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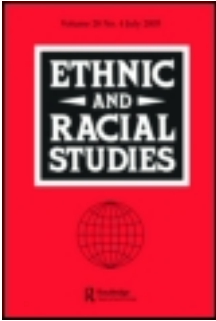
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# Living the multicultural city: acceptance, belonging and young identities in the city of Leicester, England

John Clayton

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## Abstract

Drawing upon research conducted with young people in the city of Leicester, England, this paper explores what it means for those from black and minority ethnic communities, particularly more recent arrivals, to live within and adapt to specific multicultural urban contexts. After introducing prevailing racisms and accommodations, the paper examines how forms of belonging are expressed, re-produced and negotiated through the spatial trajectories of everyday life. This includes the value of emerging versions of place through community, religious practice as a form of social capital, the importance of routine, and the construction of multifaceted identities. Such experiences relate to contingent hierarchies of acceptance and legitimacy, histories of settlement, economic marginalization, as well as gendered and generational roles. These young people negotiate everyday life and belonging by retaining, extending and forging local and trans-national ties; highlighting the relationship between socio-spatial positions, everyday practice and identity formation.

**Keywords:** Identity; multiculturalism; racism; community; place; youth.

## Introduction

This paper looks to reconnect discussions of multiculturalism with the everyday experiences of those who have come to represent this often demonized condition of diversity (Phillips et al. 2007; Hopkins 2007). By illustrating how practices of belonging play out, it addresses what it means for young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities to live in a city with a reputation for progressive civic multiculturalism, but which is not immune from racism and forms of

inequality. Going beyond a simplistic characterization of place and minority identities, the paper highlights the experiences of young people with diverse biographies and geographical trajectories, particularly focusing on the experiences of more recent arrivals and their relative positions within localized hierarchies of racialization. The manner in which young people negotiate their own identities, the power of racial and social hierarchies and those socio-spatial contexts which actively reconstitute their daily lives are explored.

The aims of the study were to understand how young people related to the notion of Leicester as a successful multicultural city and how belonging to place and ethnicity was expressed, reproduced and transgressed. In order to *understand* lives as they are lived out, a range of qualitative methods were required (Cook and Crang 2007)<sup>1</sup>. These included both performative aspects of social relations, but also what was said by participants (Back 1996; Gregson and Rose 2000). A series of methods in youth-based settings over one year were employed.<sup>2</sup> In addition to ethnographic immersion (Bauman 1996) and interviews with key informants, a total of fourteen group discussions, 30 one-to-one semi structured interviews and seven further interviews mediated by photo diaries were conducted with young people.

By employing a selection of qualitative ‘sketches’ (Amin and Graham 1997) which relate to the aims of the study and emerging themes, no claims of representativeness are made. Rather, this paper looks to illustrate relevant situated experiences which constitute places through the generation of inter-subjective and ‘warranted knowledge’ (Graham 1997, p. 7). Material reflected upon here most clearly illustrates one of the key themes to emerge; the way in which racialized young people work with and respond to their socio-spatial positions, forging identities, relationships and connections through the contexts explored below.

### **Spaces of (not) belonging**

In understanding these experiences and the reconstitution of racial and ethnic identities, the role of space is recognized as key (Dwyer and Bressey 2008; Clayton 2009). Identities and everyday opportunities are constrained by the requirement for BME young people to negotiate and adapt to dominant spaces of whiteness (Nayak 1997; Back 2005). Situated experiences draw upon and reinforce wider understandings of ‘race’ and national belonging, but make sense in relation to everyday moments of isolation and encounter that result from positions of economic and cultural marginality (Valentine 2008).

This involves the dynamic performance of complex identities by those subject to processes of racialization<sup>3</sup>; whereby communities are

in formation, rather than ever complete (Ahmed 2000). However, the (re)production of identities are rarely intentional moves enacted by unconstrained individuals, but are influenced by multiple axes of power including 'race', class, gender and sexuality (Anderson 1996). While the dynamic possibilities of identities are understood, the ability to 'become anybody' is restricted (Nash 2000). The constraining forces of racisms play a crucial role in fixing and stigmatizing the identities of those identified as 'ethnic minorities', reinforced by structures of socio-economic stratification and class division (Skeggs 2004). An emphasis on the fluidity of identities therefore may bear little resemblance to the realities of contemporary multicultural urban life, where despite cultural crossovers, strict ethnically based allegiances remain stubbornly intact.

I went to my mates' house and they took me to the family pub because they were watching a [football] match and because it was like mainly white people they were really racist towards me and I didn't understand why because I was the only Asian, it was just really stupid. And they just started to be really racist. And sometimes you've got these little areas just full of one group and it's really weird when you enter it because you just feel like everyone's eyes are on you like they've never seen a person like you.

This is emphasized above by one young female (aged fourteen, identified as a British Muslim) living in a predominantly Asian neighbourhood in the centre of Leicester, describing an occasion when she entered a pub in a predominantly white neighbourhood of the city. This demonstrates the extent of localized inter-ethnic negotiation and the reconfiguration of diasporic identities (Dwyer 2000), but also the 'double consciousness' (Du Bois 1903) of being black and living within a society that has not eliminated a hegemonic racial grammar (Bonilla-Silva 2011). The respondent entered this space with her white friend's family as a shared social experience, but soon discovered to be recognized as an outsider in a gendered and racially demarcated space (the traditionally white and masculine space of the public house) and social activity (watching the football match) over which she had little control. The significance of this narrative in relation to themes of acceptance, belonging and identity are apparent, but in interpreting such experiences an appreciation of context is also crucial.

### **The significance of place: Questioning context**

While it by no means escapes the negative racialization of urban space (Sibley 1998; Keith 2003),<sup>4</sup> the city of Leicester in the English

Midlands, has been held up as a model of progressive managed ‘race’ relations (Osborne 2001), where the presence of a substantial BME population (predominantly of Indian heritage, but increasingly diverse),<sup>5</sup> has not witnessed tensions experienced elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Leicester has not been immune from the efforts of far-right organizations to whip up conflict,<sup>7</sup> but a number of factors are identified as explaining a relatively unique history. Most of these are based upon developments following the arrival of a significant number of East African Asian refugees from Kenya and Uganda in the 1970s (Martin & Singh 2002) and continued formal and grass roots efforts to celebrate diversity and promote racial equality.

As Philips et al. (2007, p. 230) observe, factors including ‘...local histories, myths, economic structures, politics, cultures and urban and housing policies’ mean that distinct processes of racialization emerge in specific locations. In the case of Leicester, these include: early opportunities seized by some sections of the BME community for political representation, links established between the local authority and community led/faith-based organizations, the growth of multi-cultural projects, regular large-scale celebrations of diversity, shifting approaches taken by city institutions (including the police and newspaper) in dealing with community relations and the middle class character of a significant proportion of an East African Asian (largely Indian Gujarati) community, migrating as extended families and placing limited demands on services (Winstone 1996). The relative absence of dominant single industry economic collapse, the out-migration of some of the most vocal racists, the rejection of far-right political parties by white working-class communities and the role of a strong and visible anti-racist movement in the city are also recognized as contributing to this picture (Singh 2003). However, reactions to the growing diversity of the city’s population, has also thrown up new dynamics and tensions (Bonney and Le Goff 2007), leading to concerns that it may be the *multicultural* as opposed to the *intercultural* character of relations that may be the city’s greatest ‘threat’ to a peaceful and progressive future (Hussain et al. 2003).

For some young people in this study, ‘race’ and racism were not conscious social concerns, but part of what Bourdieu (1972) calls the doxic or the taken for granted. As Patrick (male, aged eighteen, identified as Sikh) points out: ‘I’m not sure that people think about ‘race’ here, I mean they just get on, talk to each other...they don’t think about it’. This reflects some of the more positive discourses surrounding this place, but may also suggest that racism takes other less obvious forms and may not be uniformly experienced. While difference is to some extent an accepted part of everyday life, as Patrick later commented, friendship groups still broadly tend to reflect

strict ethnic affiliations and for some participants racism did form a major part of their daily experiences.

### Contingent hierarchies of acceptance

Given that there may be something specific about ‘race’ relations in this place, identities and experiences are viewed through contingent hierarchies of racialization (Garner 2007), stressing that racial identities are contextually constructed, multiply experienced and that whiteness as a tool for securing privilege is differentially enacted across time and space. Whilst all BME communities in Leicester are exposed to the possibility of racism and associated socio-economic disadvantage, those who meet certain criteria appear to be especially vulnerable to becoming ‘othered’, through which dominance of one group over another is reinforced and differences become stabilized (Said 1978). Markers particularly include non-white appearance, those with limited economic resources, the practice of Islam and those who have more recently arrived in the city, including those who are, or are perceived to be asylum seekers and/or refugees. While those exhibiting any combination of such characteristics do not form a coherent group and these markers are subject to disruption, translation and re-appropriation, there are key aspects which mark individuals and communities out as *unassimilated*, by those in *relatively* more powerful positions.

For many young white people involved in this research, specific communities were picked out as ‘too different’ – seen to pose threats to the integrity of the city in ways which others did not. Here, one group of (white) school pupils, attending one of the poorest performing schools on an outlying estate, identify the presence of Somalis (distinguished from those identified as ‘black’) within *their* school and country as responsible for tensions and difficulties. For these young people they were the embodiment of a racially threatening ‘other’. Many of the young Somalis attending this school did not necessarily live in the surrounding area, making the presumed imposition of a new racial group the basis for frequent physical confrontations between *male* white and Somali students.

Fiona: They just come over and they think that they own the place. . . They get really lary

Interviewer: What sort of behaviour do you mean by lary?

Fiona: Like having a go at you for no reason

Interviewer: Does anyone have a go at you?

Fiona: No

Jonathon: I was going down the corridor and there were some black, white and there were some Somalians and he walked past and they



were like pushing him through and it's like it just gets on your nerves. Kick 'em back down to their country innit and they treat us like that, do you know what I mean?

The Somali community, who have witnessed major international displacement in the context of an ongoing and brutal civil war (Berns McGowan 1999), were often the target of local racialized hostility.<sup>8</sup> As was recognized by key informants within the city council, this is one of the defining characteristics of inter-ethnic relations: '... basically it's everybody against the Somalis and I mean everybody'. Some of this community have arrived as refugees directly from Somalia, while many others have moved as EU citizens from other northern European countries. They also tend to be initially located in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods of the city, often wherever social housing or cheaper rented housing is available. As a result they are thrust into direct experiences of conflict with marginalized white working-class communities and deprived locations with reputations for danger and criminality.

For Ali (male, aged seventeen, identified as Somali), and other young Somalis who find themselves in these very situations, clashes with white neighbours and strangers in more public spaces, who do not recognize their rights to belong are regular occurrences: '... we have this British neighbour, she lives between, she lives exactly between two Somalian people, and she's a racist and we all know that. She hates us, but we don't hate her, because we don't care'.

Animosity towards this group was not limited to those who identified themselves as white. As is noted by Msoni (aged nineteen, who identified as Indian and Hindu and had moved from Tanzania to Leicester three years previous), the Somali community is seen on the very bottom rung of a local hierarchy. This does not significantly disturb the fact individuals such as Msoni, continue to be marked by their non-whiteness and by their more recent arrival, but it does add complexity to processes of racialization and the recognition of specific communities as unestablished – with an emphasis on cultural distinctions, but viewed through the lens of racial difference (Blaut 1992). Despite his experience of living in Eastern Africa, Msoni indicates that Somalis were not included in his definition of what it was to be African, largely due to their Islamic faith.

But the Africans are all right, especially the Africans from East Africa side, but not Somalis, Somalis are different... Because of their religion, because the whole thing that we are Indians, we will guide them wrongly, or even if it's a white guy, he will guide them wrongly, so they might get into trouble.

It is possible for some young people who have arrived more recently in the city to hide or reinterpret certain aspects of their identity seen as most threatening to the local cultural order; adopting styles that meet established standards of compatibility. As Dev (aged sixteen, identifying as Portuguese and a Muslim) indicates here, his European heritage and westernized appearance often leads to confusion over his 'true' identity. There are various consequences for Dev in this regard – his misrecognition as an unauthentic Muslim by some within his faith community, but also a reduced likelihood of receiving unwanted racist or Islamophobic attention.

A lot of people they don't say that I'm Muslim because you know gel and everything, you don't see like, now you can see more people with gel but, you don't see it too much. They're saying that you're not Muslim, you are a Hindu or something like that.

For some young people, however, the ability to adapt is restricted by the colour of their skin, their area of residence, their dress or speech – reproducing a complex but broadly hierarchical system of local acceptance. Such hierarchies form a key element of experiences of acceptance, belonging and integration and as such have an effect upon the manner in which young people adapt to the contexts in which they live. This is particularly the case for those who are more recent arrivals in the city. The paper now examines the manner in which young people in these communities negotiate the terms of their identities and their relations with others in a city which both values difference but is not immune from divisions along racial, ethnic and religious lines.

### **Valuing diversity: Community connections**

We talked to a few Somalian people and some relatives and they said it's better if you go to Leicester, you get housing very fast rather than from London... So that's the main reason [for coming to Leicester], and the Somali community in Leicester is very big and it's a very small city and it's better for the children.

As Omah (male, aged eighteen, identified as Somali) points out, for those who have more recently arrived in the UK and in Leicester itself, there were several key factors involved in relocation. In his experience these included seizing improved education and housing opportunities, but also the presence of family and friends living within the city and the sense of security this provided. Reliance upon, and the reproduction of, these communities can be seen as both a motivation for migration, but also as an ongoing response to positions of marginality.

This is identified as an important source of stability and is one of the main ways in which participants negotiate a sense of identity in the face of an unknown and potentially threatening environment (Clayton et al. 2009).

For those with experiences of other places in the UK, Leicester provides a contrasting environment in terms of the *relative* absence of overt racism and greater ethnic diversity. As one respondent, Yasmin (female, aged nineteen, identified as British Asian) explained, growing up in white and monocultural Lancaster in the north-west of England, she experienced extreme racist attitudes: ‘...on one occasion the bus driver wouldn’t let me on the bus, it was that bad!’ Yasmin’s ethnic identity and spatial trajectory differ enormously from that of Omah – she grew up as a British Asian and saw herself joining a well-established Asian community in the city. However, life in Leicester is similarly represented as a more positive experience, particularly as it offered greater community protection. In contrast to recent commentaries pointing towards a fear of segregation (Phillips 2005), diverse and distinct communities are framed here as reducing isolation. As Yasmin put it: ‘Leicester, I mean its like everybody’s here, it’s no different because you are so used to seeing Asians...where I was born I felt like an alien really’. It is this sense of belonging and not standing out as different which defines more positive characterizations of multiculturalism.

For those participants who more recently arrived from outside the country, the maintenance of a transnational sense of belonging routed through community networks, is of the utmost significance. This distinguishes their experiences from those young people whose families are more established. The city can be seen as a forum for the maintenance of a sense of belonging which is not just based upon an attachment to the locality or to the nation (Alleyne 2002). The symbolic and lived value of Leicester is conceived in relation to other places and transnational affiliations, which as Rohit (male, aged twenty, identified as Indian who recently moved from India with his family to join his father) indicates, makes life more comfortable:

John: Is there anything negative about living there [in his neighbourhood], or is it all positive?

Rohit: Not really, I can’t say anything negative because it’s all Indian community there [in his neighbourhood] so it makes it a lot easier to live there

As Ali (who had experience of living in both Somalia and the Netherlands) reflects, the more negative aspects of life in England were the aggressive attitudes of some of the English people he came into contact with. However, for him this is balanced with the ability to

maintain important links to his country of birth, the presence of some of his immediate family and of those with common connections, experiences and understandings. These links were maintained through apparently prosaic activities such as walking, talking, eating and watching movies, but played a crucial role in reinforcing a sense of transnational belonging that is routed through the locality but is connected to distant places (Fortier 1999).

So that's what I hate actually about this place and how do you call it, the mood in England, it's like everyone's angry. It's bad and good, because in here I kind of hate it, but I kind of love it a little bit too because I have here people from my own country, where I can laugh about just our things, you know. How people, how things are in Somalia or things how we eat or we walk or how we laugh or something like that. And my uncle, my brothers, my sisters, my aunties, my family, I am always with them, talking about them, watching movies or, I kind of love it.

### **Territoriality and spatial routines**

Research suggests that for many young people, especially young males in more deprived urban areas of England, territoriality is an engrained 'cultural expectation' which is often based upon ethnic distinctions (Kintrea et al. 2008; Webster 1996). While this is not uniformly the case in Leicester, the power of the racial coding of distinct areas, particularly of poorer neighbourhoods, illustrates the continued significance of such divisions (Clayton 2008). Specific areas were identified as dangerous, mostly according to popular reputation. These were amongst the most deprived parts of the city located on the outskirts, where the majority of the population identified as white. Unless individual respondents lived in such areas, these were neighbourhoods that were often avoided. This was not only because of perceived threats of racism and conflict, but often because there was little necessity or requirement to visit these largely residential areas.

Neighbourhood geographies were also often identified – not solely in terms of 'race' but, particularly in contexts of deprivation, in terms of what Cohen (1988, p. 32) identifies as 'nationalism of the neighbourhood'. Such modes of territoriality and belonging were part of a local vernacular which was learnt over time and not recognized so clearly by more recent arrivals. This could be seen for example in the adoption of postcode identities by more established young people. The names of many of the garage/hip-hop music-based 'crews' (including those identifying as white, Asian and Afro-Caribbean) encountered through youth club settings, (friendship groups formed around exclusively male MC collectives) were largely

based upon geographical distinctions. Interestingly though, such groups would be willing and able to travel into neighbouring territories to access facilities where they could practice and perform their music. The fact that safe routes had been carved out over time helps to understand the ability of such young people to navigate such everyday trajectories whilst retaining a distinctive identity based upon their neighbourhood affiliations.

For other young people, forms of competition and fragile ownership of physical spaces within ethnically mixed residential areas were recognized, particularly by male participants. In mostly centrally located areas, inter-ethnic tensions and negotiations of coexistence were played out around key sites of encounter. This was particularly the case in terms of the relationships between communities at different stages of settlement in the area. Ali here discusses the significance of ‘the cage’, a shared public recreational space where impromptu football matches were played in his central multi-ethnic neighbourhood. He explains how ownership of ‘the cage’ is up for grabs, that various groups defined by their ethnicity make claims on the site and that this weakly marked out space became a site of contestation. When trouble flares up and relationships become fraught due to the competitive nature of this encounter and the scarcity of such resources, the primary point of distinction is through ethnicity.

That’s one of the main places because everyone likes to play football down there and last summer, Somalian people, black, white people, all playing together in the cage and if one Somalian people just trips one black guy up or white guy then everyone gets mouthing and they are gonna fight, it’s that simple, yeah. . . . and now it’s like this is ours and other days it’s yours and sometimes when they both want to play.

While conflict is not always so easy to escape, the avoidance of danger and risk is a key form of protection and contributes to the development of routines of everyday activity (Watt and Stenson 1998). In addition, the ordinary demands of everyday life means that these routines revolve around key spaces such as educational institutions, the home and religious sites. As Dev details here:

I wake up at nine o’clock, come into school, like my timetable [at college] is always like nine to two, till two o’clock, something like that and then sometimes twelve. Then I am going home, I have a lunch there, then I’m going to pick up my nieces in the school and coming back and I’m going to pray, because I need to pray everyday, every day of the week I’m going to pray from half past four till half

past five and coming back home and I'm just playing with the computer

While helping to reinforce a sense of security, routine practices were not always valued by respondents. One of the key differences articulated by young people who had more recently arrived in the city, was the notion of limited opportunities. While older generations may appreciate the fact that young people have fewer social opportunities which allows them to concentrate on their responsibilities to family and religious adherence, young people may resent the levels of constraint which results. Despite an admission that living in Leicester had allowed her to practice her religion in new ways, given the fact that she had lived more of her life in Kenya than Somalia, this did not mean that Samantha (female, aged eighteen, identified as Kenyan and Muslim) also valued the presence of a coherent Somali community in the same way as her mother. There are competing and coexisting interests displayed in this account which reflect the management of multiple aspects of identities in relatively new situations.

Older people think Leicester is perfect, that's only, I'm talking about my mother and them. She thinks that Leicester is the best city in the UK and I think that Leicester is the most worst place ever in the UK (laughs)...if I want to do something Leicester's a bit boring, especially Highfields, a bit boring than when, when I was in London, we used to do some funny things and my mother thought that was very bad for me, she will say that is the reason I took you to Leicester so you have to calm down. No, I mean it was a bit, it is a bit boring here for me, but it's more fun for her because she's seen that there are more Somalis in Leicester, so she goes to them and they communicate and talk...when the Somalis come to my house and talk to my mother, I find it very boring. I don't even understand your language! (Laughs)

The possibility for geographical mobility was enhanced for those whose families had been established in the city, for those of an older age group (particularly young men) and for those with access to cars or their own financial resources. However, for young people such as Omah, who lived in London before moving north to Leicester, opportunities and time to forge new friendships and social activities were more limited. While some of his peers had turned to casual drug taking and low level criminality as a way around this, he found solace in his main passion, that of playing football and watching Chelsea FC (See Figure 1). While he regularly spoke with his closest friends in London via MSN messenger, he clearly missed life there and the

**Figure 1.** *Omah in his home watching the FA cup final*



Photo courtesy of research participant (Omah)

opportunities afforded to him in a bigger city, a place with a more established Somali community and more importantly established friendship groups. The maintenance of community through routine, is not something which was always cherished, at times it was also resented as a brake on possibilities, especially for young people whose level of autonomy was more restricted.

### **Religious practice and the reformation of community**

While religion remains an important aspect of the lives of the young people within this research, its significance and adherence varied most clearly between those whose families were more established and those who were more recent arrivals in the city. For Nav (male, aged eighteen, identified as British-Indian from a Hindu family), the distance between himself and his family in terms of strict religious and 'traditional' cultural adherence is growing. As someone who was born and had grown up in the UK, he stresses a sense of rebellion, of breaking free from the controls his family have imposed on him. In so doing he expresses his own ideas about identity and his place in the city.

I mean like me I can just go out whenever I want because I can give them the finger and that. I'm being rebellious against my parents because of the childhood that I had with them and because I'm in

the second generation to come yeah, they're all like traditional and strict right and I'm like laid back

For some respondents the practice of religion formed a central aspect of their daily activities and senses of belonging. For the participants involved, this particularly related to the Muslim faith, which has recently witnessed increasing visibility in the wake of global events and rising levels of Islamophobia (Abbas 2007; Poynting and Mason 2007). However, overtly political aspects of religion did not come through strongly. Rather, it was the visibility of an Islamic community and the relative permissiveness with which individuals could practice their religion which were valued. For Dev this was an important part of the decision of his father to send him to live with his sister, attending the FE college initially and perhaps in the future to university:

My father is not saying always keep the religion but, going like, sometimes 2 or 3 times a week, praying once a day. So in Leicester that's easy because when you are going on the streets, you can see 10 people, maybe 5 people are. . .not white people, like another religion. So my father he says look a lot of Muslim people here, so my father he sends me here

A recent survey of the Muslim population in Leicester suggests that this diverse social group feels a strong sense of attachment to the city (Open Society Institute 2010). The evidence here also suggests that positive experiences of the city may not necessarily refer to relations between ethnic groups, nor does the city represent a great place to live for those on the economic margins.<sup>9</sup> Rather, for those towards the bottom of local hierarchies of acceptance, the ability to live with a strong sense of community in a context of relative dislocation is more important.

In the case of Omah, although he doesn't always adhere to regular daily prayer, attendance at his local mosque for Friday prayers is a very important part of his weekly routine as indicated by his choice to include a photograph of the mosque in his photo diary (See Figure 2). The mosque is at the heart of his neighbourhood, close to other important social spaces such as restaurants and flats and was mainly attended by those originally from Somalia. Unlike more established mosques in the city, this was not purpose-built or funded by wealthy donors, but was a converted industrial unit, indicating the extent to which this is a community in the making. Not only was attendance here a way in which Islam remained an important part of Omah's life, but it also acted as a means of socialization through which he could



**Figure 2.** *The Masjid Al Huda Mosque in St. Matthew's estate, Leicester*



Photo courtesy of research participant (Omah)

reinforce relationships with those who were also becoming accustomed to establishing themselves in a new city.

For me it is the closest [mosque], mostly Somali people there, but there are other Muslims there from like Kenya, Iraq. But it's mostly Somali people because St. Matthews is mostly a Somalian community and they all come because there's a Somali restaurant down there and they may go and hang with their friends there after the Jumu'ah

The ability to freely and openly conduct religion was an important element of views of the city expressed by new arrivals. For Samantha, given her unique spatial trajectory (mentioned above), it was the presence, not of an identifiable Somali community, but of a strong, visible, pan-ethnic Muslim community which was significant. This has allowed her to reaffirm her beliefs and re-enact religious adherence in a new context, no longer standing out and surrounded by others also practicing their faith.

Because in Kenya, all my friends was Christian and I had no friends who was Muslims, so I was like, no if I wear scarf and things like that I'm gonna be different from my other friends. I didn't wear a scarf so my parents accepted that, but when I moved here I wanted to wear because I saw many people who was wearing and it was all right with them, and they would, yeah, so I started to wear a scarf and practise Islam more then.

Ali also indicated how coming to live in Leicester had resulted in him taking much more seriously the role of religion in his life. While living in Holland he admitted that he was much more relaxed about his religion, he had began to reassert this aspect of his identity, thus dismissing more linear models of acculturation over time (Heibert 2002). There were several reasons given for this including the idea that he had 'grown up', the responsibility that he had towards his family as the oldest male in Leicester, the absence of strong relationships outside the family or the Somali community, the lack of physical resources available to him in his neighbourhood to direct his energies towards and the importance of religion as a common grounding with others. This has all taken place within a context of 'not belonging':

I don't feel like I belong here, and in Holland I do, I did, you know because I knew everyone and I just knew everything in Holland and here I have to do it all over, you know like, it's like new like here. So I think this means, the thing that I find better in England is because I'm focusing more on my religion in England and not on just amusing myself. In Holland all I did was try to amuse myself with girls (laughs) or, you know just hanging around with people playing basketball or whatever, swimming and the thing is there are no swimming pools here.

### **Complexities of community**

However, practices of community are not stable or uniform and do not operate in isolation from wider power relations. An appreciation of this undermines the essentialized and narrow construction of communities. Below, Ali outlines what he sees as one of his key responsibilities as the senior male in order to maintain honour within his community. He discusses this role of protector in the face of the difficulties posed by everyday coexistence with other ethnic groups, as an important function of community life.<sup>10</sup> But what his narrative also points towards is the position of young women who make the 'choices' outlined, being subject to male control.

...some Somalian girl, she's 18, she got pregnant by an African boy and I didn't really know her, but I just heard about it...once she said this is your son, I'm pregnant with your son, he slammed the door in her face, he said you are from a different background, see yer, I can't, it's not my child, he said that...she got kicked out of her house by her parents, now who knows where she is? Because her parents were like true believers and they just couldn't take this...It is bad, but everyone has his own choice. And I'm there to protect my sisters from that.

Further mundane schisms can be identified through the intersection of gender relations and embodied markers such as clothing. In conversations with Rupa (female, aged seventeen, identified as Indian), for example, appearance and style adopted by individuals helped constitute the boundaries of identity and relative integration (Nayak 2003). She discussed how some young male Indians would cause problems for her close friend by calling her names such as 'freshie', due to her more 'traditional' style of clothing. This justified her dislike of Indian males, explaining that she preferred spending her time with Somali male friends, whom she saw as more friendly.

While various attachments to place expressed through the language of community can be seen as a response to cultural and economic marginality, it is also necessary to move beyond an understanding of social relations in terms of discrete social groups. Such attachments lay the foundation for emerging and multiple identity performances. For example, Omah took pride in his identity as both a Muslim and an ardent Chelsea supporter and regularly wore his replica shirt when playing football with friends in his neighbourhood. Chelsea FC were the first team he saw on TV after arriving in London and he has followed them ever since. As part of his photo diary, he had a picture taken of him watching the FA Cup Final in his family flat (See Figure 1). This is a young man with links to both Somalia and London and fascinated with the game of football, but also proud of his Islamic faith and heritage, indicated here by the Islamic style clock displayed on the wall of his flat. Unlike the opening excerpt in this paper, Omah is not watching the football match in the culturally distant and threatening environment of the public house. He chooses to watch this important match in an environment in which he feels secure; reflecting and reinforcing his specific socio-spatial positioning within this place.

Recognition of the liminality of identity (Bhabha 1994) does not merely entail the fracturing of bounded ethnic ties, implying a reduction of affiliation, but also the creation of new forms of solidarity. There is potential for those fixed within contingent hierarchies of racialization to negotiate the terms of difference by challenging versions of themselves as narrowly defined. Community may be important for those on the margins of society, but how such identities are lived out, adds an important layer of complexity to understanding the dynamics of urban multiculturalism.

### **Summary: Finding a way through**

This paper has shown that in understanding the experiences of young people in a specific urban context, we must consider enduring forms of racialization, the relative positions of individuals within local hier-

archies of acceptance and inclusion, the dynamics of place-based inter-ethnic relations and the manner in which community is reformed as a mode of security and attachment. The construction of identities and modes of belonging for these young people is not just a simplistic response to racism, but about making the best of their various situations – drawing upon a range of resources and identities from the immediate to the global, within everyday contexts of relative powerlessness. They are seen to navigate landscapes of risk and opportunity, and in doing so challenge prevailing discourses of national belonging and essentialized notions of ‘race’ and ethnicity, in order to ‘find a way through’ (Back 2005, p. 40).

A focus on the lives of a range of young people from BME communities also illustrates that places are experienced heterogeneously. All young people in this research are possible targets of direct and indirect racism (Rupra 2004; Sallah 2007), which an image of multicultural diversity and celebration in this place often conceals (Westwood 1991; Clayton 2008). However, we cannot speak of a coherent experience in the light of ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec 2007) and the voices presented. Histories of settlement and accommodation, geographical trajectories, socio-economic marginality and the practice of certain religious identities make some appear vulnerable – but also determined, in their own ways, to carve out a better life.

While there are shared understandings amongst those recognized as new arrivals such as the significance of religious adherence, the value of transnational connections and limited knowledge of place – even amongst this group there are frictions over the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre 1996). These young people occupy a paradoxical position of inclusion and exclusion – while the diversity of the city offers a sense of safety, they also find themselves towards the bottom of local hierarchies of acceptance. Everyday life therefore involves a negotiation of the contours of power and disadvantage within the constraints of place (Noble 2009). In addition restrictions placed on them by material conditions, the racialization of legitimized belonging and cultural practices entail that this is by no means a place free from restriction, division or conflict. This reminds us that despite our perceptions of place, cities are dynamic entities and that past accommodations established over time, do not ensure the absence of future exclusions.

## Notes

1. For all the attention given to the concept of ‘the everyday’ (Jacobsen 2009), insufficient consideration has been given to the significance of everyday experiences in constructing identities through fieldwork (Latham 2003).

2. This included five secondary schools, two neighbourhood based youth centres and a centrally located college of further education (FE College).
3. The attribution of fixed and often negative qualities to bounded racial and ethnic groups as an ongoing process through which 'race' becomes meaningful (Garner 2010). This process both reflects and reinforces entrenched power relations.
4. This was particularly seen in this research through the distinction between an 'Asian city' (Leicester) and a surrounding 'White county' (Leicestershire).
5. According to the 2001 census thirty-six per cent of Leicester's population were categorised as 'non-white'. Leicester also has the largest 'Indian' population of any local authority in England and Wales – 25.73 per cent of the total population.
6. The most recent large scale urban disturbances along racial and ethnic lines were witnessed in 2001 in the North West towns of England: Bradford, Burnley and Oldham (Cantle 2001).
7. Seen most recently in confrontations between the EDL, Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and the Police in October 2010.
8. Most of this community have arrived since the last national census in 2001, therefore figures are vague. It is estimated that there are between 13,000–15,000 Somalis living within the city, approximately five per cent of the population (Mistry, 2006).
9. For example, in recordings obtained through a local youth arts organisation, one group of young Somalis, explained their dislike for the UK in terms of weather, the lack of social activities and problems of 'trouble' and racism.
10. This is significant as some fathers have remained in Somalia to look after property and businesses while the rest of the family have fled abroad for safety. In this context the young men have taken on increased responsibility.

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