



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA

CULTURAL
CO-OPERATION



ACROSS THE STREET AROUND THE WORLD

DEBATABLE

Cultural diversity initiatives reinforce stereotypes rather than remove them

The Tabernacle, London, 20 October 2009

Transcript of Debate

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Organised by Cultural Co-operation
in association with the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea
as part of the 2009 *Across The Street Around The World* season

The context

In summer 2009, The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (RBKC) commissioned Cultural Co-operation (CC) to organise its annual public debate on popular culture - "Debatable" - as part of the Borough's October-December arts season, "*Across the Street, Around the World*".

CC was invited to devise the proposition to be debated and to assemble a panel of high-level guest speakers from the national arts and heritage sector to discuss the topic amongst themselves and with the public. CC accepted this invitation gratefully, not least since it allowed the organisation to address particular aspects of its major new 5-year project, 2009-14, on the theme of *World City*.

CC plans to explore this theme through a programme of public and specialist activities addressing key issues around inter-cultural contact, dialogue and understanding in 21st century cosmopolitan communities. The programme comprises 4 discrete yet inter-related strands: Festivals; Education; Artists Network; and Intellectual Discourse. *Debatable* provided CC with an early opportunity to initiate the 4th of these strands.

The proposition that CC devised was deliberately provocative, intending to divide opinion on a sensitive, yet timely, concern: "*Cultural diversity initiatives reinforce stereotypes rather than remove them*". The proposition was framed in sufficiently broad terms so as to open the debate up to a wide range of contrasting perspectives.

Resumé of the debate

The proposition seemed to touch a nerve across different sectors. A range of policy makers, academics, artists, heritage specialists and other arts practitioners came forward to join the debate, either as members of the panel or audience.

The inclusion on the panel of Munira Mirza, the Mayor of London's Director of Policy, Arts, Culture and the Creative Industries, added a particular political dimension to an already contested issue. This was perhaps to be expected, given the increasingly febrile pre-election climate across the UK at the time.

Whilst Munira's involvement undoubtedly heightened the public profile of the event, the quality of the debate itself was greatly enhanced not only by her eloquent contributions during it, but also by those of the other panel members, all of them pre-eminent in their respective fields. Wesley Kerr, Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund London Committee, chaired the debate with characteristic charm and wit, admirably ensuring a healthy balance

of debate amongst panel members and between them and members of the audience throughout the evening.

A seminal and succinct presentation by Ranjit Sondhi, one of the UK's leading lights on issues of race, class and inter-culturalism, appealed for a new, gentler politics of identity. This contrasted with passionate expositions by two of the nation's most dedicated cultural activists - Ansel Wong, on Carnival and the struggle for public space, and Reem Kelani, on artists subtly yet systematically excluded from the mainstream on grounds of race, politics or gender; both are tenacious and successful champions for social justice and cross-cultural harmony.

The distinguished writer Mike Phillips, a highly respected and knowledgeable commentator on issues as varied as migration, racism, heritage and creativity for more than 40 years, provided a uniquely personal take on the proposition. He drew attention to various shortcomings that he had personally experienced with many official good intentions; he urged individual creative practitioners to fight their own corner, regardless of whether this meant going beyond - or even, at times, against - the expectations of their "natural" communities of allegiance and interest, so as to find their own true and distinctive voice.

Last but not least, Valerie Synmoie, Head of Diversity at the Arts Council, London, presented a robust and thoughtful defence of a number of official initiatives aimed at addressing chronic structural inequality. She movingly articulated the need to continue to strive for a level playing field in all areas of public life.

Outstanding artistic performances during the evening by three entirely distinct musical ensembles drawn from CC's Artists' Network - *Poetic Pilgrimage*, *Harare* and Reem Kelani herself - added a joyful creative dimension to the event.

The overall success of this first Intellectual Discourse event in CC's *World City* project has paved the way for further regular events of this kind over the next few years. Some of the possible future debate themes are included in appendices to the Report of the debate. Interest in these has already begun to take hold among many of CC's organisational partners and subscribers. Proposals for additional themes are welcome.

CC is very grateful indeed to RBKC, to members of the Panel, and to our hosts for the event, The Tabernacle, for enabling it to present *Debatable 2009* and to our audience for their contributions on the night and the feedback that we continue to receive from them. *Debatable's* success has acted as a natural springboard into future public engagement in pressing intercultural issues that affect us all.

Prakash Daswani
Chief Executive
Cultural Co-operation

Transcript of Debate

Prakash Daswani: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to tonight's event, Debatable. It's great to see so many familiar faces as well as several new ones and we're very pleased to welcome you all to the audience tonight. I'm Prakash Daswani, Chief Executive and co-founder, in 1987, of Cultural Co-operation, the independent arts charity that's organised this evening's debate.

We're delighted that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's Arts Service commissioned us a few weeks ago to conceive and organise the debate as one of sixty events in its *'Across the Street Around the World'* season that runs until December and we're grateful to the Head of Arts for the Borough at the time, Miriam Nelken, for being kind enough to invite us to do this on their behalf. It's also wonderful to be back in the refurbished Tabernacle after many years and just as pleasing to be here in what is now home to the recently created *'Carnival Village'*.

This evening's debate is also one of the first public events in Cultural Co-operation's new five-year programme on the theme of *'World City'*, brief details of which are in your pack. This initiative builds on two long-term programmes on World Culture that we've devised and delivered in recent years, first on *'Culture & Worship'*, between 1997 and 2006, and then *'Culture & Migration'*, ever since 2001. World cities present all kinds of challenges and opportunities to the people who live in them as well as to the places that aspire to become them. The panel, and hopefully many of you from the audience, will discuss some of these challenges together this evening, while addressing the proposition. Cultural Co-operation, by the way, has its own view on the proposition, or should I say, I do. At the risk of pre-empting the debate, I'll share this with you now, since I'm not on the panel myself.

Personally, I broadly disagree with the proposition. This is partly as a result of where grappling with the theoretical and political issues involved for a quarter or a century or more has brought us. But mainly, it's grounded in long practical experience of actually doing scores of diversity initiatives and the feedback we've had on these from our project partners, from the media, from policy makers and from our audiences. This has convinced us that particular kinds of diversity initiatives can do far more good than harm and deliver priceless public benefits.

What kinds of initiatives can deliver such results? Well I'm not going to go into detail on that myself at this point, though our organisational name, Cultural Co-operation, may give you a clue. But we'll leave it to our panellists to outline their particular perspectives and discuss these further with you.

All that said, we're also in no doubt that other kinds of diversity initiatives can have negative consequences, both unintended and intended, as I'm sure we're about to hear. What I will say now, however, is something about why Cultural Co-operation itself and its many project partners, do the sort of work we do, have done for all these years, and aim to do for a good while longer, whatever the immediate future may hold.

To help keep this short, I'd like to draw on three statements, each very brief in words but huge in the vistas they open up for us. The first is by Mexican writer, Octavio Paz. It's a single line which can also be found in the frontispiece of the wonderful novel, *Maps for Lost Lovers* by Pakistani British writer, Nadeem Aslam. "A human being", says Paz, "is never what he is but the self he seeks". For me, this provides a compelling insight into the nature of identity as being open, questing, multi-faceted and unfinished.

The second statement echoes this sentiment but expands on it. It's by the celebrated Victorian poet and writer Matthew Arnold. In his series of essays, *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold describes Culture as "not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming". This makes us ask our partners, our funders, our various publics and ourselves some fairly basic questions. Namely, what kind of society are we now, how have we come to be so and what kind of society do we want to grow into in future? In short, what do we want to become? What bridges to this shared future do we want to build and what are the possibilities for the Arts and Heritage in all of this?

Arnold, incidentally, describes the men and women of culture as "true apostles of equality". This raises the question of what moral yardsticks we ought to use to track our progress to this collective goal, especially in such intensely complex sites of cultural and historic convergence like London, with its bewildering assortment of belief systems and values? Now I'm personally quite prepared to change my views as this debate unfolds, but ultimately, a very large part of me will be measuring the points made against a particular human quality that has its origins in Africa but which has taken on similar forms all over the world since antiquity, and this is the quality known as Ubuntu.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes Ubuntu in this way; "*Ubuntu is about the essence of being human. It embraces hospitality, caring about others and being prepared to go the extra mile for the sake of another human being. I believe*", says Tutu, "*that a person is a person through other persons. That my humanity is caught up, bound up, with yours. When I dehumanise you, I dehumanise myself. The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms. Therefore, one seeks to work for the common good because one's humanity comes into its own through belonging.*"

Now I'm going to introduce someone whom I know identifies with the quality of Ubuntu to open the evening with a short performance. Reem Kelani has spent her professional lifetime as both a singer and an activist who is devoted to highlighting and alleviating the plight of her

Palestinian compatriots. She's just returned from a tour of the Middle East and it's a great privilege to have her back with us. She is one of the first ever members of our artists' network and has done much to inspire the professional development of the hundreds of others within it, as well as teaching thousands of children through our education projects and those of others. And, she's kindly agreed to join our panel. But before she does that, she's going to let us hear two of her powerful and intensely beautiful songs. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Reem Kelani. Thank you.

Reem Kelani: A selection of 19th Century Palestinian bedtime lullabies that speak of the three Abrahamic faiths of Palestine.

Performs

Mr Bruno Heinen on the piano, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you.

We move from Biblical Palestine to Egypt, to one of the greatest composers in the history of Arabic music. It's music from my next album dedicated to the great Egyptian composer Sayed Darwish, 1892 to 1923. He wrote great songs, one of which said, "Don't tell me if you are a Muslim, Christian or Jew, if your homeland unites you, your religion should never divide you". Can you imagine? This was written in Egypt in 1919. He wrote anthems for working class people and in this song he's saluting people who carry the heavy loads.

But before we do this song, I would like to mention that Bruno Heinen is one of the best young Western classical and jazz musicians so please listen out. Two years ago, he didn't do Arabic music and now he's part of the wonderful pool of fifteen British musicians that I've actually learned from and introduced to Arabic music, so trying to bridge the gap between the concept of world music, which we'll talk about later, and jazz. So, Mr Heinen, jazz it up.

Performs

It's Mr George Gershwin meeting an Egyptian Sayed Darwish.

Performs

Thank you. Mr Bruno Heinen on the piano, ladies and gentlemen.

Applause

Prakash Daswani: Please show your appreciation for Reem Kelani and Bruno Heinen.

Well we hope you enjoyed that opening to this evening's debate and it's now my pleasure to welcome to the stage members of our distinguished panel, chaired by my esteemed colleague, Wesley Kerr, chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund London Committee. You'll be relieved to hear that not all of our panel members are being asked to sing although Wesley is an accomplished choral singer and it is possible he may break into song without warning. Over to you, Wesley.

Applause

Wesley Kerr: If she is as eloquent at speaking as she is singing, I think we're in for quite something. That was really wonderful as an opening.

Reem Kelani: Thank you.

Wesley Kerr: So the format for this evening is we're going to have a couple more musical performances but before then we're actually going to have the debate, so each of our distinguished speakers will speak for about five minutes and then it will be your turn and then there'll be some voting.

So it's great to be back at the Tabernacle. It's a real cultural crucible, I think, for any of us who lived, as I did for decades, in Notting Hill. It's a fascinating area with a fascinating history. It started off as a very posh housing estate and you could argue it's become that again, although actually, we have some of the worst social deprivation here in North Kensington. In the 19th Century it was quite a big Irish area. Particularly at the time of the Potato Famine lots of people came and I suppose, in a way, that they were refugees from poverty and death. There was a big Jewish community here. There was a busy synagogue just down the road. I think Christopher Isherwood writes about that in some of his early novels. And of course post the Second World War, lots of West Indians came here. This was also actually Rachman's base, so they didn't necessarily get a great deal on their housing but they survived.

This is where Oswald Mosley campaigned in the 1950's in various election campaigns and was seen off and out-argued. This is where what are said to be the first race riots in Britain happened in 1958, about the same time as I was being born. And this is where Kelso Cochrane was murdered in 1959, which is obviously another significant event. When I moved here in the late 1970s, there was a Portuguese community, very well established. The Spanish had, and still have, their own school just up the road and many Moroccans had made their home here. And now, of course, it's become very posh again and it's to 'Noughties' Conservatism what Islington was to Labour in the early 90s. So change and mixture is constant. Lets hope that the modern Conservatives, people who live around here, like Mr Cameron and Mr Osborne and Mr Vaizey, as Mr Johnson once did, will

breathe in some of that liberated air and feel the positive diversity vibes from tonight's meeting. I know Munira will be reporting back...

So without further ado, let's get on with the debate. The proposition is that cultural diversity initiatives reinforce stereotypes rather than remove them. And our first speaker is a one-man embodiment, over four decades, of bringing people together. It's very appropriate that he should be speaking first because it's also the fiftieth anniversary of the Notting Hill Carnival this year and Ansel has been one of the most important people in the whole Carnival movement. He was the former chair both of Cultural Co-operation, Prakash's organisation, and of the Carnival and he was the co-founder of the ELIMU Carnival Band. He continues to run that, as he has been doing for twenty-five years. He's an educationalist, he's an academic and in the Eighties he was on the frontline as head of Ken Livingstone's Racial Equality Unit at the GLC. Remember the GLC? At the time when Mr Livingstone was assembling his 'Rainbow Coalition', so first of all, Ansel Wong.

Applause

Ansel Wong: Thank you, Wesley. I've got just five minutes to contribute to the debate. But we are here today, as he indicated, at one of the two major centres for Carnival. This is the Carnival Village at the Tabernacle, and the other one is the United Kingdom Centre for Carnival Arts in Luton. Both centres are, in a sense, testimonies and examples of a community's struggle for the recognition of its arts and culture, carnival arts. And what I want to do tonight is to try and take Carnival as an exemplar of a quintessentially diverse and diasporic arts event – a typical diversity initiative. I hope to fashion my presentation tonight around the struggle and the challenges we faced and continue to face in the arts on a national scale.

Carnival is an example of how a major cultural event rooted in a disadvantaged and diverse community is facing up to the challenges of the cultural and political changes that inform the creative process and the operational and managerial demands of this annual festival, as well as the political context of its existence and its survival. As already indicated, it is appropriate that we have this debate in 2009 because this is the fiftieth anniversary of Carnival. It is alleged, or is indicated, that Carnival in history is often portrayed as a struggle of London's Caribbean community to ensure recognition of presence and to ensure the acceptance of its culture here, in the United Kingdom. Its roots, its culture, its history, of Carnival, are very much linked to Trinidad and Tobago. Errol Hill defined it as "*a symbol of freedom from the broad mass of the population and not merely a season of frivolous enjoyment.*" He continued, "*It has a ritualistic significance, rooted in the experience of slavery and the celebration of freedom from slavery.*"

There's a case to be made that the first London Carnival, as happened on the 30th of January 1959 at the St Pancras Town Hall, billed as 'The Caribbean Carnival, 1959' and organised by the West Indian Gazette, was recognised as such – as the first Carnival – by everyone at the time. The person behind this was political activist and editor of the West Indian Gazette, Claudia Jones. Modelled on the Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, the birthplace of Claudia Jones, the London event was timed to coincide with that festival. It also came, as already indicated by Wesley, after the Notting Hill Riots of 1958 and the death of Kelso Cochrane. In fact, Claudia Jones said that the staging of the Carnival in 1959 was to get, and I quote, "*the taste of Notting Hill out of our mouths*". And indeed, some of the proceeds from that original event was used for the defence of the people arrested during the 'civil disturbances'.

The very birth of this event – 'Carnival' – was a community struggle: a community struggle for equality; a community struggle for recognition of its physical presence in the United Kingdom and of its rights to live in a safe environment, free from danger; and, importantly, a struggle to legitimate its culture and arts. And each year, after the death of Claudia Jones in 1964, there was a carnival in London.

By mere coincidence, another woman who knew nothing about what was happening in North London, contacted the police about holding a neighbourhood festival to help combat the devastating effects of poverty and deprivation of the Ladbroke Grove area. Community activist, Rhaunie Laslett, advised by Guyanese Andre Shervington, invited various groups in and around Notting Hill to participate in this. Rhaunie Laslett said, "*It was for the emergence of an oppressed and disadvantaged people wanting to express itself. It was to prove that, from our ghetto, we are not rubbish people. It was also a very healthy way of relieving pent-up emotions in music and dance. It was also the integration of the country, regardless of race or creed.*"

The history of Carnival, then, is one of spontaneous eruption, of resistance, as part of an ongoing struggle against exploitation, domination and poverty. And these battles happened around public spaces. The space to carry, the space to dance, the space to celebrate, the space to eat, the space to survive. It was very much the same in London. Remember, Chief Superintendent Patterson of the Metropolitan Police, who sought consistently during his stint at the Met to stop the Carnival. He said after the resistance of the community in the streets of Ladbroke Grove in 1976, and I quote, "*I'm 100% convinced that the Carnival has outgrown itself and is no longer suitable for the streets of Notting Hill or any other London streets in its present form.*" No space for Carnival, here in London, or any city or borough in the United Kingdom in its present form.

What is that form? Masquerade and masks. The mask was used to great effect as a physical and visual barrier behind which and through which the mask-player voiced his or her world-view. Behind a mask, the celebrant was able to express dissenting views, intimidate the

spectator, hide their identity, extract money from passers-by and make a mockery of many aspects of polite society.

This is the artistic form that with Carnival remains a historical and cultural lineage and heritage in a vast diasporic network which circulates masks, concepts, persons and all kinds of specific carnival practices. That diasporic carnival was not simply an export to England or import from Trinidad, but also a redistribution and reinterpretation of the original. And the key question for me here, looking at diasporic debate, is what, then, are these redistributions and reinterpretations, in terms of whether they are stereotypes or whether they contribute to what's an artistic landscape? Is Carnival, in United Kingdom's cities, a challenge to the social hierarchies of British society or is it an affirmation of shared values and a sense of community? Does it reinforce the static stereotypes of the original? Are the British Carnivals a testimony of a developing organic event that embraces all other arts and communities? Is it free, is it licentious, is it spontaneous?

Of course, I'm not going to answer these questions tonight, but I want to frame it in terms of our debate. We're looking at art as a form of resistance and rebellion, as masks, masquerade, means through which that resistance is a reassertion of new cultural identities. Carnival, whether diasporic or not, is essentially a struggle for cultural, physical and political space. Spaces that are constantly being redefined, redrawn, reinterpreted and redistributed by the Arts Council, by the regulatory authorities and by the funding bodies. It occurs, this resistance, at all levels; between the local authority and the arts arenas. It is also a struggle for space, in the very heart of the Carnival, space in terms of physical, operational, performing and exhibition space.

Notting Hill Carnival occupies space by two concentric circles, each of which is prescribed by two competing constituencies that make up the Carnival. Two groups: performers and public. The outer circle is populated by masked bands, steel bands and mobile sound systems. This is masquerade, what Peter Mincshall referred to as a "*visual Carnival symphony*". The inner circle is populated by live music stages and static sound systems, playing every type of music on the Earth. Decibels of sounds emanate from banks of speakers on street corners. During the day, these two Carnival groups are in harmony, each dutifully managing their public space and providing entertainment for the respective publics.

But come 7pm, and in 2009 it was 6pm, the inner circle closes down and its public, its audience, its listeners move to occupy the space with the other public in the outer circle. These are the masked players. These are the followers in T-shirts. These are the spectators on the pavements. And the merging of these two constituencies, of these two publics, in this space, changes everything in terms of the artistic form of Carnival: the very nature of Carnival changes. Constituents become combatants for space and for the use of that space. Masquerade, masks, must battle with MTV. Costumes must fight for performance space

with the bands, some say gangs, of young people who see the Carnival procession as a suitable space to occupy and conquer, to dominate, to assert their specific rights to walk on the road. The Queen of Carnival must meet the King of 'bling bling'. Clarence Landy, Laurence Noel, Dexter Kahn, must fight for their space against the 'invasion of the bag-snatchers', the clothes horses for 'Primani', the custodians of Sheffield Steel, and the bands that have no music and have no symphonies.

This is the art form that reflects the diverse cultures of London's many communities. And the challenges we face are shown in the extent to which this event is recognised as contributing to the artistic and cultural identity of the nation. Carnival is part of that cultural landscape. It comes in many forms and many battles. Carnival will not flinch against the battle of the masks: the battle of the masks versus the bum, the beads and the bikini; the struggle of the street theatre versus the street party or the dancehall; characters versus 'jump and wave'; the Carnival Queen decked in all her finery, but she is one of many.

They are each struggling to occupy and hold that space: space occupied by the roti vendor and the Polish hotdog seller, by the forbidden, the ritualistic, the moral and immoral, the formal and informal, the black and the white, the Asian and the African, the Jamaican and the Brazilian, the heathen and the Christian, the rock and roll band from Folkestone and the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. We fight for this space against the Carnival stewards but we occupy the space with all of these people. The challenge for us is how each of us use this space and develop it for the benefit of us all: defining for ourselves in our street, and around the world, what our orthodoxy is, what our carnival orthodoxy is, what cultural and political diversity we choose to take up. So, my take, my vote is, Carnival as a cultural diversity initiative, reinterprets, reinforces, refines and regenerates stereotypes and transforms all that for better of all of us. Thank you.

Wesley Kerr: Thank you. That was very, very eloquent and started us off, although I hope not everybody will go beyond their five minutes. Now our next speaker is one of the most significant cultural figures in Britain actually, and in British cultural policy. Dr Munira Mirza has a PhD in Local Cultural Policy – which I didn't know you could study – also a degree in English from Oxford, and she's the Cultural Advisor to the Mayor of London and also to the GLA. She has a background in journalism, lecturing and policy research, and has worked, considering her youth, for a very wide range of organisations: the Royal Society of Arts; she's a member of Arts Council England and of the Museums and Libraries Association, London; a Council member of the UK Committee of the European Cultural Foundation; she is a founding member of the Manifesto Club; and she's been involved in two pamphlets, both very, very interesting and very nuanced in their arguments. They actually have rather good titles. For Policy Exchange, she wrote '*Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the paradox of multiculturalism*'. She's also edited a provocative collection of essays for policy exchange entitled '*Culture Vultures: Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?*' (To Munira:)

Very interesting topics, but not quite what you're addressing us on tonight. Ladies and gentlemen, Munira Mirza.

Munira Mirza: Thank you. I want to start by saying that one of the great things about living in London and working in the Mayor's office is that London has a highly international, highly cosmopolitan arts sector and a great cultural life which is open to influences from around the world, that has this incredible diversity and variety of different artists, different cultural traditions. So, you can enjoy theatre or music or visual arts from literally all around the world. There are 300 languages spoken in this city every day. We really are a kind of global hub or interchange for culture and one of the reasons that people come to London or come to the UK is that they have the freedom to practice their cultural traditions, to celebrate their artistic and cultural background, their ethnic background with relative freedom, or, indeed, to create new types of culture and new types of cultural identity, to meet with other people and try to transcend the ethnic background that they were born into.

I would say that this is a very positive process and it's a process of cultural change, of discovery, of curiosity and it's one of the things that makes organisations like Cultural Co-operation really important because it's about artists and people interested in culture looking for new ideas and new experiences and reaching out to try and understand the world around them.

I would draw a distinction and a difference between that kind of cultural diversity or cultural openness to what I call 'official' diversity initiatives, and that's how I understand the phrase 'cultural diversity initiatives' in this statement that we've been given.

I think that they work quite differently. Whereas artists and cultural organisations can look for cultural experiences and different traditions as sources of inspiration because they're following their curiosity, I think that official diversity initiatives, which are led by the state, led by authorities, led by agencies, often tend to have a different agenda, which is to look for the ethnicity of producers or audiences first and then to think about the cultural value of the experience afterwards and I think that by looking at the ethnicity or the things that people are born with – their nationality, or their skin colour, as bluntly as that – that you actually end up defining artists, cultural organisations and audiences in a fairly rigid way.

Because whilst many artists and arts organisations might say that they're interested in the ethnic background that they have, that's not the only thing that will define them and I think that diversity initiatives, from an official level, can sometimes restrict people.

I would make four very quick points about official diversity and the way that it has evolved in Britain over the past twenty or so years. Obviously diversity initiatives are quite wide-

ranging, they have very different appearances, and they go under a guise of different names. But, I think that, broadly, there has been a shift or there has been a growth and expansion of 'official diversity', and I think that there are four main problems or issues that I have with it.

The first problem is that I think that many artists and arts organisations themselves feel ambivalent about taking on labels which define them by their ethnicity, and I know this from having done research and having talked to artists, particularly of a younger generation who do not feel the same singular attachment to one ethnic background but are genuinely open to lots of different influences, and they themselves feel uncomfortable calling themselves either black artists or Asian artists or Muslim artists because often in their arts practice, what they want to do is not just defined by the ethnicity but look at questions which concern the whole of humanity which they think might relate to other cultures, other people that come from other backgrounds or communities.

I think that, following on from that, it's obvious that categories like 'black artist', which you do see existing in official policy language, are supposed to cover a whole range of different arts practices, different types of artists. So, is a black artist Anish Kapoor, Steve McQueen, Yinka Shonibare, Nitin Sawhney? These are artists who are very diverse but they don't see themselves in such a homogenised way. And I think the language that we use to describe ethnic artists, diverse artists, is often too blunt and too crude.

The second problem I have with official diversity is that it reinforces a stereotype not just of artists themselves but of cultural institutions. It gives you the impression that unless you had all of these initiatives, unless you have constant state funding and support and programmes, that cultural institutions themselves would be closed to these influences. I can't tell you the number of times that I've met young artists who think that museums and galleries are all racist and that they're all disinterested in influences from other countries and other communities, and I just don't think that's true.

I think that there has been this incredible opening up in Britain, over the past century, to new ideas and influences. We have a problem in this country, which is that there are lots of people who grow up thinking that there is an elite culture which is out to ignore them and that's just simply not the case. I think that there are many examples where cultures have certainly been ignored in the past but through the kind of struggle that Ansel has described and the kind of persistence and belief in their own cultural value, that they have made an impact and they have developed their own identity, which is strong and has influence in the mainstream.

If you think about communities like the Jewish community which have managed to preserve and protect and to celebrate a cultural identity without, largely, any state subsidy over the

twentieth century but have managed to grow and create a sense of strong identity. If you go to places like the Jewish Museum you will see that there is a huge amount of cultural value and interest in that identity and community.

The third issue that I have with cultural diversity initiatives is that they create stereotypes of audiences. We have a problem, I think, which is that we have an assumption that there are certain types of communities who won't have an interest in certain types of culture and this was very clear in the statement that Margaret Hodge, the then Minister for Culture, made about a year or two years ago in which she criticised the BBC Proms for effectively being too white and not being representative enough and not engaging enough with Britain's ethnic diversity. Really what she was saying was that classical music is not relevant to people from those communities, which is actually, when you think about it, quite a racialised, quite a prejudiced, view of who should be interested in classical music and what those communities should be interested in.

In fact, if you look at the Proms and you look at how hard they work to try to broaden the audience of classical music, you'll see that they make an incredible effort to do that. It's true that there is a disproportionately high number of white people who attend the Proms compared to ethnic minorities, but I think that there are broader reasons for that and it's not because there is something inherent in ethnic communities that means that they will never enjoy that kind of music or that kind of culture. So, I think that the stereotyping of audiences and what they will be interested in is a real problem.

Then, I think, finally, that the problem I have with so much of cultural diversity – official cultural diversity – is that it has been, I think, slightly out of date in the past ten to fifteen years. It has tended to focus on certain large communities and cultures that probably don't reflect the incredible change and diversity that really has taken place in London. If you think about the wave of immigration that has come in the past ten years from all around the world, not simply from those countries which Britain has had a stronger Commonwealth relationship with, then you'll see that London's diversity, in the grassroots level, in terms of people coming in, the languages spoken, the kind of restaurants that are opening up, that has moved far, far ahead – far more quickly in fact – than official diversity policy which still uses quite clunky language like 'Black and Minority Ethnic' and can't quite find the right words to describe this incredible richness that we have.

So, I would say that in some ways diversity initiatives are behind the curve compared to what's really going on. If you look at the internet, the incredible reach of new cultural experiences, the incredible range of audiences that are growing spontaneously for new types of culture, I think that's moving far more quickly than official policies and the way that authorities are beginning to react.

What I would argue is that it is important and valuable for the cultural sector in London and in the rest of the UK to really engage with different cultures and to embrace the internationalism that we're starting to see. It's particularly important in the run up to 2012 when we'll have the Olympic and Paralympic Games and we'll be welcoming cultures from around the world.

But, I'd like to see an arts and cultural policy which is genuinely about trying to understand culture and is about being open-minded to cultural experiences and which is flexible enough to realise that people don't live inside these boxes but live in very fluid ways and are not simply interested in the culture of their ethnicity and their family but are interested in, and always open-minded to, look beyond that. I think that that would be a cultural policy which reflects the way in which we really live as opposed to the way in which, perhaps sometimes, policy makers would like us to live. Thank you.

Applause

Wesley Kerr: Well, that was a very eloquent defence of the proposition if I may say so. I wonder if Margaret Hodge might have been meaning the Last Night of the Proms rather than the Proms. Whatever she was meaning, she was very much struck down by the rest of her party who disagreed with her, but I thought she was referring to the very patriotic celebrations of the last night.

Munira Mirza: Well, she talked about the BBC Proms. I don't think she said ...

Wesley Kerr: Fair enough, yes. Now we've already heard our next speaker singing and it may surprise you to know that before Reem Kelani began singing and broadcasting, which she also does, she was actually a qualified biologist so that shows, I suppose, that people cannot be put in boxes. She was born in Manchester and brought up in Kuwait but she has recently focussed her efforts on promoting Arabic and Palestinian music and, I suppose, making the point, really, that whatever happens politically to a people, that the culture survives, which many of us have reason to know.

She works a lot with school children, women's and youth groups, and community choirs, and she has already released one album, which was called 'Sprinting Gazelle: (which, I think, she was demonstrating this evening) Palestinian Songs from the Motherland and the Diaspora', and that's currently available. Then the next project, which she mentioned, is a tribute to the great Egyptian composer Sayed Darwish. Ladies and gentlemen, Reem Kelani.

Reem Kelani: Thank you.

Applause

Thank you. Hello. I'll part-read and part-speak, and I'll make it quick. As a migrant artist – and I do see myself as a migrant – living in the UK, I have often participated in specific cultural diversity initiatives, official and unofficial ones, though I realised long ago that I had to build my career in the mainstream if I was to move forward in a competitive marketplace. At the same time, such initiatives have provided support in situations, and on occasions, when the mainstream wanted, seemingly, to shut the door to people in my position.

My first employment in the United Kingdom was at the Museum of Mankind, I don't know if you remember it, it was the then ethnography department of the British Museum, much lamented. In Kuwait, where I spent my formative years, my singing repertoire included Arabic songs as well as the Great American Songbook, believe it or not. When I began work as a singer in the United Kingdom, the whole environment propelled me towards the Palestinian repertoire rather than encouraging me to do more traditional jazz or Western music.

My experience of the British mainstream – it might upset some of you – has been hugely rewarding though far from straightforward. Those who might wish to ban targeted programmes giving support to artists from minority communities need to think carefully about the current ability of the British mainstream to integrate migrant perspectives. I am reminded of this every time the issue of refugees is pushed onto the front pages of our press.

In my particular field – the so-called world music industry – is far from perfect. A relatively small number of people have disproportionate influence over which artists are played on national radio – specifically Radio Three –, or are invited to key festivals such as WOMAD, and I don't mean Cultural Co-operation, which is totally independent from this endeavour. Very few performance slots are ever gained by independent artists, let alone those based in the United Kingdom. Migrant artists living in your midst, are frequently ignored in favour of the native from afar, the perception of the exotic. Added to this, there is a distinct whiff of neo-colonialism in the approach of many in the world music industry. As for music portrayed as being from the Middle East, Orientalism and belly-dancing is rampant, and it's not the genuine tradition of the Arab and Muslim world, even if that is what middle-aged, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon men in the business like to believe.

As the music critic, Michael Church, famously wrote in *The Independent*, “*World music is not the music of the world*”. One promoter once told me that I wasn't ethnic enough. It's this enduring patriarchy which rules. In my book, they want their artists to look ethnic but to sound fusion. If it's someone like me who looks fusion and sounds ethnic...

Wesley Kerr and audience laugh

... I am outside their purview.

Applause and laughter

Added to the above, I face one other area of discrimination as an artist who maintains the independent Palestinian narrative: independent of politics, but determined in proving that I exist as a Palestinian, and there are people who say that there is no such thing as Palestinian culture and music. It is the discrimination that few dare to countenance and even fewer dare to acknowledge publicly.

One last thing... Last May, I did a workshop for women only in Arabic singing, in Burngreave in Sheffield. Over forty women attended this workshop. Most of them were Muslim and veiled, originally from Africa and the Middle East. Arguably, for me, it was one of the greatest experiences of my life, specifically in terms of what these women benefited and contributed, but I don't think you'll ever see any of them in local concert halls or mainstream music venues. It's not just that they couldn't afford the tickets – we've got to do something about that – but their whole outlook would view going to such places as inappropriate: we need to bridge that gap.

So, no. No to removing any targeted support for artists such as myself and to abandon us to the whims of the market and the mainstream institutions which would be counterproductive, as this spawns a sense of isolation, or not being wanted. A halfway house would be to hold onto what we call 'official diversity programmes' but improve them. Let them focus on the mainstream and let the mainstream welcome them. We cannot integrate the Other without acknowledging that the Other actually exists. Thank you very much.

Applause

Did I stick to my time? (*Laughs*)

Wesley Kerr: So, Reem, you do speak as eloquently as you sing and you argued on both sides of the argument, I thought, really.

Reem Kelani: Because I am olive-skinned, that's the whole point. I never fit into any category. I am Mediterranean. I'm closer to someone who is Spanish than a Muslim from Bradford. Again, in this country, they don't see these blurred lines. So, by being olive-skinned, I'm also on both sides, but I'm still against withdrawing funding. I'm not compromising on that one.

Wesley Kerr: So our next speaker Valerie Synmoie started a twenty-year career working in the arts, working in various theatres like the Bush Theatre, and has had a very distinguished career. She holds an MA in European Cultural Policy. *(To Valerie:)* It continues, your career, because you are head of Diversity at the Arts Council for England but especially in the London office, which is a very important job, and you lead on Race Equality, Disability Equality, and Gender Equality – that’s a lot of equalities there...

Laughter

Valerie Synmoie: A very unequal world.

Wesley Kerr: ...with a remit to engage audiences to increase participation, and you have also worked as Head of International Strategy at the National Office, and you ran your own consultancy bureau, so you’re very much an arts expert.

Valerie Synmoie: I wouldn’t go quite so far as to say that. Thank you very much. I first wanted to say how much I welcome this debate. I think it’s a really important thing we do, spend time stepping back and thinking about the important policies we develop, also enabling others to contribute to those.

I would say from the outset that I broadly disagree with the proposition. You might think that I probably would say that because I work for the Arts Council and the proposition seems to have been targeted at the Arts Council, to a larger or lesser degree. So, in that way, I feel I am obliged to state that, though I do recognise that there are elements of truth in that proposition, I think that it would be naïve to say that there wasn’t some grain of truth and any initiative or policy in the sense will automatically revert to the highest level.

It’s about catering for a large number of people, not necessarily always reflecting the individualities within that. But I wanted to start really by just setting the context for my contribution to the discussion; I think it’s quite important to reflect on and consider the reality of what we are really addressing here.

In terms of the Arts Council, and I’m going to apologise up front here, for using the kind of terminology that Munira referred to as the kind of ‘bureau speak’ of officials inside the Arts Council.

Within the Arts Council we have a number of organisations that we regularly fund: around 280. Of these, around 16 percent are what we define as ‘Black and Minority Ethnic led’, which essentially means that 51 percent or more of their Board or management are from diverse communities. Of our grants to the Arts programme, around 14 percent of the total budget of £10 million last year went to BME-led organisations and artists, which is an indication of where we currently are.

If we look at the wider cultural sector, around 84 percent of the workforce in the cultural sector in London are categorised as white and less than 5 percent of the curatorial staff in London's museums and galleries come from BME backgrounds.

I don't think that any of us will be surprised by the statistics. They reflect, in effect, the wider inequalities in society. Some of you may have seen in the press recently the report about the disproportionate rise in unemployment amongst black males in particular, as a result of the recession, and impact this has had. The Arts Council has been heavily criticised for being preoccupied with diversity, for creating a 'tick box' mentality and for putting artists into racial stereotypes or straight jackets.

I would reiterate that what we are trying to do is recognise that the arts and cultural sector, like the rest of society, is not a level playing field, and we are trying to address some of the inequalities that exist for many people, many very good artists who are not given the same opportunities as their counterparts. There is also the legal imperative that we face as a public body to address race equality, gender equality and disability equality and, should the Labour government remain in government, the Single Equality Bill will bring into effect a number of other equalities that we will need to consider.

So, what has the Arts Council done in terms of our diversity initiative? What initiatives have we run? I would say our initiatives largely focus on the so-called mainstream, i.e. the 230 or so organisations that are predominantly white led. These command a huge amount of our investment and form the bulk of our subsidised art sector. I want to highlight three initiatives that we have established in the London office.

The first of these is the Inspire programme which some of you may have heard of. It's a programme that looks at diversifying the curatorial workforce in some museums and galleries in the capital. Within the programme, we have offered eleven fellowships in two phases and I think that one of the key points to bear in mind here is that we received over 130 applications for these eleven places, which gives evidence of the level of demand and appetite that there is for diversity initiatives in the sector. Of those eleven places, four of the fellows now have permanent posts in the galleries and museums where they worked, and the remaining seven are established as independent curators. We are now looking at how we might roll that programme out nationally.

We ran another programme called Diversity in Publishing which does what it says on the tin: setting up publishing houses in London. Again, the level of demand was quite high. We received around 190 applications for eleven places, and ten of the eleven trainees are now in permanent employment in the publishing sector.

Finally, there is a programme that we ran in conjunction with the Mayor's office called Gain, which is about diversifying the governance of the Boards of the cultural institutions in London. So far in the programme there have been 37 trustees placed on Boards, and the programme, again, will look at how we might consider whether this could be appropriate on a national scale.

I think the key question for me here is, without such intervention in public policies, would the cultural sector itself buck national trend and address diversity of its own accord or do we need diversity initiatives to change the status quo? I would say that the Arts Council hasn't always got it right, and there isn't really room for complacency here. The initiatives I have outlined are, really, very small steps on a very long journey. There's still a long way to go and I think we need to keep challenging inequalities. If not, we may find ourselves, in another ten years, debating a very similar topic as we are today, and we may find that the statistics I outlined earlier haven't really shifted. Thank you.

Applause

Wesley Kerr: Thanks, Valerie. A very interesting perspective and it's very interesting that you see the role as actually fighting inequality. You are the only person to have seen this in those terms and I think that's fascinating.

Our next speaker is perhaps the most talented of two very talented and famous brothers and he's the older brother, so...

Mike Phillips: I'm not going to argue with you about that...

Wesley Kerr: No, I'm still introducing you, you can't speak yet.

Laughter

Mike was born in Georgetown in Guyana and grew up in London. He wrote movingly, a couple of years ago, of returning to Heathrow and thinking he was actually arriving home. He was returning from Guyana and he was thinking that this was perhaps the first time he had thought that, which I thought was very interesting. He has had a stellar career and continues to have a stellar career and has done many things. He has been educated at three different Universities, he has worked for the BBC, which is a highly commendable thing to do, has been a lecturer in media studies and was also the most marvellous journalist. I remember some excellent pieces he wrote in the Guardian at the time of the Brixton uprising in the early eighties, putting everything in context.

He has been a great Cultural Administrator at the Tate, he has been involved in the Heritage Lottery Fund, and he has also for the last few years been a fiction writer – wonderful crime fiction which has been dramatised on TV – and is working on a trilogy set in Eastern Europe. Famously he wrote with his brother, Trevor, *Windrush: the irresistible rise of multiracial Britain*. So is it still irresistible, Mike?

Mike Phillips: Ooh! Um, I have a problem with the term ‘cultural diversity’. Partly because it’s one of those portmanteau words that people use all the time for whatever they mean, and if there’s a hundred people in the room, they’re probably all thinking something different about the term. It seems to me there’s a certain importance there, in terms of how the debate is being framed, what the question is, because I don’t think of myself as being either for or against this proposition. I think that it’s sometimes true and it’s sometimes false.

But I want to go back a bit to either the business of being diverse or multicultural or not. I remember well sometimes being called a multicultural author or a diverse author and I’m thinking, “What the hell are you talking about? This is me, what I am, yes?” I don’t think of myself as diverse or multicultural, I think of myself in slightly different ways. So, that description of me makes me uneasy because it’s so far from being precise about what I am.

It’s very odd being in Notting Hill – I’m sorry, I digress – and running into Ansel Wong first thing, because I’ve got a picture in my house of Ansel with four other people including my elder brother standing on a platform wearing black gloves, their fists raised like this... Do you remember that one?

Laughter

Wesley Kerr: I think the Daily Mail would pay a lot for that picture!

Mike Phillips: But, again, it says something to me about the actual history of events like this and terms of this nature, because so many of these things come out of a background, a particular background, of struggle for cultural territory in this country, which actually the business of cultural diversity initiative has nothing at all to do with, and in fact I think very often subverts what we gained over thirty years. It is interesting to hear about the Arts Council Diversity Programme. I must be one of the few ‘diverse’ artists or writers who never got anything from any of these initiatives.

Laughter

I remember about 15 years ago being slightly desperate because I was really, really, really broke. I had no money and I kept applying to all these different places for something to help

me and I got nothing. I remember a friend of mine telling me, “Oh, they are sending me to some European capital to do talks” and I said, “What about me?!” I was at the time, I suppose, one of the first black British authors, that is, a black author who had grown up here and was writing about being black here. I suddenly thought – a light went on in my head – if I want to go to European countries, I can just get on a train and go, which I did, and the Arts Council still hasn’t sent me anywhere.

Valerie Synmoie: I can say sorry on behalf of the Arts Council.

Mike Phillips: It’s all right love, you needn’t bother. I’m really one of the best known British authors in many parts of the Continent, and now I’d be doing the Arts Council a favour.

Laughter

I’m a little bit prejudiced I suppose – biased really – about cultural diversity initiatives because, unlike many people, I didn’t benefit from them at all... but I’ve been a writer and an artist for quite a long time. So, it depends on what you mean by ‘cultural diversity’ and it depends what you mean by ‘*cultural diversity initiatives*’.

I was at a meeting only three days ago in which people were talking about art galleries and the fact that art galleries and museums in this country excluded black artists, and I said, “*What about Chris Ofili? I watched Chris Ofili negotiate a very, very large sum for one installation.*” And they said, “*Who is Chris Ofili?*” And this went on and on. I talked about Aubrey Williams and they said, “*Oh, never heard of him.*” I was talking to a roomful of young black people who were interested in the arts and they were calling for cultural diversity. There is no doubt in my mind that cultural diversity as we talk about it is a label, a label which reinforces, very often, stereotypes. At the same time, cultural diversity focuses attention on new attitudes, new ideas, new people.

For me, the danger is it is only the stereotype which lends content to the notion of cultural diversity in many cases, so that you have people who don’t understand that cultural diversity might also include Eastern Europeans. I say that because I spend a lot of time in Eastern Europe, and it’s very strange coming back here from Transylvania or wherever and trying to talk to people about the kind of cultures they never heard of. I remember a colleague at a certain museum replying to an enquiry from a Romanian friend about Eastern European art and she said, “*That’s not a priority for us*”. There’s this sense that cultural diversity is really, at the bottom of it in many institutions and with many individuals, about keeping the Blacks and Asians quiet when they approach you and start complaining once again.

I think that there's a real problem with the way that we talk about cultural diversity. I think there's a problem with intensifying the demand for more cultural diversity initiatives. Most of my friends are involved in culture and art of one kind or the other, and one of the things that comes over again and again is that the people who are asking for more cultural diversity initiatives etc. are mostly not themselves engaged in the arts, because when you are, what you are thinking about is how to express whatever it is you want to express as clearly as possible.

I think that, again, cultural diversity can be and sometimes is used, exploited, as part of a struggle for cultural territory, and it's not necessarily a struggle that is part of the struggle of the ethnic minorities. That's interesting. I grew up in a place that was culturally diverse. Like the place that Ansel grew up in – it boasted that Six Nations – we all understood each other, we shared each other's festivals etc. and we still turned around and massacred each other when the occasion arose.

The point I want to make is that cultural diversity is a condition that we have; as Munira pointed out, we live in a culturally diverse city. Now the question is, not trying to create more cultural diversity because that's nonsense – the place is already culturally diverse. What we have to decide is what we do about it, what we can use it for, and we need to decide where we want to be, what kind of society we want to live in. I want to live in a tolerant society where anyone lives and works in a level playing field, where you can be as diverse as you want – or not.

Applause

Wesley Kerr: Thanks Mike. Our last speaker has made an enormous contribution to British public and cultural life over the past 40 years. I first met him – and Munira will be pleased – in a BBC box at the Proms about ten years ago.

Laughter

Ranjit Sondhi: I was the only black face!

Wesley Kerr: No, no, that's not correct! You were a BBC governor, we were invited by Lorraine Heggeseey, who is actually half-Egyptian as you know, her husband is Dutch and all the other guests, in fact, were non-white and it was the most amazing performance of the Marriage of Figaro. So I am not sure whether Margaret Hodge would approve or not! But, Ranjit was born in India and has lived and worked here since 1966.

He has been involved in terrific community work in Birmingham for many years. He founded the Asian Resource Centre in Handsworth and he has also taught at Birmingham University. He has been on so many boards that I am surprised he is not a member of the

House of Lords. Probably, if he was a white person, he would be a member of the House of Lords! As well as the BBC, he has been on the boards of the Independent Broadcasting Commission, the Radio Authority, the Commission for Racial Equality, the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee, the DFES Disability Rights Task Force, the National Gallery and he is currently chairman of the Birmingham Primary Care Trust and a Board Member of.... But I will stop. Why don't they give you a peerage? Ranjit Sondhi.

Applause

Ranjit Sondhi: Thank you. So, a few closing remarks then from a compulsive and serial quangocrat.

I start in this debate from the position that we cannot escape the demands of diversity. Diversity, as Mike was finishing off, is the inescapable fact of life in a culturally heterogeneous society and attempts to dismantle it are either counterproductive, or exact an unacceptable moral or critical price. They provoke resistance, create insecurity, and deepen intercultural suspicions.

And, when a cultural community feels threatened, it panics and tends to become self-obsessed; suppresses internal differences; avoids contact with other cultures; and spawns, I believe, a fundamentalist orthodoxy which fragments the wider society and undermines cohesion and unity.

Secondly, since human beings are deeply shaped, though not of course wholly determined, by their culture, the latter, that is culture, is at least partly constituted of their identity. It both identifies them as a particular kind of person and as a member of a particular community of people. So, to be Irish or Asian or Chinese, is to be a member of a specific cultural community and to feel bonded to its members by a shared way of life. The basic respect that we owe our fellow human beings entails respect for their culture and their cultural community.

Thirdly, cultural diversity enriches and vitalises collective life, and is therefore desirable not only for minority communities, but also for society as a whole. It adds a valuable aesthetic dimension to everyone's life, widens the range of moral sympathy and imagination, and encourages a process of critical self-reflection. Since no culture realises all that is valuable in human life, each needs others to correct its inescapable biases, to appreciate its specificity, to help it arrest its tendency to absolutise itself, and to deepen its appreciation of the nature and possibilities of human existence.

Now in this debate, I think my starting point is, in common with multiculturalists, that all identities insist on difference; on the fact that every identity is placed, positioned in a

culture, in a language, in a history. Every sentiment comes from somewhere, from somebody in particular; every sentence has a full stop at the end of it - if it didn't, it would be meaningless.

However, where I differ from the pure multiculturalist, is in my conviction that we are no longer grounded in a set of fixed and unalterable transcendental categories. We know that identities are not forever: they are not totally, universally true, and not underpinned by any infinite guarantees. But, for the moment, this moment, there is always a boundary, no matter how partial or temporary or arbitrary. Otherwise, we would all flow into one another and there would be no political action, there'd be no cut and thrust of ideology, there'd be no positioning against each other, no crossing of lines, because there wouldn't be any lines – no change.

There are other identities out there that do matter and that do bear some definite relationship to each other (if only for that moment) and that have to be dealt with somehow. That is the politics of cultural difference: in the past this has been played out through that politics, played out through the establishment and then the defence of stark cultural boundaries. But, of course, I maintain that it can be an altogether gentler politics, a deeply non-violent encounter between two different cultures in which identity becomes not a jealous and brutalising but a generous and revitalising force.

So the cultural identity I advocate does not need to survive by marginalising, dispossessing, displacing and forgetting other identities: it is not doomed to survive forever.

This kind of identity loses its assertive power, its hegemonic dimension, and is made immediately attractive because of it. I don't want to give the impression that this new concept of identity is a powerless imperfect system. Like all other forms of social construction, there will always be dimensions of power within it. But our identity need not be quite so framed by the extremities of power and aggression, violence and mobilisation, as the earlier forms have been – no black gloves are necessary any more.

This new concept of identity moves us, then, into a different politics, into a different world of social relations in which diversity and unity become opposite sides of the same coin, a world which I believe is built upon a shared commitment to democratic principles and upon the vision of a diverse humanity; a world which, in its very diversity, unfolds a richness of what human beings might be. Thank you.

Applause

Wesley Kerr: That was wonderfully eloquent. It's very interesting, this whole dynamic between culture and politics.

So, now it's over to you. You've listened and, I hope, been stimulated, so if you could keep your comments or questions to under a minute, I would be very grateful and I think we have some roving mikes so let's have some hands pleased.

Pause

It's always like this isn't it! So, we've covered everything in the debate? The gentleman up there. And, obviously do direct a question at something that has been raised that you want to question. So, if you'll say who you are, Sir?

Audience member 1: I'm Peter Slavid. I'm a Board member of Cultural Co-operation. It seems to me that it's really quite easy from a position of authority and as a funder to say how an imperfect system doesn't work. It's not so easy to say what will work. When can we have the debate that says what removes cultural stereotypes rather than reinforces them, because I see a risk that this imperfect system will be removed and nothing else will be put in its place and everybody will suffer.

Applause

Wesley Kerr: I think that might be a question for Munira.

Munira Mirza: I don't think that these initiatives are going to be dismantled very soon, and actually I would quite like some of the initiatives to be dismantled. I'll be very honest. I think that it is great to have funding for diverse cultures for the right reasons: because they are culturally interesting. We fund the Notting Hill Carnival, we fund the Tabernacle, we fund a number of things because we think they are culturally important to London and are of value. I would – and I say this as someone who sits on the Arts Council Board as a Mayor's Representative, and I welcome having this debate publicly - I would dismantle, if I had the choice, some of the Arts Council's positive discrimination initiatives because I don't think they do work. I think that if you removed them, you wouldn't have a sudden expansion or growth of racist attitudes in cultural institutions, but what you might do is remove some of the stereotypes that do occur as a result of some positive discrimination schemes.

Just to pick up on some of Valerie's points, she pointed out that 130 applications had come in for the Inspire programme and that was a kind of endorsement for the appetite for the cultural diversity initiatives. I see it slightly differently: I see it as an appetite for programmes that give people work opportunities and when I talk to people who have been on the Inspire programme, a number of them feel uncomfortable and ambivalent about having gone on it and about being labelled in that way in those institutions. I have spoken to

lots of people who will not apply to programmes like that because they think they will be stigmatised.

Now, there is something difficult and complicated happening there and it's not because policies are always imperfect but because there is an inherent problem that when you start treating people differently because of their skin colour or their ethnicity or where they were born, you end up treating them in a discriminatory way. I think you can have equality, you can have equal opportunity and treat people fairly, without treating them on the basis of their ethnicity. That is an important debate, but it's very difficult to have it because, obviously, lots of people do get funded in this way, they do rely on funding like this, so, of course, if you try to remove any of these initiatives, it would be incredibly unpopular. This is why we have a debate where people will say, "*It's not just about my own career, the benefit that it gives to me, but what is the good for wider society?*" I can say personally that I haven't taken up positive discrimination opportunities, even though I know that they would be of benefit, because I felt uncomfortable about them.

Wesley Kerr: But isn't funding an agent for change? You've risen anyway, but maybe, if there is difficulty and discrimination, you need funding initiatives to combat that because it happens that none of the museums in this whole country have a non-white person running them; there are very few non-white people curating. So, if you want those museums to take other cultures more seriously, then don't we need to get people into the profession? I'll give you an example: fifteen years ago in the BBC there were almost no non-white people on screen and they actually had some special bursaries and one of the people recruited was Matthew Amroliwala. Nobody is saying he has got a marker: "*Oh, you were recruited on an affirmative action basis*". Maybe I'm asking a rhetorical question.

Mike Phillips: Yes – it is a rhetorical question. I just wanted to say that I would have taken money from anywhere only I never got any. But that's not my point. My point is that those kinds of things weren't around when I was quite young – later on I was too successful –, and the problem is, precisely, that you can be, both as an individual or an organisation, and in fact you have to be, forced into particular positions. As it happens, I knew some of the Inspire fellows: I had to work with them. What struck me was the extent to which where they were within these institutions was almost always a sort-of cul-de-sac. Nobody would have said that, you couldn't write it down, but it is the nature of the culture that their position and the way they went into it condemned them to be cut off from the mainstream of things.

Wesley Kerr: Before Valerie and Reem comment on this, is there anybody else who wants to comment in particular on what the gentleman up there said and what we've heard in response? The gentleman at the front. Sir... Sorry, we'll try to get a microphone to you or you can shout!

Audience member 2: *[no mic – difficult to hear]* I would like to say that from an artist's point of view, I know that *[inaudible]* More recently is the Unlimited grant for disabled and deaf artists. I'd just like to say thank you for those contributions. Without those, I wouldn't be sitting, working in 2007-2008 with a very young deaf artist who I wouldn't have been able to make contact with. *[Inaudible]* artists who are within it have reasons to aspire to the system and reasons to vote so I'd just like to say thank you.

Wesley Kerr: That's a very good point. Sir, you had a point as well.

Audience member 3: Thank you. I'm Mike Hardy, from British Council. I work in intercultural dialogue. I was very taken by the quality of the debate, I have to say, but it rarely appears take up one of Ranjit's points: my business is working with young people. If we look again at the definitions of culture and move away from ethnicity and geography to the transient nature of identity of the young, how would you apply that to the debate that we had tonight? Would we choose not to have initiatives that are focused on the young?

Wesley Kerr: Well, that's widening it a bit but Ranjit...

Ranjit Sondhi: The way the question is phrased should not lock us into thinking that cultural diversity only applies to the traditional Asian and Caribbean, so-called, BME communities. Enough has been said about that. I think, actually, cultural diversity, a proper form of cultural diversity, gets away from that straight-jacketed position that it has got itself into: the kind of 'town hall multiculturalism', as some people call it, that can only see Asians and Blacks, and not only Asians and Blacks, but middle-aged Asians and Blacks.

And that sort of multiculturalism cannot cope with those extraordinary in-between cultures with amazing vitality and energy that are redefining the cultural maps of Punjabi, Bengali, Caribbean, Guyanese, whatever communities you can think of; the in-between music form, the Bhangra raps – or whatever they are these days I'm out of it now! My children are in it - but I can tell you that that is, for me, well within the definition of cultural diversity too.

Just to come back to a point made by a gentleman up there who actually asked us, well what do you do about this? It's alright to define what the nature of the problem is, I think he's got a point; I think when we actually ask this question, we have got to be more specific. If we are saying that some cultural diversity programmes are obsolete and harmful and counterproductive, then we have to be more precise: we have got to say, "*Which ones are those and which ones are not?*" In other words, we have got to establish a criteria for judgement that takes us forward and I don't see that criteria being openly and honestly debated.

Wesley Kerr: The way we judge things in this country is opaque; boards, of which you've sat on many and I've sat on the odd one, they make the decisions.

I think the lady here in the orange scarf had a point and so we don't have too much of the panel, lets have some more points from the audience.

Audience member 4: For an access point, I think I'll come in here, rather than say later, my name's Debbie Golt, I'm part of an organisation called Wom@tt and we thoroughly support UK-based artists of African, Caribbean, Latin origins or their musics of that origin. I just wanted to widen the question of cultural diversity that's been touched on in relation to young people because I also understand cultural diversity to include initiatives involving women or led by women or across age definitions. So, in a way, the cultural diversity discussed here is a stereotype of what cultural diversity might be.

One point that I wanted to make about specific initiatives, perhaps where people are chosen for origins or age, is that I have children who are of mixed heritage – double beauties – and they say, “Where are we?” They're looking at the television, they're looking at different initiatives around it: “Where are we? Where are the artists like us? Where are the people in visible roles like us? Where are we in the magazines?” I think there would be something to be said to give young people who embrace diversity: they have very different roots; they're identifying in different ways; they're finding who they are; and they really want to see themselves up there and represented.

Wesley Kerr: Thank you...another very good point but let's take a few more. The gentleman at the back.

Audience member 5: Thank you. My name is Paul Goodwin (*Cross-Cultural Curator, Tate Modern*). I just want to go back to Munira's presentation and a very helpful distinction she made at the beginning of the presentation where she highlighted a clear difference between official diversity initiatives and other diversity initiatives which are more 'open-minded' etc. I wondered if, Munira, you could say a bit more about what you meant by the other kinds of diversity initiatives and what would be the appropriate policy response. So, taking your argument, obviously that the official diversity initiatives would probably merit being cut back or at least limited, does that imply that you would actually support some of the other cultural diversity initiatives that are perhaps more locally based or come out of a different, more 'bottom-up' approach as opposed to 'top-down'. Maybe you could clarify that a little bit? Thanks.

Munira Mirza: As an example, I don't think of Notting Hill Carnival as a diversity initiative, I think of it as a cultural event which is very popular and which receives funding from agencies. It receives funding from the Arts Council; it receives funding from us. The

Tabernacle, which is a home to carnival arts, also does. I think about those as choices made about cultural funding like anything else, so just as we might fund what you might call traditional 'high culture', we will fund other cultural expressions.

There is an argument for state subsidy for the arts where there isn't an obvious market support: where there isn't a high enough level of consumer base to pay for things, I think the state should step in; you treat Notting Hill Carnival like you treat any other kind of event. The problem I have is with those kinds of initiatives that are targeting, by ethnicity, the producers or the audiences and which have cultural value and experience coming afterwards. This is where programmes like Inspire or Decibel have tended to, I think, quite a simplistic view about what inequality is. If you take something like Inspire, which was about curators in art galleries and museums around Britain – particularly art galleries –, I think there is an issue with the kinds of people who go into curating as a profession in Britain, partly because of general levels of inequality in education; the kinds of people who go to study Art History, which is generally a requirement for becoming a curator in one of those established institutions.

I would like to see – and in fact we're looking at in the GLA – programmes for more paid internships, so people can get the experience to go into those areas. I'd like to encourage more Art History in schools, not just private schools. Now those are long-term interventions to try and improve access for a lot of people and I think that trying to raise just the number of people that go into an institution for a year is a temporary fix. It's trying to make something equal when actually the underlying problems of society have not been addressed. So, I think those initiatives which are official, which are kind of quick solutions to a problem, don't work and they have repercussions which are negative.

Wesley Kerr: But you're not in charge of schools yet.

Munira Mirza laughs

And you are in charge of arts funding. So you're specifically rejecting funding to achieve positive action, really.

Munira Mirza: No. What I would say, and I say this as a member of the Arts Council, not as a kind of representative of official policy, is that I would like to see a debate where we say, "Yes, we should have funding for a range of cultural experiences". The Arts Council has just decided to give funding to the English Folk and Music Society. I don't think it's called a cultural diversity initiative but it's a valid institution; it's trying to grow its base, trying to reach new audiences; it has a very strong community driving that, which is both an artistic one and also a social community. I think that's good and I'd like to see more of that. I'd like

to see more money directed to those things than to some of the bureaucracy and regulation that you get and the initiatives you get in other forms, which I think are less effective.

Wesley Kerr: Valerie, I think the Arts Council's come in for a bit of flack here.

Valerie Synmoie: Absolutely, yes.

Wesley Kerr: But it looks as if your job might be in danger.

Munira laughs

Valerie Synmoie: ... Well yeah, very much, in many ways more than you think... but returning to the point that the gentleman made up there, I actually agree with you. I think that there's a very real danger that we may throw out, in the old terms, the baby with the bathwater by saying that diversity initiatives, along with multiculturalism, has failed; we throw it away but we have nothing to replace it.

Currently, I think a number of you may be aware that the Arts Council is undergoing a major restructure and within that, if Munira and other council members have their way, it may be that our emphasis on diversity may well change. I think there's a sense within the Arts Council of a level of 'diversity fatigue', that people think we've done this now and we can move on to something else but actually, I think the battle isn't really won. Just to return to the points around Inspire, I think one of the things that really united the group of people who were appointed to these fellowships was the fact that they were all perfectly well qualified, yet none of them had had an opportunity to break through into the institutions that they went into as fellows. I think that that says a lot about the fact that it isn't a level playing field. That without initiatives like that...

Munira Mirza: Do you think it's racism?

Valerie Synmoie: I wouldn't say it was necessarily... I would say that – in the way institutional racism is defined – it's inadvertent as opposed to intended. There was a report that's recently been put out by an arts education learning institute, that looks at how barriers are put up for people wanting to enter into the higher education institutions you were just talking about, by the institutions that have a kind of defined stereotype in their heads about who they think is the arts education person they want to recruit. Some of the higher education institutes will actually want to recruit someone of a particular ethnicity, of a particular class, a particular economic background, and they will use that, inadvertently, to actually screen out people who don't fit that mould. It's a very interesting report.

Wesley Kerr: Mike? ...

Mike Phillips: Look, there's a broader point in answer to this question about the alternative, which is that official cultural diversity policy can't handle the non-stereotype; it can't handle the in-between. It has to have very clearly defined, fixed parameters, so that you can say 'we are funding this sort of person for this sort of role'. I don't feel afraid of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, because I don't feel the baby is worth keeping. This is the real point. It seems to me that many of the initiatives we are talking about are precisely designed – because they have to be – to reinforce the stereotype because they wouldn't work otherwise.

Wesley Kerr: Ok, Mike, so you've come off the fence. Before I come to Reem, let's have more audience participation.. the gentleman up there...

Audience member 6: Shabaka Thompson, (*Chief Exec, Carnival Village*). I don't have a problem with the stereotyping. Is 'stereotype' a negative word or is it an abused word that has negative connotations? I think that cultural diversity should be celebrated. I think we live in a world that is a mosaic, that is multi-cultural and if we can all meet in a city like London and celebrate that and be definitive about diversity, I think that's a wonderful thing. For me, that gives diverse cultures a space, like Ansel says: a space to perform; a space to have some kind of power base; also, to share in that space with others so they are better understood.

That stereotype becomes something more positive because it's understood, by the mere fact that it is identifiable. The challenge I see arising from a youth perspective – and it worries me from a cultural activist position, although this might be archaic thinking in terms of Munira – is the kind of neutral world that we should achieve. I think we will get there – we'll probably get there in two or three years time – but I think cultural diversity has to happen for us to reach that neutral point. We cannot get to a neutral point without identifying or recognising.

One of the points I want to make is that for the young people we see within Caribbean and African communities, and Asian communities, there is this new emergence of identity, especially in a carnival context: We've seen this with the young people who are coming into the carnival culture, but it is not only within the carnival. They are moving away, and maybe that [neutral ground] is where we're moving towards; moving away from traditions and histories and customs, into this kind of new area, this new citizenship, this new identity, that throws away the baby and the bath and says, "We don't belong. We don't have a link. We want to create a new culture: a culture that comes from nowhere". I question that: Isn't it that all cultures have a root? Isn't it coming from somewhere? Shouldn't we have a reference point that young people should relate to? For me, cultural diversity does that.

Wesley Kerr: I think you've made your point really well. And it's quite interesting at Carnival: there are probably more white people on the parades and on the floats. Is that a bad thing?

Audience member 6 (Shabaka Thompson): I'm not saying it's a bad thing but I'm saying I don't like the idea of neutralising all culture. Identifying diversity is positive.

Wesley Kerr: Ok, thank you. Reem and then Munira on that point and then some more points from the floor.

Reem Kelani: Ok, I'll make it very quick because you're right, we need to give the floor a chance. I am classified as 'Chinese - Other' in almost every application form I try to fill in...

Laughter

Reem Kelani: I am a 'Chinese - Other'. My identity as a Mediterranean Arab doesn't exist. It doesn't! And I agree with Munira on something: I am totally and vehemently against positive discrimination, although I will fight to keep public funding for this. The point is that we need to question the official definition of cultural diversity before we get rid of the forms for cultural diversity.

An example is a British Council trip I did with a group of English jazz musicians: they were stunned to see, in Syria, Christians, Muslims, Kurds, Armenians, a girl with a hijab walking next to a girl with strapless dress, a priest in the Christian quarter and then having lunch in the Jewish quarter; and Syria is the axis of evil according to the powers that be in this country. It's the same powers that be that decide what is cultural diversity. So, we need to actually question what the powers that be and the people in control – in central government and even in the Mayor's office – mean by cultural diversity:

What are the cultures they're talking about? How diverse are they and what's their definition? That's quite important. We're missing that point. We're not defining it. We need to know that definition of it before we say keep it or scrap it, and I don't think the definition is clear.

Wesley Kerr: Munira, I think we don't want to lose the baby and bathwater point, then.

Munira Mirza: Yes, I think there's a problem with this debate, which is that people very quickly start being alarmist in tone and saying if you start questioning these initiatives, you start questioning how they work, then you'll see a complete dismantling of it, we'll go back to a monoculture and effectively there won't be cultural diversity anymore. That's not what

I'm arguing. I'm not suggesting that we should try to get rid of cultural diversity. I'm very passionately pro-cultural diversity. It's because I'm pro-cultural diversity that I think we should question what these initiatives do.

Reem Kelani: How do you define it?

Munira Mirza: Well, I define it as the existence of lots of different cultures. Where appropriate, there should be state funding to support those cultural experiences that wouldn't happen otherwise and which are of value. I don't have a problem that there are lots of languages, lots of art forms, lots of different artists living in London, but I do think that we should be unafraid to question these initiatives. I'm not proposing that we revert back to some kind of monoculture, which sometimes, in this debate, if you start challenging these initiatives, you're immediately accused of, immediately caricatured as being quite backwards and reactionary. Actually, I think it's quite radical to say that you want to challenge these things. If you look at the way that institutions, the way that policy, authority, the way that the political parties are thinking, they're thinking in terms of all-women shortlists, positive discrimination, how do we treat people? This is not something that's radical anymore: it's become highly institutionalised.

I think that for those reasons, we should become suspicious of it and start questioning what it means for us and for artists in particular, who are sometimes afraid of saying to the people that fund them, "actually, this is not how I see myself." It's very difficult to have a funding relationship: you're dependent on the authorities to define you. That is an uncomfortable situation and it may have been to Mike's benefit that he didn't get funded by the Arts Council, because he's been free to explore the things that he's passionate about. Even though it's very difficult to turn away funding, in some cases, you can see that there are advantages to it.

Can I just quickly make one more point? It is about this question of racism and whether the reason that certain people are not getting into institutions and not doing well or succeeding is because of some kind of institutional racism. All I would say is that something that we should interrogate and question is whether the barriers are broader than racism, because I think they are. I think there are lots of white working class people who will never get into those institutions as well.

Agreement from the panel

I think that the problem with these initiatives is that they simplify what are very complex social explanations. That's something that we should unpick and not be afraid to challenge.

Wesley Kerr: So, it's as much about power as it is about race. I think the gentleman here has been waiting for some time. I think half a dozen quick points from the floor, so this gentleman, then this lady, then you can come in again because you had such a good point. Sir.

Audience member 7: My name is Taku. I work in schools as an artist and I come from Zimbabwe, so one of the experiences I've had is that when you go into a school – this is Norfolk I'm talking about – is that they expect you to be 'exotic'. So, if you go there, if I go there and I'm dressed like this, which is Western, which is what I would be dressed like in Zimbabwe, they don't see it as 'authentic'. For them, what is cultural diversity is for me to come wearing our traditional dress, which is a loinskin...

Laughter

...jumping up and down and then, to them, that makes it culturally diverse. It's interesting what everyone is saying there, which reminds me of what is happening here at the same time. There is a traditional white British culture, which is Morris dancing, the folk dance. When you talk about Morris dance to the teachers in these schools who are running the cultural diversity programmes... their response is, "Ooh, Morris dance, we don't do that". I'm like, "Ok, you're paying me to do our Zimbabwean Morris dance for you. I won't to be delivering the current, lived culture." I'm put into a box so that I deliver a historical manifestation of our culture. Some of those traditions, which we are still delivering - although less so in our traditional costumes - won't be considered authentic.

Wesley Kerr: Thank you very much. It's about nuance, you're saying. I think the Queen has the same problem. When she goes to schools, they say, "*Where are your crown and your robes? Who is this tiny little woman?*"

Laughter

So the lady here, please. The microphone will get to you. Then three or four quick points and we'll have to wind up and get to the next musical performance while we vote. Ma'am.

Audience member 8: OK. I'm Eithnie Nightingale (*Head of Diversity, V&A/Cultural Co-operation Board member 2000-7*). I think increasingly, as the debate shows, when we address cultural diversity initiatives, we're talking about a range of things, in fact. Each may have their merits. I've known cultural diversity initiatives which actually challenge stereotypes (or some people might call them cultural diversity initiatives) and I've also seen things that actually reinforce stereotypes, and there are things in the middle. So, I think we are clustering so many things together. I think there is a problem specifically about employment schemes: as I see it working in a major institution, there is a danger that one relies on that particular

scheme and doesn't look at the whole issue of equality of employment. I think that is the danger with initiatives anyway, you know, a programme, an initiative, as opposed to looking at the institutions as a whole.

Wesley Kerr: Ok, point well made. We have a lady here and the gentleman up there.

Audience member 9: I guess just following on from that point, that I think what we've done is merged diversity with equalities work, because you can have, using Munira's comment, brown faces within museums and galleries but that doesn't mean that diversity is extended at all.

I'm the Director of an organisation called Hybrid and we did a piece of research on quantitative statistical gathering as part of Arts Council's regularly funded organisations. Everybody, and I mean everybody, felt that cultural diversity initiatives had some role to play, but they also felt that they should be cleverer – more intelligent as the board member of Cultural Co-operation said – but nobody could identify a route, or categories, or labels. They recognised class but class is too ephemeral these days. They recognised economics, but how do you ask people that? All of these questions come flooding through but we don't yet have a system or a means to work with them.

We know that cultural diversity initiatives, when they're done well can be brilliant, when they're done badly can be appalling, but we need to focus not on the present but on the future – how are we going to do things in the future?

Wesley Kerr: Gentleman a few rows behind you. Then the lady there. Is there anyone else who really feels they want to make a point?

Audience member 10: Lindsay Johnson. It strikes me that one of the elephants in the room is the actual calibre and the quality of the art being produced and encouraged under these cultural diversity initiatives. Question for Munira, do you think that cultural diversity initiatives actually are hindering the production of great art?

Munira Mirza: Possibly. I'm sure that things get funded because they tick a box, in some places. That's not about the Arts Council, that's general: everybody does that to some extent. But, I don't worry about great art not being made for ethnic artists any more than I do in general, in a sense, because I think that there are always barriers to artists producing great work.

I think one of the problems that probably does happen is that artists do feel obliged to work within a particular mode or form, so that the gentleman who was having to talk about playing an exotic role or character, almost, to meet the audience's needs, I think that's probably a hazard of the job when getting arts funding generally. I think that's probably the

case for lots of artists, not just ethnic artists. I have to say, when we fund things, when the Arts Council funds things, there is an effort to try and make a judgement about the artistic quality of it, but there is an incredible pressure as well to fund things because you want to keep a community happy or you want to show statistics and I think that can be a problem.

Wesley Kerr: I think we're going to have to wind up and go onto the next performance. Just this lady very quickly. And then Prakash will tell us what's happening next.

Audience member 11: My name is Miriam Metliss. I work for Visiting Arts and I work quite a lot with the Latin American community in London. I just wanted to reiterate the point about collaboration between communities. I think Reem mentioned, rather than different initiatives, separate within communities, the importance of collaboration and exchange between their communities in London and actually creating something together with international artists, local artists and also migrant artists based in London.

Wesley Kerr: I think that's a wonderful point to end on and also because it's a two-way process and it's a coat of many colours but it is a coat, isn't it? So, Prakash, what's happening next? I think some more music while you vote, isn't it?

Prakash Daswani: Wesley's talked about the voting and I sense that now we keep coming back to semantics we've probably gone as far as we can this evening with the proposition being debated.

But can I just ask before we have a break for food, drinks and conversations that we briefly consider the next level, alluded to by Ranjit's comments about boundaries and referred to just now by Visiting Arts - and also very much at the heart of the kind of work that Cultural Co-operation has been doing all these years. This is about the trend now termed as interculturalism, which seeks to transcend individual ethnicities and faiths and encourage mutual understanding and collaboration between them.

In the high church of interculturalism, I think of you, Ranjit, as being an Archbishop and of myself as a local trainee vicar.

Laughter

You talked about boundaries of self and other and I wonder if before we leave the debate we might reflect on some of the boundaries, or limits, of interculturalism itself.

I was privileged some years ago to work in the Palestinian Territories with a number of Palestinian artists. I observed that the artistic work of a lot of them was, as you've heard from Reem herself, intensely expressive of their struggle against Israel for peace and justice

in what they consider their homeland. They complained to me that the Israeli authorities regularly try to encourage dialogue and exchange between Israeli and Palestinian artists in the name of interculturalism. Israeli artists were usually pleased to do this but the Palestinian ones tended to resist it for fear of what's known as 'normalisation', where it was felt that by collaborating with Israeli artists it could give the impression that everything was actually ok, or "normal", between the two peoples, that there wasn't really a problem.

Now that seems to me show one limit to interculturalism and I'd like to get Ranjit to comment more generally on how far can we go, how far should we go, in engaging with the perceived enemy? And maybe Reem could also give her own personal take on this.

Ranjit Sondhi: I'm not going to get into a big debate on interculturalism tonight. I think that is something for another time, Prakash. You know how passionately I feel about creating spaces in which people can have dangerous conversations. Safe places for dangerous conversations. But let me finish off with a story instead. I have a son, who when he was ten years of age, was asked by a friend of mine, "Well, Kabir", his name is Kabir, "Well, who do you think you are?" and he looked at her and he said 'well that's not a problem'. He said "I'm half English, because I'm born in England, I'm half Indian because my father's born in India and I'm half African because my mother is born in Kenya, ok?" And so she turned to him and said "Well surely, Kabir, that doesn't add up to one?" You know, my son's not a mathematician, I'm afraid, he's a bit of a philosopher. And he turns around to her and says, "Well actually, there's more to me than most other people".

Laughter and applause

And that seems to me the way, that's the way he handles the multiple set of heritages that people like him are going to grow up with in multicultural Britain in the 21st Century.

Reem Kelani: To basically comment on Prakash's point, but before that, I'd just like Munira to know that at least on my part, I know no one on the panel was accusing you of being backward or you know. And I agree with certain things but I still hold to that point, and that's why we have these wonderful debates.

The issue with normalisation, especially on the Palestinian-Israeli thing, is quite tricky. I mean this is a Judeo-Christian legacy in this country, Britain did have a role to play in the creation of the state of Israel and there is also British foreign policy, so it's very tricky to work on the Palestinian-Israeli issue here. But the point is, whenever Radio Three plays me, the point is that as soon as they're done, 'This was the Palestinian singer Reem Kelani. And now we have from Israel, Yasmin Levy'. I mean, how can you tell a black person, 'every time I play you I want to neutralise you with a white person'. Every time you have a gay musician, 'ok, I'm going to bring a straight one'.

And the point of normalisation and neutralisation, it actually connects with what you said Ranjit – is that acknowledging the other doesn't mean that I'm an isolationist, but we need to acknowledge the other. Normalisation with the Palestinian-Israeli thing, yes, I mean I am signatory with people like Harold Pinter, to a document that calls for the boycott of Israeli artists and academics. Especially after the onslaught in Gaza. Now we don't say that we don't like them, but we're saying when that happened in South Africa during apartheid, it works. I believe it's a better alternative to terrorism. Thank you.

Applause

Wesley Kerr: So I think we could be here all night discussing that but I think it's been a most terrific debate and I think that there is food and drink and also voting slips so we can find out whether your opinion has changed or not. And I think there will also be a performance.

Prakash Daswani: Please don't go because there is food and drink and before they leave, please a round of applause for our wonderful panel. Thank you.

Applause

We now have a 20 minutes interval for refreshments and networking, followed by more performances. Please don't forget to cast your vote

Interval

Poetic Pilgrimage: We go by the name of Poetic Pilgrimage. We are Muneera and Sukina and we're in betweeners – I've just realised that we're in between cultures.

Poetic Pilgrimage perform

Wesley Kerr: Marvellous. Very impressive. Thank you. Live and direct from Jamaica, like me, as you can hear.

Laughter

So with this very interesting proposition that we have debated, I think it was a fascinating discussion. On the way in, 17% Agreed, 48% Disagreed and 35% were Undecided. So we have changed opinion and it's clear that Munira swayed you. Mike, you eventually came down on Munira's side. But we haven't changed opinion all that dramatically.

The result of the debate is that 25% Agree, 44% disagree and 31% are undecided. So if I were at the Cambridge Union again, I would say that the proposition is lost and that you are in favour of cultural diversity initiatives but it may not be that the policy makers are. But thank you very much for attending this evening - and the bar is still open.

Applause

Prakash Daswani: Thanks again. Before they leave the stage, please give our panel and the Debate Chair, Wesley Kerr, another round of applause for such a stimulating set of presentations and debate. Thank you

Applause

Now please welcome our final group, the wonderful Harare. Thank you.

Harare: Thank you very much. We are called Harare. It's the capital of Zimbabwe, where we come from and we are one of the few Zimbabwean groups to be playing Zimbabwean music in Europe. And Zimbabwean music is communal so please feel free to sing with us, dance or whatever you want to do.

Harare perform, Audience and Panel dance

Wesley Kerr: Thank you all very much. Thanks to Cultural Co-operation for organizing such a terrific event.