 response teams working on the same day.
What can you tell me about the clean-ups that took place?

Yeah, but that was more in the hours of the day, like that wasn’t like… as I say, Broad Street in the day when things calmed down, it was a different animal. When the shops were being boarded up, windows being fixed, then you’d get the cleaning squads coming along with mops, buckets, and brooms; “BROOM ARMY” like! And that was reassuring to see, whereas some people in those groups probably wouldn’t talk to each other on a daily basis.

But, they had a common purpose.

*B*

B) The Riots: Background

Can you remember where you were living at the time it happened? What was it like? Can you briefly describe the activities and events during that time?

I remember more about like the London side of things but then as soon as it kind of started spreading to Birmingham and then like Wolverhampton a little bit as well, urm just little bits really and then obviously the bit when the three guys were killed.

So, that one with and I just kind of, coz I don’t think I wasn’t really that old, like 16, um so like the image of like that road when like it had all like the flowers and stuff and then like the 3 guys being killed. I remember going like a few weeks later into Birmingham and like all the shop windows being still smashed in and everything on like the main – urm, yeah, there were a few like you just saw like image and stuff on the TV but then there were quite a few like boarded up and everythin’. Urm, that’s most of what I remember really.

Yeah, it was like a petrol station and stuff. I don’t know where it is but yeah.
The Riots: Background
Can you remember where you were living at the time it happened? What was it like? Can you briefly describe the activities and events during that time?

I got home, got up in the morning, had a few hours’ sleep, got up, I’ve got kids so got up to see on my TV there’d been more rioting in London. It was getting more serious now. Watching the TV footage, like Paul’s already said, was outraged. Urm, as far as I could see, my opinion was, it was greedy, what I would call, ‘chavs’, just nicking things because they could, nothing to do with Mark Duggan. Y’know I don’t think there was any reference to Mark Duggan with that, they were using it as an excuse to do what they wanted and run amock. Urm, first thing I did was phone up my planning department to say ‘I’m on my days off, sarge, do you need me to come in? I can see what’s happening on the telly, do you need me to come in?’ and was told straight away, ‘No, No, there’s no requirement for you to come in.’ Later in the day, this time watching riots in Birmingham, seeing officers I knew on the TV – could recognise them – so they’d had the riots helmets on, we’ve all got our collar numbers on the backs so collar numbers, colleagues I knew y’ know I’d joined the police with; I’d become friends with them through the police. This time, I can again see them taking a load of shit basically, having things thrown at them, seeing shops looted. It’s a bit more personal when it’s happening in Birmingham to London, y’know I grew up, y’ know I went to Birmingham as a kid regularly, I still sometimes do go in there shopping so y’ know wanted to help, wasn’t required. Urm, phoned up on Tuesday saying ‘I’ve seen what’s happened in Birmingham, do you need me to come in? I don’t want any money for it, I’ll come and do it for time owing, in case they were worried about the cost implications, again, was told no, no. Again, Tuesday night watched it all on the telly, in Birmingham, London, obviously it was getting really serious by this point. They were deploying thousands more police officers. It wasn’t until Wednesday afternoon when I phoned in again and said ‘do you need me today?’ and initially was told no then was phoned back about an hour later to say ‘the force have cancelled all rest days for all officers, get yourself into work’ so this had been going on for days and I truly believe we were too slow to do anything about it and it wasn’t ‘til all these other officers came on the third or fourth day that we got a handle on things so that was really frustrating.
Appendix Five: Example of Twitter Matrix

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Note: This matrix shows the coding of tweets according to who published them and what types of tweet they were.
Appendix Six: Image of Twitter Network using UCINet

Note: This network shows the social ‘ties’ (relationships) between media organisations and ordinary users on Twitter.
Appendix Seven: Example of TAPoRware (Textual Analysis)

Summary: 3 entries found.

come together and help one another, often through social media. One website that sums up the sense of community, that the Internet is so often blamed for destroying, is Harringay Online. This is a local community site that posts news and information for people living in the Harringay area of London, but during the riots in the press. This site, and others like it, proved that there was a strong sense of community during those turbulent days, despite the rhetoric that many adopted. But it wasn’t just during the riots that...

Summary: There are 200 unique words, and there are 406 words in total. 134 words occurred once and 40 words occurred twice.

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<th>Counts</th>
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Note: These images show the context and frequency of words deployed on Twitter during the disorder in Birmingham in 2011.
Appendix Eight: ‘One Good Thing’ and ‘Grand Victoria Square’ (Original Drafts)

‘One Good Thing’

One good thing that came from the riots?

No racial element. And,

I’ve actually noticed this in Birmingham.

‘dem homeless, deny access to benefits an’

what exactly do you tink ‘dem do?

People who have religious conflict or

whatever, have issues?

David Starkey is wrong.

FFS! If you don’t think there’s a deprived underclass,

you are going to create one by evicting people, just

as the media perceives:

“we’ll evict looters from council houses, says council chief”

because we don’t really like each other.
‘Grand Victoria Square’

and a smashed-in Santander,

the smell of cigarettes and Steak pasties, from Greggs,

can’t even fill this empty air.

Seven steps, and

four feet in brightly-coloured orange streaks,

and a camera sits

on all three fee feet, tripod legs

cascading in the middle of New Street.

A pop-up gallery of Angel Arts has

popped up;

pulled down as the Office Angels have stocked up

on job opportunities for all.

Behind me, to the right, is

Ethel Street and

the tree green of Subway flags

swimming in the breeze.

I take twelve more steps

and find myself, again,

against a tree of Costa Coffee lovers,
handmade bouquets, and

The Coventry at 102,

or is it three?

At Bennett’s Hill, a riot van sits

peacefully watching the streets pass by

The Piccadilly.

The potato man still stands.

As I walk between designer brands,

the size of HSBC on the corner

at Corporation Street

takes me by surprise.

‘I’VE BEEN ASSAULTED’, a bald man shouts, as

blood drips from his nose and mouth.

A PCSO attempts to calm him among Tuesday’s busy crowds, and then

there’s the Carphone Warehouse,

a big Primark, and opposite

Pizza Hut Blush-es a burgundy reflection of

the official Aston Villa shop.