

**Re-imagining the national
community in urban public
place:
Trafalgar Square, 1906 - 2010**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the contribution of urban public place to narratives of national identity. In doing so, it responds to existing scholarship within nationalism studies concerning the processes by which national identity is constructed, reproduced and transformed. First, it argues that urban public place plays an important role in making the national community visible. Second, an analysis of place reveals the multiple intertwining narratives that contribute to national identities. Third, it demonstrates that the use of urban public place creates valuable opportunities for challenges or changes to national narratives, including those from less powerful social groups.

Underpinning these central arguments is a conceptualisation of national identity as an ongoing discursive process. This is combined with an understanding of place that stresses its flexibility of meaning and use despite the apparently fixed frame of a built environment rich in historical symbolism. Additionally, this project draws together top-down and from-below perspectives on the construction of national identity, foregrounding the possibilities that place offers for the expression of counter-hegemonic national narratives.

The empirical material is drawn from three sets of events in London's Trafalgar Square. These are: the use of the Square for Suffragette rallies from 1906 to 1913; the celebrations in the Square on Victory in Europe Day in 1945; and the celebration of the winning Olympic Games host city bid and memorial vigil for the victims of the 7 July 2005 London bombings. Official, media and first-hand accounts of these events are used to analyse how and whether national identity has been understood as central to these events by various participants or observers. Through this analysis, I demonstrate that Trafalgar Square provides an important environment in which national narratives can be made evident to a wider national audience, and that this has provided a possibility for the transformation of these narratives through reactions to and the reinterpretation of the Square's built environment.

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chapter one

Introduction

In August 2007, the Taj Mahal appeared in Trafalgar Square (see Figure 1). This iconic Indian building featured as part of the Trafalgar Square festival, a project of the London's then Mayor, Ken Livingstone, that was themed around the 'creative connections between London and India' (GLA 2007). In addition to the reproduction of the Taj Mahal, the three week festival also featured dance and musical performances, and included a giant canvas at the foot of Nelson's column that 're-imagin[ed] London as an Indian city' (GLA 2007). This festival took place right under the nose of the statue of Sir Henry Havelock, a imperial hero of Victorian Britain whose muscular Christianity was evident in both his relief of besieged British women and children in Lucknow during the Indian Uprising in 1857 and his willingness to burn villages and execute their inhabitants across swathes of northern India in the process. While the relationship between Havelock's London and India was very different from Livingstone's, in choosing to 're-imagine' London in this way, organisers drew upon a rich history of contact and interaction with Asia which remains a vital part of the identity of contemporary Britain.

The arranged marriage of these two structures in Trafalgar Square - the Taj Mahal and Nelson's Column - created a spatial juxtaposition of London and

India, but also one of past and present, nation and individual, and representation of history and use of place that suggests a wide range of questions that I will explore in this thesis. At its most general level, this project asks what urban public place can tell us about national identity, especially when those places are rich in historical representation, and are being used by different people for a range of purposes. In order to do so, this thesis will explore the case study of Trafalgar Square to consider how national identity has been constructed, maintained or transformed, as well as the potential of the Square to help groups resist or alter dominant narratives of national identity. I will also consider the ways that the use of place helps reframe the national meanings implied by its built forms. The spatial reality of a reproduction of an Indian building in the centre of London, I suggest, foregrounds the role of place in constructing, reproducing and maintaining national identity, and it is this role that my thesis addresses.



Figure 1: The Taj Mahal at the base of Nelson's Column, 2007. Photo: GLA

Trafalgar Square is not the only place in which national identity, history, popular use and the changing makeup of Britain come together. Other central London sites, such as Hyde Park, Parliament Square, the Mall and area around Buckingham Palace, and the streets of the City and Westminster areas would also be fruitful subjects of a study such as this one. In particular, Hyde Park has seen many public gatherings including mass protests, especially in the mid-

to late nineteenth century, regular social display by the upper and middle classes, and celebrations of royal occasions such as coronations or weddings. In its large gatherings, Hyde Park shares with Trafalgar Square a history of appropriation and use by the public that challenged the limits of official control. However, the site's prominence for new visitors to London, which I discuss in Chapter Four, as well as its proximity to Westminster Palace and the Houses of Parliament, government offices along Whitehall, Buckingham Palace and the shops, clubs and cafes of the West End, make it a valuable subject of study. Furthermore, its imperial symbolism and the implicit link this provides to the highest levels of official power and control have made it highly attractive to groups wishing to challenge this power. As Dennis (2008: 163-164) argues:

Yet despite, perhaps because of, these attempts to keep Trafalgar Square under state control, it has always been associated more with acts of popular protest than official ceremonial. The attempt to reserve the square for official and approved occasions could even have been a stimulus to protest. The square became a prize of enormous symbolic value.

In this introductory chapter, I will discuss the different aspects of my research questions, outline my main argument, and touch on the literature on which my work is based and to which it contributes. I will also discuss how the research questions and literature shaped my methodology and choice of sources. Finally, I will outline the structure of the rest of the thesis, covering my sub-arguments in more detail.

Research questions

This thesis addresses one main research problem, namely how does urban public place contribute to the construction, reproduction and maintenance of national identity? It explores the value of place for scholars of national identity, examining both theoretical and methodological implications of a place-based analysis. I draw on material from the disciplines of cultural geography and the sociology of national identity.

I contribute to this body of scholarship by exploring how national identity has been constructed and reproduced in Trafalgar Square through three historical

case studies: the Suffragettes' use of the Square for public rallies, 1906-1913 (Chapter Five); the Victory in Europe celebrations in May 1945 (Chapter Six); and the use of the Square in July 2005 to celebrate London's winning Olympic bid and to mourn the victims of the 7 July London transport bombings (Chapter Seven). This spread of case studies allows a comparison of the changing role of the Square in shaping national identity over time, including its impact on some of the larger social contests that have occurred in the past one hundred years. Using this material, I make my main argument: *that place's value in re-imagining national identity rests on the range of national narratives that are made visible in the use of place*. To arrive at this argument, I organised my project into three main research questions:

- What national narratives have been created and reflected in Trafalgar Square?
- What power relationships inform these national narratives? and
- What is the role of these narratives in connecting the national past, present and future?

What national narratives have been created and reflected in Trafalgar Square?

National identity is popularly understood as a set of characteristic or attitudes shared by members of the same nation. However, this single, totalising narrative can exclude as many as it includes. For example, in 2005 the conservative British newspaper *The Telegraph* published a list of ten 'non-negotiable components of our identity' that it perceived as central to modern Britishness. The list included state institutions, the English language or 'Anglosphere', private property and capitalism, and the 'British character', defined as 'stubborn, stoical and indignant at injustice' (*The Telegraph* 2005). Then British Prime Minister Gordon Brown (2006) also stressed the necessity of an 'essential common purpose without which no society can flourish', suggesting that a single, commonly agreed version of national identity is socially vital.

Brown's government made practical changes that reinforced this view, such as a new exam on British values required of applicants for British citizenship. There have also been suggestions for a 'Britain Day', as well as special

information for British residents turning 18, explaining the rights and responsibilities of adults in Britain (BBC News Online 2007). These examples demonstrate both the existence of a single narrative of national identity and some attempts to define its content.

Others, however, have challenged this monolithic way of conceptualising Britishness. Ward (2004: 9), for example, emphasises flexibility and mutability of British national identity, describing it as a 'work in progress'. His premise is that the ongoing, active engagement of the British people in constructing their own national identity has contributed to its resilience. This work is linked to characterisations of the nation as a powerful discourse that informs identity and normalises the nation, positioning individuals 'within a homeland, which itself is situated within a world of nations' (Billig 1995:8). This is part of a range of scholarship that treats the nation as dynamic, fluid or multiple. This includes characterisations of the nation as a framing discourse (Özkırmı 2005); a cultural matrix (Edensor 2002); a set of conflicting narratives (Hutchinson 2005); 'an everyday plebiscite' (Renan 1882 in Hutchinson and Smith 1994:17) in which the nation is constantly renegotiated; or an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991). This scholarship also reflects the notion of an abstract political and social entity with diverse meanings that individuals contribute to and shape.

This project engages directly with this debate by examining the process by which national identity is created, reproduced and maintained. To do this, I use urban public place as an organising framework, asking what national narratives enliven Trafalgar Square, how these narratives have been created and who has formulated them. As I will show, my case studies illuminate a model of national identity in which multiple imagined communities exist in tension, collaboration or uneasy truce. In this way, my findings contribute to conceptualisations of national identity as a discursive process subject to ongoing redefinition, resistance and challenge.

Additionally, this thesis explores the extent to which the experience of place can help the individual frame their relationship with the nation. Across all three case studies, I will explore the effect of the embodied aspects of being in place, including being in a crowd, as a feature of the experience of place

for individuals. This aspect responds to literature on use, practice and affect that I discuss in Chapter Two, including recent work on affect (see Thrift 2004, Nash 2000, Rose 2002). Anderson's argument about the nature of imagined communities also informs this line of inquiry: 'members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members ... yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 1991 [1983]: 6). I examine the degree to which this 'image of communion' is built in part by being in or observing others in place as part of events with a national narrative.

What power relationships inform these national narratives?

If, as I discussed above, national narratives are imagined in Trafalgar Square, I also ask who is involved in this process, and what power relationships influence various groups using or controlling the Square. In doing so, I draw on Foucault's notion of power as expressed through a discursive process that 'produces reality' (quoted in Merquior 1985: 109), as well as his concern with how power is exercised. According to Foucault (1982: 788): 'the exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others'. In this sense, power is reproduced through the creation of knowledge. In a subtle process, the exercise of power 'incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult' in addition to the use of potentially more violent strategies of restraint or coercion (Foucault 1982: 789). In terms of space, Foucault (in Faubion 1994: 361) claims that although 'space is fundamental in any exercise of power', it does not determine power relations between groups. He suggests that built architectural forms are less important than that the way people use space in determining the meanings of space (Faubion 1994: 355).

Based on this theoretical material, my second research question asks how social and political power informs the formation and interaction of national narratives, exploring the degree to which contests or agreements over the use of place represent similar processes in the definition of national identity. The interaction of these narratives can be seen, for example, in official efforts to control the use of place, through tactics such as denying or allowing access, or policing the activities that occur there. These activities can demonstrate aspects of both the mainstream national discourse and counter-hegemonic

challenges to that discourse. For example, the conflict between the Suffragettes and police over the use of Trafalgar Square, while superficially related to the question of spatial access, was framed by protestors as a much larger issue of the political right to free speech. In this example, the exercise of control of Trafalgar Square, including the sanction of certain activities, was a contest that had much wider-ranging social and political meanings.

Furthermore, I will argue that, on closer examination, the Square can reveal more subtle forms of resistance. For example, the use of the Square for Eid and Diwali celebrations that I discuss in Chapter Three, despite official Mayoral support, did challenge aspects of British national identity that were (and still are) prominent in mainstream conservative attitudes. In 2005 this was especially evident around the discussions of multiculturalism, immigration, domestic terrorism and social cohesion that contextualise my case study from that period. In engaging with these questions, I contribute to the literature concerned with change to national identity. By examining the process through which different narratives gain prominence, my work can help demonstrate how national identity changes and the conditions of that change.

Additionally, this question reframes the popular notion that Trafalgar Square is a public place. When the Square was reopened in 2003 after extensive renovations, then London Mayor Ken Livingstone described it as public, community place: 'Many of the capital's squares were built for people but have been taken over by traffic, what we want to do is return them to their original role at the heart of local communities' (BBC News Online 2003). Trafalgar Square has a recognised history as a place of public protest and expression, and this narrative has been woven into the Square's meaning. But to what degree is the Square a 'public' place, in the sense of being accessible to all and open to a range of meanings and uses? How has this changed over its history; indeed, was it even designed with 'democratic' access in mind? Does control of the Square shape the vision of the nation contained in its built elements and in the way it is used? In the chapters that follow, I will explore these questions, all of which relate to the exercise of power over public place.

What is the role of these narratives of national identity in connecting the national past, present and future?

My final research question concerns the relationship between place and the nation's history and future. If, as Massey (1995) claims, place connects us to other places and times, then this occurs in part through the built environment. For example, Trafalgar Square contains statues and monuments that celebrate people and events of the past, highlighting the cultural priorities of the Square's designers for present-day users. In this thesis, I explore the extent to which these built elements have informed the way the nation is imagined through events in the Square, and whether these elements have been understood differently over time.

Furthermore, if the built environment of the Square gives users an insight into the national past, might it also suggest visions of national futures? The creators of the Square, in shaping its design, emphasised aspects of their recent history, such as the Battle of Trafalgar, already almost 40 years past by the time Nelson's Column was built, to express a national narrative that they thought should endure throughout future generations. By memorialising Nelson in a prominent central London location, officials declared their values to both contemporary and future viewers of the memorial. The Square contains many examples of spatial symbols of national identity, steeped in the values of nineteenth century elites, and to some degree this has been successful. Users of the Square in 2005, for example, referred to Nelson's Column and the Battle of Trafalgar to contextualise contemporary national victories over the French (see Chapter Seven).

Furthermore, the relationship between the nation and the past can be an ambivalent one, and Lowenthal claims (1985: 72) that nations 'must draw sustenance from their past, yet to be fully themselves must also put it away from them'. This suggests that national narratives both include and exclude, providing a link to the discussion of power relevant to my previous research question. Implicit in a discussion of the symbolism of the national past lurks the notion of a national future that rests on a negotiation between historical narratives and power structures expressed in place.

If national identity is bound up with interpretations of the past, as Lowenthal (1985), Massey (1991) and others argue, then Britain cannot escape a relationship with empire, including the multicultural legacy inherited by the national capital. Britain's, and in particular, London's, diversity has been deeply shaped by the movements of people from former colonies (see Winder 2004). As I will discuss in Chapter Seven, for some observers, Britain's diverse nature is a weakness, while others argue that the British political union has proved flexible enough to endure ongoing social and political change (Koditscek 2002: 395). In particular, Colley (2005) contends that Britain has a flexible national identity that is in a constant process of redefinition. This resonates with Ward's (2004: 172) rejection of a fixed definition of Britishness and emphasis on the 'constructed and reconstructed nature of national identities'. The characterisation of national identity as flexible but resilient, constructed but rich in meaning, provides an invaluable platform for this thesis. I respond to this literature by exploring how national narratives, linked to both the past and future, are made visible in place and are therefore subject to being re-imagined by place's users and observers.

I will also use the case studies to interrogate what can be understood by the terms 'British', 'English' and 'imperial' when discussing national identity, and what a site-specific study might be able to add to these definitions. The literature on British national identity is large and various. Colley's (1992) influential contribution traces the origin of the notion of Britishness to 1707 and the union of the English and Scottish parliaments. In particular, she identifies 'Frenchness' as a category of identity against which Britishness has been defined. In his discussion of Englishness, Kumar (2003) argues that the British Empire inhibited English identity from emerging until the Boer war and the 'crisis of empire' it provoked. It was therefore difficult to identify or imagine England and Englishness as a distinct political entity before it started to emerge after the turn of the century.

Similarly, Wellings (2002) argues that British, English and imperial identities are effectively merged, which means that Englishness is only expressed through the symbolism of British imperialism. Again, this has made Englishness difficult to discern as a distinct category of identity. However, this account is focused on the conservative elements of English national identity and does not

account for the tradition of English radicalism evident, for example, in the popular labour movements of the mid-nineteenth century. This material feeds into debates on the significance of the empire in the everyday lives of British people, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Porter (2004), for example, argues that the Empire did not have a significant impact on the popular imagination because it was too far removed from everyday experience.

A potential weakness of these arguments is that they all rest on a clear distinction between English, British and imperial identities. In response to Porter, for example, Webster (2006) has explored the many ways that an imperial imaginary permeated popular culture in films, advertising, novels and other material, arguing that this was a result of the merging and layering of these categories by the end of the imperial period around 1960. As with Ward (2004), this approach conceptualises national identity as flexible and discursive. The case study of Trafalgar Square in this thesis provides the opportunity to interrogate these definitions and explore some of the relationships between them. I respond to the literature on British national identity by asking how national narratives, linked to both past and future, are made visible in place and might therefore be subject to re-imagining.

Methodology and approach

In order to tease out the threads of the relationships amongst various narratives of national identity and place, I focus on the interpretation of the Square's symbolic representations as they appear in the Square during three different sets of events. As I will explain in detail in Chapters Three and Four, I focus on official and media narratives, as well as participants' individual experiences of the case-study events. By examining a range of sources, this approach is intended to illuminate a range of national narratives.

The primary empirical focus of this thesis is the relationship between official narratives about the 'national' in the case studies and individual experiences of these events, against the background of the representations of national history in the Square's built environment. As I will show, this range of sources reveals how the version of the national varies across the views of officials, the

media and the wider national public, including points of contestation and difference. This will help me explore both the constructed nature of national identity, as well as the means of its ongoing re-imagining. I attempt to access as wide a range of narratives as possible, using both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' sources to make my arguments.

To access this range of material, I turned to archives in Britain, including Cabinet, Metropolitan Police and Home Office documents held in the National Archives and accounts of Victory in Europe Day, reactions to London's successful Olympic bid and other background material in the Mass-Observation Archive held at the University of Sussex. I also examined twentieth-century newspapers in the British Library as well as online media reporting for the three case studies. Autobiographies and secondary sources helped to contextualise the primary material. Finally, I engaged in participant observation in the Square in autumn 2008, including attendance at two major multicultural festivals and the annual Trafalgar Square Festival.

Thesis structure

The first third of this thesis lays out the scaffolding that supports the later empirical chapters. Here, I discuss the scholarship, research design and historical context that inform the case studies that follow. In *Chapter Two* I lay out the literature that I engage with in this thesis, across the disciplines of sociology and cultural geography. I focus on definitions of national identity, particularly those that conceptualise it as a discursive process (Özkırımlı 2005, Ting 2008, Edensor 2002, Bhabha 1990, Smith 2008, Guibernau 2007, Calhoun 1997), and probe accounts that discuss the process by which it is created or changed. Furthermore, I explore the relationship between history and place, and also touch on place's 'power-geometry' (Massey 1991), and some aspects of the use of place, such as spectacle (Hagen and Ostergren 2006) and affect (Thrift 2004).

Chapter Three discusses the choice of Trafalgar Square as a subject of study, as well as why the three case studies provide a strong basis for comparative analysis. The choice of case studies was designed to range across of several different social aspects of national identity, namely gender and political

participation in the Edwardian period; war and social unity or division in 1945; and diversity and multiculturalism in 2005. In this chapter I explain the methodology I used to interrogate my case studies, focusing on the use of discourse analysis of archival material before reflecting on the practice of 'dwelling in the archive' (see Burton 2003). I also discuss the value of focusing on both banal and spectacular events to understand the generation and use of national narratives in place, and conclude by explaining some of the limitations and surprises I encountered during my research.

Chapter Four acts as an introduction to Trafalgar Square itself, and provides some context for the case studies that follow. The first half of the chapter introduces the space of the Square in order to familiarise the reader with its built elements and local neighbourhood. This includes a discussion of how its construction and layout was characterised by the same change and multiple meanings that have been evident in its uses over time. I discuss the symbolism of the statues and other built features of the Square, identifying some of the controversies that have accompanied their construction. In doing so, I begin to build a case for characterising the Square as fluid and mutable in its built elements as much as in its uses. This chapter demonstrates that, like the changing discourse of national identity that it represents, the design and spatial features of the Square have been subject to ongoing contest and compromise.

This chapter also identifies some events early in the Square's history that shaped how subsequent users understood the space. Furthermore, in the second half of Chapter Four, I explore the quotidian life of the Square, pointing out the role that everyday uses can play in the construction of the Square's meaning. Although many of these uses are highly individual - stories of joy, despair, poverty and celebration all intertwine - they all contribute to a larger discourse of accreted symbolic meaning (see Dwyer 2004) that forms the background to the more specific case studies in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

The empirical section of the thesis begins with *Chapter Five*, the first of three case studies. In it, I focus on the use of Trafalgar Square by the Women's Political and Social Union (WSPU) from 1906 to 1913 as part of their campaign

for female suffrage. As mentioned above, the Suffragette's use of the Square for rallies and protests was one tactic in a larger spatial strategy that saw them chain themselves to railings outside official buildings, break windows in middle-class shops in the nearby West End, and force entry into the Houses of Parliament in an attempt to gain access to political leaders. I will show how the Square had a range of meanings for the WSPU, including its value as a prominent central London location where a protest was likely to generate publicity in mainstream newspapers. Furthermore, the site was imbued with political meaning for the Suffragettes because of its use by previous protestors, particularly in the late 1880s. Many of the contemporaneous reports of these events highlight the transgressive nature of the protests, showing that the WSPU was aware of how the use of Trafalgar Square enhanced the national significance of their actions. I will examine whether the Suffragettes' rhetoric activated the history of the Square to buttress their own calls for change, as well as how their protests in the Square fit into a larger strategy that used central London spaces to comment on and resist the hegemonic narrative concerning female enfranchisement. Using this material, I introduce the notion that visibility within the Square symbolised national visibility, arguing that the WSPU used the space to attempt to re-imagine the nation as one that included women as political participants. To do this, I respond to the scholarship on who imagines the nation and the processes by which it is imagined (Anderson 1991, Hobsbawm 1983 and 1990, Brubaker 1996) that I discuss in Chapter Two.

In *Chapter Six*, I focus on the Square at the end of the Second World War, during the celebrations of Victory in Europe Day on 7 and 8 May 1945. Whereas the Suffragettes used central London as a landscape of power that they could subvert or resist, participants in VE Day imagined central London, many areas of which were badly damaged by bombs or fire, as a landscape of fear and grief as well as survival and resilience. Although official messages, such as the King's speech or Churchill's announcement of the end of the war, presented the damage to London's built environment as symbolic of national resilience, many people saw destruction and personal loss in the same urban landscape. Within this spatial context, Trafalgar Square was one place in which crowds gathered to celebrate the end of the Second World War, and a subject of photographs and media reporting on the nights of 7 and 8 May.

Some newspaper accounts used the celebrations in the Square as a means to describe the mood of the entire nation (see Kynaston 2007: 12). Others, however, emphasised the excitement that participants felt as a result of simply being in a crowd, or described the event as an excuse for a party, rather than a specifically national event. In Trafalgar Square, Nelson's Column was floodlit as part of the official strategy of emphasising national survival by making certain structures visible. In this chapter, I will discuss the meanings grafted onto the Square and its monuments by officials, and popular reactions that resisted or redefined these meanings. By making a range of national narratives evident, I will extend my argument about the importance of Trafalgar Square in making the nation visible. I will discuss whether this was because the use of the Square linked the individual to the nation in complex, multiple and sometimes ambivalent ways, challenging the notion of Britain during the Second World War as 'a historical moment when the nation was truly united' (Rose 2003: 2). As I will discuss in Chapter Two, this challenges the notion of the nation as a static and inflexible 'sociological reality ... a real and unified group' (Day and Thompson 2004: 12), and suggests the usefulness of understanding national identity as discursive, flexible and complex (Bhabha 1990, Özkırımlı 2005, Calhoun 1997).

Chapter Seven moves into the early twenty-first century. In it, I focus on two events in the Square that happened within a fortnight in 2005: the celebration of London's winning bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games on 6 July, and the 14 July memorial vigil on for the victims of the 7 July London bombings. I will consider how London's multiculturalism, unique in scope and magnitude in a British city, creates a tension for any uniform national narrative, including that represented in the Square's built environment, heavy with imperial, masculine and martial imagery. I explore how the tension amongst different British national narratives was evident in the stress on racial unity which was a central theme of both 2005 events. This was because the narrative of British multiculturalism that these events highlighted was understood as both positive and negative: positive in the diversity that helped London win its Olympic bid, and negative in the form of 'home-grown' terrorists who attacked the capital city. These two events were also linked because, after the London bombings, metropolitan officials reprised Olympic organisers' emphasis on the positive

aspects of British multiculturalism in order to discourage a negative aspect of multiculturalism, the possibility of racial violence.

In this case study, as with the others, one use of Trafalgar Square influenced subsequent constructions of national identity, and a discourse was evident between the place and its users. In other words, with each event or use, new meanings ascribed to the Square helped shape subsequent uses (Dwyer 2004). Ken Livingstone alluded to this when he opened the Trafalgar Square festival in August 2005. At this event, he described the Square as a 'place of triumph and celebration' as well as a place of remembrance and a symbol of unity (London 2012 2005). In doing so, he drew on the Square's longstanding history as a gathering place to both emphasise its contemporary relevance and legitimise events held there. In this speech, Livingstone drew on one of the main messages of his Mayorship - that of a united and proud London - to further shape the meaning of the Square and set the tone for future events. However, by doing this, he claimed the Square for London, rather than for Britain. This chapter will examine how Trafalgar Square helped condition national identity in ways that were simultaneously national and local, and the effect on the national narratives. In doing so, it contributes to accounts of how the nation is imagined (Anderson 1991), and how this process occurs in place (see Azaryahu and Kook 2002, Kincaid 2006, Nora 1989, Staiger 2009, Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998).

Finally, *Chapter Eight* considers one corner of the Square, the Fourth Plinth. Given its themes of national and local, official and popular, its use of the monumental built environment to highlight the individual, and its location within a changing and contested area of the Square, the Fourth Plinth seemed a fitting place to conclude my arguments. This structure has seen a series of changing monuments and artworks that have raised discussion over the meaning of the site and what an 'appropriate' occupant should be. An example of one controversial artwork took the form of an event from July - October 2009. During this period, artist Anthony Gormley's organised individuals to occupy the plinth for an hour at a time for twenty-four hours a day over 1,000 hours. This was intended to highlight the role of public art and present a 'picture of Britain' to passers-by and virtual observers (Higgins 2009b). The installation was controversial, raising questions about public art,

national identity and the 'proper' use of Trafalgar Square. The current installation (at the time of writing), *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, draws together narratives of history, imperialism, trade and multiculturalism in an artwork that makes direct reference to the Square's central monument, Nelson's Column. In this chapter, I explore how the artworks on the Fourth Plinth have helped to make visible many of the national narratives I discuss in this thesis. In doing so, they encourage a public discourse on how the national community might be re-imagined.

Finally, having explored the differences and continuities between the case studies, I conclude my arguments in *Chapter Nine*. Here, I draw together the threads of my arguments and themes, and provide an overview of my central empirical concern: what are the ways in which both the built environment and the use of Trafalgar Square can help illuminate the way the national community is re-imagined in urban public place.

chapter two

Literature review: Imagining national identity in place

When Spain beat the Netherlands in the final of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, it was the first time the Spanish national side had ever won football's most prestigious international competition. Fans reacted by chanting 'I am Spanish' (Rainsford 2010). With this clear statement, the language of national identity was used by millions of individuals to link themselves to a much larger collective, personified by the sporting success of a small squad of twenty-two young men. Spain's national football team was known for its successful integration of players from the Basque and Catalan regions, areas of the country with strong separatist movements. Despite divisions that might otherwise separate the celebrating fans, when the national football team won, the nation was the most important category. The fans were 'Spanish'.

For a month during the World Cup, the success or failure of the participating teams, the antics of their fans, the national television and newspaper coverage and the greater visibility of supporters' flags and football scarves all became part of the backdrop to everyday life. These cultural expressions constantly reminded many people around the world of 'the nation' as an

important category of identity. For football fans and spectators around the world, dressed in national colours and watching the games together, the World Cup was a visible demonstration of the passion with which many people continue to treat national identity. It pointed to the importance of the nation, supporting Smith's (1998: 195) claim that '[to] date, we cannot discern a serious rival to the nation for the affections and loyalties of most human beings.' Even in a globalised world, the nation remains important.

Given the ongoing relevance of national identity, how can we understand its social and cultural impact? How is it expressed? Who shapes its expression and how do actors respond to alternative conceptualisations of the nation that assent to, challenge, or reject their own? In this chapter, I examine some of the scholarly literature that addresses these broad questions. In the first section, I discuss the sociology of national identity to which my work responds, and define the main concepts from this material that inform my research approach. In particular, I explore sociological material concerned with how national identity is constructed, maintained and reproduced, as well as who engages in these processes.

In the second half, I ask what cultural geography can add to questions about how national identity is shaped and reproduced. In particular, I examine the role of place in providing both the visual symbolism and spatial platform for processes of national-identity construction. I explore the work of authors who have considered how spatial environments affect the expression of national identity through physical layout and built forms, and the symbolism and rhetoric of both users and creators of these environments, particularly in cities.

By bringing together these two fields, I use literature from cultural geography to enrich an understanding of the sociology of national identity. In doing so, I seek to contribute to the sociological literature on the production of national identity, highlighting that possibility that embodied, spatial practices affect whether and how this can occur. Furthermore, while many others have taken a similar interdisciplinary approach, as I discuss below, this thesis contributes to the literature through my choice of case study, an examination of the use of Trafalgar Square throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Throughout the chapter, I outline the links between the scholarly literature and the three central research questions which emerge from it and inform the empirical research in Chapters Four - Eight. Furthermore, I foreshadow my choice of methodology, which I will discuss at length in Chapter Three, by drawing out how my approach relates to the literature on which the thesis rests.

The sociology of national identity

The question of *why* the nation maintains its appeal as a category of identity continues to fascinate researchers, and for many scholars this is linked to the circumstances of its historical development. For ‘modernists’ (see Smith 1998), national identity emerged as a response to the social and political dislocation of modernity. For Gellner (1983), modernity’s uneven waves of global development created competition between nations based on differential economic and industrial success, thus driving the development of nationalism. Culturally, it is powerful because it is ‘a way of attributing meaning and finding direction in confronting difficult circumstances’ (Hutchinson 2005: 136), and it helps ameliorate the alienation and displacement caused by modernity’s processes: ‘we may love the nation simply because there is nothing else left for us to love. When the communities to which people were formerly attached - communities of kin, village occupations, status and so on - are dissolved, individuals have nothing to turn to except the nation’ (Özkırmlı 2005: 49).

Other early theorists were primarily concerned with nationalism’s power to compel people towards violence. According to Smith (2008), the early period of the 1970s and 1980s saw a growth in thought about the ‘grand narrative’ of nationalism and national identity, largely motivated by the global process of decolonisation. Scholars were concerned with ‘why and how the world became divided into nations, and why nationalism became the dominant ideology of the modern epoch’ (Smith 2008: 563). Anderson’s (1991: 7) characterisation of national identity as an ‘imagined community’ rested on the idea that the ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ of national belonging ‘makes it possible ... for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly die for such limited imaginings’. This thesis engages with the idea that national identity is

an important social force in modern societies by asking whether and how it has been understood by users of Trafalgar Square.

How is the nation imagined?

Anderson's (1991) work hints at the way national identity can bridge the gap between long-term historical processes on the one hand, and their tangible and immediate personal effects on the other. To do this, he explored some of the specific ways in which national 'imagining' occurs, identifying the emergence of 'print-capitalism' as an important milestone in the creation of unitary national identities, particularly in post-colonial Southeast Asia. For example, he described the effect of Dutch colonial education, mapmaking and census taking in the Dutch East Indies, linking it to the emergence of an indigenous Indonesian national identity that was based on the colonisers' administrative categories of race, territory and language (Anderson 1991). Smith (1991) also emphasises the structural aspects of national identity, focusing on national territory, myths and memories, legal rights and duties, economy and 'a common mass public culture' linked to pre-modern ethnic cultural forms. In this conceptualisation, the nation has 'objective characteristics constitutive of a national identity independent of individual consciousness' (Ting 2008: 457-458).

Hobsbawm's (1983) discussion of the 'invention of tradition' highlights a similar process, demonstrating how powerful groups work through national social and political structures to serve their own interests. For Hobsbawm (1983), 'cultural elites were important in developing ideas, values and symbols that unified people across lines of language and ethnicity' (cited in Day and Thompson 2004: 27). He identifies three major innovations: primary education, which can be loaded with national content; public ceremonies, such as Bastille Day; and the production of numerous public monuments, including war memorials, giant statues and important public buildings that reflect significant national narratives.

One drawback of these definitions, however, is that by concentrating on structure and emphasising an 'objective' cultural form of national identity, they can imply that it is fixed and agreed by all members of the political community. As Day and Thompson (2004: 12) put it, classical social theory

treats 'the nation as a sociological reality ... a real and unified group', thus side-stepping the possibility of fluidity, contest or multiplicity. For example, Özkırmı's (2005: 170) reaction to the notion of the 'invention of tradition' is to both recognise the constructed nature of specific cultural attributes of nations, thus questioning their 'naturalness', while pointing out that nationalism is constructed in many different ways. Here he departs from Hobsbawm (1983) in arguing that while nations hold real and deeply-felt meaning for people, they are dynamic, changing and self-reinventing, based on 'culture...that is not a passive inheritance but an active process of creating meaning, not given but constantly defined and reconstituted' (Özkırmı 2005: 170). Picking up on this aspect, Bhabha (1990: 4) suggests that flexible and multiple narratives comprise national identity, and claims that membership of the nation 'must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new "people" in relation to the body politic [and] generating other sites of meaning'.

Building on Foucault, for Özkırmı (2005: 30-33) the nation is a discursive 'frame of reference that helps us make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us' and that 'legitimizes and produces hierarchies among actors'. In this national discourse, the values of nationalism are 'no longer seen as social values and appear as facts of nature - they become taken for granted, common sense and hegemonic' (Özkırmı 2005: 33). He also touches on the means by which these narratives are produced and legitimised: bureaucracies and other institutions are central to the creation and reproduction of national identity, which 'has to be learned and internalized through socialization ... [and] has to be reproduced daily in myriads of small ways to retain its power' (Özkırmı 2005: 33). In other words, national identity is presented as 'natural' by arbiters of social power such as national bureaucracies. Again, this raises the question of national structures and the extent to which they can be multiple or flexible.

Other work has addressed this issue directly by focusing on issues of cultural reproduction, discourse and narrative, including non-elite groups' relationship with the nation (Smith 2008: 564). While this work still links the production of national symbolism to the processes of modernity, its main concern is how and by whom this symbolism is constructed and reproduced. Building on Bhabha

(1990), these accounts also recognise the 'fluid and dynamic nature' (Guibernau 2007: 11) of national identity, and stress the contests and tensions that define it. Calhoun (1997: 3), for example, turns to Foucault's notion of a 'discursive formation' to help capture nationalism's complexity and dynamism, defining nationalism as:

... a way of speaking that shapes our consciousness, but also is problematic enough that it keeps generating more issues and questions, keeps propelling us into further talk, keeps producing debates over how to think about it.

In this thesis, I will explore some of the ways in which the historical meanings within the built environment, or structures, of Trafalgar Square have helped to shape the discourse of national identity. I will also explore how the use of the Square has reproduced the discourse reflected in those structures, and, at times, offered the possibility of subtle challenges or revisions to it. In doing so, I will explore whether national identity has been expressed as a range of narratives in Trafalgar Square. Furthermore, I ask what binds these narratives together. For example, are there common national representations in the Square that inform different narratives of national identity, and, if so, what are they?

Who imagines the nation?

Hobsbawm's (1983) 'invention of tradition' focused on the means by which the nation is defined or imagined. As discussed above, national bureaucracies were identified by early theorists as defining and mobilising national identity to the benefit of the state and national elites. In this section, I will discuss some ways in which the nation has been imagined in practice, while also considering the related question of *who* has done this imagining. In doing so, I respond to Brubaker's (1996) call that 'the principle task for those investigating nationalism should be to examine the mechanisms and strategies that underpin these processes', asking how is the nation 'powerfully realised in practice'? (cited in Thompson 2001: 20).

As with Hobsbawm (1983), in Anderson's (1991) characterisation of the nation as an imagined community, national institutions play a central role in constructing, maintaining and reproducing national identity. Official

languages, maps and cultural institutions and 'print capitalism' are all central to the process of constructing a national consciousness, helping to both normalise the idea of the nation and shape its cultural expression. Smith also touches on elites' mastery of 'bureaucratic incorporation', which allows them to 'provide cultural regulation and thereby drive a new and wider cultural identity' (Smith in Hutchinson and Smith 1994: 148). Lavrence (2005) also discusses the manipulation of national symbols by elites, and the way this helped powerful groups to shore up their political interests and consolidate power. Armstrong (cited in Smith 1998: 184) linked the centralised national administration associated with powerful bureaucracies with the growth of capital cities, identifying urban centres as critical to the diffusion of 'constitutive political myth[s]'. Nairn (1997) further suggested that capital cities' role as administrative centres help political elites consciously construct popular culture with stories to unify and bind populations.

Politically powerful groups in capital cities, however, are not the only ones engaged in the ongoing construction of national identity, and Hobsbawm (1990: 10-11) argues that examining a range of perspectives is crucial to understand national identity:

[National identities are] dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist...that view from below...[of] the ordinary persons who are the objects of [elites'] action and propaganda, is exceedingly difficult to discover.

In this thesis, I address this issue by examining a range of narratives concerning the case-study events, in an attempt to understand the views of 'ordinary persons' (Hobsbawm 1990: 10-11) as well as those of the more powerful groups who more directly shape the national discourse.

Commenting on the relationship between elites and the wider population, Nairn (2003) explains that elites seek to mobilise the populace by using popular and 'romantic' folk culture as their rallying points: 'The middle-class intelligentsia of nationalism had to invite the masses into history and the invitation card had to be written in a language they understood' (Nairn 2003 [1977]: 328). In other words, elites use vernacular culture to explain and

frame the nation and to encourage the wider population to join the nationalist project. Anderson (1991) also considers the role of individual agency in constructing national narratives, positing that while 'print capitalism' is disseminated from administrative centres, with messages usually determined by elite social groups, the role of individuals is also important in helping to shape national narratives.

Similarly, Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008: 537) argue that the nation 'is not simply the product of macro-structural forces; it is simultaneously the practical accomplishment of ordinary people engaging in routine activities'. Özkırımlı also challenges the assumption that elites are solely responsible for cultural construction. He references Billig's (1995) notion of 'banal nationalism' and its discussion of the significance of everyday material culture in normalising the nation through a set of 'ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced' that includes postage stamps, weather maps and flags outside public buildings such as schools and post offices (Billig 1995: 6). Billig argues that all these cultural artefacts serve to both reinforce the presence of the nation in the consciousness of individuals and as well as normalise it, making it easier for elites to mobilise people in pursuit of national activities, including war, if this becomes necessary.

Billig's (1995: 6) characterisation of national identity as self-normalising, based on 'a whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices...[a] collection of ideological habits (including habits of practice and belief) which reproduce established nations as nations' focuses on how national identity is understood and reproduced, almost invisibly, in the normal practice of everyday life. He describes national identity as a discourse that is 'produced, reproduced and contested in the taken-for-granted details of social interaction, the habits and routines of everyday life' (in Ozkirimil 2005: 191). In other words, national identity is not simply constructed by elites and imposed on a passive population. The people who experience it are able to add their own meanings and interpretations, thereby redefining national identity through daily use.

Edensor (2002:6) endorses this approach, arguing that 'tradition can be dynamic, contested and claimed by different groups at different moments in

time'. With this, he critiques the literature that stresses elites' role in the production of national identity, countering that popular conceptualisations of the nation are significant in reproducing it:

[National culture] is constantly in a process of becoming, of emerging out of the dynamism of popular culture and everyday life whereby people make and remake connections between the local and the national, between the national and the global, between the everyday and the extraordinary. (Edensor 2002: vii)

Cohen's (1996: 804-805) notion of 'personal nationalism' draws these points together, arguing that any study of national identity must 'recognize its personal nature' and take into account both the intentions of the producers of national symbolism and ritual, as well as how their audiences read these rituals. Thompson (2001: 20) similarly argues that the actions of individuals must be considered in studies of national identity, and that 'nations and national identity are used by people to position themselves in relation to others'.

Thompson's (2001) reference to the way people 'position themselves' in relation to others indicates the centrality of power relationships to the discourse of national identity, which is practiced by both elites and the wider population in an active and ongoing process. Through national ritual and popular culture, the nation is constantly re-imagined and re-defined, with multiple narratives interacting and influencing each other. Cohen's discussion of national identity neatly encapsulates this process:

National identity never seems to be so secure and so lacking in ambiguity and ambivalence that it can be left to look after itself. So we find it ritualized, mythified, symbolized, emblemized - evidence that we are continuously working on and with it. (Cohen 1996: 806)

This conceptualisation returns the discussion to the possibility of multiple narratives within the discourse of national identity. Rather than presenting national identity as internally consistent, Duara (cited in Ting 2008: 460) raises the possibility that it is 'the site where very different views of the nation contest and negotiate with each other'. Similarly, Hutchinson (2005: 5) proposes that conflict and 'the preservation of persisting differences and rival cultural repertoire' is central to the longevity of nations.

These definitions foreground the presence of tension between various national narratives and suggests that differential social power helps shape these narratives. If the range of narratives that Duara and Hutchinson refer to are important, then analysis of the discourse of national identity should explore both 'top-down' elite messages and the 'from-below' popular reactions to these messages. Furthermore, Hobsbawm's (1983) characterization of nationalism as an 'active process of creating meaning' also asks for analysis of the specific processes by which national identity is constructed and reproduced.

In the scholarship I have discussed so far, national identity is broadly defined as an organising social framework with particular meaningful cultural forms that are created and reproduced by both elites and the wider population in a dynamic, ongoing process. These forms are multiple, dynamic and contested, and individuals are able to exercise agency, including the ability to agree with, resist or simply ignore the dominant narratives. My research seeks to explore the scope of this composite definition by looking in detail at the process by which national identity is constructed and reproduced, as well as how these narratives are accepted, contested or resisted by national communities.

As outlined in Chapter One above, I will do this by examining the use of Trafalgar Square during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, organising each empirical chapter around three broad research questions. The first question asks *what national narratives are created* during the case study events. In a response to Anderson's (1991) notion of the 'imagined community', this question concerns the narratives through which the nation is imagined, and explores the possibility of multiple discourses and the interaction amongst them that Özkırımlı (2005), Edensor (2002), Smith (2008) and Hobsbawm (1983) suggest drives the creation of national identity. As I will discuss in detail in Chapter Three, discourse analysis will be my main methodological tool.

In a closely related question, I will also ask *how the nation is imagined*. In other words, if national identity is a discourse, what are the processes by

which this discourse is produced, and in particular, what role does the national past play in shaping it. Hobsbawm (1983), Smith (2008) and Anderson (1991) all identify the importance of history and its symbolism in shaping modern national identities. In a response to this scholarship, I will ask how any national narratives that have been created in Trafalgar Square use the national past, and how do they connect national history to the present and future. A historical methodological approach will support this research question (see Chapter Three).

Finally, much of the literature discussed so far also identifies a hierarchical power relationship implicit in the reproduction of national identity. This suggests that national narratives constructed by elites should be examined alongside popular reactions to them, including resistance or subversion. My final research question therefore asks who creates national narratives and what power relationships inform them or, in Anderson's (1991) terms, *who imagines the nation?*

Methodologically, my analysis will consider banal, popular or 'from-below' constructions of the nation as well as official 'top-down' versions. The government, media or other social elites may want the population to understand the nation in a particular way, but they cannot entirely control how these messages are received or interpreted. While elite conceptions of the nation are undoubtedly important, given this group's social power, a solely 'top-down' methodological approach to national identity overlooks the importance of popular culture, and how the nation is reproduced in everyday life.

In testing the characterisation of national identity as a discourse or set of narratives, my research contributes to a body of existing scholarship that examines the ways in which these narratives are created and by whom. In particular, place-based analyses of national discourse have yielded a rich body of literature concerning some of the processes by which discourse is defined and power is exercised. In the next section, I turn to material specific to the process of how national identity relates to place.

Geographies of national identity

In the section above, I sketched a conceptualisation of national identity as discursive, flexible, multi-faceted, deeply loaded with power relationships and shaped by actors from both 'top-down' and 'from-below' perspectives. A similar way of conceptualising space and place appears in cultural geography scholarship.

For example, Massey (2005: 59) argues that place has multiple, concurrent meanings that interact and shape each other. She characterises space as subject to a fluid and multi-strand discourse, calling for an 'unfinished' understanding of it:

Conceptualising space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open and thus a prerequisite, too, for the possibility of politics.

In this thesis, I test this claim as it applies to Trafalgar Square, exploring whether conceptualising the Square in this way can enrich our understanding of how national identity is constructed. By approaching Trafalgar Square as 'multiple' and 'unfinished', I will consider both its representational aspects, including the national symbolism in its built environment, and the ways that it is experienced and used by the people who visit it. This will contribute to the literature on national identity that I discussed above by drawing out how the nation is imagined in place by a range of groups who have shaped the built environment through, or responded to this environment in. their use of the Square.

This approach also responds to place theorists who argue that place plays a role in creating identity. For Cresswell (2004: 11), for example, place is central to identity and people need it to make sense of the world; it shows us 'what we decide to emphasize and what we decide to designate as unimportant'. Walmsley (1988: 64) also argues that place and society have a reciprocal relationship: 'whereas it is human intent and action which ascribe meaning and transform empty space into experienced place, so too can place act back on people with a result that its meaning can constrain their values and actions'. Massey (cited in Cresswell 2004: 155) also argues that space is

inherently social and that everything social is 'necessarily spatially constituted'.

Scholarship specific to the spatial aspects of the construction of national identity argues that space is subject to discursive processes in the same way that other aspects of national identity are. For example although they are commonly understood as fixed and known, Anderson (1996: 2-3) argues that national territorial borders are subject to an ongoing and divergent process of reproduction in the minds of those who use and imagine them:

Even borders, or frontiers, are negotiated discursively: meanings are given both to frontiers in general and to particular frontiers, and these meanings change from time to time...[w]hat frontiers represent is constantly reconstituted by those human beings who are regulated, influenced and limited by them. The layers of discourse - political, scholarly, popular - always overlap; divergent mental images of frontiers are an integral part of frontiers as process.

Azaryahu and Kook's (2002: 199) study of street names and Arab-Palestinian identity provides an example linking nation and space to power and the uses of history:

From the perspective of those in charge of moulding the symbolic infrastructure of society, the main merit of commemorative street names is that they introduce an authorised version of history into ordinary settings of everyday life...The authorities in charge decide what is an appropriate commemoration ...The matching of commemorations and streets produces a hierarchy of historical memory.

In this example, official history is enlisted to shape the way the nation is remembered. Azaryahu and Kook (2002: 199) contend that the form of national symbols reflects the concerns of political elites. In other words, elites' use of national symbols, as well as their effectiveness in marshalling symbols to reach their political goals, tells observers where national power is practiced. Contests over the use of symbols, by extension, can either erode or enhance elites' national power. Physical sites with national symbolic content can be elevated as important arenas of contestation over national identity. Kincaid (2006: 228) provides another example drawn from Dublin's built environment:

The location of a building, along with its style and the public debates that surround its construction, reflects the prejudices and ideologies of a culture. Any attempt to alter the built environment will also change the way the past and the future are perceived. Geography is history. The physical landscape bears the traces of the past, and all alterations to the built environment are a direct means of rethinking and determining which memories survive and which are thwarted or suppressed.

Kincaid's example points to the rich opportunities that the built environment provides to examine how national identity is constructed and reproduced. Additionally, his reference to the relationship between geography and history indicates how the spatial and experiential qualities of the built environment allow people to use and interact with the national past.

Similarly, my research explores the relationship between national identity and a specific built environment, asking whether and how Trafalgar Square has helped to construct, shape or reproduce British national identity. By conceptualising national identity as a fluid, multi-stranded discourse, by emphasising its popular and banal manifestations as well as its elite ones, and by focusing on the processes by which national identity is constructed, this thesis will build on the theoretical material from the sociology of national identity discussed above.

In drawing together two broad areas of scholarship, I propose to explore how cultural geography can augment sociological understandings of national identity. Next, I will consider the cultural geography literature as it relates to national identity in three distinct but overlapping categories that align loosely with the research questions I outlined above. First, I will discuss how cultural geographers have conceptualised the relationship between place and national histories, expanding on my research question concerning the national narratives that can be created in place. This hinges in part on the representations of history, such as statues and monuments, that are built into places such as Trafalgar Square. Second, I will examine aspects of the politics of place, including place's potential to engender political change or as a sphere in which the less powerful can express resistance to more dominant groups; this material underpins my research question regarding who imagines the nation. Finally, place as a category of use and embodied experience relates to my question on the means by which the nation is imagined, but will

also draw out the power relationships amongst different groups who use place to construct national narratives. In this final section, I will also discuss notions of practice and affect, asking how the embodied and sensory aspects of place might help to constantly construct its meanings, especially national ones.

Place and national history

The relationship between place, the past and the nation is a theoretical concern for authors such as Zukin (1995: 262) who claims that the study of public spaces is a valuable way to study nations, as 'urban public spaces are...crucibles of national identity'. Jones and Fowler (2007: 339) also argue for the utility of place in understanding the nation: 'In order to understand the complex and contested reproduction of nations, we...need to explore how active and productive places connect to the continually emerging territories, politics, and cultures of the nation'.

For others, an important aspect of place's impact on social identity rests specifically with its invocation of history. Cresswell (2004: 85-86), for example, links the past to the present with his concept of 'place-memory': 'the ability of place to make the past come to life in the present and thus contribute to the production and reproduction of social meaning'. Additionally, Massey (1995) contends that adopting alternative histories of place changes its present and future. In other words, the meaning of place changes with different versions of history.

This material is underpinned by the scholarship of Halbwachs and Nora (1989). For Halbwachs, the past is fluid and contingent. His 'collective memory' includes narratives that constitute national identity and is 'essentially a reconstruction of the past in light of the present' (Coser 1992: 34). Halbwachs identifies the importance of space in constituting the collective memory of groups, particularly in urban environments, for two main reasons. First, because of the embeddedness of spatial frameworks in our everyday memories of the relationships that take place in those environments. Second, because of the impact of more unusual events on collective memory:

Of course, extraordinary events are also fitted within this spatial framework, because they occasion in the group a more intense

awareness of the past and present...a truly major event always results in an alternation of the relationship of the group to place...from then on, neither the group nor the collective memory remains the same, but neither have the physical surroundings. (Halbwachs 1950: 2)

According to Olick (2003), Halbwachs emphasises a strong connection between the nation and collective memory. Furthermore, he highlights the discursive process of national remembering, the 'processual aspects of *remembering*, not the static aspects of *memory*' (Olick 2003: 6), reinforcing the notion of a discursive process of national identity formation that I touched on earlier in this chapter.

In addition to Halbwachs' contribution, theoretical work on the historically-contingent quality of place also draws heavily on Nora's (1989) influential notion of *lieux de mémoire*, sites of national memory where the past is explicitly evoked and represented. Nora (1989: 12) defined *lieux de mémoire* as cultural 'texts' that could include archives, rituals, ceremonies and other forms of public and collective memory, as well as sites in a spatial sense.

For this thesis, it is spatial *lieux de mémoire* that are of most interest, and many authors, including Halbwachs (1950) as discussed above, have focused on this aspect of collective memory. For example, Hoelscher and Alderman (2004: 350) described such sites as 'spaces explicitly designed to impart certain elements of the past - and, by definition, to forget others'. Nora grapples with this simultaneous remembering and forgetting by emphasising that *lieux de mémoire*, in foregrounding only some aspects of the past, represent a tension between official history, which he characterises as a 'representation of the past', and vernacular or popular memory, 'a perpetually acting phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present' (Nora 1989: 8). The contrast between official and popular memory speaks to the same 'top-down' and 'from-below' groups who help to shape national narratives, as claimed by Hobsbawm (1983), Anderson (1991), Smith (1998) and others as discussed above.

Wertsch (2002) addresses this material by referring to 'cultural tools', drawing on Anderson's (1991) discussion of maps, newspapers, the census and other national narrative-making techniques of modern states. He argues that these tools are necessary for 'imagined communities' to be created, and in order to

‘create a collective that can be clearly recognised’ (Wertsch 2002: 64). Mirroring the role of bureaucracies in Anderson’s (1991) ‘imagined communities’, Nora (1989: 12) similarly suggests that we create official versions of the past in place because the nation’s collective memory cannot keep up with changing times: ‘without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep [sites of memory] away. We buttress our identities upon such bastions, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them’. Additionally, Lowenthal (1985:72) discusses the ambivalent relationship between the nation and the past, recognizing that national narratives can both include and exclude.

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), Harvey (1989), and Berman (1988) link the tension between the past and the present to attempts by elites to protect their position from the social dislocation brought on by the forces of modernity. Berman characterises modernity as a combination of the ephemeral and the lasting, holding modern capitalism responsible for a ‘creative destruction’ in which history must be destroyed in order to create the future. This makes the modern city a place of dizzying change and constant redevelopment. Applied to the urban built environment, this resonates with Massey’s notion of ‘unfinished’ places and their political potential, and underscores the value of studies of place in understanding change and identity at the national level.

This body of scholarship draws together material that argues for the importance of the past in constructing the national present, and the social relationships implicit in national ‘collective memory’. It furthermore identifies the ‘sites of memory’ or ‘cultural tools’ that help cohere the national imagined community, as well as the centrality of urban space in the creation and consolidation of ‘collective memory’.

In terms of Trafalgar Square, my research will ask how history is mobilised by various groups to support their versions of the national narrative, and what power relationship are implicit in the different narratives that have emerged historically in my case studies. I will examine whether Trafalgar Square might be a site where the relationship between past and present is negotiated, and how this can help shape national identity. This is reflected in my research

question concerning what national narratives are constructed, reproduced or maintained in the Square.

Power and politics in place

In an extension of Hobsbawm's (1983) argument that both elites and the wider populace help shape national narratives, Kostof (1992: 124) identifies how this can occur in public place: 'The square is where we exercise our franchise, our sense of belonging...But these prerogatives impelled ruling agencies early on to dominate the square'. By highlighting the paradoxical role of place in both democratic processes and elites' control of the public, Kostof suggests that the public square can be understood historically as a nexus between the expression 'from-below' of political views by the public, and 'top-down' official attempts to control those expressions through the built environment, including spatial control over access and regulation of activities.

Implicit in this discussion is the notion that place is a vehicle for the expression of and resistance to power. Massey (1992: 81) argues that space is inseparable from power and symbolism, due to its implicit social meaning, and because it is 'conceptualised as created out of social relations, space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation'. She describes this as 'power-geometry' (1991: 24), which she describes as the differing ability of people to relate to and be mobile in place. Cresswell (2004: 12) makes the point more bluntly: 'Place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power'.

Woven into the relationship between power and place is the question of what is meant by the term 'public', especially as it relates to *lieux de mémoire*. As with Nora's expansive definition of what a 'site' of memory might include, Warner (2002: 50) similarly links the notion of a 'public' to a particular text: 'a public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself'. Warner's detailed explanation of what he means by public emphasises its discursive, contingent, reflexive and multivalent qualities, placing 'public address' as its core. He emphasizes that a public 'exists by virtue of being addressed' (Warner 2002: 50). Iveson (2007: 12) builds on this by addressing

the role of urban space in creating a 'public', offering this understanding: 'we ought to explore the particular materiality of different forms of space, asking about how this materiality is made and remade, and considering the consequences of this materiality for different forms of public address and for different publics'. For Iveson, then, the text around which a public can coalesce appears to include particular public spaces and their material environments. Staiger (2009: 312) also frames the notion of 'public' with a spatial element, arguing that public place is necessary for a flourishing public sphere of democratic practice to exist. In a cosmopolitan city like London, public sites are 'perceived as political spaces. Serving on the one hand to exercise and claim civic rights, public spaces are on the other regulated in terms of who may appear in, or intervene in the decision-making about, these sites'. Drawing together this material (Nora 1989, Warner 2002, Iveson 2007, Staiger 2009), I will explore if Trafalgar Square can be understood as a text around which a public can form, looking both at its history of use and the symbolism in its built environment.

Closely related to the question of who might use such sites and how they might use it is the question of power, particularly as expressed in the control of the use or symbolism of the built environment. Berman (1988) links social power to both versions of the past and contemporary political concerns in discussing official historical representation in the capital cities of then communist states. He argues that forms of identifiably 'vernacular' architecture spring from 'the desire of autocratic governments to mobilize traditionalist loyalties by creating a sense of continuity with the autocracies of the past' (Berman 1988: 100). Here, the urban landscape is designed to connect the present with regimes of the past, empowering current elites by connecting them to historically successful groups.

Hoelscher and Alderman (2004: 350) make a similar point: 'Governing elites...often make or preserve historically inflected urban landscapes as a way to bolster a particular political order'. This scholarship argues that place is steeped in power relationships, demanding a methodology that considers a range of perspectives. My research builds on this by asking how social and political power relationships historically have been expressed in the both the physical environment and the control and use of Trafalgar Square, and adopts

both elites' and popular perspectives in doing so. I will address this through my research question that asks who imagines the nation.

Other authors claim that spatial power relationships can be destabilising and contested. Forest *et al* (2004: 358) foreground the political tensions inherent in *lieux de mémoire*, such as Trafalgar Square, when social or political groups seek to promote their agendas to the public. They argue for the complexity of the relationships among groups who use place:

...there may not be consensus amongst state and local elite groups as to how and if these places should be remade, because 'official' agendas vary. Further, different social groups, functioning as distinct 'publics' and counter-publics, may interact with officials or choose other actions that influence the remaking of these places ... public memory is an activity or process rather than an object or outcome.

Said (2000: 185) agrees with Forest *et al* (2004) that collective memory is a process, 'not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified and endowed with political meaning'. This fluidity opens up the possibility for competing national narratives and identities, and the 'often-rigorous contestation of those identities' (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004: 348). Embedded in place, therefore, are power relationships reflected in part in the political renderings of place's meaning. The tension that Nora identifies between official history and vernacular memory emphasises the role of the elites in attempting to control what histories are told, and which groups are cast as oppositional. In this sense, place, including its representations of history, is implicitly political.

However, in the context of their emphasis on the political character of place, Forest *et al* (2004: 363) caution that the dichotomy between official 'history' and vernacular 'memory', or the elite and the popular, is too simplistic:

...public memory is a political process that both creates and responds to power relations and identities. At the national scale, elites, publics and public spheres are dynamic, multiple, and intersecting social and spatial categories that cut across and through local, urban, regional and international affiliations and power relations. Consequently, studies of public memory require more nuanced understandings of the complex relationships among these unstable categories and social groupings that are

continuously created and recreated through place-making, social memory, and their related multi-scaled and shifting configurations of identity and belonging.

My research responds to this suggestion by using Trafalgar Square to assess the claim that sites of public memory are subject to a range of constantly shifting power relationships, and that these sites can be used to promote various visions of national identity. Many authors have pursued this line of inquiry, and the links between place, history, nation and political power have been explored through research on public places in European cities including Rome (Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998, Doordan 1983), Nuremberg (Hagen and Ostergren 2006), Dublin (Kincaid 2006), Belgrade (Panteli 1997, Lavrence 2005), and several cities in Germany and Russia (Forest *et al* 2004). In these studies, urban *lieux de mémoire* have served a range of purposes. In particular, they are commonly found to have been used to consolidate official state power by linking contemporary regimes to narratives of historical power through public ritual and display, place naming, 'vernacular' styles of architecture, or control of access to space by different groups.

Accounts specific to Trafalgar Square (see Mace 1976, Cherry 2006, Hargreaves 2005, Hood 2005) have not focused on the ways in which the Square helps to construct national identity. This thesis will test the extent to which the Square's prominence in central London, and its long history as a site of national protest, celebration or mourning make it a valuable site to examine questions concerning national identity. Furthermore, this thesis seeks to add to existing research on the Square by focusing on the implications of its historical use for the creation of narratives of British national identity.

An example of the relationship between place, national power and historical narrative is Atkinson and Cosgrove's (1998) account of the Vittorio Emanuele II monument in Rome, which was built in 1911 to celebrate the unification of Italy in an attempt by the Italian state to formalise a fluid notion of Italian national identity. Building on Nora's (1989) concern with the political struggle over place, Atkinson and Cosgrove (1998: 30) focus on the links between place, time and the nation as spatialised at the Vittoriano. They argue that the monument tries to encapsulate a version of Italianness that is linked to ancient Rome, invoking past regimes to legitimise national ambitions of early

twentieth century governments. Exploiting the symbolism of the Vittoriano, Italian Fascists later placed it at the heart of their national and imperial ambitions, linking it by road to 'their' Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, Atkinson and Cosgrove (1998: 32) point to a Europe-wide context of national-imperial goals for the political ambitions expressed in Italian Fascist urban design:

The heady combination of national pride and imperial confidence that infused political and civic discourses in the closing decades of the nineteenth century ensured that, in many cases, the capital cities of European nations and empires were replanned and reconstructed to express a newly conceived national-imperial identity. The most prestigious and self-conscious elements of these recast cityscapes were large public monuments that sought to locate and embody national and imperial identities and meanings in key metropolitan locations.

Although built about 70 years earlier than the Vittoriano, Trafalgar Square can be characterised as a similar type of national-imperial place, linked explicitly to other nations and places through its built elements (see Massey 1995). This includes colonised nations, implicit in the Square in statues of imperial 'heroes', such as Havelock and Napier, and imperial competitors, such as France, whose defeat at the Battle of Trafalgar is represented by Nelson's Column. However, according to Massey (2005), Forest et al (2004) and Said (2000), discussed above, if a place such as Trafalgar Square references a particular historical narrative in the symbolism of its built environment, this symbolism is not necessarily fixed and unchanging.

This thesis will look closely at how Trafalgar Square's monuments have been understood by the Square's users and whether these users have shaped discourses of national identity within the Square. In particular, in Chapter Four I will explore how the Square's built elements have changed over its history, asking what the implications of this have been for the possibility of shifting and multiple social meanings within the Square, especially regarding national identity.

As discussed in the first half of this chapter, for Hutchinson (2005), tensions between competing groups are inherent to the survival of the nation, because the range of narratives offers a flexibility of national possibilities that help nations maintain themselves in a modern, changing environment. Staiger

(2009:311) relates this specifically to urban public place, suggesting that such sites can provide a safety valve by which competing narratives can meet, interact, and influence each other, providing a common point of usage that can bind them to the nation. This raises a question to which my thesis responds directly: what is the role of public place in mediating these contests? By allow members of the 'public' to gather and express themselves, does it provide the 'prerequisite for private people to gather as a public' (Staiger 2009: 11). Till (cited in Staiger 2009: 312) claims that place can play an active role in shaping the public expression of national identity: 'places are never merely backdrops for action or containers for the past. They are fluid mosaics and moments of memory, matter, metaphor, scene and experience that create and mediate social spaces and temporalities'. My thesis will test this proposition by exploring historical examples from Trafalgar Square of how place, nation and history are used and experienced by the 'public'.

Furthermore, the Square's history as a gathering place for less powerful groups, discussed in Chapter Four below in more detail, suggests that one of its important roles has been as a protest site. If this is the case, the use the Square could be part of larger political struggles for power within the British state. I will interrogate this through my research questions on what national narratives have been created in the Square and by whom, including how power relationships have constituted and been constituted by these narratives.

In this section, I have positioned this thesis within the scholarship that argues that meanings of place are shaped by power relations among a range of social groups. This suggests avoiding a straightforward elite/popular dichotomy. Furthermore, the authors above sketch a conceptualisation of place as having multiple co-existing meanings which exist variously in tension or cooperation, and that are fluid and change over time. In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I apply these principles to the history of the use of Trafalgar Square by asking three research questions: what national narratives have been created and reflected in the Square? What is the process by which these narratives have been constructed? Who has constructed them and to what end? In doing so, I test the proposition that place can engender multiple narratives and power relationships in a fluid, ongoing process of identity construction.

The experience of place: process, use and affect

In the final section of this chapter, I will explore the literature specific to the way that place is experienced and used and how this might affect its meanings. This body of work considers how social groups within a national 'public' meet and interact in place, and how places are more than just 'backdrops for action' (Staiger 2009:312). Overall, this scholarship claims that the use of place is germane to the ongoing construction of social and historical meaning.

For Massey (2005), the use or interpretation of place is the most important factor in determining its nature; more important, for example, than representations of history, such as statues or monuments. She argues that users of place link it to other times and places in a progressive process that constantly constructs meaning. Walmsley (1988: 51) also discusses the ways that people use urban places: 'the urban environment is not simply architectural space; rather places become endowed with significance through the actions that are permitted or enjoined within them'. Bataille (cited Rose 2002: 456) describes the Place de la Concorde in Paris using similar terms:

Its existence is founded on the fact that it is incorporated into people's diverse activities and projects: it is constituted not by something inherent to itself ... but through the meanings and practices of others.

According to this material, people change place through their use of it from minute to minute, user to user. It is never entirely fixed in how people approach or experience it and place always has a relative quality. Mace's (2005 [1976]) account of Trafalgar Square as the heart of the British nation and empire similarly stresses the contest over the use of the Square as central to its significance, in part because it has been an important place for making social and political arguments that reach a wide national audience.

Harvey (1997) extends this to define whole cities as processes. He argues that the process of how places are built is more important than form, stressing the dialogue between process and form: 'things, once constituted, have the habit of affecting the very processes which constituted them' (in LeGates and Stout 2003: 230). Much like the relationship between place and its users, the

dialectic between ‘thing’ and ‘process’ is at the heart of how a city is constructed. Harvey decouples the meaning of place from its physical form, an argument which positions narrative and ‘social-constructedness’ before built materiality. This foreshadows more recent work (see Thrift 2004) which stresses the importance of ‘practice’ within place over representation in constituting its meaning.

Rose (2002) picks up on the relationship between flexible, multiple users of place and its fixed built environment in his discussion of ‘culture’. This work hinges on the relationship between individual agency and cultural constraints, defined broadly. Rose (2002: 459) suggests that despite the emphasis on agency and flexibility within cultural systems, ‘some form of dominance must always be present for culture and/or cultural landscapes to exist...while struggle is always present in the landscape, it is ultimately the forces of limitation and control, rather than those of interpretation and resistance, that define what culture or the cultural landscape *is*’. Here, culture can be read as parallel to the physical environment of place: ‘on the one hand the landscape is a cultural symbol that can be diversely interpreted and on the other it is a stable image whose existence depends on its interpretation being contained’ (Rose 2002: 459). Similarly, in this thesis I explore how Trafalgar Square’s physical form has been determined by powerful authors, and how this ‘blueprint’ is challenged and reinterpreted in everyday practice.

Going back to the beginning section of this thesis, the characterisation of place as process also has implications for the relationship between place and history. It suggests that if place is a process, then national history, as spatially represented in place, does not have fixed and unchanging meanings. If official ‘history’ exists as an unchanging past represented in the built environment, then place is where this history collides with everyday uses and where people seek to graft living emotional meaning onto the past (see Nora 1989). I will explore the extent to which this process occurs through my case studies. My research addresses this relationship directly by exploring how the symbols of national history in the Square’s built environment have been understood by different users during different events in the Square’s history. Furthermore, I will ask how the use of the Square might have shaped spatial meanings for subsequent users.

If, as the authors discussed so far claim, use of place is important in determining its meanings, then this leads us to ask what types of use are important? Several different perspectives emerge from the literature, highlighting the significance of both spectacular and quotidian uses of place. Trafalgar Square has hosted a range of public events, from celebrations and festivals to rallies and violent protests, and has been the setting for the unusual, extraordinary and spectacular. In this sense, it can be understood as a stage on which groups invoke nation and history and reach a wider public with their messages: 'the idea of landscape as a stage and an emphasis on the role of performance recognise a greater degree of dynamism and interactions between people and place' (Hagen and Ostergren 2006: 157-158). This conceptualisation of place as a stage, dynamic and in-use, highlights the active process of the reproduction of meaning in place.

Hagen and Ostergren (2006) argue that public place conceptualised as a stage can help reveal the connection between the individual and the nation. They examine the Nazi rallies in Nuremberg rallies in the 1930s, carefully coordinated spectacles built on the city's historical symbolism. They argue that the success of these rallies was due in part to being situated in a landscape 'endowed with a history capable of evoking a particularly powerful sense of national pride and belonging' (2006: 158), in part because the city of Nuremberg had particular forms of medieval architecture that the Nazi regime had identified as expressing the German 'spirit' (2006: 167).

Hoelscher and Alderman (2004: 350) extend this idea of place as a 'stage' to less spectacular, although not quite banal, activities:

Through bodily repetition and the intensification of everyday acts that otherwise remain submerged in the mundane order of things, performances like rituals, festivals, pageants, public dramas and civic ceremonies serve as a chief way in which societies remembers ... Civic celebrations ... are always embedded in place and inevitably raise important questions about the struggle of various groups to define the centre of urban politics and urban life.

According to this body of work, place can be a stage for national political activities that range from the spectacular to the everyday, or the official to the vernacular. Dwyer (2004) accounts for the effectiveness of place-as-stage

by calling on Foote's idea of 'symbolic accretion', claiming that as existing memorials are used over time, the weight of accumulated commemorations deepens their meanings. According to Dwyer (2004: 420), 'activists use symbolic accretion as a strategy for burnishing the reputation of their cause via proximity, both actual and metaphorical, within an established memorial landscape'. He characterises monumental places as 'political resources, laden with authorial intentions, textual strategies and readers' interpretations' (Dwyer 2004: 422). However, as discussed above, he claims that place is not a static text, but is reproduced and remade through use, as 'monuments are shaped by and in turn influence the society that produces them' (Dwyer 2004: 422). This scholarship characterises place as in-use and reproduced in a process that binds contemporary users to historical narrative, and my work explores the extent to which this might help explain the role of Trafalgar Square in contributing to narratives of national identity.

Furthermore, because monuments can be interpreted in many different, and sometimes conflicting, ways, they can be the focus of tension over meaning as different social groups compete for power. According to Dwyer (2004: 425), 'monuments are targeted by activists for symbolic accretion because these sites are at once authoritative and yet susceptible to rewriting and appropriation... [they are the] product of and conduit for ongoing political debate'. In this sense, public place is political, mutable, and active, with meanings which change with use over time. This claim suggests that powerful groups use place to consolidate the nation with the past and future through representations, expressing a politically-invested version of identity along the way. Because of this, place can become the stage for political conflict over historical or national meanings as oppositional groups contest politically-dominant interpretations. My research will test the degree to which users of the Square have understood it as a stage for their activities, and whether it has been a site of contest for different social or political groups. All three of my main research questions concerning national narratives, power relationships and the role of historical symbolism, reflect this research concern.

Other scholars are less interested in the spectacular or extraordinary. For example, Cresswell (in Merriman *et al* 2008) argues that the 'everyday' is

often ignored in geographical inquiry into the landscape. DeLyser (2004) makes a similar call for focusing on the 'small' in doing geographical research, arguing that her uses of tourists' postcards in research on the cultural landscape of southern California allow us to understand the perspective of the active spectator who interprets and remakes place, connecting them not only to the place, but to their experience of it (DeLyser 2004: 486). Research methods such as DeLyser's focus on the everyday experience of visitors to a place, and emphasise how important this level of analysis is in understanding the meanings of place. In Trafalgar Square, both spectacular and everyday uses 'take place', given the Square's role as a site for quotidian activities such as eating, watching or resting. My work engages with this literature by considering how national identity has been constructed in a range of everyday uses throughout its history (see Chapter Four).

Rose's work (in Merriman *et al* 2008) on the uses of place also raises the notion of 'spectating' as a practice which can occur in many different types of places, and which, despite its apparent passivity, is one way that people can exercise agency. For Rose (in Merriman *et al* 2008: 201), spectating reproduces meaning, and is 'a complex, ambivalent relation to visual objects [such as the built environment of urban place], in which the psychic and the discursive quite often, if not usually, displace questions of composition or veracity... there's never such a thing as a gaze in some kind of vacuum'. In other words, spectating or looking is strongly informed by the perspective of the spectator. As with other uses, place is made by how it is regarded or looked at, and the way place is constituted by the spectator is informed by their particular social perspective - gay, black, female, parental or middle-class, for example.

Rose's research on the landscape of a shopping mall in Milton Keynes, north of London, and the type of 'looking' done there also activates the spectator, making him or her an active participant in place through his or her gaze. Three types of looking, 'landscape, shopping and mothering', approach the same landscape very differently, and she claims that 'exploring those different modes of being a spectator is just as important as thinking more carefully about landscape' (in Merriman *et al* 2008: 202). Rose's shopping mall research reinforces the role that the everyday, or the banal, plays in the story of any place. Similarly, this thesis will adopt multiple perspectives on Trafalgar

Square to test whether and how its meanings are contingent on the viewpoint of the user.

Thrift is also interested in the everyday aspects of place and its use, emphasising 'practices, mundane everyday practices, that shape the conduct of human being towards others and themselves in particular sites' (in Nash 2000: 655). The main concern of this approach is how everyday practices help us to engage in a changing environment, and Thrift argues that research should move 'towards understanding the micro-geographies of habitual practices' (in Nash 2000: 656). He underscores the importance of 'ordinary people' rather than texts constructed by 'those who are paid to comment [on the world]' (in Nash 2000: 655), and wants to commemorate ordinary lives, taking into account how their practices engage with the world of representation. As with de Certeau's (1984) description of 'tactics' used by people walking in the city to interpret and move through the urban landscape, Thrift's notion of 'non-representational' practice is made up of small political acts that resist, adhere to, or seek to redefine urban places through everyday use. In Chapter Three, I engage with these ideas by exploring some of the small, everyday uses of Trafalgar Square that contrast with the more spectacular subjects of later chapters.

By asking about the range of narratives that are created in place, I remain open to the possibility that different users and uses might produce different narratives in the same place. In addition to the use of the Square, my research will also examine the symbolic representation of the nation in its built environment. By looking at both representation and use, I hope to build up a nuanced picture of the role of the Square in constructing national identity that draws on the range of literature discussed in this chapter.

As discussed above, one theme in the literature on place is the importance of power relationships that are exercised and negotiated through the use of place. This is variously expressed as an uneasy tension between symbolic representation and use of place, between elite control of place and public reactions to that control, even between official and vernacular approaches to history. This tension is implicit in the notions of cultural 'blueprints' and symbolic accretion. This discursive, dialectical power relationship is helps

shape the meaning of place, just as it shapes the meanings of other aspects of culture. As an aspect of material culture, then, the built environment is as meaningful as other forms of culture for the individual, and its use helps to regulate and define society:

Meaning is also produced whenever we express ourselves in, make use of, consume or appropriate cultural things; that is, when we incorporate them in different ways into the everyday rituals and practices of daily life and in this way give them value or significance...meaning also regulate and organize our conduct and practices - they help to set the rules, norms and conventions by which social life is governed and ordered. (Hall 1997: 3-4)

One aspect, however, which has not yet been the subject of wide research is how the construction of place's meaning, as constituted by both the historical symbolism in its built environment and how it is used, might help to shape national identities. This literature review has suggested how this thesis might contribute to approaches to national identity. As I have described in this section, in this thesis, I will draw material from both 'official' and 'vernacular' sources to examine what particular implications the use of place might have for the construction of national identity as opposed to other national cultural or social expressions such as print capitalism (Anderson 1991), political economy (Hobsbawm 1990), comparative global development (Gellner 1983), or everyday items including postage stamps, flags and weather maps (Billig 1995). In doing so, I will use theory and methodology drawn from cultural geography to contribute to scholarship on how national identity is constructed, reproduced and maintained.

Before concluding this chapter, I will discuss one additional aspect of the use place, that of affect, or the embodied, experiential aspects of place. This scholarship stresses the visceral interaction between the individual and his or her environment, taking into account the power structures and politics of these interactions. According to Lorimer (2008: 552):

... affects are: properties, competencies, modalities, energies, attunements, arrangements and intensities of differing texture, temporality, velocity and spatiality that act on bodies, are produced through bodies and transmitted by bodies. Our sensual worlds catalyze complexly and dissipate unexpectedly. Social fabrics and practices are not locked in to rational or predictable logics, and are often visceral and instinctive.

The city provides one environment in which national identity can be shaped by these actions. The notion of affect is embedded in early writing on cities that stressed individuals' experience of modern urban settings. Berman (1988), for example, described nineteenth century St. Petersburg and its dizzying mix of people, carriages and shopfronts on newly developed grand boulevards. Simmel (1908: 33) highlighted the 'blasé' attitude that city people adopt in an emotional response to the overwhelming diversity of city stimuli that they cannot ignore: 'Primarily the large city can be seen as a setting for contrasting physical and social stimuli so numerous and diverse that any single individual exposed to them cannot possibly respond to them all; nor can one escape a subliminal awareness of their presence'. He also described the reserve of urban people and their repressed hostility in dealing with others, a theme that resonates with Goffman's (in Karp, Stone and Yoels: 92-93) notion of 'civil inattention', the state of being aware of the presence of others while clearly signaling an unwillingness to engage or connect: 'As in many other public contexts, persons are forced to recognize each other's presence while trying to minimize the possibility of having a 'focused' interaction'. Finally, Raban (1974) described the loneliness that results from the disengagement unique to urban environments. This discussion of the urban environment draws together physical stimuli and emotional responses, and is linked closely to theory on affect which takes a similar, embodied approach to place.

This literature brings together the 'top-down' manipulation of public space and the 'from-below' reactions to it. Similarly to other processes of national identity discussed above, it is underpinned by power relationships involving different groups. The concept of affect offers a way of framing public place as an experience, as sites which are used by different people in different ways. My work responds to this methodologically by linking it to national identity literature and by considering 'from-below' perspectives on place that emphasizes how they are used and what physical responses they engender in their users.

Thrift (2004: 64) argues for the importance of affect in understanding the relationship between politics and identity: 'affect has always been a key element of politics and the subject of numerous powerful political technologies which have knotted thinking, technique and affect together in various potent combinations'. This relates to this thesis through his claim that

urban places are consciously manipulated by authorities 'to produce political response...[including through] design, lighting, event management logistics, music, performance' (Thrift 2004: 67-68). As Thrift conceptualises it, the politics of affect is a 'top-down' process concerning how the built environment is shaped or manipulated to produce a reaction in people who experience it. He argues that the twentieth century has seen an increase in this type of design as powerful groups have learned how to elicit a particular affective response through the manipulation of the urban environment. The result is that:

... affective response can be designed into spaces, often out of what seems like very little at all ... It is a form of landscape engineering that is gradually pulling itself into existence, producing new forms of power as it goes. (Thrift 2004: 68)

In terms of national identity, an approach that considers affect can highlight the relationship between national symbolism in the built environment and the people who use and experience that symbolism in places such as Trafalgar Square. My research responds to notions of affect by asking what tactics officials used to control or manipulate Trafalgar Square in aid of particular agendas of identity, and how people in and around the Square responded to these tactics. This is implicit in my research question asking what power relationships inform the national narratives that are constructed, reproduced or maintained in place.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explored the literature from the sociology and cultural geography of national identity that form the basis of my research questions and methodological approach. I have identified some of the overlapping concepts within these related disciplines that I wish to explore through my case studies of Trafalgar Square.

Based on the literature on national identity, I identified scholarship that frames the nation as an ongoing and dynamic discourse that helps 'make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us' (Özkırıklı 2005: 30). This characterisation of national identity, which has also been used to describe

place, is a central research concern of this thesis. By examining Trafalgar Square's symbolic representations and use over its 170 year history, I probe the notion that the Square can be understood as a discursive process that has helped to construct, reproduce and maintain versions of British national identity. I seek to capture the interactions amongst the Square's users, the nation, history and the Square's built environment to contribute to the literature on how national identity is created, and in particular whether examinations of place can offer new insights into this process.

In order to do this, I have asked how the literature treats the question of how the nation is imagined (Anderson 1991). Above, I have discussed theories that identify some of the 'top-down' processes by which national identity can be shaped. However, I have also identified the role of the wider populace in shaping national narratives, drawing out the emphasis in this scholarship on the power relationships and social hierarchies that inform the construction of national identity. Furthermore, by asking who imagines the nation, I have highlighted the possibility of multiple narratives that can exist in tension or cooperation with each other in place. With this, I have foreshadowed my methodology and its consideration of both 'top-down and 'from-below' perspectives on national identity. Based on this literature, I have suggested that my potential contribution to scholarship on national identity is one addressing the means by which national identity is constructed, reproduced or maintained.

In order to do this, I have turned to cultural geography, focusing on material that concerns national identity and place. This body of work is extensive and varied, but I have pulled together concepts that are most relevant to my research questions. I have drawn heavily on Massey's (2005:59) characterisation of place as open, relational and 'unfinished' to highlight the potential of place to contribute to an ongoing discourse of national identity that Özkırımlı (2005) and sociologists have identified. I also turned to scholarship considering the processes of this discourse as reflected in the relationship between the nation and place, and positioned my research as similarly considering the relationship between British national identity and Trafalgar Square.

Furthermore, I discussed the characterisations of place as sites of national history or memory (Nora 1989, Hoelscher and Alderman 2004, Cresswell 2004, Massey 1995), linking this to the sociological literature that emphasises the manipulation of history by elites in shaping national narratives. Engaging with this literature, I will ask whether Trafalgar Square can be understood as a site where the past and present interact, and what effect this interaction might have on British national identity. I also explored the literature on the power relationships that are implicit in the built environment and the use of place, relating this to my research question that asks who imagines the nation. I discussed the possibility that a place such as Trafalgar Square might be a site where different national groups interact and possibly dispute the nature of Britishness (Hutchinson 2005), and proposed to test this possibility in my case studies.

I also discussed the discursive qualities of place, especially the possibility that it is continually reproduced through its use and the implications this might have for its meanings. Additionally, I focused on the role of affect in shaping the experience of place for its users, and how this embodied, sensory aspect might contribute to constructions of identity. I linked this to my previous discussion of the possibility of 'top-down' control of place, and 'from-below' reactions to this control, asking whether this would be significant in Trafalgar Square.

In this final section, I considered the parallels between sociological theory that frames national identity as a discourse, and geography theory that characterises place in the same way. Based on this theoretical overlap, I discussed different ways that users of place can contribute to this discourse, and how both use of Trafalgar Square and the national representation within it will be the subject of my empirical research.

Through my case studies of Trafalgar Square, I seek to test the extent to which these characterisations are useful in understanding how British national identity is constructed, reproduced and maintained. As discussed above, I have framed my analysis of the relevant literature around three broad questions: what national narratives are imagined in place? What is the means by which these narratives are created? Who does the imagining? I have refined these

broad areas into three research questions to guide my examination of Trafalgar Square and its role in shaping British national identity:

- What national narratives have been created and reflected in Trafalgar Square and by whom?
- What power relationships inform these national narratives? and
- What is the role of these narratives in connecting the national past, present and future?

The first question relates to what national narratives are imagined in the Square, and who images them. Methodologically, this points to a focus on the use of place, testing whether Trafalgar Square can be understood as a discursive process in which meanings are constantly reproduced through the way the place is used, observed or commented upon. This analysis will include unchanging aspects of social meaning, in a response to Cresswell's (2008) challenge to account for 'obdurancy' of meaning in place. Cresswell (in Merriman *et al* 2008: 195) claims that while the users of place might reproduce it through their practices, they might not choose new narratives: 'People do practise, and in their practising, they more-often-than-not reproduce what went before, rather than something new'. Through three historical case studies in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I will engage with this idea, testing whether place's meaning is constantly reproduced, and if so, the scope and nature of any change or continuity in meaning.

The second question explores the notion that place is implicitly political (Massey 2005) and steeped in power relations, with its meanings contested by different groups or individuals. Again responding to the literature on who imagines the nation (Hobsbawm 1983 and 1990, Anderson 1991, Edensor 2002, Nairn 2003 [1976]), I ask which groups have used Trafalgar Square and how their uses may have reflected a consolidation of, or challenge to, the structures of social power. Similarly, if place is invested with meaning through its use, then tension over use highlights the importance of examining events in place from a range of perspectives. In other words, researchers must adopt both 'top-down' and 'from-below' approaches. Finally, as Billig (1996), Thrift (2004), Edensor (2002) and others suggest, if the meanings of place are inflected by banal and everyday uses as well as spectacular ones, then

researchers must consider a wide range of moments and events. These are methodological concerns as much as theoretical ones, and in response I examine a range of uses and users in my three case studies, as I explain further in Chapter Three.

Finally, I will test the links between place and the national past and future, by reflecting on the nature of the historical narrative represented in the Square: how do people respond to it? How does it shape the activities which take place there? These questions build on the previous two because they point to the range of narratives constructed within the Square, as well as the power relationships implicit in them. Furthermore, they draw out both the symbolic representations with Trafalgar Square and the Square's use throughout its history. With these questions, I continue to test the success with which elites can manipulate space (Thrift 2004) and the degree to which the accretion of symbolic significance (Dwyer 2004) may have shaped the meanings of the Square for users over time.

Through this thesis, I seek to explore the potential of place to offer rich and varied empirical material that can help illuminate how national identity is constructed, reproduced and maintained. In doing so, my contribution will build on many other researchers' discussion of the potential of place in this regard, drawing together scholarship from the both the sociology and cultural geography of national identity, and applying it to a fresh case study in Trafalgar Square.

chapter three

Methodology: Researching national narratives in place

In the previous chapters, I introduced my research questions, discussed the literature underpinning them, and identified the contribution to existing scholarship that this thesis seeks to make. In this chapter, I will explain how I address my research questions in the methodology I applied to the empirical chapters of this thesis. I will begin by discussing my choice of case studies before detailing the methods and sources I used to address my research questions. I will then discuss some of the limitations and boundaries that this methodology entailed, including some of the surprises and false starts that shaped the project as I went. First, however, a reminder of my main research questions:

- What national narratives have been created and reflected in Trafalgar Square and by whom?
- What power relationships inform these national narratives? and
- What is the role of these narratives in connecting the national past, present and future?

Embedded in these questions, and important for my methodology, is the hypothesis that national narratives in Trafalgar Square are constructed through both its representations, in other words, the built forms within and around the space, and its uses. As I discussed in the second half of Chapter Two, there is a rich body of scholarship within cultural geography (see Massey 2005, Walmsley 1988, Rose 2002, Cresswell 2004, Hagen and Ostergren 2006) claiming that the use of space, and its effect on both the users and the observers of those uses (for example, readers of media reports about events in the Square), is an important part of how the meanings of place are created. Additionally, as I explained in Chapter Two, sociologists of national identity (see Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm 1983 and Anderson 1991) recognise the role of state power structures such as centralised bureaucracies in controlling the way the nation is represented, which helps shape how national identity is produced amongst the wider population.

This thesis therefore seeks to test the degree to which both national representations within Trafalgar Square and the Square's uses might help to construct, reproduce or maintain versions of British national identity. In each case study I will consider whether the history of the way the Square has been used in the past is important in constructing its meanings for subsequent users (Dwyer 2004, Lowenthal 1985). By adopting a comparative historical approach, I will explore the degree to which place can help connect people to national narratives, as well as how those narratives may have changed over time. Furthermore, I will probe the importance of the Square's use in shaping national narratives by considering both spectacular and everyday types of use, a response to calls for consideration of the importance of everyday uses of place (Cresswell 2008, DyLyser 2004, Edensor 2002).

Finally, if places such as Trafalgar Square are sites of tension between official representations of the past and the interpretations of its users (see Nora 1989), what are the implications for the way in which national identity is constructed in the Square? In other words, what do the varying perspectives of 'top-down' shapers of the Square's environment, including designers and the authorities that police or regulate it, and the 'from-below' users offer to my analysis (Hobsbawm 1983 and 1990, Anderson 1991, Lawrence 2005)? As I discuss in more detail below, by including both official and popular

perspectives, my case studies will address the range of national narratives created within place and the power relationships among them.

Case studies

London has history as a city stretching over 2,000 years, and has long been one of the largest and most influential cities in the world, both as a national and imperial capital. It is still by far the largest city in the UK, the location of national political and economic power, an important centre for international finance, and a magnet for visitors and migrants. In addition, London's demographic makeup differs considerably from the rest of Britain. For example, it is much more ethnically diverse, with a large proportion of its population born overseas. With around seven million inhabitants, London is much larger than the next biggest city in the UK, Birmingham, which contains around one million inhabitants.

London's nationally dominant economic and political profile exists alongside its non-representative demographic qualities. For example, 'London' may be shorthand for 'Britain' for many outsiders, but it is unique among British cities in its diversity and size. The city is simultaneously representative of the state in its power structures, but nationally unique in its diversity and scale. This apparent paradox is one reason why I looked to a London site to test the literature discussed in Chapter Two. What implications does the implicit tension between the symbolically national and the uniquely local in London have for the way national identity is constructed within the city?

I chose Trafalgar Square, a well-known site at the heart of London, as my main case study because of its history, prominence and familiarity to many people, both in Britain and elsewhere. While rich in historical imperial imagery, it also currently displays a rotating program of contemporary sculpture that addresses national themes on the Fourth Plinth, an empty pedestal in the northwest corner (see Chapter Eight). The Square has been used for a wide range of purposes over its history, potentially allowing for multiple simultaneous meanings, including national ones. Furthermore, its 2003 refurbishment and subsequent official use as a site for specifically

'multicultural' events, led by previous London mayor Ken Livingstone, has marked out a new set of meanings for twenty-first century users.

Trafalgar Square has been an important site in London's architectural landscape from its development in the mid-nineteenth century. Its ongoing history of use, its central location and its popularity with both visitors and Londoners mark it out as special. Other places in London, such as Hyde Park, also resonate in the national popular imagination as sites of popular protest or celebration, but the Square's use for a wide range of popular, official, informal, highly-controlled and spontaneous activities made it an attractive subject of inquiry given my research questions. In particular, its range of uses and users suggest the possibility that different national narratives relate to it, and that these could include both official and popular versions. Furthermore, aspects of the representations of national history in its built environment have not changed, while the demographics of the surrounding city have changed enormously since the Square's construction. These elements relate directly to my research questions about the possibility of different national narratives, and the potential role of power relations and history in shaping these.

I chose three sets of events to explore some ways that the Square has been used, focusing on how national narratives have been constructed during very different uses of its built environment (although there have been some changes to the Square's layout in its history, as I discuss in Chapter Four). The three case studies span about 100 years, and I chose them to allow for a historical comparison that would help address my research question about the role of place in connecting the national past, present and future. For each case study, I asked whether activities in the Square had shaped and been shaped by the historical national narrative, and would people using the Square consider previous uses (see Dwyer 2004). Furthermore, how would users understand the history of the Square as related to their own activities? Using these questions as a guide, the temporal spread of case studies allowed me to address the relationship between history and national identity from the perspective of the use of place.

1906 - 1913: *spatial strategies of the Suffragettes*

The first case study (Chapter 5), concerns the use of the Square for political protest from 1906 - 1913 by the Women's Social and Political Union's (WSPU), or the Suffragettes. The WSPU's use of the Square was perceived by the authorities at the time as transgressive, although the strategies used to control access to the Square, by the police, for example, appear to try and accommodate some counter-hegemonic political expression. This was perceived at the time to be an acceptable, even traditional, use of the Square (see Figure 2).

The Suffragettes included the use of the Square in a larger set of spatial tactics that they employed to press their claim for national political inclusion. I wanted to explore how they used the Square, given their goal of recasting British national identity to include women as more fully-participating citizens. In terms of my research questions, I asked how their demands for a new national narrative played out in the Square, what power relationships shaped these narratives, and whether they linked their claims to the national past or future.



Figure 2: Emmeline Pankhurst in Trafalgar Square. Photo: BBC News Online

In particular, I asked whether the WSPU referenced previous uses of Trafalgar Square, particularly as a site of protest, to contextualise their own use, thereby connecting themselves to political struggles of the past. Did they link their struggles to other site-specific protests, accessing a historical narrative to bolster their political objectives? Furthermore, what power relationships, especially with the British government of the day, informed their use of the Square, and how did these shape the discourse of national identity and create national meaning? These questions flowed directly from my main research questions.

This case study also draws in the larger social themes of formal political representation, particularly the role of women as participating political members, as well as social questions concerning the role of women in Edwardian London's public life. I asked why WSPU leaders choose Trafalgar

Square as a demonstration site, especially given the importance of publicity for their campaign. As both a spatial strategy and in their invocation of the history of the Square, did the Suffragettes' use of Trafalgar Square engage with the discourse of national identity? How did it treat mainstream notions of political participation, femininity and the spatial logic of the city, especially as they related to the nation? This material forms the basis of Chapter Five.

1945: Victory in Europe Day



Figure 3: Climbing the lions in Trafalgar Square, VE Day 1945.
Photo: *Daily Mail*.

I chose the second case study, 8 May 1945, the end of the Second World War and Britain's Victory in Europe Day (Chapter Six), because of its explicitly national meaning, as well as the importance of World War Two in the British imagination. Wartime London, especially the Blitz of 1940-41, and attendant living conditions remain the subject of national fascination. The celebration of a military victory (or at least national survival) over a European foe highlights Britain's ambivalent relationship with Europe and its status as an 'island nation'. The history of World War Two hints at the changing role of the British Empire, evidenced by the large number of Imperial and Dominion troops who fought in the war. The combination of larger social themes of relationships with other nations, the beginning of the end of Empire, the prominence of official messages from a

government experienced and capable in the use of wartime propaganda, and the rich archival record from the time all made this an attractive choice of case study. It appeared to provide a wealth of material relating to my research questions about the national narrative, the role of users in creating this narrative, the historical connections that can occur through place, and the power relations implicit in the use of and representations within place.

VE Day is popularly portrayed as an intense, giddy celebration, when the British let loose after long years of war, loss and deprivation (Rose 2003). Images of the event from London show people dancing in the streets, climbing streetlamps and embracing strangers in a celebration of victory (Figure 3).

Trafalgar Square was at the heart of a landscape of celebration in central London that extended throughout the West End and included Buckingham Palace to the southwest of the Square and Whitehall south of the Houses of Parliament.

To some extent, however, popular impressions of the event may have been shaped by the newspaper reporting which focused on the loudest and merriest celebrants. Many people, one assumes, must have felt profound sadness over the personal losses they had endured. Away from the mainstream media reporting, what other narratives existed about the war, national identity and social and political power? Did any of these play out in Trafalgar Square, and if so, how? Was the use of the Square typified by the image in Figure 2, or were there other uses that may have shaped other narratives? These were some of the questions I used to explore this case study.

Given the wealth of archival material and the wartime changes to Britain as a nation and Empire, I asked whether events in the Square on VE Day engage with narratives of victory or survival of World War Two. Was there much reference to Empire as an important part of British identity? Based on Thrift's (2004) notion of affect and official manipulation of public place, I also asked how officials used the Square's built environment during the post-war celebrations to reproduce national narratives, and how the public responded to these efforts. Did officials use the Square, as Thrift (2004: 68) claims, to 'produce new forms of power'? If so, how did the population respond to this?

2005: Olympic host city bid and London bombings vigil

The final case study (Chapter Seven), examines the 2005 Olympic host city bid win and the vigil held a week later for the victims of the 7 July 2005 London bombings. These events were closely linked in time, as the bombings occurred during rush hour the morning after London won its bid to host the 2012 Olympics. A week after the bombings, on 14 July, a two-minute silence was observed across the country



Figure 4: Vigil participants in Trafalgar Square, 14 July 2005.
Photo: Kim Gilmour

and an event in the Square commemorated the victims under the slogan 'London United'.

In 2005, as for much of its history, London was indisputably a world city, with a highly diverse and globally-connected population (Massey 2007). As London's diversity has grown, however, so have its demographic differences from the rest of the nation, making it less representative of the rest of Britain. In both events in 2005, London's multiculturalism was a focus: during the host city bid, it was a deciding factor for IOC judges, and after the bombings, it was discussed at length in the media, especially in terms of British identity. This case study allowed me to explore the larger themes of multiculturalism in London and the UK, including how the diverse metropolitan population uses the Square and reacts to its nineteenth century imperial symbolism. I will also discuss some of these themes in Chapter Four in the discussion of Diwali and Eid celebrations in 2008.

This case study also explores narratives on the historical conflict with the French (London's Olympic bid just beat Paris' in the last round of IOC voting), as well as questions of internal national conflict in the form of domestic terrorism. In light of the ongoing public debate about multiculturalism and its relationship with national identity - a debate that runs the gamut from celebratory to foreboding - the treatment of multiculturalism in the two events was especially relevant.

In terms of my research questions, this case study allowed me to explore how a diverse, multiracial and multicultural population might use the Square to add new narratives of national identity, as well as the power relations that inform these redefinitions. As with the example of the Taj Mahal at the base of Nelson's Column, I used this case study to explore how the Square might connect modern Britain to the past in new ways, and how unprecedented uses might recalibrate power relationships, especially between officials and users of the Square.

More specifically, I asked whether and how London's diversity was a prominent part of the events in the Square, and how this was linked to larger narratives about national identity. Were other aspects of London highlighted, such as its

political or financial dominance of the country, and how was this received by the Square's users. Finally, what aspects of the past were evoked in 2005, and how was the Square's built environment used to reinforce or undermine these narratives? These sub-questions helped guide my examination of the record of the 2005 events.

Approaches and sources

Having chosen these three case studies, I began by exploring the relationship between the use of Trafalgar Square and the national representations in its built environment. I hoped this would help reveal some of the national narratives at play in the Square, and represent the first steps in a discourse analysis of both the Square's representation and use. While I refined my approach throughout my research, these questions were a preliminary attempt to operationalise my larger research questions:

Representation and the built environment: How is national identity represented in Trafalgar Square's layout, design and statuary and other built features? Has this changed over time? What aspects of national identity are represented in Trafalgar Square? What is the relationship between past representations of national identity in Trafalgar Square and current ones?

Use and experience of place: How is national identity represented and reproduced in different uses of Trafalgar Square? Has this changed over time? What is the relationship between different uses? How do power relationships inform these uses?

Through these questions, I explored the range of narratives evident in the Square. They activate my research questions, and are consistent with the approach to national identity as a discourse, as discussed in Chapter Two. Given its concern with power, social organisation, representation and identity (Lees 2004: 104), discourse analysis emerged as my main methodology. According to Hall (1997: 6), power and history are central aspects of discourse analysis, which:

examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about and studied ... It points us towards greater historical specificity - the way representational practices operate in concrete historical situations, in actual practice.

As I discussed in Chapter One, the centrality of power and its role in shaping discourse derives from Foucault. Furthermore, the emphasis on power relates directly to my questions about national narratives, and how they relate to each other. According to Hall, discourse analysis is linked to power, as well as a strong understanding of the social contexts of the past. To some degree, I treated the built environment as a text, reading the 'language' of its representative symbolism for definitions of identity and nation. This allowed me to explore how these definitions linked to the past and future, reflecting my research questions.

However, in doing this analysis of the Square's built environment, it became apparent that national narratives have also been generated within and through the *use* of the Square. This has included both everyday and spectacular uses over history, as experienced and retold by a range of official, popular, and media voices. This discovery helped shape my methodology: historical comparison, sensitivity to both the everyday and the spectacular, and the importance of listening to a range of voices.

Change and continuity over time

When I began my research, Trafalgar Square's role as a national *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989) appeared to be based largely on the historical events represented in its built elements, and the national narrative that they symbolise. These forms tell a version of official national history in which military and imperial figures are memorialised and celebrated, even though this version of history is contested or perhaps even irrelevant for some national social groups. The cultural relevance of these representations appeared to have been greater closer to the time when they were created. General Havelock, for example, whose statue stands in the southeast corner of the Square, was perceived by the public as an example of the muscular

Christian ideal in the mid-nineteenth century, and would presumably have been recognised by Londoners in the Square in the 1860s (see Figure 5).

However, he is much less well known today. This was demonstrated in 2000, when London's Mayor Ken Livingston suggested that statues in the Square, including that of Havelock, were no longer relevant for the majority of Londoners. If the statues in the Square were unknown Victorian relics by the twenty-first century, could this tell us anything about other narratives that may have replaced nineteenth-century ones? How does more general social change alter the meaning of the Square, especially in terms of how the nation is imagined within it? These questions flowed from my larger research questions concerning the national narratives that have been created in the Square and how might they connect the present to the national past and future.

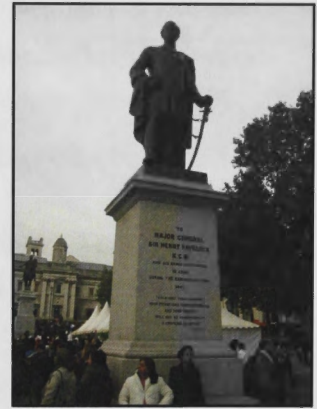


Figure 5: General Sir Henry Havelock , Trafalgar Square 2008. Photo: author's own.

An historical study also allowed me to examine whether and how the Square's meanings may have been altered and augmented, as well as how they may have *not* changed. This responded to Cresswell's (2008) challenge to account for obduracy or continuity in place-based narratives. Furthermore, I built on Burke's (1980) notion that historical comparison provides greater analytical reliability, thus strengthening results. For example, would the national narratives of one period appear in a subsequent one?

The choice of my case studies was informed by several considerations. First, for the reasons described above, I decided to draw from the Square's 170-year history, rather than choosing a range of more recent events. In the past ten years, for example, Trafalgar Square has been used for a wide range of purposes, including sporting celebrations and political protests, as well as undergoing major changes to its layout and relationship to surrounding structures. However, I sought out a wider temporal spread because I wanted to identify longer trends of change or continuity in British national identity which might have manifested in the use of the Square. I also wanted to test

whether the longevity of the Square was central to how national identity was created or reflected within it.

The everyday and the spectacular

Although the three case studies primarily focus on spectacular and out-of-the-ordinary events, I also consider the 'geographies of the mundane and everyday' (Riley and Harvey 2007: 348), in response to cultural geographers who claim that this type of analysis is underutilised (see Cresswell 2008, Delyser 2004, Rose 2008). Based on the literature, I hypothesised that the everyday uses of the Square are important because this is how most users experience the place. It is a site in which everyday activities take place, such as eating lunch or catching the bus; it is also a tourist site, which people observe and experience in particular ways. In exploring the everyday activities that take place in the Square, I focused on the range of uses that might help shape its meanings, including those directly addressing my research question asking what national narratives are created there. The quotidian life of the Square, which forms the basis of Chapter Four, helps to contextualise the more spectacular events which are the subjects of chapters Five, Six and Seven.

However, when I began my research, it was not clear to me how the everyday inflected the spectacular uses, and I considered two possible approaches. First, I tried treating the uses of the Square thematically, rather than chronologically, in order to capture as wide a range of uses as possible. Possible themes included celebration, protest, tourism, advertising and marketing and transport. While this was fruitful in terms of variety and range, there did not appear to be enough material in every category to allow for an adequate historical analysis.

My second approach, which I ultimately adopted, was to seek out specific events which would capture some of these categories of use while allowing for comparison over time. Given my focus on national identity, I sought out events in the Square which appeared to have national importance. Furthermore, I chose events that tapped into larger contemporaneous themes within British society, as well as spanning most of the Square's history. While

this did not capture the same range of references to the Square as a thematic approach, especially those in popular culture such as music lyrics, advertising images or fictional literature, it allowed me to consider a narrower range of uses in greater depth, addressing my research questions about representation and the range of national narratives more effectively.

I also chose to focus the bulk of my research on spectacular events because these seemed more likely to generate national commentary, and to draw on national themes. Spectacular events establish the timeline of the history of place and have a larger presence in official and unofficial records, making a more explicit contribution to larger questions of national identity. Spectacular events provide more opportunity for the 'symbolic accretion' that Dwyer (2004) and Foote argue can occur in national places. Furthermore, during these events the Square provides a stage for national activities that connect the individual and the nation (see Hagen and Ostergren 2006, Driver and Gilbert 1998). Finally, the historical record for spectacular events is richer than for more banal uses, and the practicality of readily available archival and secondary source material for the case studies influenced my choices.

A range of voices

In examining the experience of using the Square in the case studies, I focused on three main categories of primary material: first-hand accounts by users, including biographies, diaries and mass-observation material; official records about events, such as police or parliamentary sources; and media reports from newspapers, illustrated magazines and film or broadcast footage. In using this range of sources, I wanted to draw together the first-hand experience of place with how it was represented to a larger, national public, as well as official interpretations of its use. By using this variety of material, I could draw out the tensions and points of agreement among different groups with an interest in how the space was used.

This range of sources helped me identify the range of narratives at play in the Square, and the roles performed by different users. It also allowed me to directly address my research question about power relationships within the discourse of national identity, based on the literature discussed in Chapter Two (see Bhabha 1990, Guibernau 2007, Calhoun 1997, Özkırımlı 2005, Edensor

2002, Cohen 1996, Hobsbawm 1983, Billig 1995). How, for example, did accounts of events by participants, police, government or the media agree or differ? Were there power relationships implicit in the differences and similarities, and how did these play out in the Square itself? These queries flowed directly from my research question asking how national narratives within Trafalgar Square were informed by power relationships among the Square's various users.

Another advantage of this approach was the freedom it gave me to look at a variety of perspectives, although, as Hobsbawm (1990: 11) predicted, the 'view from below ... by the ordinary persons who are the objects of [official] action and propaganda, [was] exceedingly difficult to discover'. In particular, first-hand accounts were sometimes difficult to find outside secondary sources, such as biographies. I managed this by considering additional sources such as photographs, newsreels and other images, but the embodied experience of the events, and how they made people think or feel about the nation could only be inferred from these sources. I found that few first-hand accounts referred directly to abstract notions of nation or national identity. This lack of explicit mention of the nation, however, was valuable in what it revealed about the range of perspectives on national identity, including how it has not been explicitly recorded as important during apparently 'national' events.

Each of the case studies threw up its own set of challenges in finding sources and getting as wide a range of material as possible. My time in archives in the UK was limited, and I developed and refined my research questions alongside ongoing archival research. My methodology emerged as I went, shaped by the dead ends and successes along the way.

However, each case study yielded rich and sometimes surprising material, especially as I refined my research goals. An example was the Suffragette case study, when I looked for WSPU papers that might record the organisers' rationale for using the Square, or records of the events themselves. However, much of this material was not available, as the WSPU's records were confiscated by the police during their activities and possibly destroyed. In the absence of this archival material, I eventually discovered that one of the richest sources for the WSPU's use of Trafalgar Square lay in police records of

rallies and speeches, particularly in 1913. The police took meticulous notes of speeches and these were invaluable for their references to previous uses of the Square that peppered the speeches of Suffragettes and their supporters. I also used biographies and autobiographies of WSPU leaders to identify the role Trafalgar Square played in their larger spatial campaign in central London. A discourse analysis of contemporaneous media reports and Hansard revealed how the WSPU activities were interpreted by a larger national audience, and many of these records contained reference to the built environment and its role in the WSPU's political agitation (see Chapter Five).

Furthermore, I used secondary sources to contextualise the historical period in which the events took place, and for subsequent analysis of the events themselves. This material identified the larger social issues that the WSPU addressed. For example, in addition to voting rights, female suffrage organisations also challenged Edwardian notions of 'proper' femininity and women's public roles against the background of a modernising urban environment and widening employment opportunities for women.

The 1945 case study rested on an even wider range of sources, as the popular and official experience of Victory in Europe Day is very well documented. For first-hand accounts of the event itself, I used the rich and detailed material in the Mass-Observation Archive at the University of Sussex, a unique national record which was used during the Second World War by the government to help gauge public morale. This Archive drew on the observations of a large team of 'correspondents' who recorded what they saw and heard on 7 and 8 May 1945 around the country. Other first-hand material was readily available in secondary sources, such as Cabinet and Home Office documents that provided insights into official planning for the celebrations. Finally, media reports in the London and national papers demonstrated how the event was reported to a larger public, and many of these newspaper reports contained references to Trafalgar Square or photographs of people in the Square. As with the Suffragette case study, my choice of both official and popular sources responded to the literature that argued for the power of a range of voices in constructing narratives of national identity (Hobsbawm 1983 and 1990, Anderson 1991, Gellner 1983, Lawrence 2005, Nairn 2003, Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). Furthermore, this range of sources helped reveal the power

relationships implicit in the creation of national narratives in the Square, one of my central research questions.

Finally, the 2005 case was also based on a wide range of sources, particularly given the ready availability of online news reporting and opinion pieces, first-hand accounts and official responses. Online news outlets provided a rich source of material, and many of these contained first-hand accounts. Official material from the London Mayor's office and Hansard was also valuable. First-hand accounts of the event were not as readily available, but media reporting captured the sense of 'being there' much more than for the earlier case studies. In all three case studies, but particularly for this one, media descriptions of the embodied experience of being in the Square helped me engage with the role that affect (Thrift 2004, Lorimer 2008) might have played in shaping national narratives.

Another first-hand perspective on the Square was my own, developed through participant observation. I went there in August 2008 during the Trafalgar Square Festival to see how the space was used, and also attended large Eid and Diwali celebrations in October 2008. This material appears in Chapter Four, and provided a unique source by which to explore the recent production of national narratives in the Square. This method allowed me to consider my own embodied response alongside an analysis of the relationship between the Square's historical representations and its contemporary use. At other times, I stopped in the Square, always during the day, to observe how people used the space in a 'banal' sense when there was *not* a special event occurring. Like many others, I approached the Square as a tourist or casual visitor, sometimes visiting alone, and at other times with my partner and children.

By approaching the Square in this way, I wanted to both observe how others used it, as well as generate my own first-hand experience. Going there with small children, for example, and taking their photograph on the lions beneath Nelson's Column, linked me to the experience of other parents and tourists doing the same thing, and allowed me to consider the possibilities for use of the Square to link individuals to past and future users.

However, my experience of the Square was also unique, given my interest in it as a subject of study. While participant observation of both quotidian and

spectacular aspects of the Square's use helped round out my sense of the range of narratives occurring there, it also helped narrate my own story. Based on what I found there, I explored my own relationship with British national identity as the mother and partner of British people, as a citizen of a commonwealth country, and as a temporary resident of London, just like many other migrants. This helped me consider the role of the Square in shaping individual relationships with 'Britain', as I discuss further in Chapter Four.

Finally, walking the area around the Square, including down Whitehall to the Houses of Parliament and along the Mall to Buckingham Palace, was an important part of my research. Many of the historical accounts I read refer specifically to walking or using public transport to get to the Square, and as I got to know the extended neighbourhood, these accounts were enlivened by my own experiences of the places they described. It helped me understand the distances described in some first-hand accounts, demonstrating, in de Certeau's (1984: 99) terms, how near and how far other places were from the Square: 'a walker constitutes, in relation to his position, both a near and a far, a *here* and a *there*'. For example, it revealed the logic of official concern over transgressive or unauthorised uses of the Square, as an unruly crowd gathered in the Square could easily walk to the centres of power in nearby Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament, as well as the middle and upper class shopping and residential areas of the nearby West End. I describe some instances of this in Chapter Four.

So far, I have discussed my case studies and some of the themes I considered when choosing them and in approaching them. I have also discussed the sources and approaches I used, and the links between these and the literature in Chapter Two. I have explained that the main advantage of these case studies is that they represent a wide temporal spread, taking material from around two-thirds of the Square's history. Different types of use and a range of voices appear in a rich documentary record for all of them, making research feasible and providing a wealth of material for robust comparative analysis. Furthermore, they alerted me to larger social themes such as gender, race and urban/regional difference which, while not the primary focus of this thesis, are important aspects of the history of the Square and the context in which the case study events occurred. Overall, I have identified how I will use the

case studies to explore conceptualisations and processes of national-identity creation that I discussed in Chapter Two.

Boundaries, limitations and surprises

Before I conclude this chapter, I will discuss the boundaries of my chosen methodology, including some of the limitations and surprises that I encountered in my research. In brief, these boundaries were: the choice of spectacular over everyday uses, the limits of source material, the parameters of working in national archives, and my focus on the Square and on 'national' narratives.

As discussed in Chapter Two, authors such as Billig (1996), Edensor (2002), Cresswell (2008) and DeLyser (2004) have called for research that considers the everyday uses of place in constructing and reproducing national identity. Recognising this, Chapter Four takes a quotidian approach to the Square, exploring a range of everyday uses. However, the larger part of my research focuses on spectacular uses mainly because of the larger implicit audience, and the impact this might have on the wider national community. While both types of use can shape identity, everyday uses are most prominent for those participating in them, whereas spectacular events such as protests, celebrations and commemorations are more likely to be well-publicised, have a national audience, and therefore affect a larger national group.

Furthermore, the three case studies were all supported by a wealth of archival material. Given that I wanted to take in a large time span, the availability of material from the early and mid-twentieth century was an important consideration. The Suffragette campaign and the end of the World War Two are very well documented, and material for the 2005 case study was readily available from online media sources. The choice of spectacular events meant there was material available that was more likely to comment on any national significance of the events.

An example of how the availability of sources shaped this project comes from the 1945 case study. I originally planned this chapter to focus on the 1937 coronation of George VI, when Trafalgar Square was a central gathering place

for spectators to watch the royal procession. Several photographs of the event, notably by French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson (see Hargreaves 2005: 48-49), suggested a rich historical record. However, the first-hand accounts of this event, and in particular those concerning the experience of being in the Square, were sparse and brief, and I concluded that they did not offer enough material for analysis. VE Day, on the other hand, was very well documented, and there was a wide range of material that dealt with Trafalgar Square, central London, and the construction of national identity through reference to the built environment. Although this material is easily accessible and has been used by many researchers before me, by using it specifically for a study of how the use of the Square shaped national identity, I have adopted a fresh interpretive position that contributes to existing literature on place's role in shaping national identity.

Overall, the bulk of my research was done in archives, examining newspapers, first-hand accounts and official documents, and the reliance on archival sources shaped my research findings. In her exploration of the methodology of researching in a photography archive, Rose (2000: 556) discusses how her own perspective shapes how she saw her material, drawing attention to the interpretive lens that researchers bring to their work. In their examination of archival material, she argues, researchers have 'their own ways of seeing and the specificity of these needs to be problematised'. As with the discussion above of participant observation, my own interpretive lens deserves to be made explicit, and in doing so, I will reiterate my debt to existing scholarship.

First, my approach to archival material assumed the importance of the 'national', as well as defined it in particular ways. For example, as discussed in Chapter Two, my theoretical approach to national identity in this thesis was informed by the literature describing it as an open-ended discourse subject to challenge, contradiction and revision that can accommodate a wide range of people and many different, co-existing meanings (Hutchinson 2005, Smith 2008, Özkırmı 2005). In seeking out the specifically national, or trying to understand why it does *not* appear, I have assumed that certain subjects are national ones. I have not questioned the presence or salience of a national narrative in the use and representations in the Square, risking a 'self-normalising' national discourse (Özkırmı 2005). In terms of my methodology, I have highlighted the national, rather than focusing on what other types of

identities Trafalgar Square might help construct. For example, based on the literature in Chapter Two, I framed the WSPU's activities in the Square primarily as a struggle for formal participation in the nation, foregrounding this aspect of identity before considerations of gender or class which others have done beforehand.

I have also not looked beyond British sources. The use of the square by Allied servicemen and women during the Second World War, or by international tourists since its construction, for example, does not feature in my analysis. Again, this is a question of focus, as I have concentrated on how events in the Square have constructed 'Britishness' for British people and residents, by looking at how it was represented in the British media, official documents and diaries, biographies and other first-hand sources. While this material was certainly available to a wider, non-British audience, especially in 2005, the reactions of this audience are not my main research concern.

Furthermore, in prioritising sources that seemed most likely to speak to the condition of British national identity, I depended on what others had recognised, primarily through their inclusion in the National Archive, as nationally significant. At a basic level, the importance of particular documents, as determined by the National Archives collection policy, is apparent from the ease of access that the Archive provides. Cabinet Office documents, for example, are readily available online and can be downloaded in full remotely. From my desk in Canberra, I was able to print War Cabinet documents from 1945 that are held in a building in Kew, outside London. Other valuable source material, however, such as police records of the speeches made at labour and suffrage rallies in Trafalgar Square in 1913, were only available at the archive.

The availability of documentary material that pertains to my research questions about national identity also raises the issue of how decisions are made about what is national. As Burton (1997: 238) claims, 'clearly the politics of who or what is the subject of "national" history begs the question of how such a subject becomes nationalised'. Why, for example, are police records regarding a local demonstration in London part of the national record? Furthermore, what other events have *not* entered the public record, have

been lost or were deemed unimportant by archivists? Robertson (2004: 453) argues that 'archives do not neutrally store documents, but rather in capturing them, archives transform objects into knowledge'. According to the National Archives website, its role is to:

... help government departments manage their information more effectively and promote the re-use of public sector information. This work helps inform today's decisions and ensures that they become tomorrow's permanent record. (National Archives 2010)

This collection policy is necessarily focused on the national and the bureaucratic, but its richness, availability and national focus made it appropriate to my research questions. In particular, it contained valuable official sources that helped me understand some of the power relationships implicit in the Square. For example, the police allowed some activities, such as dancing in the fountains on VE Day, that were not allowed on other occasions. By aligning this information with first-hand accounts and media reports, I was able to build up a detailed picture of what happened at each event, including the parallel narratives created by different users.

The archive, however, can provide the opportunity to use official knowledge for new purposes. For example, when searching police records for their views on Suffragette demonstrations, I discovered apparently verbatim records of speeches given in Trafalgar Square in 1913. I chose the records because I wanted to see how the police had interpreted these events, as I knew they had been to previous rallies and had responsibility for approving and controlling crowds. However, I did not expect to find a detailed record of what the speakers said, having underestimated their value for the police. I assume this lay primarily in their evidentiary value, as I knew from preliminary background reading that there was a history of Suffragette leaders being prosecuted for the use of inflammatory language in public speeches.

I found it tempting in archives to be pulled into the logic of what was readily available or what the archive thought was important, a process that Rose (2000: 561) exhorts researchers to resist. However, by treating place as a starting point, as the main pivot around which my historical, social and political explorations revolved, I was able to weave together official archival 'knowledge' with other first-hand or media sources. Using a wide range of

sources meant that I was able to develop a composite and nuanced picture of the use of Trafalgar Square that was not dominated by official sources.

Conclusions

In Chapters One and Two, I explained my research questions, and discussed their value and how they respond and contribute to the relevant literature. In this chapter, I have described my research methodology, linking it to the research questions that are based on the literature in Chapter Two. I have outlined the details of the case studies, explained why I chose them, what sources I used to research them, and discussed some of the issues I encountered as I went: the value of examining change and continuity over time, the role of both the everyday and the spectacular, and the richness available from a range of voices. I have also presented some of the limits of my methodology.

In the next chapter, I introduce Trafalgar Square, describing its built environment, the symbolic meaning of its monuments and some of the everyday uses of the Square which I do not discuss in my case studies. Chapter Four's discussion of the quotidian uses of the Square contextualises the more detailed case studies in subsequent Chapters Five, Six and Seven, which focus on more spectacular and extraordinary events.

chapter four

Introducing Trafalgar Square

Trafalgar Square simultaneously attracts a steady flow of tourists, is a site for special events, and is a place for Londoners to meet, pause or pass through on their way to other places. Its national representations are both fixed and fluid: solid in the Craigleith sandstone and bronze of Nelson's Column, but flexible in the use of these elements as backdrops for dance performances, children's play or protest rallies. For a previous Director of the National Gallery, Charles Smith, the Square's multiple roles are inherent to the space, if slightly regrettable: 'It is perhaps too often spoiled in appearance by temporary festivals and the ephemeral rubbish they generate, but the combination of history, grandeur and public protest is part of the psyche of the Square' (in Hood 2005: 7). The nineteenth century West End socialite and the unemployed family sleeping rough, the imperial general and the Indian immigrants' daughter, Olympic athletes celebrating their success and the everyday gymnastics of small children climbing the lions all have had a home in the Square.

The range of different uses of the Square to some degree represents its place in a larger web of spatial networks or paths within central London, Britain, and the wider empire. For example, many visitors to the Square pause there

on an excursion to the National Gallery. As evidenced by Charles Smith's comments above, the Gallery and the Square are closely linked by age, proximity and imperial symbolism. As I will discuss in more detail below, the Square can be conceptualised as the heart of a landscape of imperial power (Driver and Gilbert 1998) that connects central London to places around the world.

It is also central to long-standing nodes of social, commercial and physical transit and exchange. Just opposite Trafalgar Square, in the entrance to Whitehall on Charing Cross, a few dozen metres from Nelson's Column, is a bronze equestrian statue of Charles I that has stood there since 1676 (Hood 2005: 13-14). Set into its base is a plaque that marks the point from which all distances in London are measured, indicating the place's role as a national spatial milestone that marks the geographical centre of London, and by extension the centre of Britain and of the former Empire.

In a practical demonstration of the role as a 'Hub of the Empire' (White 2007: 101), Charing Cross was the site of the Golden Cross Hotel, a major terminus for coaches from across the United Kingdom. This linked the site spatially to areas outside the metropole as the 'Golden Cross and the inns nearby were filled with newcomers and visitors just arrived or just about to depart' (White 2007: 101). Furthermore, the site provided a popular meeting place for new Londoners recently arrived from the provinces to meet others from their areas. Even before it was built, the area that became Trafalgar Square was an important node in webs that linked different parts of the country and Empire.

Additionally, according to Mace (2005 [1976]: 23) the area around Trafalgar Square has long been a site where subjects gathered to voice their opinions and authorities worried about the activities of the mob, a 'site of a continuing sparring match between the state and the people'. It was a site of public congregation and the expression of political views before the existence of Trafalgar Square, in large part because of its proximity to the Palace of Westminster. Some of these were orderly protests, while others ended in violent confrontation between participants and police (see Mace 2005 [1976]).

In addition to these activities, the Square has also been used for less dramatic purposes. Everyday, people use it to rest or play, as a tourist destination or transit point, as well as for advertising, community celebrations or meeting friends. Edensor (2002: 48) links the ongoing multiple uses of the square to the expression or experience of national identity:

Certain spaces of assembly inevitably associated with national identity, such as ... Trafalgar Square in London ... are venues for seething motion, a multiplicity of activities, identities and sights. In contrast to the rather purified, single-purpose spaces of state power, they are more inclusive realms which allow for the play of cultural diversity. They provide an unfixed space in which tourists and inhabitants mingle, people picnic and protest, gaze and perform music or magic, sell goods and services, and simply 'hang out'.

Edensor's characterisation of the Square is a practical expression of the notion of a multi-stranded discourse of national identity that I discussed in Chapter Two (see Özkırmılı 2005, Edensor 2002, Smith 2008). His description of the Square as an inclusive space of multiplicity reflects the aim of this chapter: to discuss some of the uses of Trafalgar Square throughout its history, and whether these help construct multiple, co-existing national narratives framed by common symbols. I ask whether and how these narratives reflect a national culture that is 'not fixed but negotiated, the subject of dialogue and creativity, influenced by the contexts in which it is produced and used' (Edensor 2002: 17). In this sense, this chapter explores the notion of national identity as a discourse in order to address the research questions I introduced and discussed in Chapters One to Three: what national narratives are created and reflected in Trafalgar Square and by whom? What power relationships inform these national narratives? And what is the role of place in connecting the national past, present and future?

In addition, this chapter helps contextualise the historical case studies in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. I will illustrate how the creators of the Square built a space invested with symbols of power. The choice of Nelson as a subject of commemoration, for example, or the inclusion of fountains in the final design, reveal how the Square's designers understood the role of the Square as a 'national' place, as well as the image of the nation they wanted to project to future generations. Furthermore, the way they expressed these priorities spatially shaped the way the Square could be used. As many of the

early decisions of the builders and funders are still apparent in the Square's built environment, the story of its construction shaped the experiences of it that I consider in my case studies.

As I discussed in Chapter Three, based on the existing literature on national identity and place, I have hypothesised that both the physical representations present in the Trafalgar Square and the range of uses of the space have been important in shaping national narratives. This chapter mirrors the dual concerns with representation and use that is central to my methodological approach by considering both these elements in detail. I begin this chapter by introducing the Square with an explanation of its main built elements and the history of their construction. As discussed in Chapter Two, many scholars have recognised the role of national symbolism in shaping narratives of national identity (see Anderson 1991, Smith 1991, Hobsbawm 1983, Billig 1995). Here, I examine the creation of the Square's 'top-down' symbolism, exploring the motivations and goals of its creators.

In the second half of chapter, I turn to some of the uses of the Square since its construction, in response to the notion that the use and history of place shapes its meaning (Cresswell 2004, Massey 1995 and 2005). The discussion of the use of the Square in this chapter also lays the foundation for the more in-depth research in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

'Let it be called Trafalgar Square': history and representations of nation

The creation of Trafalgar Square had its roots in early nineteenth century changes to central London that included the development of large areas of the West End, with new streets and vistas opening up the crowded, busy city. Proposed and developed by planner and architect John Nash, these plans included the regulation of spatial access of the 'lower' classes to more wealthy areas of West London. In 1812, when Nash first proposed his design changes to the streets and buildings around Charing Cross, the Trafalgar Square site was at a crossroads of London classes: to the south and west were government buildings and upper class homes, while to the north lived 'some of the city's poorest and most destitute people' (Mace 2005 [1976]: 31). In one

report to government around the time of the proposal, Nash clearly indicated the social intentions of his spatial design: ‘...the line of separation between the inhabitants of the first classes of society, and those of the inferior classes is Swallow Street...’ (cited in Mace 2005 [1976]: 33). This aspect of the site’s location meant that control of access by the less well-off was a consideration to authorities, and demonstrates that from its beginning the site itself was literally contested ground.

Throughout the late 1820s, the Office of Woods, Forests, Land Revenues, Works and Public Buildings (WFLRWPB) gradually acquired the properties making up the site, and in 1830, William IV approved the name Trafalgar Square. The National Gallery was constructed and opened to the public in 1837 and by April 1840, architect Charles Barry had been commissioned to construct the Square, with plans mirroring previous ones drawn up by the architect of the National Gallery, William Wilkins (Mace 2005 [1976]: chapter 1).

The proximity of both extreme poverty and wealth to the site continued to vex the Square’s designers and funders. From its earliest stages, it appears that control and use of the Square, especially by protestors of the lower classes, was a consideration and a concern for planners. In an 1841 letter to the Treasury, the First Commissioner of WFLRWPB, who had administrative responsibility for the Square, alluded to official concern about the potential for the Square to be used for popular protest, referring to ‘evils of a generally objectionable character [that] may be anticipated from leaving so large a space in this particular quarter of the metropolis’ (quoted in Mace 2005 [1976]: 87). Given London’s role as a centre for a range of radical movements in the 1830s, including the growing Chartist movement (White 2007: 364-365), the possibility of the use of the space by protestors was well-founded. Charles Barry, the Square’s designer, agreed, and fountains were included in the design of the Square to both improve the amenity of the Square and decrease the amount of open space in which a crowd could gather (Hood 2005:49).

This example shows how the Square’s basic layout reflected attempts by designers to shape who could use the space and for what purposes, and also points to more general official concerns about the London ‘crowd’ as an entity

that needed to be controlled or guarded against in the interest of public order. According to White (2007: 354), the 'excitable' London crowd had a long history of protest, violence and 'disorder for disorder's sake'. This was largely driven by poverty and, particularly before the Reform Act of 1832, a lack of other outlets of political expression. In addition, London's vast size meant that enormous numbers of people could be mustered in protest, celebration or for a spectacle such as the 1851 Great Exhibition (Porter 1994: 207). For example, in July 1839, during a rally calling for electoral reform, a crowd approximated at 200,000 forced open the gates of Hyde Park, which the police had closed to prevent the gathering. White (2007: 372) argues that the crowd was understood as powerful and volatile and that reform leaders feared its unpredictability and potential for violence as much as officials did.

This understanding of the 'crowd', and its association with crime, disorder and the unemployed or working classes, formed part of the social context in which the Square was built. As I will discuss, the regulation of the space by controlling its potential for use by crowds was important to designers, and demonstrates the larger power relationships between officials and the range of people they anticipated would use the Square.

Other built elements similarly demonstrate the power relationships implicit in the Square. When it was being designed, London had no major memorial to mark Admiral Nelson's victory in the Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805. After news of the battle and Nelson's death reached London, fundraising began for 'a Public Monument to the Memory of the Ever to be lamented Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson' (Mace 2005 [1976]: 58). However, it was not until 1838, around the time when the National Gallery was completed and plans for the Square were being commissioned, that the Nelson Memorial Committee formed to raise money and commission a monument, and won the approval of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to use Trafalgar Square for the new memorial (Mace 2005 [1976]: 59).

By January 1839, William Railton had won the right to design the Nelson monument in a contentious competition that included letters of complaint from disappointed competitors. The magazine *Art Union* objected to Railton's design of Nelson's attire, claiming that the costume would 'hand down

specimens of the bad taste of a nation... [marble] should exhibit the attributes of the mind, not the decoration of the body' (Mace 2005 [1976]: 64).

Eventually, however, the Committee finalised its decision and responsibility for the different sculptural elements - the statue and column, the reliefs at the base of the column depicting Nelson's major achievements, and the lions surrounding the monument - were all assigned to different artists.

The construction of the Square, however, did not run smoothly, and in July 1840 (Mace 2005 [1976]: 69) Parliament set up a Select Committee to investigate the entire project, on the basis of concerns over rising costs and the possibility that the government might have to pay for any funding shortfall (Hood 2005: 50). The Committee appeared to be looking for reasons to stop the project, as demonstrated by their views on the potential for Nelson's Column to 'block up' the valuable open space of the Square:

... it is undesirable that the Nelson Column should be placed in the situation which is at present selected. If it is desirable in a great city to suggest the idea of space, and having obtained space, not to block it up again; if the general architectural effect of Trafalgar Square or of the buildings around it, is to be considered ... the situation at present selected for Nelson Column is most unfortunate. (in Mace 2005 [1976]: 71)

However, by 3 November 1843, despite delays and challenges, Nelson's statue was in position on the column. The *London Illustrated News* covered its labourious ascent and placement in detail, alluding to the symbolic value of the monument: 'may the great memorial...be as a pharos to the public spirit in all-coming time' (quoted in Mace 2005 [1976]: 93).



Figure 6: Trafalgar Square under construction, 1843. Photo in Mace 2005 [1976].

Although the Nelson Memorial Committee disbanded in 1844, it took until July 1858 for the Office of Woods, Forests and Land Revenues, which was now responsible for the Square, to ask Sir Edwin Landseer to sculpt and cast the four lions at the base of the column that were the final element of Railton's design. Landseer was a painter who had never sculpted before (Hood 2005: 63), and although it took ten years to complete the commission, the lions were quietly installed in 1867, the last element of Trafalgar Square to be completed (see Figure 7).

The whole process had taken almost thirty years, and was accompanied by conflict over the choice of designs and artists, cost overruns and poor workmanship. Mace (2005 [1976]: 109) estimates that by 1870, at least £50,000 had been spent on the monument, compared with the £20,000 - £30,000 that the original 1838-39 competition had specified. According to Hood (2005: 64), 'Nelson would have been astonished at the controversy, inefficiency, fraud and incompetence that had delayed the monument and [increased] the costs'.



Figure 7: One of Landseer's lions.
Photo: author's own.

This brief history of the Square's design and construction shows how it was subject to competing concerns, with the final outcome a product of many different power relationships and negotiations. For example, the construction of the Square was perceived as slow, inefficient and open to corruption; the lions were slow to arrive; the fountains were redesigned and were used as rubbish bins by the public; the column

itself was said to ruin the view of the National Gallery; and not all the statues and busts were intended for the site, and discord accompanied some of their installations.

In this sense, many different narratives have shaped the Square's physical form. First, the Square was conceptualised as a 'national' place from its beginnings, demonstrated by its dedication to Admiral Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar. With the choice of name and central monument, a martial and

masculine national narrative was built into the space. This was overlaid with the realities of the social, class and political tensions of the early nineteenth century, which saw the inclusion of fountains to aid in crowd control. Furthermore, cost overruns, controversial selection processes for the Nelson Monument's design, and poor quality and delays in some elements were banal but important in shaping the Square's finished form.

In terms of my research question about the Square's role in linking the national past, present and future, these aspects of the Square's history also demonstrate a link between users and the original designers' vision of the nation. The description of Nelson's column in the *London Illustrated News* as reaching forward into 'all-coming time' (in Mace 2005 [1976]: 93) also hints at the notion of a future in which Nelson's achievements would still be a source of national pride. However, Nelson's victory was not the only message to Trafalgar Square's users; the design of the Square also demonstrates authorities' concerns about transgressive uses of the space and a desire for official control, revealing a power relationship that was literally built into the Square.

Overall, the evolving nature of the Square's built environment lends support to Massey's (2005: 29) concept of space as 'open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming' (see Chapter Two). Whereas Hood (2005) presents this as an inefficient and costly problem, the 'contestedness' of the Square which was evident in its planning and construction hints at the range of narratives that the Square encompasses. Rather than destabilising the meaning or impact of the Square, these spatial contests, as I hypothesise in Chapter One, suggest a range of narratives within national identity that strengthen the role of the Square as a national place (Edensor 2002). In the second half of this chapter, I will demonstrate how the Square's flexibility and 'openness' affect its use. First, however, I will discuss the statues and monuments added to the Square since its construction, and how these representations deepen its layers of meaning.

Statues in the Square

Within the completed Square, contestation accompanied the creation and placement of new statues and monuments within it. As I will discuss below, this included disagreement over who should be depicted in the Square and where proposed statues should be placed. Some statues were created specifically for the Square, whereas others ended up there, or have been removed since their initial placement. I suggest that this demonstrates a fluidity within the Square's built environment that reinforces the possibility of multiple and changing national narratives throughout the Square's history.

When considering plans for the monument, the Nelson Memorial Committee felt that 'Poets, artists and politicians had their place in Westminster Abbey; Trafalgar Square should be for the men who took up arms for Queen and country' (Hood 2005: 47). The first representations of these figures appeared between the 1840s and the 1880s, when the statues of George IV (1843), Charles Napier (1856) and Henry Havelock (1861) were installed, and later a statue of Charles George Gordon, best known for his 'martyrdom' in Khartoum, Sudan in 1885. His statue stood between the Square's fountains, but was moved during World War Two and later relocated to Embankment Gardens near the Thames. In the Square, there is also a plaque indicating the imperial standards of length, and an empty 'fourth' plinth which, since 1999, has been occupied by a series of temporary sculptural installations.

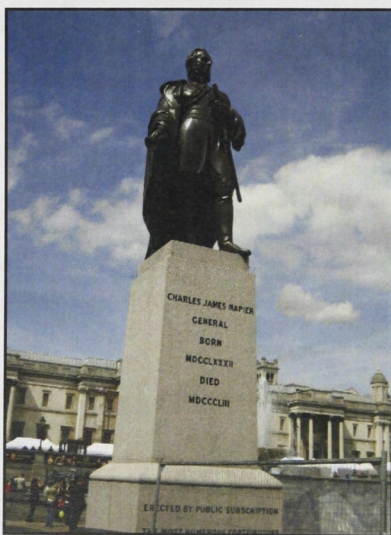


Figure 8: Statue of Charles Napier.
Photo: author's own.

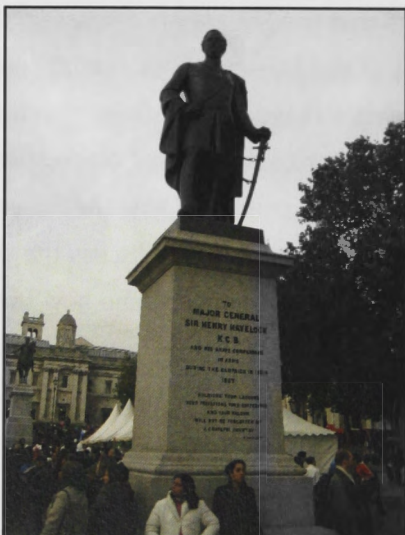


Figure 9: Statue of Henry Havelock.
Photo: author's own.

The representations of Napier and Havelock (Figures 8 and 9) emphasise the imperial flavour of the Square, and both statues reference their subject's activities in the Indian subcontinent (Cherry 2006: 678). Major-General Charles James Napier, for example, became the Governor of the province of Sind in 1843, created a police force, reformed the local civil service and prided himself on delivering justice for the poor and for women. However, he was also harshly criticised for a lack of knowledge of the area and disrespect for local customs (Embree 2009), believing 'that barbarous peoples should be absorbed by their civilised neighbours' (quoted in Mace 2005 [1976]: 116). In the statue's right hand is a scroll symbolising the constitution Napier imposed on the province during his time as Governor (Cherry 2006: 678), and an inscription indicates his popularity with the soldiers who served under him (Mace 2005 [1976]: 113). Napier was a career soldier who believed in the inevitability of imperial rule in the Indian sub-continent on the basis of Britain's superior civilisation. His statue was installed in Trafalgar Square after some discussion about other possible locations, three years after his death in 1853.

In contrast, Havelock's statue was specifically designed for Trafalgar Square. Havelock was a prominent Victorian, whose death, according to *The Times*, '[fell] upon the British public with the suddenness of a thunderclap' (quoted in Mace 2005 [1976]: 117). He captured the public imagination when he relieved the town of Lucknow, which had been besieged during the Indian Uprising of 1857. The Uprising resulted in the murder of British civilian women and children by mutinous troops in Cawnpore (now Kanpur), an incident which riveted the Victorian public with its gruesome details and reinforced the perception of the barbarity of India and its people.

Despite his violent treatment of civilians in Oudh (now Awadh), the countryside surrounding the besieged Lucknow (Schama 2002: 252-255), Havelock was perceived by the public at home as the antithesis of this barbarity, an archetypical muscular Christian. His religious devotion was publicly well-known, and after his death from dysentery in 1857, he was grieved by the Victorian public as a Christian hero. According to Lunt (2009), 'he was a supreme exemplar and symbol of what historians later called Christian militarism, and his reputation ... was indicated by the popularity of

Havelock as a Victorian Christian name and by something of a Havelock cult in Victorian Britain’.

Another imperial reminder in the Square is a set of imperial standards of length (see Figure 10), installed in 1876. If Charing Cross is the point from which all distances in London, and by extension Britain and the Empire, were measured, these are the standard lengths used to measure them. In addition to the statues, the plaque of standard imperial lengths connects present-day users of the Square to a narrative of the national past that emphasises the martial, the imperial, and the masculine. These elements describe a version of national power that was important to the creators of the Square and its monuments, and in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I will explore connections between this narrative and subsequent users of the Square, including their construction of national identity. In particular, I will explore whether imperial categories of meaning have continued to be important to users of Trafalgar Square, and how this might have been expressed in the case studies.



Figure 10: Imperial standards of length.
Photo: author's own.

Whereas Napier, Havelock and the standards of length highlight the imperial narrative in Trafalgar Square, the busts of World War One naval commanders, Admirals John Rushworth Jellicoe and David Beatty, who both participated in the battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916 (Hood 2005: 91), emphasise the naval symbolism established by the monument to Nelson. This continuity was made explicit in the case of Andrew Browne Cunningham, who served as Admiral-in-Command in the Mediterranean during World War Two. His bust sits alongside Jellicoe's and Beatty's, and he was described by US General Eisenhower, with whom Cunningham served, as a 'Nelsonian type of admiral...he always thought in terms of attack, never of defence' (Hood 2005: 110). Along with the statue of Nelson, these figures act as a reminder of the importance of naval power in British history.

However, the presence of these elements also reflects the many changes which have taken place since the construction of the Square, and represent some of the controversies over those changes. Controversy and prevarication accompanied the placing of several of the statues, with some, such as George the IV and Napier, arriving there after several alternative locations were considered. As mentioned above, 'Gordon of Khartoum's' statue was in the Square until World War Two, but was removed to another location and never returned to the Square. Changes or indecision regarding monuments demonstrate a similar mutability of the space to that displayed in the design of the overall Square. Cherry (2006: 666), in examining the archive of material available on the early years of Trafalgar Square, similarly claims that Trafalgar Square has been subject to physical as well as symbolic transformation over time:

the intractability of materials, the conflicting accounts, contradictory dates, the indeterminacy of the site, the fluidity of its borders and edges...an unresolved and unsettled space, the square has been the subject of reorganisation and re-imagination, demolition and rebuilding, its space has been drawn and re-drawn in relation to its surrounding area.

Perhaps the most immediate reminder of the flexibility of the Square's built environment is the fourth plinth. When it was constructed, it was intended for an equestrian statue of William IV to mirror that of George IV on the opposite corner, but after the monarch's death the statue was never commissioned (Mace 2005 [1976]: 56). Subsequently, 'the question of what to do with the empty pedestal has become a vexed one for a generation encouraged to feel ill at ease with its past, particularly so when it comes to military leaders' (Hood 2005: 124). Since 1999, the plinth has been used to exhibit public sculpture on a rotating basis, and the national symbolic importance of the space has been made evident in controversy over who or what should be portrayed on the plinth. This was demonstrated by tension in 2008 over the installation of a statue of Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park, an RAF commander during the Battle of Britain. London Mayor Boris Johnson (2008) promised Park's supporters that 'some day your plinth will come' while recognising that many Londoners liked the rotating system of fourth plinth sculptures, and did not want another 'dead white male war hero' in the Square. Eventually, Park's supporters' plinth did come, and the statue of their hero occupied it from 4 November 2009 to 24 May 2010, when it was replaced by a sculpture of

Nelson's Ship in a Bottle, by Anglo-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare MBE. The role of the Fourth Plinth in contributing to national narratives in Trafalgar Square is the subject of Chapter Eight.

Finally, a further aspect of the Square's built environment that this thesis considers is its surrounding neighbourhood, a response to Massey's (1991: 29) claim that 'places do not have boundaries in the sense of divisions which frame simple enclosures'. Similarly, Cherry (2006: 671) argues that 'Trafalgar Square exemplifies the ways in which a location is defined as much by its surroundings as by its internal reorganizations'.

The Square stands at the head of Whitehall, a street reshaped in the 1860s as 'an architectural manifestation of the institutions of state' (Cherry 2006: 674), that stretches for less than half a kilometre from the Square down to the river Thames and the Houses of Parliament in Westminster. It is also within easy walking distance of Whitehall, the Prime Minister's residence in Downing Street, and to Parliament (see Figure 11), and this has been a concern to authorities seeking to control gatherings in the Square because of fears that protests might spill out and affect nearby places. In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I will explore how this may have happened during the case-study events and how authorities responded. This aspect of the use Trafalgar Square is reflected in my research question concerning the power relationships that inform national narratives within the Square.



Figure 11: Trafalgar Square and its immediate neighbourhood.
Image: GLA.

So far in this chapter, I have explored the history and meanings of some of the built elements of Trafalgar Square. I have emphasised the imperial and national imagery and symbolism in the Square, drawing out how these elements represent aspects of the national past, and touched on the role of the Square's surrounding neighbourhood in shaping its meanings. In doing so, I have highlighted the mutability and ongoing change that have characterised apparently fixed structures. I have also discussed some of the contests over the Square's creation. More recently, in 2003 a major transformation of the site saw the northern terrace pedestrianised (Greater London Authority 2003b) and, although this has been broadly welcomed, other changes, such as the ban on feeding pigeons and the Fourth Plinth sculpture scheme, have been more controversial.

Despite the 'timeless' hopes of the original creators, this material appears to support Massey's (2005: 29) case for conceptualising space as 'unfinished and always becoming' as well as contested and subject to disagreement over both its representations and its use. It also demonstrates the possibility that the Square has had many simultaneous narratives concerning its meaning over time, and also hints at the discursive process by which national identity has been shaped during this process, as I discussed in Chapter Two (see Özkırmlı 2005, Edensor 2002, Smith 2008).

Throughout the case studies in the following chapters, I will continue to explore these questions. For example, if the Square can be understood as 'unfinished', how have different users understood this quality? In terms of my research questions, what impact do these conflicts and changes have on the range of narratives that are constructed or reproduced in the Square? How have these narratives been shaped by intersecting social and political power relationships? For example, the tension between the possibility of the use of the Square for public protest and designers' purposeful inclusion of the fountains to limit the numbers who could gather there demonstrates a contest over the space that mirrored more general social and political contests at the time.

Furthermore, although the Square's built environment reflects only a narrow, mainly martial range of narratives of national history, does the 'openness' of

the Square allow users some agency in how they interpret this history and its symbolism, giving them an opportunity to create new narratives? As discussed in Chapter Three, I will explore this by listening to a range of voices, including users, officials and the media. As a result of this methodological concern with capturing both 'top-down' and 'from-below' perspectives, in the next section I will shift focus away from the details of the built environment of the Square and the motivations of its designers. Instead, I will focus on various users of Trafalgar Square, asking how the use of place might create national narratives, reveal the power relationships embedded in those narratives and connect the nation's present to its past or future.

A day in the life of Trafalgar Square

In this section, I explore how people use Trafalgar Square and engage with the built environment I described in the first half of the chapter. In doing so, I focus on how users might construct meaning by noting, ignoring, forgetting or reinterpreting the Square's built environment. In an precursor to Massey's (2005) characterisation of space as 'becoming', de Certeau (1988 [1984]: 104) claims that over time, the specific symbolic language of the proper names such as Trafalgar Square and Nelson's Column acquire meanings which 'detach themselves from the places they were supposed to define', opening up the symbolism of place for negotiation and reinterpretation. As I will demonstrate below, this has occurred in Trafalgar Square, in as much as the symbols in the built environment have been reinterpreted by successive users. A good example is the Fourth Plinth sculpture scheme and the response of artists to the Square's symbolic environment, which I focus on in Chapter Eight. However, it is less clear whether the symbolic language of the Square and its built environment have become detached from each other over time, as de Certeau claims. Even for some of the most transgressive users, such as protestors, the Square still appears to have some 'fixed' meaning attached to its symbolism and location, even if this symbolism is used in ways that transgress the creators' intentions. I shall explore this further in the remainder of this chapter.

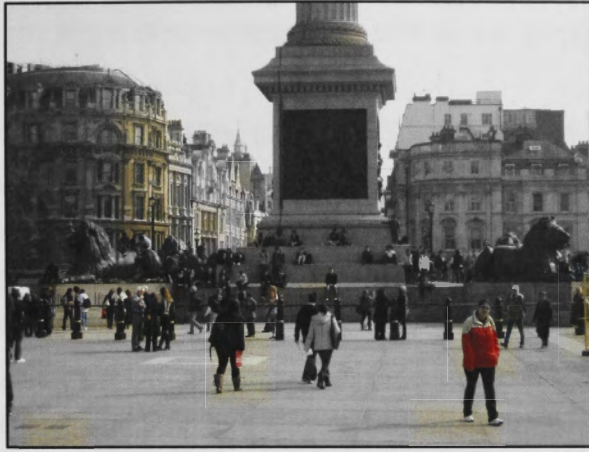


Figure 12: Trafalgar Square, 3 April 2009. Photo: author's own.

There is certainly evidence that any reinterpretation of the space through various uses can be contentious. For example, according to Nicholas Penny, Director of the National Gallery in 2009, the Square has become ‘uncivilised’ since its pedestrianisation in 2003: ‘Levels of civil behaviour are incredibly low. As I speak, people are riding the lions and climbing up as far as they can on the reliefs of Nelson’s Column’ (quoted in *The Times* 2009). For artist Mark Wallinger, whose sculpture appeared on the Fourth Plinth in 1999, the question of competing views on the use of the Square rests on one question: ‘you have to decide who is the Square for’ (*The Times* 2009).

In this section, I address the question of ‘who the Square is for’ by looking at some of the different people who use it, and for what purposes, as well as how this informs my research questions on narratives of national identity, power relationships and connection with the national past. Because of the breadth of material in this section, I have adopted an impressionistic style, drawing material from the approximately 170 years of the Square’s history.

The following material also uses a thematic approach to introduce the chronological analysis in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, and gives a sense of the very wide range of uses of the Square over its history (see Chapter Three). I have adopted this approach because the Square’s many uses means it has been ‘for’ many different people at many different times. Furthermore, the quotidian approach responds to Edensor’s (2002: vi) observation that the

‘routines of everyday life provide fertile ground for the development of national identity’.

For a space like Trafalgar Square, the ‘everyday’ might include uses that would be unusual in other places. For example, Jones and Merriman (2009: 166) claim that ‘the everyday ... in addition to being a place of banal and mundane processes, may also incorporate a variety of hotter “differences and conflicts” that affect people’s lives on a habitual basis’. In defining the quotidian in terms of the Square’s history, I have therefore included protests, cultural events and other spectacular uses that are fairly commonplace in the Square.

tourism

August 2008 was the wettest month of an already very rainy summer in England (Met Office 2008), and the rare sunny days were welcome. Even when overcast, the weather in London was pleasantly warm and people sat outside during sunny spells. In the centre of London, Trafalgar Square was busy. Banners announcing the annual Trafalgar Square Festival promised ‘amazing outdoor performance and live coverage from the Beijing Olympic Games’. These Games were indeed being shown on a big screen mounted underneath Nelson’s Column. Team GB was working its way towards fourth place in the medal tally, and when I visited the Square, an equestrian event was on, a sport in which Britain usually does well (see Figure 14).

Many people were seated on the steps facing the screen, turning the space into a temporary, impromptu amphitheatre, but they were watching the big screen casually, still eating, talking and moving around the Square (see Figure 13). Children broke away from their parents to run across the pavement and chase the few hopeful pigeons. Tourists took snapshots and ate sandwiches from paper boxes. As people moved across the open spaces of the Square, they stopped to eat, take photographs, or absorb their surroundings, diverted briefly to take in the ‘atmosphere’. Here, the personal and intimate narratives of eating or childminding coincided with the more national, official discourse represented by the broadcast of Olympics coverage. There was a sense of possibility, of spontaneity, of temporary, pedestrian diversion, as people

paused in public space. There was the possibility for less structured experiences on the fringe of something more official and purposeful.

On this pleasant summer day, the flexibility of the Square was evident, as was its role as a tourist destination. According to one 2009 survey, Trafalgar Square is the UK's top tourist attraction (First Rate 2009). Visitors to the capital have been drawn to the Square for decades; it featured in British Railways' advertisement to 'See England by Rail' in the 1950s, guide books for foreign and Commonwealth service men and women during the two World Wars (Driver and Gilbert 1998), and postcards featuring images of the Square document all stages of its construction and development.



Figure 13: visitors watching 2008 Olympic coverage, Trafalgar Square, August 2008.
Photo: author's own.



Figure 14: big screen showing 2008 Olympic coverage, Trafalgar Square, August 2008.
Photo: author's own.

For many visitors, memories of the Square have been framed by their photographs, visual reminders of the place and experience, part of an ongoing record built up over decades. These images vary enormously, and tell the individual story of the visitor as much as of the place. Berger (1972: 10) claims that 'every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other sites ... The photographers way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject'. According to this, tourist images of Trafalgar Square create many different narratives that are as individual as the viewer. They also help define the experience of the Square as flexible, complex and diverse. On a warm day in August 2008 (see Figures 13 and 14), some of these diverse narratives were clearly on display, as the Square was simultaneously an amphitheatre, a picnic spot, a place to

let the children off the leash and a reminder of national sporting prowess. The photographs that people took on that day reflect some of those uses and are a part of how the Square's meanings are constructed by its users.

This grey January image of my own family in the Square also communicates some of the narratives at work (see Figure 15). In this photograph, the Square is a place to pause and to play, with delighted children sitting above their father's head between the paws of a lion. As a family, it is an image we can use to mark our having been together to the Square, and we will look back at this image to help us remember the experience of the place. This photograph, like many similar ones belonging to other families, fixes us against a British national backdrop, with Landseer's lion identifying us as having been in Trafalgar Square, its symbols of imperial power framing a family portrait. But at the same time, it is our experience that we remember, a symbolic narrative of national history embedded in our family history.

These examples begin to unravel who the Square is 'for'. Tourism is an approved activity in the Square, and in terms of my research questions, the power relationship between tourists and authorities is untroubled. Even climbing the lions' pedestal, which is officially discouraged, is not prohibited in practice.

Images such as Figure 15 also demonstrate a continuity of some types of use over time, as evidenced by similar images of families in the Square, many covered by pigeons, or climbing the lions (see Hargreaves 2005: 68-69). In engaging in these activities, tourists re-emphasise the role of the Square as a significant national site, strengthening this meaning through their visits to it.

protest

While tourism is a largely uncontested use of Trafalgar Square, other uses, have been more contentious. The Square, for example, has been a site of protest many times throughout its history. On 6 March 1848, for example, approximately 15,000 Chartists and sympathisers, calling for parliamentary

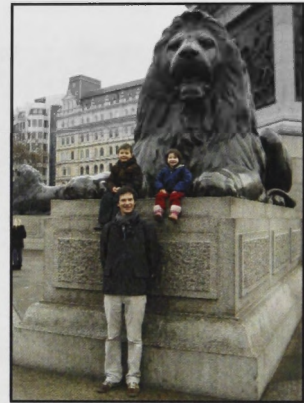


Figure 15: Adi, Ria and Ben Wellings, Trafalgar Square, Jan 2009. Photo: author's own.

and enfranchisement reforms to create 'a fairer society to unite rather than divide the classes' (Hood 2005: 65), gathered in Trafalgar Square. 500 police officers were required to restore order (Hood 2005: 65). While some press reports described the tone as mischievous rather than violent, others described the crowd as unemployed or merely curious, 'for the most part the refuse of a crowded city' (quoted in White 2007: 366). The fear of the mob, especially by shopkeepers eager to protect their property, continued for days after this demonstration, culminating on 13 March 1848 when, in response to a Chartist mass meeting in Kennington Common, police and troops were posted across London in anticipation of revolutionary violence. According to White (2007: 367), 'Londoners...believed themselves on the brink of civil war'. Although the protest slowly dissipated, the potential of the newly-completed Trafalgar Square as a central rallying point for political protesters had been affirmed, as had the fears of authorities.

Approximately forty years later, Trafalgar Square saw violent protests that would resonate for years with subsequent protestors in the Square, including Suffragette leader Christabel Pankhurst (see Chapter Five). Several incidents of mob violence in London, particularly in the West End, took place in 1886, with protest directed at the wealthier classes by socialists demanding employment, parliamentary reform and poor relief (White 2007: 376). The protests included a demonstration on 8 February 1886 during which West End shops were looted and their windows broken, and this event, coupled with a dense fog, fed panicked rumours of thousands of marchers descending on London, prompting businesses and banks to close early (Mace 2005 [1976]: 166). By the next summer, socialist protest was occurring regularly in Trafalgar Square (White 2007:377). On 8 November, the Commissioner of Police banned meetings in the Square given the growing number of protests and, in response, radical groups demanded 'freedom of speech and the right to protest in London's great open spaces' (White 2007:377). On 13 November, on what came to be called 'Bloody Sunday', a large meeting was called by the Metropolitan Radical Federation, and marchers converged on the Square from working class areas around London (see Figure 16).



Figure 16: 'Bloody Sunday', 13 Nov 1887.
Image in Mace 2005 [1976]: 185.

As the demonstrators moved towards the centre of London they clashed with police and broke up into smaller groups. In the Square itself, large numbers of police and troops were ready to prevent marchers from challenging the ban on meetings. According to observer George W Smalley: 'Mounted police were in strong numbers at every angle of the square; on the south side a line of policemen "four deep, elbows touching", on the other sides just two deep' (quoted in White 2007:378). When groups of marchers reached the Square, they were confronted by police and troops, including some with fixed bayonets, who tried to disperse the crowd. According to Porter (2001 [1994]: 253), the fracas 'was marked by unusual brutality', and a West End business owner complained to the House of Commons that 'for at least an hour, the most frequented streets in the West End of London [were] entirely at the mercy of the mob'. By the end of the day, around two hundred protestors had to be treated in hospital, and two police officers had reportedly been stabbed. At least two people died in the following weeks as a result of injuries they sustained during the protest.

The next weekend, police and newly recruited civilian 'Special Constables' again guarded the Square and other central London places to prevent further attempts at protest. Alfred Linnell, an off-duty law-writer, went to the Square, got caught up in a police charge and died of blood poisoning after his thigh was crushed by a police horse (White 2007: 378-9 and Hood 2005: 76). His death embarrassed the police, and the protesters organised a massive funeral with a hearse bearing the notice 'Killed in Trafalgar Square'. A pamphlet was printed for his funeral (see Figure 17) to raise money for his orphaned children (Mace 2005 [1976]: 192-193 and Hood 2005: 76).

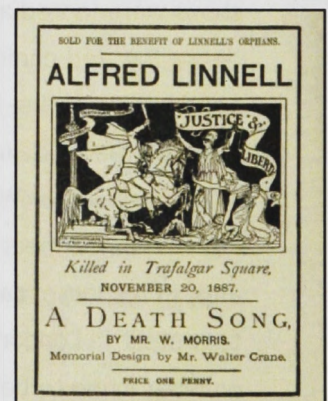


Figure 17: Song written for Alfred Linnell, 1887. Image: Working Class Movement Library.

‘Bloody Sunday’ was a demonstration of the animosity between the working and propertied classes in late Victorian London, and the use of Trafalgar Square had symbolic value for both sides. The authorities, in response to middle-class fears of poverty, and the crime and degeneracy they associated with it, saw the open space of the Square as a threat, a place where large numbers of people could gather, become agitated by firebrand speeches, and rampage through the surrounding streets, as they had done the previous year in 1886. For radical organisers, the Square was a public space, available for everyone’s use, and a valuable platform for protest against government actions. To deny speakers the use of the Square was to deny them the right to free speech.

Here, the Square can be understood as a symbolic national forum that represented the ability to express anti-establishment views, an activity seen by protestors as central to British democracy. The police ban on meetings was a tactical use of space intended to control the much larger social issues of poverty, crime and unemployment. For the less powerful, however, this tactical use was perceived as a restriction of free speech and political participation. The contest over the Square in this example was a contest over two different visions of the nation associated with political disagreement over the extension of the franchise and the question of free speech. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, a similar symbolic contest over the use of the Square occurred during the Suffragettes’ campaign for female enfranchisement.



Figure 18: Poll Tax Riot, 31 March 1990.
Photo: BBC News Online.

Just over one hundred years later, on 31 March 1990, the most violent protest in Trafalgar Square since ‘Bloody Sunday’ took place. The Poll Tax Riot (Figure 18) began as a demonstration against the introduction of a new tax that was perceived as discriminatory towards the poor. A peaceful demonstration that began in the afternoon escalated into a violent confrontation between protestors

and police, involving around 3000 people (Hood 2005: 124). During the riot, scaffolding adjacent to the Square was ignited, neighbouring South Africa

House was attacked, and 'bricks, bottles, scaffolding poles, oil drums and fire-extinguishers were thrown at police' (Butler *et al* 1994: 152). Despite official efforts to disperse the crowd, by early evening, much of nearby Soho, Covent Garden and Charing Cross were strewn with broken windows and burned out cars. 339 people were arrested, 374 police officers and 86 members of the public were injured, twenty of the forty police horses on duty were also injured and there were 250 reports of damage to property (Bulter *et al* 1994: 153).

In an echo of late Victorian concerns about mob rule and the degeneracy of the poor that influenced mainstream reporting of the 1886-87 disturbances, press coverage of the 1990 riot included reference to the protestors as 'an alienated British "underclass"', portrayed the police as victims of criminal hooligans and thugs, and emphasised an underlying criminality and conspiracy (Deacon and Golding 1994: 132-133). Again echoing some of the rhetoric of 1887, in the House of Commons Sir John Wheeler MP described the police as '[defending] the principle of parliamentary democracy and freedom' (HC Deb 2 Apr 90 Col 895). Labour Party Deputy Leader Roy Hattersley also characterised the conflict as one between a democratic society and criminal forces:

All democrats will combine in demanding the rooting out of the threat to our free society which was perpetrated by individuals and organisations who were responsible for the disgraceful scenes and conduct in the capital last Saturday. (HC Deb 2 Apr 1990 Col 895)

Accounts by rioters characterised the event as a 'class war', claiming that 'Trafalgar Square showed what was possible ... that people were not prepared to take shit lying down and were able to organise resistance without leaders or parties' (Anon 1990: 67). One point of agreement between the two sides was that the Poll Tax Riot symbolised a struggle over more than Trafalgar Square. Instead, it was a contest over the right to be heard, and the involvement of the different classes in a struggle for democratic self-rule. In terms of my research questions, it was a struggle over the national narrative and the power to shape it.

These examples are pertinent to the discussion of who the Square is 'for'. In staking a claim on the space of the Square, the protestors and authorities that

I have discussed in this section all invoked narratives of democracy, rights, order, class and resistance that they explicitly connected to national identity. This range of narratives includes power relationships between classes and political groups. In echoing nineteenth-century rhetoric about democracy and resistance, for example, people involved in the Poll Tax Riots linked themselves to previous users of Trafalgar Square. This speaks directly to my research question about the connection between the present and the past, and suggests that the Square played a role in linking in these national narratives.

community

So far, I have explored several different groups that the Square has been ‘for’, including tourists, families, protestors and authorities. I have discussed the different meanings these groups have ascribed to the Square, and how these different narratives have been informed by both power and a relationship to users of the past. However, although the relationship between authorities and other users of the Square has been contentious, as in the section above that discusses protests in the Square, this power relationship can also be more harmonious. For example, another use of the Square is as a venue for performances and festivals. With the official support from the controlling authority, the Greater London Authority (GLA), the Square is currently used throughout the year for festivals specific to London’s cultural communities, including Eid, the festival marking the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan and Diwali, the Hindu festival of light. During these events in 2008, the Square was transformed into a place specifically ‘for’ these communities and others who wanted to participate or observe.

My experience of Eid was one of being in a familiar space transformed, becoming simultaneously unusual and routine. On the sunny Saturday in October 2008 when ‘Eid in the Square’ took place, Trafalgar Square was crowded with families, but was no longer predominantly a tourist destination. The large number of people, the presence of many women in headscarves, significant in this case as a visible indicator of Muslim faith, and the food and information stalls changed the feel of the Square. It had become a more enclosed space, more demarcated from its surroundings than usual. It

contained the same visual elements - Nelson's Column, the imperial and naval statues, the terrace, steps and fountains - but these had been transformed into background elements for a modern celebration of urban diversity. It was visually 'for' the group using it to celebrate Eid.

The UK faith-based representative group the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) emphasised the role of the event as an opportunity to create individual connections between Muslim and non-Muslim co-nationals, both within the Square and nationally. For the MCB, this event was both a celebration of London's diversity and a hopeful example of social harmony for the rest of the nation:

[‘Eid in the Square’ is] a landmark event that will benefit not only all Londoners, but the rest of the nation. The MCB has marshalled its strength in bringing together London's diverse and vibrant Muslim community to come together to celebrate the very best of the British Muslim cultural scene. We hope this will be replicated across the country, where Muslims will invite fellow citizens in their celebration. (Muslim Council of Britain 2008)

In his speech opening the celebration, London Mayor Boris Johnson similarly highlighted an individual relationship to Islam: ‘exactly 100 years ago, in 1908, my father's father's father came to south London. He was a Muslim and he knew the Koran off by heart in Arabic ... He would be absolutely amazed to discover that his great-grandson had become mayor of London’ (BBC News Online 2008). In invoking his great-grandfather, Johnson appeared to link the event in the Square to a history of British multiculturalism. Furthermore, in terms of this thesis, his legitimisation of the use of the Square for a celebration of Eid helped answer the question of who the Square is ‘for’. By officially recognising Muslims as a British cultural group, he effectively acknowledged them as members of the British nation.

A sense of the metaphorical ownership of the space by event attendees was similar at the Diwali celebrations the following weekend. The big family event was extremely crowded, and inter-generational groups with children and grandparents met, watched other participants and took photographs. It was too crowded to descend the steps from the forecourt of the National Gallery, and as I walked around the outside of the Square, I was struck by how bounded the event was, just as I had been during the Eid celebration. For example, I

was not aware of the presence of the crowd until I was actually part of it, and my approach from the north gave no clue of the thousands of people gathered in the Square. Despite the size of the gathering, it did not spill over into surrounding streets, and the Square seemed to completely contain the celebrations. As I left from the south side, facing Whitehall and walking past Nelson's Column, the crowd completely and suddenly dissipated. A sole reminder of the event behind me was a boy with an Indian flag draped over his shoulders (see Figure 19), passing under the statue of General Sir Henry Havelock.



Figure 19: Diwali, Trafalgar Square, 18 Oct 2008.
Photo: author's own.

These two events in 2008 illustrate how the Square can be a flexible place despite its established topography, with meanings that change according to use. Furthermore, events such as these subtly reinforce connections with other times and places, providing a 'global sense of place' (Massey 1991). For example, the use of the Square by the descendents of those who Havelock or Napier may have tried to control reminds us simultaneously of Britain's imperial history and its multicultural present. By including themselves in who the Square is 'for', these groups can be seen as staking a claim for national belonging through their use of it. Officially recognised and sanctioned, these events contribute to the flexibility of the Square's meanings and help build a place-based national narrative that includes Muslims, Hindus and others (such as the Mayor of London), and that reframes the imperial past to assert the belonging of British Asians in the national present.

transit

The discussion so far has focused on uses of the Square that treat it as a specific destination. For many people, however, it is a spot on a bus or tube map, a transit point, a place to move through on the way home or to work. For Ken Livingstone (2001), London's former mayor, this is a problem, because 'most Londoners rarely stay long in the square. The closest most get to it is waiting for a bus or driving through'. His refurbishment of the Square in 2003 was an attempt to make it more of a destination for Londoners. However, The Square's role as a transit site is embedded in its history.

Even before the Square was constructed, Charing Cross, opposite the Square's current location, was important in the local landscape as a drop off and collection point for coaches in and out of London. Nelson's Column sits on the previous site of the West End's largest inn in the eighteenth century, the Golden Cross, with stables that could accommodate seven hundred horses (Hood 2005: 18-19). It has also been an important point along processional routes through central London for national and imperial events. In 1852, for example, the funeral procession of the Duke of Wellington, victorious commander at the battle of Waterloo and former Prime Minister, passed Trafalgar Square where crowds had gathered to catch a glimpse of the spectacular funeral car with its 'lion's heads projecting from the bosses of the wheels', and its 'magnificent dolphins' (Hood 2005: 67-68).

The Royal Coronations of George V in 1911, George VI in 1937, and Elizabeth II in 1953 also all passed the Square. During the 1937 coronation, spectators tried to catch a glimpse of the coronation procession, but the photographs of the event (Figures 20, 21 and 22) also show people sleeping, resting, climbing the lions (and each other), and staring off in different directions. These images remind us of the Square's multiple uses and narratives and the role of its users in shaping these narratives. In these images, the Square is simultaneously a reminder of imperial history, a vantage point from which to watch a Royal event, and simply a place to rest.



Figure 21: Coronation spectators in Trafalgar Square, 12 May 1937. Photo: Henri Cartier-Bresson.



Figure 20: Coronation spectators in Trafalgar Square, 12 May 1937. Photo: Henri Cartier-Bresson.



Figure 22: 'Three Indian soldiers, coronation of King George VI, London, 12 May, 1937' Photo: *Daily Herald*.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf (1925: 45) invokes a sense of motion and transit, using the Square to communicate a sense of possibility and fluidity created by walking in the city. When Peter Walsh walks through Trafalgar Square on a pleasant June morning, 'feeling like a child who runs out of doors', he lets the city wash over him and impulsively follows a woman who catches his eye:

...walking across Trafalgar Square in the direction of the Haymarket, came a young woman who, as she passed Gordon's statue, seemed ... to shed veil after veil, until she became the very woman he had always had in mind ...

By placing her character in Trafalgar Square, even briefly, Woolf situates us in central London, at a location familiar to many readers. The Square is a milestone in a bigger landscape. Although not a destination, it is still an important part of the experience of the city for residents and visitors, and provides the possibility of 'chance' encounters with strangers.

In terms of my research questions, Trafalgar Square's role as a place of transit demonstrates the range of narratives that it can encompass. According to de Certeau (1988 [1984]: 101) 'the long poem of walking manipulates spatial organisations', and the person moving through the city does not have to interpret the built environment as its creators intended. He claims that the urban experience is a highly individual one that sees the pedestrian, in engaging with the fixed built environment of the city, transform it. The example of the spectators at the 1937 Coronation shows how the Square can be reframed as a place to rest or watch the crowd, in addition to its 'official' role as a central observation point for a passing state ceremony. These examples of people using the Square for a range of purposes show how different users can create different meanings in place.

transgression

If daytime in the Square sees it used by tourists, commuters, protestors or celebrants, night time witnesses alternative uses. In the late nineteenth century on a nightly basis, for example, the Square hosted a demonstration of the disparate but parallel experiences of life in central London. In the 1880s, whole families slept rough there, huddled under newspapers. An image from *The Illustrated London News* on 29 October 1887 shows food being distributed to 'campers' in the Square at



Figure 23: 'Trafalgar Square - Night', 1923.
Photo: Fred Judge.

1am by charity workers, as well-dressed men and women watch from the railings above, their hats and clothes a contrast to the rags worn by the people below (see Mace 2005 [1976]).

The Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, mentioned this use of the Square in an October 1887 letter to Queen Victoria, when up to four hundred homeless people were recorded in the Square:

I have just walked through Trafalgar Square. There was no sign of disorder; only about 300 dirty people clustering around the column. The streets were in no way obstructed or disturbed, and everything was going on as usual. (cited in Mace 2005 [1976]: 176)

For the sleepers in the Square, the fountains were more than ornamental, and a letter written to the Office of Works in 1887 objected to people sleeping in the Square and then 'performing their ablutions in the morning in the basins of the fountains' (quoted in Mace 2005 [1976]: 171). At other times, however, this was a result of celebration rather than poverty. Figure 24, for example, shows a sailor, having slept out in the Square with his two female companions, washing his face in the fountain on Victory in Europe Day (Hargreaves 2005: 56).



Figure 24: 'VE Day, 8 May 1945'. Photo: *Daily Mirror*.

Perhaps the sailor would have thought twice if he had known what else the fountains had been used for over the years. As mentioned above, when they were unveiled on 2 May 1844, they were quickly used as public toilets and rubbish bins, and in 1854, cleaners removed the decomposing remains of cats and dogs from the sludge at the bottom of the fountains (Hood 2005: 57-59). As discussed above, when they were planned in 1841, they were intended to

help restrict the number of people who could gather in the Square, and were a means of controlling the large open public space that the designers thought could become a protest site (Mace 2005 [1976]: 88 and Hood 2005: 49). Whether as bath, toilet, rubbish bin or crowd control, the fountains symbolise some of the transgressive uses that authorities wanted to prevent or control.

The transgressive uses of the Square demonstrate its utility in illuminating larger national power relationships. By recasting the Square as a place to sleep or wash, the poor made themselves highly visible to authorities, and these uses of the Square's benches, platforms and fountains, against the wishes of authorities, pointed towards larger contests over national inclusion and exclusion. That the issue of people sleeping rough in the Square was brought to the attention of the Queen demonstrates how important this space was for powerful Londoners, particularly given the possibility of political protest that the poor represented. Trafalgar Square, especially in the late nineteenth century, symbolised the intersection of poverty and social unrest that the wealthy establishment feared, and control of the use of the Square can be understood as a way to assert a 'top-down' national narrative.

administration

The problem of control and cleanliness described above also accompanied other long term residents of the Square, the pigeons. In 2003, a Trafalgar Square bye-law was enacted to prohibit feeding of pigeons in the Square, to help make the space cleaner and more amenable to visitors (Greater London Authority 2003a). Until this time, large flocks of the birds had gathered there daily to feed, becoming a familiar icon of the space, and featuring in countless photographs. Their presence had been recorded by the prog-rock group Genesis on the 'Spot The Pigeon' E.P. in 1977:



Figure 25: Pigeon passing a 'Do not feed the pigeons' sign, August 2008. Photo: author's own.

Who congregate around Trafalgar Square
Taking pot shots at the tourists?
Oh you've got to watch out
When you wander round the square in the morning
Cos they're everywhere, they're everywhere.

According to Mayor Ken Livingstone, who led the efforts to rid the Square of pigeons, the regulations would mean 'a cleaner, healthier environment on [sic] Trafalgar Square. Cleaning costs and treatments have been reduced as guano levels are now fairly low' (Greater London Authority 2003a). For Livingstone and the GLA, the basis of the anti-pigeon measures was cleanliness and amenity, and this justified the feeding ban (see Figure 25) along with subsequent falcon patrols intended to discourage the birds from returning. Livingstone's approach also rested on what, in his view, the Square symbolised: 'what Trafalgar Square looks like is representative of the city as a whole. It is a public space for the enjoyment of Londoners and visitors alike' (Livingstone 2001). These comments address one of the central questions about Trafalgar Square, one that has reoccurred many times during its history and that has been at the root of many conflicts between users and authorities, and that has also informed this chapter: who is the Square for?

More recently, this has been answered by the presence of 'Heritage Wardens' (see Figure 26) who have the task of assisting visitors, and making sure the Square's bye-laws are obeyed. These uniformed wardens remind users of the Square that regulations about its use must be respected. In official information, they are emphasised as a safety feature:

They wear distinctive uniforms and are on Trafalgar Square 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Since they were introduced in 2000, the Heritage Wardens have helped reduce graffiti and have made people feel safer on the square. (Greater London Authority 2009b)

The dual role of the Heritage Wardens of providing assistance and surveillance encapsulates the complex relationship between users and the authorities. Sometimes these interactions have been benign or friendly, especially during officially-organised events or national celebrations. During the 1937



Figure 26: Heritage wardens, October 2008.
Photo: author's own.

coronation, for example, police turned an indulgent eye to the celebrations in the Square, 'laughingly preventing a very good-tempered crowd from climbing up [Nelson's Column]' (Jennings and Madge 1937: 153). At other times, such as the Poll Tax Riots in 1990, confrontation was violent and bloody: 'Next thing I was up against the wall and riot cops were charging straight at us. I couldn't move anywhere and was terrified as they came within a few fee [sic], truncheons raised, manic frenzied looks on their faces' (Anon 1990: 7).

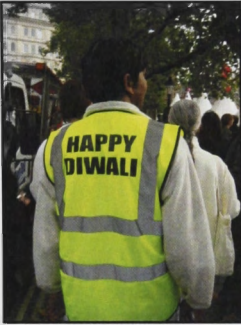


Figure 27: Official Diwali crowd warden, October 2008.
Photo: author's own.

In terms of my research questions, these relationships demonstrate how power, in particular official power, informs access to the Square by setting boundaries on the way individuals can use it and create their own narratives within it. The Heritage Wardens are the most recent manifestation of official control over the space that has included police, armed soldiers, and crowd wardens for specific events (see Figure 27) since the 1840s.

The presence of the Heritage Wardens is a reminder for users that the Square is not 'for' everyone. In the examples discussed above, it is clearly not for violent protestors, pigeon food vendors, or rough sleepers; it *is* for tourists, community groups, spectators and 'normal' Londoners. In imposing limits on the uses of the Square, the police, mayor, GLA and other authorities manifest their power. In this chapter I have demonstrated that who the Square is 'for', in other words, who may use it and for what purposes, has been an aspect of its history since it was in the design stage.

In seeking to control the use of the Square, authorities also attempt to shape the narratives that can be constructed there. In contemporary daily use of the Square, according to surveys by the GLA (2009b), this control is mostly welcome. As it delineates what is allowed and what is prohibited, however, official control of the Square subtly describes the parameters for contests over national inclusion and belonging. This is because by setting boundaries for the use of the space, the authorities help to determine the way that the nation can be imagined within it. However, as demonstrated by the examples of transgressive uses, these attempts at control have not gone unchallenged, and in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I will explore three examples of how issues of

official ‘top-down’ control of the Square’s built environment have been challenged by popular responses to that control.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed some of the activities in the Square, and have explored some of the ways in which contests over access to space and definitions of who is included and excluded help to construct national narratives when they take place in Trafalgar Square. These narratives have seen the Square framed as a memorial, a playground, a protest site, even a national village green (see Figure 28).

Darwent (2008) claims that ‘for all its marble and bronze, Trafalgar Square is an homage to forgetting’ because the population has forgotten who the figures in the Square are, and what their activities represent about the nation and the empire. Although the Square’s representations provide a strong link to Britain’s imperial and military history, through its use for different purposes by a range of groups, this history has been reinterpreted or even forgotten. For former Mayor Ken Livingstone, this was a problem he sought to solve with a major refurbishment to the Square’s built environment.



Figure 28: Trafalgar Square covered in green turf, 24 May 2007.
Photo: BBC News Online.

The evidence in this chapter, however, suggests that even ‘forgetting’, to the extent that it happens, does not lessen the national relevance of the Square. The nation is invoked not only in its built environment, but in the discourses

surrounding its use and the Square's popularity as a national tourist destination; in appeals to free speech couched in the terms of democratic national rights, as in the examples of the Chartist and Poll tax protestors; in depictions of the Square as a central national point of celebration for Muslim Britons by the MCB; and even in its role as a site to observe national events, such as coronations. All these uses embed it in the discourses of national identity.

In terms of my research questions, issues of access and control of the space shed light on the power relationships between different social groups through the prohibition or sanction of various uses of the Square. In this way, the use of place can illuminate not only a range of different national narratives, but how these narratives respond to each other, including the contests or tensions this creates. Additionally, both the Square's built environment and its uses link it to other times and other users, on both an individual and a national scale.

In the next three chapters, I will examine three of Trafalgar Square's more spectacular uses, including those that clashed with official versions of what was permissible. These chapters all examine different examples of the creation of national narratives within the Square, with different groups claiming the space 'for' themselves. Additionally, these case studies all explore varying degrees of contest between these groups and officials. Through them I will continue to develop some of the hypotheses that this chapter has introduced: that Trafalgar Square is a flexible place that can help us understand national identity as based on particular historical narratives, but also as ongoing multiple and contested discourses, and that contests over Trafalgar Square represent contests over national identity.

chapter five

A contest for national visibility: the WSPU, 1906 - 1913

In 1911, Britain celebrated the coronation of a new monarch, George V, and on 17 June, as part of the celebrations, female suffrage groups organised the Women's Coronation Procession, with participants from Britain and overseas. The national, imperial and international display wound through the streets of central London and included marchers dressed as powerful women from the past to emphasise women's contribution to the nation. The pageant also provided an opportunity for women to demonstrate 'their sense of patriotism, and their readiness for public service in the interests of their country' (Tickner 1987: 124).

The event was well-attended and good weather added to the spectacle. As with similar events, discussed above in Chapter Four, Trafalgar Square was full of people watching the procession: 'the weather was brilliant ... In Trafalgar Square, a favourite vantage point, there were people on all the hundreds of seats erected for the coronation' (Tickner 1987: 125). In Figure 29 below, which shows the Procession, Nelson's Column is just visible in the upper left corner.



Figure 29: The Suffragette Float, Women's
Coronation Procession, 17 June 1911.
Image: The Museum of London

The leaders of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), female suffrage campaigners and co-organisers of the procession, had discussed the possibility of militant action at a time when 'the Empire was to be in London' and 'the Suffragettes held the centre of the world stage' (Pankhurst 1959: 175), but they decided instead to participate peacefully in the procession and to express their loyalty to the nation in a message to the newly-crowned monarch:

Our [WSPU] tender to their Royal and Imperial majesties, the King and Queen, their loyal and devoted service ... May the Empire prosper under their guidance and advance in strength, in honour and in righteousness, and may men and women, rendered equal before the law, secure, by their united endeavour, a future greater than heretofore. (quoted in Pankhurst 1959: 184)

This message demonstrates how the WSPU constructed its political aims as a group in terms of national identity. First, its members saw themselves as loyal to the monarch, nation and empire while, second, they wanted to redefine the nation to include women as voting participants, engaged and active in the national public sphere. As the coronation procession shows, the WSPU used public places such as Trafalgar Square to pursue their political goals. The spatial aspects of their campaign are the focus of this chapter, in particular their use of Trafalgar Square for protests and demonstrations.

The Women's Coronation Procession provides an example of the role that the Square played in national events, but also points to the relationship of Trafalgar Square to other nearby sites and the significance of central London

as a whole for the observation of significant national and imperial events. As discussed in the previous chapter, Trafalgar Square has contributed to the construction of many different narratives, and has been important throughout its history as both a part of the larger urban landscape and a destination in itself. As I explained in Chapter Four, the inner core of London, with Trafalgar Square at its centre, was not only the heart of the city, but was also the heart of the British Empire (see Jacobs 1996, Driver and Gilbert 1998, Mace 2005 [1976]).

In this chapter, I begin to tease out in detail the ways that national identity is constructed and reproduced through different groups' use of Trafalgar Square during specific events. In doing so, I continue to discuss whether national narratives are created or reproduced in Trafalgar Square and by whom, as reflected in my research questions. Specifically, in this chapter I will explore how campaigners for female suffrage constructed their own national narratives using the built environment of the Square as a reference point. I will show how they linked their movement to previous campaigns for extended citizen rights, using aspects of the past to reinforce their national narratives, as well as how the built environment helped shape their rhetoric. Furthermore, in a response to Massey's (2005: 59) notion of space as 'open' and 'always becoming', discussed in Chapter Two, I will explore the political possibilities of place, and how this might allow for a range of counter-hegemonic voices to make themselves heard. This will be developed in my arguments concerning Trafalgar Square as a contested place, and will directly address my research question that asks what power relationships inform the creation of national narratives in place.

This chapter is organised into two sections. The first provides an overview of some of the national narratives that the female suffrage movement in general created around the issue of increased political visibility, focusing on how this was linked to a campaign of physical visibility in places of central London. One of the most prominent of these places was Trafalgar Square, and I turn to this in the second section, undertaking a detailed analysis of how the WSPU used the Square to redefine British national identity in protest meetings there in 1906, 1908 and 1913. In doing so, I explore how WSPU rhetoric and action used

the history and built environment of the Square to construct a national narrative that redefined the role of women as members of the political nation.

Edwardian London: women, place and politics

By the turn of the twentieth century, Britain was the most urbanised country in Europe and London was not only the largest city in Britain, but also the most powerful one. The home of national government and an important global financial and shipping hub, London's seven million inhabitants were becoming more metropolitan and national, rather than solely local, largely because of the change in the economy from 'manufacturing industry to international finance' (Harris 1994: 19). London also experienced a 'gradual renaissance...as a centre of fashionable and artistic life' (Harris 1993: 21), and certain areas of London, such as the West End, home to shops, clubs and upper-middle class residences, were important places for the middle classes to socialise, shop and set the political agenda for the nation (see Rappaport 2000). The West End, including the landmarks of Leicester Square, Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square, had special national significance as an area of power, consumption and display.

Changes to the industry, economy and demographics of Britain in general and London in particular were accompanied by changes to social structures. The Edwardian period has been described as a time of crisis for the British state (see Powell 1996) in part because the social divisions of class and gender were often subject to violent contestation. By the beginning of World War One, Britain's wealth was highly concentrated in the hands of the very few; in 1914, ten per cent of the population owned ninety-two percent of Britain's wealth (Schama 2002: 313). This underscored one of the central social concerns of progressives at the time: the relationship among the classes, and in particular the extent to which the poor and unemployed had a right to a 'modern, just and compassionate industrial society' (Schama 2002: 316). Political representation was an important part of radical vision of a 'just society' and the extension of the national franchise in 1832, 1867 and 1884 had enabled most men to vote in parliamentary elections (National Archives 2010). Local government had also become more representative (Powell 1996: 5) and Home Rule was on the political agenda.

The social changes of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, however, affected men and women differently, with gradual but uneven renegotiation of gender roles and relations between the sexes (Harris 1994: 24). Women and girls of all classes had more access to education (see Hobsbawm 1987, Ch 8) and middle-class women sought work or professional training in larger numbers (Harris 1994: 24). However, for the majority of women, the range of social roles that they could respectably occupy was still quite narrow. Modesty and propriety were highly valued aspects of femininity, especially for the middle classes, and sexual identities were largely confined to marriage and reproduction. Urbanisation and female political representation both cut across the question of the public role of women in Edwardian society, because as women sought to participate more in the life of the city, by going out to shop, work, or play, they challenged the existing notion of a 'public woman', who had previously been sexualised and associated with danger or transgression in the Victorian imagination (Rappaport 1999: 393, Walkowitz 1998). Overall, the visibility of women as public members of society was limited but expanding.



Figure 30: Anti-suffragette postcard.
Image: Museum of London.

In terms of political participation, however, the role of women remained limited. Although women could be active in government at a local or municipal level, through participation in local school boards, councils, or even as city mayors, they were still excluded from the national vote. The campaign for female suffrage began around the middle of the nineteenth century, demanding the right for women to be able to vote on par with men (Phillips 2003). This campaign occurred within a larger set of changes occurring around women's social roles, and suffrage campaigners' tactics resonated with increased female visibility in the public sphere in other areas, such as employment or consumption. Female suffrage campaigners' tactics ranged from the patient lobbying of the 'constitutionalists' to the publicity-seeking actions of the 'militants', the best known organisation of which was the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

For opponents of female enfranchisement, members of suffrage organisations were unnatural or unfeminine. Themes of deviant gender roles appeared in anti-suffrage representations of campaigners, portraying them as immature and girlish, remiss in their maternal duties (see Figure 30) or 'unsexed', hysterical spinsters (Tickner 1987: Ch 4). Some 'experts' felt that female education and intellectual life were deleterious to health and reproduction (Harris 1994: 27). For those opposed to female suffrage, traditional definitions of femininity and respectability, and suffrage supporters' failure to comply with them, were important rhetorical tools used to discredit suffrage campaigners and their political goals.

Furthermore, according to their detractors, female suffrage campaigners were not only unfeminine, but were also neglecting their duty to the nation, therefore posing a threat to the British 'race'. Social Darwinists, for example, emphasised women's vital role as mothers, or 'progenitors of the race' (Tucker 1987:186). This occurred in the context of falling fertility rates across the economically-advanced countries of Europe. In the UK, official concern was so high that the 1911 census was used for the first time to survey the fertility patterns of the entire country (Szreter 1996: 2). In the global political environment of the early twentieth century, racial superiority was vital to prevail in the competition amongst nations, and enfranchised women appeared to pose a threat to fertility rates because of their activities outside the domestic sphere.

According to Edwardian social conservatives, the 'modern woman', interested in a life outside her home, was selfish or 'unwomanly', and she presented 'an inevitable conflict of interest between women's demands for greater autonomy and self-fulfilment and the progress of the race' (Tickner 1987: 186). Female suffrage supporters' alleged neglect of domestic and non-traditional stance on the role of women was linked to a perceived decline in the standard of the British 'race', and was therefore a threat to the nation. This anxiety was reinforced by examples such as the large proportion of potential British soldiers who were found to be medically unfit to fight in the Boer War (1899-1902), which some saw as evidence of deteriorating British racial stock (Winter 1980: 211). For the opponents of female suffrage, the

poor health of army applicants was a symptom of national decline that could be directly linked to changing gender roles.

However, the use of the rhetorical power of 'femininity' was not limited to the anti-suffrage movement. Gender was also an important part of the images and representation used by the Suffragettes themselves in the pursuit of their political goals. Some pro-suffrage groups, for example, used conventional readings of Edwardian femininity to frame their campaigns by claiming that only women could understand and represent the needs of women. According to Jorgensen-Earp (1999: 25), WSPU leader Emmeline Pankhurst made use of mainstream definitions of femininity, despite her organisation's otherwise radical tactics. In this discourse, the nature of femininity and the 'appropriate' public role for women was a question of both gender and of national political identity:

Pankhurst implies that the vote will be a support to the Perfect Lady...She further implies that the vote will help to solve problems wrought by the Fallen woman (the prostitute) and the Redundant Woman (the spinster), the two negative incarnations of woman who formed a counterpoint to the Perfect Lady... Pankhurst positions voting as an integral part of the neotraditional view of women.

The image of traditional Edwardian femininity as linked to national identity was a visible part of the campaign for female suffrage. The Women's Coronation Procession of 1911 that began this chapter, for example, was a spectacular event designed to raise publicity and widen support for female suffrage by depicting women as visible and loyal members of the British nation and empire. However, for middle-class Edwardian women, appearing in public for the purposes of protest or demonstration was unusual and personally difficult because of the social expectation that women's place was primarily in the private, domestic sphere. As a result, large numbers of women protesting in public had a strong impact as both a tactic and a spectacle (Tickner 1987). Suffrage organisations used public spaces in their effort to transform women's national roles, including public appearances to draw the attention of the local and national media. As the campaign for female suffrage developed, processions and mass meetings were used to gain publicity and to demonstrate the extent of the movement's support to a government sceptical about enlarging the franchise. Processions were used by members of several female

suffrage groups as a tactic to raise public awareness of the issue and thereby pressure the government into considering it formally in Parliament.

In the next section, I will discuss the impact of some of these events on the Edwardian public, including the participants' use of visual effects and political rhetoric, as well as the media coverage that accompanied them. Following this, I will consider Trafalgar Square specifically, through examining one group's use of it, the WSPU. While both sets of activities were undertaken in aid of the cause of female suffrage, they referenced national identity very differently, with those in the Square making more specific reference to the built environment and its value in creating new national narratives. As discussed in Chapter Four, the history of the Square as a site of radical protest provided narratives that the WSPU could use to buttress their own political messages in a process of symbolic accretion that Dwyer (2004) argues gives place a unique role in shaping identity (see Chapter Two).

'Colour, gay sounds, movement, beauty'

Between 1907 and 1911, four large suffrage processions took place, including the Coronation Procession discussed above, organised by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), WSPU, and others. These events made use of urban place and rhetorical and visual propaganda, and relied upon the media and local crowds for publicity. According to Jorgensen-Earp (1999: 20): 'Just as Parliament greeted bills concerning women and children with raucous laughter and rude jokes, the press responded to the suffrage movement with what amounted to a press blackout. The need to overcome this blackout formed the first major rhetorical exigency leading to an increase in WSPU militant tactics.' As a political strategy, public spectacle helped the suffrage movement gain coverage in mainstream newspapers which had been largely uninterested in the campaign, and through the newspapers, the public (Tickner 1987: 58). Central London provided landmarks familiar to the British public that formed the perfect stage for their campaign of visibility (Kelly 2004: 331).

Visual imagery was an important part of the suffrage campaign, and organisations used spectacular displays against the backdrop of public places

in central London to redefine women in terms of both their femininity and their role in the nation. According to Tickner (1987: ix), these displays were produced at 'a moment which was not that of the specific struggle for the vote alone, but also of a broader debate about definitions of femininity and women's place in public life'. In their use of processions, suffrage organisers drew on a form of spectacle familiar to Edwardians, who were fascinated with the 'pageantry which the suffragists fused with the political demonstration in the production of their own ... particularly 'feminine' kind of spectacle' (Tickner 1987: 56). As I will discuss below, this pageantry included colourful banners and costumes such as those evident in the 1911 Coronation Procession.

However, public display in pursuit of their political goals was an ambivalent basis for their political demands, because of the 'double nature of the women's struggle: against a presumed consensus, and at the same time for the right to be more fully represented within it' (Tickner 1987: 57). In other words, campaigners wanted to be included in a national system that they also wanted to change radically. The effect of this tension was evident in one participant's report on the 'Mud March' of February 1907, the first female suffrage procession in central London: 'There can be nothing worse to the average woman ... than the sensation of being ruthlessly planted in full view of all the people she knows and does not know' (Tickner 1987: 75). The discomfort felt by this participant points to the difficulties that many women must have felt in challenging social and political norms through their participation in the female suffrage movement. It also indicates the novelty of female processions and their value as spectacle, as well as how participants were using urban space in new, untried ways.

In 1908, two further processions took place that combined the visual effect of a uniform colour scheme with the spectacle of large numbers of women in public. The use of a distinct colour scheme, such as the WSPU's purple, white and green, when campaigning, in processions, or simply to show support for female suffrage, had a strong visual effect that resonated with conventional notions of femininity. Recognising the business potential, shops kept stocks of clothes and accessories in the WSPU's three colours, 'all with the purchasing power of middle-class Suffragettes in mind' (Atkinson 1992: 19). This included

items such as 'walking skirts', and accessories made with processions specifically in mind:

The colours enable us to make that appeal to the eye which is so irresistible. The result of our processions is that this movement becomes identified in the mind of the onlooker with colour, gay sounds, movement, beauty. (*The Suffragette* in Atkinson 1992: 15)

The first of the processions to use these types of visual methods to spectacular effect occurred on Saturday, 13 June 1908, when the NUWSS organised a large procession through the streets of central London that converged on Hyde Park. Newspaper reports of the events highlighted the impressive visual aspects of the procession, drawing out the dignity of the participants:

Marshalled in a mighty phalanx over ten thousand strong and nearly two miles in length, the women suffragists marched through the streets of London on Saturday [13 June 1908] to the Albert Hall - and the conquest of the vote. The event was in every way a triumph. It was impressive and picturesque. (*Daily News* 1908a: 7)

Newspaper coverage of the 13 June procession hints at the event's popular reception, as well as attitudes to the question of female suffrage. It also identifies the challenges that many women must have faced in participating:

... many of the sightseers that had come to scoff remain to cheer ... Here and there, of course, a ribald jest or a vulgar music-hall refrain was heard; but they were few and far between and altogether missed fire in the presence of the dignified attitude of the women. (*Daily News* 1908a: 7)

One participant, Eunice Murray, of Dunbartonshire, Scotland, provided an evocative description of the event in her diary, including how it felt to participate, the reaction of the crowd and support of authorities in the form of a mounted police escort:

They were inspiring, such huge masses of women animated with the same hope. Ten thousand walked in the first procession - one quarter of a million gathered in Hyde park for the second. Professional women, working women and women of all classes gathered from every part of the country to take part in the proceedings. The banners on the 13th were many of them unmistakably beautiful. The procession from start to finish took three-quarters of an hour to pass any given point. Women walked four abreast, bands played, banners waved and hope stirred in my heart. It was impressive to the onlookers, inspiring to those who

took part. Escorted by the mounted police we trudged along. People cheered as we passed along and handkerchiefs waved. (Murray 2007: 114)

The organisation of this march, as well as its size and visual impact, was a focus of comment in both public and private documents. NUWSS organiser Phillipa Strachey received messages from participants congratulating her on the march, in which the importance of positive publicity is evident:

Hard as your labours were I feel sure the reports in the newspapers will amply reward you, for the procession accomplished what we have long desired ... to show that an earnest desire does exist among the 'quiet' women'. (Palliser 1908)

The next weekend, on 21 June, the WSPU organised a 'Women's Sunday' along similar lines, which was reported in the sympathetic *Daily News* in visual and spatial terms that contrasted it with more masculine and martial displays:

It was a white demonstration, touched with the green and purple that have become the emblem of the Women's Social and Political Union, which organised it. More than two-thirds of the women taking part wore white dresses, giving to the streets of London through which they marched under their silken banners a richness and refinement of colour such as the grandest of military pageants has never supplied. (*Daily News* 1908b: 7)



Figure 31: Suffragette procession, June 1908. Photo: World's Graphic Press Ltd.

In these examples, the campaign for female suffrage is visual and aesthetic. Newspaper reports highlight the appearance of the procession, casting it in terms of feminine beauty and display: 'the women brought beauty into a

political demonstration ... not in themselves alone, [but] by their myriad banners, every one a work of art' (*Daily News* 1908b: 7). During these events, the female suffrage campaigners' made their demand for national political membership by occupying the streets of the capital in a highly visible and spectacular display (see Figure 31). The decision to mount the processions in central London helped raise publicity and gain media coverage, positioning the campaigners firmly in the public sphere.

This material points to how the campaigners used London's public places to demonstrate their physical presence in a demand for a redefined national political presence. Their public demonstrations helped to create a narrative of a visible, politicised femininity that challenged mainstream Edwardian expectations of women as restricted to the private domestic realm. In doing so, they sought to transform the social and political power relations at the heart of British citizenship, that of the right to vote. However, in contrast with the use of Trafalgar Square that I will discuss below, these processions were highly controlled and organised. While it was unusual for female marchers to appear in public, these participants largely conformed to gender expectations of respectability. Their use of the streets had been approved by the authorities, as demonstrated by the police escort that accompanied the processions, as Eunice Murray described above.

The novelty of the spectacle of women marching in public gradually wore off, and the 1911 coronation was the last large procession as a part of the campaign for female suffrage. By this time, the WSPU had begun using more violent tactics, in part as a result of frustration with government inaction and in an attempt to maintain publicity. Over the next three years, these would grow to include window breaking, arson and property damage (Phillips 2003). While the WSPU continued to attract large numbers of supporters in public displays, its 'militant' tactics were a violent and disorderly contrast to the more traditional image of attractive and orderly femininity depicted in the processions discussed above. In the next section, I explore the WSPU's use of Trafalgar Square as a location for political demonstrations, exploring their significance for the construction and reproduction of narratives of national identity, including how the Suffragettes linked themselves to counter-hegemonic uses of the Square in the past.

The WSPU in Trafalgar Square: visibility and history

Although the WSPU was neither the only group that campaigned for female suffrage, nor the only militant group, I focus on this organisation because of the spatial aspects of its campaign, and in particular its use of Trafalgar Square. Known as 'Suffragettes', the WSPU's militancy was at odds with the strategies of 'suffragists', such as the NUWSS, which favoured less violent or publicly visible 'constitutionalist' tactics such as lobbying key politicians or peaceful processions. The WSPU used Trafalgar Square and other parts of London to increase the physical visibility of women and, through the publicity that this tactic raised, the political prominence of their cause. Furthermore, as I will show, they contextualised these activities with a narrative of liberty and rights that they drew in part from the history of Trafalgar Square and that they linked to a tactical use of space.

Before the establishment of the WSPU by the Pankhurst family in 1903, the female suffrage campaign was organised by 'suffragists' who were 'ladylike, low-key and law-abiding' (Atkinson 1992: 8). These women conformed to mainstream attitudes, according to which 'participation in public events such as processions and rallies, let alone making far-reaching political demands, was considered by most people "unwomanly" and "unsexing"' (Atkinson 1992: 16).

From 1906, however, the WSPU used more militant tactics as a means to pressure government to follow through on a series of parliamentary measures to advance female suffrage. An important strategy in the period from 1906 to 1914 was civil disobedience, summed up by the WSPU slogan 'Deeds not Words'. The WSPU used language and techniques that were new to the suffrage campaign in order to make its demands, and according to Atkinson (1992: 51): 'The union's shocking tactics, courage, fundraising and organisational capabilities set it apart from its predecessors and contemporaries'. Many of these, such as property damage or the large processions of 1908 and 1911, used space in politically innovative ways. Through a visible presence within the city, the WSPU and other groups sought a share of public decision-making through the vote, while simultaneously challenging conventional stereotypes of women in public. These tactics

included crowded and sometimes violent rallies in Trafalgar Square that led to marches on Downing Street, arrests, and sensational news coverage.

From 1906 to 1914, in addition to the processions I have already discussed, the WSPU and other women's suffrage organisations held rallies, meetings and demonstrations in central London, particularly Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park. These two places were used for very different purposes. For displays of numbers and large meetings, Hyde Park provided a perfect venue in which to gather many thousands of people, and some of the processions discussed above used Hyde Park as a rallying or end point. Like Trafalgar Square, the Park had a history of use to air public grievances in pursuit of political change. However, Trafalgar Square's history as a national protest site included the labour riots of the 1880s (see Chapter Four), which the Suffragettes and other groups referred to as a means to link their causes to a wider narrative of British liberty and rights, as I will demonstrate below.

Furthermore, Trafalgar Square had value for protestors in terms of its public visibility. It was a rare large open space in the crowded landscape of central London. Its location close to the House of Commons made it a useful gathering point for marches down Whitehall, the location of the Prime Minister's residence and many government offices, to Westminster and the Houses of Parliament. The Square was at a major intersection, and large numbers of people gathered there, spilling over into the surrounding streets, could bring central London traffic to a standstill. Police documents, for example, mention official concern over the threat of 'obstruction of the thoroughfare' potentially caused by large or unruly meetings in the Square (MEPO 2/7218).

According to Kelly (2004: 329), for the Suffragettes, 'visibility [was] the cornerstone of their representational strategy'. The Pankhursts' move to London from Manchester in 1906 was intended to raise their national profile 'with the explicit purpose of securing national press coverage for their cause' (Kelly 2004: 329). Christabel Pankhurst described the WSPU's new choice of location for their headquarters in terms of its value for raising publicity. The central WSPU office was 'adjacent to Fleet Street, [and] was highly convenient for the newspapers who were ever interested in the militant movement' (Pankhurst 1959: 70). This demonstrates the WSPU's awareness of

the importance of public visibility in the national press; the use of a prominent site such as Trafalgar Square was an important part of this strategy of visibility.

Further publicity for their cause was created by the WSPU's methods of causing disruption in public places, the purpose of which 'was to break the stalemate caused by public apathy and press indifference' (Tickner 1987: 9). Inasmuch as its tactics of property damage and the arrest of its leaders kept the organisation in the newspapers, it was successful in creating publicity for the movement. According to Kelly, this use of spectacle was a central tactic for the WSPU, as it 'laid the groundwork for [political change] by integrating women into the physical landscape and media representations of the city ... the voting woman became a credible actor in London's future imaginary' (Kelly 2004: 330). For the WSPU, therefore, urban public place was an important stage for activities in which women challenged social control of their public visibility, and in doing so, raised publicity for the cause of female suffrage. To ensure press coverage, their actions had to be as newsworthy as possible, and Trafalgar Square was one of several London venues in which the WSPU used spectacle to press their political agenda.

They were aided in publicity by the fact that the processions through central London, which involved thousands of women, were watched by many thousands more, and received widespread media coverage. Although these events were not confined to Trafalgar Square, the Square was a popular gathering place for spectators as part of the larger area of central London through which the processions moved. Furthermore, the 'respectable' construction of femininity that these processions invoked in contemporaneous reports contextualised the descriptions of other events in the Square as 'riotous and disorderly', as I will show. In the analysis of the WSPU's activities that follows, I will focus in two aspects of their use of the Square: the importance of the history of the Square in providing rhetorical material for their protests, especially the notion of liberty and 'rights', and the visibility that they gained by using it.

1906

In May 1906, a protest meeting was held in Trafalgar Square, 'the first large open-air women's suffrage gathering ever to take place in London' (Purvis 2002: 83), although 'the audience of 7,000 was predominantly male' (Purvis 2002: 83). The meeting was intended to raise publicity to pressure the Government on female suffrage, and Sylvia Pankhurst, Emmeline's daughter, appeared to be aware of the history of the Square as a site of previous demands to renegotiate change in the relationship between individual social groups and the nation. According to Mace (2005 [1976]: 206), at the meeting in the Square on 19 May, Sylvia felt proud to be proclaiming the rights of women on this ground, consecrate to the discontented and the oppressed:

... uppermost in her mind, that day, was the thought that on the very spot where [she] stood, forty years before... 'leaders of the Reform movement had spoken from the plinth in favour of the vote'.

Their use of the Square, as Sylvia Pankhurst indicated, was part of a lineage of previous counter-hegemonic uses of the space, including previous contests over the right to vote. The question of the 'rights of citizens' had been debated from the plinth of Nelson's Column before (Mace 2005 [1976]), and by associating itself with previous, successful campaigns for extending the vote, the suffrage movement used the Square to frame its vision of a national future that included enfranchised women. This was to become a theme of future meetings held in Trafalgar Square.

This evidence demonstrates that WSPU was well aware of the significance of the Square as a venue for previous political demands, as well as the way their cause could be enhanced through an association with historical struggles:

[WSPU leaders] selected Trafalgar Square as a meeting place for their first march [in 1906] to reinforce the WSPU's symbolic alliance with radical political disturbances of earlier decades... As an icon of open-air radical agitation, free speech and urban confrontation, Trafalgar Square provided an ideal platform for the WSPU slogan, 'Deeds not Words'. (Kelly 2004: 351)

According to this example, in 1906 the WSPU understood the Square as a site anchored in a narrative of national political rights and used it to legitimise its

campaign by linking itself with the political symbolism of the past. Furthermore, in doing so, it sought to shape a British *future* that included the political voices of women. Trafalgar Square, therefore, was a site in which the past was mobilised to create a reimagined national future. Additionally, the WSPU used the Square's history as a site of counter-hegemonic protest to frame its own radical demands. For example, by linking its struggle to the labour protests of 1887, as Sylvia Pankhurst did in her recollection of the protest on 19 May, the WSPU legitimised what they saw as a related struggle for political recognition, represented by the right to vote.

If the Square's historical resonance was important for the WSPU, it was also significant as a highly visible site. Publicity was a new weapon of the WSPU (Jorgensen-Earp 1999: 19), and demonstrations in Trafalgar Square were part of this strategy. While the WSPU's daily business was being conducted in semi-public meetings or in its offices, Trafalgar Square was a venue to make arguments and rally support as publicly as possible. Devices such as banners and bands were used, and prominent speakers addressed the crowd. At the May 1906 meeting, for example, the *Labour Leader* (1906: 10) reported that Emmeline Pankhurst and Labour MP Keir Hardie spoke at 'an imposing demonstration, led by three bands, with hundreds of banners flying in the breeze'. Dwelling on the visual and aural spectacle that a large number of people in the Square presented, the report mentioned the physical occupation of the space as a significant aspect of the demonstration: 'a vast crowd thronged Trafalgar Square, surrounding Nelson's Column...the stronger the argument the louder the vast assembly cheered' (*Labour Leader* 1906: 10). The newspaper goes on to quote the speakers, who '[made] clear to London's citizens that, as more than one speaker declared, "The time for mere talk had gone, the time for action had come"' (*Labour Leader* 1906: 10). The call to action was repeated by Keir Hardie, who urged 'all women to carry on a persistent agitation until the degrading political outlawry from which they suffer is ended and they have attained their rights as citizens' (*Labour Leader* 1906: 11). For these supporters, direct action was the best way to pressure the government to adopt the policy of female suffrage, and the Square was important because it provided a historically significant platform from which to broadcast the message of the 'natural rights' of citizens as widely as possible.

In the speeches reported above, women's political identity was described in terms of the 'rights of citizens', and was presented as incomplete given their inability to vote. The national narrative that Keir Hardie offered was one of 'unlawful' government that the suffrage movement wanted to force to comply with an older national tradition of popular rights. In terms of my research questions, the use of the Square helped to subvert official power by allowing speakers to address the public directly. It also provided a link to the national past that allowed this narrative to develop, as recognised by Sylvia Pankhurst. In terms of publicising their aims, however, this meeting was not as successful as the WSPU hoped. Notably, it was not mentioned in the House of Commons debate in the following sitting week, nor was it covered by the mainstream national newspaper, *The Times*.

1908

Two years later, in 1908, another gathering in Trafalgar Square again tried to raise publicity for the cause of female suffrage. In the autumn of that year, Parliamentary consideration of a female suffrage bill was refused, this time by new Liberal Prime Minister Asquith. In response, the WSPU organised a 'mass meeting' in Trafalgar Square on Sunday, October 11, where leaders Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and Flora Drummond addressed the crowd from the plinth of Nelson's Column (Jorgensen-Earp 1999: 25). Thousands of handbills were distributed urging supporters to 'Help the Suffragettes to Rush the House of Commons on Tuesday Evening, 13th October, 1908 at 7.30' (Purvis 2002: 113). This 'mass meeting' was reported in the *Daily News* the next day:

Mrs Pankhurst told a crowd of three thousand people. 'What will happen [when we 'rush' the House of Commons] I can't tell you ... but I believe that the men and the women who go to see them demand political justice will help them to reach the people's House of Commons - the House which belongs to the women as well as the men of this country. (*Daily News* 1908c: 9)

At this rally, the WSPU's leaders described the space of the House of Commons as both material and metaphorical, a building only few hundred metres away



Figure 32: Emmeline Pankhurst in Trafalgar Square.
Photo: BBC News Online

that was the political possession of all members of the nation. Pankhurst connected the physical occupation of Parliament to the right for women to be recognised within the nation. In this example of WSPU rhetoric, physical visibility in places such as Trafalgar Square or the House of Commons symbolised visibility within the nation.

Physical visibility was also an issue for those who did not support the Suffragettes. On Wednesday, 14 October, the day after the House of Commons had been 'rushed' by a group who had been encouraged by some WSPU leaders to enter the building, the Member for York, Mr Hamar Greenwood, asked that the Speaker 'take steps to exclude all women absolutely from the inner, or Members' lobby of this house during its sittings' (HoC Deb 14 Oct 1908). The member feared that the 'dignity' of the House had been impunged as 'the elementary rules of courtesy were violated in a way that I had hoped was restricted to pagan tribes in remote parts of the world' (HoC Deb 14 Oct 1908). In comparing the attempts by WSPU supporters to gain access to the Parliament to the worst discourtesies of paganism, Mr Greenwood called for limits to the presence of *any* women in the Member's area of the Commons. In reply, the Speaker pointed out that 'for a great number of years - the privilege has been accorded to ladies of visiting the Members' lobby', and that he was not willing to withdraw the privilege (HoC Deb 14 Oct 1908). As in Trafalgar Square, the question of women's presence appeared to symbolise more than merely a question of physical access. Here, physical visibility was contingent on standards of behaviour that were subtly linked to national participation.

As a result of the Pankhursts' exhortations, Eunice Murray, the visitor from Dunbartonshire, participated in the 13 October 'rush' on the House of Commons. As discussed above, she had travelled to London to assist in the suffrage campaign and had attended processions in London in June, as well as the October protest. The description in her diary provides a different perspective on Mr Greenwood's characterisation of the suffragette's activities:

The W.S.P.U. have had a scene in Parliament Square, such a performance on the part of the Government truly laughable. All London ablaze with excitement because a few women were going to the House, shouting crowds blocking the way, mounted police patrolling the streets and charging the crowds. Rows and rows of police to protect the legislators, a double row on each side of Parliament Street down towards Charing Cross - 8,000 police out,

not to protect these gallant men from armed mobs, but to stop a few women coming to ask for their rights. (Murray 2007:119)

In this account, Eunice Murray highlights a discrepancy between the female protestors and the numbers of police sent to control them. The control of and right to use public place was a perennial theme for suffrage campaigners, pointing to the importance of the contestation of space in national political struggles. For example, at the 11 October 1908 rally, according to Emmeline Pankhurst, 'police were there...taking ample notes of our speeches. We had not failed to notice that they were watching us daily, dogging our footsteps, and showing in numerous ways that they were under orders to keep track of all our movements' (Purvis 2002: 113). In addition to surveillance, the police repeatedly responded to WSPU rallies or movement through the city by erecting barriers, often with their own bodies. In an example of Massey's (1991) power-geometry, officials prevented campaigners from gathering, or removed them from areas near Downing Street or the House of Commons, restricting their mobility. This appeared to be a political tactic designed to reduce their visibility and to control a perceived threat to public order. Here, control over the use of public places represented official attempts to suppress a counter-hegemonic version of the nation, one that included women as enfranchised citizens.

As a result of their encouragement of the crowd to 'rush' the House of Commons, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, along with Flora Drummond, were quickly arrested and prosecuted. In Emmeline's defence speech during this case, she lays out the WSPU's implicit understanding of the nation and women's role in it:

...[the vote] is the only way in which women can get the right of deciding how the taxes to which they contribute should be spent, and how the laws they have to obey should be made ... we are here, not because we are law-breakers; we are here in our efforts to become law-makers. (Pankhurst 1959: 112)

Her characterisation of the rights of women calls on construction of the history of British 'rights' that echoed John Locke's principles that 'government should rest on the consent of the governed, who were ultimately justified in rebellion if their rights were infringed' (Leach 2009: 32). The WSPU's use of these political ideas appeared elsewhere in references to previous reform and labour

movement rallies in Trafalgar Square. As discussed above, Sylvia Pankhurst referred to previous rallies in 1906, when the WSPU drew together the spatial and historical to reinforce its vision of the nation in its use of Trafalgar Square as a protest site. However, this aspect of the WSPU's tactics appeared to strengthen over time, and by 1913 the use of the Square to link the suffrage movement to previous radical causes was much more evident, as I discuss in the next section.

1913

Five years later, in 1913, in reaction to the campaign of militant Suffragettes and concerned about the possibility of civil disobedience as a result of large gatherings, the Government removed the right to protest in Hyde Park. This was an attempt to control the numbers of people who could gather and was aimed at discouraging the 'monster meetings' in the park that had been one aspect of the overall female suffrage campaign. However, campaigners turned to other central London places, and on 4 May, they responded with a meeting in Trafalgar Square 'to defend free speech' (*The Suffragette* 1913a: 498). According to sympathetic press coverage, restrictions to the 'right' to gather in particular public places were tantamount to an abrogation of public liberty. This was reflected in one of the resolutions put to the crowd: 'That this meeting declares the unalterable right of free meeting and free speech, regarding them as the only safeguards of public liberty and of the claims of minorities' (*The Suffragette* 1913a: 498). This statement linked the suffrage campaign with a belief in popular liberty expressed as the right to free speech.

Material from other speeches provides additional evidence that suffrage campaigners understood 'liberty' in this way. The police records of the 4 May 1913 meeting contain detailed transcriptions of the campaigners' speeches (MEPO 2/1556). As with *The Suffragette* coverage discussed above, speakers began by linking British national identity with a historical notion of liberty that included the right to gather in public places. One early speaker used history to reinforce the point, mentioning the 1887 Trafalgar Square rally:

I do not believe any liberty loving British Citizen wishes to leave it to the Police in this Country to decide whether it is right or safe

that people should be allowed to hold a meeting in Hyde Park. We won the right of meetings in Hyde Park in 1867 just as we won them here in 1887... (MEPO 2/1556: 2)

The reference to 1887 was an ongoing rhetorical device, with speakers mentioning it several times: 'They [the Government] are going to have the lesson of 1887 again, if they are not careful' and: 'The last speaker spoke of 1887. What was necessary in 1887 is necessary now. The Governments last resource is always one of force' (MEPO 2/1556). Keir Hardie, a longstanding supporter of female suffrage, was even more explicit in his rhetorical use of Trafalgar Square to link the 1913 event to past struggles for popular rights:

We have had the finest demonstration seen in Trafalgar Square since 1894. On that occasion the demonstration compelled the Liberal Government to give the eight hour day. (MEPO 2/1556: 13)

According to the police transcripts, Hardie also linked the Square with labour solidarity and political recognition, and alluded to past struggles with authorities that had occurred there:

Give nobody any excuse for using violence...Remember 1887. Do not forget friends that our strength lies in our solidarity. Solidarity in Trafalgar Square...so as to bring about the day when our own class shall have become the ruling class, and thereby brought assurance of liberty, equality, and fraternity. (MEPO 2/1556: 13)

Finally, Mrs Despard, leader of suffrage organisation the Women's Freedom League, made a strong claim for women to be heard within the public sphere: 'They are trying to stop women from speaking, but the woman [sic] are going to speak and act ... The capitalistic papers will say that there was [sic] a few women in Trafalgar Square today. The great heart of the men of country [sic] - and the women - is beating in unison' (MEPO 2/1556). In her speech, Mrs Despard connects female visibility - and audibility - with national unity in support of free speech rights. Referring to the authorities' opposition to both their cause and their use of public space to protest, she describes the gathering as both powerful and counter-hegemonic. As discussed in previous sections, this contest over the right to gather and be visible in Trafalgar Square symbolised the right to national visibility in the form of enfranchisement.

This material positions free speech as a demand to use urban public place for meetings, and the use of Trafalgar Square as a protest site provided a rhetorical connection to past struggles for political rights and national membership. By gathering in the Square, suffrage supporters linked themselves to a history of similar uses, and they described this activity as necessary to a narrative of British liberty with roots in previous struggles for political recognition. The speakers used the Square to legitimise their claim to membership of the nation, particularly through references to historical uses of the space for what they saw as similar instances of demands for popular and counter-hegemonic rights. This demonstrates that in the Suffragettes' national narrative, the Square was a device to link themselves to both a national past and a re-imagined national future.

In addition to the links with the past and future that the Square provided, it also acted as a highly visible stage for a spectacular gathering (see Hagen and Ostergren 2006), an aspect of the Square's use that I discussed in Chapters Two and Three. *The Suffragette* coverage of the 4 May 1913 rally, for example, emphasised the visibility of the event by describing the large number of attendees, painting a picture of a massive public event:

For two hours before the meeting began an enormous crowd thronged the square. Processions of men and women poured down from all quarters of London, until a mass of 30,000 people, all eager to declare their dissent from the suppression of Suffrage meetings in Hyde Park, were gathered round the Nelson Column. (*The Suffragette* 1913a: 498)

The Daily Citizen also highlighted the presence of the large crowd as a memorable aspect of the protest: 'The square was packed ... Before long, hundreds of people could find room only in the Strand approach to Charing Cross and in the opening of Northumberland Avenue merely as a spectacle it was memorable' (cited in *The Suffragette* 1913a: 498). The nature of the spectacle, however, went beyond the large numbers of participants. While *The Times* (1913a: 8) emphasised the size of the crowd, which it estimated at 20,000 to 30,000, it was the 'riotous' behaviour of the crowd, rather than its size, that provided the main spectacle:

During a 'free speech' demonstration in Trafalgar Square yesterday, intended as a protest against the prohibition of

suffragist meetings, there were scenes of great disorder, and the police were compelled to take vigorous measures to disperse the crowd...free fights ensued between the police and the crowd....several [police] helmets rolled off on the melee and scores of people were knocked down and trampled upon.

This line of reporting continued across a range of editorial positions. The *Daily Citizen* reported that 'There was literally a fight for free speech in Trafalgar Square yesterday afternoon' (cited in *The Suffragette* 1913a: 498). The pro-suffrage *Daily News* described the 'exciting scenes in Trafalgar-square' blaming the trouble on an 'unauthorised' speaker, who, in attempting to speak from the southern side of the plinth of Nelson's Column, had caused a conflict with police and 'brought a disorderly finish to an otherwise orderly and successful meeting' (*Daily News* 1913: 1).

The differing tones of these reports demonstrate the range of national opinion on the activities of the WSPU and its sister organisations, as well as the different publications' attitude to power and authority. *The Suffragette* described the public as incensed over the related issues of the Government's position on female suffrage and the right to free speech, and by linking these two issues, the paper connected female suffrage to a contest between the state and the British people. While *The Times* was concerned with the impact of these activities on public order and characterised the protest as transgressive, *The Suffragette* blamed the Government for the 'riot', claiming that 'by trampling on the franchise rights and free speech rights of the people, [the Government is] provoking grave public disorder' (*The Suffragette* 1913a: 499). However, these contrary positions reported both the spectacle of the crowd and the excitement of conflict with authority as central to the event. By describing the protestors as either transgressive or within their constitutional rights, the different versions of the 1913 rally reflect a range of national narratives. For *The Times*, order and authority were being flouted, whereas *The Suffragette* appealed to a alternate version of the 'rights of the people'.

The 4 May meeting can be understood in terms of the rhetorical use of history and the opportunity for national visibility that the use of the Square provided. In the accounts above, the use of Trafalgar Square as a meeting place was rich with historical precedent, its environment central to a narrative of a struggle

for citizens' rights that drew on national history and contemporaneous power relationships. Speakers in the Square characterised their struggle in terms of national 'rights', referring to both the right to use the Square and the right to national recognition through enfranchisement. As with previous events, the contest over the right to meet and campaign in Trafalgar Square appeared to symbolise a right to national political membership for British women.

Later in the year, on Sunday, 10 August 1913, another rally took place in Trafalgar Square, attended by WSPU's Sylvia Pankhurst, who had been temporarily released from prison as a result of her hunger strike. According to Purvis (2002: 230) 20,000 to 30,000 people gathered in the Square to protest against the imprisonment of George Lansbury, a prominent supporter of female suffrage. The 'monster demonstration' was described in *The Suffragette* (1913b: 768) newspaper as 'one of the largest held in the Square in recent years, some estimates giving the number of the audience as 20,000'. At the rally, a fight with police broke out, and Pankhurst was one of several people arrested.

In contrast with *The Suffragette's* reporting, which emphasised the unusual size of the crowd, *The Times* report of the 'suffragist disorder' highlighted the violence of the crowd, repeating the coverage of the 4 May meeting earlier that year. Its reporter described the scene when Sylvia Pankhurst was arrested: 'some of the men in the crowd and some of the militant women suffragists attacked the police and detectives, while others clung to Miss Pankhurst in an attempt to drag her away' (*The Times* 1913c: 5). In these accounts, the size and behaviour of the crowd, as well as the effect on nearby people and traffic, again made for an exciting and newsworthy spectacle. Scuffles between the crowds and the police are confirmed by a police file from the next day that contains an account of the disorder (MEPO 2/1226). According to police records, as on 4 May, the conflict began as a result of an attempt by a man to speak from the south side of the plinth, an activity prohibited by the police on the grounds of problems with traffic: 'Speaking from the south side of the plinth is contrary to the Regulations governing the Square, and dangerous to pedestrians owing to the traffic' (MEPO 2/1226).

Large meetings in Trafalgar Square such as this one presented a genuine issue for London officials, particularly the police, who wanted to ensure that traffic

could continue to flow freely through central London. The area around Trafalgar Square was a central congestion point, and people spilling out of the Square, especially onto the nearby road to the south, could easily block traffic from surrounding streets, as can be seen in newsreel footage of the 10 August rally (*Pathé* 1913).

This newsreel gives a sense of the experience of being at such a demonstration. The opening frames describe the event as the 'Trafalgar Square Riot' and headline the coverage with the announcement that 'ugly rushes were made to secure the release of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst' (*Pathé* 1913). It shows a tightly packed Trafalgar Square with a marching band weaving through it, followed by waving flags and banners. As reported in *The Suffragette*, one of these banners included the phrase 'Remember Trafalgar Square 1887', a reference to a rally which included the death of Alfred Linnell, an onlooker who died as a result of being trampled by a police horse (see Chapter Four).

On the newsreel, the crowds appear to spill out of the confines of the Square onto Charing Cross Road to the east, and later footage shows people, buses and mounted police surging down Whitehall, providing visual evidence of the effect that large numbers of people gathered in Trafalgar Square could have on central London traffic, just as police reporting indicated. Finally, one man and two women are led away by the police and the newsreel ends with a shot from a nearby street of the thronging crowds, the vast majority of whom are men, surging around the Square.

In the meetings on 4 May and 10 August 1913, the themes of liberty and rights are closely linked to the spatial occupation of Trafalgar Square as a tactic to demand political inclusion. The banner urging participants to 'Remember 1887' and the description of the Square as a battlefield for free speech reference notions of citizens' liberty and the right to national visibility that were central to the WSPU's political claims. Furthermore, newspaper coverage emphasised both the size of the crowd and the conflict with police, reinforcing the spatial, social and political visibility of female suffrage supporters that the event promoted. The Square's value as a prominent site is also demonstrated by official concern over the effect of the demonstration on

the surrounding city. For the police, unauthorised use of the south side of Nelson's Column as a speaking platform was worth scuffling over, whereas for the WSPU, the resulting sensational newspaper coverage helped make their arguments as widely-known as possible.

In the Suffragettes' version of Trafalgar Square's history, it was a space of contest over free speech, liberty and the future of the nation. Previous contests over access to the space and the 'right' to use it to promote popular political causes contextualised WSPU campaigners' approach to the Square, and over the course of their campaign, they used its history as a site of resistance to mainstream political power to bolster a counter-hegemonic national narrative that included women as active, enfranchised citizens. By 1913, the WSPU was making increasingly explicit reference to previous demands for political recognition that had been made in the Square to strengthen their claims, including by the labour and free speech movements in the 1840s and 1880s (see Chapter Four). The WSPU used the Square to demand the liberty that they characterised as a 'national' characteristic in order to legitimise their demands in historical perspective. In addition to its role in creating publicity, the Square's history of contest and protest was an increasingly important motif of their claims to a stake in both the place and, through it, the nation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed Trafalgar Square as part of a strategy that female suffrage campaigners used to demand political change. I began by discussing the use of processions that were understood by both participants and the press as highly feminised displays. The use of 'spectacle' as a means to raise publicity, however, was not limited to the orderly and well-organised processions of 1907, 1908 and 1911. In the 'riotous' and 'disorderly' rallies in Trafalgar Square, particularly in 1908 and 1913, similar tactics of physical occupation of a central London place and the visual display of banners, marching bands and large crowds were enlivened by scuffles with police and the interruption of busy central London traffic.

Along with sister organisations, the WSPU became highly skilled in using spectacle as a means to maintain publicity, but in doing so, they had to negotiate the difficulties of women appearing and speaking out in public, confronting Edwardian definitions of respectable middle-class femininity that demanded women be appropriately occupied in the home and out of the public gaze. Implicit in the suffrage movement's ideology was a recasting of women as appropriate actors in the public sphere, and the WSPU and other female suffrage organisations sought to redefine female participation in the public life of the nation. In seeking the right to vote and an expanded role for women in society, they used public places in ways that 'respectable' middle-class women had not usually used them before, for example by selling newspapers, chalking meeting announcements on pavements or by breaking shop windows. In Trafalgar Square, they occupied the space during several demonstrations, ensuring media coverage because of the Square's prominent location as well as the spectacle of women speaking in public in support of a radical cause.

The WSPU used Trafalgar Square to bring their national narrative to public attention through two main devices which I have discussed in this chapter: visibility and history. First, the WSPU's strategy of feminine visibility in public manipulated the generally masculinised character of the 'street' to press for national legal recognition alongside physical recognition. As they campaigned for female suffrage, they negotiated the tension between raising publicity for their cause and maintaining the respectability that defined middle-class Edwardian femininity. This public visibility, however, was central to the suffrage movement's claim to national participation. According to John and Eustance (1997: xv), 'the campaign for female suffrage helped to change the very idea of what constitutes the "political nation", but being part of a wider women's movement they [were] also central to the disintegration and reformation of ideas around the "public and private"'. For the Suffragettes, the struggle over space, and the right to be present in it, represented a struggle over the right to be literally counted as part of the national body politic. As they worked for formal political inclusion in the nation, they made themselves more visible members of it through their use of central London. Their goal of national *political* visibility was pursued through a strategy of *spatial* visibility in urban places, notably Trafalgar Square.

The WSPU increasingly couched this campaign in terms of the language of a history of British rights and liberty based on the history of Trafalgar Square. In using the Square they accessed a place-based historical narrative of citizen rights, such as those of free speech and free assembly, that linked their movement to previous radical causes. This demonstrates that the use of Trafalgar Square created access to historical narratives that the Suffragettes used to frame and legitimise subsequent political demands, reinforcing Nora's (1989) characterisation of *lieux de mémoire* as sites where the national past is explicitly evoked. However, in activating Trafalgar Square as a *lieu de mémoire* to link themselves to the past, they also implicitly linked themselves to the future, and a new, more inclusive political system. The contest over Trafalgar Square, in other words, represented a contest over possible national futures, as much as a contest over the space itself.

Furthermore, the use of such rhetoric, exemplified by reference to the 1887 Trafalgar Square demonstrations, demonstrates the importance of power relationships in shaping the national narratives created in place. By linking themselves to previous radical causes, WSPU leaders identified their movement as similarly counter-hegemonic in its demands to reshape British national identity. In doing so, they took care to stress their support of the nation, as with the support of the monarchy expressed during the 1911 Coronation Procession. While Suffragettes wanted to change the relationship between women and the state, they did not seek to overthrow or even diminish the British nation.

The WSPU's use of Trafalgar Square responds to some of the central claims within the literature that this thesis seeks to explore, including whether national identity can be usefully conceptualized as a discourse (Özkırmlı 2005), or an active, place-based process (Edensor 2002, Massey 2005), in which different groups negotiate (sometimes violently) their ideological or material goals for national inclusion (Hutchinson 2005). Aspects of the Suffragettes' use of Trafalgar Square help address these claims. For example, conflicts between authorities and groups wishing to use place in particular ways, such as the 1913 rally that ended in scuffles with police and traffic chaos in central London, were constructed as national and historically-linked

struggles by the WSPU. On the other hand, the fact that the authorities allowed the rally in the first place suggests that even hegemonic versions of British national identity can accommodate a range of different narratives, some of which were on display in the Square and other public places during these rallies and processions.

The evidence of these contests, including how they were constructed by the WSPU leadership, the police and other national authorities suggests two arguments that I will develop over the next two empirical chapters. First, I suggest that contests over Trafalgar Square can represent contests over the nation, and the 'occupation' of space, for example through a rally or demonstration, can function as a bid for national belonging and a re-imagined national identity. The Suffragettes, for example, gained press coverage and thereby national visibility in part through their use of the Square. Official attempts at control over activities in the Square were based on concerns over their tactical use of space in pursuit of political goals, such as marching to important nearby sites such as Downing Street or the Houses of Parliament, or the potential disruption to London's busy traffic. However, they were also informed by questions surrounding the 'appropriate' behaviour of women, as with Mr Greenwood's comments about female access to parts of the House of Commons, or newspaper descriptions of the feminised 'beauty' of large processions.

Second, I suggest that the prominence of Trafalgar Square as a site where national identity is contested or re-imagined cannot be adequately understood without considering the urban spatial context in which it is located. As discussed in Chapter Two above, Massey (1991, 2005) argues that place does not have strict divisions, spatial or otherwise, and that its boundaries create and define relationships between different entities rather than divide people from each other. In the material above, the Square's physical boundaries appear to become more flexible when events there spill out onto neighbouring streets. This complicates the role of Trafalgar Square as a self-contained *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989), suggesting that the content of the national narratives constructed within the Square might not end at its physical boundaries. Instead, it might be more useful to conceptualise the Square at the centre of a discursive process (Edensor 2002, Massey 2005) that includes

the surrounding environment. In the chapters that follow, I will continue to explore the usefulness of these two hypotheses.

chapter six

Illuminations: VE Day 1945

At 9.00 on the evening of 8 May 1945, King George VI announced to radio listeners across Britain that the Second World War had ended in Europe, calling for a national ‘pause for thanksgiving’ to mark the occasion (Miller 2007 [1995]: 178). The day had been a public holiday, and like other people across the country, Londoners celebrated in the streets of their city, gravitating towards the centre, seeking out public celebrations. George Broomhead was among them:

I caught the train to London and made my way to Trafalgar Square and after a while I climbed onto the lion and finished up perched on its head and someone passed me the Union Jack ... I was trying to conduct the singing in the crowds at the same time! Those were unforgettable scenes, dancing and singing - it went on all night. (cited in Royal British Legion 2010)

The public celebrations such as those that George Broomhead enjoyed were widely reported in the national and international media, and have become some of the central images of VE Day in Britain. At the heart of the landscape of celebration was Trafalgar Square and many personal and media accounts describe how the Square was used by celebrants and officials on 7-9 May 1945.

This version of VE Day is still prominent in the contemporary British imagination. In 2010, for example, the Royal British Legion framed its 65th anniversary of VE Day event with the following description of the end of the war along similar celebratory lines:

Bells across the country pealed, tugs on the Thames sounded their horns and planes roared overhead, some doing the victory roll. A sea of red, white and blue erupted - even dogs wore tricolour bows - spontaneous celebrations broke out as men, women and children rejoiced ... London was the place to be; it had taken the brunt of the war's bombing and it was only right that it should be the place to celebrate. Anyone who could reach the city did so. The centre of London was full of people waving flags. (Royal British Legion 2010)

In this chapter, I examine the VE day celebrations in Trafalgar Square and its surrounds, asking how they helped to shape the way British national identity was understood by the users of the Square and others who observed this use, through media or other channels. In doing so, I focus on two main aspects. First, the Square's role as a gathering place during the VE Day celebrations in central London. Second, the location of prominent local and national landmarks that were floodlit on the evenings of 8 and 9 May as a symbolic 'turning on of the lights' that occurred around the country during the VE Day celebrations. The choice of this material reinforces my argument that visibility or occupation of public place works to make the nation visible to both participants and those who observe events through media coverage, thereby shaping how people imagine national identity. In addition, the national past, as represented in the built environment of central London, also helped shape the narratives created in place. Finally, by contextualising the floodlighting of Trafalgar Square with a consideration of its surrounding neighbourhood, I continue to argue for conceptualising the Square as a discursive process at the centre of a larger urban landscape of national identity.

Before I turn to this material, however, I will begin by exploring accounts of British national identity during World War Two, including the symbolic value of central London as a national and imperial landscape. This will provide the social context for my analysis of the 8 May celebrations. I will then explore the experience of VE Day in Trafalgar Square and its surrounding neighbourhood, analysing the use of the Square during the celebrations by drawing out how

national identity was conditioned by the built environments in which they took place. In the conclusion, I will compare the use of Trafalgar Square during VE Day with its use by the Suffragettes that I discussed in Chapter Five.

This material will allow me to continue to develop the answers to my research questions, namely: what national narratives are created and reflected in Trafalgar Square, and by whom? What power relationships inform these place-based narratives? What is the role of these narratives in connecting the national past, present and future? Finally, I will return to the overall hypotheses on the relationship between place and national identity that I discussed at the end of the previous chapter.

London 1945: the ‘People’s War’

The version of national identity officially promoted in Britain throughout the Second World War was one of national unity and common purpose. As Churchill said in the summer of 1940: ‘The whole of warring nations are engaged, not only soldiers, but the entire population, men, women and children. The fronts are everywhere’ (cited in Calder 2008 [1969]: 17). In wartime publications and broadcasts, writers and essayists such as George Orwell and J.B. Priestley reinforced the idea of a unified nation with longstanding universal characteristics, as in this example from Orwell’s (1957: 64) *England Your England*, first published in 1941:

Yes, there *is* something distinctive and recognizable in English civilization ... It is somehow bound up with solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar-boxes. It has a flavour of its own. Moreover, it is continuous, it stretches into the future and the past, there is something in it that persists...

Here Orwell identifies an aspect of national identity directly relevant to this thesis: that it works to connect the national present to both its past and its future. According to Rose (2003: 6-7), such themes of unity and endurance were part of a common narrative during the war that presented the British to themselves as a national community despite social divides such as class, region or gender:

[During World War 2] There were numerous portraits depicting the nation as a unified community of ordinary people contributing to the war effort. These characterizations made 'the common man' central to the nation at war, celebrated diversity, implicitly advocated tolerance, and recognized Britain as a class- and gender-divided society but denied that it mattered to national unity - to the image of the British as essentially one people. This vision of World War Two patriotism provided the parameters for defining the nation as a community.



Figure 33: 1939 government information poster. Image: Imperial War Museum.

In 1940, the phrase 'a People's war' was shorthand for an influential idea that 'shaped the rhetoric of five years of official and unofficial propaganda' (Calder 2008 [1969]: 138), and that actively promoted this idea of a unified nation. Furthermore, the 'People's war' saw the civilian population effectively 'mobilised' in support of the fighting troops through schemes such as the Land Army and the conscription of factory workers. To further reinforce the notion of national unity, the government monitored civilian morale closely and called on British people to remain cheerful in the face of wartime deprivation such as increasingly stringent rationing. As the information poster in Figure 33 demonstrates, in the

official wartime narrative, high morale was depicted as crucial to military success.

However, the official vision of a united and determined nation obscured a much more complicated reality of a country subject to a range of social divides, and Britain in 1945 remained divided by class, despite the attempts by the British government to unify the population during the war (Rose 2003, Calder 2008 [1969]). An example of ongoing class issues, according to Stedman Jones (1989), was the image of the working-class Londoner, the cockney. According to Stedman Jones, the 'plucky cockney' was a construction of the middle and upper classes designed to illustrate British resolve. During the London Blitz, 'The terms in which the iconography of the "cheerful cockney" were resurrected by the Conservative press betrayed its ignorance and lack of intimacy with the world of the back streets' (Stedman Jones 1989: 314). Whilst this is only one example of social division in wartime Britain, it does demonstrate some of the complexities of British identity.

According to Rose (2003), by 1945 the country was exhausted by war, with a sense of vulnerability that extended to the 'national unity' that the authorities had worked hard to inculcate. Rose (2003: 2) highlights the 'fragility of a unitary national identity, even during a war that involved total mobilization of the country's citizenry'. In 1945, the possibility of a single British national identity was perceived as both stronger and weaker than it had been before 1939, as the wartime experience had both unified the nation towards a common purpose and exacerbated existing social divisions because of the difference in resources that people were able to draw on. MP and diarist Harold Nicholson, for example, recorded rumours that the 'King and Queen had been booed the other day when they visited the destroyed areas' (Calder 2008 [1969]: 164). When Buckingham Palace was bombed on 13 September 1940, the Queen was reported to have said that she was glad the royal residence had been damaged, because now she could 'look the East End in the face' (Calder 2008 [1969]: 168). The East End, a traditionally working class area and home to London's docks, was bombed extensively during the September 1940 - May 1941 Blitz. Thus, despite official attempts to promote national unity in the face of physical and emotional wartime loss and trauma, the image of Britain as unified against its enemies that authorities presented was not, according to Rose (2003), Calder (2008 [1969]) and Stedman Jones (1989), the primary experience of many people in London's homes, neighbourhoods, and public places. According to these authors, the national community was not as uniform or unified as the phrase 'the People's war' suggested.

Another aspect of attempts to build a unifying national narrative was geographical. Although many areas of the UK were damaged by war, attacks on London came to symbolise attacks on the whole country. The Blitz strengthened the role of London as a national symbol, both in terms of its built environment and its inhabitants. Reinforcing Stedman Jones' (1989) description of the 'cheerful cockney' described above, according to White (2008 [2001]: 102), London residents were cast as plucky, stoic and resilient, and during the Blitz the term 'Londoner' became a 'title of honour': 'from 7 September 1940, literally overnight, the image of the Londoner was remade in the eyes of the English speaking world...[the war] bridged the gulf between London and the nation...' (White 2008 [2001]: 102). If the nation looked to

Londoners as symbolic of stoic endurance, London's built environment also became a symbol of British resilience, and played an important role in the narrative of national resistance to German aggression, especially after the fall of France in 1940 (Bell 2009).

In particular, the London Blitz of September 1940 to May 1941 brought London to the forefront of the British national imagination, placing it 'at the heart of the nation' (Stedman Jones 1989: 314). Noel Coward summed up this sentiment in verse in 1941's 'London Pride':

London Pride has been handed down to us.
London Pride is a flower that's free.
London Pride means our own dear town to us,
And our pride it for ever will be.

As evidence of London's power to symbolise national survival, at the end of the war in a speech on 9 May 1945, Churchill described it (with imperial and anthropomorphic overtones) as a robust and resilient African beast: 'London, like a great rhinoceros, a great hippopotamus, saying: "Let them do their worst. London can take it." London could take anything' (quoted in Eade 1945: 127). One MOA correspondent who participated in the VE Day celebrations also alluded to London's special symbolic role: 'Of all Britain, London stood out as the centre of resistance to German "culture", and when I heard the cheers of the people, I was happy, for were they not entitled to cheer louder than any' (Mass Observation Archive FR 2263 1945: 55).

This characterisation of the capital city as a symbol of national survival also appeared in King George VI's nationally-broadcast thanksgiving speech on VE Day. He made his speech from the war-damaged capital, recognising London's special symbolic importance for the nation:

Speaking from our Empire's oldest capital city, war-battered but never for one moment daunted or dismayed - speaking from London, I ask you to join with me in an act of thanksgiving...(in Waller 2004: 297)

In these statements, the damaging effect of the war on the urban landscape is symbolic of the national experience of war, as well as endurance and national pride. According to Bell (2009: 157), London's built environment represented national resilience, because although it was a military target, it was also a

'powerful ideological symbol of civilian endurance'. The importance of the built environment was based in large part on its cultural symbolism. Images of the Blitz, such as the survival of St Paul's Cathedral intact despite German bombardment of the surrounding area, were (and still are) part of the narrative of British endurance as told through London's built environment (see Figure 34).



Figure 34: St Paul's Cathedral during the London Blitz. Image: BBC Online.

However, despite the prominence of the official narrative that emphasised London's role as a symbol of national endurance and imperial power, the fragility of the urban landscape was also evident. According to Waller (2004: 1), London towards the end of the war was uninspiring: 'the first impression was one of grimy, grey drabness. Buildings black with soot...Boarded-up windows ... [and] mean terraces, with now and then a gap...acres of bomb sites ... After five years of war, the people looked tired and worn'. Fear had been a feature of the war for many Londoners, especially during the Blitz of September 1940 to May 1941, as well as later rocket attacks in 1944-5. In the 1940-41 bombardment, 15,775 Londoners were killed and almost one-sixth made homeless (Bell 2009: 158). In addition to the loss of life, London's built environment was a casualty of the Blitz, and according to Porter (2001 [1994]: 341), this had a significant effect of the city: 'Killing only 20,000 civilians, the Blitz destroyed or damaged 3.5 million homes in metropolitan London. London's wartime toll was thus less in deaths or social breakdown than in destruction to property'. According to Bell (2009: 153-157), this transformed London into a 'landscape of fear':

During the Second World War, London was the primary and most dramatic stage where both personal and communal fears were played out. Londoners feared death, loss of property, injury, bereavement, and on a broader scale, the loss of the war and the end of Britain...the landscape of wartime London, stripped of familiar landmarks and after 1940 damaged by bombs...became imbued with fears of imminent individual and collective destruction.

In this account, London's landscape reflected national fragility and anxiety, a very different narrative from Churchill's confidence that 'London can take it'.

Finally, in addition to London's role as an official symbol of national survival, it also played a role as an imperial centre, as emphasised by King George VI in his Thanksgiving Speech. Churchill also invoked this in his address to the nation on 8 May 1945, characterising the war effort as an imperial one: 'After gallant France had been struck down', his statement read, 'we from this island and from our united Empire maintained the struggle single-handed for a whole year' (HL Deb 8 May 1945). According to Driver and Gilbert (1998: 17), imperial symbolism was particularly evident in the central London area around Trafalgar Square, the focus of this study:

This triangular area - with Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square, and the Houses of Parliament at its three corners and the ceremonial routes of the Mall and Whitehall along two sides - is probably the most celebrated of all sites of 'imperial' London.



Figure 35: 'Visit the Empire', 1932. Image: Ernest Dinkel.

Before the war, tourist guidebooks to London emphasised London's role as the centre of the world's largest empire. In one, 'Trafalgar Square was "truly the centre of Empire" not only because of its historical significance, but also because Canada and South Africa had "chosen wisely to place their London home here"' (Gilbert 1999: 279). A 1932 poster for the London Underground (Figure 35) illustrates how London's geography symbolised the empire: 'London was not merely the heart of a global empire; it was the place in which an enormous variety of imperial sights could be seen' (Driver and Gilbert 1998: 1). These examples suggest that Empire was an important part of how London's built environment was both represented and understood.

Other accounts, however, suggest that the role that Empire played in the interwar and wartime public imagination was less important for the British people than it appeared to be for national officials. For example, an author for the Left Book Club wrote in 1945 that the Empire had ‘little hold on [people’s] imaginations’ (Campbell 1945: 7), and Colonial Office surveys found evidence of widespread ignorance of the Empire just after the war (MacKenzie 1986: 7). Porter argues that the Empire was not very important to people in Britain ‘for most of the time that [Britain] was acquiring and ruling the greatest empire ever’ (Porter 2004: 3), and that subsequent representations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have had Empire ‘inserted’ as culturally significant. Below, I shall explore in more detail the extent to which this aspect of collective identity was evident in the VE Day celebrations.

Overall, during World War Two, London’s people and built environment represented contradictory aspects of British society and identity. The social unity that government morale-boosting campaigns sought to engender papered over existing class divisions (Rose 2003). Additionally, the existence of the Empire did not appear to be as compelling for the population as it did for national authorities, suggesting that official and popular narratives differed in their conceptualisation of national identity.

Furthermore, the survival of buildings such as St. Paul’s Cathedral, the heavily bombed East End and the image of the ‘plucky cockney’ were symbolic of national survival and resilience, and the buildings and place names of the central areas invoked an enduring global empire. On the other hand, the destruction of property and the displacement of thousands of Londoners also symbolised national fragility in a ‘landscape of fear’ (Bell 2009). Because of this special and complex role in the national imagination, central London’s VE Day celebrations had a national significance beyond those in other locations.

Against this background of social unity and division, Victory in Europe Day was celebrated. Next, I will turn to the celebrations themselves, focusing on Trafalgar Square and how it helped shape the way national identity was constructed by participants and observers, and how variation in these

representations can help us understand the tensions and complexities of British national identity that I have discussed so far.

VE Day in Trafalgar Square

On 7 May 1945, North Americans and Europeans, including people in Britain who had access to German broadcasts, heard that Germany had surrendered and that the war in Europe had ended. In the UK, the BBC briefly covered German reports of surrender in its 3.00pm afternoon bulletin. However, despite widespread rumours of the end of hostilities, there was no official announcement in Britain about the end of the war during the afternoon, and the lack of official communication created a sense of frustrated expectation amongst the public (Miller 2007 [1995]). An announcement from the British government did not come until later that evening at 9.00pm, in the form of an ambiguous Ministry of Information statement that 'an official announcement will be broadcast by the Prime Minister at three o'clock tomorrow, Tuesday afternoon, 8 May' (Longmate 1977: 55). As a correspondent to the MOA noted, this delay confused and annoyed many people:

Know what they're doing? You can see what they're doing ... with all their false alarms, they're taking all the thrill out of it, so that nobody'll be excited when V. Day does come. Oh, it's a mean trick. It's making people properly fed up. I know I don't care whether they ever have a V. Day or not, I'm just disgusted with it all. (Mass Observation Archive FR 2263 1945: 11)

This account reinforces the difference between popular and official attitudes towards the end of the war, as foreshadowed above. This appeared in further notes made by MOA observers, who recorder that as the day passed, the general public became more cynical and suspicious of government motives:

gradually feeling became more bewildered and frustrated [about the announcement of the end of the war]...a note of bitterness crept in, and a tendency to blame the government for what they vaguely felt was a deliberate policy of procrastination. (Mass Observation Archive FR 2263 1945: 7)

The impending end of the war, and the arrangements for the public announcement, had been discussed in a War Cabinet meeting around two weeks before, on 25 May (CAB/65/50/22: 342). The delay in telling the public

that the war had ended was partially a result of an existing agreement with Stalin that the official announcement would be made simultaneously in the UK, the US and Russia. Despite growing public knowledge of the German surrender, Stalin did not want to deviate from this agreement and the War Cabinet 'thought it preferable to avoid the risk of a reproach from Marshal Stalin' (CAB/65/50/22: 342). Furthermore, Cabinet documents show that officials anticipated mass absenteeism as a result of the end of the war and that they questioned the necessity for an official 'VE Day' at all, based on concerns over disruption to work and 'amongst civilians a relaxation of spirit, which may have an adverse effect on the conduct of the war in the East' (CAB 66/65/19 1945: 1). Furthermore, although they thought that public holidays would help limit any interruption to manufacturing and service provision, Cabinet wrestled with the suitability of the date:

If there were a sudden and dramatic collapse of German resistance, general celebrations throughout the country would be natural, but it appears clear that on this occasion there is unlikely to be any event of so dramatic a character...(CAB/66/65/19: 2).

The 9.00pm broadcast on the evening of 7 May 1945, therefore, represented a compromise between the demands of British allies and an official desire to manage the public reaction to the war's end. In addition to foreshadowing the King's speech scheduled for the next afternoon, the broadcast also announced that 8 and 9 May had been designated as public holidays. In Trafalgar Square, where people had been waiting for the evening news to be broadcast on public speakers, the reaction to this announcement was subdued:

People hanging around in knots waiting for the nine o'clock news. Seats round the fountain difficult to find. Nine o'clock and the news is on [the radio, over loudspeakers]. For a few seconds there's a strange stillness in the square as people listen to what the announcer is saying. This time the waiting crowd hear that Mr. Churchill is to speak at 3 o'clock tomorrow and that Wednesday is to be VE Day ... Quietly and soberly the crowd disperses. (Mass Observation Archive FR 2263 1945: 24)

Many of the people who had been milling around central London on 7 May, waiting for an official announcement, had given up and gone home. According to the MOA (FR 2263 1945: 7-8), the low-key tone of the announcement of the end of hostilities in Europe helped explain the initial public reaction that is

evident in the example above, as did the broader public mood of cynicism. Up until the 7 May announcement:

...feeling [had become] predominantly apathetic. People now reacted more of [sic] less with indifference. Sooner or later victory was bound to come, and it was no use getting excited about the exact date.

This evidence shows that the first official announcement of the end of the war was low-key and was met with a measure of public cynicism, frustration, or apathy. According to these accounts, the initial public response was slow to build, and, in part as a result of the staggered nature of the announcement, there did not appear to be widespread wild, spontaneous rejoicing, as later historical accounts suggest.

Any expression of joyous national celebration was moderated by the ambivalence that many people seemed to feel, and the sense that there was not much to celebrate beyond the enjoyment of a couple of days off work. Thousands had lost friends or relatives, been injured themselves, or had been subjected to other personal trauma, such as long-term uncertainty or the destruction of property during the 1940-41 and 1944-45 London bombardments. Daily life was still dominated by shortages and rationing, and the war against Japan was ongoing. Again, the MOA summed up the public ambivalence towards the occasion:

V.E. behaviour seems to have been the product of many conflicting emotions. People were resentful at the way peace had been announced and did not wish to celebrate. They knew the war was not really over - felt it too early to celebrate. In any case, they felt vaguely guilty about the war and, at the same time, they felt something lacking now it was over. But the European war was finished and perhaps more important still, the procrastination and uncertainty of the peace announcement was at an end; they were expected to celebrate and there was a possible opportunity really to enjoy themselves. (Mass Observation Archive FR 2263 1945: 56-57)

As the reality of the end of the war sunk in, however, the public mood became more lively, and later on the evening of 7 May some places in London refilled with people (Longmate 1977: 57). Trafalgar Square was one of these, described by a woman who lived nearby:

The whole square was filled with people. One could just see groups of men and women, their arms linked together, whirling round and round. Others leapt about on their own in their irrepressible relief and joy...An enormous tide, or river, of humanity filled the square in ever-increasing numbers, as others heard the news and flocked in from neighbouring streets. The great lions, occasionally visible in the flare of a torch, seemed the right background to the spontaneous expression of relief of those thousands who, for so long, had endured the shattering sorrows of war, the darkness and gloom contrasting with the light and joy in the hearts of the people. (quoted in Miller 2007 [1995]: 131)

This passage identifies two important themes which I will discuss in the remainder of this chapter. First, the experience of using the streets of central London to celebrate with thousands of others - 'an enormous tide, or river, of humanity' - was a common type of description in individual accounts of the celebrations. This created a sense of 'crowd-feeling' that enhanced the occasion, contributing to the excitement felt by participants and linking them to others. Second, particular buildings and monuments, including Landseer's lions revealed in 'the flare of a torch' or Nelson's Column that was floodlit on the night of 8 May, were transformed into metaphors for national survival and resilience. Here, the main focus will be the official mobilisation of the physical national symbols in the Square's built environment, as well as the popular response to the official display.

According to the MOA investigators, celebrations continued from the evening of 7 May through the next day, 8 May. Of these, central London celebrations were prominent in the media and formed a large part of how the event was reported at the time, contributing to London's role as a symbolic representative of the nation. Against this context of the announcement of the end of the European war, in the next section I will explore the celebrations themselves, drawing out how the built environment, particularly Trafalgar Square, was used by participants, the media and officials to express a sense of national identity.

Crowds and 'group feeling': imagining the community

One main narrative concerning the celebrations, most common in the popular press, was of a city going 'wild' with elation at the end of the European war (see Figure 37). For example, the *Daily Mirror* printed photographs of people



Figure 36: VE Day, Trafalgar Square. Photo: *Daily Mail*.

dancing in the streets and climbing on lampposts in Piccadilly Circus on the evening of 7 May under the banner headline 'The Nation Celebrates'. The back page of the paper featured a large picture of a crowd in Piccadilly Circus, with an accompanying caption that described a feeling of elation, although it seemed to be as much about the prospect of a holiday as the end of the war in Europe: 'Like a magnet, Piccadilly drew the cheering crowds. With the prospect of two whole days' holiday in front of them, people let their pent-up feelings go' (*Daily Mirror* 1945: 8).

Similarly, the MOA (FR 2263 1945: 42) also explained public enthusiasm in terms unrelated to the end of the war. Instead, it was the embodied experience of being in the crowd that generated public excitement:

... the feeling of being in a crowd, the decorations and festive atmosphere, perhaps the final, official certainty of peace ... managed at last to stir people to something like real excitement ... Most people's participation was confined to singing and cheering when called upon, and admiring the abandonment of others.

Another popular paper, the *Daily Express*, linked the excitement evident on crowded London streets to the 'heart' of the British people and a relaxation of their stereotypical reticence: 'What a fine thing is spontaneous rejoicing of a whole nation. What tonic medicine just to pass through these gay, crowded carnival streets. How splendid are the British people when they bring to the surface moods and feelings that normally they keep so deep down within themselves' (*Daily Express* 1945: 2). This report seemed to treat the celebrations as almost uncharacteristic of a reserved national type, drawn into the event by the excitement of the crowd.

While VE Day was celebrated in streets and neighbourhoods throughout the country, many people went into the city to try and catch a glimpse of the King or Churchill during their official announcements. Official records suggest that the authorities planned for large numbers of people to gather in central London. In particular, as with the Suffragette rallies, the police foresaw large

crowds in Trafalgar Square, and planned for the impact on traffic in central London should Trafalgar Square overflow and crowds block adjoining streets (HO 186/2050). The interdepartmental conference on VE Day arrangements was clear about the impact on London of the cease-fire:

Notwithstanding any suggestion the Government may make that celebrations should take place as locally as possible, crowds will undoubtedly throng in the centre of London and will congregate round such places as Buckingham Palace and Trafalgar Square. (HO 186/2050: 3)

In many first-hand accounts of VE Day, these 'thronging' crowds of other people celebrating the same event was an important part of the spectacle of the event, and this was enhanced by the general colour and excitement of the occasion. The MOA's editors summed up the overall mood:

Gradually the flags went up until London was 'vivid with red, white and blue'. Flags and decorations and the excitement and group feeling which is associated with them, must have helped a lot to lift people from the mood of apathy and depression into which they sunk in the last week of the European war. (Mass Observation Archive FR 2263 1945: 15)

Here, the visible, colourful decorations in London were a counterpoint to public ambivalence about the announcement of the end of the war, and lifted the feeling of community amongst celebrants that drew people into the festivities. In addition to the decorations, descriptions of the size and behaviour of the crowd were common aspects of first-hand accounts of VE Day in central London, and the presence of 'group feeling' identified above is reinforced in subsequent reports. According to the MOA (FR 2263 1945: 56-57), the crowd was a crucial part of the occasion: 'Above all, there were the decorations and the emblems and the excitement of being one of an excited crowd'.

Importantly, the spectacle of the crowd appears to have been a large part of the appeal of the celebrations, as was the experience of moving through the crowded central London landscape. An example of the mood of the crowd was recorded in Whitehall, near Trafalgar Square, as thousands of people gathered in hope of catching a glimpse of Churchill or of hearing him speak. An MOA investigator recorded this aspect of the celebrations: 'Thousands and thousands line the pavements...everybody's pushing one another and laying the

blame on someone else. But it's all in good humour...' (Mass Observation Archive FR 2263 1945: 34). This suggests an orderly and reasonably amicable feeling amongst people waiting to hear the Prime Minister.



Figure 37: VE Day in Regent Street. Image in Marwick 1976: 165.

Overall, two aspects of the crowd's behaviour emerge from these reports of the VE Day celebrations. The first one was of wild celebrations, beginning with the coverage of the evening of 7 May. Another prominent, theme, however, was of calmness (see Figure 36) or even resignation in the face of a long wait for an announcement or the appearance of Churchill or the Royal family.

Overall, there was little reported conflict despite the large numbers of people packed into a relatively small area. In central London, for example, 'the police were massively outnumbered but there were few reported cases of trouble. Most people were heading in similar directions - towards Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square, the Houses of Parliament and Piccadilly' (Cabell and Richards 2005: 132-133). MOA investigators reinforce the characterisation of the crowds as relatively quiet and peaceful, although this appeared in part to be due to public confusion over the correct response to the occasion: 'everywhere, people are sitting on walls or walking around with a curious aimlessness. It all seems very muddled and confused for a day of celebration' (Mass Observation Archive FR 2263 1945: 36).

Although people flocked to central London to participate in the celebrations, according to observers such as Mary Carlton, sometimes 'there was nothing to see but crowds' (quoted in WW2 People's War). The MOA editors described this

aspect of the occasion in their summary of the investigators' reports of VE Day:

Most of the excitement [in central London on VE Day] bore little relation to victory itself; it was only the feeling of being in a crowd and had little in it that was stable and more lasting (Mass Observation Archive FR 2263 1945: 55).

All these accounts point to the role of the crowd in creating a sense of unity and inclusive national celebration, a contrast to the more general social division that Rose (2003) and Calder (2008 [1969]) identify. In this material, the crowd itself appeared to represent the nation and the feeling of being a member of the crowd engendered excitement and a sense of celebration. In this unofficial discourse, mainly reported by MOA observers, the nation was imagined (Anderson 1991) as the crowd on the streets of central London. Media coverage of the event also highlighted this aspect. For example, the crowd represented 'the spontaneous rejoicing of a whole nation' (*Daily Express* 1945: 2), with participants coming from 'every part of the land' (*Daily Mail* 1945: 3).

The crowd was also the audience for its own spectacle, and individuals seem to have observed as much as participated. The first-hand accounts suggested that a large part of the significance of the day lay in the effect of being with large numbers of like-minded people, demonstrating that the imagined community of the nation was made real during these celebrations as individuals included themselves in a larger group. This also supports Rose's claim that an individual's understanding of national identity is based on their experience of 'taking action' with others, building up an idea of what constitutes the nation:

Community may be understood to be the outcome of the process of collective identification; it is made through practices that establish who 'we' are as a collective body. As is the case with group identities generally, communal identities are forged as people take action together...(Rose 2003: 10)

In the case of VE Day, the use of central London by the crowds was an example of joint action that helped them to imagine themselves as one community. The existing social divisions within London in 1945 appear to have

been largely forgotten in the moment of national celebration in Trafalgar Square and other areas of central London. Neither popular nor official accounts focus on class or other categories of social division, instead emphasising the unity of purpose of the VE Day crowd.

Furthermore, reporting on the event framed the activities of the crowd with references to central London's landmarks, including Trafalgar Square. The experience of being in the crowd for this national event appeared to be conditioned by the built environment, and the national and imperial landmarks of Trafalgar Square, Whitehall and the Houses of Parliament, and Buckingham Palace, all provided a symbolic setting for the celebrations. VE Day was presented in the media as a public performance of community in the historically-resonant built environment of central London, one that included 'ceremonial avenues and spaces designed for spectacular performances' (Driver and Gilbert 1998: 10). The use of these places, including the journey from site to site alongside others in the crowd, was part of the experience of how national identity was understood on 8 May 1945. For many participants, the physical geography of central London was prominent in their descriptions of VE day celebrations. In these accounts, London's built environment provided 'sites in which individuals make sense of their relationship with the nation' (Jones and Fowler 2007: 335). Many records of the occasion described the movement of people from place to place, particularly in the crowded areas within central London and the West End, particularly around the area bounded by Trafalgar Square, Leicester Square, Piccadilly Circus, Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament. Trafalgar Square was one site within a larger area that people invested with meaning during the VE Day celebrations, as in this example from the *Daily Mail*:

To The Empire's Heart Came the greatest Victory Crowd

In Trafalgar-square, symbolic heart of the British empire, there assembled yesterday the greatest victory crowd in the history of a nation. They came, these many thousands, not only from all parts of London, but from every part of the land that could afford them access to the Mother-Capital. Many hundreds of them must have walked miles ... but they kept their Rendezvous with Triumph.
(*Daily Mail* 1945: 3)

References to the use of the built environment by celebrating crowds were common in media reports of the public reaction to the end of the war in

Europe, including its imperial significance. Trafalgar Square provided a stage for congregation amongst the symbols of Empire and nation, as in this description in the *Daily Mail* of the evening of 7 May:

It was a high old time in Trafalgar Square last night. Everybody wanted to climb something. [A] party of Wrens and Allied soldiers celebrated by clambering on to the lion. Army police men present - like Nelson on his column - turned a blind eye. (cited in Cabell and Richards 2005: 27)

The crowds in Trafalgar Square were constructed in media reports as symbolising the whole country, framed by the Square's built elements in the reference to Nelson. This embedded the Square's built environment into the celebrations and, by extension, the national community. In these examples, the Square was a 'reminder of nationhood [that] serve[d] to turn background space into homeland space' (Billig 1995: 43). Evidence of this lies in reports of VE Day that highlighted the experience of using this environment to celebrate a national event alongside thousands of other people. Mass Observation accounts, for example, repeatedly mention the importance of the feeling of 'being in a crowd' or 'group feeling' and how this enhanced the celebrations, especially with reference to the national colours that many people wore, the victory chants of the crowd, and the movement of other bodies in the most crowded sections of the city. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the role of affect (Lorimer 2008, Thrift 2004) enhances the embodied, visceral interaction between the individual and his or her environment, in helping to shape national narratives through the use of place. I will return to the notion of affect in the next section.

However, the version of the use of Trafalgar Square and surrounding areas during VE Day celebrations, drawn from media and personal accounts above, present only a limited version of the national occasion. For example, Kynaston (2007:13) points out that 'The West End...was not London, let alone Britain.' He cites the MOA's overall assessment of the evening for a national perspective:

Usually, crowds were too few and too thin to inspire much feeling ...and on V.E. night most people were either at home, at small private parties, at indoor dances or in public houses, or collected in small groups around the bonfires, where there was sometimes singing and dancing, but by no means riotously.

London's role as the national capital meant that it dominated reporting of the event, but according to the evidence above, other, less spectacular experiences were more characteristic of the experience of VE Day. Outside of central London, and even for many people within it, VE Day was not a wild party on the streets, or a chance to engage with a much larger national group, but was instead a quiet event spent alone or with a few friends or neighbours. While these accounts are outside the limited scope of this chapter, it is important to recognise that as multiple narratives were constructed about the event in public celebrations in Trafalgar Square and central London, other, more private stories also wove together the national and the personal in many different ways.

The dominance of the narrative of wild celebrations, such as that which began this chapter with even dogs wearing tricolour rosettes, sheds further light on my research question concerning power relationships and the symbolism of Trafalgar Square. Officials, mindful of public morale, along with newspapers, with circulation figures to consider, shaped the public record of the event. This is reflected in the media focus on instances of wild celebration, such as those in Trafalgar Square late in the evening of 7 May. However, first-hand accounts and the Mass Observation Archive present a more nuanced national picture including reactions that were more private or subdued. Even for people celebrating in central London, accounts suggest that they enjoyed the experience of being in a crowd without necessarily explicitly connecting it to a larger narrative of military victory or national or imperial sentiment, even though media accounts set these experiences in a national context.

In this section I have drawn from first-hand and media accounts of the VE Day celebrations, drawing out how participants and observers understood the event in terms of national identity and place. I have identified subtle differences between media accounts that describe the events as national or imperial and first-hand accounts that do not emphasise these elements. In the next section, I will include official narratives of the celebrations, through a discussion of the floodlighting of significant public buildings across London, including Trafalgar Square.

'Dazzling relief': spotlighting the national

As people moved through central London, stopping at Trafalgar Square, Buckingham Palace or along Whitehall, they observed more than their fellow celebrants. According to Calder (2008 [1969]: 567), the illumination of central London was an important part of the festive atmosphere of the evening of 8 May:

The night scene was consummated by the exhilaration of full-powered, aggressively sported, lighting. The statues and public buildings were floodlit; the searchlights danced a ballet in the sky ...[there was a] glow which seemed unearthly to the small children whose parents let them stay up late to wander in this unimagined fairyland of illumination.

A reaction to the display in Trafalgar Square, Mary Carlton's first-hand account captures this sense that the spectacle of the colourful lights was a source of wonder:

[Trafalgar Square] was really a picture. Green floodlighting on Nelson, Mauve on the lions, Green and White on Admiralty Arch, White on the Art Gallery and St. Martin's and there was a large globe of changing lights on top of the Coliseum. It was wonderful. We then made our way down Whitehall again to see the floodlighting. As we passed the Min. of Health it was all lit up with floodlights and looked lovely. (WW2 People's War)

Other first-hand accounts, such as Joan Wyndham's, also stress the spectacle and wonder of the floodlighting, linking it to the 'wild excitement' of the occasion:

There was wild excitement in Trafalgar Square, half London seemed to be floodlit - so much unexpected light was quite unreal ...There were people dancing like crazy, jumping into the fountains and climbing lamp-posts. (quoted in Kynaston 2007: 12)

Government planners were certain that the Square would be an important gathering point during VE Day celebrations (HO 186/2050: 3), and recollections of being in the Square appear in many accounts, as discussed above. The display also had practical and symbolic significance. As well as lighting the streets for the thousands of people in the city, it was as if 'through representations and rhetoric [the nation] appear[ed] to exist in a concrete

form' (Rose 2003: 7). An example is this excerpt from the *London Illustrated News* (1945: 523) that contrasted the brilliance of the lights with the metaphorical and literal darkness of the war and the blackout:

As at the outbreak of war one of the most poignant phrases was 'The lights are going out all over Europe', so it was most fitting that the lights of London should blaze out to celebrate Victory in Europe: and Victory Night was celebrated with lights of every form, colour and source...that peculiarly modern art of peace - floodlighting - was used to illuminate and to illustrate all the main buildings of the metropolis...some of the chief landmarks of London, glowing in the unaccustomed light [included]...Admiralty Arch, the Royal Exchange, Nelson's Column and the Houses of Parliament.

Here, the illumination of the 'main buildings of the metropolis' represents national victory and a metaphorical return to the light of peace. Along with other important structures, including the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace and St Paul's Cathedral, Nelson's Column was illuminated on the evening of 8 May. These and other structures were floodlit (see Figure 38) on the evening of VE day and for several nights afterwards:

To visually mark the end of the blackout that had plunged many [British]...cities into total night-time darkness, searchlights were symbolically trained onto London's most iconic landmark, Nelson's Column. (Hargreaves 2005:5 8)



Figure 38: The illumination of Nelson's Column, VE Night 1945, *Picture Post*. Photo: Francis Reiss.

Even Hitler had recognised the significance of Nelson's Column, and evidence emerged after the war of SS plans to remove and re-erect it in Berlin following the German invasion planned for September 1940: 'It would be an impressive way of underlining the German Victory if the Nelson Column were to be transferred to Berlin' (quoted in Mace 2005 [1976]: 16). Longmate (1977: 72-73) emphasises the symbolic aspect of floodlighting in terms of national survival, and describes the impact of floodlighting in the context of war and the blackout:

...as dusk fell the floodlights, doubly astonishing after nearly six years of darkness, were switched on, throwing into dazzling relief all those great public buildings which had miraculously survived... most impressive of all...was the stately quadrangle of buildings around Trafalgar Square, with... 'Horatio Nelson standing aloft on a greenish ray of light...as romantic as even he could have wished'.

This aspect of the celebrations was widely reported in local and national newspapers. According to the *Daily Telegraph's* front page, 'The floodlighting of prominent London buildings and public places last night, including Buckingham Palace, St. Paul's, the Houses of Parliament, Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus, aroused great enthusiasm among the crowds still celebrating VE-Day' (*Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* 1945). On page five, it was discussed further:

London Revels in Glare of Floodlights: Enormous crowds assembled in Westminster, Whitehall and Trafalgar Square last night to see some of London's most historic buildings floodlit for the first time since the [1937] Coronation.

Here, the reference to floodlighting is used to link VE Day with a previous national and imperial event, the coronation of King George VI, discussed in Chapter Four. This account describes Trafalgar Square in terms that evoke previous celebrations of a powerful imperial event, the coronation of a new monarch. In this way, floodlighting Nelson's Column helped connect the present to the national past, and acted as a reminder of pre-war history and the survival of the monument despite the bombings that London endured during the war, including a hit very close to the Column itself. The references to the brilliant, blazing glare of floodlights used the built environment to create a narrative that invoked national survival, a demonstration that the buildings, like the nation, had endured years of war.

The reporting in the *Daily Mail* (1945) also alludes to the historical symbolism of the Square in a report that captures a sense of wonder similar to that described by Mary Carlton and Joan Wyndham above. Furthermore, this report also focused on the behaviour of the crowd, describing it almost as a single entity, as in the discussion above about the effect of ‘group feeling’ of participants in the VE Day celebrations:

A floodlit London went crazy with joy last night. Searchlights swept across the sky and aircraft swept low over the city as great crowds jammed into the main squares and streets. At 10 p.m. Trafalgar-square was flooded with light as Nelson’s Column was illuminated, and the swaying crowd of 100,000 had hardly room to breathe. Searchlights placed in front of the National Gallery lit up the historic scene and their beams reached along Whitehall...The crowd shrieked and roared when coloured rockets were sent shooting into the air. Some cast a fountain of light almost as high as the top of Nelson’s Column.

Even though the *Daily Mail*’s main emphasis is the crowd, it still describes the Square, with Nelson’s column and the façade of the National Gallery, as ‘historic’, contextualising the celebrations there with a representation of the national past. Through reference to the Square and its structures, the report links a giddy, celebratory present with a stable narrative of national history.

The illumination of Nelson’s Column seemed to demonstrate that the landmarks of the capital, like the nation, had endured the war. Floodlighting reminded people that the European war was over, and media reporting represented an official narrative that contrasted the brilliance of the illuminations with the metaphorical and literal darkness of the war and the blackout. It also emphasised the history of British power as expressed through the buildings, monuments and streets of central London, including reference to Nelson and to previous royal events. The floodlighting literally highlighted a landscape of power that cast national identity in terms of historical buildings and invited people to participate and walk through this vision of the nation.

This narrative was an *official* one, tied to the monumental structures that were chosen by authorities to floodlight. In this sense, officials used Trafalgar Square and its surrounding neighbourhood to try and engender particular affects in the crowds celebrating the event and the newspaper reports

describing it. This is consistent with Thrift's (2004: 67-68) account of affect that I discussed in Chapter Two, the 'careful design of urban space to produce political response...[including] design, lighting, event management logistics, music, performance'. He argues that the politics of affect includes the way the environment is shaped or manipulated to produce a reaction in people who experience it. The VE Day floodlighting is an example of authorities using urban space to fashion a narrative of national unity, timelessness and stability for public consumption.

This official tactic of public display did appear to create a sense of community among those who witnessed it, as they participated in the spectacle either through observation or vicariously through media reports. As noted previously, those looking at the floodlighting described it as exciting, and it appeared to be made more so by the experience of doing so alongside many others. The following first-hand account links the spectacle of the floodlighting with the activities of the crowds, describing the experience as noisy, colourful and active:

In Piccadilly Circus the crowds are fairly dense, and also down Coventry Street. We exclaim at a neon sign in Leicester Square and at the lighted revolving dome of the Coliseum - sights forgotten in these six years. The crowds are hilarious in Trafalgar Square ... The Westminster - and the face of Big Ben lit up - another forgotten sight! Rosy floodlights are being tested on a government building, but a policeman tells us that the Houses of Parliament floodlights are not going up until tomorrow night...(quoted in Miller 2007 [1995]: 133)

In 1945, central London symbolised the endurance and survival of the nation in concrete form. However, while techniques like floodlighting were used to reinforce an official national narrative that drew on aspects of British history, there were different responses to the illuminations. For example, media reporting emphasised national aspects of the celebrations much more explicitly than first-hand accounts, which tended to focus on the spectacular aspects.

I suggest this indicates the range of national narratives that can be produced around the same event. These narratives served different purposes. For authorities, it was a reiteration of official power in an attempt to maintain national unity. For many participants in the celebrations, however, the event

in central London helped narrate an experience of being-in-a-crowd after years of wartime self-restraint. Overall, the landscape of central London, including Trafalgar Square, framed the VE day celebrations with a range of spatial reminders of the nation, constructing VE Day as an event 'situated within a homeland, which itself is situated within a world of nations' (Billig 1995: 8).

Authorities' arrangements to spotlight nationally significant structures such as Nelson's Column reminded participants and observers of an official version British history, and the event emphasised the symbolic value of the built environment as redolent of previous British victories and power. By spotlighting major London landmarks, the authorities emphasised an urban landscape punctuated by national and imperial symbols that both reminded viewers of the nation and connected them to a version of the national past. At the same time, it reminded participants of wartime loss and destruction, as well as the survival of the war. London's damaged landscape was central to the narrative of British resilience during the war, and this landscape cast victory in terms of survival rather than dominance.

Despite this sense of vulnerability, first-hand accounts of watching the floodlighting display did not appear to reflect the tension between national endurance and destruction, although they did contrast the brilliance of the lights with the darkness of the blackout. Even the government official responsible for organising the floodlighting links the illuminations with the blackout arrangements, wryly suggesting that he was given the job because he had been in charge of organising the blackout restrictions during the war (HO 186/2050). For people celebrating the occasion, the main focus appears to have been the spectacle of the floodlighting, especially after years of government-enforced blackout. The more metaphorical descriptions characterising the display as the light of victory after the darkness or war were present in media reports, rather than first-hand accounts. In the official program of floodlighting, the narrative of national power on display was a fragile but ultimately enduring one anchored in central London's landscape that worked to link celebrants to a version of the national past.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have focused on the celebration of Victory in Europe Day in Trafalgar Square, the role that the Square played in constructing this public event as national, and what this can tell us about British national identity in 1945. I have argued that the meanings of VE Day in central London, including in Trafalgar Square, were deeply embedded in a particular built environment. The crowds that were drawn into the area created a sense of an imagined community, performing the national to each other through their celebratory occupation of the city streets, sharing the common experience of being in a built environment that linked national history with the spectacle of VE Day. Despite evidence for significant social divisions in Britain in 1945 (Rose 2003, Calder 2008 [1969]), these were not evident in first-hand or media accounts of VE Day. London's built environment, with certain landmarks such as Nelson's Column picked out by floodlighting, provided the frame for the event, as well as a spectacle in their floodlighting, reminding observers of the survival of Britain through the European war.

I have argued that this urban landscape, with Trafalgar Square prominent within it, was central to the form and expression of national identity during the VE Day celebrations because of its role in constructing a highly visible narrative of national endurance and resilience during World War Two. This official version of Britishness was created through authorities' floodlighting of what they perceived as nationally significant buildings as well as newspaper reporting that emphasised the celebratory behaviour of the crowd.

On the other hand, first-hand accounts stress the brilliant spectacle of the floodlighting and the excitement of being in a crowd, both indicators of the role of affect in shaping the narrative of the event (Thrift 2004). The fact that reports of the experience and representation of VE Day varied indicates that the framing of Trafalgar Square by authorities as a symbol of national survival did not capture the first-hand experience of the event. For people celebrating in the streets of central London, the event was a chance to imagine the national community by being part of a large crowd.

Additionally, the large crowds throughout central London, the symbolic resonance of the 'illuminations' and the widespread media reporting meant it was a highly visible event even for those who did not participate. Accounts of the celebrations effectively imagined the national community in the Trafalgar Square crowds, ascribing national characteristics to the behaviour of these crowds or framing their activities in a symbolically-laden urban landscape. As I will show in Chapters Seven and Eight, the narrative of the 'wildly' celebratory crowd has reappeared at other times to reinforce official versions of the nation, even though this was not the only experience that participants had on VE Day.

Other gaps between the first-hand and official versions of the event were also evident. Most first-hand accounts of the occasion, for example, do not mention the empire, although imperial references do appear in media accounts and official speeches, such as the King's thanksgiving speech and Churchill's address to the nation. This suggests that empire may have been a more important aspect of Britishness for more powerful groups, with political oversight or financial investment in the empire. It also points to the prevalence of imperial imagery in places such as Trafalgar Square, and while it may not have been uppermost in the minds of people climbing the lions at the base of Nelson's Column, the symbolism of empire provided a backdrop to the celebrations, especially in the case of the floodlighting. Overall, this demonstrates the divergence between official 'top-down' narratives and popular 'from-below' ones and reinforces the possibility, discussed in Chapter Two, that multiple narratives can co-exist in the discursive process of national identity.

The relationship between the Square and Britishness that I discuss in this chapter contributes to more general hypotheses that developed in Chapter Five. The first of these was that contests over Trafalgar Square can represent contests over the nation, and the 'occupation' of space can function as a highly visible bid for a national belonging and a re-imagined national identity. While the use of the Square in 1945 was not as contested as it was for the Suffragettes, it was still highly visible through media reports and the large numbers of people who used it. Finally, in the discussion above I suggested that the prominence of Trafalgar Square as a site where national identity is

contested or re-imagined cannot be adequately understood without considering the larger urban spatial environment in which it is located.

This chapter augments these arguments in several ways. First, the 'occupation' of the Square during the VE Day celebrations was not adversarial or contested in the same sense as the Suffragette's use of the space, and it represented an official sanctioned version of the nation that the media promulgated. As opposed to the Suffragettes' transgressive use of the Square, this event has provided an opportunity to examine the official version of the national community in detail, alongside popular reactions to it.

For example, in 1945 Nelson's Column symbolised British resilience in the teeth of German bombardment, and its survival (alongside other monuments and buildings within central London), was visually emphasised by floodlighting in the officially organised aspects of the VE Day celebrations. These structures also included the National Gallery, Admiralty Arch, Buckingham Palace and St. Paul's Cathedral and the choice of these buildings and monuments reflected an official narrative of British history and identity that stressed religious and political institutional power. These choices linked the end of the European war in 1945 with other important aspects of Britain's official culture, such as naval power, the monarchy and the church. In terms of my research questions, the use of the Square helped reinforce these narratives of formal British national power.

However, these narratives were not prominent in first-hand accounts, which instead stressed the affective, embodied response to 'being in a crowd' and the spectacle of the event. While first-hand reports appear to imagine the nation as the crowds in the street of London, it is the emotional rather than the physical urban landscape that looms largest in these first-hand narratives. The significance of the size of the crowd was also evident in reports of Suffragette protests in the Square, as discussed above. This suggests that while official aspects of national identity might be prominent in the historical record, participants imagining the community in their own ways, including in terms of the affective experience of being amongst many other people, or alternate, transgressive histories of place.

Second, during the VE Day celebrations, Trafalgar Square acted as a transit point. It was part of a larger informal processional route that took in Piccadilly Circus and Leicester Square in the West End, Buckingham Palace, where people gathered to hear and see the King and his family, and Whitehall, leading down to the Houses of Parliament, where Churchill spoke to the crowd on the afternoon of 8 May. As with the Suffragette protests, the Square's boundaries did not contain the activities that took place within it. Officials sought to reproduce an institutional version of the nation by floodlighting certain structures during the celebrations, and first-hand accounts show that people, free to move throughout the central London area, did not always perceive these displays explicitly in terms of the nation or national identity, but rather as a more immediate spectacle or reminder of survival.

Finally, an additional hypothesis that this chapter suggests is that London and Trafalgar Square work to symbolise the entire nation in official narratives. In 1945, for example, the media and the national leadership explicitly and repeatedly linked the survival of central London's landscape to national endurance of World War Two, constructing it as a symbol of triumph. Despite the damage that many other cities endured, London's experience of the Blitz set it apart as particularly representative of what officials identified as British resolve and resilience. For others, however, London was also a 'landscape of fear' (Bell 2009), a site of destruction, grief and anxiety that would take years to repair.

The ambiguity of the Square's symbolic value suggests that British national identity was as multifaceted and contested in 1945 as it was in 1913, discussed in Chapter Five. Between 1906 and 1913, the use of Trafalgar Square witnessed a social and political contest over female enfranchisement that was expressed within the spatial frame of symbols of national identity and history. In 1945, despite authorities' efforts to represent a homogeneous picture of national identity, through the use of phrases such as 'the People's war' or symbolic floodlighting of national buildings, first-hand accounts suggest that Trafalgar Square provided the means for a subtle re-imagining of this official image of Britain as grounded in a particular historical narrative. By focusing on the activities of the crowd, 'group-feeling' and the spectacle (rather than the explicit symbolism) of the floodlighting, individual participants do not appear

to have been as concerned with the national symbolic significance of these events as authorities would have liked, or even as their behaviour was represented in the press. Although officials tried to imbue the event with national symbolism based on the imperial imagery of the Square and other central London landmarks, participants in the event went to Trafalgar Square to be part of a celebratory crowd after years of wartime self-restraint. In this way, Trafalgar Square provided the possibility for alternatives to be written to the official narrative, which was strongly anchored in a version of the national past.

The role of the past in contextualising events in the Square was evident during events from 1906 to 1913 and in 1945, as was the differential power of those doing the imagining, in the range of national narratives imagined in the Square. In the next chapter, I extend this analysis by exploring the use of Trafalgar Square in 2005 to both celebrate London's winning bid to host the 2012 Olympics and to commemorate the victims of the 7 July 2005 London transport bombings.

chapter seven

London United 2005

On 6 July 2005, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced London's selection as the host city of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. London's competitors included New York, Moscow and Madrid, although its final rival after several rounds of voting was Paris. In Trafalgar Square, at least 10,000 people had gathered to watch the announcement of the winning host city on large screens at a 'Thank You UK' party, the largest of several official celebrations across the country (London 2012 2005a).



Figure 39: Celebrations in Trafalgar Square following London's winning bid for the 2012 Olympic Games, July 2005. Photo: AP News.

The announcement of London's success was met with euphoria in the Square, as athletes, officials, celebrities and the public celebrated. This moment of national delight and pride was expressed in a tone of disbelief in *The Guardian*: '... in these affairs a rhythm has long been established: Britain goes for a big sporting event, Britain's representatives insist they can get it, Britain loses horribly' (Ingle, 2005), and 'For a nation wearily accustomed to sporting defeats, it is a triumph and a coup ... surely defeat was inevitable. Now, suddenly, we are winners' (Ashley, 2005). In these reports, London's unexpected success was also a British one, expressed in the delighted disbelief of celebrants in the main site of national celebration, Trafalgar Square.

The next day, in the morning rush hour of 7 July 2005, four bombs went off in London. Three exploded on Underground trains near Liverpool Street, Edgware Road and Kings Cross stations. A fourth exploded on a bus in Tavistock Square, in central London, not far from the British Museum (BBC News Online 2005a). Fifty-two people were killed, and around 700 were injured. This was a significant terrorist event even in a city with a history of bomb attacks. When news of the bombings reached him, London's Mayor, Ken Livingstone, was in Singapore for the Olympics host city announcement. He issued a brief statement about the bombings and then returned to London, cancelling the 'fanfare farewell' from Singapore and the homecoming celebrations in London (2005a). In an emotional and improvised statement, he laid out the message he was to repeat over the following weeks: London's diversity was a source of strength, and its multiculturalism would not be damaged by terrorism.



Figure 40: Bomb-damaged bus in Tavistock Square, 7 July 2005. Photo: BBC Online.

Livingstone's statement echoed the narrative of endurance concerning central London's built environment in 1945 that I discussed in Chapter Six. In that analysis, I identified a tension between resilience and fragility in characterisations of London after the Blitz. This included the possibility that London was a 'landscape of fear' (Bell 2009) that represented wartime anxiety and emotional pain as well as a landscape of national victory. As with officials in 1945, Livingstone promoted unity in the face of attack. The narrative of

national unity was also central to the Olympics celebrations, and Trafalgar Square linked the two events through its use as the venue for official public recognition of both occasions. This connection also appeared in newspaper reports on 7 July, as in this example from *The Guardian*:

Across London, the sense was the same: a barely comprehensible lurch from limitless jubilation to a very provisional emotion, mixing horror and bafflement in equal measure ... Of the celebrations the evening before few signs remained: London's night armies had long removed most of the bunting from Trafalgar Square, along with the boards saying 'Thank You London!' from the foot of Nelson's column. (Burkeman, 2005)

In this chapter, I will focus on the 6 July celebrations for the London's successful Olympic host city bid and the 14 July vigil to commemorate the victims of the 7 July London bombings. I will examine how national identity was expressed in media and official comment on these events, exploring how the use of the Square helped condition these discussions, and the range of national narratives that that these discussions encompassed. Furthermore, following my research questions, I will explore the different voices within this discourse and the power relationships that constitute them, and will therefore capture both official and 'from-below' narratives. Finally, I will draw out how the past was used to frame and contextualise the events, particularly as expressed in the built environment of the Square, and will consider the implications of this research for the future of British national identity.

In 2005, when these two events occurred, Trafalgar Square was a recently re-imagined urban place. Two years before, Mayor Ken Livingstone had unveiled a re-furbished Trafalgar Square after eighteen months of construction work (GLA 2003). The changes were part of Livingstone's plan to transform 'London's central square' into, as he put it, a 'unique venue for innovative events' (London 2012 2005b). As discussed in Chapter 4, the Mayor's 2003 alterations were the latest reshaping of a place that has had its form changed in many ways since its initial construction 170 years ago.

The 2003 refurbishment of the Square emphasised accessibility and openness, highlighting the role of the Square as a gathering place. In addition, by promoting a strong multicultural program of events for the Square, the GLA constructed a physical and metaphorical space that it

intended to represent an official metropolitan government vision of twenty-first century London. In a narrative evidenced by the GLA's practical official support, London's multiculturalism has been highlighted in Trafalgar Square through its use for events to promote the positive aspects of cultural diversity. This was a purposeful strategy on the part of the GLA and Mayor Livingstone. In 2005, for example, he launched 'Eid in the Square', an annual celebration of the Muslim religious holiday marking the end of Ramadan. Since, then religious and cultural festivals, such as Eid, the Hindu festival of light Diwali, Chinese New Year and Hanukah have all been celebrated in Trafalgar Square (see Chapter Four).

Some aspects of Trafalgar Square's history have been germane to this project of reinventing the Square as a more 'multicultural' place. The Square's longstanding use as a gathering place to express public sentiment about national issues (see Chapters Four, Five and Six), for example, is a 'tradition' the GLA has chosen to support. Although explicit highlighting of the symbols of Empire and naval power did not figure strongly in the redesign of the Square, the past that the Square's statues and monuments represent are part of what has made London into the super-diverse 'world in one city' (*The Guardian* 2005a) that Livingstone championed as mayor. This is because many of London's non-Anglo inhabitants have family roots in the countries that comprised parts of Britain's former empire in Asia, the West Indies and Africa. In a debate on the future of London, Massey (2007b) called this the 'external geography' of the city, 'the connections that run out from "here": the trade routes, investments, political and cultural influences; power relations of all sorts run out from here around the globe and link the fate of other places to what is done in London'. The imperial history represented in the built environment of Trafalgar Square continues to shape its present and future through the 'external geography' evident in the multiethnic makeup of London's population.

I begin the analysis in this chapter with a discussion of a debate germane to both events in the Square: the issue of modern British multiculturalism. This has been one of the notable aspects of the GLA's vision for the Square since its

refurbishment in 2003, and was also central to the narrative surrounding both the Olympics bid win and the London bombings that form the empirical core of this chapter. After discussing the two case study events, I will consider my central research questions in light of the additional material in this chapter. I will also directly address some of hypotheses I have been developing throughout this thesis so far, namely that visibility with Trafalgar Square provides national visibility and that events in the Square can be narrated as representing the nation.

Britishness, London and multiculturalism

In Chapters Five and Six, I framed my examination of the use of Trafalgar Square with a discussion on constituent aspects of national identity. In Chapter Five, I explored the role of women in public and political life, and in Chapter Six, I touched on the notion of ‘the People’s war’ and the degree to which Britain was socially unified in 1945. The events I explore in this chapter took place against another ongoing public debate about British national identity, namely the question of the extent and value of multiculturalism.

An example of the renewed discussion over British identity, largely championed by previous Prime Minister Gordon Brown, was an exam on British values for applicants for British citizenship, the ‘Life in the UK’ Test, introduced in November 2005. Passing this exam has become a requirement for all people wanting to acquire UK citizenship or permanent residency, and was an example of an attempt to codify aspects of Britishness in reaction to concerns over immigration.

Other related suggestions of ‘Britain Day’, based in part on the example of Australia Day, and ‘citizen packs’ for British residents when they turn 18, that explain what the state expects from adults in the UK (BBC News Online 2007), were not adopted, but do give a sense of official concern over the nature of British culture, diversity and the relationship between the individual and the state that was visible around 2005. These attempts to standardise ‘Britishness’ occurred in a context of perceived challenges to national identity. These included European enlargement and new groups of mainly eastern Europeans who moved to the UK for work; ongoing devolution movements in the ‘Celtic

fringe', especially Scotland, which began to gain real political momentum in 1997; and increased political concern over the potential for terrorism (see Alibhai-Brown 2000).

In terms of the inclusion of Muslims and other non-Anglo groups into the national imagined community, London was notably unique. In 2008, about one million Londoners were Muslim, representing approximately two-thirds of the Muslim population of Britain. Around 42 per cent of London's population was non-white, as opposed to 8 per cent in the UK overall, and a third of London residents were born outside the UK, compared with 12 per cent of the overall population (National Statistics Online 2010). In addition, London had accommodated Britain's largest increase in numbers of immigrants, with a 44 per cent increase in the number of people in London who were born abroad from 1991 to 2001. Although this measure also captures white immigrants, many of whom may have come from the former Commonwealth countries or Europe, among the leading five places of birth outside the UK were India, Pakistan and the Caribbean (BBC News Online 2010a). These statistics give a sense of the makeup of 'visible minorities' (Alibhai-Brown 2001) in London in 2005.

London's visible diversity contributed to an ongoing public debate over the value of this diversity, and after the 7 July 2005 bombings, existing disquiet about British multiculturalism and immigration intensified. In August 2005, for example, Shadow Home Secretary, David Davis, called for the Labour Government to 'scrap its outdated policy of multiculturalism' and move towards a society in which immigrants were more integrated (2005c). The reaction to Davis' comments were reflected in a BBC News online discussion in which most respondents were broadly supportive of his approach, as in this example:

Multiculturalism is a myth. If you don't enforce integration into the country's society you end up with what Britain has today, microcosm societies living side by side with no interaction and no understanding of each other. It is time to end all this idiotic political correctness and to stand up for British culture. (2005e)

For this member of the public, the main issue seemed to concern the boundaries of British national identity, and the necessity for newcomers to

adopt a particular narrative of Britishness. Again focusing on the issue of integration and the parameters of the national discourse, the Prime Minister Gordon Brown stressed the importance of 'the balance between diversity and integration' (Brown 2006). While invoking a flexible and changing discourse of national identity capable of including a diverse and multicultural population, Brown insisted on cultural boundaries that he expressed as very general values: 'liberty for all, responsibility by all and fairness to all' (Brown 2006). Despite the generic terms he used, this statement suggested that he understood Britishness with limits that were being tested by the presence of multicultural communities. For Brown, the flexibility of national identity was finite, and the UK risked serious social division if it did not address that question of 'how diverse cultures, which inevitably contain differences, can find the essential common purpose without which no society can flourish' (Brown 2006). Here Brown described a subtle threat to national unity and division, identifying cultural diversity the source of this potential conflict.

Other commentators also took up the question of the flexibility of national identity. For example, rather than focusing on the boundaries of national identity, Alibhai-Brown (2000, 2001) positioned multiculturalism at its core. She argued that Britishness is not merely enhanced by recognising its potential for racial inclusion, but instead is an identity in which blackness is inherent, stressing that 'there is no modern British identity without Indian food, black music, Salman Rushdie and [black television presenter] Trevor Phillips' (Alibhai-Brown 2000: 29). In a book published only a year before the Olympics win and London bombings, Ward (2004: 140) also argued for the centrality of race in current and future versions of Britishness, as well as the need to jettison old attitudes about the inferiority of black and Asian people:

Most white Britons have, after half a century of black and Asian immigration and descendency, begun to come to terms with the need to define a new way of being British, because black and Asian Britons have insisted that they do so. Many, probably most, British people, white and black, have seen the experience of immigration and ethnic diversity as a positive benefit to British culture and identity.

In these accounts, one of the issues driving the discourse of Britishness is multiculturalism and the question of what its limits should be, if any. This again reflects the characterisation of national identity as a discursive process

that I explored in Chapter Two (Özkırımlı 2005, Edensor 2002, Smith 2008) and illustrated in Chapters Four, Five and Six. In light of this ongoing contest over the value, impact and limits of cultural diversity, official statements about the Olympics bid and bombing vigil that emphasised the positive value of diversity were highly political and germane to the debate on British national identity.

In the next section, I turn to some of these statements and explore the official, media, and first-hand narratives surrounding London's winning Olympics 2012 bid and its 6 July 2005 celebration in Trafalgar Square. I will continue to develop the answers to my research questions, namely: what national narratives are created and reflected in Trafalgar Square and by whom? What power relationships inform these national narratives? What is the role of these narratives in connecting the national past, present and future? Subsequently, I will consider the use of the Square during the 7 July bombings vigil before concluding with an assessment of how this material relates to the hypotheses that I reiterated in the introduction to this chapter.

London's 2012 Olympics Bid

Official coverage of London's successful bid to host the 2012 Olympics focused on national jubilation, and media coverage of the event was similarly characterised by descriptions of popular elation when London's win was announced. An example was Prime Minister Tony Blair's physical expression of delight when he heard the news: 'It's not often in this job you get to punch the air and do a little jig and embrace the person next to you' (Purcell 2005). On the Number 10 website, he went on to comment: 'I am just overwhelmed. I can scarcely believe it actually, it is just the most fantastic thing. It is extraordinary, momentous, a great honour and a privilege, and I am just really proud of our country today' (Blair 2005). His feeling of delight was shared by others who took part in the official celebrations, such as athlete Abi Oyepitan: 'I can't believe it, I am totally shocked and I didn't think we were going to get it. I'll be here in 2012 and will hopefully win gold' (BBC Sport Online 2005). At the 'Thank You UK' event in Trafalgar Square, celebrants 'jumped up and down in disbelief as, for once, the tub-thumping, hype and blind optimism of the leaders of the capital's bid was justified' (Ingle 2005).

However, the delight over the Olympics win was not universal, with some people expressing objections or complete disinterest. Directly after the win, some public attention began to focus on the enormous budget for the development of infrastructure and the opportunity cost of the Olympic Games, as reflected in these replies to the MOA's Summer 2005 Directive:

There seems to be something seriously wrong to me when the government won't pay for drugs for cancer patients, yet they will find cash for hosting a two week P.E. lesson! (M3684, female aged 39)

Another MOA respondent hinted at part of the reason for her attitude:

I can scarcely write about this because I am almost totally uninterested in sport and have never enjoyed it or taken part in any sport except when I was forced to do so at school. What could be more foolish and mind-numbing than standing about in a dank autumnal field, waiting to try and catch a ball. (D966)

Although these did not reflect the majority view represented in the mainstream media, this ambivalence to the Olympic Games hinted at the varied range of public responses to the win. Despite official elation, these examples show that some responses were highly critical, and questioned the importance of the Olympic Games for the narrative of national success that other, more positive accounts emphasised.

Furthermore, prior to the announcement, London's diversity and multiculturalism had been a major theme of the official narrative around the event. This was reportedly one of London's most attractive qualities for the IOC members who considered the bid. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), a body representing over 400 Muslim community groups across the UK, was one organisation that provided the 'official' multicultural support central to the Games bid. According to the MCB's Secretary General, Iqbal Sacranie, the MCB fully supported the Games' multicultural vision: 'We [the MCB] want to play an active role in welcoming visitors and ensuring a London 2012 Games are fully reflective of our multicultural, multi-faith society' (London 2012 2005c). In the same press release, Lord Coe, Chairman of the London 2012 bid committee, presented the MCB's support as an example of the multiculturalism at the heart of London's bid, claiming it 'demonstrates our

vibrancy as a truly diverse city where every athlete and visitor can feel at home.'

The newspaper coverage of the bid also reflected this aspect of London: 'Those making the final decision [on the Olympic host city] were impressed, apparently, with our openness to other countries and cultures ... [London] is a global centre for transport, money, communications and migration, with its 50 separate ethnic communities and its more than 300 language groups' (Ashley, 2005). The editors of another broadsheet quoted Nelson Mandela on London to demonstrate London's unique diversity: 'There is no city like London. It is a wonderfully diverse and open city providing a home to hundreds of different nationalities. I can't think of a better place to hold an event that unites the world' (*The Guardian* 2005b).

Further examples of the recognition of the value of multiculturalism as it related to the Games occurred in Parliament on 6 July, when MP Sir Menzies Campbell, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and MP Sadiq Khan all pinpointed London's diversity as crucial to its success. Khan, Member for the London constituency of Tooting, put diversity at the heart of his London pride: 'As a lifelong Londoner, I am extremely proud and joyous about today's decision ... one of the reasons for the success of the bid is that London is the most diverse city in the world' (HoC Deb 2005, Col 418).



Figure 41: Children in Trafalgar Square celebrate the London 2012 Olympics win. Photo: BBC News Online.

In Trafalgar Square itself, the multiculturalism that was a part of the official and media representation of London's character also informed coverage of the 'Thank You UK' Olympics bid party. People in the Square at the celebration party, clearly delighted in media photographs, enjoyed a range of musical performances and other entertainment: 'in keeping with London's cultural diversity, which has been one of the bid's selling points, there will also be a carnival group and Indian drummers [at the party]' (Muir 2005). Photographs of the event on BBC Online show a measure of visible diversity, with several images of black and Asian spectators and performers (see Figure 41).

These examples show that London's multiculturalism was an important aspect for the 2012 Olympics bid and a focus of official preparations for the celebrations. The emphasis on diversity within the bid itself and in general reactions to the win, however, almost all appear in official or media sources, suggesting that this was an important part of what authorities wanted to highlight about London. Other accounts, such as those describing the event in Trafalgar Square itself, do not focus as strongly on multiculturalism or diversity as a significant aspect of the celebrations, demonstrating how the official and media narratives of the event differed from the accounts of those who participated.

An additional aspect of the official narrative, portrayed in the press and by political leaders, described the Olympics bid as a win for all of Britain, even though it was centred on London. For example, in the House of Commons on the day the winning bid was announced, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw spoke about his own feelings, ascribing them to the wider national community:

The nation has united behind this vision. The latest polls show that 80 per cent of people backed the bid and more than 3 million people sent individual pledges of support ... Securing the games is one of the greatest international prizes for any nation. Like every hon. Member, I have always been proud of my country but today I am prouder than ever (HoC Deb 2005, Col 404-405).

According to this account, London's win was a British win, an event for the whole nation to celebrate. Straw appears to conflate London with Britain, and similarly, London's Mayor Ken Livingstone, swept the two together in an *Evening Standard* report: 'This is one of the best days London has ever had and it is one of the proudest days for Britain and for British sport' (Lydall and Warner 2005). Although the national papers mentioned other parts of Britain, the Games bid was primarily London's victory, as in this example from *The Guardian*:

Brilliant for London as a whole, for which the Olympics will provide a thrilling validation and climax to its 21st-century re-emergence as an open, multiracial and dynamic world city. And brilliant too, we must ensure, for other cities and other parts of Britain too. Many of them will play a role in 2012 and their interests must not be forgotten, even if in the end the focus inevitably concentrates on

this extraordinary and wonderfully diverse capital city of ours.
(2005d)

By doing this, officials narrated the event in terms that effectively emphasised the national benefits of London's multiculturalism. Other voices, however, resisted this, insisting that while London was sometimes symbolic of the nation, it was not completely representative of it. After the Olympics bid, there were several pleas in the House of Commons, like that of the Member for the Northern Irish constituency of North Antrim, Rev. Ian Paisley, for areas outside London to benefit from the Olympics (HoC Deb 2005, Col 410). Foreign Secretary Straw was careful to underscore the national benefit of the Games: '... they are not just a games for London. They will leave a legacy for the entire country. Olympic competitions will be held in Glasgow, Cardiff, Weymouth, Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle' (HoC Deb 2005, Col 404). Beyond the official narrative, an MOA respondent to the Summer 2008 Directive expressed scorn at a perceived pro-London bias:

Why always London? Isn't this Britain? What about Birmingham, Manchester or Glasgow? Other nations have used non-capital cities! No! London wants its glorification again and to hell with the provinces. Just like it treats the provinces in everyday life ... I am already fed up to the back teeth of the 2012 Olympics and say roll on 2013. (A4127)

As with the issue of multiculturalism, the reporting of the party in the Square did not focus on this issue. However, the evidence I have presented so far suggests that the use of Trafalgar Square for what was arguably a London-specific occasion helped to conflate London and Britain, in part because Trafalgar Square is understood in the popular imagination as a national site. Many of London's prominent sites have national significance because of their functions, such as Buckingham Palace or the Houses of Parliament, but for Trafalgar Square, its national significance in this instance rested on its historical symbolism.

For example, a prominent theme in reports of the Olympics bid used Trafalgar Square and the statue of Admiral Nelson to construct a national narrative based on general victory over the French that referenced the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar. The media emphasis on French inferiority hinged on London having beaten Paris by a close margin of fifty-four IOC votes to fifty. It also occurred

in the political context of a G8 summit meeting before which French President Jacques Chirac had insulted British cuisine, joking that ‘mad cow disease [was] ... the only British contribution to European agriculture. “You can’t trust people who cook as badly as that’ [Chirac] added”’ (Porter, 2005).

The editors of *guardian.co.uk* linked the G8 summit political tensions to a much longer history of conflict between the two countries, with the title of their leader piece, ‘A famous victory’, alluding to both the Battle of Trafalgar and the Olympics win. They began the editorial by describing the scene in Trafalgar Square when the outcome of the Olympics competition was announced: ‘On the ground, there was instant celebration too. In Trafalgar Square, there were hugs and kisses for the cameras in front of the banner that simply said Thank You’ (*The Guardian* 2005b). The editorial then emphasised the ‘political frissons’ of London’s win, given the state of British-French relations. This narrative reminded the reader that Trafalgar Square, with its historical representation of British victory over the French, could also frame modern celebrations of a national victory over the same adversary.

Other newspaper coverage of the Olympic bid celebrations also identified British success with French defeat, linking it with the symbolism of Trafalgar Square. In one example, the reporter used the celebrations in the Square to link the Olympics win to both VE Day and the Battle of Trafalgar: ‘Yesterday, in Trafalgar Square, amid scenes the likes of which Londoners had not seen since VE Day and, probably, since Nelson’s victory over the French in 1805 ...’ (Honigsbaum 2005). The reference to VE Day reminded readers of the popular narrative of the wild celebrations in the Square on 8 May 1945, discussed in Chapter Six. In *The Sun*, Wheeler and Blair further emphasised the links between the battle of Trafalgar and London’s victory over Paris against a background of general British superiority over the French:

More than 10,000 ecstatic Brits celebrated yesterday’s triumph over the French - in Trafalgar Square ... The occasion could not have been better scripted - in this the 200th anniversary of our greatest naval success. Admiral Lord Nelson looked down from his column at the historic events unfolding below him ... Horatio Nelson himself could not have been prouder. The French had been sunk again. (Wheeler and Blair 2005)

By referring to the structures in the Square, this report took advantage of the accreted symbolism of the site (Dwyer 2004), using aspects of the national past to frame the Olympics bid success with a narrative of longstanding competition between the British and the French. Not everyone, however, shared this approach. Ashley, for example, warned against interpreting London's success as 'a triumph for the British way, a vindication of Britain's approach to Europe and a final trouncing of the French' (Ashley 2005). But even though she was careful to play down any prejudice, Ashley's caution against it serves to highlight the more general anti-French bias in the narrative of British national identity in coverage of the celebrations.

This line of reporting reflects a tension between the French and the British that Colley (Colley 1992:17) argues is not only longstanding, but is also central to British national identity. The role of the French as central oppositional *bête noire* in the development of British national identity is prominent in her explanation of the creation of the British nation:

... men and women came to define themselves as Britons ... because circumstances impressed them with the belief that they were different from their prime enemy, the French ... a strong sense of dissimilarity from those without [the British isles] proved to be the essential cement.

In terms of my research questions, the central monument of Trafalgar Square, as well as the battle after which it was named, formed part of the scaffold for a narrative that was portrayed as longstanding and even 'natural'. The anti-French theme of the Olympics bid reporting is a good example of the use of Trafalgar Square to tap into a historical narrative of British national identity to contextualise historical events, this time expressed through a celebration of 'victory' over the French.

These examples demonstrate the divergence between official narratives of the Olympics bid and popular ones of the event, especially in terms of multiculturalism and diversity. Significant official representatives, such as London and national governments, who strongly supported the Olympic bid team, used events in the Square to promote messages about identity which did not appear to be central aspects of the event for users of the Square. As with the VE Day celebrations in 1945, during which individual accounts rarely

mentioned the national and imperial symbolism that official and media reports highlighted, the official emphasis on multiculturalism in the 2005 Olympics bid was not common to other accounts, which tended to emphasise the size or happy behaviour of the crowd.

In addition, some media narratives drew heavily on aspects of national history, as demonstrated by *The Sun* coverage that linked the occasion to a longstanding contest between the British and the French. Media reports also used references to VE Day to characterise the celebrations of the Olympics bid as both joyous and national. These reports demonstrated how the Square can link users and events in the present to those in the past.

Next, I move forward one day from the 'Thank You UK' party, to 7 July 2005, when four bombs exploded on the London Underground and a bus. A week after the bombings, on 14 July 2005, the Square hosted a two-minute silence at midday and a commemorative vigil in the evening. I will discuss the use of the Square for this vigil, drawing out the multiple narratives around these events, the power relationships embedded in these narratives, and the selective use of the past to create them.

London bombings vigil

As I described in the introduction to this chapter, the morning after the Olympics bid party in the Square, four bombs exploded on London's public transport system, killing fifty-two people and injuring hundreds. Media coverage linked this event to the Olympic bid celebrations by comparing the public reaction to both (Burkeman 2005), including this example, which contrasted the joy and pride of 6 July with the distress and fear on the 7th:

What bitter irony and terrible perfection of timing this was, just as London celebrated its glorious, unexpected Olympic win ... Yesterday morning I was sitting down to write hosannas to our magnificent capital and its radiant revival in the last decade. Instead the shriek of sirens was quickly followed by shocking images of people streaming blood from blackened faces. (Toynbee 2005)

In London's Mayor Ken Livingstone's first statement after the attacks, he indicated what city officials hoped the public response would be. This message outlined the London authorities' version of the 'appropriate' response to the bombings and set the tone for the official narrative of the attacks:

[The bombers] seek to divide Londoners. They seek to turn Londoners against each other ... [but] the city of London is the greatest in the world, because everybody lives side by side in harmony. Londoners will not be divided by this cowardly attack. They will stand together in solidarity alongside those who have been bereaved ... (2005g)

This narrative was reinforced at an officially-sponsored vigil in Trafalgar Square a week later that commemorated the victims of the bombings. Livingstone's office flagged the official response in a press release two days before, entitled 'London united in defiance of terrorist attacks' (GLA 2005a). It clearly set out how the London government wanted the public to understand London in the context of the bombings:

At 6pm Londoners are invited to a vigil in Trafalgar Square to remember those who died, to show that London will not be moved from our goal of building an open, tolerant, multi-racial and multi-cultural society showing the world its future ...



Figure 42: Crowds at the vigil in Trafalgar Square, 14 July 2005. Image: BBC News Online.

Fifty thousand people attended the vigil on the evening of 14 July (see Figure 42), and many more observed a two-minute silence in London and across the UK at midday (GLA 2005b). Echoing descriptions of the 1945 celebrations,

some media reports of the event referred to the collective experience of attending the vigil by mentioning the number of people who could gather in at the site: 'it was standing room only in Trafalgar Square ... as thousands of people shouldered their way in to attend a vigil' (Griffiths 2005). Furthermore, it was unusual, according to *The Guardian*, for Londoners to gather to hear such positive messages about themselves: 'last night in Trafalgar Square was a novel experience. A huge crowd, standing in their thousands in blinding sunshine, to be told again and again that they live in one of the greatest cities in the world' (Freedland 2005). As with the 'crowd-feeling' in 1945 and the spectacle of the mob in 1913, the event was characterised in terms of the large number of people in the Square to demonstrate the significance of the event, as well as the emotional effect of the crowd.

Other reports emphasised the Square's symbolic value and historical role as a gathering place by contrasting the bombing vigil's two-minute silence with other uses of the Square: 'At Trafalgar Square, which so often has served as the meeting quarters for Londoners to protest and to pray, to sing and to celebrate, people began to gather well before noon [for the two minute silence]' Richissin (2005). In this example, the Square's importance as a national site is reinforced through its description as a gathering place for people to participate in significant national moments.

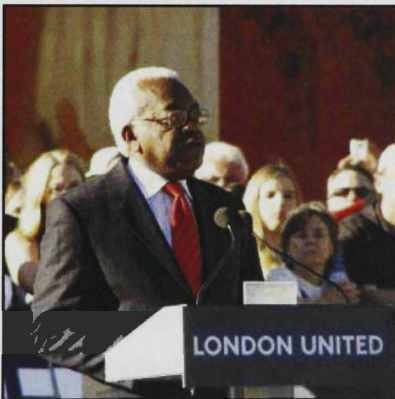


Figure 44: Former newsreader Trevor MacDonald at the vigil, 14 July 2005.



Figure 43: Mayor Ken Livingstone and Olympic bid chairman Lord Seb Coe at the vigil, 14 July 2005.

As shown in Figures 43 and 44, the event on 14 July was framed by the prominently displayed slogan 'London United', a play on words that suggested

a football team name as well as metropolitan solidarity. This set the tone for the speakers' messages of tolerance, togetherness and the value of diversity (Griffiths 2005). Mayor Ken Livingstone was the first speaker, and in his emotional speech he pleaded with Londoners to resist accusation and division as a result of the bombings:

I have watched this city transform in my lifetime as a beacon of what the world can be and I hope and pray will be. It is a city that embraces change. It is a city which is the most tolerant in the world.

Those who came here to kill last Thursday had many goals, but one was that we should turn on each other like animals trapped in a cage. And they failed. They failed totally and utterly. There may be places in the world where still that would have happened, but not here. (2005f)

The Mayor's well-publicised entry into the book of condolence repeated this message: 'The city will endure. It is the future of the world. Tolerance and change' (Muir and Honigsbaum 2005). During the vigil, media coverage singled out similar views from participants as part of the significance of the events. For example, in *The Guardian* (2005c) 'Stuart Giddens, 26, of Hatfield, Hertfordshire said he attended the vigil because it was 'really important that we show that we won't be alarmed by anything that these people can throw at us ... There are people here from every walk of life, all different types of people and the point is to show that we are stronger than them, collectively'.

Other reports noted not only this spirit of solidarity, but also how different the participants were from each other in terms of social background: 'Some... were clearly tourists who had got caught up in events while visiting the square. Cyclists and students lined up alongside men in suits and others in bandanas along the square's steps, fountains and walls' (Griffiths 2005). Here, the message of 'London United' that was such a strong theme of the official message broadcast from Trafalgar Square also appeared in descriptions of participants. The crowd in the Square was characterised in media reporting as demonstrating the kind of diversity that the speakers praised, and the Square functioned as a tableau for the modern London that officials such as Livingstone and Coe promoted: diverse, multicultural, unified tolerant and resilient (Freedland 2005, Muir and Honigsbaum 2005, Griffiths 2005).

Furthermore, at the vigil, the chairman of the Olympics bid, Lord Coe, reinforced the connection between the ongoing development of Olympics facilities and the bombings: 'As we move forward, we will never, ever forget those who suffered so grievously last Thursday, but our efforts and actions over the next seven years are dedicated to them ...' (2005h). In addition, Ken Livingstone promised that people affected by the bombings would receive special access to Olympic events: 'We will never think about the Olympics to come without thinking of those who lost their lives ... when these games begin in seven years' time, sitting in the seats in the front of that stadium and cheering ... will be those who were maimed and survived and the relatives of those who died' (Mendick 2005). In the speeches at the vigil, the Olympic Games became shorthand for a particular vision of London as positive, successful, multicultural and tolerant. In other words, the diversity of London which had been a selling point in the Olympics bid was revisited in official attempts by the media and London authorities to knit the city together after the bombings. In this narrative, London had won the Olympic host city bid because its identity and value depended on its diversity and tolerance. Olympic success was used in response to the bomb attacks to remind audiences of the desirability of London's multiculturalism.

Closs Stephens (2007) similarly argues that 'the Olympics narrative was mainly deployed to affirm London - and through it Britain - as a multicultural, multiethnic community' in the official reaction to the London bombings. By linking the two events, officials defined national identity as both diverse and unified. The theme of the value of diversity, and the importance of national unity, was repeated in the House of Commons on the day of the vigil, as the following extract from Hansard demonstrates. This exchange also hinted at the reasons behind the message of positive multiculturalism that had been adopted by officials as they sought to shape public opinion:

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and East Cleveland) (Lab):
Following the tragic and evil events of last week caused by terrorism, there is already fallout in the Asian community—not just the Muslim community but the Hindu community and the Sikh community—to which I belong. Given the serious effects on multiculturalism and the great society that we have built up ... it is important that we ... show strong support for the spirit of multiculturalism?

Mr. Hoon (Lab): My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point ... it is vital that there should not be a backlash against our Asian community and that we continue to maintain and support strong principles of multiculturalism. (HC Deb 14 Jul 2005)

The reference to a 'backlash' against Asians suggests that the official message of 'London United' was intended to counter perceived national racial prejudice. For example, the day of the bombings, according to a report in *The Independent* (Herbert 2005):

The explosions prompted the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) to issue the extraordinary advice yesterday that no Muslim should travel or go out unless strictly necessary, for fear of reprisals. The Muslim Association of Britain said women in headscarves were at particular risk, asked police to consider extra protection for mosques and Islamic schools, and also warned Muslims against unnecessary journeys.

Furthermore, in an interview with the BBC a year after the bombings, Mayor Ken Livingstone hinted that London officials had been aware of the potential for racially-motivated conflict after the London bombings. He also identified how he tried to steer the public away from such conflict:

Ken Livingstone: The only thing, the only doubt [about London's emergency planning] was, would it [a terrorist attack] unleash tensions between Londoners. And therefore everything I had planned to say on that had to be directed at making sure we got through this, that London was united

Interviewer: Were you surprised that London ... became the target ... of homegrown Muslims?

Ken Livingstone: Nothing was a surprise, except that Londoners stood united. We assumed that there would be some tensions, some thugs would go out and beat up the first Asian-looking person they found and so on and I think that a lot of London's ethnic minorities wondered when this does happen won't people turn on us and that they didn't I think has left London immeasurably stronger. (in BBC News Online 2006)

These examples help explain why the theme of unity and the positive value of multiculturalism was so consistently repeated by London officials.

Livingstone's expression of surprise that 'Londoners stood united' suggests that officials viewed the London's social cohesion as fragile and contested, rather than the open, tolerant and robust characteristic which had been a

selling point in the Olympics bid. That the mayor of London should express any doubt about the success of London's multiculturalism aligned with the ongoing debate about the success and value of British multiculturalism and immigration more generally, and suggested the importance of the city in forming narratives of national identity. For example, the following 9 July 2005 response to an MOA directive expresses ambivalence about modern British diversity, as well as eliding London and Britain with a reference to 'TV pictures from London':

I would personally swap a number of my close neighbours for quiet, self-respecting Muslim families, but when we look at the TV pictures from London streets we can't help but wonder how we came to have so many 'foreigners' living in Britain...now we are told that in addition to our coloured British citizens we have many thousands of failed asylum seekers running free without anyone having a clue as to where they are. Immigration controls appears not to exist. No wonder we have terrorist bombers among us. (B1654)

An attitudes survey at the time also seemed to question the official emphasis on unity. Results of a poll by ICM research found that: 'Nearly two-thirds of Muslims ... had thought about their future in Britain after the attacks, with 63% saying they had considered whether they wanted to remain in the UK' (Dodd 2005). The following year, in an MOA directive asking respondents what they understood 'core British values' to mean, one 59-year-old woman wrote about her perception of the problem at the root of multiculturalism:

With so many cultures all crammed onto one small island, all vying for superiority, the poor old host is being trampled underfoot and the values with it. How long will it be I wonder before it becomes illegal to call oneself British ... I honestly can say I am more racist now than I ever believed possible. (H1703)

These examples represented a challenge to the theme of positive multiculturalism that was central to both the Olympics and bombings coverage. They demonstrate that it was not universally accepted, and did not represent the views of all Londoners or Britons. Despite official narratives emphasising London's, and by extension Britain's, unity in diversity, this discourse was not uniformly reflected in popular views.

The tension over the multicultural narrative also further demonstrates the value to officials in hosting the bombing vigil in Trafalgar Square. As with the

Suffragette rallies and uses of the Square for multicultural festivals discussed in Chapter Four, the visible presence in the Square of a crowd apparently committed to London's diversity worked to emphasise the value of a multiethnic narrative of Britishness. By using the Square to promote a version of London that was multicultural and peaceful, authorities promoted a vision of the city and nation they wanted to encourage, or, in Anderson's (1991) terms, they imagined a particular type of national community. While this use of the Square was not directly contested, as was the case with the Suffragettes, the examples above show that the message of multicultural tolerance was not universally accepted.

The bombings fuelled an ongoing debate about the relationship between multiculturalism and 'Britishness', which included the view that multiculturalism was seen to have allowed, as possibly even encouraged, the bombers. In light of this, the bombing vigil was a political statement about London's official stance towards multiculturalism, namely that it made London unique, powerful, attractive and dynamic; that it had gained the city (and the nation) the Olympics; and that it would help the city's residents to come together to support each other after the bombings. In using Trafalgar Square as the venue for the official bombing vigil, London officials attempted to leverage the positive and future-oriented vision of diversity that had been emphasised in the Olympic bid celebrations to reassure Londoners and help maintain order following the bombings.

Furthermore, media reporting also constructed the event in terms of its relationship with aspects of the national past. For example, sections of speeches made at the vigil in the Square reported in the media alluded to London's experience of war, such as the section of poet Ben Okri's speech that said London had grown stronger and more beautiful following past 'bombings, burnings and wars' (BBC News Online 2005a). Other reports highlighted the mood of unity and resilience at the vigil itself (Richissin 2005, Griffiths 2005), subtly linking them to the view that Londoners showed the same stoicism during World War Two.

The reporting of the two-minute silence and the Trafalgar Square vigil in the mainstream newspapers, including *The Guardian*, *The Daily*

Telegraph, *The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, and *The Evening Standard*, uniformly adhered to the themes of unity, dignity and calm, with many using the Blitz as a historical reference point to describe Londoners' response to the bombings. *The Sun* used the theme of the Blitz and World War Two (White 2005, Moore 2005) to encourage participation in the two-minute silence, thus helping to transmit official messages regarding the 'appropriate' public reaction to the bombings. Manthorpe (2006) argues that the 'rhetoric of the Blitz was pervasive' in the newspaper reporting the day after the bombings, quoting the leader article in *The Sun*: 'Our spirit will never be broken: Adolf Hitler's Blitz and his doodlebug rickets never once broke London's spirit' (cited in Manthorpe 2006).

Beyond the event in the Square, the emphasis on calm pervaded the reporting on the bombings, with reports of a dignified and compassionate public response to the attacks. For example, according to the London paper *The Evening Standard* (2005): 'people placed in terrifying situations today have been extraordinarily composed in responding to the crisis and [doing] their best to help each other'. A similar narrative of resilience was used to link the public response to the 2005 bombings with 1940-41: 'The spirit of the Blitz was invoked shortly after the bombings of Thursday July 7, and it seemed to resonate immediately. Those directly affected by the attacks ... did indeed behave with courageous stoicism, and Londoners took a little reflected pride in their dignity' (Dowling 2005). The theme of quiet dignity appeared again in media emphasis on widespread public participation during the two-minute silence beyond the Square on 14 July (Richissin 2005).

The cultural reference point of World War Two was also significant for voices outside the media, as shown by its repeated mention in responses to the MOA's special 2005 'Postscript: London' Directive on the bombings. Many people, for example, made reference to their own memories of World War Two:

... one thinks what our parents and grandparents had to suffer during the six long years of the Second World War. Not knowing, when they left for work in the morning, whether their loved ones or even their home would still be there in the evening. (D1602)

When you look at programmes showing what people suffered in World War II you realise life usually goes on, some die, but others are born and hope is renewed. Sometimes good things come from evil - a sense of community spirit, for example. (D826)

It all reminds me of the war (39-46) when I saw bodies and debris on an everyday basis during the blitz on London. What memories come flooding back to me as I watch it all on TV. Of course we had no counselling in those days. We just got on with our lives! I shed a few tears just remembering family and friends I lost. (H260)

However, despite the common mention of Londoners' stoic response to the bombings, there were other reports of fearfulness and caution (Davenport et al. 2005). Bicycle sales, for example, reportedly doubled in the days after the attack, as more people presumably sought to avoid public transport (Dowling 2005). One reporter summed up this feeling: 'I must admit I'm now afraid; afraid that another attack is imminent, afraid of the idea of 3,000 armed police on the streets, afraid that London will never be quite the same again' (Dowling 2005). This was also evident in other responses to the MOA:

I think when the first London bombs went off, the media banally kept reporting the 'Blitz' spirit but I would think that the majority of people in London now would hardly know what the word referred to let alone remember it. And to say how stoic people were and would remain so was being naive (*sic*) in the extreme. (H1703)

As with Londoners in 1945 who appeared to treat VE Day as simply a chance for a holiday rather than a symbolic national celebration, some people did not internalise official messages promulgated by the authorities at the commemorative vigil in Trafalgar Square. A more complex version of public reaction to the bombings emerges from these examples, one that does not conform to the message of resilience and calm that was emphasised in official and media narratives.

Furthermore, as with the World War Two bomb attacks on London, the 2005 bombing of the capital was constructed as an attack on the whole of Britain. As with the Olympics bid, the event worked to emphasise London as a symbol of Britain. In the House of Commons, for example, Prime Minister Tony Blair conflated London and Britain in describing Londoners' reactions to bombings:

Yesterday we celebrated the heroism of World War Two, including the civilian heroes of London's blitz. Today, what a different city London is—a city of many cultures, faiths and races, hardly recognisable from the London of 1945. It is so different and yet, in the face of this attack, there is something wonderfully familiar in the confident spirit that moves throughout the city, enabling it to take the blow but still not flinch from reasserting its will to triumph over adversity. Britain may be different today, but the coming together and the character are still the same. (HC Deb 11 Jul 2005)

Blair's description of London 'taking the blow' was very close to Churchill's famous comment of the city during the Blitz of 1940-41, that 'London can take it'. This was a commonly-repeated theme in media representations of the events. As with the Olympics celebrations, the past was used to frame the present during the bombing commemoration. An example refers to the crowd reactions at the vigil in Trafalgar Square: 'Applause rang out at every mention of London's resilience. It survived the Blitz, it would survive and defy the suicide bombers' (Mendick 2005). In this example, Trafalgar Square's spatial environment framed the demonstration of what reporters described as 'British' qualities anchored in an historical narrative, which included calm, resilience and unity in the face of attack. While for the Olympics bid, the Napoleonic wars and victory over the French were historical references, for the bombing vigil, the dignity and resilience of Londoners featured, with particular reference to World War Two and the London Blitz.

Blair identifies the 'confident spirit' of the city as a British quality, rather than one specific to London, but by using London as shorthand for Britain in this way, he appears to effectively describe London's unique diversity as a national characteristic. The conflation of London and Britain is also reflected in MOA responses that identify London's diversity as a problem for the entire nation. Closs Stephens (2007: 159-160) argues that some of the conflict over London's multiculturalism, as expressed in the national discourse following the bombings, rests with the use of the narrative of the Blitz:

By invoking the Blitz ... the history of London is recounted as the history of Britain. By tying the people living in London today into a direct relationship with those who lived in London at the time of

World War II, this linear national narrative produces a particular idea of British culture ... it evokes the image of a distinctively white, wartime Englishness.

In other words, by using London as shorthand for Britain, Blair activated a narrative of unity that is white and English and that existed uneasily alongside other messages stressing London's valuable multiculturalism. This was especially problematic given that London's multicultural diversity was a prominent aspect of other aspects of the official narrative following the bomb attacks, such as the emphasis on the winning Olympic bid.

In this section, I have discussed aspects of the London bombings vigil held in Trafalgar Square on 14 July, focusing mainly on the references to multiculturalism and the use of the Square to link the event to the past. I have shown that, as with the Olympics bid party, official messages and popular responses did not always align. While London's multiculturalism was a focus for speakers at the vigil, and on media commentary about the event, it was not a large part of how the events in the Square were characterised in the media. A much more common theme in media reports characterised the public response to the bombings in terms of a popular version of British reaction to the London Blitz. This theme was repeated in the official emphasis on resilience, calm and unity made in speeches in Trafalgar Square as part of the official commemorations.

Additionally, the official narrative generated during the bombings vigil in the Square highlighted London's diversity as a strength, using the Olympic bid celebrations to frame an official message of positive unity. In private, however, officials such as Mayor Ken Livingstone were concerned about unity within the wider London community, as demonstrated in his interview with the BBC a year after the bombings. In terms of my research question on the range of national narratives created in the Square, this reveals the divergence between the official narrative, expressed repeatedly in Trafalgar Square, and some aspects of broader public understanding of national identity. Additionally, the highly choreographed nature of the 'Thank You UK' party and the uniform 'London United' slogan during the bombings vigil highlighted the tight control that London and Olympic bid committee authorities

exercised over both events. These powerful narratives were largely mirrored in the press. However, more private responses to the MOA demonstrated reluctance to whole-heartedly adopt official narratives of multicultural unity.

Finally, media and official accounts used aspects of the national past to frame and legitimate their national narratives. For example, although more subtle than reporting on the Olympics party, with its explicit mention of the Battle of Trafalgar and Nelson's approving gaze, reports of the dignified silence of Londoners at the vigil in the Square supported a narrative of national identity that drew on popular perceptions of Londoners' reactions to the 1940-41 Blitz. Official statements made similar connections, such as Prime Minister Tony Blair's association of the contemporary 'confident spirit' of the city (HC Deb 11 Jul 2005) with a familiar narrative of wartime London. However, the use of the narrative of the Blitz also conflated Britain with London, setting up a contradiction between an imagined monocultural past and a multiethnic present. The analysis above showed not only the range of national narratives imagined in the reactions to the 7 July bombings, but also some of the tensions that they reveal between official and popular discourses.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how Trafalgar Square helped to frame the construction of national identity during two events held there in July 2005. I have focused on three aspects of the national narrative at this time: first, the role of multiculturalism in defining British national identity; second, the use of the Square's historical symbolism to characterise modern British identity; and third, the conflation of London with Britain, including the tensions this created within the discourse of national identity.

First, behind the multicultural celebrations of both the Olympics bid and the bombings vigil was an alternative vision of a possible national future in which racial tension was both evident and violent. Ken Livingstone

reflected on this in 2006 when he described the importance of the post-bombing 'London United' campaign in controlling potential tensions between Londoners, and it was evident in a spike in racially motivated crime following the bombings themselves (Manthorpe 2006).

Conservative Party statements challenging the value of multiculturalism during the 2005 election campaign also pointed to an ongoing national debate on diversity. At the vigil in July 2005, London and national officials used Trafalgar Square as a platform to disseminate messages about the nation that stressed the importance of unity and pride in a diverse population, in part to manage the possibility of race-based violence.

Second, another aspect of national identity I discussed in this chapter was how the built environment of the Square framed the events, helping to link them to aspects of the national past. In this way, Trafalgar Square acted as a *lieu de memoire* (Nora 1989) in which the narrative of national identity was conditioned by a particular version of the past, manifested in the Square's monuments and statuary. This was evident in media reports which linked the Olympics win to the Battle of Trafalgar and the statue of Admiral Nelson, linking both events as victories over French adversaries. Furthermore, the coverage of the reaction to the bombings made reference to public behaviour within the physical space of the Square during the vigil and two-minute silence, contextualising it with a version of the stoic public response to the London Blitz.

Third, some media and official accounts of Trafalgar Square's use in 2005 used it to conflate London with Britain, despite significant demographic differences between the populations of the two entities. London's symbolic role in this sense, however, was subject to resistance, as demonstrated by voices from other parts of the country who questioned the capital's dominance of Olympics events and funding. Others understood London's diversity as a national problem rather than an asset. This was evident in 'bottom-up' responses from the MOA to the Olympic bid and the bombings.

The material in this chapter relates directly to my research questions concerning the creation of national narratives in Trafalgar Square and the use of the past in framing them. The July 2005 events, as discussed above, were described in official and media reports in terms of a version of the past that invoked the popular vision of Londoners' wartime stoicism. This was used to unite a multicultural population in the case of the bombings vigil, constructing London and Britain as diverse but unified. Furthermore, by dedicating the Olympics bid win to the victims of the bombings, officials created a narrative that used the optimism of the victory to manage the identified potential for racial violence, as well as the sadness and fear following the 7 July bombings. The official narrative also strongly stressed London's multiculturalism as a national asset as much as a metropolitan one. Resistance to this narrative was muted in terms of the July events, appearing instead in more general personal views, such as those expressed in responses to the MOA, or in opposition political material, such as Conservative Shadow Home Secretary David Davis. Again, this demonstrated the limits of the official narrative, even for other within the national bureaucracy.

For both events, the use of the Square appeared highly uniform. In images of both, participants seemed to adhere to appropriate levels of either jubilation or solemnity, and during these two occasions, officials exercised tight control over the form and messages of the events, including the prominent display of the 'London United' slogan that appeared in Trafalgar Square during the bombings vigil. In these case studies, activities in the Square were part of a discursive process of national identity as the national community was imagined (Anderson 1991) via the visible crowd in the Square during these events. These imaginings, however, were highly controlled by London and national officials.

Versions of national history were used to frame both events in the Square. In the case of the Olympic bid, this took the form of reference to Admiral Nelson, the Battle of Trafalgar, and London's victory over the French. This line of reporting used a history of conflict with the French, as represented in the Square's built environment, to contextualise the

Olympic bid win. During the bombings vigil, the behaviour of the people in the Square, and in London more generally, was compared to perceptions of similar public behaviour during the London Blitz, linking the present to a version of the past (Nora 1989).

This relates to a hypothesis I have explored in the chapters above, namely that visibility in the Square, through protests, celebrations, commemorations or other events, can constitute a bid for greater visibility in the nation. In this way, the version of the nation on display in the Square, through both its built environment and its users, demonstrates some of the ways in which Britain's national community has been imagined (Anderson 1991). By staging events in 2005 with strong messages of tolerance, diversity and unity, for example, the GLA and other officials made a strong bid for a version of the nation that featured these qualities.

I have also been exploring the relationship between Trafalgar Square and its surrounding neighbourhood, and I have argued above that the Square must be understood as situated in a larger landscape of political, cultural and financial power. This draws on Massey's (1991) challenge to understanding place as bounded or proscribed, and I suggest that its proximity to other important national places enhances the Square's symbolic and practical power as a site in which national identity can be made visible and re-imagined. However, in contrast to the examples in Chapters Five and Six, the events in 2005 were not notable for the links they provided to other, nearby sites. I suggest this is because of the official control over the Olympics party and the bombings vigil, and the media focus which largely adhered to the official narrative.

In the next chapter, I will focus on the role of a site's larger neighbourhood in a discussion of to one element in the northwest corner of the Square, the Fourth Plinth. As I will show, the meanings of the artworks on this plinth rely in part on their proximity to other structures in the Square. Furthermore, if Trafalgar Square, as I have discussed, helps to demonstrate a range of national narratives, and provides a site in which they can converse, how might one small area of the Square

contribute to this symbolic value? In a concluding analysis, I will scale down my subject, focusing on one area of the Square which has served as a platform for a range of national symbols.

chapter eight

‘Some day your plinth will come’: the Fourth Plinth, 2005 - 2010

When Boris Johnson was elected Mayor of London in May 2008, many Londoners worried that an Eton-educated former editor of conservative magazine *The Spectator* was not an appropriate representative or leader for Britain’s most multicultural and diverse city. The ability of the candidates to manage London’s cultural diversity had been an important campaign issue, and Johnson’s record of public comment on race, for example, did not reflect the inclusive perspective that many people thought was necessary to govern London fairly. During the campaign, the left-wing pressure group Compass produced a document tracing his published views on social and economic issues, which included a description of the reception of then PM Tony Blair in Congo as being greeted by ‘cheering crowds of flag-waving picaninnies’ and ‘tribal warriors [with] watermelon smiles’ (Compass 2008). For Johnson’s Labour opponent Ken Livingstone, the incumbent mayor, the issue of London’s multiculturalism was linked to its artistic dynamism, and Livingstone accused Johnson of lacking policies that addressed the ‘artistic and cultural life of this city’ (Livingstone 2008).

In terms of Trafalgar Square, which had been a focus of development for incumbent Mayor Livingstone, Johnson's views were also controversial. In particular, questions hung over his support for the Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group, which had chosen a series of temporary modern sculptures to be displayed in Trafalgar Square. The program had been initiated in 1998 by the Royal Society of Arts, and had enjoyed 'keen support' from Livingstone (Hanman 2008). Johnson was on record as favouring a permanent statue of World War Two Royal Air Force commander Sir Keith Park (which I discuss in more detail below), so when he announced he would support the Fourth Plinth scheme, the Chair of the Commissioning Group, Ekow Eshun, was relieved: 'The Fourth Plinth is ... an ambitious, important project that has brought new dynamism to Trafalgar Square. I am delighted the new Mayor has given the programme his backing ...' (Fourth Plinth 2008). Johnson expressed his support in terms of the cultural benefits of the sculpture program:

London is one of the greatest cities I the world for arts and culture ... The Fourth Plinth is a project that encapsulates that fantastic mix, putting contemporary work against the context of some fine old buildings ... [it] has also proven popular, sparking the public's imagination and will continue for the foreseeable future. (quoted in Fourth Plinth 2008)

Here, the new mayor touched on some of the general themes that I will explore in this chapter. Johnson identified London's status as a unique and diverse city on the world stage, with a population that valued the public life of the city. Furthermore, by describing the contemporary art on the Plinth as forming a constructive contrast with the background of a historical landscape, he alluded to the heritage value of 'fine old buildings', while also acknowledging the built environment of Trafalgar Square as a symbol of urban diversity and national identity.

Furthermore, for the Commissioning Group, the Fourth Plinth program is foremost about using public space to engage with the arts, and is 'part of the vision for Trafalgar Square to be a vibrant, public space and to encourage debate about the place and value of public art in the built environment' (Greater London Authority 2010). For the public and the artists, however, the sculptures have prompted a much wider discussion about identity, tolerance, diversity, history and modernity in the context of Trafalgar Square.

In this chapter, I will show how many of the sculptures and installations which have been displayed on the Square since the Fourth Plinth scheme began in 1999 have addressed issues related to national identity. I will explore aspects of the narratives surrounding the Fourth Plinth scheme. I draw material from where the last chapter ended, in 2005, to link the arguments I have developed throughout this thesis about national identity and public place. As I will show, several of the sculptures on the Fourth Plinth have explicitly sought to contribute to a conversation about national identity, with many participating artists describing their entries to the competition in terms of nation, identity, diversity and history. I will explore what selected sculptures reveal about some of the main themes of this thesis: the presence of multiple national narratives, visibility in and control of space and resistance to that control, and the use of historical narratives to shore up contemporary versions of national identity. As with the other uses of the Square considered in the previous chapters, I will examine how the Fourth Plinth scheme reveals the presence of multiple narratives of Britishness by making them physically visible in a historically-symbolic place, Trafalgar Square.

In order to reinforce the arguments in this thesis, in this chapter I will discuss the artworks in the order that they relate to the chapters above, rather than the chronological sequence in which they appeared on the Plinth. Therefore, I will begin by discussing the 2009 installation of Antony Gormley's *One and Other*, and how this work explored the relationship between the historical representations in the Square along with the use of the space for a range of activities. This was one of the main themes of Chapter Four. In particular, Gormley's artwork comments explicitly on British national identity in the context of official control over the Square's use.

Next, I will consider Marc Quinn's 2005 sculpture *Alison Lapper Pregnant* and the discussion it generated around the public visibility of femininity, disability, and depictions of heroism. The narrative surrounding this artwork revisited some of the arguments around the public visibility and national presence of women that I discussed in Chapter Five on the Suffragettes, namely that physical visibility in Trafalgar Square was a tactic used by campaigners to claim political visibility within the nation. I will then discuss the memorial

statue of Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park, installed in 2009, which was seen to represent a narrative of British heroism in World War Two. I focused on this in the context of VE Day in Chapter Six, and this narrative also appeared in 2005 in media and official accounts of Londoners' responses to the 7 July bombings. Finally, I will consider the current (at the time of writing) sculpture, Yinka Shonibare MBE's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*. This artwork reiterates themes that I discussed in Chapter Seven, such as the role of London's multiculturalism in complicating historical narratives of Britishness represented in Trafalgar Square. All of these works relate explicitly to British national identity and comment directly on the role of the Square in expressing and reproducing that identity.

Whereas previous chapters of this thesis have focused on Trafalgar Square and its surrounding neighbourhood of Whitehall, the West End and the locations of power in Parliament and Buckingham Palace, this chapter adopts a different perspective. In Chapter Five, I introduced the argument that the importance of Trafalgar Square as a site where national identity is contested or re-imagined cannot be adequately understood without considering the larger urban spatial context in which it is located. In this chapter, I apply this argument to one corner of the Square, the Fourth Plinth, treating it as my main subject of inquiry, and the Square as the wider spatial and symbolic context.

My discussion of these works therefore directly incorporates the research questions I have been exploring throughout this thesis, namely: what national narratives are created and reflected in Trafalgar Square and by whom? What power relationships inform these narratives? What is the role of these narratives in connecting the national past, present and future? I will conclude this chapter by considering how this material might help refine my hypotheses about national identity, as well as how some of the uses of the Plinth planned for the future might progress the notion of Trafalgar Square as a site of national identity.

Britain on the Plinth

One and other

Instead of adopting the image of one person, as depicted on the other three plinths in the Square, artist Antony Gormley multiplied this idea by 2,400 for his work *One and Other*, which was displayed on the Fourth Plinth in the summer of 2009. Gormley's installation invited people from all over Britain to stand on the Fourth Plinth for an hour for 100 consecutive days from 5 July 2009. Applicants were chosen at random by a lottery, but represented all the areas of Britain in the same proportion as their region's percentage of the national population. This meant, for example, that 207 Scots were asked to participate, and 333 from the south-east of England (Cornwell 2009). The activities of the 'plinthers' were broadcast online via a webcam mounted on the plinth, therefore reaching a much wider audience than the one in Trafalgar Square itself.

For Gormley, this use of the plinth drew together many themes, including the power of the individual, the role of art in creating a public discussion and explicit questions about national identity. For example, he described his project to one journalist as an attempt to present a 'portrait of Britain made out of 2,400 hours of 2,400 people's lives' (Sooke 2009), and in creating this portrait, the installation was intended to contrast the participants with the figures on the other three plinths:

We are celebrating the living, and not the dead, the living who make up Britain in all its magnificence. We are creating a picture of Britain, and we don't yet know what the picture in composite will be...This is a test of... what sort of people we are. (quoted in Higgins 2009a)

In terms highly relevant to this thesis, Sooke (2009) described *One and Other* as explicitly a project about British national identity, with the goal to use a narrative of the 'everyman/woman of Britain' to provide a form of popular democracy through 'making art that [is] for everyone, irrespective of creed, language, race' (Sooke 2009). The national portrait that the installation created was certainly diverse. Participants dressed variously as human faeces, a gorilla, a town crier, a football referee, Britannia, a giant pigeon, and a few wore nothing at all. Some of the participants explicitly referenced their

immediate environment. Gerald Chong, for example, dressed as Godzilla, played tennis before destroying a cardboard model of London, including Nelson's Column, and the Houses of Parliament. Neil Studd, in a costume the colour of the plinth's stone, stood dressed as Admiral Nelson (see Figures 45 and 46).

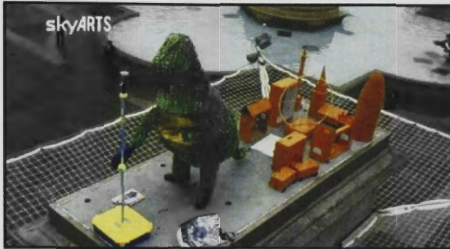


Figure 46: Gerald Chong as Godzilla.
Photo: Sky Arts.



Figure 45: Neil Studd as Admiral Nelson.
Photo: Sky Arts.

The media reaction to *One and Other* similarly covered a wide spectrum, but much of it evaluated the project in terms of its place-specificity. In *The Telegraph*, blogger Peter Whittle complained, in a somewhat self-contradictory manner, that it was 'spectacularly boring' and that it 'says nothing, illuminates nothing, and just adds to the mess which...is gradually eroding the grandeur of Britain's foremost public place' (Whittle 2009). His complaint was based on the view that the installation was unsuitable for the Square, and diminished its national and historical significance. Others took issue with Gormley's intention to provide a display of the 'heroism of everyday life' or a 'portrait of Britain in our time', instead describing the plinth as an isolating 'hermit's platform' that diminished the individual on it with its size, rather than a 'great democratic spectacle' (Jones 2009). Other opinions were more favourable. Needham (2009) praised it as a 'life-affirming portrait revealing Britain's better side' that 'championed the little guy against the intimidating grandeur of the square's institutions.' Searle (2009) described it as Gormley's 'best artwork yet.'

The contrast of the populist 'plinthers' with the Square and its historic symbolism was one of the central themes of Chapter Four, namely the relationship between the representations in the built environment of the Square and the use of the space. In one interview, Gormley discussed this issue by describing how his work engaged with the history and national

symbolism of the plinth, and expressing its impact in terms of a popular, democratic response to a dominant historical narrative:

The square has its history as a place of national identity ... My project is about trying to democratise this space of privilege, idealisation and control. This is about putting one of us in the place of a political or military hero. It's an opportunity to use this old instrument of hierarchical reinforcement for something a little more ... fun. (quoted in Sooke 2009)

However, despite the emphasis on subverting a 'space of ... control' (Sooke 2009), the project was very tightly controlled, as with other aspects of the Square's recent use (see Chapter Seven). The choice of participants was limited to a certain number from each national region, and was chosen by computer lottery. While participants could do whatever they chose, it was strictly limited to one hour, and the only access to the plinth was via a cherry-picker that lifted people to their place. One participant described her experience:

I was given a glass of water and a clipboard of forms to fill in to prove my identity and confirm my image could be used. Would I also please promise not to break the law? Also, was I, by the way, carrying weapons? And, if I did feel faint, would I please fall towards the terrace side of the square, where the drop was less deadly? Fair enough, I would try. (Thorpe 2009)

This high degree of official control complicates Gormley's characterisation of his project as a challenge to the 'privilege, idealisation and control' (Sooke 2009) that he believed the Square represents. Given how Gormley framed his project as a democratic and subversive exploration of national identity, the example of *One and Other* helps shed light on my research questions about the creation of national narratives in the Square and the power relationships that inform these narratives. As participants helped build a 'composite picture' of Britain, they created their own national narratives, but as with other uses of the Square, these were shaped by the constraints of both the project's rules and the site itself. In this way, the power of this installation to comment on modern British national identity was shaped by the environment of the Square, just as narratives of national identity discussed in previous chapters are all in some way bounded.

Alison Lapper Pregnant



Figure 47: *Alison Lapper Pregnant* by Marc Quinn. Photo: Dan Regan/Getty.

Four years before *One and Other*, the first statue installed under the new Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group was *Alison Lapper Pregnant* by artist Marc Quinn (see Figure 47), which depicted the disabled Lapper when eight months pregnant. Mayor Ken Livingstone, who had supported the scheme and endorsed the choice of works for display, described it as questioning ‘our notions of who should be the subject of a statue or memorial’ (Fourth Plinth 2005). The treatment of the statue as a challenge to the surrounding works was a theme picked up by other commentators on the 3.55 metre tall sculpture, including the contrast with other statues in the Square on the grounds of its depiction of femininity. Creator Marc Quinn compared it with the ‘triumphant male statuary’ in the Square and nearby Whitehall, and said he ‘felt that the Square could do with some femininity, linking with Boudicca near the Houses of Parliament. Alison’s statue could represent a new model of female heroism’ (Fourth Plinth 2005). Elsewhere, the artist suggested that ‘Nelson’s Column is the epitome of a phallic male monument and I felt the square needed some femininity’ (Reynolds 2005).

In these accounts, the artistic strength of the statue was inseparable from its location in Trafalgar Square. As Ken Livingstone said:

The square celebrates the courage of men in battle. Alison’s life is a struggle to overcome much greater difficulties than many of the men we celebrate and commemorate here. (Reynolds 2005)

In Livingstone's account, the symbolic power of *Alison Lapper Pregnant* rested with the artwork's relationship to the statues on the other three plinths, General Sir Henry Havelock, Sir Charles Napier and George IV, discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Livingstone presented the statue's subject matter, a pregnant disabled woman, as a contrast and a challenge to the narrative of martial, masculine and imperial power that the three other statues represented. Cooke (2005) also compared the statue to the other figures in the Square, although she emphasised the suitability of the sculpture, commenting that 'as a fighter, she takes her rightful place alongside the soldiers on the other plinths'. In both accounts, the other statues form a vital symbolic context for the Fourth Plinth sculpture, central to the sculpture's meaning. Furthermore, with his comments, Livingstone's suggests that the narrative of national identity represented in the Square should be re-imagined to include women such as Lapper. As with the Suffragette's claims on the use of public space, with this installation, the Square was a site in which the nation was made visible and subject to renegotiation.

Another, less positive, take on the statue, particularly its depiction of disability, described it as a 'preachy' (Hanman 2008), and evidence of 'the new elite's contempt for the public' (O'Neill 2007):

In the past, public art was generally born out of public consensus: only when there was a palpable sense that a person had achieved widespread respect would a statue be commissioned in his or her honour. Now, under Mayor Ken Livingstone and the Fourth Plinth organisation, it seems the aim of public art is to hector the public ... where the military statues in Trafalgar Square are in fact quite modest, the Lapper statue was big and oppressive, a god-like figure surveying the masses that pass through Trafalgar Square. (O'Neill 2007)

O'Neill identifies a change in how public art is chosen. However, he also identifies one of the main changes to the use and meaning of the Square over its history, a change in the power relationship between the users of the Square and the authorities who choose the art to be displayed there. In previous chapters, I have been tracing the control of the use of the space by the relevant authorities, arguing that this control has become tighter and tighter over the Square's history. In the Edwardian period, for example, although the WSPU and other organisations had to seek police permission to use the Square,

this was granted as long as protest organisers promised to clear the Square by an agreed time and not to speak from the south side of the plinth. The main concern of officials was the potential obstruction to traffic, rather than the substance of the protest itself. Similarly, in 1945, although climbing the monuments in the Square, such as the lions at the base of Nelson's Column, was formally prohibited, police reportedly turned a blind eye to these activities when they occurred during VE Day celebrations.

By 2008, when I visited the Square, the types of events for which the Square could be used were also tightly controlled by the authorities in charge of it. In practice, this has seen the Square used for a program of official multicultural festivals throughout the year including Chinese New Year, Eid, Diwali, Hanukah and others, some of which I discussed in Chapter Four. For Livingstone and the GLA, the Square appeared to have a very clearly defined role as a 'multicultural' space, and its festivals helped to 'build the cohesion and integration of our city, making all our citizens feel recognised, breaking down barriers and creating momentum as we all learn and experience new culture' (Livingstone 2008). This policy resonates strongly with his message of 'London United' following the 7 July 2005 bombing, and points to an overall official emphasis on urban cohesion that had come to dominate the official narrative of Trafalgar Square by the time the Fourth Plinth scheme began. As Livingstone (2008) himself said, the Fourth Plinth project was also a part of an overall strategy of 'cultural dynamism' link to London's multiculturalism.

O'Neill's (2007) description of Quinn's statue as 'big and oppressive, a god-like structure' can be interpreted as representing the increasingly strict official control over Trafalgar Square by Ken Livingstone and the GLA under his Mayorship. In terms of my research question about how power relationships inform the reproduction of national identity in the Square, the choice of statues for the Fourth Plinth has been an attempt by London authorities to shape these narratives. *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, by making visible a 'a new model of female heroism' (Fourth Plinth 2005) alongside older versions of imperial male heroism, demonstrates how, despite a change in national narratives over time, the use of public space to represent and influence these narratives remains a powerful means to shape national identity.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park

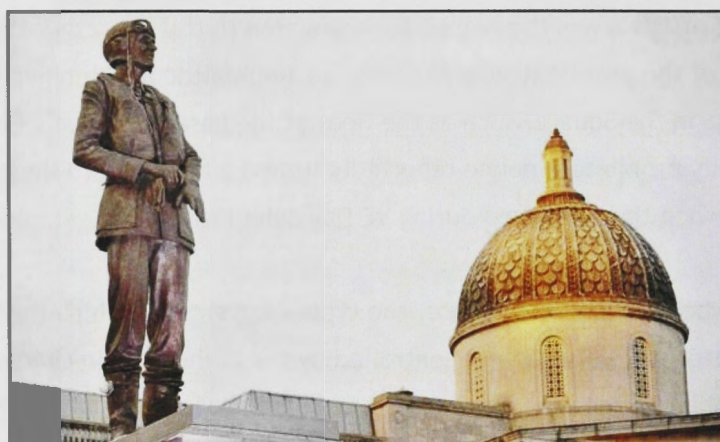


Figure 48: Sir Keith Park's statue in Trafalgar Square, November 2009.
Photo: Times Online.

While public discussion of *Alison Lapper Pregnant* touched on themes regarding the public role of women similar to those I discussed in Chapter Five, the sculpture of Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park (Figure 48), installed in November 2009, relates directly to some of the themes discussed in Chapter Six. Sir Keith Park commanded the Royal Air Force in southeast England in 1940 during the Battle of Britain. A New Zealander by birth, he is credited as having held off the Luftwaffe, forcing Germany to reconsider its planned invasion of Britain (Greater London Authority 2009c). Park's statue stood on the Plinth for six months. The statue was not commissioned specifically for the Fourth Plinth, like Quinn's or Antony Gormley's, and its sixth month tenure represented a compromise between the London government and campaigners who wanted a permanent statue of Park in the Square.

The contest over the permanency of the statue had begun the previous year. In March 2008, Terry Smith, the leader of the Sir Keith Park Memorial Campaign framed his support for the statue in terms of his views on the 'real' meaning of Trafalgar Square, based on a fixed notion of national identity. Criticising the Fourth Plinth scheme, Smith said that 'the square was built to commemorate those who saved the nation and defended it. It was not intended as a contemporary art fair' (Akbar 2008). During the 2008 mayoral election campaign, London's new mayor Boris Johnson had similarly claimed that the choice over what should fill the plinth was symbolic of larger national cultural and historical questions:

I can go for a dead white male war hero, gloved, goggled, moustached, forged in traditional bronze and thereby - so I am warned - earn the odium of the entire liberal funkapolitan art world, or else I can continue to support the rotation of strange and wonderful works of contemporary art and enrage those who think these conversation pieces are out of keeping with Nelson's square and that a failure to install Sir Keith Park is a disservice to the memory of those who saved our country from tyranny in 1940 ... I say to the Keith Park campaigners 'some day your plinth will come' (Johnson 2008).

In these examples, both Johnson and Smith describe the symbolism and purpose of Trafalgar Square in very narrow terms linked to wartime commemoration. Furthermore, by resisting the possibility of the display of a range of national narratives in the Square, they characterise British national identity in terms of the martial and masculine aspects of the past that are depicted in its statues and busts.

In particular, Johnson recognised the Square as a site saturated with a national historical narrative of martial victory, beginning with Nelson's naval victory, continuing through Havelock and Napier's imperial battles in India, and finally expressed in the busts of World War One naval commanders Beatty and Jellicoe. For Johnson, the question of what should be on the Fourth Plinth was based on the importance of this aspect of national history, as already represented in the Square. However, as the new London mayor, he also recognised that the Fourth Plinth scheme had been very popular (Jury 2008), and was reluctant to cancel it.

For Akbar (2008), writing in *The Independent*, this was a cultural struggle over history that underlined Trafalgar Square's role as the symbolic heart of London, and by extension, the nation:

Yesterday, more that 30 years after his death, Sir Keith Park was plunged into another tussle for the heart of the capital as a row over Trafalgar Square's empty fourth plinth sparked a furious standoff between some of the country's most eminent statesmen, historians and artists.

The contest between the supporters of the Keith Park statue on the one hand and the modern artworks through the Fourth Plinth scheme on the other neatly symbolises the relationship of the present with the past and the future

that is one of my central research concerns. For London officials, the choice of what occupied the plinth appeared to provide a possibility for a forward-looking discussion about the nature of national culture and identity, through a 'public debate about contemporary art' (Jury 2008). According to a Westminster Council planning report that rejected the possibility of a permanent memorial to Park on the plinth, 'The fourth plinth is regarded as a site ideally suited for the display of provocative contemporary art' (cited in Wardrop 2009). The same report found that a permanent statue of Park would be 'too representational and traditional' (Wardrop 2009).

However, it was precisely this 'traditional' link to the history of World War Two that supporters of the statue invoked to buttress their claims. Sir Keith Park Memorial Committee chairperson Terry Smith, for example, used the history represented in the built environment of the Square to link Park's image with longstanding national narrative. When the statue was removed from the plinth in May 2010, Smith stated: 'Park's statue has fittingly sat beneath Nelson's Column - a memorial to another great commander who likewise defended Britain from invasion 135 years earlier.' (BBC News Online 2010b)

The disagreement over Park's statue, therefore, was foremost a conflict over the meaning of the Square. For supporters of the Fourth Plinth scheme, the Square provided a valuable context for artworks that explored modern identity. For Smith and his supporters, however, modern British national identity was best represented by a figure symbolising historical national heroism. Park's statue also contributed to a longstanding narrative of British resistance to German attack, particularly during the London Blitz, which appeared in 1945 (see Chapter Six), and in 2005 after the London bombings (see Chapter Seven). However, in reaching a compromise to allow Park's statue to stand for six months, London officials seemed to demonstrate that the Square could accommodate a range of national narratives, and that many different visions of Britishness could be made visible there.

Nelson's Ship in a Bottle

After its allotted six months on the plinth, Park's statue was replaced by a sculpture by Yinka Shonibare MBE, a British-Nigerian artist with a record of works that have explored race, history and identity, particularly regarding the

relationship between Britain and its former colonies. Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* was chosen by the Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group and installed on 24 May 2010. The sculpture is a 1:30 replica of Admiral Horatio Nelson's ship the HMS Victory, from which he commanded the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Its 37 sails are set for battle and made of colourful and distinctive Dutch wax fabric (Dorment 2010). As with the other artworks on the plinth that I have discussed, Shonibare's installation is highly relevant to the themes of this thesis, particularly the issues of multiculturalism considered in Chapter Seven.



Figure 49: *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* by Yinka Shonibare MBE.

Shonibare's use of Dutch wax fabric (see Figure 50) has featured in some of his previous artworks. According to the Fourth Plinth group (2010), the fabric and the artwork symbolise the connections between empire, naval power, global trade and British national identity:

[Dutch wax fabric was] inspired by Indonesian batik design, mass produced by the Dutch and sold to the colonies in West Africa. Tying together historical and global threads and traversing Oceans and Continents, the work considers the complexity of British expansion in trade and empire, made possible through the freedom of the seas that Nelson's victory provided.



Figure 50: A detail of Shonibare's Dutch wax printed fabric.
Photo: Santa Barbara Independent.

The way the sculpture works to remind viewers that modern British multiculturalism has deep roots in the history of imperial expansion and conflict is one of

the main themes in reporting on Shonibare's artwork. For the artist, the role of trade and cultural exchange in British history and the multiculturalism of modern British national identity is central to this work. As noted in the discussion of multiculturalism in Chapter Seven above, this aspect of national identity has been linked specifically to London, as Shonibare described in a report on the installation of the artwork:

For me, it's a celebration of London's immense ethnic wealth, giving expression to and honouring the many cultures and ethnicities that are still breathing precious wind into the sails of the United Kingdom. (quoted in Jury 2010)

Some commentators, such the one from the national conservative daily broadsheet *The Telegraph*, appeared to resist Shonibare's message about multiculturalism. According to Dormont (2010):

[Shonibare] asks us to consider the relationship between Nelson's 'historic victory and the multicultural society we have in Britain today'. Now, there are so many dodgy ideas packed into those two short sentences that I'm not going to bore you [with a] futile, politically correct debate that became so fashionable about 20 years ago.

This dismissal of even considering a relationship between the Battle of Trafalgar and modern British multiculturalism as 'futile' uncovers some of the competing narratives of British national identity that are made visible in Trafalgar Square and that I have explored in this thesis. Even though for Dormont, the work is 'joyful and enchanting', a clever and visually arresting 'substantial work of art', any discussion of multiculturalism would be outdated and 'politically correct'. Instead, he highlights the visual affect of the artwork and quietly approves of the historical realism of the 'perfect replica' (Dormont 2010).

The realism that Dormont praises is another important aspect of the sculpture's site-specificity. According to Shonibare:

... it seemed obvious to do a work that was connected to the square in some way ... Nelson's victory freed up the seas for the British, and that led, in turn, to the building of the British Empire. But in a way, his victory also created the London we know today: an exciting, diverse multicultural city. (quoted in Cooke 2010)

Shonibare links Nelson's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar with the expansion of the British Empire. This contributed to the vibrancy of contemporary London. At the unveiling of the sculpture, Shonibare was even more explicit: 'I think Nelson would be proud to see that his battle has had a significant effect on the lives of so many people. This piece celebrates the legacy of Nelson' (*The Telegraph* 2010). Here, he describes the artwork as connecting contemporary viewers to a version of the past that Shonibare argues has been central in shaping multicultural London and Britain. His ship in a bottle specifically invokes the Battle of Trafalgar, and through it, the Square, to link the British present with a version of the British past. In Shonibare's version of the Battle of Trafalgar, it created the possibility for further imperial expansion, trade and cultural exchange that has made London so diverse, allowing space for people like him, born in Britain and raised in Nigeria before returning to London for his education and opportunities, to work as an artist.

While this message appears to celebrate the preconditions for the modern British diversity that Shonibare values, it also hints at darker aspects of imperialism, such as slavery and other forms of exploitation. London Mayor Boris Johnson asks: 'Is it pro-empire? Is it anti-empire? This colourful and quirky take on our seafaring heritage provides a vivid contrast that intensifies the historic surroundings of Trafalgar Square' (quoted in Jury 2010). In this description, the sculpture works to subtly highlight the historical setting, symbolically as well as visually. Higgins (2010) also responds to the historical aspects of the work, arguing that it recasts a familiar London place for her, causing her to 'pay attention to the original reason for this square's existence', with the artwork highlighting some of the historical meanings of the Square itself. As with Gormley's and Quinn's works, the relationship with its surrounding environment is central to the meaning of Shonibare's *Ship in a Bottle*.

Shonibare seeks to engage the audience's emotions, as have many other previous spectacles in the Square, through his use of colour and whimsy. According to the artist, the artwork is simultaneously serious and 'exciting, magical and playful' (Cooke 2010), and he wanted to use the space of the Square to generate a particular affect:

A ship in a bottle is an object of wonder ... How can such towering masts and billowing sails fit inside such a commonplace object? With *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* I want to take this childhood sense of wonder and amplify it to match the monumental scale of Trafalgar Square. (quoted in BBC News Online 2010c)

According to Searle (2010), the artwork is successful in creating this sense of wonder, bringing out the 'little boy and the sailing pond admiral in me.' He also identifies the complexity that Shonibare negotiates, arguing that *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* 'does manage to celebrate both Nelson's success at Trafalgar and the postcolonial multi-ethnic mix and mingle of Britain today' (Searle 2010). This description neatly draws together two of the main narratives at play in the sculpture, and points out that, like many other uses of Trafalgar Square, they represent intertwining strands of history and identity, rather than mutually exclusive ones.

In terms of my research questions, particularly the discussion in Chapter Seven, Shonibare's sculpture demonstrates how aspects of Trafalgar Square can generate discussion over a range of narratives. Responses to the artwork touched on its multiple national meanings, including the history of a specific battle, as well as more general issues of imperialism, trade and cultural exchange. As in Chapter Seven, the links between these historical narratives and modern London's multiculturalism are especially important to the artist. Shonibare captures the ambivalence of imperial power, crediting it with London's diversity, while also alluding to the exploitation implicit in its economic exchanges and military victories. He also recognises the flexible symbolic meaning of both the artwork and the history that inspired it, claiming that he is trying to be both celebratory and critical (Cooke 2010). His work suggests a narrative of a contemporary Britain and London that is subject to the cultural and social tensions that are the legacy of empire, but which also can produce a vibrant and unique metropolitan culture typified by tolerance.

Shonibare's visual reference to the Battle of Trafalgar, designed specifically for the Square, directly addresses my research question concerning the relationship between the present and the past by linking viewers to a historical narrative and asking them to reconsider its meanings and influence on the present. Recognising the ambivalence and multiple cultural and

historical narratives within his work, in one interview Shonibare summed up his sculpture as 'a monument to live, and let live' (Cooke 2010). This statement manages to capture the possibility of the co-existence of many of the national narratives have been imagined in Trafalgar Square, and that I have discussed in this thesis.

Conclusions

Nelson's Ship in a Bottle is scheduled to be removed from the Fourth Plinth at the end of 2011, with a replacement likely to be chosen by the Commissioning Group before then. However, some media reports suggest that a more permanent replacement is being considered. In 2008, *The Independent* (2008) reported that a statue of Queen Elizabeth II was being planned for the Fourth Plinth, and that this explained ongoing GLA support for the rotating program of modern artworks, rather than a permanent installation. While these reports were not officially confirmed, they do point to the ongoing interest in the occupancy of the space. The Fourth Plinth, through its lack of a permanent statue or memorial, seems to ask for a nationally-significant artwork to fill it, prompting a discussion of *what* is nationally significant in contemporary Britain.

This question reinforces the central argument of this thesis that national identity is best conceptualised as a complex and multi-stranded narrative. Furthermore, as with the Suffragettes' use of the Square, the reactions of the VE Day crowd to the celebrations of the end of the war and the official messages of multicultural unity in 2005, visibility in the Square is used by various national groups as a practical demonstration of visibility in the nation.

This issue of visibility can be expressed in terms of contest or tension, as with the WSPU's tactical use of space to specific political ends that I discussed in Chapter Five. However, it can also be more subtle, and in the case of the Fourth Plinth, this is demonstrated by the variation in public reaction to the program of artworks. *One and Other*, for example, sought to make Britain itself visible, through a composite portrait of its residents, and was 'widely celebrated as a democratic portrait of Britain in the 21st century' (Jones 2009). Some people, however, thought it was vacuous and reflective of a 'Big Brother' culture typified by fame-hungry narcissism (Jones 2009). *Alison*

Lapper Pregnant was an attempt by the artist to write a new narrative of 'Everywoman' heroism that some saw as brave and others as 'preachy' (Hanman 2008) or 'horrid ... like a slimy bar of soap' (Reynolds 2005). Sir Keith Park's brief stint on the plinth was cast as a struggle between the traditional forces of 'proper' history and the 'funkapolitan' cadres of modern art enthusiasts (Johnson 2008).

Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* was by far the best received, perhaps because it did not shy away from the ambivalence of the history that the site represented, but instead sought to incorporate many different narratives into a playful and visually-arresting installation. For some, his sculpture respected the history of the Battle of Trafalgar and reminded viewers of the symbolism of the site itself. For others, including the artist himself, it represented a celebration of contemporary Britain's multiculturalism and the cultural vibrancy that this engendered. In terms of this thesis, the significance of his work is that it does not force the range of narratives germane to the Square into a contest with each other, but instead presents them as inseparable, highly visible facets of modern British national identity.

Shonibare's work also reminds us of another theme that has run through this thesis: the conflation of London and Britain. As in Chapter Seven, this is almost an unconscious process, pointing to the dominance of London and its unique metropolitan culture in shaping the narrative of identity for the whole nation. On the Fourth Plinth, Shonibare links the British history of the Battle of the Trafalgar with the multiculturalism of modern London which he identifies as 'vindaloo Britishness ... a mixed-up thing' (Cooke 2010). *One and Other*, in meeting its goal of a proportional representation of British residents by region, saw more people from the London area in the southeast of England mount the plinth than participants from anywhere else. This can be contested by the periphery, however, as shown in Chapter Seven by the scepticism about the likelihood of the benefits of London's Olympics flowing to the whole country.

Overall, the value of the Fourth Plinth in advancing the arguments of this thesis lies in the way it can draw together and make visible multiple narratives at the same time. Whether reviews of the installations were been positive or

negative, by engaging with questions of what should be represented on the Square, the public was asked to consider issues of national visibility for a range of groups. Furthermore, Trafalgar Square frames of this ongoing discussion with its structures and their historic symbolism, pointing to the Square's ongoing relevance as a site in which British national identity is made visible, shaped and re-imagined.

chapter nine

Conclusions

Yinka Shonibare MBE's sculpture of the HMS Victory, which I discussed at the end of Chapter Eight, is the perfect point at which to both end and sum up the arguments of this thesis. In both its symbolism and materiality, *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* is a metaphor for one of the main arguments of this thesis: that Trafalgar Square's impact as a site of national identity rests on the fact that it makes national narratives visible and therefore available for renegotiation. This extends Anderson's (1991) argument suggesting that in order for a national community to be imagined it must be visible. In addition, the multiple national narratives on show in the Square are bound together with differential social power. They make use of different aspects of the past to enhance their saliency, and exist in conflict, tension, cooperation or ambivalence with each other.

Shonibare's artwork brings together the symbolism and history of national identity in a highly visible, site-specific object in the Square. Public responses to it have recognised this mix of elements. One reviewer, for example, described it as 'a complex symbol that relates to the past and present of London on several levels' (Gayford 2010), and another linked it to its site in Trafalgar Square: 'it causes us to pay attention to the original reason for this square's existence: Admiral Lord Nelson, who presides over the square'

(Higgins 2010). While recognising its complex symbolism, however, Shonibare himself also wanted to create something visually arresting that would catch the eye and bring ‘simple pleasure and amazement’ (Gayford 2010). Dorment (2010) identified this as an important aspect of the sculpture, emphasising it as simply beautiful to look at, no matter what one’s individual political views on imperialism, multiculturalism or historical conflict. As an artwork displayed in a prominent national place, and an object rich in historical symbolism that viewers observe, consider, and respond to, *Nelson’s Ship in a Bottle* provides a tangible example of the role of public visibility in constructing the narratives of the imagined national community.

Research questions and approach

In this thesis, I have focused on one place, Trafalgar Square, and examined how different national narratives have been narrated within and about it by a range of social groups. In doing so, I have looked at both the national representations in its built environment and how this environment has framed the use of the Square since its construction in 1840. I structured this project around three research questions that interrogate the symbolism and use of the Square. These were:

- What national narratives have been created and reflected in Trafalgar Square?
- What power relationships inform these national narratives?
- What is the role of these narratives in connecting the national past, present and future?

To establish the basis of these questions, Chapter Two began by asking how the scholarly literature from cultural geography can help shed light on sociological questions of national identity. Drawing from these two fields, I focused on material in both disciplines concerning how the nation is constructed, represented and reproduced, which groups participate in this process and how the national past is used to legitimise narratives of national identity in the present. I identified the main theoretical contention underpinning my research questions: that national identity is a discourse or ‘frame of reference’ that ‘has to be reproduced daily’ (Özkırımlı 2005: 33).

Furthermore, I focused the way in which this manifests itself. For example, is national identity created by cultural elites working through national political and social structures to weave this daily narrative of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991, Hobsbawm 1983), or is it a multi-stranded discursive process that includes a wide range of perspectives and where 'very different views of the nation contest and negotiate with each other' (Ting 2008: 460, Hutchinson 2005, Edensor 2002)? This central question in the literature helped shape the way I examined the use of the Square as well as the national representations within its built environment.

In terms of the literature on urban geography, I focused on three different aspects of place. The first was its relationship with versions of the national past, for which I relied on Nora's notion of the *lieux de mémoire* (1989), sites where national narratives are created with reference to particular versions of history. Second, I looked at the political potential of sites such as Trafalgar Square as places where national identity can be re-imagined, in part through the influence of counter-hegemonic narratives. Here, I engaged with authors (Massey 2005, Cresswell 2004, Forest *et al* 2004), who claim that social identity is a place-based process, 'continuously created and recreated through place-making, social memory, and their related multi-scaled and shifting configurations of identity and belonging' (Forest *et al* 2004: 363). This led me to ask whether this process extended to the construction of national identity, and if so, how does this occur? This inquiry reflected in my research questions concerning whose national narratives are expressed in place, and the power relationships that these narratives reflect. I adopted a historical case study approach to address these questions.

Before turning to the case studies, however, I laid out the methodology I used to explore my research questions, with a focus on how both the *representations* within and *use* of Trafalgar Square have shaped the way the nation has been made visible in the Square, and how both of these might contribute to the way the nation is imagined. In Chapter Three I explained that my choice of historical case studies was designed in part to try and understand how the meanings and uses of place might have changed over time, and what the implications might have been for national identity. In this

sense, my empirical approach was comparative, and the relationship amongst the case studies has been an important part of my findings. In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I have attempted to weave a comparative aspect of the case studies' meanings into the discussion of each of them.

Chapter Three also emphasised the value of looking at a range of empirical sources in order to understand both 'top-down' and 'from-below' perspectives on the use of the Square. This aligned with the discussion in the literature review of the way different groups might seek to shape the national narrative, and the importance of listening to popular voices as well as official ones (Hobsbawm 1990). This also related to my research questions about the range of different national narratives created in place, and the power relationships that might inform them. Having established these questions and framework, Chapters Four to Eight considered different aspects of the Square's use.

Evidence and arguments

In this thesis, I contended that Trafalgar Square was a significant *lieux de mémoire*, even if it was not the only one in central London. In Chapter One, I introduced the notion that it had strong symbolic value to protestors because of ongoing official attempts to control the use of the space (Dennis 2008). This was borne out by my empirical evidence. For example, WSPU leaders specifically identified the Square as a site that they could use to gain widespread publicity by occupying it, and it was not until they did so that their campaign received coverage in the mainstream conservative newspaper, *The Times*. They held several colourful and highly visible events there, packing the space with processions, banners and speakers from the base of Nelson's Column. In doing so, the WSPU used the accreted symbolism of the space to buttress their political claims, and also added to the site's symbolic value for subsequent users.

In 1945, the symbolic value of the site was different but no less compelling. The floodlighting of Nelson's Column reminded viewers of imperial history and victory through representations in the built environment, and the embodied experience of 'being in the crowd' helped to engender a sense of 'imagined community' amongst strangers celebrating together in the street. The throngs

of people in the streets also resonated with an older London history of the crowd and the expressions of public sentiment, even though on this occasion, unlike the nineteenth century and earlier periods, the mood was neither volatile nor violent. Finally, in 2005 the Square's role as a *lieux de mémoire* was reinforced by London officials who chose it as the venue to make a public show of metropolitan and national unity. On this occasion it was used to help legitimise Mayor Ken Livingstone's social agenda of multiculturalism, and it was likely chosen because of its central location and its history of a platform for the expression of popular sentiment. This 'popular' history was implied despite the fact that strong official control of the space had become a widely accepted feature of the Square by 2005.

The empirical section of this thesis began with Chapter Four, which introduced Trafalgar Square, discussing some of its main spatial elements and the wide range of uses of the space throughout its history. In the first half of the chapter, I described the national symbolic value of the Square's built environment, focusing on the statues of imperial and military figures; the way the open space was designed with the intention to showcase an urban environment that was emblematic of national and imperial power, such as the National Gallery and the vista down Whitehall; and official attempts to control physical access and use of the Square by protestors or the poor. Through these spatial attributes, I discussed the Square's role as a simultaneously local, national and imperial place that symbolised its creators' (Gans 1974) 'top-down' version of Britishness as martial and masculine.

In the second, more thematic, half of the chapter I discussed some of the ways the Square has been used since its construction in 1840. I discussed both spectacular and quotidian uses, introducing the different ways that users have understood and responded to the space. In this look at the Square 'from below', I included ways that the Square has been re-imagined or used for purposes other than those intended by its creators, responding to the literature that argued for the importance of examining a range of narratives of national identity (Hobsbawm 1990). In doing so, I began to build the sub-argument that multiple narratives inform national identity and that some of these have been made evident in different groups' use of Trafalgar Square. This supported the notion that national identity is a discursive process that I

identified in Chapter Two (Özkırmlı 2005, Ting 2008, Edensor 2002, Bhabha 1990, Smith 2008, Guibernau 2007, Calhoun 1997).

Chapter Five was the first of my historical chapters. I looked at the use of the Square as a protest and publicity site from 1906 to 1913 by the Suffragette organisation, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). I argued that, in making themselves visible to the public and national authorities through their use of the Square, the WSPU was attempting to make women more visible, participative members of the nation. In the context of the demands for enfranchisement, this was equivalent to using visibility in Trafalgar Square to make a claim to national membership. In doing so, they built on the tactical use of space that militant female suffrage organisations had used throughout central London more generally, through processions, 'monster' meetings and civil disobedience. Returning to Anderson's (1991) notion of the national 'imagined community', I suggested that the WSPU's use of Trafalgar Square helped emphasise the Suffragettes in the national imagination, and that their contest over the use of the Square represented a contest over membership of the national community.

In addition, I discussed how the WSPU legitimised its political claims through reference to previous uses of the Square by popular rights movements, using the accreted symbolism of the Square (Dwyer 2004) to help them to contextualise their political aims. This process appeared to develop over time, and by 1913, their speeches and activities in the Square included references to previous protests that they used to contextualise their own. In terms of my research questions, they used the Square's history of counter-hegemonic political protest to buttress their own national claims, accessing a historical narrative in order to imagine a new national future.

Finally, I suggested that the prominence of Trafalgar Square as a site when the nation can be re-imagined cannot be adequately understood without considering the urban spatial context in which it is located, building on Massey's (1991) challenge to the notion of place as spatially bounded. For the WSPU, Trafalgar Square's symbolic importance was enhanced by its proximity to sites of political power in the Houses of Parliament and Whitehall, as well as upper middle-class shopping, socialising and residential areas in the West

End, where militant tactics of property crime, such as shop window breaking, would be met with widespread publicity. Throughout subsequent chapters, I continued to explore the role of the Square's immediate neighbourhood in enhancing its national significance.

In Chapter Six, I discussed the use of the Square during the celebration of Victory in Europe Day from the evening of 7 to 8 May 1945. I examined Home Office and Cabinet records alongside the rich material from the Mass-Observation Archive (MOA) as well as media reporting. I contextualised my analysis with a discussion of official attempts to raise public morale and create a unified national narrative exemplified by phrases such as 'the People's war', and evident in public information campaigns that encouraged frugality, courage or unity in the face of wartime deprivation. However, as Rose (2003) noted, these campaigns masked vulnerability in social cohesion, and by 1945 the national community was less uniform than official messages suggested.

I examined two main aspects of the 1945 celebrations. The first was the excitement and 'group-feeling' that M-OA correspondents reported as fuelling the public merrymaking. Despite official rhetoric, such as Churchill's or George VI's official speeches, that stressed the historical significance of the allied victory, in some accounts the public was ambivalent about the explicitly 'national' aspects of the end of the war. Instead, according to the M-OA, people 'were expected to celebrate and there was a possible opportunity really to enjoy themselves' (Mass Observation Archive FR 2263 1945: 57). According to first-hand accounts, for many people, the excitement of being allowed to be in a lively crowd was enough reason to celebrate, as occurred in Trafalgar Square. Despite the symbolism of the Square, its value as a built environment for these celebrants was as a large space in which people could gather and as a stopping-off point to observe the crowd or listen to the loudspeakers while progressing through central London. For these celebrants, the Square did not appear to symbolise the national history and power that the official narrative emphasised, but instead was a chance to relax and mingle with co-celebrants. I suggested that this indicated a subtle counter-narrative, as people simply enjoyed the celebrations and the crowds, despite dominant official messages that emphasised nation and imperial victory and resilience.

The second element of the celebrations that I explored was the floodlighting of prominent London landmarks, including Nelson's Column. The illumination of the symbols of empire and nation in the built environment was described in the media in metaphorical terms as the light of Victory after the darkness of the wartime blackout (see *London Illustrated News* 1945: 523). This conformed to an official national narrative emphasising the symbolism of a floodlit built environment that had survived the destruction of the war. However, in other accounts, it was simply a brilliant diversion that 'aroused great enthusiasm among the crowds' (*The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* 1945: 1) by using central London's structures to provide a dazzling spectacle in an official strategy of affect (Thrift 2004).

Based on these aspects of the VE Day celebrations, I extended my argument that the nation must be visible to be imagined. For people celebrating in the streets of central London, the national community was tangible, immediate and exciting, and the 'group-feeling' was experienced as intoxicating. In this case, the nation was the crowd, and again Trafalgar Square provided a symbolic frame in which to experience or recall and observe the nation alongside thousands of others. The floodlighting of Nelson's Column, the lions at its base, the National Gallery, Admiralty Arch and other structures served to highlight this frame, as well as creating an official narrative of national identity based on the historical symbolism of the built structures.

Through this material, I also began to explore the way that London and Britain were conflated, and asked what the implications of this were for national identity. This was particularly evident in official accounts: in George VI's victory speech to the nation, for example, London's experience of the war represented both the nation and the empire. I suggested that London's experience of the Blitz helped define the city as an exemplar of British resilience and resolve, constructing a narrative of survival that officials would use to interpret and contextualise subsequent events, such as those discussed in Chapter Seven.

I also continued to explore the importance of the Square's local neighbourhood in creating its meanings. On 7 and 8 May 1945, for example,

the Square was one place that people visited as they moved through a larger central London landscape, rather than a destination in itself. This reinforces Massey's (1991) point about place's flexible boundaries, but also suggests that, as a site in which the nation is imagined, Trafalgar Square is understood by users in the context of its surrounds. In other words, the visibility of events in the Square, and the impact of these events on national identity, relied in part on the significance ascribed to nearby sites, particularly Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament and the upper middle-class shopping, leisure and residential district in the West End. This was similarly the case during the Suffragette protests from 1906 to 1913.

In contrast, in Chapter Seven the Square was a single destination. During the events of early July 2005, it was a designated gathering place for two nationally-significant events: the celebration of London's winning 2012 Olympics bid and the commemorative vigil for the victims of the 7 July 2005 London transport bombings. During these two events, as in 1945, it was a focus of national attention, and the messages broadcast from it reached a wide national audience. However, in contrast to 1945, it was subject to high levels of official control regarding the activities that could occur there.

I contextualised the analysis in this chapter with a discussion of how London and national officials mobilised messages of cultural unity during both the Olympics bid party and the bombings victims' vigil to cast London's multiculturalism as a source of national strength. During the events themselves, the Square's built environment was used to emphasise certain historical narratives. During the 2005 bid party, for example, the statue of Admiral Nelson was mentioned in media reports to create a sense of historical continuity with British victory over the French at the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar. During the two-minute silence to commemorate the bombings' victims, some reports described the vigil as a demonstration of the same resilience and calm that Londoners were perceived to have exhibited during the London Blitz in 1940-41. In these examples, the events in the Square were used to link the present to approved versions of the national past (Nora 1989).

In Chapter Seven, I also used the widespread media and official discussion of London's multiculturalism to further develop my argument about the effects

of conflating of London and Britain. This saw uniquely local characteristics, such as London's racial and cultural diversity, ascribed to the whole nation. The events in Trafalgar Square were an important part of how this happened, as in the slogan 'London United' which was prominently displayed during the bombings vigil underpinning an official narrative of diversity and tolerance. During this event, Londoners were also described as united against terrorists whose aim was to divide the population along religious and cultural lines, much as they had been united against German bomb attacks during World War Two.

However, as Closs Stephens (2007) points out, the use of the popular narrative of London during the Blitz to frame the public response to the 2005 bombings uses a version of social history that is predominantly white and English. This demonstrates the limitations of this narrative to interpret events in the highly diverse London of 2005. However, by using both the Olympics party and the bombings vigil to promote a multicultural version of Britishness, officials used the space of Trafalgar Square to make London's diversity highly visible and to write it into a national narrative.

In Chapter Eight, I revisited many of the arguments in the historical chapters by narrowing the empirical focus to the Fourth Plinth. This pedestal has hosted a range of modern sculptures since 1999, with artworks for display there now chosen by a Commissioning Group. The Fourth Plinth scheme is a material demonstration of how different national narratives are made visible in Trafalgar Square. Furthermore, the response to these narratives can reveal not only the presence of multiple national narratives, but also the relationship among them.

I discussed four recent artworks on the plinth, exploring what their creators and commissioners intended to communicate, and how these messages were received by the public, mostly through the media. I showed that the location of the artworks in Trafalgar Square enhanced their national significance in the eyes of the public, and that many of them dealt explicitly with issues of identity and the relationship between the individual and the nation. In both official and media reporting on the sculptures, their national aspects were often emphasised. Furthermore, many responses to the works related to their

national meanings, and conflicts often related to which national group the sculptures sought to make visible.

For example, the discussion of Antony Gormley's *One and Other* focused on the appropriate use of the space, the relationship between individuals' use of the plinth and the representations of national history in the Square, and the question of official control over what 'plinthers' would be allowed to do. This revisited the material in Chapter Four that considered the relationship between representations in and use of the Square; the role of 'top-down' and 'from-below' perspectives in constructing the Square's meanings; and the significance of the Square as a highly visible site in which the national community can be imagined. Marc Quinn's *Alison Lapper Pregnant* similarly referenced the focus of Chapter Five by raising questions about the public role of women and the Square as a contested site that subordinate groups can use to renegotiate their national membership. By making the image of a pregnant disabled woman highly visible, Quinn and Lapper emphasised both its contrast to and its similarity with the other structures in the Square. This underlined the site's role as a space in which multiple national narratives can be made visible and in which the relationships between these narratives can be explored.

The controversy over the statue of World War Two RAF Commander Sir Keith Park touched on the subject matter in Chapter Six. Public discussion of this statue was described as a contest between 'traditionalists' who wanted to depict a national wartime hero and 'funkapolitans' who were more interested in exploring the dynamism of contemporary, multicultural London. For the 'traditionalists', the nature of the site meant that a historically-resonant figure should occupy the plinth, whereas others felt the Square provided an opportunity to explore the social concerns of modern London and re-imagine the nation in the process. In the end, a compromise was reached, and Park's image occupied the plinth for six months before being replaced by Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*. This installation spoke directly to questions of modern British multiculturalism, the uses of aspects of history to interpret and produce national identity in the present, and Trafalgar Square as a site of accreted symbolism that has been used repeatedly to buttress official national narratives (Dwyer 2004). Shonibare himself described the artwork as an

exploration of the diverse cultural influences implied by British national identity, rather than identifying it with a single totalising narrative: 'I love what you could call "vindaloo Britishness". It's a mixed-up thing. You hear it in British music, and you taste it in British food. This purity notion is nonsense, and I cherish that' (in Cooke 2010).

Significance

Throughout this thesis, I have made a number of overarching arguments that relate to the relationship between national identity and urban public place as conceptualised in the literature, discussed in Chapter Two. The first is that national 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991) can include many different narratives, and that these are created by different 'top-down' (or official) and 'from-below' (or popular) groups (Hobsbawm 1990, Smith 2008). The symbolism of place and its histories is a crucial element in this discursive process that re-imagines the nation. Furthermore, while these narratives can exist in tension or conflict (Hutchinson 2005), they can also call on aspects of each other to buttress their own claims, as in instances of the use of the accreted symbolism of place to frame subsequent events (Dwyer 2004).

Urban public places, especially those that have been explicitly constructed as national ones, such as Trafalgar Square, provide an important environment in which these narratives can be made visible to a wider national audience (Hagen and Ostergren 2006). As it is used by different groups, aspects of Trafalgar Square's symbolic built environment have been woven into a range of narratives, helping to frame their re-imagining of the national community. However, despite the apparently fixed nature of Trafalgar Square's built environment, it has undergone physical changes since its initial construction. Importantly for my arguments, the meanings of the Square are not fixed, but are re-imagined in an ongoing discursive process, in the same way that national identity is constantly re-imagined (Özkırımlı 2005, Ting 2008, Edensor 2002, Bhabha 1990, Smith 2008, Guibernau 2007, Calhoun 1997).

Trafalgar Square has provided a national symbolic framework that different users have reinterpreted through their uses of the space, including quotidian or banal uses, and their responses to its national representations. For

example, while the built elements of Trafalgar Square represent a version of Britishness that aligned with the views of its creators, this narrative was challenged and contested almost immediately. This included small acts of civil disobedience such as dumping rubbish in the fountains, to large scale protests in 1848, only a few years after the Square's completion.

Additionally, the symbolic representations that are the reference points of particular national narratives might remain, but the way these are interpreted or re-imagined change over time. Nelson's Column, for example, was a symbol of national survival when floodlit during the VE Day celebrations in 1945, and the figure of Nelson himself was depicted as gazing down benignly on the celebrations taking place in the Square. In 2005, Nelson was similarly depicted as looking down on the crowd celebrating the Olympics bid, this time with a reference to victory over the French. However, in these two cases, the purpose for which the symbols were mobilised was different, pointing to the flexibility of meaning in the Square's structures. By 2010, Shonibare's depiction of Nelson's ship was used to comment on imperial trade and its connection with modern British multiculturalism.

In this thesis, I have argued that Trafalgar Square shows us the complexity and mutability of British national identity, supporting Ward's (2004) challenge to the fixed definition of British, English and imperial identities implied by Colley (1992), Kumar (2003), and Wellings (2002). Whilst I have found evidence of a British narrative based firmly on imperial symbolism and history, I have also found that the categories of Britain and England have been used almost interchangeably by many users of the Square over the period that this thesis examines, particularly by national officials.

In addition, references to the Empire have consistently appeared, although their meanings have changed considerably. In Edwardian pageants, for example, London's connection to the rest of the world was framed in terms of the Empire. By 2010, in the 'super-diverse' environment of the capital, the Empire was also an important symbolic resource, as demonstrated by the work of Shonibare, the Eid and Diwali celebrations, and the image of a model of the Taj Mahal at the base of Nelson's Column that began this thesis. However, for

many modern residents none of these are relevant categories of identity, with London itself a more important entity.

Nevertheless, it is not clear that this means that national identity is now unimportant. Instead, the evidence in this thesis suggests that national identity has a strong and specifically urban component. London's environment has been important for the reproduction of national identity because of who lives there, the way its symbolic landscape references the nation, and the visibility that can be gained through media attention to the capital city. I have shown how events in Trafalgar Square, and the people participating in them, have repeatedly been imagined as representative of the nation, much as the built environment of the Square has been imagined as a national space. London's repeated conflation with Britain in official narratives around the events I examined reinforce the importance of the capital in constructing national identity in this case study. This in itself becomes another element of the contested nature of national identity, as shown on VE Day in 1945 and in 2005.

Overall, the main contribution of this thesis lies in its demonstration that an important aspect of place's value in terms of national identity is how it can make national narratives visible, and how the contest, tension and confluence among multiple narratives can help people to re-imagine the nation. The way different groups access and understand Trafalgar Square, in particular its representations of history and the control of activities within it, demonstrates the power relationship between these groups, and the ability of authorities to shape national narratives. This suggests that national identity is much more complex and subtle than a 'top-down' imposition of meaning. Instead, the evidence in this thesis suggests that while elites might use public places to create or shape national narratives (such as the powerful groups who conceived and built the Square, controlled the use of its space, chose which of its elements to emphasise or selected artworks for display in it) national identity is an evolving multi-stranded discourse that is shaped by many actors, including those 'from-below'. In part, this occurs through the use of nationally-significant places. By examining a range of spectacular and banal uses, this thesis has demonstrated the important role that Trafalgar Square plays in creating, maintain and re-imagining narratives of national identity.

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