

# **Identities and ‘new ethnicities’ among British Bangladeshi and mixed-heritage youth in London**

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## ***About the project***

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This research project was funded by Leverhulme Trust and coordinated from the University of Surrey. The research team comprised: Prof Martyn Barrett (Surrey), Dr Marco Cinnirella, (Royal Holloway), Prof John Eade (Roehampton) and Dr David Garbin (Surrey). The research took place in two phases. The first phase consisted of qualitative interviews to allow in-depth exploration and analysis of the social construction of identity, 'new ethnicities' and the role of (youth) popular cultures. The second phase used a quantitative questionnaire, developed on the basis of the findings of the qualitative interviews. This report presents the findings of the qualitative stage of the research project.

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## **1. OVERALL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT**

The general aim of this research was to examine identity construction processes among British Bangladeshi and mixed-heritage adolescents living in London. The principal goals of the research were twofold: first, to understand how these individuals negotiate the demands of living with multiple cultures, and second, to contribute to the re-conceptualisation of the concept of 'acculturation' within the discipline of Psychology, by drawing upon insights from Sociology and Anthropology.

The initial research questions were:

- How do the participants understand themselves in terms of 'race', ethnicity, nationality and religion, and how do they understand the broader society in which they live?
- How do the participants relate to the construction of cultural and religious differences in their everyday lives?
- To what extent has the rise in 'Islamophobia' in British society after the events of September 11, 2001 (and July 7, 2005) affected the attitudes, aspirations and identities of our Muslim participants?
- What types of identification strategies do these individuals adopt, and are different cultural practices and identities adopted in different social contexts?
- What are the goals and aspirations of these individuals? How do they perceive the constraints and obstacles which might prevent them from realising those goals?
- What are the relationships between tastes/consumption patterns, popular culture, and perception of self and identity?

## **2. THE QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY**

The research took place in two phases. The first phase consisted of qualitative interviews to allow in-depth exploration and analysis of identity issues. The second phase used a quantitative questionnaire, developed on the basis of the findings of the qualitative interviews. Here, we report the findings from the first qualitative phase of the research. During this initial phase, 24 interviews were carried out, 12 with British Bangladeshi individuals and 12 with mixed-heritage individuals, with an equal number of males and females within each sub-sample. This report presents the findings of the qualitative stage of the research project.

## Participants<sup>1</sup>

<b>Mixed-heritage sample</b>				
<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Background (F=Father; M=Mother)</b>	<b>Place of residence</b>
Charlotte	Female	16	(F) White English/ (M) Jamaican	South Norwood
Rachel	Female	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Catford
Rose	Female	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Catford
Helen	Female	12	(F) Eurasian/ (M) Ghanaian	South Norwood
Nathalie	Female	17	(F) Ghanaian-Finnish/ (M) White Scottish	Tooting
Jade	Female	16	(F) St Vincent/ (M) White English	Mitcham
Leo	Male	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) English-Jamaican	Brixton
Mark	Male	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) Scottish	Thornton Heath
Nick	Male	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Kennington
Alex	Male	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	South Norwood
John	Male	17	(F) Barbados/ (M) White English	Norbury
Chris	Male	17	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Croydon

<b>British Bangladeshi sample</b>			
<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Place of residence</b>
Rupna	Female	13	South Camden
Basima	Female	16	South Camden
Muna	Female	14	South Camden
Munira	Female	11	South Camden
Pari	Female	15	South Camden
Fatima	Female	14	South Camden
Shiraj	Male	14	South Camden
Ahmed	Male	13	South Camden
Noor	Male	16	South Camden
Abdul	Male	16	South Camden
Karim	Male	14	South Camden
Ayub	Male	12	South Camden

<sup>1</sup> All the names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

### 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 3.1 LOCALITY, COMMUNITY AND URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Many studies of youth (sub)cultures in multicultural environments emphasise the relationship between space, territoriality and identity (Alexander, 2000; Back, 1996 ; Desai, 1999). This relationship was not central in our research framework but during the qualitative phase we included several questions related to local identities. We were interested in the ways in which young people made sense of their everyday experience of the city and their local area, in particular. During this qualitative phase of the research the interviewees were keen to talk about their perception and experience of the local urban environment - or about multicultural London as a whole.

Many participants mentioned the proximity of shopping and leisure complexes - as well as a good transport system linking their locality with central London (especially for interviewees living in South London) - as attractive features of their local area. Participants, who had a positive opinion about their area, also frequently mentioned the important role played by their networks of social relations with friends and families and their knowledge and familiarity with their neighbourhood. Thus several young people said they felt that they belonged to a 'local community' or talked about a sense of 'home' among their own religious or ethnic group. Noor (16), a British Bangladeshi from Camden, for example, explained:

*(Noor) It's alright cos there's quite a lot of friends around here... I feel at home...It's mainly Bengali people, it's easy to get along with people...*

**(Question)** What makes you feel at home?

*(Noor) It's highly populated with Bengali people and Muslim culture...religion as well.*

**(Question)** Would you always stay in this area?

*(Noor) Yeah, I would...*

**(Question)** Why?

*(Noor) I find it safe, at home and relaxed.*

Some participants, such as Nick, a 16-year-old mixed-heritage boy from Kennington, contrasted the 'boredom' of the countryside with life in London, where he said that he felt 'part of a community':

*Yeah, I like being in London, a lot...There's so much things, like shopping centres, different shops...There's lot of people around...big areas...Basically, nice areas to live in, compared to the countryside, cos the countryside, everything is far away, is too quiet...It's boring, there's no one about for miles...Yeah, I feel part of a community...Everybody is connected in some way, someone knows someone, someone knows someone else...everybody together...when you live in London...*

As the following quotes illustrate, this sharp rural/urban dichotomy frequently recurred in the narratives of the young people interviewed:

**(Abdul, British Bangladeshi boy, 16, from Camden)** *I really like living in London because there's everything I need, the local shops as well as the high streets...If I lived in the countryside it'd be more quiet. In a way it's a good thing. In a way it could be...bad...boring. [...] In a way you can have your own area...There's less people around, so they can't come and do bad things around.*

**(Question)** Would you stay in this area?

**(Munira, British Bangladeshi girl, 13, from Camden)** *Yes and no...Yes, because it would be good for my mum 'cos all the local shops and banks are around here...And no, because it's too loud and noisy, I'd rather prefer somewhere in the countryside...*

**(Rupna, British Bangladeshi girl, 13, from Camden)** *Yeah, I like London [...] In London you see different kind of people. And if you go to the countryside, you just see one sort of people... [The countryside] I like it, it's just too quiet. Do you know what I mean? You go outside and there are not a lot people outside...Everything is really far, the shops.*

Moreover, some respondents mentioned high levels of crime and violence associated with their local areas, often using terms such as 'rough' or 'dodgy' to describe their reputation. This was particularly salient in the case of Charlotte (16), a mixed-heritage girl from South Norwood:

*[In my area] there's always something happening, there's always stabbings and shootings. Not really a nice place to live...You can't really go anywhere without having to be careful...You can't just walk down the road...if you see a big gang of people, you're most likely to be approached...If you're a young girl like me, you're always likely to be approached by guys and stuff...Sometimes they can be quite vulgar or rude to you if you don't speak to them...*

In Camden and in South London, several participants made reference to the existence of tensions or even violent conflicts occurring in their localities between groups of young people (always male) from different areas and/or ethnic groups. These rivalries or conflicts may play an important function in youth subcultural affiliation, sense of masculinity or, more simply, processes of urban territorialisation (see Alexander, 1996; Desai, 1999). In Camden, several young British Bangladeshis also mentioned different levels of racism associated with certain areas of the borough, a process explored in detail by Desai (1999) in his ethnography of young Bangladeshis in Camden.

Finally, many of the respondents who held negative views of their local areas - mentioning crime, violence or more simply noise - often expressed a desire to live elsewhere, in the country or even abroad, as illustrated by the quotes below:

**(Jade)** *I would move to Florida, one of them countries. Every year we go to Florida and it's so much nicer, cleaner and everything...I just wanna move down there...The people are nice over there as well...You can just walk around and people just talk to you...more polite...not so much crime there...It's just a nicer place...They've got their own villa now, so I could move there...*

*(Chris) Yeah...If I was to move I would like to live in somewhere like Japan...I love Japan...People are friendlier, a lot cleaner...the environment is different compared to down here....I want to visit, but it's very expensive...*

### **3.2 PRIVATE SPHERE, FAMILY AND SOCIAL CONTROL**

In sociology and anthropology the difference between private and public sphere traditionally lies in the opposition between 'home', the domestic space, and outside home. In many studies, this division is also conceptualised in terms of gender roles and social control. Bourdieu (1986) for instance has shown in his famous ethnography of Kabylean domestic organisation how the boundary between masculine and feminine domain was maintained by a set of norms and values regulating a broader socio-symbolic universe. A similar approach can be found in Pitt-Rivers' (1977) analysis of the relationship between social status, gender roles and the ambivalent honour/shame dichotomy in Andalusia, which has been applied to several studies of rural Bangladesh. Thus Kotalova (1996) and Rozario (2001) suggest that, in rural Bangladesh, the regulation of women's public behaviour (or sexual purity) appears to be essential in protecting the group from *shorom* ('shame'). Yet they show that *shorom* also refers to a highly positive gendered disposition (discretion, modesty of women) within the local *shomaj*, the public/community sphere dominated by men.

In the diasporic context, among Bangladeshis and other South Asian groups, the observance of 'traditional' gender roles may often imply a very strong boundary between the public and private sphere, especially when young women are concerned (Ghuman, 2003; Shaw, 1988). While respect for this boundary appears to be a crucial marker of *izzat* (prestige/honour) for kinship groups, it is also important to note that notions of tradition, status and prestige linked to gender roles can be reinterpreted or contested, in particular by these young girls (Jacobson, 1998; Samad and Eade, 2002). Moreover, research has also shown how educated girls, who prioritise a Muslim identity, criticise or challenge what they described as 'cultural' practices. They refer, for instance, to the influence of the 'caste' (*zat*) system on marriage arrangements, the practice of 'dowry' (from the bride's family to the groom's family) or a general 'double standard' which favours young boys (Garbin, 2004). However, most of the young Bangladeshi girls interviewed in our study did not complain about the 'lack of freedom' or any 'unfair' restrictions imposed on them. In fact, some British Bangladeshi girls (and also boys) indicated that their family was 'quite open' and that they were, for example, able to go out freely, to 'hang out', as long as their parents knew where they were.

Having said that, several young British Bangladeshi girls living in Camden mentioned 'culture' or 'tradition' when asked about the importance of discipline in the family or a possible 'generation gap'. For instance, in the quote below, Basima (16) talks about the respect for older people (*morrhabis*) and the acceptable 'behaviour' associated with it:

*(Basima) I respect older people, my friends respect older people but I don't know about other people...I think maybe some boys or girls they don't really care anymore...[...] In Camden, just walking down the high street to do some shopping, I saw two Bengali girls sitting...and really publicly they were smoking...and there were lot of Bengali*



*people walking pass...Like old people...[..] Yeah, it's culturally wrong...I think it's disrespectful...*

Her comments also suggest that outside the domestic space the cultural and social regulation of gender roles and the observance of specific types of 'correct' practices are very important. Particular spaces may indeed be meaningful in terms of gender division. Brick Lane, the heartland of the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets, is also a highly masculine Bengali space - with a mosque, many shops and 'Indian' restaurants (see Garbin, 2004).

Another young Bengali girl, Pari (15), mentioned the 'cultural' dimension as well as 'tradition' when referring to the issue of 'going out', thus 'ethnicising' the notion of parental authority and the gendered division of space:

*(Pari) She [my mother] is more open like if we go out and stuff and as long as we tell her where we're going...Before she said no, because girls are not allowed to go out in our tradition, our culture...*

When talking about the difference between the 'ideal' behaviour of girls in 'her culture' and her own behaviour (and her sisters' behaviour too), she made a parallel between the notions of respect and culture. In that sense, she was again drawing the boundary of the ethnic group in gender terms, presenting the discretion/modesty (*shorom*) of (young) girls as an expected value of community identity:

*(Pari) In our culture, girls are supposed to be low and they're not supposed to say anything, they should be quiet...But we're loud, me and my sisters, we're all loud...I think some families they teach respect and stuff like that, but nowadays, it's not about respect.*

Beyond this perceived cultural or ethnic dimension of gender roles, for the great majority of participants in both groups, the boundary between home and 'outside' was socially meaningful. Noor (16 years old, from Camden), for example, sharply distinguished between how he behaved at home with his parents, and outside home with his friends:

*(Noor) When I'm at home, with my parents I can't do the things that I do when I'm with my friends...[...] At home, I'm more kind, polite...don't make a fuss about anything...I do what I'm told...When I'm outside, it's freedom, I do whatever I want...*

Rachel (15), a mixed-heritage girl from Catford, also referred to the 'rules at home', contrasting them with her 'more open' attitude when among her peer group:

*(Rachel) I'm just more open with my friends...I am completely myself but at times I have to watch what I say...There's more rules at home...*

This issue of language was a recurrent theme. In many cases, language (what is said but also how it is said) was spontaneously mentioned by the participants when they were asked about the difference between their behaviour at home and outside (at school or among friends), as this extract from Alex's interview shows:

**(Question)** Do you think you behave differently inside your home and outside your home?

**(Alex)** *Yes...It's usually the way I speak. The words I use when I speak to my friends, be different to the one that I speak to my dad...*

**(Question)** With your friends?

**(Alex)** *Like slang and all that, they don't like it. My dad he says 'don't use that language when I'm around'...*

Among the male participants it was more particularly the use of slang or swear words which was presented as an 'incorrect' practice at home. This can be illustrated by these extracts from the interviews with Nick (mixed-heritage, 15 years old), Leo (mixed-heritage, 11 years old) and Ayub (British Bangladeshi, 12 years old):

**(Nick)** *There's more respect when I'm in the house...You have to show your mum respect...You can't talk to your friends like you talk to your parents...It's not right, you have to show respect in the house...[...] Like you couldn't use slang much when you're with your mum...In the house you have to pick up after yourself, clean...help out about the house.*

**(Leo)** *Inside my house, I change quickly at the doorstep. If were inside talking all that slang language, they'd understand and stuff, and at school for language it's like at home. You'd get grounded like you are not allowed to play outside, stuff like that. Outside I am free to say anything.*

**(Ayub)** *I swear outside. I can behave however I want. At home, I have to behave good if I'm in front of my parents.*

Muna, a young British Bangladeshi also associated correct language with a respectful attitude towards older generations:

**(Muna)** *Obviously you can't go to one of your elders 'Whass' up, how you doin'!', it's just 'Hi, how are you?'...*

In sum, we can say that this notion of respect towards adults and parents can reinforce the ethnic boundary when associated with a set of cultural or 'traditional' gendered norms. However, the respect for older generations and parents, and the broader differentiation between private and public realms, were not exclusively connected to the social experience of young British Bangladeshi females. Indeed, for both groups respect was perceived as an important value, an integral part of a general 'correct' behaviour. Thus, we can quote here Charlotte (mixed-heritage, 16) and Helen (also mixed-heritage, 12):

**(Charlotte)** *Parents' generation, they were always brought up with discipline and they learned respect...Most of the young people today, they have no respect...And they have no manners at all, and they don't realise that they're wrong. Respect is having a mutual...If someone sees someone on the road nowadays, say you're with your friends and you see a group of people that you don't know, girls or boys, you are more likely to have them giving you a funny look, or look at you really weird...Young*

*people talking to adults, rude, people in shops, just rude...They just have a really bad attitude [...] Even if I had big rows with my mum, I've never ever in my life sworn at my mum, never sworn at my dad, or maybe once...I've never ever pushed my mum or my dad, even in big arguments I've always respected my mum and dad to the point where...like: let them finish saying what they're saying and then I'm trying to say what I'm saying...It is respect cos they are parents and they are older than me...*

**(Helen)** *No...I don't know why...We've only been in the world for 11 years or 12 years and our parents they've been in the world longer than us...So...they're more...wise...we have to listen to them cos they've been in the world longer than us...*

### **3.3 POPULAR CULTURE AND TASTES**

In this research, the study of popular cultural and tastes proved to be crucial to our understanding of identity construction processes. We were interested in broader subcultural dynamics and, in particular, the production and expression of intercultural, diasporic and 'hybrid' identities through music, consumption patterns, leisure or media. This interest was also connected to an exploration of the ways in which young people perceived, embodied or even contested a set of national, ethnic, cultural and religious belongings and how those processes impacted on their everyday social practices.

During the qualitative stage of the research, the data collected through the semi-structured interviews revealed many commonalities but also major differences between the two groups. In addition to the interviews, some observations were conducted in the youth clubs (in Camden, Brixton and Kennington) where several interviews took place with British Bangladeshi and mixed-heritage boys and girls. Some important data related to issues of identities, popular culture and tastes were also collected during the quantitative stage, with the help of the questionnaire administered in three schools.

#### ***Music***

The focus of the sociological and anthropological research on youth subcultures has gradually shifted from a study of 'resistance through rituals' (Hall and Jefferson, 1975) during the 1970s and 1980s to a more post-modern conceptual framework concerned with the formation of new ethnicities and the dynamics of interculturalism (Wulff, 1995). While the study of 'hybridity' and fluid identities is at the heart of the analysis of subcultural practices, it may also still be relevant today to approach the 'cultural production of multiculturalism' through its particular role in the (micro)politics of the everyday life. The close links between 'conscious hip-hop', black subculture, and urban resistance to cultural hegemony is a good example here of the continual relevance of this particular approach (Garbin, 2004).

Broadly speaking and perhaps following a Durkheimian framework, the subcultural ritualisation of social life can be crucial to the processes of collective identification, group inclusion and boundary maintenance. In this sense, subcultures can be seen as an expression of both collective identity and an individual sense of belonging. In the case of

hip-hop, Clay argues that 'by incorporating hip-hop culture into rituals of everyday life, black youth have made it a marker of black youth subculture' (2003: 1355). According to Clay, hip-hop is thus an important source of cultural capital which can reinforce ethnic and 'racial' boundaries and can also serve to 'authenticate' a black cultural experience.

Few would disagree with the fact that one of the most salient aspects of globalisation and global capitalism is the increasing homogenisation and standardisation of commodities and consumer culture, in the food, media or fashion industries. Yet it is also true that we can observe today the formation of a global subcultural public sphere, a site of boundary transgression, hybridity and intercultural experiments. Within this subcultural sphere, and particularly in music, the process of hybridisation is closely linked to the construction of diasporic identities, which are said to challenge the hegemony of national, ethnic or cultural categories (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1992). Indeed, many second and third generation of immigrants in the West have been increasingly attracted to musical genres which blend 'traditional' cultural elements with modern hip-hop, electronic rhythms, reggae beats or jungle/dance music. A growing body of literature has emerged concerning this new musical creativity and its relationship to the formation of diasporic and intercultural identities in urban settings. Thus, bhangra trends among South Asian communities in the UK or in the USA (Maira, 2002; Sharma et al., 1996), rai music among young Franco-Maghrebi youth (Gross et al., 2002) or reggaetón and various forms of 'Latino hip-hop' in the USA (Flores, 2000; Rivera, 2003) have been the subject of recent studies in the field of youth subcultures.

During the qualitative phase of the research, the influence of this hybridised genre was noticeable for some young British Bangladeshis interviewed, as bhangra and 'Bollywood remix', in particular, were mentioned several times. Bhangra, which is popular among youth all over the South Asian diaspora, is played in radio stations, dance clubs, private parties and also during *melas* (Asian fairs). Originating from Punjab, it is a form of Indian folk music and dance, which dates as far back as the 14th century and which is traditionally performed when celebrating important occasions such as the harvest or weddings (Huq, 1996: 61). The contemporary forms of bhangra, also known as 'new bhangra', 'bhanga remix' or 'bhangramuffin'<sup>2</sup>, have retained some traditional elements of folk bhangra<sup>3</sup>, incorporating them into other modern subcultural musical genres - sometimes themselves the product of innovative musical fusions (like ragamuffin or UK garage). Another musical genre, the 'Bollywood remix', is also popular among Bangladeshis and other South Asian youth. It consists of adding electronic, dance music or jungle rhythms to songs (mainly in Hindi) from successful Indian films produced in Mumbai. Some British Bangladeshis interviewed said that they listened to Club Asia, one of the London-based radio stations playing bhangra or Bollywood remix, while bhangra artists such as Jay Sean or RDB (Rhythm Dhol Bass) were also mentioned.

In her study of the 'Desi scene' and bhangra culture among second and third generation Indians in New York, Maira states that one can read this South Asian diasporic subcultural sphere as an 'attempt to mediate between the expectations of immigrants parents (in this case, literally the parents' culture) and those of mainstream American peer culture by trying to integrate signs of belonging to both worlds' (2002: 42). She adds that 'a uniquely Indian

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<sup>2</sup> A fusion of bhangra and ragamuffin.

<sup>3</sup> Like the *dhol*, a large drum, a traditional Punjabi instrument.

American subculture allows second-generation youth to socialize with ethnic peers while reinterpreting Indian musical and dance traditions through the rituals of American popular culture' (2002: 44). While it may be difficult to argue that, in the case of British Bangladeshi youth, (Indian) Bollywood films and (Punjabi) bhangra belong to their 'parents' culture', it is clear that this particular subcultural sphere blends elements of 'Asianess' (regardless of ethnic or religious divisions) with contemporary modern musical genres. Thus, through this hybridisation, the 'Asian element', is symbolically relocated in a new subcultural framework, a process which serves to delineate the boundaries of a positive contemporary British Asian identity capable of challenging some stereotypical visions of Asians as 'uncool', passive or even 'feminine' (Desai, 1999; Huq, 1996). On that matter, it is interesting that a distinction was made between 'Bengali music' - a rather wide category which could include traditional love songs (*gan*), folk music or sometimes, but less often, songs from 'Dhallywood' films (the Bangladeshi equivalent of 'Bollywood') - and Bollywood songs or diasporic 'remix' genre. In some cases, the Bengali 'classic' repertoire (as opposed to the 'remix' genre) was associated with the parents' generation or was described as being 'good for laugh' (Pari). This can be illustrated by the following extracts from the interviews with two British Bangladeshi boys Karim (14), Ayub (12) and two girls, Pari (15) and Fatima (14):

(Question) Do you listen to any Bengali music?

(Karim) *The one that sounds nice...not the old ones, the new ones...*

(Question) The remix type?

(Karim) *Yeah...*

(Question) Do you listen to any Asian underground, you know like RDB and stuff?

(Karim) *Yeah, I do...*

(Question) So you listen to bhangra as well?

(Karim) *Yeah...*

(Question) What sort of music are you into?

(Ayub) *Rap and RnB...*

(Question) What about bhangra?

(Ayub) *Yeah...*

(Question) What about Bengali music?

(Ayub) *For my mum and my dad!*

(Question) Do you listen to Bengali music?

(Fatima) *Sometimes, yeah...Do you mean Indian?*

(Question) No, Bengali...

(Fatima) *No...!*

(Question) But, you do listen to Bollywood, some stuff?

(Fatima) *Yeah...*

(Question) What sort of music do you like to listen to?

(Pari) *Indian...I love Indian music but I do listen to hip-hop, garage and stuff...*

(Question) Do you like Bangladeshi songs?

(Pari) *Sometimes, depending on what they are...If they make me laugh, obviously they're good for laugh, not for listening...But they are some nice ones...*

(Question) Classic?

*(Pari) Remix and classic...*

Another important aspect of the construction of a positive Asian identity is its association with black subcultural codes, themselves, of course, the result of constant hybrid (and diasporic) rearrangements (Gilroy, 1993). In fact, this association operates well beyond the realm of musical production and individual musical tastes as Desai (1999) has indicated. In his Camden ethnography, he explored the appropriation of an archetypal black 'hypermasculinity' by young Bengalis and examined its symbolic and social use in local settings:

Bengali young men have also developed a new hypermasculine archetype – the Bengali Bad Boy – which draws upon a range of cultural resources and is deployed as a form of resistance to racism. The Bengali Bad Boy – tough, modern, urban, assertive and aggressive on occasions – subverts racist stereotypes of Asian males as feminised victims of violence and challenges white male control in the local area. However, the difference between “black macho” and the Bengali Bad Boy archetype is that black young men who choose to deploy these forms of masculinity are working within existing colonial stereotypes of black males as tough and sexually powerful, but Bengali men are inverting the stereotype [...] (1999: 29).

Given the importance of black codes and the influence of black subcultural styles, it is therefore not surprising that, in addition to (new) bhangra and other genres linked to a South Asian hybrid subcultural sphere, the majority of British Bangladeshi youth interviewed (both boys and girls) also expressed their preference for (mainstream) black American hip-hop or black RnB music. While hip-hop and RnB remain very heterogeneous genres, the interviews reflected a relative homogeneity of preferences in both groups, Bangladeshi and mixed-heritage. Within the mainstream hip-hop scene, 50 Cent - perhaps the most famous (and controversial) of black American 'gangsta' rappers - was the most often cited, before others, such as Jay-Z, Dr Dre, 2Pac, Snoop Dog or Eminem (a white rapper). One can, of course, deny the authentic subcultural 'Blackness' of this mainstream rap and view it as a global commercial genre (alongside pop music genres), and this, even if the 'macho gangsta' attitude prevalent in this commercial rap could be linked to the expression and embodiment of an archetypal black hypermasculinity as Desai noted<sup>4</sup>. Increasingly rappers, and in particular American rappers, are becoming major actors in a global consumer culture directed at youth. 50 Cent, for example, launched his own clothing line and signed a deal with Reebok for 'G-Unit'<sup>5</sup> trainers. This clearly appealed to Leo, a young mixed-heritage boy (11) from Brixton who talked about 50 Cent's distinctiveness and 'creativity':

**(Question) Why do you like 50 Cent?**

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<sup>4</sup> To quote Desai (1999: 28-29): "Particular forms of masculinity therefore function as defensive strategies in the resistance to various forms of racism, either physical aggression or social and political marginalisation. Kobena Mercer (1994: 130 – 171), following Robert Staples (1982), argues that because black men in America were denied more conventional attributes of masculine power, such as stable jobs, family life and political influence, they developed 'macho' forms of behaviour to recuperate some sense of masculine power. Mercer links this concept of 'black macho' to physical aggression and oppressive behaviour towards black women."

<sup>5</sup> The name of his hip-hop label and 'crew'.

*(Leo) Cos he's different from the other rappers. He sounds different, he acts different and dresses different as well...And like, he makes up his own trainers and hats and stuff...So, he's more creative...*

Ayub, a 12-year old British Bangladeshi boy, also admired the American rapper but this time for his fame and wealth. Yet, he mentioned the 'explicit' character of his 'lyrics':

**(Question)** Have you ever wished that you'd be someone else?

*(Ayub) Yeah, famous people...Like 50 Cent...Cos he's famous, he's rich...Everyone respects him...The only thing is that his lyrics are explicit...*

In the qualitative phase of the research, there was a more marked tendency from mixed-heritage youth to objectify the relationship between the construction of black identities and the sphere of cultural or social preferences and tastes. We shall explore this relationship in greater detail later, but as regards musical preferences, the narratives of two participants were particularly interesting.

The first participant is Rachel, 15 years old, living in Catford and from British Jamaican (father) and White English (mother) descent. During the interview she compared herself to her younger sister, Rose, whom she described as being 'more black'. Rose, who has mainly black friends, likes hip-hop and RnB music, as opposed to Rachel who feels 'more white than black' and who mainly listens to indie and rock music (she mentioned, for example, the band Coldplay). Here a clear link was thus established between the sphere of musical tastes and the perception of self in terms of 'racial' identity:

*(Rachel) This might sound weird, but I am more white than I am black...Kind of my attitude towards things is more stereotypical kind of a white, which is the opposite of my sister...I would say she's more black...Almost all of her friends are black...It's kind of to do with the music as well...Me and my sister have different tastes in music...And the way I act, is more kind of British...I don't know why...*

Nick also suggested the existence of this link but he emphasised the cultural rather than 'racial' dimension, as we shall see. First, he talked about his preferences in music:

**(Question)** What music do you listen to?

*(Nick) Grime garage, garage...*

**(Question)** Grime garage?

*(Nick) It's like rap, but it's faster...and I listen to rap, hip-hop, RnB, lots of other music...I listen to more black music, I wouldn't listen to Pop or rock n Roll...*

**(Question)** You don't like it?

*(Nick) No.*

**(Question)** So give me some names of rappers or bands you really like...

*(Nick) Rappers... at the moment I like Riggle Players, 50 Cent, Eminem, Alyah, Shanti, Bobby Valentino...And...say...G-Unit...I prefer 50 Cent compared to the other G-Unit members... At the moment, I like Jay-Z...Cos...he don't stick to the subject...Cos most rappers would talk about guns, and money and girls...but he has different things to talk about...life, mainly, you know...*

Nick, 15, is also from a mixed Jamaican and white English background and lives in Kennington. The majority of his time in the youth club was spent in the small recording studio, where he was 'making beats' with other young people from the neighbourhood, an activity which he hoped can be turned into a real professional career in the future:

**(Question)** What do you do with your friends?

**(Nick)** *We usually go to the studio...downstairs, where you make beats, rap...I wanna do garage, until I'm in college and start studying sound engineering...And I can make beats and I'd get paid of my beats...I'll get enough money to get a studio...and I'd charge people for hours in the studio...I'd become a record label man...*

The quote below illustrates how the influence of a black cultural sphere was objectivised through Nick's reconstruction and negotiation of his 'mixed-race' identity. As Suki Ali (2003) has argued, this type of discourse associated with popular culture preferences and practices can help us make sense of the (performative) positioning of mixed-race subjectivities within a 'post-race' deconstructive analytical framework (2003:9). Hence, music ('black RnB and hip-hop'), alongside clothing style/fashion and manners of speech, were mentioned as relevant and meaningful elements of this black cultural domain. Furthermore, Nick described the dominance of a 'black heritage' in the contemporary subcultural sphere and its influence in the broader society and he also stressed the positive dimension of the combination, the 'merging', to borrow the term he used, of 'white' and black cultures. In other words, he not only suggested a negotiation of 'black' and 'white' cultural categories but also acknowledged the role of dialogic and intercultural dynamics, which were constructed in opposition to the 'separation' of 'black people and white people', prevalent 'back in the days':

**(Nick)** *I feel mixed-race, yeah...The reason why I put black and white [when asked to choose between cards with identity labels] is that, because black is more in my culture...Cos I would dress like a black person, talk like a black person, listen to black RnB and hip-hop...but white hasn't got much to do with it because there's not a lot of white culture...White culture doesn't do much, not as much stuff as the black culture...White culture doesn't have as much...like food or, say, comedy of all sorts...Most of the stuff has come from black heritage...I reckon it's bonded together right now...Cos white people are following a black trend, so then it doesn't become a black trend, it becomes a both trend, just a straight trend...*

**(Question)** White people follow black trend?

**(Nick)** *Yeah...There's no problem with it...*

**(Question)** How do you see that?

**(Nick)** *How do I see that? A trend is basically a fashion statement...clothes...*

**(Question)** It's cool?

**(Nick)** *Yeah, but it's merging as one...Back in the day it wasn't so nice...black people and white people separate...It wasn't so nice...so...*

While mainstream US rap, RnB or garage are popular among almost all the youth interviewed, several participants also expressed very critical opinions. They mainly referred to the explicit character of some songs and the promotion, by the rappers, of a 'gangsta'



lifestyle associated to sexist, misogynist attitudes. Before examining these critiques it should be noted that several youth also talked about their parents' disapproval of rap and RnB videos shown on music channels. This was the case especially among the British Bangladeshis, as suggested by these extracts from the interviews conducted with Muna (14, girl), Noor (16, boy) and Basima (13, girl):

**(Question)** Does your mum have an opinion about the films that you watch or the music that you listen to?

**(Muna)** *Yeah, she goes 'Hey you watch all these naked things'...*

**(Question)** Do your parents say anything about the music you listen to, the films that you watch

**(Noor)** *Some hip-hop channels...it's not suitable for my age...it's not suitable to watch in front of your parents....*

**(Question)** What's on them?

**(Noor)** *Some things parents don't feel suitable to watch...*

**(Question)** You're talking about bikinis women, aren't you?

**(Noor)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** Your parents do they have a view about the music you listen to?

**(Basima)** *Yeah kind of...Sometimes when I'm watching RnB or hip-hop videos they...my mum changes the channel...*

**(Question)** The videos are really rude, the RnB ones...?

**(Basima)** *Yeah...Women in bikinis and stuff...*

In his critiques of rap (presented below) Abdul, was not referring to sexual references or how women were portrayed in the videos or lyrics. Rather, he tried to establish a causal link between rap music and violence (or 'gang crime' to use his term):

**(Abdul)** *I like the MCs and the rap and all that...And I've realised over the years there's more younger kids, coming on TV singing and rapping. They rap about stopping gang crime but I realised that them coming on TV and their dress code and all that, it just influences more gang crime and the way they present themselves on TV, the words they say...I definitely don't agree with that kind of music....[...] I mostly listen to them for the tune, not for the words...*

He underlined a paradox: despite the fact that rappers were publicly denouncing violence, their attitude, styles and lyrics were still encouraging 'gang crime' in the context of an increasing media visibility of rappers. Yet, despite his critical stance and his 'disagreement' with 'gangsta rap' message, Abdul still enjoys listening to rap. In the interview, he rationalised this by saying that he was, in fact, making a distinction between the 'tune' and the 'words' of rap songs.

Another type of distinction revolved around the difference between sub-genres or the opposition between 'old' and 'new'. The latter distinction was particularly salient in the case of garage. For example, 'old garage' was opposed to the most recent forms of garage, mainly UK garage or grime garage. While traditional/old garage is closely linked to American

RnB and influenced by soul and funk, UK garage and grime garage, both British creations<sup>6</sup> are more 'underground', Jungle, and hip-hop-oriented (and thus more 'hardcore' and 'explicit'). Two mixed-heritage participants, Chris (17) and Charlotte (16), were keen to make this distinction when asked about their tastes in music. They preferred RnB/garage and the Motown repertoire, the famous American record label which was created in the 1960s and introduced black music (soul and funk) to a wide audience across the world:

**(Chris)** ...*The main stuff that I listen to...is nothing but Smooth FM...I love all my classic soul...and all that...jazz, Motown...I do like to listen to RnB and garage and that stuff, but, the way I put, I listen to all types of music, apart from serious Heavy Metal...I appreciate all types of music...RnB and stuff, I don't mind really... I used to listen to what my brother listen to...Like old school garage...I prefer that a lot more than the New garage...Obviously there's some tunes that I do like but...But there's nothing like the old garage...I remember I have a CD 'Pure Garage 1', the best garage, I've heard in my life...It's so old...But I can still listen to...*

**(Charlotte)** *I like a lot of music...I like RnB, I like jazz, I like soul, I like acoustic, rock...*

**(Question)** And RnB?

**(Charlotte)** *I like the mellow, funky beats...I like a lot of Funky music as well, old Motown...I'm really into the whole proper Funky music, 70s...[...] I love Heart and Magic...They play Motown, they play Funky music...Saturday night on Heart FM, it's like having a party in your room! Great music, which is not about sluts and whores. It's great, wonderful music...*

For Chris and Charlotte, the reading of popular culture in terms of an opposition between old and new garage allowed them to define the authenticity of a musical genre by using such terms as 'old school', 'proper' or 'classic' and referring to one of the most influential American black music labels. In the case of Charlotte, the differentiation also served to underline the perceived sexist dimensions of new/grime/UK garage, as opposed to the more 'mellow' style of RnB/soul.

Nathalie (17), a mixed-heritage girl, held a similar view. She strongly denounced the materialism, rudeness and 'disgusting' sexism of (new) garage which she characterised as being 'violent' and 'nasty':

**(Question)** What sort of music do you listen to?

**(Nathalie)** *RnB, hip-hop, reggae, ragga...*

**(Question)** Sort of black music, more or less...

**(Nathalie)** *Yeah...But I don't like garage....*

**(Question)** Why not?

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<sup>6</sup> Grime garage is in fact said to originate from East London: 'Grime is a music that was born in East London, lives in East London... and maybe only makes sense in East London. It is a mutt genre, a bastard blend of street English, Jamaican dancehall reggae and two kinds of rave music: (1) drum 'n' bass, an electronic party monster built from breakbeats, or loops fashioned from the percussive "breakdown" sections of other songs; (2) a U.K. delicacy called garage, which rhymes with carriage and feels like RnB running a fever. The sum is a fast clatter of syncopated claps, alien chirps and machine bursts. Grime vocalists resemble turbo-charged rappers, racing to match backing tracks that thump about 130 times per minute — near your target heart rate for vigorous physical activity. ('Grime wave', <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/music/grimewave.html>, accessed February 2006)

*(Nathalie) I like the old garage, like Gabriel...This new stuff is too violent...They're talking about guns, about shootings, they talk about your car, your phone about 'oh I slept with your girlfriend...I'm gonna take your girl!'...It's just nasty...When they speak about girls, no respect...disgusting, no respect at all, disgusting...*

Among all the participants interviewed, it was Charlotte who was the most critical of (new/UK) garage and commercial hip-hop. As we shall see, through her reading of mainstream hip-hop culture she constructed a discursive space where gender and black politics were discussed and where, above all, hegemonic hypermasculine codes were actively challenged.

At the initial stage of the interview, Charlotte made a comparison between the contemporary commercial hip-hop (described again as sexist and rude) and the hip-hop 'before', i.e. when it was connected to reggae and blues, at a time when 'people actually used to say stuff that was real':

*(Charlotte) Hip-hop is very similar to garage, it's just different accents...Hip-hop is one of the most disgusting kinds of music I know, because before hip-hop was actually full of talents. People actually used to say stuff that was real... and politics...It was related towards reggae, because in reggae and in the blues it's all about politics and what's going on in the world and...that's the old reggae stuff...But the hip-hop today you can't actually get a song which doesn't say, which doesn't have the words 'gangster', 'whore', 'bitch'...*

She then deplored the passivity of young women who are today consuming this commercial hip-hop. In doing so, they were disregarding the notion of 'respect' and 'women's rights', core elements of (past) feminist struggles:

*(Charlotte) Any girl who can buy a CD that is calling her a whore and saying that a guy could get her to do anything he wanted and said 'oh I just want you to do this, I just want you to do that, I've got my other girlfriend, I've got this'...Any women who can marry... who actually believes in that kind of...Women have fought so many years for respect, they fought for women's rights, they've done all this, like: 'why are you throwing it away and let someone make you feel that way and make you feel like trash? You're gonna dance in someone's video when they're basically calling you a whore and you're only there for one thing!'...Like, they say women have no minds and...I hate that!*

Charlotte's strong critique of mainstream hip-hop (and its consumption by girls) was not only re-located in the sphere of gender politics as she also referred to black struggles and resistance. Interestingly, in the following discussion of 'race' and politics of naming (the use of the word 'nigger' in US black rap songs), her own sense of 'blackness' was made more salient by terms which suggested a sense of collective belonging ('our ancestors', 'we' and 'us'):

*(Charlotte) We actually used to listen to Bob Marley and Jimmy Cliff. They actually had some kind of meaning to their music...Now it's all 'signal the plane'...It's a dance*

*move...They have the whole song goes: 'signal the plane, now signal the plane...wind down, wind down'...Just telling the guys what to do to the girls...You're going there to dance, I thought you was meant to freestyle, not be told what to do...And then, every song you listen to: 'nigger this, nigger that'...What is that about? How many years did people fight for 'oh we don't wanna be called nigger, but yeah, I'm gonna use it in music now!'... 'I'm gonna propose it across the world'... 'Yeah, it's OK to call me nigger as long as you're not white!'...I mean my ancestors had to be called nigger. That was kind of the point of: 'you're a nigger, you're a slave, shut up!'...They finally got 'yeah we're black people, that's what we wanna be called' and now these people are like 'Yeah, what's goin' on nigger?'... 'My nigger this, my nigger that...' He's not your nigger, he's a person, he's black...It's completely different, how can you be calling someone 'a nigger' after all the problems that used to be around? Even though that's over now, you still have to respect it because we wouldn't be where we are today, if people hadn't have fought for people not to call us niggers!*

Latter, the American rapper 50 Cent appeared in the conversation. Unlike Leo and Ayub who expressed their admiration, Charlotte was, again, strongly critical:

*(Charlotte) 50 Cent has no actual knowledge behind his...the words he uses...He said he's a pimp, he's a P.I.M.P, he's gangsta, he got shot in his face, whoa, great! What? People haven't been shot before? That's how you're making your music... 'You got shot, why did you get shot?' I doubt someone came along and just 'bang bang bang' for no reason...This guy is proposing drugs...He says drug is good, 'have some weed, that's real good! Yeah, let's do that...' Little kids listen to that on the music...I was baby sitting and this little girl, she turns around and said 'I've got a boyfriend, I'm his bitch'...*

*(Question) How old was she?*

*(Charlotte) She's 10! And this is a young girl and she's actually thinking it's OK...You got young boys singing these songs and they even talk like the rappers...So can you imagine what they gonna be like towards women, when they're older...Even in some lyrics, they're just like: 'Yeah, I'd slap a bitch if she ever speaks to me in that way'... I mean, proposing: 'let's hit some women'...You see a video, loads of women...no clothes on...You want that...You go and buy the CD, because you see all them women in that video...What they do is they use beats that are catchy [...] You see a lot of women naked in a video you say 'oh I want that, I want that'... 'He smokes weed, I'm gonna have to do that to get these women'...The girls, you see a nice man with a six-pack, 'oh I just want it so I can get the free pictures!'...None of them guys seems actually attractive to me...I like Thierry Henry, not gangsta, French, very romantic, 'va va voum'...He can va voum me anytime he wants...*

Through this critique of the controversial rapper, Charlotte was denouncing the influence of a 'gangsta lifestyle' on youth, which would be, according to her, promoted by commercial hip-hop. This discussion also offered another opportunity for her to condemn the tacit acceptance by young girls of the degrading image of women by certain hip-hop artists. Finally, the reference to the footballer Thierry Henry, was interesting as an embodiment of the 'black anti-gangsta' figure – i.e. 'French' and 'romantic' - which could be compared to

the 'aesthetically non-threatening' and non-controversial figure of the black rapper and actor Will Smith as analysed by Suki Ali (2003:5).

### ***Cinema, television and visual media***

In addition to music, we were also interested in the participants' preferences in visual media, mainly cinema, television as well as the press. Regarding television, there was a relative homogeneity of tastes among both groups as most participants said they enjoyed watching popular mainstream genres such as sitcoms (*Friends*), 'reality shows' (*Big Brother*), soaps (*East Enders*), teenage drama (*Hollyoaks*) or cartoons (on CBBC Channel for example). Similarly, recent mainstream - mainly American - films tended to dominate the participants' preferences in cinema. Finally, only few participants said reading regularly British newspapers.

Furthermore, in the context of a global emergence of digital/satellite technologies, we were keen to explore the question of diasporic media (or 'ethnic media'), especially among the British Bangladeshi group. Diasporic media are often described as major players in the formation of 'imagined communities' and new deterritorialised 'mediascapes' among ethnic and migrant groups (Appadurai, 1990). Thus, as Tsagarousianou (2004) argues 'whereas earlier forms of socio-cultural distancing were inextricably linked with temporal distance, making it very difficult for dispersed migrants to share experiences and form common frames of making sense of these, the sense of contemporaneity and synchronicity made possible by diasporic media in late modernity enables new ways of 'coexistence' and 'experiencing together'. Another important dimension of diasporic media is that the transnational flows of information, images and ideas entailed by their development can disrupt bounded notions of identity, belongings and 'home'. This process is closely linked to cultural hybridisation and creolisation (Hannez, 1996) as well as the multidirectionality and decentralisation of diasporic flows (Cunningham and Sinclair, 2000). It is also important to note that despite a growing body of literature on the relationships between transnational communication, cultural production and diaspora, few studies have taken into account how the perception, use and function of ethnic or diasporic media (including printed media) may vary according to gender, different social and domestic contexts, or across generations, within a given ethnic/migrant group.

In the case of the printed media, there is a plethora of newspapers in Bengali language published in Britain, which usually share a common 'journalistic' format. In addition to UK and international news, they are also reporting the current events in Bangladesh (and in Sylhet in particular) and providing news about Bangladeshi communities in the UK. In these newspapers, there is a strong emphasis on politics, both about the situation in Bangladesh and in the diaspora.

Bangladeshi newspapers and magazines published in the UK<sup>7</sup> did not appeal very much to our British Bangladeshi participants. One of the reasons explaining this could be the little interest that young people show towards the political situation in Bangladesh or in their district of origin, Sylhet (Eade and Garbin, 2006; Garbin, 2008). Moreover, because they are written in standard Bengali (i.e. the national language of Bangladesh), these newspapers

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<sup>7</sup> The main ones are *Surma*, *Notun Din*, *Potrika* or *Eurobangla*.

mainly target the elder generation (or newly arrived migrants) rather than an audience of young British Bangladeshis, less likely to read standard Bengali. However, several participants said that they were having Bengali lessons, but as in the case of Noor (16), it was not sufficient to 'understand' the Bengali press:

**(Question)** Do you read any Bengali papers?

**(Noor)** *No, cos I can't understand it.*

**(Question)** You can't read Bengali?

**(Noor)** *I can read Bengali, I take Bengali lessons, but not as proper. If I go through a paper it would probably take me days to...*

As far as television is concerned, there are several Bengali channels available through satellite technology, such as Ekushey TV, Bangla TV or Vectone Bangla. As in the case of the printed media, the fact that the great majority of the programmes are in Bengali could also be a major hindrance for younger generations. Yet, Channel S, a channel broadcasting mainly in Sylheti dialect, was recently created and is now available through satellite TV. During a discussion on TV, Basima said she liked the Channel S programmes when they are 'showing different sites of Bangladesh':

**(Question)** Do you watch the Bengali channels on Sky?

**(Basima)** *Yeah...*

**(Question)** What do you watch?

**(Basima)** *Channel S.*

**(Question)** 'S'...what does it stand for?

**(Basima)** *I think Sylhet, I'm not sure...*

**(Question)** Your parents watch that?

**(Basima)** *Yeah, my mum...*

**(Question)** What kind of programmes on that channel?

**(Basima)** *Just dramas and stuff.*

**(Question)** Bangladeshi *natoks*?

**(Basima)** *Yeah, and programmes where they show Bangladesh, like the really traditional stuff.*

**(Question)** Do you like that?

**(Basima)** *I don't like watching the dramas and stuff but I like the programmes when they show Bangladesh, like different sites and stuff.*

As Basima, many participants said that their parents and especially their mother were watching Channel S. However, their interest for this channel and its most popular programmes, known as *natok* ('dramas'), appeared rather weak. Munira (11), for instance was clearly rejecting the genre:

**(Question)** Do you like watching Bollywood films?

**(Munira)** *They're OK...*

**(Question)** Do you watch Bengali *natoks*?

**(Munira)** *No way!*

In the case of Pari (15), it is interesting to note that her comments about *natoks* echo the ones about Bengali music ('good for a laugh'):

(Question) What films do you like?

(Pari) *Bollywood...*

(Question) What about Bangladeshi *natoks*?

(Pari) *It's just something to watch...If it's on, then I watch it...*

(Question) Because you're mum is watching it?

(Pari) *Yeah...Cos we always mock it...But if you sit down and watch it, it's kind of funny sometimes...*

A parallel could be drawn here with music and more specifically the opposition between Bengali songs and Bollywood remix/bhangra examined earlier. Thus we could make the hypothesis that with its 'glamour' and worldwide popularity, Bollywood cinema is providing a positive image of 'Asianess', as opposed to the Bengali/Sylheti genre of *natoks*, which have been described as being 'funny', subject to 'mocking' (Pari, above) or even 'stupid' (Munira, 11). Having said that, while all the young British Bangladeshi girls said that they liked (or just watched) Bollywood films, none of the boys seemed to show a strong interest in them. This suggests the need to take the gender factor into account when exploring the issue of diasporic media.

Finally it should also be noted that several participants said that they could hardly understand Bollywood films (as they are in Hindi language, for their great majority). For instance here we can quote Shiraj (14) and Basima (16):

(Question) Do you ever go to the cinema?

(Shiraj) *Sometimes...*

(Question) What kind of films do you like?

(Shiraj) *Adventure, action, thriller...*

(Question) Do you like Indian films?

(Shiraj) *Depends... The only thing I don't like about them is I don't understand them...*

(Question) Do you ever watch Indian films, Bollywood films?

(Basima) *Sometimes, if there's subtitles.*

(Question) You find it really difficult to understand or...?

(Basima) *Yeah kind of...If there's subtitles it's alright but if not I just get bored of the film cos I can't understand it...*

### ***Sport***

Sport is generally presented as a central component of adolescent lives. In social sciences it has gradually played a greater role in recent years, for instance in the analysis of masculinities and 'bodily capital' (Wacquant, 2004) or in the study of the negotiation of national, ethnic and cultural identities (Smith and Porter, 2004). Given the time constraint of the research, we limited ourselves to a brief exploration of the links established, in the narratives of our participants, between sport and dynamics of identity, belongings or 'allegiance'. The questions were centred around the notion of 'supporting a country' and

more particularly with regards to two popular sports, cricket and football, as well as the Olympics.

During the interviews the participants seldom said that they did not either practise or watch/follow sports on TV. Within the British Bangladeshi sample there were various responses. One type of response, usually from the females, suggested a total lack of interest in watching cricket and football. However, when cricket matches between England and Bangladesh were discussed, support would be expressed for Bangladesh. Pari (15), for example, indicated that this support was linked to what could be defined as a 'parental context':

**(Question)** Do you like any sports?

**(Pari)** *I did like swimming, but I forgot...and dancing...*

**(Question)** Did you support the Bangladeshi cricket team?

**(Pari)** *No!...I hate cricket and football...*

**(Question)** If England played Bangladesh in cricket...

**(Pari)** *If I'm watching, and I'm with my parents, Bangladesh...*

The question about 'allegiance' to a particular team proved difficult to answer for some participants who were often hesitant or confused, especially when asked to choose between England and Bangladesh. However, several young British Bangladeshis assumed that 'supporting Bangladesh' was the 'natural' or 'obvious' option. This was indicated by the spontaneous use of such expressions as 'co's it's my country' or 'cos it's where I'm from' as can be seen in several extracts presented below. It is also interesting that none of these expressions denoting symbolic notions of national origin, belonging and 'home' were explicitly associated with England or Britain.

Noor, for example, who was 16 years old, said that he 'support[s] anything to do with Bangladesh' which was 'my home country':

**(Question)** Are you into any sports?

**(Noor)** *Yeah mainly football...*

**(Question)** Do you play?

**(Noor)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** You know the Bangladeshi cricket team, do you support them?

**(Noor)** *I don't really watch cricket but I play cricket...Yeah, I do support anything to do with Bangladesh anyway...*

**(Question)** If England played against Bangladesh, who would you support?

**(Noor)** *Bangladesh.*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Noor)** *Cos it's my home country...*

**(Question)** Do you support England in football...?

**(Noor)** *Yeah...If Bangladesh was good I would support them...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Noor)** *They're my country...*

**(Question)** Do you support Britain in the Olympics?

**(Noor)** *I don't really watch that, but, yeah, I'd probably do...*



Two female participants, Muna (14) and Basima (16), also used similar expressions ('my country', 'my home country') when asked if they would support Bangladesh against England in cricket:

**(Question)** Do you like any sports?

**(Muna)** *I like basketball.*

**(Question)** Do you play it?

**(Muna)** *Yeah, sometimes...and I play football when I'm with my mates sometimes, just to...I don't know how to play professional but I do know how to kick a ball around...*

**(Question)** Do you support Bangladesh in cricket?

**(Muna)** *I don't watch though, it's so boring...I don't watch any sport...*

**(Question)** If England would play Bangladesh in cricket; which team would you support?

**(Muna)** *Obviously Bangladesh, man.*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Muna)** *Because it's my country...*

**(Question)** Do you like any sports?

**(Basima)** *Yeah...I like football, but I don't play it that much now...When I was in primary school, I used to play a lot of football...*

**(Question)** Do you do any sports now?

**(Basima)** *No, not really.*

**(Question)** Do you like cricket?

**(Basima)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** Do you support Bangladesh in cricket?

**(Basima)** *Yeah...I wanted to go to the cricket match but I had exams during that time so I couldn't go to any...*

**(Question)** Who was it between?

**(Basima)** *Bangladesh and England...*

**(Question)** So Bangladesh against England, which team would you support?

**(Basima)** *Bangladesh...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Basima)** *Cos it's my home country...*

**(Question)** Do you support England in football?

**(Basima)** *Yeah...*

**(Question)** But if Bangladesh would be against England who would support?

**(Basima)** *Bangladesh...*

**(Question)** Did you support Britain in the Olympics?

**(Basima)** *Yeah...*

Fatima, a 14-year-old-girl, said she would support England in football and Britain in the Olympics. Yet, like Muna, she would 'obviously' support 'her country', Bangladesh, if it was playing against England in cricket, even if she said, at first, that she did not support the Bangladeshi cricket team:

**(Question)** Do you like any sports?

*(Fatima) I play basketball, at school I play football....an I watch tennis...*

**(Question)** Do you like cricket?

*(Fatima) I like playing it, but I don't like watching it...*

**(Question)** Do you support the Bangladeshi cricket team...?

*(Fatima) No...*

**(Question)** Why not?

*(Fatima) Because I don't watch it...*

**(Question)** If Bangladesh was playing England, who would you support?

*(Fatima) Bangladesh, obviously...Because that's like my country init...*

**(Question)** Do you support England in football?

*(Fatima) Yeah...*

**(Question)** Britain in the Olympics?

*(Fatima) Yeah...*

Similarly, Ayub initially said that he was not supporting Bangladesh in cricket but then added that he would support his 'home country' if they played against England. As regards football, he confessed to 'hating England' and preferring teams such as Spain or Italy:

**(Question)** You watch football and play it?

*(Ayub) Yeah...*

**(Question)** Do you play cricket?

*(Ayub) No...*

**(Question)** Do you support the Bangladeshi cricket team?

*(Ayub) No...*

**(Question)** If England played Bangladesh, who would you support?

*(Ayub) Bangladesh...*

**(Question)** Why?

*(Ayub) Cos they're my home country...*

**(Question)** Do you support England in the world cup, football?

*(Ayub) No I hate England...I support Italy or Spain...because they're good teams...*

**(Question)** Do you support Britain in the Olympics?

*(Ayub) No...I don't watch it...*

Abdul (16) was more hesitant when asked to choose between Bangladesh and England in cricket. First he described the Bangladeshi team as being 'bad' before saying that he would 'probably' support them:

**(Question)** Do you like sports?

*(Abdul) I like baseball a lot...I played in school...I don't know anyone with whom to play it now...[...] I also like softball. I also like football...But I haven't played for some time...I do like cricket...*

**(Question)** Do you support the Bangladeshi cricket team?

*(Abdul) Not really...because I believe that they're bad... [...]*

**(Question)** If England was playing against Bangladesh, who would you support?

*(Abdul) I don't know really...probably Bangladesh, cos it's where I'm from...But then again England would probably be a better team...*

**(Question)** Do you support England in football?

*(Abdul) No...On their matches I'd support them, yeah...But if they're against other teams, like Real Madrid...Obviously I'd go for the opposing team...Cos I believe they'll beat them...But a team which I support since I was young is Manchester United...*

Karim (14) also seemed hesitant. Yet because 'England would win' (against Bangladesh) he would support England in cricket. As for football he chose Brazil:

**(Question)** Sports?

*(Karim) I like football...I used to play...I left the team, school team...*

**(Question)** Do you play cricket?

*(Karim) Yeah...*

**(Question)** Do you support the Bangladeshi cricket team?

*(Karim) I don't like watching cricket...*

**(Question)** If England was playing against Bangladesh, who would you support?

*(Karim) I know England would win...so...I don't know, I'd support England...*

**(Question)** You know, in the world cup in football, do you support England?

*(Karim) No...Brazil...*

**(Question)** Do you support Britain in the Olympics?

*(Karim) I don't like the Olympics...*

Shiraj (14), who supports the England football team, used the expression 'my home country' to say that he was behind Bangladesh in cricket. However, when it came to a game between Bangladesh and England, he would support both teams. In justification he referred to his parents' national origin and also to the fact that he was living in England:

**(Question)** Do you like any sports?

*(Shiraj) Yeah, cricket...I play for Westminster, I play for my school...*

**(Question)** [...] Do you support the Bangladeshi cricket team?

*(Shiraj) Yeah, but they're not good...*

**(Question)** Why do you support them?

*(Shiraj) My home country...*

**(Question)** If England played Bangladesh?

*(Shiraj) I would support Bangladesh...and England...*

**(Question)** Both?

*(Shiraj) Yeah...I live in England and my parents are from Bangladesh, so...It doesn't matter whoever wins...*

**(Question)** Do you support England in football?

*(Shiraj) Yes...International, so I have to...*

Ahmed, (14) justified his support for Bangladesh in cricket in a different way, mentioning that it was the only sport 'they've made into'. He also expressed his wish to become a footballer, before saying that he supported Brazil, rather than England, in football. When asked if he could name someone he admires, he cited Ronaldinho, a Brazilian football player, and not David Beckham, who, according to him, was popular in England only because of his nationality:

**(Question)** What sports do you like?

(Ahmed) *Football, tennis...*

(Question) Do you play as well?

(Ahmed) *Yeah, I mainly do football, cos I wanna be a footballer when I grow up...*

(Question) Do you like or play cricket?

(Ahmed) *I don't mind playing cricket and I don't really hate it, I like it as well...*

(Question) Do you support the Bangladeshi cricket team?

(Ahmed) *Yeah...*

(Question) England against Bangladesh, who would you support?

(Ahmed) *Bangladesh.*

(Question) Why?

(Ahmed) *Cos England won everything and Bangladesh it's the only sport that they've made into...*

(Question) So they deserve a chance?

(Ahmed) *Yeah...*

(Question) Do you support England in football?

(Ahmed) *No.*

(Question) Really? In the World Cup who would you support?

(Ahmed) *Brazil...They're my favourites and they won all the time...*

(Question) Do you support Britain in the Olympics?

(Ahmed) *Yeah, definitely...*

(Question) Do you watch it when it's on telly and stuff?

(Ahmed) *Yeah, obviously...*

(Question) Could you name someone or people you admire?

(Ahmed) *A footballer...Ronaldinho...*

(Question) [...] Why do you look up to him?

(Ahmed) *Cos he's very skilful and he's a very talented player, the best player in the world...*

(Question) What about Beckham?

(Ahmed) *I don't care, he's rubbish, I don't like him... Everyone loves him because he's from England, that's it...*

Among the mixed-heritage participants, the use of such expressions as 'my country' was usually associated with support for England. Yet, while Chris (17, Jamaican/English background) used this expression, he did not want to choose between Jamaica and England in the Olympics:

(Question) Do you like sports?

(Chris) *I'm into hockey...And basketball, I used to play a lot of basketball...At Lanfranc...we used to win all the times...*

(Question) In football do you support England?

(Chris) *I'm not really interested in football...I don't mind watching it...I'm not bothered about it...*

(Question) What about Jamaica...?

(Chris) *I'm not really bothered...I don't really support football...If I had to then it would be Italy...they have so many good players in their team...*

(Question) In the Olympics...?

(Chris) *England is my country. Olympics is a lot different from football I think...it's a*

*better sport...I used to do long jump but I damaged my knee...*

(Question) But what about Jamaica?

(Chris) *If Jamaica was running, then yeah 'come on Jamaica!'...If England...Basically I'd support both team, but I wouldn't support one before another...*

Leo (11, Jamaican/English background) said that he supported Jamaica in the Olympics and England in football. He would also support both West Indies and England in cricket, except if they played against each other (in that case he said he would support none of the teams):

(Question) Do you support England in football?

(Leo) *Well... yeah.... I don't support Jamaica because they're not quite good...*

(Question) You've never supported Jamaica?

(Leo) *They never play...I never see them play...*

(Question) They played in the world cup I think?

(Leo) *They're not good. I support England. My dad would support Jamaica and England as well...*

(Question) What about in the Olympics?

(Leo) *I support Jamaica...*

(Question) Really?

(Leo) *Yeah.*

(Question) Why?

(Leo) *Cos, like the way it's set...If I support English in football, it will be fair for my mum but if I support English again [in the Olympics] it won't be fair for my dad...But they are good in the Olympics so I support them.*

(Question) Jamaica?

(Leo) *Yeah... And like in cricket, the West Indies are good as well...*

(Question) So who do you support in cricket?

(Leo) *West Indies and England...*

(Question) If they play against each other?

(Leo) *...I would support no one...*

(Question) No one?

(Leo) *I won't watch it.*

(Question) You won't watch it?! Really?

(Leo) *Yeah.*

(Leo) *Whoever wins, then I say 'they won'...*

Here we can say that Leo creates a discursive space associated with what Sultana Choudhry (2003) called a 'chameleon identity repertoire'. His support for England in cricket and Jamaica in the Olympics suggests an ability to negotiate a double identity. Perhaps more importantly, the reference to the ethnicity of his parents and the desire 'to be fair' to both of them when choosing which team to support also revealed a desire to keep both parents happy. The last sentence of the quote refers to a point which recurred in the interviews with mixed-heritage youth: the positive dimension of a 'dual belonging', the ability to switch and navigate between two worlds in a fluid, neutral, non-conflictual way.

Nick (15, Jamaican/English background) seemed hesitant when asked whether he would support Jamaica or England in football if they played against each other. However, he

indicated that a 'part of him' wanted Jamaica to win before saying, in the end, that he would support both teams, because 'he wouldn't mind who win':

**(Question)** What about sport now, what do you like?

**(Nick)** *I like basketball, football...I play basketball...in the youth club, in the gym....*

**(Question)** Do you support any team in football?

**(Nick)** *I support Arsenal...*

**(Question)** What about England in football?

**(Nick)** *England in football aren't bad, but I reckon Brazil and France will always be better...*

**(Question)** Do you support England, the world cup and stuff...

**(Nick)** *In the world cup they ain't gonna win it...because of all the best players that play for Arsenal and all that, they're foreign...Thierry Henry is French, he don't play for England...*

**(Question)** What about Jamaica? Do you support Jamaica?

**(Nick)** *No, not really, cos they're not in the World Cup...*

**(Question)** Would you support a Jamaican team?

**(Nick)** *If they win I'd support but I wouldn't get too keen cos I know they wouldn't get too far...*

**(Question)** What if England played against Jamaica? Who would you support?

**(Nick)** *I don't know! There's a part of me that wants Jamaica to win, just to prove...you know, just to let them win...But I know England will win in the end cos they got better players...Jamaica on the pitch they look unorganised...so that's about it...*

**(Question)** So you would support England or...

**(Nick)** *Both! I wouldn't mind who win, I wouldn't care...*

Helen (12), whose mother is British Ghanaian and whose father comes from a mixed Burmese-Portuguese parentage, hesitated when asked to choose between Ghana and England if they played against each other in football:

**(Question)** Do you like any sports?

**(Helen)** *Table tennis, football, tennis, badminton, running, croquet, hockey...I've got a long list...*

**(Question)** Do you support England in football?

**(Helen)** *I can't really say that...but I love Arsenal...England is alright but I like Arsenal better...*

**(Question)** Say Ghana was playing England, who would you support?

**(Helen)** *It's a tough one...I kinda have to go for Ghana, cos it's my background...but England...I don't really know...I can't really say...I don't know, they're both good...*

**(Question)** In the Olympics would you support Ghana or Britain?

**(Helen)** *I don't really know...Cos I don't really watch the Olympics...*

Mark (11, Jamaican/Scottish background) said he supported England in football, cricket and Britain the Olympics. In doing so, he mentioned the fact that he was 'supporting his country'. However, he said that he would support also West Indies, when they are not playing England:

(Question) Do you like any sports?

(Mark) *Football and cricket...*

(Question) Which team do you support?

(Mark) *Manchester United...*

(Question) And cricket?

(Mark) *England...*

(Question) Do you play sport yourself?

(Mark) *Yeah...cricket...and football...*

(Question) What if England played against West Indies in cricket, which team would you support?

(Mark) *England...But when West Indies are playing a different team, I support West Indies...*

(Question) Do you support England in football?

(Mark) *Yeah...*

(Question) And if they played against Jamaica?

(Mark) *I'd still support England...*

(Question) Britain in the Olympics?

(Mark) *Yeah...*

(Question) Why?

(Mark) *Cos...I'm supporting my country...*

Finally, Charlotte (16, Jamaican/ white English), talked, not without humour, about the Jamaican team, referring to the stereotypical figure of the marijuana smoker<sup>8</sup> after expressing an unconditional support for the French footballer Thierry Henry:

(Question) Would you support England in football?

(Charlotte) *Depends what the players look like....If they're losing then I probably won't, but if they...play against France, no way!*

(Question) You would support France?

(Charlotte) *Yeah, they've got Thierry Henry...I'd support him wherever he goes...*

(Question) What about Jamaica?

(Charlotte) *Not trying to be funny, but most of them are kind of lean on the pitch, like they probably smoked a spliff before they come and they kind of falling about...They all look like they're on drugs when they're playing...*

She added that she would support Jamaica against England in football but added that she would be behind England in the Olympics, using the expressions 'my country' and 'my English people':

(Question) But England was playing against Jamaica, who would you support?

(Charlotte) *England...Cos England is more likely to win...*

(Question) In the Olympics?

(Charlotte) *I'm always supporting England in the Olympics...England is my country and the Olympics you get good looking Olympians who...The women most of them look like men and the men have got weird faces, so...*

(Question) What about Jamaica or France or?

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<sup>8</sup> She used the patois term 'spliff', which means a cigarette of marijuana (joint).

*(Charlotte) I guess I could support Jamaica when they're running...but I'd probably support my English people more...*

### **Food**

Discourses about food were examined in this research in order to shed some light on the construction of cultural and religious boundaries associated with different social or community contexts. One of the key issues was to explore the difference between 'food practices' at home and outside the domestic/family sphere.

Regarding the consumption of food outside home, there was a relative homogeneity of responses. Fast food such as McDonald's or KFC, pizzas, takeaways, 'fish and chips' (or even 'junk food') were the most common responses among both British Bangladeshis and mixed-heritage youth. Only Helen (12) expressed her 'disgust' for McDonald's food, after having watched 'Supersize Me', a film which strongly criticises the fast food industry in the USA:

**(Question)** What do you eat outside of home?

*(Helen) I mostly go to Pizza Express or Marks and Spencer's or my nan's house...McDonald's...I don't like...*

**(Question)** Why not?

*(Helen) Cos I saw Supersize Me...disgusting...He just ate a lot of hamburgers...Pure lard...horrible...*

**(Question)** You don't eat fast food or takeaway food?

*(Helen) Not that much...Just if I have a takeaway I might go to, this Chinese restaurant in Thornton Heath...*

For the British Bangladeshi sample, food consumption reflected the maintenance of cultural practices as, in their great majority, the British Bangladeshi youth interviewed stated that they liked 'rice and curry', which was said to be the main type of food consumed at home. However, the participants mentioned as well the consumption of other types of food, in the domestic sphere, coined as 'English' or 'Western', such as pizzas, pastas, chips, etc. For instance, we can quote here Pari (15) and Muna (14) - whose discourse also suggested the normality of consuming 'rice and curry' in a Bengali family:

**(Question)** What food do you eat at home?

*(Pari) Nice.. I like rice and curry...She [my mum] also has pizza, fish and chips and stuff in the fridge, but I like eating the rice...My sister and that, they like the chips and pizza, but I like eating the rice...*

**(Question)** Why?

*(Pari) There's more flavour...*

**(Question)** Do you eat different food outside?

*(Pari) Yeah, chips and fast food...*

**(Question)** How would you describe the food that you eat at home?

*(Muna) Different types of food...*

**(Question)** Your mum cooks everything...rice and curry?

*(Muna) No she does, obviously...How can a Bengali family not!*



**(Question)** I was gonna say...

**(Muna)** *Everyday there's rice and curry but sometimes she would make pasta...She likes making new things...*

The question about the consumption of pork, which is *haram* (forbidden) in Islam, was not asked systematically to the young British Bangladeshis interviewed. Among the participants who were asked about it, none said eating pork, thus reflecting a strong commitment to this highly central religious prohibition. However, concerning *halal*<sup>9</sup> meat, a question also included later in the research process, the responses indicated a more flexible attitude. Furthermore, several young participants stated that they ate in fast food restaurants (such as McDonald's) without really knowing if the meat served was *halal* or not.

In their study, Tizard and Phoenix (1993) found that an important proportion of youth from mixed British and Caribbean parentage said they liked African or Caribbean food<sup>10</sup> and for the authors, its consumption also appeared to represent a strong marker of a black cultural affiliation. In our research several mixed-heritage youth interviewed indicated eating Caribbean or 'black' food regularly at home. In their discourses, it was often associated with dishes such as chicken and rice, as illustrated by the interviews with Jade (16, St Vincent/English background) and Chris (17, Jamaican/English background):

**(Question)** What kind of food you eat at home?

**(Jade)** *Mostly black food, chicken and rice and stuff like that...*

**(Question)** Is that a Caribbean influence?

**(Jade)** *Yeah...My dad cooks that...*

**(Question)** Do you eat differently outside?

**(Jade)** *Yes...I don't like it...From the canteen, only the salad...*

**(Question)** And takeaways?

**(Jade)** *Yes...Chinese and stuff like that...I won't eat McDonald's...KFC, but not McDonald's...Everyone thinks I'm weird...!*

**(Question)** What kind of food to eat?

**(Chris)** *I don't know...Cos lately I've started cooking for myself...I do a lot of fried stuff...Fried tuna and rice, fried corn beef and rice...*

**(Question)** British food?

**(Chris)** *Well, when my dad was living with us, my mum used to do a lot of Caribbean dishes, but now it's more frozen food, she doesn't really like cooking herself...Every now and again, she does the odd Caribbean dish, but not often...Usually I go to my sister's, she does a lot of Caribbean food...frozen food now and then, quick food, but...So, it's mixed...but usually it's British frozen food, quick and easy, really...*

**(Question)** Outside?

**(Chris)** *KFC or McDonald's...Fried chicken...Cos I'm a mixed-race...- I don't really class myself as a mixed-race to be honest – I class myself as black...My family, and...my brother...quite a few of my friends are black...I don't really see myself as mixed-race...Actually I don't really see myself as black all the time...*

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<sup>9</sup> 'Licit' in Islam, opposed to *haram* ('illicit', 'forbidden'). When associated with meat, 'halal' refers to the correct preparation of the meat, i.e. the specific ritualised slaughtering of the animal.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that the same proportion (two-third of their sample) said they also liked 'British' food.

**(Question)** Is it in relation to the way you eat?

**(Chris)** *Yeah...Cos, you know lot of people say 'black people always eat chicken'...I don't know if it's true! Cos if a black person eats chicken, I'd say there is nothing wrong with that...*

While many mixed-heritage participants said they eat a diverse range of food at home, when black/Caribbean food was consumed, it was said to be cooked by the parent with a black or Caribbean background. The difference between the cooking practices of each parent was perhaps perceived in a stronger way in the case of separated parents. Thus, food can be seen as playing a role in the construction of a cultural boundary between two specific domestic environments, a boundary negotiated by the mixed-heritage participants in their everyday social lives. Here we can quote Leo (11, Jamaican/English-Jamaican background) and Mark (11, Jamaican/Scottish background) whose discourses suggested this dualism associated with the consumption of food in the domestic sphere:

**(Question)** How would you describe the food you eat at home?

**(Leo)** *Sometimes I eat chips. Sometimes my mum cooks stuff. And my dad cooks rice and chicken.*

**(Question)** So your dad is cooking Jamaican stuff?

**(Leo)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** And your mum?

**(Leo)** *She cooks other food and stuff. Sometimes she cooks chicken and stuff..*

**(Question)** I forgot to ask you....Was your father born in Britain?

**(Leo)** *Yeah. But his granddad and grandma are Jamaican...*

**(Question)** So they came to England...

**(Leo)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** They are here?

**(Leo)** *But they don't live together...*

**(Question)** Ok. Do you eat differently outside home?

**(Leo)** *Yeah chips and stuff...*

**(Question)** Do you live with your dad or mum?

**(Mark)** *Both...Sometimes my mum, sometimes my dad...*

**(Question)** With your dad, what sort of food do you eat?

**(Mark)** *Chicken, rice, potatoes and sweet corn...*

**(Question)** With your mum?

**(Mark)** *Sausage, beans and potatoes...*

**(Question)** It's different then?

**(Mark)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** Which food do you like most?

**(Mark)** *Chicken...*

**(Question)** What about outside? At school?

**(Mark)** *Chips...and Chinese...*

### 3.4 'TRADITIONS', RITUALS AND RELIGIOSITY

The initial research questions centred on religion were manifold. What is the role of religion in the life of our young participants? How is it perceived and expressed in the discourse? What part does religion play in the dynamics of hybridity and 'new ethnicities'? Can we observe different degrees of religiosity in relation to practices and rituals, in relation to the performing of faith? What is the role of religious education? How is 'tradition' transmitted and/or reinterpreted?

#### *British Bangladeshi youth and religious practices*

All the British Bangladeshi interviewees said they were Muslims. As we shall see later, for a majority of them religion appeared to be a central element in the self-identification process.

#### *Religious education*

For the British Bangladeshi group, religious education and transmission are essential. First, it is important to note that, while none of the young British Bangladeshis interviewed attend an Islamic school, all have received (or still receive) some form of religious 'education', mostly in the mosque or through private tuition, generally at home and over several years. This education reflects the central role of religion in the family socialisation process, as well as the parental commitment to pass on a set of religious traditions and norms. As Maréchal (2003:28) points out, there is a strong desire to see that 'the religious continuity is assured in and through change across several generations' in a new diasporic context. An aspect of this context is the settlement outside the *Dar-ul-Islam* (the Land of Islam) in a Western, un-Islamic, society which was frequently seen as threatening 'traditional' values and practices, religiously and culturally constructed and legitimated (Garbin, 2004). Moreover, alongside the effort to preserve a cultural and religious heritage in the domestic sphere, we could say that the parental wish to transmit a set of correct values and practices is also linked to the protection of the family respectability (*izzat*), mainly through controlling the (public) behaviour of the young girls (Shaw, 1988).

The parents combine with Islamic teachers (*mehsab*) and imams (usually Bangladeshis themselves) to train the next generation, especially through the *embodiment* of religion. The 'correct' (*adab*) ritualistic gestures, such as those related to the five daily prayers, are generally learned through practice or observation at home or in the mosque<sup>11</sup>. It is also within the family that some of the most important Islamic tenets, such as the opposition between pure/licit (*halal*) and impure/illicit (*haram*) are transmitted and interiorised. This opposition is expressed through, for example, the prohibition of pork or alcohol. The religious transmission within the domestic sphere appears to be 'tacit' in character. It represents a social incorporation of basic religious principles, a progressive constitution of an Islamic *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1986) which is of great importance because "as a religion which provides prescriptions for action encompassing all aspects of daily life, Islam ensures that the boundaries defining Muslim identity emerge in routine, mundane behaviour as well as through explicitly 'religious' activities" (Jacobson, 1998: 130).

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<sup>11</sup> The young boy can learn the bodily techniques of prayers if he accompanies the father to the mosque.

The religious classes are taught by the *mehsab* or the imam usually for a few hours a week after school or during weekends. During these classes, the youth mainly learn how to read 'Koranic Arabic'. There are different stages in this initial process of *fora*<sup>12</sup>, starting with the alphabet and finishing with what is called the '*khatm*' ('sealing') a term which refers to the completion of the Holy Book. Sometimes the Koran can be read several times, which was the case for some of the oldest adolescents interviewed, such as Abdul, 16 years old, who also admitted that he forgot how to read Koranic Arabic, having stopped practising:

**(Question)** Did you have Arabic classes, did you go to mosque?

**(Abdul)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** Did you finish the Koran?

**(Abdul)** *Twice...two, three times...But now I can't read a single word of the Koran...I forgot...[...] Me and my brother went to Drummond Street mosque, four or five years ago...and we started on hadda and we finished in a couple of weeks and then we went to Koran and finished that so quick...And the mehsab told me I should go madrassah cos I was really good...Then I read at home, for a couple of years...I went to Bangladesh, I came back...I slightly stopped reading...And now my little brother and my little sister, they go to mosque...They can read...Cos I don't sit down and read at home, I kind of forgot...If I tried I could easily get back to it...Cos when you have the experience, it doesn't take you as long as when you start from scratch...*

None of the British Bangladeshi youth interviewed expressed a radical disagreement with the idea of religious education and Arabic classes. Rupna, 13 years old, found it 'important':

**(Question)** Did you have a religious education?

**(Rupna)** *Yeah, I used to learn Arabic, but I left cos I kind of finished it...*

**(Question)** For how long did you learn?

**(Rupna)** *For a long time...for five years...I took breaks...I didn't go for a year then I used to go back...*

**(Question)** Was it your dad who wanted you to?

**(Rupna)** *Most kids have to learn...that's important...*

**(Question)** You were happy to have done that, to do that?

**(Rupna)** *Yeah, I think it's important...*

**(Question)** Your dad and mum also were very religious?

**(Rupna)** *Yes, very religious.*

For Noor (16), 'it's the right thing to do':

**(Question)** Did you get Arabic lessons or...

**(Noor)** *Yeah, every Saturdays and Sundays...*

**(Question)** Have you finished?

**(Noor)** *No.*

**(Question)** What you up to?

**(Noor)** *Koran.*

**(Question)** Which *sifara* you're in?

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<sup>12</sup> 'Reading' in Sylheti.

**(Noor)** *Third fufa...*

**(Question)** Do you do it at home or?

**(Noor)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** Do you like it ?

**(Noor)** *Yeah, cos that's the right thing to do...I know I should read once, understand it and everything...*

**(Question)** Do you ask the mehsab about religion and stuff or... ..

**(Noor)** *Mainly the meshab and in the Chabotra mosque, I ask people there...*

**(Question)** Do you talk to your mum about religion and stuff?

**(Noor)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** When?

**(Noor)** *When I pray, when I need to ask my mum about something that I'm not pretty sure about...*

However, the discourse of Munira, 11 years old, the youngest British Bangladeshi interviewed, was slightly different as she deplored the fact that she is learning how to read the Koran without really understanding the meaning of Arabic:

**(Question)** Do you have Arabic classes?

**(Munira)** *Yeah...at home...*

**(Question)** Do you like them?

**(Munira)** *No...Because all you have to do is just read, say and remember...*

**(Question)** And you don't understand...

**(Munira)** *No...it's all right...you have to do it because...otherwise I believe you get...punished...and I want to read it...*

**(Question)** Does religion play a big part in your life?

**(Munira)** *Yes...Because if you don't know nothing about your religion, you might not achieve and follow it...*

Moreover, Basima's view of 'Arabic reading' is interesting insofar as it suggests a change of perception regarding the function, use and importance of religious education at a more individual, intimate level. She describes a shift from an initial stage, when the Koranic education, imposed by the parents, was perceived as 'pointless' ('*what's the point?*'), to a new stage characterised by what appears to be a greater awareness of a Muslim identity, a greater recognition of a personal need to gain religious knowledge. This is reflected here by a desire to go back to the basic learning of Arabic – often described as the sacred and 'authentic' language of the Koran:

**(Question)** Do you talk about religion with your parents?

**(Basima)** *Not really, but I was telling my mum the other day that I wanna start reading the Koran cos I've never finished it. And I'm starting to forget everything and I don't wanna forget everything I read...I told her...*

**(Question)** Over the years the way you think of Islam, has it changed?

**(Basima)** *It's more important to me now...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Basima)** *I don't know, I just find it more important to me now...Like, before, when I was really young I didn't really care, I didn't like going to Arabic reading, I don't know, like 'what's the point?' but now I find it more important...*

In the discourse of Pari (15), a similar change of perception regarding Islam and the teaching of Islam was suggested. Indeed, she established a distinction between the obligatory and somehow 'unavoidable' aspect of the religious learning that she was 'fed with' ('*down my throat*') and her current desire to gain religious knowledge. She insisted strongly on the opposition between the 'to have to' and the 'to want to' in order to develop another opposition between the acquisition of knowledge in the past and the present:

(Question) Have you changed your views about Islam, over the years?

(Pari) *Before I thought it was kind of 'in my face', 'down my throat' kinda thing. But now if my mum does say it... I know there's truth in it, and I believe in it....Before you had to, now I want to...*

### *The performance of faith: rituals and celebrations*

The *praxis* of religion is central to the social and even spiritual experience of Islam. The *performance of faith* through bodily practices, collective celebrations, rituals, dress, etc. represents both strong markers of religious identity and constant reminders of the all-encompassing and 'total' dimension of Islam as a system of beliefs, norms and codes.

During the interview stage of the research we asked the participants about their religious practices, mainly the five daily prayers (referred to as *salat* but more often as *namaz* among Bangladeshis), the fasting of Ramadan and the celebrations of Eid.

#### *- Prayers*

Among the youth interviewed there were no strict followers of the religious obligation concerning prayer (i.e. the five daily prayers and/or the participation in the collective service of *jumma* every Friday). There was, in fact, a variety of answers, which reflected a diversity of attitudes, ranging from the ones who did not pray at all to those who tried their best to be regular in their practice. For instance, Shiraj appeared to be the most committed when it comes to praying. He said praying four times a day (he is unable to do the morning one). *Jumma* is organised in his school, but he said that he could not always attend due to lack of time:

(Question) Do you do *namaz*?

(Shiraj) *Yeah.*

(Question) All five or?

(Shiraj) *Four...The one in the morning I can't do, fozr...*

(Question) In school?

(Shiraj) *zohra, I can't do...*

(Question) Because, you're in lessons?

(Shiraj) *Yeah. Jumma, they do it in lunch time...Cos in North Westminster, year 7, 8 and 9 there was a religious teacher called Mr Islam and he used to get people to pray...He told them one by one, 'come to a room...211' - or something like that - and then you just pick if you wanna come or not...*

**(Question)** Do you go to *jumma*, if you can, on Friday?

**(Shiraj)** *If I have the time...*

In the case of Noor (16) the practice was more irregular. He attended *jumma* every week (except during exams) and prayed at home, but due to lack of time and other activities, praying is often difficult for him. He described his lack of commitment as 'wrong' and stressed, with some feeling of guilt, his moral duty to find time to pray. However, he also explains how the situation during the 'holy month' of Ramadan is quite different from the rest of the year:

**(Question)** [...] Do you pray?

**(Noor)** *Yeah, I do pray at home sometimes, but...*

**(Question)** How often?

**(Noor)** *There's months when I do pray quite a lot, and months I don't... I don't always have the time, but I know that's wrong, I should always have the time to pray...But sometimes I'm out, or work to do or...[...] I pray a lot during Ramadan, that's a holy month...*

**(Question)** [...] Do you go to *jumma*?

**(Noor)** *Yeah, every time....*

**(Question)** From school?

**(Noor)** *There's a mosque in school, but sometimes I can't attend it cos I got exams...*

**(Question)** Do they encourage you in your school, to do *jumma*?

**(Noor)** *There's people going around telling them, inviting people to come along...but it's up to you, if you wanna go or not...*

Abdul (16) also attended the Friday prayers but did not perform the five daily prayers (*namaz*). He tried to pray five times before Ramadan but the physical constraint of the ritual was too important for him and he got 'tired' quickly:

**(Abdul)** *...I don't really pray, I go to Friday prayers but I don't pray like everyday....*

**(Question)** How come you don't pray?

**(Abdul)** *Just before Ramadan started I tried to pray five times a day, except the one in the morning...I did that for a couple of days...but the prayers are long and I wasn't strong enough to...Cos in namaz you stand up for a long time...*

**(Question)** You're just tired...

**(Abdul)** *Yeah...My mum prays but my brothers don't pray...I just don't pray...*

**(Question)** How come you go to *jumma* though?

**(Abdul)** *Because my mum tells me to...*

Basima (16), who does not attend the Friday *jumma* service (like all the girls interviewed<sup>13</sup>), also made reference to the month of Ramadan, the period of the year when she made 'an effort':

**(Question)** Do you pray?

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted here that mosques do not usually have a female section, except the largest ones, such as the East London Mosque, in Tower Hamlets.

(Basima) *No, not really...Probably when Ramadan comes, I'll make an effort...*

(Question) How come you make an effort in Ramadan, yourself or somebody tells you to?

(Basima) *Me, just myself...and my mum tells me as well...*

(Question) Do you do *jumma* at home?

(Basima) *No.*

Like Basima and Abdul, Rupna (13) and Ayub (12) mentioned the fact that their mothers have a role to play in their religious practices:

(Question) What about religion now? Do you do *namaz*?

(Rupna) *Yeah, sometimes...*

(Question) When?

(Rupna) *When my mum asks me, I just go and do it...*

(Question) Do you go to *jumma* as well?

(Rupna) *No...*

(Question) Do you pray?

(Ayub) *Yeah, sometimes...*

(Question) Do you go to *jumma*?

(Ayub) *Every week...*

(Question) Really? When at school?

(Ayub) *School prayer...My mum said...*

Moreover, Ahmed's practice was also rather minimal as he said attending mainly the Friday prayers during holidays, and not being 'bothered' anymore with the daily prayers:

(Question) Do you pray?

(Ahmed) *Not often...*

(Question) How often?

(Ahmed) *In the holidays, I do the Friday prayer...I don't pray that much, I don't pray...*

(Question) Why not?

(Ahmed) *I can't do it sometimes...I don't know...sometimes I'm not bothered...Once, I went into it and I started praying for quite some time and then I just lost it...*

(Question) Mainly, it's just because of not having time?

(Ahmed) *Yeah...and sometimes I don't bother...*

(Question) Do you do *Jumma* in school?

(Ahmed) *No...*

Furthermore, Muna (14) admitted not praying anymore, yet she stressed the positive feeling of performing *namaz*:

(Question) Do you pray, do you do *namaz*?

(Muna) *I used to...When I do *namaz*, I just feel so good...*

Pari's (15) attitude to praying was very similar. Thus, before deploring her own 'laziness' when it comes to praying, she exposed in greater length the positive feelings she had



when she was praying. Her discourse described the 'rewarding' experience of this mind-body unifying ritual and the sensations of 'freshness' and relaxation encountered:

(Question) Do you do *namaz*?

(Pari) *I used to...Namaz gives you a kind of refreshing feeling and makes you feel fresh, makes you feel relaxed...I liked it when I did it...but now, it's just you feel lazy...before you do it, you feel lazy, but once you do it, it just rewards you so much...it just makes you feel so much better...*

(Question) Would you like to get back into it?

(Pari) *I would like to...not be lazy and get back into it, yeah...*

The rest of the participants did not really talk in detail about their relationship and attitudes to praying. Fatima (14) just said she did not pray but was 'trying to'; Karim stated that he was not praying and 'not going to *jumma* anymore', and finally Munira (11) said she was still learning how to pray.

#### - *Fasting during Ramadan*

Ramadan takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and this month of fasting is the holiest period for the Islamic faith. Consumption of food and drinking (as well as sexual intercourse) is not allowed between dawn (*fajr*), and sunset (*maghrib*) and during Ramadan, Muslims are also expected to put more effort into following the moral principles of Islam.

Among all the participants, it was again Shiraj who appeared to be the most committed as he said that he was fasting the entire month:

(Question) Do you fast?

(Shiraj) *Yeah.*

(Question) All of them?

(Shiraj) *Yeah.*

(Question) Do you fast because your parents told you or...?

(Shiraj) *I want to...*

(Question) Why is it important?

(Shiraj) *Cos...I support a religion, I stick to it...and I respect it...*

Several participants, such as Noor (16) said they were trying their best to respect the entire fast:

(Question) Do you fast during Ramadan?

(Noor) *Yeah.*

(Question) Is that the time when you pray a lot?

(Noor) *Yeah, I pray a lot during Ramadan, that's a holy month...*

(Question) Do you keep all of them?

(Noor) *I try my best...*

But this was often described as difficult, as instanced by the following quotes from the interviews with Ayub (12), Pari (15) and Muna (14):

(Question) Do you fast?

(Ayub) *Yes, if I can...when I'm not hungry...*

(Question) Most of them, do you keep them?

(Ayub) *Yeah...*

(Question) Why do you fast?

(Ayub) *My mum said...*

(Question) Do you fast?

(Pari) *I used to...*

(Question) Why not now?

(Pari) *I do, but then I can't hold my temptations, I can't resist...Before I used to do it, non-stop...But my auntie told me not to do it, because I was getting skinny...From then I stopped doing it, kinda...*

(Question) Do you fast?

(Muna) *Yeah...*

(Question) What age did you start?

(Muna) *I don't know, I can't remember...*

(Question) But you always keep all of them?

(Muna) *No, never...I don't think I've ever kept all of them...*

(Question) Why?

(Muna) *I don't know...Sometimes I break it...*

The significance of Ramadan for Muslims revolves around a strong commitment to a religious ethos defined by purification, moral 'regeneration', discipline and rigour. When asked to provide some reasons behind their decision to fast, the religious dimension and the notion of a religious 'duty' were implicitly invoked. This appeared, for instance, in the interviews with Rupna (13) and Ahmed (11):

(Question) Do you fast?

(Rupna) *Yeah, I did last year...*

(Question) When did you start?

(Rupna) *Just last year.*

(Question) It was your first time?

(Rupna) *Yeah, I did it before but not exactly all of them.*

(Question) Why did you do it? What is important for you to do it?

(Rupna) *Yeah, it's part of my religion...*

(Question) Do you fast?

(Ahmed) *Yeah...*

(Question) All of them?

(Ahmed) *I haven't done all of them yet, but I've done like 20...*

(Question) How come you fast?

(Ahmed) *Cos it's a religious thing init...*

(Question) Do you fast because you want to or because somebody else wants you to?

(Ahmed) I wanna but...It's to do with the religion so I have to...Praying is to do with the religion as well, but...I don't know how to explain why I don't do it...

When asked about the reasons of his observance of the fast, Abdul (16) clearly referred to a central dimension of the Ramadan experience which involved abstaining from food and water and made a symbolic connection with the daily suffering of the poor:

(Abdul) Yes, I do fast...Maybe I'll break one or two...I fast because I believe I should feel what other people in other countries are experiencing throughout their whole life...like African people...Poor people have no food and water for the whole day...They have to live on rations and all that...

Finally, among the British Bangladeshis interviewed, only Karim (14) said he did not fast at all:

(Question) Do you fast during Ramadan?

(Karim) I tell my mum I am, but no, I don't...

#### - Eid

The two festivals of Eid are traditionally of great importance in the Islamic calendar. They are performed by Muslims around the world, thus providing a powerful symbolic sense of connection and unity, central to the idea of a global, universal and 'imagined community' of the *umma*.

On the day of Eid ul Adha, an animal has to be slaughtered, divided into parts and then equally distributed to kin, friends and poor people as *zakat* (charity)<sup>14</sup>. The other festival of Eid, called Eid ul Fitr, marks the end of Ramadan and charity and donations are also important on that day. In addition to their deep religious signification, both Eid festivals contribute to socialisation and the consolidation of links between families and friends, as, for instance, clothes or money (*salaamis*) are given to children, food is shared when relatives and neighbours invite each other for the traditional greetings (*Eid Mubarrak*). It is important also to note that in certain areas, for example in Camden, where the fieldwork for this research was conducted, Muslim pupils can enjoy a day off from school.

As Alexander (2000) and Garbin (2004) have shown, it is possible to differentiate several elements in the event of Eid, regarding the way it is lived and experienced by the young British Bangladeshis. There is, first, the religious moment, with the prayers at the mosque when, for the occasion, everyone is dressed up in new clothes (Sharwani, Punjabi and Shalwar Kameez for the females if they attend the service). Then, after the prayers, it is time for the visits to family members, followed by the traditional meal. Finally, young people usually spend time with their friends either in their homes or outside, where they occupy visibly the public space, generally outside the gaze of the parents and *morrhubis* (elders).

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<sup>14</sup> This ritual of *korboni* (sacrifice) commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. This festival also coincides with *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the five pillars of Islam.

Let us explore now how our participants experience this particular festival. For Ayub (12), the family experience appears more important than being with his friends:

**(Question)** What do you do for Eid? With your family and what do you do with your friends?

**(Ayub)** *I go out to my relatives' house, I don't see my friends on Eid...just go out...to my cousins' house...*

**(Question)** Not with your mates?

**(Ayub)** *I wanna be with my family first...*

Shiraj (14), who explicitly mentioned the prayers, talks about 'enjoying himself':

**(Question)** What do you do on Eid day?

**(Shiraj)** *In the morning I have a bath and then go to the prayers and then I go to people's houses. Food, video games...basically enjoying myself...*

Ahmed (13) said spending some time with his friends, but only the day after Eid:

**(Question)** What do you do for Eid? With your family and with your friends?

**(Ahmed)** *Family, I go relatives' house, have meals and all that...The next day and all that with my friends...I go places...like cinema or other places...*

One of the most widespread practices of these youth during Eid day is to 'go cruising'. It generally means for them travelling across (and, to a lesser extent, outside) London in cars usually rented and driven by the oldest teenagers of the peer group, listening to loud music (hip-hop, RnB, bhangra, etc.) and sometimes waving Bangladeshi flags (Garbin, 2004).

Pari (15) and Fatima (14) mentioned this practice without, however, giving much detail:

**(Question)** What do you do for Eid? Family? With friends?

**(Pari)** *With my family, just go to cousins' house and stuff...With my friends...maybe hire a car and go cruising...*

**(Question)** What do you do on Eid, with your family and friend?

**(Fatima)** *Friends, we go out, hire a car...Family, we eat in the house...*

Noor (16) was more precise as he said going to games arcades and Leicester Square in Central London:

**(Question)** What do you do for Eid?

**(Noor)** *Spend time with my family, have a meal, chat to them after that...Going out with my friend... We go to arcades and Leicester Square...*

**(Question)** With hired cars, you are cruising in cars?

**(Noor)** *Yeah!*

For Karim (14), the 'cruising' was preferably in the Bengali area of East London, 'for the girls':

**(Question)** What do you do for Eid with your family and friends?

**(Karim)** *Dinner with my mum and then I go with my mates...we hire a car and go cruising...*

**(Question)** And what's your favourite area for cruising?

**(Karim)** *East London...*

**(Question)** Why there?

**(Karim)** *The girls!*

It was Muna (14), who was probably the more enthusiastic when speaking about Eid. In the quote below, she describes how, as she is 'getting older', she wants to spend more time with her friends rather than her family during that day. Furthermore, and more importantly perhaps, she exposes her notion of 'having a good time'. This appears to revolve around the 'cruising' practice but also around the encounter with boys, because as she puts it herself, when 'looking nice', she enjoys 'getting chupped':

**(Question)** What do you do for Eid?

**(Muna)** *Yeah, Eid! Go out and have a good time!*

**(Question)** With?

**(Muna)** *With all my mates...in cars...*

**(Question)** Always in cars...So, how much of it do you spend with your family?

**(Muna)** *Before, I used to spend most of the time with my family but it's kind of like, because I'm getting older, I always wanna go out...But always in the morning with my family...*

**(Question)** What do you guys do?

**(Muna)** *My mum cooks and we just eat before we go out...Sometimes when I come back in the night all my cousins are over and it's just so nice...*

**(Question)** And when you are with your friends? What do you do on Eid day?

**(Muna)** *Go out, look nice, get chupped!...Chatted up!...Eat out...in a restaurant...*

The way our participants described their experience of Eid during the interviews echoes the analysis of Claire Alexander (200) in her study of British Bangladeshi youth in South London. She points out that, for the young Bengali boys

Eid day as a public celebration was then an exclusively masculine area – a chance to spend time with male friends, to travel outside the area away from the gaze of family and community, to drive fast cars, talk to girls, stay out all night. [...] Eid days were crucially structured around two major axes – that of family and that of peer group. In addition to the few immediate family obligations, the former was illustrated by the bonds across peer groups, between the older and younger men, which was manifested firstly, in the time taken to give the little ones rides in the hire cars (and the reciprocal obligation to be suitably grateful and appreciative of the driver's skills); and secondly, in the tacit agreement to give each other space – physical and metaphorical – to do whatever they wanted. [...] Eid day plans, then, were centred on a notion of 'community' strongly structured on gender and age divisions, and although a time of solidarity, it was also a time when the boundaries between agesets were most clearly marked. (2000: 133-134)

Although no ethnographic observation was conducted during Eid as part of our research, several discourses suggest that young Bengali girls are also publicly engaged in their own experience of 'fun' during this religious festival. The discourses show, moreover, how young people, boys and girls, participate in the reinterpretation of tradition through this public experience of amusement, fun and 'good time' outside the sphere of the Bengali community social control (*shomaj*). The religious 'tradition' has been given a new signification through a specific urban social practice, the 'cruising', very close to what we could call a *subcultural use of public space*.

The event is also a great visible expression of cultural hybridity among Bengali and other South Asian Muslims youth. The emergence of 'fun spaces' defined by their transgression and sinful potentialities<sup>15</sup> (Werbner, 2002) is indeed closely linked to a *bricolage* within a cosmopolitan space, where national, cultural, ethnic and 'traditional' religious references are re-appropriated, combined, entangled or in creative and innovative tension<sup>16</sup>.

To summarise this section, we can say first that religious education appears to be fundamental for the parents of the British Bangladeshis interviewed. The transmission operates at two distinct levels in the life cycle of the youth: tacitly through family socialisation and progressive embodiment; and more formally, through the teaching of the imam or *mehsab*. Sometimes described as boring, repetitive or 'pointless' the learning of Arabic is generally perceived as obligatory by the youth. However it is important to note that several older participants expressed a desire to return to the acquisition of religious knowledge, suggesting a greater awareness of a Muslim identity. This point was also raised by Jacobson (1998) in her study of young British Pakistanis:

While the Islamic education that is provided for children in mosques tends to be extremely traditional, with much emphasis for example on learning by rote, increasing numbers of young people appear to be committed to the notion that they should learn for themselves what it means to be a Muslim, rather than simply accept what they are told by their parents and the local imams. (1998:32)

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<sup>15</sup> Werbner points out that the logic of these 'fun spaces' could be defined by the relationship between 'sin' and 'fun': 'If to if to have fun is to sin, then being sinful is fun' (2002, 189).

<sup>16</sup> Of course, such ways of celebrating Eid are strongly criticised by the most religious youth or members of the *shomaj* (the political community of elders) including religious leaders. The extract below, which appeared just before an Eid in a magazine sold at the East London Mosque, shows the nature of these critiques:

'For many of the Muslim youth, Eid has become an opportunity to flaunt their hired cars up and down the streets of London, Bradford, Manchester...a display that even Top-Gear cannot match! Eid for the Police force in Britain means they have to be on high alert, as the hired cars start to spin their wheels, many lose control resulting in fatal accidents. A more recent phenomenon is the hired limousine with tinted mirrors (leaving you wondering what's happening inside!). [...] The pulling over of cars to chat up the opposite sex, the loud playing of music, the flying of national flags, and the desperate effort to walk in 'style' with those skin tight jeans makes you wonder whatever happened to modesty and humility! This is all done in Muslim communities with no respect for the elders. [...] The month of obedience and discipline cannot be followed by a day of disobedience and licentiousness. [...] In the excitement of the day, many Muslim youth fall into the traps of shaytan [Satan], their hearts inclines towards evil and their eyes are attracted towards sin.' (*Insight*, 1 (3), 2001).

According to Jacobson, this process can pave the way to an increasing role of the religious identity in many spheres of the individual's social life and can also result in 'a willingness to question not the basic tenets of Islam, but aspects of traditional interpretations of the religion' (1998:32).

In terms of practices, while there was a diversity of attitudes, we can say that none of the British Bangladeshis interviewed showed a strict, scriptural sense of religiosity. This could be seen as different from, for instance, the strong commitment of some young people involved in religious associations, such as the Young Muslim Organisation (YMO), linked to the East London Mosque, an institution which plays a very central role in the community landscape of Tower Hamlets (Eade and Garbin, 2006). Moreover, no girls said that they were wearing the Islamic headscarf (hijab)<sup>17</sup>, even if, for instance, they were strongly opposed to the ban of hijab in France (as were the boys). On this issue, the discourses of Fatima (14), Abdul (16) or Shiraj (14) can reflect the dominant feeling among the youth interviewed:

**(Question)** Have you heard of the ban of hijab in French schools?

**(Fatima)** *Yeah...I think that's not right...because I think...it's their religion, they should be allowed to wear what they want...*

**(Question)** Did you hear about the ban of hijab in French schools?

**(Abdul)** *No, but I heard about a girl that got kicked out of a school for wearing it...I think that is totally out of order...The people that kicked her out they have a religion to follow if they are religious, and she follows her religion...Why shouldn't she be allowed to wear it? She just doing what she thinks is right, her belief...*

**(Question)** Have you heard of the ban of hijab in French school?

**(Shiraj)** *Yes...*

**(Question)** What did you think about that?

**(Shiraj)** *It's just bad cos the people that want to wear headscarf should be allowed, cos it's religious...Basically it's like racism...*

Several interviewees said praying rarely and some did not pray at all, but almost all of them considered Ramadan special, i.e. a period when they are 'trying their best' to follow the obligations and moral codes of Islam. Finally, their description of the celebrations of Eid were interesting insofar as the experience of this festival appears to crystallise hybrid dynamics of cultural belongings through a specific use of public spaces which, for many religious leaders, contradicts the moral Islamic principles and challenges the production of a 'pure' and essential Muslim identity.

### ***Mixed-heritage youth and religious practices***

Within the mixed-heritage sample, the individuals who said having a religion tended to define it as 'Christianity'. There was, moreover, a diversity of attitudes towards the practice of religion.

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<sup>17</sup> However, one interviewee said she wears it when she goes to Arabic class and another stated that she wore it once when she went to Mecca (to perform the 'little pilgrimage' of *umrah*).

### *Absence of religious identification and the secularisation of religious traditions*

While among the British Bangladeshis sample we could always observe a 'minimal' form of religious practice even in the more 'secularised' individuals, we found that for several mixed-heritage participants the religious practice was completely non-existent.

For instance it was the case of John (17, Barbados/White English) who does not go to church anymore:

**(Question)** Do you have a religion?

**(John)** *No, I was never christened...When I was young, I used to go to church, but now, I don't go to church, I don't believe in what the Bible says...*

Similarly, religion appeared to play no role in the life of Jade (16, St Vincent/White English) and Charlotte (16, Jamaican/White English), who both referred to the negative dimension of conflict between religions:

**(Question)** Did you have a religious education?

**(Jade)** *No...*

**(Question)** It's not important, for you?

**(Jade)** *No...*

**(Question)** Why not?

**(Jade)** *Too much trouble between people from different religion, I just can't be bothered...*

**(Question)** Do you, or did you, have any religion education...?

**(Charlotte)** *I'm a C.of E., Church of England, I don't believe in none of it really...*

**(Question)** Religion is not important for you at all?

**(Charlotte)** *Not at all...Look at all the arguments and all the disputes that come over religion and no one actually knows if it's really true...*

Alex (15, Jamaican/White English), who said having no religion, goes to church only to accompany his dad and grand mother, on Mother's Day:

**(Question)** What is your religion...Have you got one?

**(Alex)** *No...*

**(Question)** Have you been christened?

**(Alex)** *I don't know...*

**(Question)** I guess religion is not important to you?

**(Alex)** *No...I don't deal with religion...*

**(Question)** Do you go to church?

**(Alex)** *On Mother's Day...with my dad and dad's mum we go to church...*

This lack of religious commitment is often linked to the absence of spiritual signification of traditional Christian events and celebration. This is, of course, an element of the dominant trend of the 'secularisation of Christianity' in contemporary Western societies.



We can examine here how several participants described their experience of ‘celebrating’ Christmas and Easter in this secularised way, for instance Jade (16) and Charlotte (16):

**(Question)** Do you still celebrate Christmas and Easter?

**(Jade)** *Yeah, Christmas we have a big Christmas dinner...in family, normal Christmas dinner, Turkey, vegetables...Easter for me is just chocolate!*

**(Question)** Do you celebrate Christmas and Easter?

**(Charlotte)** *Anything that celebrates me getting presents, I’m celebrating...Chocolate eggs, Christmas presents...If Jesus wants me to celebrate his birthday and get some gifts for it, I’m fine!*

**(Question)** Are your parents religious?

**(Charlotte)** *No! No way...Thank God for that!*

### *The different contexts of the individual experience of faith*

For several other mixed-heritage participants, however, religion and religious practices appear to play a more important role. It should also be said that the experiences of belief and faith, though relatively diverse, were more present in their discourses than in the discourses of the young British Bangladeshis interviewed.

Leo (11, Jamaican/English-Jamaican), for instance, does not go to church and said that he has not been baptised yet. This quote suggests, however, a link established by Leo between luck, destiny and religious belief:

**(Question)** What about religion?

**(Leo)** *Christian.*

**(Question)** Is it important for you?

**(Leo)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** Do you go to church?

**(Leo)** *No...I wanna go to church though...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Leo)** *Cos when I am older, something might happen. It might give me luck...for going to church...and learn about stuff...You could be more Christian...Cos I ain’t baptised yet...*

He also referred to the correct behaviour to adopt and the fact that he is eager to ‘stick to the rules’:

**(Leo)** *I really stick to the rules, even though I don’t go church...I keep the swearing outside, I don’t do anything, like when I’m in secondary school I’ll keep it to them...Jesus Christ and stuff like that...I really stick to the rules very strictly...*

Furthermore, Mark (11), who is going to church every Sunday with his (Jamaican) father, mentioned the religious notion of the Afterlife when asked why religion was important for him:

**(Question)** Is religion important for you? Are you Christian?

(Mark) *I'm Christian...*  
(Question) Do you go to church?  
(Mark) *Every Sunday...*  
(Question) With your dad?  
(Mark) *Yeah...*  
(Question) So is religion important for you?  
(Mark) *Yeah...*  
(Question) Why?  
(Mark) *Because when I die I want to go to Heaven...*  
(Question) Do you like going to church?  
(Mark) *Yeah...*

Nick (15, Jamaican/White English) says that he believes in God. He has a more personal, individual rather than socialised and collective relationship to religion. He stated that he does not go often to church, that it was 'not really on top of his agenda', but nonetheless he is praying a lot and regularly and also reading the Bible:

(Question) Do you have a religion?  
(Nick) *Christian...*  
(Question) Any religious education?  
(Nick) *Yeah, in school...*  
(Question) Do you go to church or...  
(Nick) *Not often...I would go if my nan asks me to go with her...*  
(Question) The mum of your father?  
(Nick) *Yeah.*  
(Question) Which church?  
(Nick) *Around the corner...I don't remember the name, but it's a hall...*  
(Question) Is it important for you to go to church or...  
(Nick) *Not really, cos as long you pray...I pray a lot before I go to sleep...but church isn't really on top of my agenda...*  
(Question) Do you read the Bible or...  
(Nick) *I read the Bible, I read the Bible, not all of it, some parts...*  
(Question) You are Protestant?  
(Nick) *Church of England...*

It appears that a key moment in his relationship to religion was the death of this father. Moreover, in the quote below he stresses the beneficial functions of religion in terms of confidence and faith:

(Question) Do you believe in God?  
(Nick) *Yeah, I believe in God...*  
(Question) Before, you were less religious or...  
(Nick) *I was less religious before my dad died...Now, I'm quite religious...*  
(Nick) *Because I believe religion is important...Because religion is something that puts faith in you...Religion can boost your confidence and explains certain things to you...*

Like Leo, the discourse of Chris (17, Jamaican/White English) also revealed the importance of a 'correct behaviour' linked to religious principles when he said that, with his lifestyle, he was 'staying clear from the bad things':

**(Question)** Do you have a religion?

**(Chris)** *I am Christian...*

**(Question)** Is religion important in your life?

**(Chris)** *Yeah...To be honest...I am not the best Christian...I haven't been to church as much...reading the Bible much and stuff...But as a Christian you're not supposed to do bad things...but with my lifestyle I am staying clear from that...*

Concerning his practices, he described how his participation in a steel band prevented him from attending church and going to the Bible study group regularly. The last section of the following quote is also interesting as he talked about the limit of his religious commitment. He justified his refusal to cross the boundary towards a more 'serious' religious involvement by a desire to 'experiment' and 'live his life':

**(Chris)** *Last year, I was going to church on Mondays, going to Bible study...and church on Sunday...but I had steel band...I had to teach steel band to young people and new people...Cos'I am one of the best in the band...*

**(Question)** So different priorities?

**(Chris)** *Yeah...even it's said that I shouldn't let anything coming between me and God...I see it now...I still go to church and read the Bible but...I am not gonna get baptised or anything...serious like that, cos I still have my life to live...I know it sounds bad, God forgive me, but I still wanna experiment...I mean, I don't mean as in bad stuff, but...*

Rachel (15, Jamaican/White English) and Rose (11, Jamaican/White English) are sisters and both of their parents are very religious. They are also very committed in their practices and religion plays an important role in their life. Rachel, for instance, talked about the fact she 'lives her life for God':

**(Question)** Did you have religious education?

**(Rachel)** *Yeah...I'm Christian...I go to church...*

**(Question)** Religion is important in your life?

**(Rachel)** *Yeah...I live my life for God...every day...So it's really important for me...*

**(Question)** Are your parents religious?

**(Rachel)** *Yes...*

**(Question)** Do you talk to them about religion?

**(Rachel)** *Sometimes, just a little bit...*

**(Question)** Your opinion of religion has it changed?

**(Rachel)** *My understanding of religion has grown; I live my life as changed...*

Rose, her youngest sister, mentioned the notion of spiritual 'help' and 'trust' linked to her religious faith:

(Question) Did you have a religious education?

(Rose) *Yeah...*

(Question) You went to a Church of England School?

(Rose) *Yes.*

(Question) Religion is important in your life?

(Rose) *Yeah.*

(Question) Why?

(Rose) *Because...I go to church every week...and...I don't know how to explain it really...It's important because you have someone to trust...when you don't think that there's anybody else with you...*

The parents of Helen (12) are also very religious. Helen talks about religion with them:

(Question) You have a religion?

(Helen) *I'm a Catholic...*

(Question) You go to church?

(Helen) *Yeah...We learn about Jesus and at school we learn about God and other religions like Buddhism...because Chinese people are Buddhist...*

(Question) Are your parents religious?

(Helen) *Yeah, we are all religious...*

(Question) And do you talk about religion with them?

(Helen) *Yeah, if I have homework or whenever I don't understand something in the Bible...*

(Question) You ask your mum?

(Helen) *Both...My mum knows a lot...*

Furthermore, the importance of religion in terms of (appropriate) rules of conduct and behaviour in the everyday life appeared again in the discourse when Helen stressed the need to 'follow the footsteps of God':

(Question) How important is religion to you?

(Helen) *Being a Catholic is kind of very important to me because you learn more about God and you want to follow his footsteps. Not to do this and not to do that...and not to follow this and not to follow that...*

(Question) Like guidelines?

(Helen) *It's not really strict, you can do what you want to do, but you still have to follow the footsteps of God...If your friend wants to smoke, tell him not to smoke...Cos it's not a really good thing...If your friend wants to bully another kid cos of their size, let them bully, but tell them it's not a really good thing...*

Finally, Jade (16, St Vincent/White English) who was in foster care in a Jamaican family, used to attend regularly black dominated churches, such as the Seventh Day Adventists. She said 'having always holding on to her faith'.

(Question) Have you got a religion?

(Nathalie) *Christian...*

(Question) Did you have a religious education when you were growing up?

*(Nathalie) My mum doesn't really believe in anything. My dad claims to be a Catholic, but he's not...*

**(Question)** Did you go to church and the Sunday school?

*(Nathalie) When I was with the Jamaican family, we used to go the Seventh Day Adventists...I've always believed in God, since I was little...my brother used to buy me little prayer books...I always, always held on to my faith through everything I went through...and...I don't know...not so much now...but I was going to church regularly...mainly black dominated churches...*

Interestingly, she added that she felt more 'comfortable' in black churches, where the services are livelier, more 'upbeat' as she put it:

*(Nathalie) I don't feel comfortable in a white church...I think it's a bit too boring...They're just singing 'a-lle-lu-ia...' [she's singing] and I'm like 'hein?...'.Whereas with black... 'whoa, yeah!' [clapping]...Even when they're talking about sensible stuff, it's just more upbeat and it's not they're doing anything wrong...cos it's still praising God...it's just in a different manner...*

The last part of her narrative exposed the more intimate nature of her relationship to religion. When she talked about her mother or the contexts in which she developed a 'strong bond with God' religion, and her strong faith in particular, were an important resource in difficult times. We can see also how, through her individual experience, several traditional Christian references and notions, such as the omniscience of God, forgiveness, guilt and redemption became more and more important:

**(Question)** Do you talk a lot with your parents about religion?

*(Nathalie) Not really...I try to influence my mum, cos she drinks and stuff...My mum's got now a problem with her liver and things like that...I'm trying now, more than ever, to push her...push her towards God, cos obviously when the time comes, I want her to go to Heaven... [Talking about God] He may be mad at me, but He'll forgive me...He'll understand, He'll see me, He'll know that I feel guilty or I feel bad...If I don't feel bad, then obviously He won't help me but if I feel guilty and apologise and He sees that I'm being truthful...I've had a strong bond with God because [...] I've been through lots of stuff...with my mum and dad, I've been in care...I've been suicidal, I've attempted suicide few times...I've been through so much stuff that I know there's a God...I know...I know He's with me now...*

To conclude this section, we can say that the social frameworks related to the experience of religion are quite different when we compare the two groups. While the *practice* and 'routine' of Islam, with its all-encompassing character, occupied a central role in the discourses of British Bangladeshis, the relationship to religion seemed more individualised, intimate and 'privatised' for most of the mixed-heritage participants who showed some form of religious commitment. However, the notions of religious 'guidelines' and 'correct' behaviour to be adopted in the sphere of the everyday life were also mentioned several times. Furthermore, the congregational aspect, which is important in the Islamic ethos, was significant as well for several mixed-parentage youth. While this aspect could not be explored in detail, it seems that the practice of religion is also articulated to ethnic and

cultural dynamics. Thus, it is usually with the black parent that the youth is introduced to the religious realm and one can also take the discourse of Jade about ‘black churches’ as a relevant example. In that sense, for the mixed-heritage participant, the religious experience is part of a broader negotiation of cultural positionality and ethnic subjectivities. Finally, the perception and construction of religion as a resource for the individual is dependant on the contexts of practice and belongings within a social and family trajectory. In sum, the relationship to religion and faith evolves and is never static.

### **3.5. NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY AND THE SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF ‘NEW ETHNICITIES’ AND HYBRID BELONGINGS**

#### ***Hierarchy of identities***

One of the central questions here was to see how our young participants would rank different ‘categories’ of identity and belongings to define themselves. To do so, they were first shown a set of cards labelled with a wide range of possible identifications.

#### ***British Bangladeshi youth***

The British Bangladeshi youth had the choice between the following categories of identification during the card task:

EUROPEAN – BRITISH – ENGLISH – LONDONER – FROM CAMDEN – BANGLADESHI – BENGALI – ASIAN – MUSLIM – SYLHETI – MAULVI BAZAR – FROM NOAKHALI

One of the most notable results of this self-identification ranking exercise was the central place occupied by ethnic and, above all, religious identities. Indeed, a total of eight participants (four boys and four girls) ranked the category ‘Muslim’ on top of the list of possible options of identity (see table 1). Moreover, for three participants (two boys and one girl) the first choice was the category ‘Bangladeshi’ or ‘Bengali’, and one female interviewee chose to rank first both Bengali and Muslim identities.

While ‘British’ was ranked several times within the four first possible options, ‘English’ appeared only once and at the fifth position (Noor, 16). The identity ‘Asian’ appeared eight times within the four first possible options and the category ‘London’, as well as the local identity (‘from Camden’) were rarely chosen. Finally, another notable element in this exercise is the fact that the ‘European’ category was never ranked.

Table 1 - Cards ranking task, British Bangladeshi youth

Name	Gender	Age	Cards Ranking
Rupna	Female	13	<b>1 Muslim, 2 Bengali/Bangladeshi, 3 Asian, 4 British</b>
Basima	Female	16	<b>1 Bengali, 2 Muslim</b>
Muna	Female	14	<b>1 Muslim, 2 Bengali/Bangladeshi, 3 Asian</b>
Munira	Female	11	<b>1 Muslim, 2 Bangladeshi, 3 British, 4 Sylheti</b>
Pari	Female	15	<b>1 Muslim, 2 British, 3 Bangladeshi</b>
Fatima	Female	14	<b>1 Bengali, 2 Muslim, 3 Asian, 4 British</b>
Shiraj	Male	14	<b>1 Bangladeshi, 2 Muslim, 3 Asian, 4 Bengali, 5 British, 6 Londoner, 7 Camden</b>
Ahmed	Male	13	<b>1 Muslim, 2 Bengali, 3 British, 4 Asian, 5 Camden</b>
Noor	Male	16	<b>1 Muslim, 2 Sylheti, 3 Bangladeshi/Bengali, 4 Asian, 5 English</b>
Abdul	Male	16	<b>1 Muslim, 2 Asian, 3 Bengali, 4 Sylheti, 5 London, 6 Camden</b>
Karim	Male	14	<b>1 Bangladeshi, 2 Muslim, 3 Sylheti, 4 Camden</b>
Ayub	Male	12	<b>1 Muslim, 2 Bengali/Bangladeshi, 3 London/Camden</b>

*- The importance of religious and ethnic identities*

The Muslim identity was, therefore, often prioritised in the ranking task and more generally in the discussion about issues of belonging. The following short excerpts from the interviews with Rupna (13), Ayub (12) and Ahmed (13) illustrate how a Muslim identity was prioritised:

**(Rupna)** [When asked to rank the cards] *Muslim...The first thing I'd say is Muslim, that'd come to my mind...Then I'd probably say Bangladeshi, then Asian cos Bangladesh is in Asia...I'd put these two together co's it's kind of the same meaning to me ['Bangladeshi' and 'Bengali' cards]...I think it's the same thing...*

**(Question)** So...if you ranked those cards, the first one would be 'Muslim'?

**(Rupna)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Rupna)** *Cos I am this and this [showing the other cards], but I am mostly this [Muslim]...*

**(Ayub)** *The most important identity is Muslim...then Bengali and Bangladeshi, number 2 and then Londoner and Camden...*

**(Question)** Why Muslim first?

**(Ayub)** *That's what matters the most, Islam...*

**(Question)** What is your ranking?

**(Ahmed)** *The most important card would be...It's a hard one...I think it's most important to be Muslim...Then Bengali, then British then Asian, then from Camden...*

**(Question)** Why Muslim first?

**(Ahmed)** *Cos that makes me who I am, that's the most important thing I look up to...*

Let us examine how the young British Bangladeshi participants explained their choices when prioritising the Muslim identity. For Muna (14), ranking the category 'Muslim' first was an 'obvious' choice to make and the Bengali/Bangladeshi identities were ranked just after - she said being 'proud' of Bangladesh:

**(Question)** So your first choice is Muslim, then Bengali, Bangladeshi, finally Asian. Why this order of importance?

**(Muna)** *Cos Muslim, obviously, to me religion is more important than where I'm from...And obviously Bangladesh, that's where I'm from, I'm proud of it, that's what I am....And then Asian is for other people...*

For Pari (15), who described herself as 'Muslim British Bangladeshi', religion 'comes first'. The use of such expressions as 'it has to be' or 'Muslim should be the first thing', suggests an interiorised moral requirement to place religion in a central position in terms of identification but also in relation to the 'presentation of self'. Moreover, the fact that she was brought up in Britain was the reason why she felt being 'more British than Bangladeshi':

**(Question)** What do you say when someone asks you where do you come from?

**(Pari)** *Bangladesh... I'm a Muslim British Bangladeshi...*

**(Question)** So first Muslim, 2 British, 3 Bangladeshi...Why this order?

**(Pari)** *Cos my religion comes first and in this country, obviously I'm a British Bangladeshi...Ethnicity, I'm a British Bangladeshi...Cos I've been brought up in this country, I'm more British than I'm Bangladeshi...Muslim is the most important to me...it has to be...In a Muslim person's life, being Muslim should be the first thing, it should come first...*

Munira, the youngest of the sample (11 years old), also ranked the religious identity in the first position. Beside the fact that it connects identity to the realms of practice (the fast) and scriptures (the Koran), her discourse was interesting because it underlined the universal aspect of Islam. As she explained, 'it doesn't matter what country you're from':

**(Question)** So you ranked: 1 Muslim, 2 Bangladeshi, 3 British, 4 Sylheti...Why Muslim first?

**(Munira)** *Cos I am Muslim and I fast and I believe in the Koran...*

**(Question)** Being Muslim is more important than being Bangladeshi?

**(Munira)** *Yeah...Because it doesn't matter what country you're from...because you're still that... you are Muslim and...from Asia...*

**(Question)** Lots of people come from different countries, but they're still...

**(Munira)** *Muslim...*

**(Question)** Then Bangladeshi, why?

**(Munira)** *So that people know that I am Bangladeshi...Muslim that would describe me because I am a Muslim, but from which country, that would be Bangladeshi...*

Noor (16) emphasised his Muslim 'genealogy' and upbringing when talking about this religious identity. Moreover, he was keen to stress his Sylheti origins in a very positive way:

**(Question)** Which cards would you use to describe yourself?

**(Noor)** *Bengali, Muslim, Asian, Sylheti...English*

**(Question)** Pick them in order of importance...

**(Noor)** *1-Muslim, 2-Sylheti, 3-Bangladeshi/Bengali, 4-Asian, 5-English...*

**(Question)** Why Muslim first?

**(Noor)** *People are Muslim, cos it's important...*



**(Question)** Why?

**(Noor)** Basically because my parents are Muslim and I was brought up as a Muslim...

**(Question)** Then Sylheti?

**(Noor)** That's my home country and that's where my parents live and everything...It shows what part of Bangladesh I'm from, and how Sylheti people are and...mainly Sylheti people are successful and everything...It gives a good view of Bengali...

**(Question)** And then Bengali number 3, why is that?

**(Noor)** Cos I'm Bengali and my parents are Bengali...

**(Question)** How come Sylheti first and then Bengali?

**(Noor)** Cos...It's pretty much the same thing, really...and they're both important to me...

When Bangladeshi and/or Bangladeshi categories were ranked first, the family background and the notion of 'origin' were often mentioned. That was the case of Fatima (14) and Shiraj (14) for example:

**(Question)** Why Bengali first?

**(Fatima)** Because that's my background, that's where I'm originally from...

**(Question)** Muslim?

**(Fatima)** Because that's my religion...

**(Question)** Asian?

**(Fatima)** Because I'm Asian...it's important to me...

**(Shiraj)** First is Bangladeshi.

**(Question)** Then... 2-Muslim, then 3-Asian, 4-Bengali, 5-British, 6-Londoner and 7-from Camden...Why Bangladeshi number 1?

**(Shiraj)** Cos my whole family is basically from there and I'm used to the country....

**(Question)** Why number 2 Muslim?

**(Shiraj)** Cos I am proud of being a Muslim...I respect my religion...

**(Question)** Asian, number 3?

**(Shiraj)** Cos I'm from Asia...

**(Question)** Why Bengali after Asian?

In sum, while the Muslim identity appeared to be very important for the young participants, none of them were clearly rejecting other forms of identification. In that sense, our research provides an interesting contrast with earlier studies conducted in Tower Hamlets which show that the prioritisation of an Islamic identity often involves, in the discourse of youth and young adults, an opposition between, on the one hand, a 'backward', syncretic or 'impure' Bengali (or Sylheti) 'culture' and, on the other end, a positive, modern and universal Muslim identity (Garbin, 2004; Gardner and Shukur, 1995).

Moreover, another important element of this part of our research is the existence of discourses suggesting a strong religious identification – which is sometimes perceived as 'obvious' and therefore 'naturalised' - for individuals yet not showing a significant and strict sense of religiosity through regular practices. Even if it is not explicitly revealed by the results of the card task, the 'internalisation' of an Islamic habitus through education may have a strategic role to play here. Indeed, 'learning to be Bengali/Bangladeshi' and 'learning to be Muslim' differ insofar as the religious education is not only tacitly transmitted but also

formalised. This involves the existence and development of relations between the domestic sphere and Islamic institutions such as the mosque or the Koranic school, which reinforces the awareness of a 'legitimate' and 'normalised' religious identity while formalising the process of disciplining the body and mind.

The symbolic dimension of the Islamic belonging could also be an important factor explaining the centrality of the religious identity. The *umma*, the worldwide community of believers, is a powerful vector of identification as it relates to the perception and the ritual, social and political experience of the global territory of Islam. The construction of an 'imagined community' of Muslims, challenging national and ethnic boundaries thus relies on a symbolic global identity but also on the transnational flow of ideas, images and information. However, for the British Bangladeshi interviewed one could not observe a real engagement with a 'Muslim public sphere' (Mandaville, 2001) or a 'globalised virtual Islam' (Roy, 2002) as none reported reading Islamic newspaper or consulting religious websites, for instance. Only in few cases, the global dimension of an Islamic 'community of suffering', to borrow P. Werbner's (2002) expression, appeared in the discourses, as shown in the quotes below:

**(Question)** Are you concerned about the Muslim community around the world?

**(Munira)** *Yes...Cos there's a lot of homeless people and orphans...cos their parents got killed or taken away...they don't have food...cos they're not as lucky as we are cos we have everything we need and not them...*

**(Abdul)** *I don't really think about it that much [the umma], but if I do think about it, I feel bad...Cos conflicts and wars...Many Muslims are dying...innocent Muslims are dying for no reasons...Hundred and thousands of Muslims are dying in other countries, Palestine and that...When one British person dies in London, they put it all over the papers. In London, the more religious you get...if you put a hat on your head you get seen by the police in a different perspective, like you're a terrorist or something...*

Alongside the Islamic identity, the Bengali ethnicity and/or the Bangladeshi identity were important for the youth, as mentioned already. When asked whether they were 'proud' of being Bangladeshi, the answers were always positive and many among the 11 participants who have been to Bangladesh enjoyed the experience, such as Rupna (13) or Karim (14):

**(Question)** Have you been to Bangladesh?

**(Rupna)** *Yeah, once.*

**(Question)** Did you like it there?

**(Rupna)** *Yeah I liked it there...People were very friendly and so on... I liked it there, cos most of the people there are family, so cousins and so on... The people are really nice...Some people are...sad looking and...cos some people are really poor...They looked to you and they think that we have the perfect life but if you think about it we're not exactly that perfect...*

**(Question)** Is Bangladesh important for you?

*(Rupna) Yes it is because I've been...I was born there...I don't know...And my mum's from there as well...She was brought and she came here when she was kind of old...Not that old, but she kind of had her all childhood there.*

**(Question)** Are you proud of Bangladesh? Of being Bangladeshi?

*(Rupna) Yes I am. Yeah I probably am. I haven't thought of it that way, so...*

**(Question)** Have you been to Bangladesh?

*(Karim) Yeah, once...when I was 7...*

**(Question)** Did you like it over there...?

*(Karim) Yeah, I met my mum's family which I haven't met before...so it was nice...*

**(Question)** How did you feel there?

*(Karim) Good...It was interesting...*

It was also the case for Basima (16), who enjoyed the authenticity of 'the culture', in her own words 'the proper traditional stuff':

**(Question)** Do you feel proud about Bangladesh?

*(Basima) Yeah.*

**(Question)** Why? How many times have you been back home?

*(Basima) Three times*

**Question)** Why do you feel proud?

*(Basima) I don't know, because it's my own country and I feel proud towards it...*

**(Question)** Is it something that you've been taught or you fell in love there?

*(Basima) I've been taught, but I went to Bangladesh and I really enjoyed it...*

**(Question)** What did you like about it?

*(Basima) Everything...Which is your culture which you don't see much in this country...In Bangladesh, it's proper traditional stuff you see...*

Several participants expressed more contrasted views. It was the case for Ahmed who felt that living there was 'uncomfortable'. He rejected the idea of a permanent stay because of the poor educational system and the hard living conditions:

**(Question)** Have you ever been to Bangladesh?

*(Ahmed) Yeah, once...*

**(Question)** Did you like it?

*(Ahmed) Some ways, yes...*

*(Ahmed) I saw my relatives and I learned more things and a good experience...But otherwise living there was uncomfortable...*

**(Question)** How did you feel?

*(Ahmed) I felt sorry for the people that live there...*

**(Question)** How did people perceive you there?

*(Ahmed) They thought I was rich...I thought when I went there that my luggage would get robbed...I've got different clothes to them, that they're not used to...They think England is the best place to go to...Every Bangladesh person want to come to England...*

**(Question)** Would you live in Bangladesh?

*(Ahmed) No.*

**(Question)** Why not?

*(Ahmed) Life would be a lot harder, and I wouldn't have been able to cope and...I wouldn't get as good education as I do here...*

In the last part of the quote, Ahmed described what he thought were the perceptions of people in Bangladesh about British Bangladeshis (called 'Londonis') and their 'fascination' for England. This element was present in the discourse of many participants. This was the case for Ayub (12) who felt 'careless' in Bangladesh and who also said he would be bored if he stayed permanently there - as his friends are in the UK:

**(Question)** Are you proud to be Bangladeshi?

*(Ayub) Yeah...Because it's my background...My family live there...I go every year...not every year...last year I didn't, two years ago I went...*

**(Question)** During the summer?

*(Ayub) Yeah...*

**(Question)** How do you feel there?

*(Ayub) Careless...There, everything is cheap...Here you go on a bus, it's 20p there, it's 10 takas...*

**(Question)** How do people perceive you?

*(Ayub) Everyone looks up to me...Speaking English...I'm a Londoni!*

**(Question)** Would you like to live in Bangladesh?

*(Ayub) Yeah...*

**(Question)** Really? Permanently?

*(Ayub) Not permanently...a year or two...*

**(Question)** Why not for ever?

*(Ayub) I'd be bored...Here I know everyone, my friends are here...*

Pari (15) expressed her preference for the rural environment before talking about what she described as the 'jealousy' and 'back-chatting' of Bangladeshi people when she stayed there:

**(Question)** Where did you stay there?

*(Pari) We don't stay in one place because we haven't got a dad, so...Our house and stuff are taken over by step-sisters and stuff, so...They tell us that we can stay, but we don't feel like it's our own...So we stay in my mum's place and it's a really poor area...or we stay in Dhaka ... We rent out a flat and stuff, and we stay there...*

**(Question)** Do you like the village though?

*(Pari) I like the village, because everyone's there, you can go out whenever you feel like, you can go whenever you want, but in Dhaka, you're in a penthouse, you can't even go out...Because of the fact that there's so much traffic and you don't know anything outside of the house...*

**(Question)** How do people see you?

*(Pari) I don't know what they think...But I know that in front of our faces they're all like 'we love you...we missed you so much!' and behind our back their back-chatting, 'look at them, they come from a different country'...They're jealous...In our culture, in any culture, the gossip, they just love gossiping and they've got nothing better to talk about than us, because we're the 'hot topic' while we're there...*

Finally, Abdul (16), who felt proud to be Bangladeshi, said that since he was born in London, Bangladesh 'is not for him'. He justified his dislike (or even 'disgust') of Bangladesh by referring to the 'filthiness' of streets, the political disorders and the widespread corruption:

**(Question)** Do you feel proud to be Bangladeshi?

**(Abdul)** *Yeah, because everyone supports each other and I was born to be Bangladeshi, my parents are Bangladeshi, I was born as a Bengali, a Bangladeshi...*

**(Question)** Have you ever been to Bangladesh?

**(Abdul)** *Twice. When I was a baby and when I was 10 years old...*

**(Question)** Do you like Bangladesh?

**(Abdul)** *No. Cos it's disgusting...The streets are filthy and the government is messed up...You can murder someone and bribe the police...When you go to the airport and if they see that you're rich they will tell you 'give us money and we'll let you go'...*

**(Question)** How people look at you in Bangladesh?

**(Abdul)** *Everyone looked at us like 'look they're rich, they've got lots of money, let's do this to them, let's do that'...That's why I got fed up...*

**(Question)** Would you live in Bangladesh?

**(Abdul)** *No. Because I feel that... it's not for me...I was born in London...*

**(Question)** Are you proud to be Bangladeshi though?

**(Noor)** *Yeah...Because it's important and Bangladeshi is something that everyone should be proud of...*

The views about Bangladesh were often mixed as some young people enjoyed their stay 'back home' while others complained about the corruption or the political situation, like Abdul, but also, and more simply, about the heat, the mosquitoes or the 'boredom' of village life, for instance. Yet for all the young people interviewed the Bangladeshi identity seemed to be very important.

#### *- British and English identities*

As regards the meaning of British and English identities for our participants, there was also a diversity of responses. For Rupna (13) being British did 'not mean anything':

**(Question)** What about British? Do you feel British? Are you proud to be British? What does it mean for you?

**(Rupna)** *Being British doesn't really...I don't know...What do you mean?*

**(Question)** You are British Bangladeshi...

**(Rupna)** *It doesn't really mean anything...It doesn't affect me...Nobody asks me 'are you British?'*

Abdul (16) said he was proud to be British and explained why:

**(Question)** Do you feel proud to be British?

**(Abdul)** *Very proud. I have a shelter, a place to live, I have a nice family...The government is good...*

Sometimes Britain was seen in a positive light when a comparison was drawn with Bangladesh. It was the case of Pari (15) and Shiraj (14):

**(Question)** Do you feel proud about Britain?

**(Pari)** *Depending what way...It's cleaner than in Bangladesh, yes...*

**(Question)** Do you feel proud to be British?

**(Shiraj)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Shiraj)** *Cos say if you go to Bangladesh, you won't have the good technology, you won't have all the money, all the jobs and all this. When you come here, you have all this luck for you...*

Ahmed also compared Britain and Bangladesh, in terms of wealth. But he first mentioned racism to explain why 'in some ways' he was not proud about Britain:

**(Question)** Are you proud about Britain?

**(Ahmed)** *Yeah. But in some ways I'm not because of racism...*

**(Question)** Why are you proud then?

**(Ahmed)** *Some places are bad...Some places are nice and good...And the people here, some are bad and some are good...*

**(Question)** Are you proud about Bangladesh?

**(Ahmed)** *Yeah...They're quite...like a cheap country...But if they were as rich as London, I think they could fix it up proper...*

**(Question)** Would that make you more proud?

**(Ahmed)** *Yeah...*

Moreover, we can say that the degree of identification with Englishness was very low. This emerged more particularly when we asked the participants about the difference between 'being British' and 'being English' or between 'British culture' and 'English culture'. Indeed, the English category (ethnicity or 'culture') was often associated with whiteness. For instance Ahmed (13) felt that 'English culture is mostly white people'. He talked about a more inclusive and multicultural sense of Britishness:

**(Question)** What is the difference between English culture and British culture?

**(Ahmed)** *I don't know...English culture is less Asian people and British there's more Asian and more black people...English culture is mostly white people...*

**(Question)** And the difference between being British and being English?

**(Ahmed)** *English, there's like mostly white people, less of different cultures...But if you're British it's multicultural...*

Muna's discourse was very similar:

**(Muna)** *I think English culture is just for white people...British culture is for...worldwide...everyone...*

**(Question)** Do you think it's possible for a Bengali person to be English?

**(Muna)** *No...It's possible for Bengali people to be British, but not English...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Muna)** *Cos you're Bengali! Because you're not white!*

Abdul (16) referred to the idea of formal citizenship to differentiate between English and British:

**(Question)** Do you think there are differences between English and British?

**(Abdul)** *British, you're a citizen, you've got passport, you have rights...English you're born in London...I can't explain...You're white...you're born from an English family, your parents are white...British you can be black, born in London, with a passport...*

*- Biculturalism*

Finally, we asked the British Bangladeshi participants if they felt belonging 'between two cultures'. None of the responses suggested a 'crisis of identity'; instead their discourses often implied an awareness of a *combination* of both identities instead of a negative 'in-betweenness'. As the quotes below show, this biculturalism was expressed in many different ways. Here, it is also interesting to see how the markers and boundaries of Britishness and Bengali/Bangladeshi lifestyle and identity were constructed by the young people:

**(Question)** Do you think you are between cultures? Bangladeshi culture and British culture?

**(Basima)** *Yeah, kind of...*

**(Question)** How?

**(Basima)** *I don't know...British culture, I always go to cinema, with my friends and stuff...*

**(Question)** What is the Bangladeshi culture side of you?

**(Basima)** *I like to stay home with my parents, I like to cook and stuff...British culture, usually when they're 18, they move out and stuff and they put their parents in nursing homes...Whereas in our culture we wouldn't do that to older persons, like grand parents we would never put them in a nursing home...*

**(Question)** Do you view yourself as been between two or more cultures? Bangladeshi culture and British culture?

**(Muna)** *Yeah...Bengali culture is inside me, but English culture is just the way I talk and the way I dress.*

**(Question)** Do you feel you are between two cultures? Part of Bangladeshi culture and British culture?

**(Munira)** *Yeah...Because I live in England and I know most of the things that go around...and all the games they sort of play and the rules...And Bangladesh, sort of...Cos I don't know to play all the games...And I can speak both country languages...*

**(Question)** Do you think you are between two different cultures?

**(Karim)** *Yeah...cos my parents are from Bangladesh and I was born in England...*

**(Question)** Do you think you're between two cultures?

**(Ayub)** *Yes, because I've lived in England all my life...and I'm from Bangladesh...*

(Question) Do you think you are between two different cultures?

(Noor) Yeah, cos being brought up in England...and being a Bengali, yes, you do get two different cultures...But I feel more Bengali than...

(Question) British...

(Noor) Yeah.

(Question) How come?

(Noor) Cos my home country is Bangladesh, you got to relate to that and everything...My parents are Bengali, they brought me up and everything...

(Question) It's the values?

(Noor) Yeah...

### *Mixed-heritage youth*

The mixed-heritage youth had the choice between the following categories of identification during the card task:

EUROPEAN – BRITISH – ENGLISH – LONDONER – FROM LOCAL AREA – BLACK – WHITE – BLACK BRITISH – MIXED-RACE – MIXED-HERITAGE – AFRICAN – CARIBBEAN – CHRISTIAN – WEST INDIAN – JAMAICAN

As shown by table 2, the category 'mixed-race' was ranked first by six participants and second by three participants. The religious identity ('Christian') was ranked at the first position by four participants and at the second position by one participant. Another interesting result of this card task was the fact that several young people were keen to rank a combination of categories in addition to the category 'mixed-race', for example 'white and black', 'black and white' or 'white and Caribbean'. Furthermore, as it was the case with the British Bangladesh sample, the 'European' category was never ranked within the six first options.

Table 2 - Cards ranking task, mixed-heritage youth

Name	Gender	Age	Cards Ranking
Leo	Male	11	<b>1 Black, 2 Mixed-race, 3 Caribbean, 4 Brixton</b>
Mark	Male	11	<b>1 Mixed-race, 2 Brixton, 3 Caribbean, 4 English, 5 Black British</b>
Nick	Male	15	<b>1 Mixed-race, 2 Christian, 3 British, 4 Kennington, 5 Black and White</b>
Alex	Male	15	<b>1 English, 2 British, 3 Mixed-race, 4 White and Black, 5 Jamaican, 6 London</b>
John	Male	17	<b>1 Mixed-race, 2 English, 3 Caribbean</b>
Chris	Male	17	<b>1 Mixed-race, 2 Jamaican, 3 British and English</b>
Charlotte	Female	16	<b>1 Mixed-race, 2 London, 3 English</b>
Rachel	Female	15	<b>1 Christian, 2 English, 3 White and Caribbean</b>
Rose	Female	11	<b>1 Christian, 2 Mixed-race, 3 English</b>
Helen	Female	12	<b>1 Christian, 2 African, 3 Black, 4 Mixed-race</b>
Nathalie	Female	17	<b>1 Christian, 2 Mixed-race, 3 White and Black, 4 British and English, 5 London</b>
Jade	Female	16	<b>1 Mixed-race</b>



It is not our objective here to discuss the issue of terminology i.e. the implications of the use of such expressions as 'mixed-race', 'mixed-heritage', 'mixed parentage', etc, even if we acknowledge the strategic importance of the politics of naming in relation to the ways in which 'mixedness' has been socially/politically perceived and constructed over the years (Ali, 2003; Parker and Song, 2001; Tizard and Phoenix, 1993). In the set of cards we only included the categories 'mixed-race' and 'mixed-heritage'. While we are mainly using the latter expression in this report, all the interviewees chose to describe themselves using the expression 'mixed-race' and were satisfied and comfortable with it - one participant, Helen (12), did not understand the term 'mixed-heritage'.

Let us look now at how the respondents justified their choice when it came to the ranking of the cards, first with the prioritisation of the 'mixed-race' category.

*- Being 'mixed-race'*

We can start with Jade (16, St Vincent/White English) who chose to rank only the category 'mixed-race', explaining that she was neither 'full black' nor 'full white':

**(Question)** Which of the cards would you rank first?

**(Jade)** *Mixed race...*

**(Question)** What about Caribbean?

**(Jade)** *No, I don't know, cos I'm not full Caribbean...*

**(Question)** European?

**(Jade)** *No...Like if somebody asked me 'what I was' sort of thing, I'd just say mixed-race, I just wouldn't say I'm anything else...*

**(Question)** White?

**(Jade)** *No...*

**(Question)** Black?

**(Jade)** *No...Cos I'm not full white and I'm not full black...I've never used either...Cos...if I say I'm white, then it's like...if I was speaking to a black and say 'I'm white', 'yeah but you got black in you', sort of thing...*

**(Question)** British?

**(Jade)** *No...*

**(Question)** Londoner?

**(Jade)** *No...*

**(Question)** English?

**(Jade)** *If someone said to me, yeah I'd just say I'm English, but I don't think being English is an important part in me...*

Nathalie (17, mixed African-White/White Scottish), talked about how the term 'mixed-race' was the most appropriate one to describe her:

**(Question)** The mixed-race identity?

**(Nathalie)** *I think is probably the most important one out of all them...I don't like being called other names, I find other names offensive...It depends on how it's worded...Some people say it, they don't mean to be offensive, but other times it can be [...]*

She elaborated more on her choice:

*(Nathalie) I chose mixed-race, because that's where I'm from...If you say 'what mixed-races are you?', then it's Ghanaian, it's Finnish, it's Scottish...and I was born here. So that's the basis of me...That's like the foundation...*

John (17, Barbados/White English), had a simple explanation for his choice:

**(Question)** Why did you choose 'mixed-race'?

**(John)** *It's what I am, it's who I am...*

**(Question)** What comes first in the ranking?

**(John)** *Mixed-race...Because that's the one that describes me the best...*

For Chris (17, Jamaican/White English) 'mixed-race' was 'what defines him', before the other identities, which, however, were still important. The issue of authenticity also emerged when he mentioned the influence of a Trinidadian cultural heritage without 'real blood link' with Trinidad and Tobago:

*(Chris) So first mixed-race, then Jamaican and English, even maybe British here as well cos it's similar. Christian, mixed-heritage, black and white even...from local area, and then West Indian, Caribbean and Trinidadian...*

**(Question)** Why mixed-race first?

*(Chris) Cos at the end of the day, if someone saw me, they'd say I am a mixed-race person, that's what defines me...Cos thinking about it, everything is here...mixed-race...Christian is my religion, is not part of a mixed-race person... West Indian, Caribbean and Trinidadian...at the bottom...I don't have actually real blood link to that [Trinidad], but any link I have is my steel [band], so I do appreciate that...The food, the culture that they have or the things they do...I am glad I have knowledge of Trinidad and Tobago...*

Mark (11, Jamaican/Scottish) justified his choice of putting the mixed-race identity on top of the list by referring to the fact that he eats 'black food' with his dad and 'white food' with his mum, suggesting the importance of family socialisation in the construction of a *mixed belonging* ('I feel both'):

**(Question)** First is mixed-race?

**(Mark)** *Yeah...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Mark)** *Cos when I'm with my dad, I eat all the black food...And when I'm with my mum, I eat white food...So I feel both...*

For Charlotte (16, Jamaican/White English) using the term 'mixed-race' was the 'easiest way' to describe her identity. It is also interesting to see, how, in the quote below, she explained

why she did not feel, black, white or European, for instance, before saying that 'colour' or origin did not matter to her:

**(Question)** Which cards would you choose?

**(Charlotte)** *I would be a mix between Mixed Race, Londoner and English...That's it...*

**(Question)** What about.... [the other cards] ?

**(Charlotte)** *Well, I'm not white...I'm not European...*

**(Question)** Why not?

**(Charlotte)** *I am, cos England is part of Europe innit?...But we still got our Pound so I'm not European. I didn't get Euros, so I'm not European! Christian, I'm definitely not Christian...and I'm not black because I'm mixed-race...I've got white in me, you know...West Indian...I ain't from West India...From Norwood, I wouldn't want anyone to know that really...It's something that I don't like people knowing...black British, I'm not black...Caribbean, I've never been to the Caribbean...I guess I could use British, but I guess English is easier to use...Because England is the actual place I'm from, not from Ireland or nothing...*

**(Charlotte)** *Londoner, I'm a Londoner [...] because I've lived in few places in London, so...[...] If I just had to describe myself, I'd say I'm Charlotte, I'm not...It doesn't matter where I'm from or...what colour I am...I'm just me...*

**(Question)** Do you feel...?

**(Charlotte)** *Mixed-race, really...Cos I'm mixed black and I'm mixed white, so that's two races...It's the easiest way to say it, isn't it?*

#### *- Religious identity*

Moreover and as said earlier, religion came up as an important category for the youth during the card task. Helen (12, Eurasian/British Ghanaian) for example, 'felt strongly' about the black identity and her African 'roots' but choose to rank the card 'Christian' first because, as she put it, 'faith comes before anything else':

**(Question)** What is the most important card for you?

**(Helen)** *Christian...cos your faith comes before anything else...Of course, your family and things, but your belief makes you stronger...*

**(Question)** Next one?

**(Helen)** *African...I feel strongly about Africa...My roots...*

**(Question)** Your roots?

**(Helen)** *Where my parents are from...*

**(Question)** Then?

**(Helen)** *Black, I feel strongly about that...*

**(Question)** Then?

**(Helen)** *Mixed race, cos that's who I am...*

For Rose (11, Jamaican/White English), one the youngest interviewees of the sample, being Christian was also the most important identity:

**(Rose)** *So first Christian, second mixed-heritage, then English...*

**(Question)** Why?

*(Rose) Christian is the most important cos I'm Christian, so...And it's one of the main things in my life...Mixed-heritage, because my parents come from different places, so that's what I am...And then English because you can really tell I'm English, anyway so...*

**(Question)** Would you use mixed-heritage then... or mixed-race?

*(Rose) I'd say mixed-race*

Similarly, in the case of Rachel (15, Jamaican/White English) being a Christian was described as a 'top priority' in her life:

*(Rachel) I would say that I was white-Caribbean and Christian...and English I guess...*

**(Question)** How important are each of these cards?

*(Rachel) If someone asks me where I'm from, I would say English...I wouldn't say white-Caribbean, so those two would be the most important, English and Christian...*

**(Question)** How would you rank them?

*(Rachel) Christian, English and then white-Caribbean [combining the two cards]*

**(Question)** Why Christian first?

*(Rachel) Because I feel like being a Christian shapes my life...It's like top priority in my life...The reason why I put white-Caribbean at the bottom is because I don't think that is important to me...My background is obviously partly that, but it's not important in my life...*

*- 'Mixed-race' and relationship with black identity*

Many mixed-heritage youth (black/white background) interviewed in Tizard and Phoenix's (1993) research reported being often regarded as black. In our study we did not ask specifically the participants if they were considered as black but rather if, according to them, their identity or ethnicity has ever been 'mistaken'. As shown by some quotes below, there was a diversity of answers. Mark (11, Jamaican/Scottish background) for instance said that he has been mistaken for being Caribbean, and he did not have a problem with this:

**(Question)** Do people mistake your identity sometimes?

*(Mark) Yeah...they think I'm Caribbean...*

**(Question)** How do you react?

*(Mark) I say, I'm not Caribbean, my mum's white...*

**(Question)** Are you angry when they say that?

*(Mark) No.*

**(Question)** You don't care...

*(Mark) Yeah...*

For Charlotte (16, Jamaican/White English) it was different as she has never been 'called black':

**(Question)** Do people mistake your identity?

*(Charlotte) Yeah, I get a lot of people thinking I'm Spanish, I don't know why...*

**(Question)** Or Asian or...?

*(Charlotte) Not Asian...I've never been called Asian, I've never been called black...Spanish, that's all about it...*

Chris (17, Jamaican/White English), who said that 'most people know he is mixed-race', was however reflecting on the ambiguity of the identification through the skin colour when talking about him and also about two mixed-race friends:

*(Chris) Most people know that I am mixed-race...Some people do think I'm black...I know a guy with my colour of skin, which is very light, and his dad is black, like my dad, and his mum's black as well...But then again, my two friends, a lot of people think they're Asian, which is weird. Like, they do look Asian, but then again, they don't...I probably say that because I know them...*

Nathalie (17, mixed African-White/White Scottish) presented the range of identities (including white and 'light skin Jamaican') she has been associated with before saying how she was happy with her 'mixedness', a subject of people's admiration:

**(Question)** Do people mistake you for something else?

*(Nathalie) Yes...Hungarian, Spanish, I've been Portuguese...some people ask me if I'm just a light skin Jamaican...Some thought I was white...*

**(Question)** Do you mind that?

*(Nathalie) I laugh at it, I just think it's funny...*

**(Question)** Are you happy with who you are?

*(Nathalie) Yeah...and I like saying 'I'm Ghanaian, Finnish and Scottish' ...They go 'whoa!'.... 'That is a mix!'...*

Furthermore, and it is an important point, we can say that our participants did not really wish to prioritise a black identity when asked how they would describe themselves. Leo (11, Jamaican/English-Jamaican background) could be seen as an exception here, as he ranked the category 'black' at the first position during the card task. He also said that 'he would like to be a proper black person' so that people 'look up' to him:

**(Question)** How would you rank the cards?

*(Leo) First is black.*

**(Question)** Then second most important for you?

*(Leo) White...First black, cos I really wanna be black...*

**(Question)** And you feel white as well...a bit?

*(Leo) Yeah...*

**(Question)** What about British?

*(Leo) Not really...*

**(Question)** So are you happy with who you are? Would you be someone else?

*(Leo) ...I would like to be like a proper black person...*

**(Question)** Why?

*(Leo) Cos there's more thing to think about, and they'd really think that you are a black person...So people look up to you...they've got something in their head, like that they think you're mixed-race...*

Moreover, Mark (11, Jamaican/Scottish) felt 'black British' when with his dad's family (this context-based identification process will be explored further in a next section):

**(Question)** Number 5?

**(Mark)** *English...*

**(Question)** Then?

**(Mark)** *Black British...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Mark)** *Cos when I'm with dad's family, I feel black with them...but I'm still British...*

Nathalie (17, mixed African-White/White Scottish) talked about her relation to blackness and whiteness. She implicitly made reference to her curly hair as a physical marker of blackness, a positive 'part of her identity', something that people envy:

**(Question)** What about the identity as black?

**(Nathalie)** *I'm far to be black...I'm just as much far to be black as I am to be white ...I'd say, yeah, it is important...Because that's a part of my identity...That's part of my...hair...Some people, they would pay to get their hair curly or pay to get it shaved.*

*- West Indian and/or African 'roots'*

For several participants, the West Indian or African identities had a role to play in terms of dynamics of self-identification. For instance, Chris (17, Jamaican/White English) was very keen to appropriate a Trinidadian heritage and culture when talking about his participation in a steel band. Nathalie (17, mixed African-White/White Scottish) mentioned her social and family history/trajectory to make sense of what she called a 'mixture' of a West Indian/Jamaican cultural 'day to day' influence and an African/Ghanaian origin:

**(Question)** And the West Indian identity?

**(Nathalie)** *I'd say it's important because of the influence it has had in my life...Like, the music, the people, the food...Even carnival is mainly West Indian [...] West Indian...and African at the same kind of level...because of the influence it has had...I'd say I'm a mixture...West Indian is day to day, I don't really listen to African music or African dancing...It's more based on the Jamaican [...] I had a stronger Caribbean influence...on the Ghanaian I know a few bits, influence is not that really strong...After next year [when she goes to Ghana] it might be different...in Ghana...I haven't been to Jamaica yet...My partner's mum, she's Jamaican, I lived with her for a long time...My foster carer...well, I've been there twice...my other foster carer who I was with when I was 15, she was Jamaican...When I was pregnant at 15, I had a miscarriage, but when I was pregnant, the father, that was partner, he was Jamaican...so all his family was Jamaican...and I was around Jamaicans, and the music, and the food.*

Moreover, the quote below shows how important this 'African origin' was for her:

**(Question)** How important is your African side?

*(Nathalie) It's very, very important, cos my family is very strict and traditional, I've got to learn more about it...I'd say, it's more important...Cos a lot of my family follow certain rules...*

While Nathalie mentioned her future trip to Ghana and how it might change the perception of her identity, the majority of the participants have never been to Africa or the Caribbean, i.e. to visit the 'black side' of their family. It was the case of Leo (11, Jamaican/English-Jamaican background) who, interestingly, found it embarrassing to speak Jamaican patois:

**(Question)** Do you have any family in Jamaica then?

*(Leo) Yeah, I think my cousins are in Jamaica. I don't really see them often cos I never go to Jamaica.*

**(Question)** So you've never been to Jamaica...

*(Leo) Yeah.*

**(Question)** With your parents, which language do you speak? English?

*(Leo) English...And...I don't speak Jamaican, cos I think it's embarrassing. I could speak it...but I don't wanna speak it...*

**(Question)** What's the difference between English and Jamaican?

*(Leo) Jamaican is a bit louder, English is kind of more posh.*

#### *- British/English identities*

If we look now at how British and English identities were perceived by the mixed-heritage youth, we can say first that the establishment of a direct correspondence between 'being English' and 'being white' was not recurrent among them - while it was a salient tendency among many of the British Bangladeshi youth interviewed. Some participants, like Nick (15, Jamaican/White English) or Alex (15, Jamaican/White English) did not, in fact, really make a difference between English and British:

**(Question)** Do you feel European?

*(Nick) No...None of them...*

**(Question)** What about English?

*(Nick) English is basically the same as British...This is country [British card], this is part of the country [English card]...*

**(Question)** Do you feel patriotic about Britain?

*(Alex) What's that mean?*

**(Question)** Like proud...

*(Alex) Yeah...*

**(Question)** Why?

*(Alex) I'm not sure...Cos that's where I'm from...*

**(Question)** Do you feel patriotic with any other country? Like Jamaica or?

*(Alex) No...*

**(Question)** Do you make a difference being English and British?

*(Alex) I don't think there is a difference...*

When asked if they were proud about Britain only Jade said that 'she did not like Britain':

**(Question)** Do you feel proud about Britain?

**(Jade)** *No...I don't like Britain...I don't like the people, I just don't like it...It's just the rudeness...Basically you can be walking the street with your friends, and you hear people bitchin' about you behind you back...for no reason, people just being people...*

**(Question)** Is it any other country that you do like? America?

**(Jade)** *I just know Florida, but sometimes they are worse than the people over here....Over here, there's only a few decent people, but...some of them are just so bitchy and so rude...Cos they think cos they're American, they're better than you...*

Some participants, like Rachel (15, Jamaican/White English), did not provide clear-cut responses:

**(Question)** Do you feel patriotic or proud about Britain?

**(Rachel)** *Yeah, I guess...but not hugely...But yeah, proud to be British...*

**(Question)** Do you see a difference between being British and being English?

**(Rachel)** *I think there are differences...Like if you live in Scotland or Wales...You'd say Scotland is better than England...*

It was also the case of Chris (17, Jamaican/White English) who, however, stressed the advantage of a 'free' British health care system when drawing a comparison with the USA, before explaining why he preferred the term 'English' to the term 'British':

**(Question)** Do you feel proud about Britain?

**(Chris)** *Not necessarily...Yes and no. Like if someone came up to me and says 'fight for your country!'...And I'd say yeah...I live in Britain...They have certain...whassit called, certain regulations we get for free...like the NHS for example, we get that free, whereas in America, you have to pay for all of that...Britain is better cos we got lots of things for free, through the NHS and all that... [...] To be honest I don't like the word British...It sounds corny...I would prefer to be called English...You know, there is a game, if someone says a word to you, you gotta say the first thing you think...So if someone said 'English'; I'd probably say like 'myself', or 'language' or 'education'...But if someone said 'British', I'd probably think 'pork', 'pork chop' something....So personally I don't like the word 'British'...*

Other participants were more definite in their responses, for instance Jade (16, St Vincent/White English) whose pride of being English was linked to the language:

**(Question)** What about the British identity?

**(Nathalie)** *I'd say it's important cos I'm proud to be British...I am proud to be born here...*

**(Question)** And English?

**(Nathalie)** *English, I'm proud of because English is the same as British and a lot of people speak the English language...or learn it...So I'm very proud...even the American speak English, they don't speak American...*



*-Urban and local identities*

Finally, it seemed that there was a stronger emphasis on urban/local identities among mixed-heritage youth than among British Bangladeshis. For instance, Nathalie (17, mixed African-White/White Scottish) said she was 'proud' to be from London and also talked about her local area:

**(Question)** What about being a Londoner?

**(Nathalie)** *I'd say it's important as well, cos I'm proud to be from London...*

**(Question)** From you local area? That's Thornton Heath?

**(Nathalie)** *Yeah, around there...I think it's important cos that influences me, the way that I am, the way that I speak...*

For Nick (15, Jamaican/White English), being from Kennington was an important part of his identity. During the interview, he referred to a sense of family and unity

**(Question)** Which card would be number 4?

**(Nick)** *From Kennington...*

**(Question)** It's important for you?

**(Nick)** *Yeah, it's like a family unit...Everybody knows each other, like a culture...Everybody is connected in some way...It's like a family, do you know what I'm trying to say? Everybody has to get along with each other...*

**(Question)** There's a strong...

**(Nick)** *Bond...Especially with the youth together...*

Moreover, when initially asked about how he would describe himself, Leo (11, Jamaican/English-Jamaican background) talked about the significance of a local urban identity, especially with regards to language and the bodily technique of an authentic 'bop' Brixton street style:

**(Leo)** *I'd say I am from Brixton...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Leo)** *Cos I talk like them, I walk like...*

**(Question)** You walk?

**(Leo)** *Yeah, you know the people how they walk...They have this kind of style...It's called the 'bop'...*

**(Question)** The bop? What does that mean?

**(Leo)** *It's like they walk in a certain kind of way...*

**(Question)** And you can tell that they're from Brixton?

**(Leo)** *Yeah...But if it was you, a Frenchman, who would walk in this kind of style, it would really look funny...*

## Contexts of identities

### British Bangladeshi youth

One of the central objectives of our research was to shed light on how British Bangladeshi and mixed-heritage youth negotiate and 'manage' their multiple identities in context. To do so, we asked our participants which identity they would use to describe themselves in reference to three different environments: at home, at school and with their friends. The results for the British Bangladeshi youth are presented in the table 3, below.

Table 3 – Identities and contexts, British Bangladeshi youth

Name	Gender	Age	Identity at home	Identity at school	Identity with friends (outside school)
Rupna	Female	13	Bengali/Bangladeshi	Bengali/Bangladeshi	English
Basima	Female	16	Bengali	British	Bengali
Muna	Female	14	Bengali	Bengali/British/Muslim	Bengali (with Bengali friends)
Munira	Female	11	Bangladeshi	Muslim	Bangladeshi
Pari	Female	15	Mixed	British	Bangladeshi
Fatima	Female	14	Bangladeshi	British	Bengali
Shiraj	Male	14	Bengali/Muslim	Bengali/Muslim	Bengali/Muslim
Ahmed	Male	13	Bengali	British	British
Noor	Male	16	Bengali/Muslim	English/Bengali	English/Bengali
Abdul	Male	16	Bengali	Bengali/British	Bengali
Karim	Male	14	Bangladeshi	From Camden	-
Ayub	Male	12	Muslim	Bengali	Bengali/Londoner

Among the British Bangladeshi participants there was a strong tendency to choose the categories 'Bangladeshi' and 'Bengali' with reference to the domestic sphere. For instance, we can quote here Fatima (14):

**(Question)** When at home which card would you choose to describe yourself?

**(Fatima)** *I feel more Bangladeshi...Cos my whole family is Bangladeshi...And when outside with friends, not everyone is Bangladeshi, but when I'm at home, I feel more Bangladeshi...*

The dominant aspect of this choice was language. It appears that British Bangladeshi participants mainly speak Sylheti/Bengali at home with their parents. Yet, many also said switching often between languages, i.e. speaking English with their siblings or a combination of English and Sylheti/Bengali to their siblings and parents.

In addition to language, Basima (16) also mentioned food as a relevant marker of her sense of Bengaliness at home:

**(Question)** At home do you feel more British, Muslim, Bengali...which one?

**(Basima)** *More Bengali...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Basima)** *Cos we talk Bengali all the time, and we have curry and stuff...*

Abdul (16), Munira (11) and Ahmed (13) also referred to language as shown by the quotes below:

**(Question)** When you are at home, do you feel more Bengali, British or Muslim?

**(Abdul)** *Bengali...Because everyone in the house is Bengali and I speak to my mum and my brother-in-law in Bengali...*

**(Question)** At home, which card would you choose?

**(Munira)** *Bangladeshi...Because there's Bangladeshi people around me and I always talk in that way...*

**(Question)** When you're at home do you feel more....?

**(Ahmed)** *Bengali...*

**(Question)** How come?

**(Ahmed)** *Cos mostly I speak Bengali at home...*

Religion was not as important as Bengali/Bangladeshi ethnicity but was still present in the discourses. In his response, Noor (16) mentioned the practice of religion (the prayers) as well as language:

**(Question)** When you're at home, do you feel more....like Bengali, British or English or Muslim or...?

**(Noor)** *Mainly, bit of both, of Bengali and Muslim...*

**(Question)** How come?

**(Noor)** *Cos I talk more Bengali, cos prayers and everything.*

**(Question)** You're practising Islam?

**(Noor)** *Yeah...*

Ayub (12) also mentioned the prayers:

**(Question)** At home, which identity?

**(Ayub)** *Muslim...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Ayub)** *Cos I have to pray...*

Pari's (15) sense of identity at home was different in comparison with the rest of the participants. It involved a combination of religion, with her mother's practices, ethnicity, with the Bengali TV programmes, and Britishness, with her dress style:

**(Question)** When at home, do you feel more British, Muslim or Bangladeshi?

**(Pari)** *There's not a certain thing I feel...I don't know, all of them, because when I'm at home, it's all about Islam cos my mum is always talking about it, she's praying or she's reading or there's a Bengali programme on, so here it's Bengali and the way I'm dressed, I'm dressed like a British person.*

Regarding the school environment, we can say that language represents a relevant marker as well when several participants justified their choice of a British identity in this context.

The following quotes from the interviews with Basima (16) and Ahmed (13) can illustrate this:

**(Question)** When you're at school?

**(Basima)** *Probably British...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Basima)** *Cos we're talking in English all the time and I don't know... I think that's about it...*

**(Question)** Which identity when you're at school?

**(Ahmed)** *British...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Ahmed)** *Cos everyone around me is speaking English. Different people and they're British as well...*

Ayub's (12) response suggested the influence of a specific peer group socialisation as he defined his identity at school in the context of a separation between different 'crews':

**(Question)** At school?

**(Ayub)** *Bengali...because everyone is separate, everyone's got their own crew, like Bengali...*

**(Question)** So you're part of the Bengali crew then?

**(Ayub)** *Bengalis, Indians...*

While Fatima (14) said 'she felt British because everyone in the school was British', Pari's answer was different:

**(Question)** For the school, which card would you choose?

**(Pari)** *I'm more British than anything...Because there's not religion, except for R.E....And you know they don't consider you as Bangladeshi, kind of thing...Cos they don't know I'm born in Bangladesh or anything...They just think you're Indian...*

Several youth, such as Abdul (16) and Noor (16) chose to combine categories of identity (Bengali, British and English) in reference to the school environment:

**(Question)** At school which card would you choose?

**(Abdul)** *A bit of Bengali and British...Because I was born in London and there's other people that were born in their country...*

**(Question)** And when you are at school?

**(Noor)** *Mainly English and Bengali...English because the whole school is basically in England and everything...a lot more speak English with people...And Bengali because everyone, the community at school is mainly Bengali...And being a Bengali is pretty important to me.*

Shiraj combined the religious and ethnic identities, justifying his choice of the category 'Muslim' by highlighting the relation between religious affiliation and the socialisation dynamics in his school:

(Question) What about when you're at school, which card would you choose?

(Shiraj) *Muslim.*

(Question) Why?

(Shiraj) *...and Bengali...*

(Question) How come Muslim?

(Shiraj) *...There's not a lot of Bengalis in my school...You'll see Muslims and Muslims hanging around...The Christians will start hanging around with us too...*

Munira, who attends a Church of England school, explained why she chose the category 'Muslim':

(Question) And when you are at school?

(Munira) *Muslim, because I am Muslim, you don't have to know what other country I am from...Everyone knows I am Muslim and you don't have to know if I'm Bangladeshi...*

(Question) Maybe it's because you go to a Church of England school?

(Munira) *Yeah, and I'm still a Muslim...*

Regarding the peer group context, there was also a diversity of responses. For instance, Rupna (13) chose the English card because of language, but Fatima (14), also because of language, felt Bengali:

(Question) What about with your friends?

(Rupna) *This [the 'English' card].*

(Question) English?

(Rupna) *Yeah...Because I will speak that language to communicate with most of them, so...*

(Question) With your friends?

(Fatima) *I'd feel Bengali...Cos most of my friends are Bengali, and I talk Bengali to them...*

Shiraj (14) chose the religious category, saying that he has some (non-Bengali) Muslim friends:

(Shiraj) *Actually Muslim...They're not Muslim, they're Christian...But the Kosovan one and the Somalian one, they're Muslim...So I prefer Muslim.*

While Ahmed (13) felt British because 'his friends are British', Noor chose English (and 'a bit of Bengali') because of the English language that he speaks with them:

(Question) With your friends?

(Noor) *Mainly English, but a bit of Bengali...Cos we talk in English and the environment is mainly in English, everywhere you go, it's basically England...*

(Question) What are you doing that makes you feel English?

(Noor) *I talk in English...*

Abdul's (16) discourse was interesting insofar as it suggested the role of ethno-national boundaries in reinforcing the awareness of a Bengali identity in the peer group context:

**(Question)** With your friends?

**(Abdul)** *It depends which friends I'm with, cos most of the time I'm with friends that are from other countries and I feel Bengali...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Abdul)** *Because it's like a category kinda thing, they're from Sudan or Iraq or whatever and I'm from Bangladesh, I'm Bengali...*

Finally, in order to make sense of the variety of discourses on identity among friends, we also took into account the socialisation patterns of youth and the composition of their peer groups. Table 4 shows the importance of 'Bengali friends' but also how diverse the ethnic background of our young participants' friends, especially school friends, can be.

Table 4 - Peer groups and socialisation, British Bangladeshi youth

Name	Gender	Age	School	Peer groups/friends
Rupna	Female	13	South Camden	<i>'I've got a mixture of friends'</i>
Basima	Female	16	South Camden	<i>'My closest friends, they're all Bengali...But obviously in school I have, like, other friends... Some are Turkish, white girls, black and Somalians'</i>
Muna	Female	14	Haverstock	<i>'I've only got Bengali friends outside of school...like my mates I used to go primary school with'. At school: 'All different...some are Arabic, Iranian, Croatian, Kosovan, Italian, Malian, Jamaican, white...everywhere...'</i>
Munira	Female	11	St M. C. of E.	<i>'Some friends from Bangladesh, but I don't quite like staying with them...and English people of course and my two best friend'</i>
Pari	Female	15	E. G. Anderson	Only Bengali friends
Fatima	Female	14	South Camden	Bengali friends but also <i>'Filipino, Indian...Somalian [friends]'</i> at school
Shiraj	Male	14	N. Westminster	Mixed
Ahmed	Male	13	N. Westminster	Mixed: <i>'There's Bengali, mixed-race, there's black, there's white...I've got a mate he's a quarter Singaporean and three quarters Bengali...I've got a mate that is Chinese and Italian'</i>
Noor	Male	16	South Camden	Bengali friends and <i>'three of my friends are Moroccan, from Afghanistan and Turkish'</i>
Abdul	Male	16	N. Westminster	Bengali friends and <i>'I've got Arabic friends, Somalian friends, black friends, all sorts...I've got white friends'</i>
Karim	Male	14	South Camden	Mixed
Ayub	Male	12	South Camden	<i>'Most of them are Bengali, some are Indian, one or two of them, and the rest are English'</i>

Moreover, during the interview, we asked our participants to indicate the ethnic background of their three best friends. While a certain diversity of ethnic backgrounds was also noticeable (see table 5), especially among boys, three quarter of the respondents had at least one Bengali boy or girl among their three best friends.

Table 5 - The three best friends of British Bangladeshi participants

Name	Gender	Age	School	Best friend 1	Best friend 2	Best friend 3
Rupna	Female	13	South Camden	Bengali girl	Black girl	White girl
Basima	Female	16	South Camden	Bengali girl	Bengali girl	Bengali girl
Muna	Female	14	Haverstock	Somali girl	Arabic girl	White girl
Munira	Female	11	St M. C .of E.	Bengali girl	Bengali girl	White English girl
Pari	Female	15	E. G. Anderson	Bengali girl	Bengali girl	Bengali girl
Fatima	Female	14	South Camden	Bengali girl	Bengali girl	Bengali girl
Shiraj	Male	14	N. Westminster	Filipino boy	Kosovan boy	Somali boy
Ahmed	Male	13	N. Westminster	Black boy	Black boy	Mixed-race boy
Noor	Male	16	South Camden	Bengali boy	Bengali boy	Bengali boy
Abdul	Male	16	N. Westminster	Sudanese boy	Arabic boy	Arabic boy
Karim	Male	14	South Camden	Bengali boy	Bengali boy	Kuwaiti boy
Ayub	Male	12	South Camden	Indian boy	Bengali boy	English boy

Regarding these friendship links with Bengali youth, Fatima (14) talked about an easier interaction based on a common 'culture' and 'background':

**(Question)** Your friends? They are only Bengali?

**(Fatima)** *Not only, Filipino, Indian...Somalian....school friends...*

**(Question)** What about your three closest friends?

**(Fatima)** *One is my age and she's Bengali, then S. is Bengali and then N. is Bengali...My age...*

**(Question)** Why are they your three best friends?

**(Fatima)** *Cos it's easy to interact with them and, it's easier to talk to them...because they know about their culture, because they're Bengali and everything...*

But it was the important notion of mutual understanding which was dominant, as shown by the discourses of Basima (16), Pari (15) and Noor (16):

**(Question)** Who would you say are your three best friends?

**(Basima)** *The three closest ones are Bengali...*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Basima)** *I don't know, sometimes they understand...you...your background and stuff.*

**(Question)** Because they're Bengali as well?

**(Basima)** *Yeah...*

**(Question)** So you have only Bengali friends then?

**(Pari)** *At the moment, yeah...*

**(Question)** No others, why?

**(Pari)** *Because I get along with my kind of cultural people more, they understand me more...*

**(Question)** What about your three best friends?

**(Noor)** *All Bengali, yeah...*

**(Question)** How come?

**(Noor)** *Because they understand my problems, they would know what's going on cos they're Bengali as well...If I have any home problems, it's easier to understand because they're Bengali as well...They probably went through the same problems...*

### *Mixed-heritage youth*

As suggested by table 6 (below) there was a great diversity of identities chosen by the mixed-heritage participants for each different context.

Regarding the domestic environment, and as opposed to the British Bangladeshi case, there was no real dominant trend. Leo (11, Jamaican/English-Jamaican background) said that he 'felt black' in all three environments, even with his white English mother, who, according to him also wants 'to be on the black side'. Mark (11, Jamaican/Scottish background) said that he sees himself as 'black British' when with his dad and 'English' with his mum. In the case of parents living separately, this sense of biculturalism with an ability to navigate between different social and/or domestic worlds was indeed salient among some mixed-heritage youth. For instance, Chris (17, Jamaican/White English) explained how at home with his white mum his 'English, British side' was more important even though she 'sees him as a black person', while with his Jamaican brother-in-law he felt more Jamaican:

**(Chris)** *[My identity at home] is a mixture of both, Jamaican and English...Even my mum talks about the black people, the black culture and all that. It's racist but...my mum sees me as a black person and she makes joke about it...Say for example, I am talking to her, she would come up with something like 'Oh nigger, please' ... Even my brother would laugh, and he's black himself, and he makes black jokes...And I'd say, when I am with my brother-in-law, it's more my Jamaican side, and when I am with my mum it's more my English, British side.*



Table 6 – Identities and contexts, mixed-heritage youth

Name	Gender	Age	Background (F=Father; M=Mother)	Identity at home	Identity at school	Identity with friends (outside school)
Leo	Male	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) English-Jamaican	Black	Black	Black
Mark	Male	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) Scottish	Black British (with father) English (with mother)	Local area	Black
Nick	Male	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Black and white (with mother)	'More black'	-
Alex	Male	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Mixed-race and South Norwood	South Norwood	South Norwood
John	Male	17	(F) Barbados/ (M) White English	-	-	-
Chris	Male	17	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Jamaican (with brother-in-law) British/English (with mother)	Black	-
Charlotte	Female	16	(F) White English/ (M) Jamaican	English and Black (with mother)	-	-
Rachel	Female	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	-	-	-
Rose	Female	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Christian	Christian	Christian
Helen	Female	12	(F) Eurasian/ (M) Ghanaian	Christian, mixed-race and African	Mixed-race	-
Nathalie	Female	17	(F) Ghanaian-Finnish/ (M) White Scottish	Christian, mixed-race, African and West Indian	Ditto	Ditto + local area
Jade	Female	16	(F) St Vincent/W (M) White English	Mixed-race	Mixed-race	Mixed-race

Charlotte (16, Jamaican/White English) who grew up in a white environment and lives with her British Jamaican mother and white English step-father talked about a 'mix' of identities at home, playing with stereotypes when giving some interesting anecdotes:

*(Charlotte) In my mum's house, I guess I feel English....No actually, in fact, it's a mix between black and English...Because sometimes my mum wants to kick off, like you just hear some Jamaican accents flying about the house...Then I have a step-dad, he's very British, so...He speaks very like, he speaks like 'oh dear' [imitating stereotypical English accent]...He drinks a lot of tea...He's proper stereotyped English person...Speaks very well, drinks a lot of tea, he has lots of scones. Not a lot of English people have scones and tea and stuff...it's more like coffee, burger, a bit of chips...I guess I'm pretty much English...*

Helen (12, Eurasian/British Ghanaian) and Nathalie (17, mixed African-White/White Scottish) also chose a combination of identities, including 'mixed-race':

**(Question)** At home, which identity would describe you? What identity is the strongest?

**(Helen)** *Being a Christian...to me...I like being a Christian and I like also being African and mixed-race, cos some people they don't really know that much about Africa...so I told them about being African and then they're fascinated...*

**(Question)** So when you're at home what identity is important to describe you?

**(Nathalie)** *Christian and mixed-race...Cos my faith again, is the strongest part of me...and mixed-race because that's my foundation...*

Moreover, regarding the school context, there was also a certain diversity of responses. Chris (17, Jamaican/White English) said he felt 'more black because surrounded by black people', but also because a lot of teachers and students thought he was black:

**(Question)** And at school?

**(Chris)** *Black... A lot of teachers and students thought I was more black...*

**(Question)** What sort of identity would you?

**(Nick)** *At school, I feel more black, because surrounded by black people...*

Several participants referred to a local neighbourhood identity, like Alex (15, Jamaican/White English):

**(Question)** At school how do you feel?

**(Alex)** *South Norwood...Cos that's where I hang about most of the time...*

When John (17, Barbados/White English) mentioned the lack of interaction between black and white pupils, he explained that being mixed-race allows him to 'mix with both' in the school environment:

**(Question)** At school how do you feel?

**(John)** *Mostly mixed-race...Because black people don't mix with the white people that much and the white people don't mix with the white people that much...Being a mixed-race I can mix with both...*

Regarding the important dimension of friendship and peer grouping, there was no clear dominant pattern of socialisation among the mixed-heritage youth interviewed.

Table 7 gives some details about the variety of these dynamics of socialisation. It is interesting to note that Rachel (15, Jamaican/White English) 'feels more white' and has mostly white friends while several youth, like Rose (11), her younger sister, and Leo (11, Jamaican/English-Jamaican), whose identification to blackness was more salient than the rest of the individuals in the sample, said having mostly black friends. Yet, as Les Back (1996: 157) has shown this attachment to a black-dominated peer group does not necessarily involve the prioritisation of an exclusive black identity by the mixed-heritage individuals. Indeed, in the case of Rose the mixed-race and religious identities were also greatly socially relevant in specific contexts, including the school context.

It emerged that, in fact, many youth move between different peer groups. For instance, several participants said having a mixed group of friends outside school (a friendship usually based on local ties and/or on a past common primary school attendance) and mostly black friends at school (see table 7). Moreover the three best friends of many participants are ethnically diverse. Four youth also said having at least a mixed-race boy or girl among their three best friends.

Table 7 - Peer group and socialisation

Name	Gender	Age	Background (F=Father; M=Mother)	Peer group/friends
Leo	Male	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) English-Jamaican	Mostly black Jamaican friends
Mark	Male	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) Scottish	<i>'All colours'</i>
Nick	Male	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Mixed outside and at school mostly black friends
Alex	Male	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Mixed outside and at school mostly black friends
John	Male	17	(F) Barbados/ (M) White English	<i>'I don't really care what they are...a mix, white, black...some Asians'</i>
Chris	Male	17	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	<i>'Mixed friends...few Asians, lot of black people...whites. I try to be with everyone as much as possible'</i>
Charlotte	Female	16	(F) White English/ (M) Jamaican	Mixed, different groups of friends
Rachel	Female	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	<i>'Most of my friends are actually white...a couple of black friends, but no other racial background'</i>
Rose	Female	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Mostly black friends
Helen	Female	12	(F) Eurasian/ (M) Ghanaian	Mixed
Nathalie	Female	17	(F) Ghanaian-Finnish/ (M) White Scottish	Mixed outside and at school mostly black friends
Jade	Female	16	(F) St Vincent/W (M) White English	Mostly white friends (before mostly black friends at school)

Table 8 - The 3 best friends of mixed-heritage participants

Name	Gender	Age	Background (F=Father; M=Mother)	Best friend 1	Best friend 2	Best friend 3
Leo	Male	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) English-Jamaican	Jamaican boy	Mixed-race boy	Portuguese boy
Mark	Male	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) Scottish	Mixed-race boy	Mixed-race boy	Mixed-race boy
Nick	Male	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Black boy (Caribbean)	Black boy (African)	-
Alex	Male	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Mixed-race	Black boy (Caribbean)	Black boy (Caribbean)
John	Male	17	(F) Barbados/ (M) White English	White boy	Black boy	Black boy
Chris	Male	17	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Mixed-race boy	Mixed-race boy	Black boy
Charlotte	Female	16	(F) White English/ (M) Jamaican	White Irish girl	Italian-Belgian boy	Black girl
Rachel	Female	15	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	White girl	White girl	White girl
Rose	Female	11	(F) Jamaican/ (M) White English	Black girl	Black girl	White girl
Helen	Female	12	(F) Eurasian/ (M) Ghanaian	White girl	White girl	Black girl
Nathalie	Female	17	(F) Ghanaian-Finnish/ (M) White Scottish	Black (African) girl	Black (Caribbean) girl	Black (Caribbean) girl
Jade	Female	16	(F) St Vincent/W (M) White English	White girl	White girl	White girl

*- Biculturalism and the location of 'mixed-race' identity*

The aim of this last section is to shed some light on the ways in which the biculturalism and the multiplicity of identities is described in relation to the positionality and the location of 'mixed-race' belongings.

One of the most important findings of the research is that there was no apparent feeling of marginality expressed when our mixed-heritage participants talked about their identities and experiences of different cultural and social worlds. As it was the case with the British Bangladeshi youth interviewed, they did not see themselves as being 'caught between two cultures'. Rather, they were keen to use such expressions as 'combination', 'mix', 'mixed culture', etc. when referring to their sense of identity. The data collected also showed how the sense of identity was fluid, changing and contextually contingent. For instance, we can quote Chris (17, Jamaican/White English) whose discourse also suggested the role that social contexts played in the dynamics of cultural affiliation:

**(Question)** Do you view yourself between two cultures? Or more...

**(Chris)** *I wouldn't say 'in between', but sometimes...depending on who you're with personally...you can be pushed to be more of one certain culture than the other...or acting as both...I don't know...I just see myself as part of a mixed culture, really...*

Similarly Rachel said she felt part of both black and white cultures; yet she also indicated that, in the past, she had 'wished being just part of one or the other':

**(Question)** Do you feel between two cultures? Black and white?

**(Rachel)** *I don't know whether between...I'd just say that I'm part of both...*

**(Question)** I was wondering how comfortable you are with being mixed or if you wanna be one side more than the other at all?

**(Rachel)** *I think I have done sometimes...wished that I could be just part of one or the other...But it don't wish that now...I'm glad that I'm mixed-race...*

Like Helen (12, Eurasian/British Ghanaian) all the participants were comfortable with their 'mixed' identity:

**(Question)** Are you happy with who you are?

**(Helen)** *Yeah...Because I'm mixed and God made me different...*

For many youth, the most positive aspect of a 'mixed-race' identity was the ability to negotiate black and white social worlds, to navigate, with a great fluidity, between the two. For example, when saying that she 'can be anywhere she wants', Nathalie suggested that 'being mixed-race', having 'the best of both worlds', allowed her a certain social and cultural ubiquity:

**(Question)** So it's really black world and white world, you're going in and out of these cultures?

**(Nathalie)** *I mix with both...That's the reason I like to be mixed-race, that's why I always say to everybody 'I love being mixed-race, the best of both worlds', and it really is that, it is...Sometimes you get frown up, you get looked upon differently...but on the whole...As long as I am outspoken...you can say look 'I'm half of both, yeah, I can be anywhere I want, half here, half there!'*

Similarly John (17, Barbados/White English) thought that, thanks to his mixed-race identity 'he can mix with anything'. Interestingly, his discourse suggested an opposition between the perceived rigidity of racial boundaries at school and his own 'competence' to cross and challenge a black/white boundary:

**(Question)** How do you feel at school?

**(John)** *Mostly mixed-race, cos black people don't mix with the white people that much and the white people don't mix with the white people that much...Being a mixed-race I can mix with both...*

**(Question)** You're comfortable in both groups?

**(John)** *Yeah...*

**(Question)** Would you say you're happy with who you are?

**(John)** *Yeah...You cannot change, so it's better to get on with it...What I am is the best cos I can mix with anything...I've always been happy with who I am...*

Jade (16, St Vincent/White English) also talked about the school environment and her position in relation to the black/white boundary:

**(Question)** Do you feel comfortable with different groups?

**(Jade)** *Yeah...Here, in the common room, it's mainly black people, and friends don't like coming down here...but I just don't care...If it's a room for the white people I go there, if it's a room for the black people I go there...it don't actually bother me...*

In their discourses, Nathalie (17, mixed African-White/White Scottish) and Charlotte (16, Jamaican/White English) reconstructed their mixed-race position not only in relation to ethnic or racial boundaries but in a context of inter-group debate or even tension. Indeed, in the quote below, Charlotte talks about how she can share both black and white 'points of view' without privileging one over the other and indicating also how she would feel 'equally' offended by insults directed towards white and black people:

**(Charlotte)** *I'm not like: 'should I be on the black side?', I'm both...If I was in a debate, I'd find it more... of a plus point...Cos I can see it from a white person's point of view because I've lived with white people. I can see it from a black person's point of view...If someone was to insult someone who is white, I would feel offended because my dad's white...There's part of me...half of me is white...I've got a lot of white in me...And if someone, say a white person, was to insult black people, I would feel just as offended...It's equal...It's not like 'oh I am more offended, because it's black, or I'm more offended if it's white', it's exactly the same...*

She added that 'being mixed-race' can signify a more 'open-minded' approach to differences between people:

**(Charlotte)** *If you're mixed-race you should be proud to be mixed-race, because you've got more of a chance to be more open-minded. Because you can see it from both sides...Because sometimes it can be very different, like, my dad's side are very different from my mum's side. In ways they're similar.*

The last part of her discourse was perhaps the most interesting as she presented the 'mixed-raced' identity as a resource which could be mobilised to actively challenge stereotypes, representing a instrument of symbolic 'protection' in a culturally and racially divided environment:

**(Charlotte)** *But then you can't actually be stereotyped because if anyone says 'you're this' you can say 'well, at the end of the day, I'm half of you, I'm half of your culture, so you're still part of me! And if someone black was saying something about white people, I would say 'well, I'm half of you, so...'*

Nathalie first exposed her reaction, her resistance, to some accusations of 'passing' before expressing her pride of being mixed-race:

**(Nathalie)** *Yeah...when I was in Croydon... I've got a really strong character, and some people cos of my skin colour, because of the way I speak, it's just the way I've been brought up, certain things I've learnt... They said something about me, 'she's trying to be something she's not' and I'm like 'will you excuse me, would you like to repeat that?' and then when they find out that I'm mixed-race then 'oh...oh' Some people*

*think I'm lying... 'Why I am not gonna say I am mixed-race?' I'm proud of it...I'm proud to be me!*

This notion of resistance to a specific external perception of her identity was also present in the final part of the quote when she explained how she refused to be identified as black at school. Moreover, and like Charlotte, she felt belonging to 'both sides'. As a result, she said it was normal and legitimate for her to be equally offended by bad comments about black and white people:

*(Nathalie) And then in school, people made comments about...There was the black girls, I end up hanging around with more black people and mixed-race people than I do with whites...It's nothing racist or anything...It's just the way it works out...and I was with a group of black girls and there were two white girls there...And they said all white girls give...oral...sex... And I said 'excuse me, that's my mum, that's my nan, that's a lot of people in my family'... And I said 'my skin colour is not black, so you cannot see me as black'... 'But we do, we do...we see you as black'...and I said 'well I'm not black, so if you can't see me for what colour that I actually am, then, don't speak to me!'...And I walked off. Because I'm both sides...If someone was to make a comment about black people, I'll be going mad! How come, yeah, you're gonna claim 'oh that's racist' but then when you do the same thing to the other side, it's not racist, it's just your personal opinion? It works both ways; I won't stand for either...*

The narratives of Charlotte and Nathalie show the ways in which composite identities can be constructed as resources socially relevant in specific contexts. In sum, the mixed-heritage youth clearly have the competence to negotiate and 'manage' their multiple identities in different environments.

As said earlier the mixed-heritage participants were comfortable with their 'mixed-race' identity and several were keen to express how they were proud of it. While many were stressing that they were neither 'fully black nor fully white but both', some were also happy to show a preference for a socialisation in white or black-dominated peer groups. However there was a marked tendency to move across social/ethnic groups. An important element is that beyond a simple ethno-racial dualism many identities were associated with different contexts.

Regarding our British Bangladeshi participants, while we could also observe a diversity of discourses on identity and belongings some dominant trends emerged. For instance, religious and ethnic identities were often prioritised by British Bangladeshi youth and Britishness was perceived as more inclusive than the English identity, which was often synonymous with whiteness. A certain discrepancy between a strong discursive association to an Islamic identity and an average or low level of religiosity was also observed. This, we argued, could suggest the importance of a progressive incorporation, 'formalisation' and 'naturalisation' of an Islamic habitus.

Moreover, Bangladeshi youth chose to associate different identities with different contexts. Within the domestic sphere the ethnic and religious categories seemed to be the more meaningful, whereas the participants referred to a diverse range of identities when talking

about the social spaces outside home (i.e. at school or with their friends). Language appeared to be a crucial marker of affiliation to these context-based identities. Here young people were stressing their ability to switch code easily; they were drawing the attention on their skills for the negotiation of an everyday urban multiculturalism. The recurrent emphasis on language perhaps also suggests the perception of the strategic role that communication is playing in the shaping of composite belongings and new ethnicities. Finally, the analysis of patterns of socialisation revealed that while many participants had ethnically mixed peer groups, friendship with other British Bangladeshi boys and girls was valued in terms of a mutual understanding linked to a social and cultural proximity. This proximity, in addition to a desire to conform to parental wishes and views, were the main reasons given by the British Bangladeshi youth interviewed when they said that they would prefer to marry within their ethnic and religious group (table 9).

Table 9 - Dating, opinion on arranged marriage and marriage preference, British Bangladeshi youth

Name	Gender	Age	Boyfriend/girlfriend	Opinion on arranged marriage	Marriage preference
Rupna	Female	13	No	Would mind one	<i>'It doesn't matter'</i>
Basima	Female	16	<i>'I just don't like boys'</i>	<i>'I don't see anything wrong with arranged marriages'</i>	Bengali husband
Muna	Female	14	One black boy and several Bengalis before	<i>'I wouldn't mind an arranged marriage'</i>	Bengali Muslim husband
Munira	Female	11	Never	<i>'That's OK'</i>	Bengali
Pari	Female	15	British Bangladeshi at the moment	<i>'As long as it's not forced, there's nothing wrong with arranged marriages'</i>	Muslim, preferably Bengali husband
Fatima	Female	14	Never	<i>'I personally think it's OK'</i>	Bengali husband
Shiraj	Male	14	No	Agrees	Bengali wife
Ahmed	Male	13	No	<i>'That's wrong'</i>	Does not know
Noor	Male	16	British Bangladeshi at the moment	<i>'Love marriages are better'</i>	Bengali wife
Abdul	Male	16	No	<i>'I would say love marriages are better'</i>	Bengali wife
Karim	Male	14	Bengali and white girlfriends in the past	<i>'I don't want one'</i>	<i>'I don't mind marrying a Bengali or someone else Asian'</i>
Ayub	Male	12	Never	<i>'Everyone should marry whoever they want'</i>	Bengali wife

### 3.6. MULTICULTURALISM, RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

In this final section, we will explore the issues of racism and discrimination in relation to our participants' lives and social experiences. But first let us look at their views of multiculturalism in contemporary Britain.

#### *Living in multicultural Britain*



The young people interviewed acknowledged the cultural diversity of today's Britain and the great majority of them viewed it in a positive light. Among the British Bangladeshi sample, we can quote, for example, Karim (14), Noor (16), Shiraj (14) Basima (16) or Abdul (16):

**(Question)** Britain is a multicultural society?

**(Karim)** *Yeah...*

**(Question)** How do you feel about that?

**(Karim)** *It's a good thing, different people...*

**(Question)** Do you think Britain is a multicultural society? A place with lots of cultures?

**(Noor)** *Yeah, I think, Britain has a lot of cultures in different areas...*

**(Question)** How do you feel about this multiculturalism?

**(Noor)** *I think it's a good thing because instead of being one country with the same people, there's quite a lot of different people.*

**(Question)** Do you think Britain is a multicultural society?

**(Shiraj)** *Yeah.*

**(Question)** How do you feel about that?

**(Shiraj)** *It's ok, cos we're getting more friends, a lot of people from the place you're from and other countries.*

**(Question)** How do you feel about Britain being multicultural?

**(Basima)** *I think it's great.*

**(Question)** Why?

**(Basima)** *Lots of different around whereas it's the same people...I don't see anything wrong with like mixed cultures...*

Among several mixed-heritage participants, like Nick (15, Jamaican/White English) or Rose (11, Jamaican/White English), a similar type of discourse was observed:

**(Question)** Britain as a multicultural society....Do you understand?

**(Nick)** *Multicultural, basically there's a lot of cultures...Lots of culture that do get along...*

**(Question)** How do you feel about that?

**(Nick)** *Ok, I feel fine...*

**(Question)** Is Britain multicultural?

**(Rose)** *Yeah...*

**(Question)** How do you feel about it? Good thing, bad thing?

**(Rose)** *I think it's a good think...Because everybody get to know different people from different cultures...*

Some were talking more specifically about London, like John (17, Barbados/White English) and Chris (17, Jamaican/White English) - who also mentioned tourism:

**(Question)** Do you think Britain is multicultural?

*(John) In London yeah....But even in London there are some parts that aren't. But where I'm living, it's alright...*

**(Question)** Britain as a multicultural society?

*(Chris) I don't know because...I'd say Croydon is a multicultural place...Like London...A lot of foreigners, Europeans come over, for the tourist attractions...*

Similarly Pari (British Bangladeshi, 15) was explaining how London was multicultural and how 'people do something about racism', which, according to her, is more prevalent outside the metropolis, in rural areas. The last part of her discourse was interesting as she expressed her feeling of 'happiness' and sense of 'safety' living in a multicultural city:

**(Question)** Britain...is it multicultural society?

*(Pari) Yeah...I think London is...But outside London like Hertfordshire and whatever, I think there is a lot of racism going on...We don't know, cos we don't live there...Other people live there, other people are facing it...Because we live in London, there is a lot of tackling against racism and stuff, and people do something about it...I think London is more multicultural...I mean Britain is, the whole of Britain is, but there's more in London...*

**(Question)** How do you feel about that? Where you live?

*(Pari) I feel safer, happier...I'd rather be here in London, than anywhere else...*

More nuanced views about multiculturalism were also expressed, however. Nathalie (17, mixed African-White/White Scottish) was referring to racism and a certain discrepancy between the discourse of multiculturalism and the way she perceived its reality:

**(Question)** Do you think Britain is a multicultural society?

*(Nathalie) It supposed to be...but a lot of people are racist...Multicultural, but it's not accepting...*

For Jade (16, St Vincent/White English) multiculturalism implied more the idea of a 'separation' than the idea of a 'mix':

**(Question)** What do you think of multiculturalism?

*(Jade) All the mix of the different cultures and stuff...But it isn't really a mix...they're all separate...Living in one country but they are all separate...*

These notions of separation and division were also present in Charlotte's discourse when she deplored the negative effects of racialised identity politics. According to her, England would be a better place if people decided 'to drop the whole colour thing' and communicated more:

**(Question)** How do you feel about Britain being a multicultural society? It's a good thing, a bad thing?

*(Charlotte) Yeah, it's a good thing...but you still get the racism...If everyone stopped thinking about the past and 'who's white, who's black' and 'who's acting white, who's acting black, who's acting Asian'...I think if everyone just drop their guard and see people just as people, then I think England would get a lot better...England has*

*the potential to be a lot better than what it is...Because if there was more, say, black people in the House of Parliament or...Black people would have a bit of hope...Then, I think everything would be different if everyone just decided to drop the whole colour thing and just communicate with everyone...We have so many different people in this country...we have people from France, people from South Africa...We have people from all over...We just have to get to know them, find out about them, not because of the colour of their skin, but where they're from...*

### *Perception of discrimination*

We also wanted to know what were the perceptions of our participants concerning the degree of discrimination and racism in the British society, especially in the job market, media, police and educational sector.

Regarding the job market, only Abdul (British Bangladeshi, 16) thought that there was some racism in this sphere:

**(Question)** Do you think there is racism in media, in the police, in education?

**(Abdul)** *Job market kind of, because say there's a white person and an Asian person...and the Asian person has better qualifications, say...They'll put the Asian person on a second level...Sometimes it can be true, sometimes it can't...In football as well...it's like very racist...I rarely see Asian players on the pitch...Media, not really...They just pick on everyone...*

When reflecting on their experiences at school (and in a highly multicultural environment, for most of them) the great majority of the interviewees, from both samples, did not think that there was a significant level of racism and discrimination in British education.

Only Charlotte (16, Jamaican/White English), talked about the stereotypical views of black girls held by some teachers, who would then, according to her, 'give more time' to white and Asian girls:

**(Question)** What about racism in education?

**(Charlotte)** *In schools, I think...it's more...black girls just either decide, because I went to a girls' school obviously, they either decide to [mobile phone interruption] ... start being educated cos the teachers kind of stereotype them... 'They don't wanna work, they don't wanna work'... They give more time to the white girls and the Asian...*

**(Question)** Have you experienced any forms of discrimination in schools or?

**(Charlotte)** *Yeah, certain people, they just like 'oh she's just trouble anyway' ...me and the Black girls... 'oh I wanna learn' but they dismiss them...*

This notion of stereotyped views and representations was very present in discourses about media. We can quote here Chris (17, Jamaican/White English) who gave the example of a stereotype of terrorist 'influenced by the media', Basima (British Bangladeshi, 16) who evoked the portrayal of the 'Asian female' or Ahmed (British Bangladeshi, 13) who mentioned the production of a negative image of Muslims:

**(Question)** Do you think there is racism in the media?

**(Chris)** *I can't think of anything at the moment...But a lot of stereotypes are influenced by the media...Say for example, if there's a bomb scare in Croydon, you gonna think of a guy with a beard and a turban, an Asian guy...And that's only because of the media...I try not to stereotype because of the media...*

**(Question)** What about racism in the media?

**(Basima)** *I think the media are still kind of racist because when they have like a role of Asian female, it would be typical...*

**(Question)** Do you think there is racism in the media?

**(Ahmed)** *Yeah because sometimes if it shows like a Muslim person or Iraqi person, the media would act something to make them look bad, not positive about the person...*

Charlotte talked about a certain bias of the media in favour of 'white people from the country':

**(Question)** Do you think Britain is a racist country? In the media for example?

**(Charlotte)** *Yep! Because, I'm not being funny, but all these times, when all these people go missing, you get all these kids and stuff, they go missing...And it's always, most of the time, you get big stories like certain black people...But my friends he got stabbed out of gang-related stuff, you didn't see him on a main paper...*

**(Question)** Not a racist crime?

**(Charlotte)** *No...but even the racist crimes down here...Like, around the corner there was a big group of white guys and they used to hate black people, they used to beat up black people, one of them died from it...Never went in the papers...Kids go missing around here all the time, it never goes in the papers. But you get someone from the country and who is very white and who has a very good family or...and they're in the papers straight away!*

For the great majority of the participants, it was the police which were perceived to adopt discriminatory practices. The dominant opinion among the youth interviewed was that policemen were targeting specifically black and Asian people:

**(Question)** What about in the police?

**(Fatima)** *Yeah, I think some white policemen are racist towards Asians...I've heard it from other people, how they are really bad to Asians, white policemen are more bad to Asians...*

**Question)** Racism in the media, police or education?

**(Muna)** *Police, some policemen are really racist, because you know sometimes, when there's police officers that stand there and stop cars, yeah...It's true, yeah, whenever you see who they've pulled over, it's mostly black, Asian people...*

Pari (British Bangladeshi, 15) described a violent experience which happened to her (Bengali) friends in East London:

**(Question)** Do you think there is racism in the police?

**(Pari)** *Yeah, there is, definitely...Because the other day in East London, my friends, they were just doing their business, this is long time ago...just hanging around, playing and the police just all of sudden came, rushed in and beat them up and then went...And then again, the other day, the same police, came back in, started beating up one boy, even when an old lady got in, saying 'stop it!', they started hitting the old lady and the children...I think they brought it up in the Respect meeting...If the police beat us up, then who do we turn to? Apparently the police are saying that they started it...But that's a lie...and obviously they gonna believe the police more than anybody else...*

Charlotte (16, Jamaican/White English) also relied on her personal experience to denounce the prejudiced tendencies of the police:

**(Question)** What about the police?

**(Charlotte)** *Oh yes...I'll tell you what: my boyfriend is white, he drives and sometimes like...he smokes weed, so he'll be lean or whatever...And he don't really get stopped by police...I think he got stopped twice, and that's when I was with him...and the police let him off...But whenever I'm going in a car with a black guy, even a proper...normal black guy...Cos I don't really hang about with the kind of gang people...I can tell you that I've been stopped in so many cars with black guys by the police...They've got their windows open, the music ain't even playing that loud and they'll get stopped...*

Interestingly Nick (15, Jamaican/White English) said that, as he is 'classed black' by the police, he would be singled out, contrary to Nathalie (17, mixed African-White/White Scottish) who could 'pass' for white:

**(Nick)** [Racism] *it's definitely with the police force as well...The police would count me as black, I'll be classed black...If something went down, police would say 'oh it was a black youth' they would pull up every black youth they see...in a group...*

**(Question)** Do you think the police are racist then?

**(Nick)** *Some of them are...*

**(Question)** What about racism in the police?

**(Nathalie)** *With black people, yeah...but because I'm so light, I usually get away...I'm OK...But black people, fully black people, yeah...*

Abdul (British Bangladeshi, 16) raised the issue of anti-Muslim prejudice among the police in London:

**(Abdul)** *In some places yeah, there's lot of racism and in some places there isn't...In central London some Muslims get racially abused a lot...and by the police probably...The police they pick on them all the time...They pick particular people...Some people get abused by their second names in certain areas...*

This question of anti-Muslim sentiment was particularly important among the British Bangladeshi participants. Many pointed a growing Islamophobia in the West, and in Britain in particular, after the '9/11' attacks in New York and the '7/7' bombings in London and in

the general context of the 'war on terror' led by the USA and its allies. The following quotes can illustrate this:

*(Basima) More and more Muslim people in this country are getting stopped by police and getting searched because they think they're terrorists...when they have like a beard and a hat and stuff...*

**(Question)** Do you think there's more prejudice towards Muslims since 9/11?

*(Basima) Yeah...*

**(Question)** Where do you get that view from?

*(Basima) Well, I've seen it myself this black girl, yeah...my friend is doing this documentary about 9/11 and people, and she said openly that she'd be afraid if she sat next to a Muslim man...*

**(Question)** Do you think there is a new type of racism against Muslims?

*(Basima) Yeah...*

**(Question)** Do you think there is a new form of racism, Islamophobia?

*(Pari) I think so, people get bullied because they're Muslim...Or some people because they're wearing headscarf they would get...something at them... My friend's parents saying 'don't wear a scarf to school today'...when the 9/11 thing happened...she wasn't wearing a headscarf anymore...They were happy cos they were forced to wear it, not forced to wear it, but they would get told off if they didn't wear it, and then all of sudden, after the 9/11 thing, they were told not to wear it...Because of the fact that they might get attacked...*

**(Question)** Are you concerned with Muslim communities around the world? You know like Iraq...

*(Ahmed) Yeah, because George Bush, he hates Iraqis and all that...I don't like him...I think he's a prick...*

**(Question)** Do you think since 9/11, there's more prejudice towards Muslim people?

*(Ahmed) Yeah, yeah, definitely...*

**(Question)** Have you seen it?

*(Ahmed) Yeah...Americans held prisoners and they start taking the piss...they put them in underpants and all that...*

**(Question)** Are you concerned about Muslim communities around the world?

*(Abdul) I don't really think about it that much, but if I do think about it, I feel bad...Cos conflicts and wars...Many Muslims are dying...innocent Muslims are dying for no reasons...Hundreds and thousands of Muslims are dying in other countries, Palestine and that...When one British person dies in London, they put it all over the papers... In London, the more religious you get...if you put a hat on your head you get seen by the police in a different perspective, like you're a terrorist or something.*

**(Question)** After 9/11 more prejudice against Muslims, you think?

*(Abdul) There's more hatred against Muslims in London...Before [the London bombings], it was mainly in America...*

**(Question)** Since 9/11, do you think people are more wary of Muslims?

*(Karim) Yeah, because you hear white people beating up Muslim people...*

(Question) How do you feel about Iraq and Israel?

(Ayub) *I don't know...*

(Question) Since 9/11, do you think people are more prejudiced against Muslims?

(Ayub) *Yeah...and because the bombings and everything, they think all Muslims are like that...*

### *Experience of racism*

While the previous sections dealt essentially with the perception of discrimination and Islamophobia, this final section explores the more personal experiences of racism.

Regarding our British Bangladeshi participants, it is important to take the urban context of South Camden into account and especially the history of racist hostility against the Bangladeshi population in such areas as Somers Town (Desai, 1999). In the quote below Basima (16) evoked her experience in this particular area when she was younger:

(Question) Have you ever experienced racism or discrimination...Like teasing, name calling...hitting?

(Basima) *I can't remember much of it, but when I was younger in my area, Somers Town, it used to be really racist...*

(Question) How young?

(Basima) *When I was about 8, 9, 10....*

(Question) So have you experienced?

(Basima) *Just like 'Paki' and stuff, 'you smell of curry'...*

While no participants mentioned having been the victim of a physical violent racist attack, many British Bangladeshis interviewed, like Basima, reported having been verbally abused in South Camden. As illustrated by the following quotes all these racist experiences appear to be of a similar nature, as all of the interviewees said that they have been called 'Paki':

(Question) Have you experienced racism?

(Pari) *Yeah, a lot...Under our block, people used to say 'Paki' and stuff like that...I use to retaliate...Once I did retaliate and I said 'honkey' back...and they just ran...They were saying 'Paki!' and they were starting running and I went after them... 'Honkey!'*

(Question) Any physical violence?

(Pari) *No*

(Question) Have you experienced racism or any forms of discrimination?

(Fatima) *Yeah, in Robert Street...*

(Question) Oh obviously because of the whites and the Bengalis and stuff...

(Fatima) *Yeah...just name calling, like 'Pakis' and stuff...*

(Question) Never beaten up or anything?

(Fatima) *No...*

(Question) Have you ever experienced racism?

(Shiraj) *Yeah.*

(Question) Did they physically hurt you or...

*(Shiraj) Name calling...*

*(Question) How did you deal with it?*

*(Shiraj) Answer back to them and then...*

*(Question) You started a fight...*

*(Shiraj) Yeah...He called me a 'Paki'...*

*(Question) Have you experienced any forms of racism or discrimination?*

*(Ahmed) Yeah...It's like little things, like 'Paki' and stuff like that...*

*(Question) In your school?*

*(Ahmed) Around...in Camden...small things, I just black it out*

*(Question) You just walk away...Have they ever attacked you?*

*(Ahmed) No...*

*(Question) Did you experience racism here in Camden?*

*(Ayub) Yeah...name calling, 'Paki'...*

Four participants among all the mixed-heritage young people interviewed indicated that they also have been verbally abused. For instance John (17, Barbados/White English) reported having been called 'nigger' in a Brighton pub:

*(Question) Have you been victim of racism?*

*(John) Yeah...Mostly name calling...Once I was not allowed into somewhere because they cussed me at being black...*

*(Question) Where?*

*(John) It was on the coast...a pub in Brighton...I was with black friends and white friends as well, we all went in, and then they say 'no we don't want you in'...So we just all went out...*

*(Question) Name calling?*

*(John) Someone across the street, white guys, and then they ran off...Calling me 'nigger' and stuff like that...I didn't care...So if they were to come down to London, they would be shocked...They can see that everyone gets along...and they would be the ones who would be out...be the ones who everyone hated...That was in Brighton...I don't really care...*

While Nathalie (17, mixed African-White/White Scottish) recalled some racist name calling at school:

*(Nathalie) Someone said that I belong...on a Klux Klan cross...He was very little, that young...and then I said to him 'would you like it if somebody would say that about you because you're white?'...It was racism and my mum went mad...So in school, kids used to say stuff, and I used to tell my mum and she'd say 'just say to them: 'I'm this colour because my dad is, you're this colour because you don't wash!' I was laughing...When I go to the shops, the security man will follow me around! [laughing]*

*(Question) Have you been teased about it?*

*(Nathalie) Yeah, I used to be called 'the Albino'...*



**(Question)** Who by?

**(Nathalie)** *People in my school...in secondary...and said I was Ben Ladden's daughter, because of my skin colour, and 'sunshine baby' that's really sweet! [laughing]*

Like Nathalie, Chris (17, Jamaican/White English) said that he has been verbally abused because of his particular 'mixed-race appearance'. He described the experience he had with a black customer when he was working in a sport shop:

**(Question)** Have you experienced any racism, discrimination?

**(Chris)** *Yeah, man, lots of time...*

**(Question)** Where?

**(Chris)** *In the street...*

**(Question)** From whom?

**(Chris)** *White people...black people...Cos I am mixed-race, and I was telling you earlier about how black people, Jamaicans, like yardies and all that, they don't like mixed-race...They don't believe in half breed, that's how they call them...I was working, just before Christmas, and I was serving two customers, a white customer and an Asian customer, and there was a black customer...It was a busy day, Christmas Eve even...The third day before Christmas Eve...And the black guy said 'can I change my trainers' and I said 'sir, I'm sorry I'm serving this other customer, you came after this customer'....And that was it...He started calling me F-this, CU-that, C-U-N-T-that! I couldn't believe it...And then he called me a half breed...I was really, really offended by that...but I couldn't do anything cos I am working...I didn't want to jeopardise my job...just because of the ignorance of one customer...I just kept my cool and I just calmed down...It's not worth it...*

Charlotte also provided a detailed account of her experiences of (verbal) racism, mainly in the school environment. She started by indicating that her school 'was extremely racist' and that 'being mixed-race was probably one of the worst things to be'. She described how some black girls insulted her using offensive names such as 'half breed' (like in the case of Chris):

**(Question)** Did you like your school?

**(Charlotte)** *No...Because my school was extremely racist...as in like...you used to have the black girls and you used to have the white girls...and the Asian girls...Sometimes they used to mix...But sometimes not...Because black girls used to give more abuse to mixed-race girls than to white girls, I don't understand why, but mostly black Africans and proper black Jamaicans they used to really...They thought that mixed-race girls is wrong, it's just wrong...It's wrong to be mixed ...you're either black or you're white...And then the Asian girls used to socialise with their own part...Certain white girls used to hang about with the black girls...But being mixed-race in my school was probably one of the worst things to be...They used to say that my parents were gonna be punished by God because they decided to mix cultures...And people calling me names...*

**(Question)** Who? Black girls?

*(Charlotte) Yeah...They used to call me 'stupid half breed' and...just because of the fact that I'm mixed-race they used to always insult me, and because I'm not bad looking either that used to make things worse...*

There is a great contrast therefore, here, between this type of discourse and the one analysed earlier suggesting the flexible and 'comfortable' positionality of a 'mixed-race' identity. Indeed, in the extract below Charlotte talks about the difficulty to 'be accepted as mixed-race' by both black and white people:

**(Question)** Have you experienced any forms of racism?

*(Charlotte) Yep, a lot of racism...More when I was younger than what I do get now...For mixed-race people, it's kind of hard to be accepted, because some black people don't like you because you got white in you and some white people don't like you because of the fact that you are just mixed-race...You just get called 'half breed' and 'pick and mix'...*

#### **4. SUMMARY OF MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS**

##### **1-Local identity**

- Several young people said they felt that they belonged to a 'local community' or talked about a sense of 'home' among their own religious or ethnic group.
- Many contrasted the 'boredom' of the countryside with life in multicultural London.
- However, in Camden and in South London, several participants made reference to the existence of tensions or even violent conflicts occurring in their localities between groups of young people (always male) from different areas and/or ethnic groups.

##### **2-Private/public sphere boundary**

- For the great majority of participants in both groups, the boundary between home and 'outside' was socially meaningful.
- In many cases, language (what is said but also how it is said) was spontaneously mentioned by the participants when they were asked about the difference between their behaviour at home and outside (at school or among friends).
- British Bangladeshi girls (and also boys) indicated that their family was 'quite open' and that they were, for example, able to go out freely, to 'hang out', as long as their parents knew where they were.
- However several young Bangladeshi girls living in Camden mentioned 'culture' or 'tradition' when asked about the importance of discipline in the family or a possible

'generation gap'. Some were 'ethnicising' the notion of parental authority and the gendered division of space.

- In sum, we can say that the notion of respect towards adults and parents can reinforce the ethnic boundary when associated with a set of cultural or 'traditional' gendered norms.

### **3-Popular culture and tastes**

#### ***Music***

- The influence of a hybridised, diasporic genre was noticeable for some young British Bangladeshi interviewed, as bhangra and 'Bollywood remix', in particular, were mentioned several times. Through this hybridisation, the 'Asian element', is symbolically relocated in a new subcultural framework, a process which serves to delineate the boundaries of a positive contemporary British Asian identity.
- The influence of black codes and hip-hop subcultural styles is important among young people from both samples.
- There was a marked tendency from mixed-heritage youth to objectify the relationship between the construction of black identities and the sphere of cultural or social preferences and tastes.
- While mainstream US rap, RnB or garage were popular among almost all the youth interviewed, several participants, especially female, also expressed very critical opinions. They mainly referred to the explicit character of some songs and the promotion, by the rappers, of a 'gangsta' lifestyle associated to sexist, misogynist attitudes.

#### ***Media***

- Regarding television, there was a relative homogeneity of tastes among both groups as most participants said watching popular mainstream genres such as sitcoms (Friends), 'reality shows' (Big Brother), soaps (East Enders), teenage drama (Hollyoaks) or cartoons (on CBBC Channel for example). Similarly, recent mainstream - mainly American - films tended to dominate the participants' preferences in cinema.
- Only few participants said reading regularly British newspapers.
- Bangladeshi newspapers and magazines published in the UK did not appeal very much to British Bangladeshi participants. One of the reasons explaining this could be the little interest that young people show towards the situation in Bangladesh or in their district of origin in Sylhet.

- All the young British Bangladeshi girls said that they liked (or just watched) 'Bollywood' films but none of the boys seemed to show a strong interest in them. This suggests the need to take the gender factor into account when exploring the issue of diasporic media.

### **Sport**

- The question about 'allegiance' to a particular team proved difficult to answer for some participants who were often hesitant or confused.
- However, several young Bangladeshis assumed that 'supporting Bangladesh' in cricket was the 'natural' or 'obvious' option. This was indicated by the spontaneous use of such expressions as 'cos it's my country' or 'cos it's where I'm from'. It is also interesting that none of these expressions denoting symbolic notions of national origin, belonging and 'home' were explicitly associated with England or Britain.
- Several mixed-heritage participants created a discursive space associated with a 'chameleon identity repertoire'. For example a support for England in cricket and for Jamaica in the Olympics -suggesting an ability to negotiate a double identity.

### **Food**

- Regarding the consumption of food outside home, there was a relative homogeneity of responses. Fast food such as McDonald's or KFC, pizzas, takeaways, 'fish and chips' (or even 'junk food') were the most common responses among both British Bangladeshis and mixed-heritage youth.
- For the British Bangladeshi sample, food consumption reflected the maintenance of cultural practices as, in their great majority, the British Bangladeshi youth interviewed stated that they liked 'rice and curry', which was said to be the main type of food consumed at home. However, the participants mentioned as well the consumption of other types of food, in the domestic sphere, coined as 'English' or 'Western', such as pizzas, pastas, chips, etc.
- Among the British Bangladeshi youth, none said eating pork, thus reflecting a strong commitment to this highly central religious prohibition.
- Concerning the consumption of *halal* meat, the responses indicated a more flexible attitude.
- Many mixed-heritage participants said eating a diverse range of food at home, but several mixed-heritage youth interviewed indicated eating Caribbean or 'black' food regularly. In their discourses, it was often associated with dishes such as 'chicken and rice'.
- When black/Caribbean food was consumed at home, it was said to be cooked by the parent with a black or Caribbean background.

- The difference between the cooking practices of each parent was perhaps perceived in a stronger way in the case of separated parents. Thus, food can be seen as playing a role in the construction of a cultural boundary between two specific domestic environments, a boundary negotiated by the mixed-heritage youth in their everyday life.

#### 4-‘Traditions’, rituals and religiosity

- While none of the young British Bangladeshis we interviewed attend an Islamic school, all have received (or were still receiving) some form of religious ‘education’, mostly in the mosque or through private tuition, generally at home and over several years. This education reflects the central role of religion in the family socialisation process, as well as the parental commitment to pass on a set of religious traditions and norms.
- None of the British Bangladeshis interviewed showed a strict, scriptural sense of religiosity and there were no strict followers of the religious obligation concerning prayer (i.e. the five daily prayers and/or the participation in the collective service of *jumma* every Friday). There was, in fact, a variety of answers, which reflected a diversity of attitudes, ranging from the ones who did not pray at all to those who tried their best to be regular in their practice.
- Most of them also indicated ‘trying their best’ to fast the entire period of Ramadan. When asked to provide some reasons behind their decision to fast, the notions of purification and religious duty were implicitly invoked.
- The festivals of Eid were described as important religious and family events. Yet British Bangladeshi youth also participate in the ‘reinterpretation of tradition’ through a public experience of amusement, fun and ‘good time’ outside the sphere of the Bengali community social control (*shomaj*). The religious ‘tradition’ has been given a new signification through a specific urban social practice, the ‘cruising’, very close to what we could call a *subcultural use of public space*.
- Within the mixed-heritage sample, the individuals who said having a religion tended to define it as ‘Christianity’.
- While among the British Bangladeshi sample we could always observe a ‘minimal’ form of religious practice even in the more ‘secularised’ individuals, we found that for several mixed-heritage participants the religious practice was completely non-existent.
- This lack of religious commitment is often linked to the absence of spiritual signification of traditional Christian events and celebration.

- While the *practice* and 'routine' of Islam, with its all-encompassing character, occupied a central role in the discourses of British Bangladeshis, the relationship to religion seemed more individualised, intimate and 'privatised' for most of the mixed-heritage participants who showed some form of religious commitment.
- The perception and construction of religion as a resource for the individual is dependant on the contexts of practice and belongings within a social and family trajectory. In sum, the relationship to religion and faith evolves and is never static.

## 5-Narratives of identity and the social context of 'new ethnicities' and hybrid belongings

### *Hierarchy of identities (British Bangladeshi youth)*

- While the Muslim identity was often prioritised by the British Bangladeshi participants, none of them were clearly rejecting other forms of identification.
- Many discourses suggested a strong religious identification – which was sometimes perceived as 'obvious' and therefore 'naturalised'- for individuals yet not showing a significant and strict sense of religiosity through regular practices.
- For all the young people interviewed the Bangladeshi identity seemed also to be very important.
- The views about Bangladesh were often mixed as some young people enjoyed their stay 'back home' while others complained about the corruption or the political situation, but also, and more simply, about the heat, the mosquitoes or the boredom of village life, for instance.
- We can say that the degree of identification with Englishness was very low and the English category (ethnicity or 'culture') was often associated with whiteness.
- When we asked the British Bangladeshi participants if they felt belonging 'between two cultures', none of the responses suggested a 'crisis of identity'. Their discourses often implied an awareness of a *combination* of both identities instead of a negative 'in-betweeness'.

### *Hierarchy of identities (Mixed-heritage youth)*

- 'Mixed-race' was preferred to other expressions (such as 'mixed-parentage', 'mixed-heritage', etc.) and was constructed as a viable category of identification.
- For several participants, religion and also the West Indian or African identities had a role to play in terms of dynamics of self-identification.

- The participants did not really wish to prioritise a black identity when asked how they would describe themselves, even if some said that they were often perceived as black.
- The establishment of a direct correspondence between 'being English' and 'being white' was not recurrent among them (while it was a salient tendency among many of the British Bangladeshi youth interviewed). Many said to be 'proud to be British'.
- It seemed that there was a stronger emphasis on urban/local identities among mixed-heritage youth than among British Bangladeshis.

### ***Contexts of identities (British Bangladeshi youth)***

- Among the British Bangladeshi participants there was a strong tendency to choose the categories 'Bangladeshi' and 'Bengali' with reference to the domestic sphere. The dominant aspect of this choice was language.
- It appears that British Bangladeshi participants mainly speak Sylheti/Bengali at home with their parents. Yet, many also said switching between languages often, i.e. speaking English with their siblings or a combination of English and Sylheti/Bengali to their siblings and parents.
- Regarding the school environment, we can say that language represents a relevant marker as well when several participants justified their choice of a British identity in this context
- Many chose a combination of identities in reference to social contexts outside home.
- Three quarter of the respondents had at least one Bangladeshi boy or girl among their three best friends. The issue of cultural proximity and 'mutual understanding' seemed to be central here.

### ***Contexts of identities (mixed-heritage youth)***

- There was a great diversity of identities chosen by the mixed-heritage participants for each different context.
- Regarding the domestic environment, and as opposed to the British Bangladeshi case, there was no real dominant trend. However, in the case of parents living separately, a sense of biculturalism with an ability to navigate between different social and/or domestic worlds was salient.
- Regarding the important dimension of friendship and peer grouping, there was also no clear dominant pattern of socialisation among the mixed-heritage youth interviewed. In fact, many youth move between different peer groups.

- An attachment to a black dominated peer group does not necessarily involve the prioritisation of an exclusive black identity.
- One of the most important findings of the research is that there was no apparent feeling of marginality expressed when our mixed-heritage participants talked about their identities and their experiences of different cultural and social worlds. As it was the case with the British Bangladeshi youth interviewed, they did not see themselves as being caught ‘between two cultures’. Rather, they were keen to use such expressions as ‘combination’, ‘mix’, ‘mixed culture’, etc. when referring to their sense of identity. The data collected also showed how the sense of identity was fluid, changing and contextually contingent.
- For many youth, the most positive aspect of a ‘mixed-race’ identity was the ability to negotiate black and white social worlds, to navigate, with a great fluidity, between the two. In sum, the mixed-heritage youth clearly have the competence to negotiate and ‘manage’ their multiple identities in different environments as there was a marked tendency to move across social/ethnic groups.

## **6- Multiculturalism, racism and discrimination**

### ***Living in multicultural Britain***

- The young people interviewed acknowledged the cultural diversity of today’s Britain and the great majority of them viewed it in a positive light.
- More nuanced views about multiculturalism were however expressed (with reference to racism and ethnic/racial divisions).

### ***Perception of discrimination***

- When reflecting on their experiences at school (and in a highly multicultural environment, for most of them) the great majority of the interviewees, from both samples, did not think that there was a significant level of racism and discrimination in British education.
- This notion of stereotyped views and representations was very present in discourses about media.
- For the great majority of the participants, it was the police which were perceived to adopt discriminatory practices. The dominant opinion among the youth interviewed was that policemen were targeting specifically black and Asian people.
- Many British Bangladeshis pointed a growing Islamophobia in the West, and in Britain in particular, after the ‘9/11’ attacks in New York and the ‘7/7’ bombings in London.



### *Experience of racism*

- While no participants mentioned having been victim of a physical violent racist attack, many among the British Bangladeshis we interviewed reported having been verbally abused in South Camden.
- Four participants among all the mixed-heritage young people interviewed indicated that they also have been verbally abused.
- Some said having been verbally abused because of a particular 'mixed-race appearance'.

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