BELIEVING CITIZENS:
RELIGION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG
LONDON’S SECOND GENERATION YOUTH

Daniel Nilsson DeHanas

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of Sociology.

Chapel Hill
2010

Approved by:
Christian Smith (chair)
Jacqueline Maria Hagan
Krishan Kumar
Margarita A. Mooney
Lisa D. Pearce
ABSTRACT

DANIEL NILSSON DEHANAS

Believing Citizens: Religion and Civic Engagement among London’s Second Generation Youth
(under the direction of Christian Smith)

The goal of this dissertation is to answer the question “What kinds of citizens are London’s second generation youth becoming?” The question is asked in particular reference to the role of religious beliefs and practices in citizenship development. The dissertation is a comparative study of sixty youth from the immigrant second generation (age 18-25): Bangladeshis in the East End (predominantly Muslim) and Jamaicans in Brixton (largely Christian). Analysis is based on in-depth interviews with youth and ethnographic observation in the mosques, churches, and streets of both locations. In the second chapter, “civic engagement” is defined as the actualization of citizenship by cultivating political literacy, developing a civic identity, and participating in political activities. Analysis reveals that Jamaican and Bangladeshi youth are moderately politically literate and have low levels of civic identity invested in “Britishness.” However, Bangladeshi youth have very high levels of political participation when compared to Jamaicans and to the British population overall, and this political participation increases with Muslim religiosity. The same religiosity effect is not found among Jamaicans. The remaining chapters of the dissertation progressively build an explanation for this political participation disparity. It is argued that second generation Bangladeshis in the East End tend to adopt “deculturated” Muslim identities propagated
by local mosques that set them apart from the culturally infused Islam of their parents. The pervasiveness of this form of Muslim identity in the local area provides civic orientation and motivation to youth, enabling collective action on issues that are seen to affect the global community of Muslims. Jamaican youth, in contrast, tend to develop hybrid and situational identities that do not provide the same coherent basis for collective civic engagement. While Brixton Jamaican-led churches are more individual-focused and may engage in revival-like campaigns of political activism, East End Bangladeshi mosques have developed a sustained vision for local civic advocacy that is buttressed by the regularity of community-level Islamic practice. Therefore the most likely paths for youth citizenship development differ in the two contexts.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mentor Chris Smith and my dissertation committee members Jackie Hagan, Krishan Kumar, Margarita Mooney, and Lisa Pearce for their support and guidance over the years. I am grateful to Fiona Adamson, Grace Davie, Gordon Lynch, Tariq Modood, Therese O'Toole, and Natasha Warikoo for giving me such a warm and generous welcome into the UK academic community. Most importantly, I thank all of the Londoners who were willing to be interviewed or to help in other ways to make this research possible. This dissertation has been supported by funding from the National Study of Youth and Religion, a UNC Smith Graduate Research Grant, and a National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant (SES-092878).
To my wife Sara and my parents Steve and Sinikka. Thank you for your unfailing love and support which have made this dissertation possible.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION................................................................................................. 1

Why Study Jamaicans and Bangladeshis? Why in Brixton and the East End?................................. 7

How I Studied Second Generation Youth........................................................................ 15

Plan of the Dissertation........................................................................................................ 19

CHAPTER 2: YOUTH AS CITIZENS: APATHETIC, ALIENATED OR ATOMIZED?............... 22

Two Young Men................................................................................................................ 26

Perspectives on British Youth Civic Engagement................................................................ 33

Data and Measures............................................................................................................. 39

Religiosity.............................................................................................................................. 40

Civic Identity......................................................................................................................... 42

Political Literacy.................................................................................................................. 42

Political Participation.......................................................................................................... 43

Results.................................................................................................................................. 45

Civic Identity......................................................................................................................... 45

Political Literacy.................................................................................................................. 45

Political Participation.......................................................................................................... 49

Revisiting Mike and Hamid.................................................................................................. 62
CHAPTER 3: SHAPING CITIZENS: MOSQUES, CHURCHES, AND YOUTH CIVIC SOCIALIZATION

The Religious Scene in Brixton                                   77

Case Study Churches and Mosques                                 82

Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church: The Dutiful West Indian Citizen  86

Brick Lane Jamme Masjid: The Dutiful Bangladeshi Citizen          96

Ruach Ministries: Champions and Ambassadors                      104

The East London Mosque: Islamicized Citizens                    115

Concluding Discussion                                            127

CHAPTER 4: COMPETING ALLEGIANCES?: SECOND GENERATION
IDENTITY OPTIONS

Second Generation Youth: Four Styles of Identity Construction    139

Continuity                                                      139

Between Cultures                                                140

Hybridity                                                      142

Deculturation                                                   143

The Identity Ranking Method                                     146

Basic Youth Values                                              148

Jamaican Identities                                             151

Race                                                          151

Mabel                                                        155

Moving with Music                                               160

Bangladeshi Identities                                          172

Muslim First                                                   172
Yasmin............................................................................................................................. 176
Rubina............................................................................................................................. 180
Deculturation in Action................................................................................................. 185
Not So British?............................................................................................................... 189

CHAPTER 5: RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM: BUILDING BLOCKS OF
SOCIAL CHANGE........................................................................................................... 197

The LIVE Event: Opposing Gun and Knife Crime, One Person at a Time............... 199
The Big IFtar: Breaking a Ramadan Fast for the Hungry and Homeless............... 208

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION: BELIEVING CITIZENS.................................................. 220

Present Realities, Future Hopes................................................................................... 226

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE............................................................................... 235

REFERENCES.................................................................................................................. 239
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1. Hypotheses of Youth Civic Engagement......................................................... 37
Table 2.2. Political Literacy Measure............................................................................. 41
Table 2.3. Political Participation Measures.................................................................... 44
Table 2.4 Jamaican and Bangladeshi Youth Political Literacy, by Religiosity.................. 46
Table 2.5. Jamaican and Bangladeshi Youth Political Participation, by Religiosity........... 50
Table 2.6. Brands that Bangladeshi Youth Boycott, with Frequencies......................... 56
Table 2.7. Brands that Jamaican Youth Boycott, with Frequencies................................. 56
Table 3.1. Religious Organizations Visited for Participant Observation.......................... 83
Table 3.2. Megachurches in Britain................................................................................ 84
Table 4.1. Theoretical Models of Youth Identity........................................................... 145
Table 4.2. Labels Used in Identity Ranking Exercise..................................................... 147
Table 4.3. Samuel’s Identity Ranking........................................................................... 154
Table 4.4. Mabel’s Identity Ranking............................................................................. 159
Table 4.5. Damien’s Identity Ranking.......................................................................... 162
Table 4.6. Identities Chosen as “First,” Youth Subsample from Secular Contexts............ 172
Table 4.7. Yasmin’s Identity Ranking.......................................................................... 178
Table 4.8. Rubina’s Identity Ranking.......................................................................... 182
Table 4.9. Farouq’s Identity Ranking........................................................................... 186
Table 4.10. Khan’s Identity Ranking.......................................................................... 188
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Electric Avenue Market in Brixton................................................................. 10

Figure 1.2. Brick Lane in the East End............................................................................. 13

Figure 2.1. Major Citizenship Concepts in this Dissertation (Citizen Side) ................................................................. 25

Figure 2.2. A “Boycott Israeli Goods” Campaign Sticker at a Pedestrian Crossing on Whitechapel Road................................................................. 59

Figure 3.1. The Universal Pentecostal Church on Acre Lane........................................... 73

Figure 3.2. Whitechapel Road in the East End................................................................ 74

Figure 3.3. Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church......................................................... 88

Figure 3.4. Brick Lane Jamme Masjid.............................................................................. 97

Figure 3.5. Ruach Ministries........................................................................................... 108

Figure 3.6. The East London Mosque and London Muslim Centre after Friday Prayers........................................................................................................... 117

Figure 3.7. Subjective Experience, Objective Reality, and Action................................ 131

Figure 4.1. The Identity Ranking Exercise..................................................................... 138

Figure 5.1. Seventh Day Adventist LIVE March 2009.................................................. 198

Figure 5.2. Personal Faith as a Causal Mechanism of Individual and Social Change........................................................................................................... 206

Figure 5.3. The Big IFtar Charity Event, 2009............................................................... 210

Figure 5.4. Solidarity through Ritual as a Causal Mechanism of Individual and Social Change................................................................................................ 213
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Can Europe be the same with different people in it?” This question is the subtitle of a recent book from Christopher Caldwell (2009), in which he writes about the cultural implications of Muslim immigration in Europe. Caldwell’s Reflections on a Revolution in Europe harkens back to a book of a similar name from Edmund Burke (1790) about the French Revolution. Caldwell believes that contemporary changes brought by Muslim immigrants and their descendants will be at least as far-reaching for Europe culturally as the secularist and democratic coup in 1789 was politically for France. His primary basis for argument is that Muslims in Europe are a characteristically different people carrying a distinctive religious culture, and that they are beginning to replace Europe’s populations and institutions with their own. As they become citizens in European states, Caldwell believes, these states will gradually but irrevocably shift beyond recognition as European.

Islam haunts Caldwell’s prognosis for Europe. Yet, his book remains distant from the daily lives of the “new Europeans” and the roles religion might have in them. If Europe is beginning to have “different people in it,” more must be done to flesh out what Europe’s immigrants, and their descendants, are actually like. The key question

---

1 This is Caldwell’s subtitle for the European edition of the book, published by Allen Lane. In North America, the subtitle is simply “Immigration, Islam, and the West” and the book is published by Doubleday.
underlying Caldwell’s analysis remains unanswered: What kinds of citizens are “new Europeans” becoming?

In this dissertation I focus on a single segment of “new Europeans”: The children of immigrants. This group is often called the second generation, meaning that they follow on from their immigrant parents who were the first generation in Europe. I spent about two years coming to know second generation 18 to 25 year olds in one city, London, UK. I attended their places of worship, walked the streets where they have grown up, and sat down with many for interviews and informal conversations. I was able to study in an in-depth and qualitative way how sixty of these young second-generation Londoners are emerging into adulthood and becoming engaged or disengaged as British citizens.

I broaden the lens beyond Muslims in this dissertation to also look at second generation Christians and non-religious youth. There are probably more than one thousand research publications and popular books written about Muslims in Europe (Bujis and Rath 2003). This dissertation contributes to that important literature. Yet the European research tradition on Christianity among immigrants and subsequent generations is much thinner and less well developed. The research disparity is unfortunate, because it results in lopsided accounts of European religion and migration. The majority of migrants in Europe are in fact of Christian background, if we include migrants moving across the intra-European borders, such as Poles and Romanians. Even when only migrants who have come to Europe from outside the continent are considered, the numbers of Muslim and Christian migrants appear to be nearly at parity (Jenkins 2007). My purpose in including Christians, Muslims, and some non-religious youth in
this study is threefold: 1) To be more true to the varieties of religious experience for second generation youth in Europe; 2) To compare youth across their religious traditions, showing how they are influenced differently by particular strains of Islam, Christianity, and secularity; and, finally, 3) To be able to discern general influences of religiosity and broader trends that are not related to religion at all.

Only by broadening the lens beyond Muslims can we judge whether Muslim youth really are an exceptional case in Europe that requires the urgent attention called for by authors such as Christopher Caldwell, Bruce Bawer (2006), and Melanie Phillips (2007). It may be, instead, that some young Muslims’ struggles and reactions are common to the wider experience of migrant communities and their religions. Or perhaps the answer is somewhere in between – there could be aspects of the situation of young second generation Muslims that are unique (as there could be for second generation young Christians), but these do not constitute an unreasonable or unbridgeable gulf of difference with the rest of Britain and Europe.

The primary research question guiding this dissertation, foreshadowed earlier, is: *What kinds of citizens are London’s second generation youth becoming?* I ask this question in particular reference to the influence of religious identities, beliefs, and practices on the development of youth citizenship identities and civic engagement. The dissertation compares British second generation youth of two different immigrant origins, Bangladeshis and Jamaicans, who have been sampled from a variety of religious and secular contexts.

Through the touchstone of the Bangladeshi and Jamaican comparison groups, I can capture something of (though not fully address) questions that are commonly asked
about broader ethnic populations they represent. The most recent British Census (2001) found that 7.9 percent of the British population are of non-white ethnicities. The largest non-white ethnic populations in Britain are South Asians\(^2\) (Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi) who together compose 4 percent of the population, blacks (Caribbean and African) who compose 2 percent, and mixed race with 1.2 percent. Bangladeshis and Jamaicans are large and historically important ethnic minority populations in London, as I will explain further in this Introduction. These two groups will provide us with some leverage for understanding issues faced by Britain’s South Asian, black, and mixed race populations more broadly.

The problems that black British and British South Asians face in the UK are legion. As ethnic sub-populations, they are most economically deprived in the nation and have the lowest levels of educational achievement (Modood 2005). Most relevant to this dissertation on citizenship, research studies have found that black British have the lowest average levels of participation in British elections. The effect is particularly acute among black youth (Purdam et. al. 2002; Saggar 1998). Initiatives such as Operation Black Vote are attempting to respond to this democratic deficit and to mobilize young black voters. It is also possible that religion could help address this issue – particularly Christianity, which predominates in the Black British population. Can religion motivate and structure the civic engagement of Black British youth? Or does religion more often influence

---

\(^2\)In Britain, historic immigration from Asia has predominantly been from the Indian subcontinent. For this reason, the general term “Asian” is typically used instead of “South Asian.” I choose to use “South Asian” in this dissertation to provide clarity, because the term “Asian” in the American experience of immigration most often connotes ethnic origins in East Asia.
black youth into otherworldliness, alienation, or simply apathy? These are questions to which we need better answers.

Questions are also frequently asked about citizenship among British South Asian Muslims. Worries about their participation in British civic life first became widespread during the protests and book burnings of the 1989 Rushdie Affair (Weller 2009; Werbner 2002). In the wake of the youth disturbances in Oldham, Burnley, and Bradford in summer, 2001, the British government issued the Cantle Report which stated that South Asians may be living “parallel lives” set apart from the rest of Britain. More recently, Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, has stated that in Britain “we are sleepwalking our way towards segregation.” The London bombings of 7/7/2005 and subsequent terrorist attempts raise particular fears of a “home-grown” terrorist threat from youth in insular Pakistani and Bangladeshi enclaves.

These issues about South Asian youth, like those about black African and Caribbean youth, can be framed as issues of disengagement from the nation of citizenship. Some questions highlighting commonly raised concerns are: Does religion (particularly Islam) contribute to the ghettoizing and separation of communities from British national life and culture? Is religion leading youth to take on radical and violent ideologies? Or does religious influence tend to be more benign, more varied, or perhaps more positive when it promotes stable self-identities and practices?

---

3 Because such a large proportion of South Asians in Britain have their origins in Pakistan or Bangladesh, a slight majority of the British South Asian population is Muslim. Many British Indians and other British South Asians practice other faiths such as Hinduism, Sikhism, or Christianity.

4 Trevor Phillips has renamed Commission for Racial Equality as the Equality and Human Right Commission, partly reflecting a change in philosophy to more classically liberal notions of equality.
To address these questions of citizenship, I conducted sixty in-depth interviews with youth along with dozens of interviews with local leaders and community observers. All of the youth were 18 to 25 at the time of interview, placing them in a period in their lives that can be called emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000). As such, many of them were working through the issues of education, employment, and long-term relationships that are common to people of this life stage. Emerging adulthood is the time period in which youth are first able to vote (age 18 in Britain). The political attitudes and preferences that are formed in these relatively early years of political enfranchisement can solidify and last over the life span. In this dissertation I will tend to refer to the young people I interviewed as “youth,” simply for ease of expression. Yet it is important to remember that they are in a transitional period of life, a period that falls after adolescence yet still somewhere between youth and adulthood. The term “emerging adulthood” captures this well.

Along with being in a certain age cohort, the youth in this study are, as previously mentioned, all members of the second generation. With very few exceptions, all sixty youth that I interviewed in-depth were born in Britain to immigrant parents and are legal British citizens. Second generation youth have been a focal point for much contemporary

---

5In defining the second generation as the children of immigrants, born in Britain, I follow an extensive research literature (e.g., Crul and Vermeulen 2003; Kasinitz et. al. 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). The youth I interviewed also most often thought of the second generation in this way, perhaps because they have heard policy and media discourses. For example, without my own mention of the term, a Bangladeshi youth named Yasmin (introduced in Chapter 4) offered her own description: “Being a second generation, my connection to my ancestors has my parents between the two.” The exceptions (those who were not second generation) were: one Jamaican female and one Bangladeshi female in the third generation, and a Jamaican female, Jamaican male, and Bangladeshi male who are in the 1.5 generation because they came to the UK during childhood. These five exceptional cases were generally more similar than different when compared to their second generation peers.
social scientific research, partly because their integration and citizenship activities can be read as a barometer of the future outcomes for their ethnic groups. While many immigrants of the first-generation naturally retain their closest feelings of cultural and family connection with their country of origin, their second-generation children are socialized in Britain and are educated by British schooling. Thus the second-generation, more than the first, might be expected to have a cultural affinity with Britain and to contribute to it as a nation. Some scholars are concerned that second-generation failings in integration and citizenship could herald problems that will last for generations to come (Timmermans 2009).

**Why Study Jamaicans and Bangladeshis? Why in Brixton and the East End?**

I chose to focus my dissertation on Jamaicans and Bangladeshis primarily because these two groups provide for a well-matched sociological comparison. Both have played important roles in London’s immigration history. The Bangladeshi Muslims of Tower Hamlets constitute the largest Muslim population of any local area in Britain, and have played a major role in the public face of British Islam. The Jamaicans of Brixton, while not as ethnically concentrated, have also been highly influential in British religious and cultural arenas. Both ethnic populations are at comparable points in their migration histories. Both have large populations of second generation youth. Jamaican and Bangladeshi youth each face problems that are typical to inner cities, including drugs, gangs, socio-economic deprivation, and educational disadvantage. Next I briefly profile the histories of both groups in these particular areas of London.
Jamaican immigration to Britain was inaugurated with the “Windrush Generation.” The story of their arrival has become a defining episode for modern Britain. In 1948, the British Nationality Act made the first legal distinction between citizens in Britain and those who lived in Britain’s colonies, who became Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies (CUKC). In the same year Britain was suffering from a post-war labor shortage. Royal Mail placed an advertisement in a Jamaican daily newspaper for the Empire Windrush steamship, which was carrying passengers and commercial goods from Jamaica to Britain. A total of 490 men and two women bought tickets and undertook the journey from Jamaica. The Windrush voyage was highly publicized in Britain – even as it sailed, it provoked vigorous debate about immigration in Parliament. When the Windrush arrived at the Tilbury Docks on June 22, 1948, the image of hundreds of black Caribbean passengers disembarking from its gangplank became a symbol of Britain’s transition into a multi-ethnic society.

Most Windrush passengers took accommodation near the Labour Exchange close to the Tilbury Docks, which happened to be in Brixton. It was from this initial settlement that Brixton became the heartland for British Jamaicans and a wellspring of Black British culture in general. The area has long been noted for the Brixton Market that stocks

---

6I narrate the story here as it is commonly told by British historians and media. Recent historiography of the event (Mead 2009) is beginning to question the number, origins, and destinations of those who embarked on the Empire Windrush voyage. This recent work adds greater nuance and clarity to the history; yet the Windrush “story” as I relay it here has gained a reality and influence of its own.

7Until 1948, all members of British colonies were in practice entitled to the same citizenship rights and participation as “native” Britons. In fact, the first MP from the Indian subcontinent was Dadahai Naoroji, elected by a London constituency to the House of Commons in 1892 (Anwar 2001). The British Nationality Act did not actually institute substantive changes to this citizenship arrangement, but was instead a precursor to the more significant Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962.
Caribbean and African foods, for the classic 1911 Ritzy Cinema building, and for its
dynamic live music scene.

Brixton is also known as a place of racial tensions. The Windrush Generation
arrived with high hopes for opportunities in the “Mother Country” of Britain. In the
decades that followed, the experiences of these Jamaicans and subsequent blacks in
Britain would be marred by racist confrontations and institutional discrimination. Racial
tensions came to a head in the Brixton Riot of 1981. Police had been scouring the streets
in Operation Swamp, using a surge of “stop and search” methods to root out local crime.
A struggle between police and a crowd involving a stabbed youth led to different
interpretations of the incident on both sides. Five hours of violence erupted, involving
hundreds of injuries and destroyed vehicles and dozens of burning buildings, in what was
in the aftermath of the riot, confirmed that some police were at fault for discrimination
and overreaching their authority. Brixton has seen two more riots of a smaller scale since
then, in 1985 and 1995, which also pitted black residents against mostly white police.

Over the years, Jamaicans in Brixton have responded to racialized British society
in various ways. In a seminal article, Stuart Hall (1992) outlined a history of Black
British self-definition that moved from “West Indian migrant,” to “black identity,” to
“new ethnicities.” Hall’s historical account is exemplified by Jamaicans in Brixton.
Their first years of settlement were marked by strong identification as West Indian
migrants. The 1970s and 1980s saw a cresting of ‘black identity’ as Rastafarianism, Pan-
Africanism, and race-based political movements provided different black responses to
racism. It was in this period that minorities developed a strong political consciousness,
and “black” political activism included South Asians alongside Caribbeans and Africans (Solomos and Back 1995). According to Hall, the 1990s and onwards have signalled a period of “new ethnicities,” in which mixed-race identities and hybrid-ethnic allegiances become more common. New ethnicities are expected to be especially prevalent in second and further generations, as youth have more freedom from parents’ identities and take part in multicultural peer groups. In Hall’s model of transitions in black identities, vestiges of each previous period continue to remain. Thus, in Brixton today, Jamaicans may have many cross-cutting options along the spectrum from fixed West Indian ethnicity to fluid new ethnicities.

Figure 1.1. Electric Avenue Market in Brixton

---

8 All photographs in this dissertation were taken by the author from 2008 to 2010 and are copyrighted.
Contemporary Brixton is gentrifying as young professionals are attracted to its arts and nightlife. The area has likewise diversified in terms of immigration. Numbers of African migrants have grown and Portuguese now constitute a sizable community, among several others. Brixton struggles with poverty, hard drugs, knife crime, and gang violence. Cannabis use is widespread, provoking various opinions (cannabis is legal in Jamaica). Brixton is also the setting of variegated spiritualities, from many modest storefront churches to a well-known mega-church, from spiritual practices loosely based in West African Vodun to a staunchly Salafi mosque. Brixton has been and continues to be a place of many and varied influences. It has a busy and vibrant street life that Jamaican second generation youth described to me as “loud” or a place of “hustle and bustle.” Brixton is much more a place of movement than stability.

The East End of London, now home to Britain’s largest Bangladeshi population, has also played stage to migratory movements. Yet these movements have taken a somewhat different form than in Brixton. East End migration has generally resembled a succession of “waves” rather than a mix of simultaneous currents. East End immigrant communities have each retained a relatively solid character in their first generation or even first several, with low rates of intermarriage. The less permeable nature of these communities can be attributed, at least in part, to religion.

The immigration history in the East End began with French Huguenots, Protestants fleeing persecution from the Catholic monarchy in the middle of the Eighteenth Century. Huguenots took occupations primarily as weavers: The upper windows that allowed light for their looms can still be seen on Fournier Street. Although an enclave community at first, the French Huguenots assimilated within a few
generations. They are now remembered largely in names, e.g., the actor Laurence Olivier. After the Huguenots, there was a migration of Irish to London, escaping the potato famine of the mid-1800s. A sizable number settled in the East End. It was next that Jews, fleeing Russian pogroms, arrived in the late Nineteenth Century. In this same period Jack the Ripper murdered his hapless female victims in overcrowded East End slums, and William Booth, touched by the area’s poverty, founded the Salvation Army. The Jewish population of the East End swelled to over 100,000 by the turn of the Twentieth Century, and the area took on the informal designation of “New Jerusalem.” Anne Kershen (2005) notes that for these successive waves of immigrants it was religion (though not necessarily religiosity) that provided cultural stability and the institutions of community life.

Bangladeshis can trace their history in the East End to lascars⁹ who worked on ships that landed at the London docks. Many of these sailors came from the Sylhet region, an area with good river links down to Bengal’s main ports (Eade and Garbin 2006). However it was the fateful combination of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) and East Pakistan’s independence as Bangladesh (1971) that led to a substantial wave of Bangladeshi immigration. The 1962 Act restricted what had been a very generous British policy of admitting all members of Commonwealth lands, as it instead required immigrants to prove employment, economic independence, or armed forces service. A rush of Bangladeshis entered Britain under the more generous policy before the bill was passed. The largest numbers came from the Sylhet region of Bangladesh, due to lineage and patronage connections with the earlier generations of lascars (Gardner

⁹Lascar: A sailor. The term, originally from Persian, was used by the British for the South Asian seamen who manned the ships of the Empire.
1995). It is because of a process of chain migration – Sylhetis progressively bringing family members and others to join them – that the composition of the East End Bangladeshi population today is predominantly Sylheti (Gardner 2002).

*Figure 1.2. Brick Lane in The East End*

The Bangladeshis had arrived for economic opportunities, and many began by working in textiles. Others started restaurants or small shops. Bangladeshis would over time come to account for the vast majority of “Indian” Restaurant owners in Britain. Brick Lane in the East End became the heartland of settlement, with many businesses and organizations beginning there. The Brick Lane area gained such a visible Bangladeshi character that, with the support of local entrepreneurs, it was dubbed Banglatown in the late 1990s (Carey 2004). In 1997 an arch reminiscent of those in many Chinatowns (but
in a more Bengali style) was erected at the entrance of the Brick Lane, which has earned the reputation of Britain’s heartland of curry houses. The area has been portrayed frequently in literature, most notably in Monica Ali’s acclaimed *Brick Lane* (2003) and in Salman Rushdie’s highly contentious *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

Like Jamaicans and other blacks in Brixton, the Bangladeshis of the East End have recently been targets of racism and discrimination. In 1978, white racists murdered the 25 year-old textile worker, Altab Ali. A demonstration of thousands of Bangladeshis and others carrying the young man’s coffin made a powerful statement against racism. Today, a sculpted gate at Altab Ali Park stands in memory of the incident. As virulent racism continued to threaten the Bangladeshi community, young men formed groups to oppose racist violence. Young Bangladeshi males in the area took on tougher personas and formed petty gangs to defend their areas. These ‘gangs’ have now taken on lives of their own, with some involved in the local drug trade (Dench et. al. 2006; c.f., Alexander 2000). Bangladeshi youth have been affected by broader British and global youth culture. Many listen to the hip hop of 50 Cent or Lil Wayne as much as their Jamaican peers.

According to Gardner and Shukur (1994), the other common Bangladeshi response to British racial exclusion has been to take on strong identities as Muslims. Indeed, while Bangladeshi and Sylheti identities are important for the first generation, and a form of black politics may have had unifying potential in the 1980s, today Muslim identity is the most widespread and valued (Modood 2005). In the East End area, the East London Mosque is the largest and most well known mosque propagating strong Muslim identities. Ed Husain (2007), who grew up in the East End, argues that this
mosque primed him for the development of an aggressive Islamist identity, which he has since abandoned. Others situate Husain’s biography in religious developments of the 1990s, which they say are no longer relevant (Birt 2007). Yet whether benign, dangerous, or positive, it is clear that globally-oriented, revivalist streams of Islam are growing in their influence in the East End. These forms of Islam are showing particular traction among the young, both male and female (Glynn 2002).

The East End, like Brixton, is an impoverished area which struggles with issues of crime and delinquency. Yet it is gentrifying as well. The Canary Wharf development transformed acres of abandoned dockland warehouses into a business complex with some of the sleekest skyscrapers in Britain. This massive business development, along with the thriving artistic scene on the North half of Brick Lane and in Shoreditch, are major economic drivers for many urban renewal projects. The upcoming 2012 Olympics in East London promises to add yet another chapter to the East End’s history of cultures, conflict, and competition for resources. The potential influence of Olympic investment on the wellbeing of second and further generations of Bangladeshis is, for the moment, difficult to discern.

**How I Studied Second-Generation Youth**

The sixty young people I interviewed for this dissertation are from inner city areas of London. I met and interviewed all of the Jamaican youth in Brixton, South London, and all of the Bangladeshi youth in Tower Hamlets in East London. Tower Hamlets is ranked as the third most deprived borough out of 354 in England, while Lambeth (where Brixton is located) is ranked the 19th most deprived (Government Office for London
My youth interviewees were all born into immigrant families, and typically come from humble socio-economic backgrounds. The average Bangladeshi youth I met was living in cramped social housing conditions with parents, siblings, and perhaps extended family. Many Bangladeshis told me that their parents were currently unemployed or suffer from serious health conditions or work injuries. Most of the Jamaican youth I interviewed had been raised in single-parent households. Some were estranged from one or both of their parents. Jamaicans and Bangladeshis both spoke of the ravages of drugs and delinquency among friends and schoolmates in their generation.

The aspirations and likely life outcomes of my interviewees varied widely. Some were attending university. Mike, a Jamaican mixed race youth, was about to enter a prestigious law program at the London School of Economics. For others, university or even a stable career was impossible to imagine. Some of the young men I interviewed were ‘hustling’ to make ends meet. Others had chosen to live on modest means to devote themselves to intensive religious study and prayer. Yet others were putting careers on hold to plan and start families. Rubina, a 19 year-old Bangladeshi woman, is a university student who has ambitions to become a well-known Muslim writer. Samia, of the same age and ethnic background, attends a basic work skills center in the hope of shedding alcoholism and scraping her life back together.

My research in these inner city areas of Brixton and the East End (specifically Spitalfields and Whitechapel) began when I explored each area on foot. I spoke with shopkeepers and community contacts to gain a better orientation in the two research sites. I read academic studies of both sites and kept up with British news media. Through these initial months of research I was able to identify the religious and community institutions
in each site that are the most influential with local young people. These institutions
would be key to my analysis of whether and how religion can motivate second-generation
youth into civic engagement or perpetuate disengagement.

I then began visiting the local institutions I had identified, focusing on churches
and mosques. I chose two Jamaican-led churches in Brixton, which I attended for in-
depth case studies: the large Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church and a Neo-
Pentecostal megachurch called Ruach Ministries. In the East End, I chose two case-study
mosques: The prominent East London Mosque on Whitechapel Road and the traditional
Bengali Jamme Masjid on Brick Lane. I attended many mosque congregational prayers
and special events. From all religious institutions I built a network of contacts with
congregants and leaders, observed events carefully, and took in-depth fieldnotes to which
I would refer later.

I found my sixty youth interviewees in two different ways. Twenty of them were
young people who I met naturally through attending their churches and mosques. For
example, Mike, mentioned earlier, is someone I met as we stood in the foyer of Ruach
Ministries waiting for the youth service to begin. These twenty youth from “religious
contexts” gave me a detailed view into how particular religious institutions influence the
young people who regularly attend them for worship.

I recruited the other forty youth interviewees from “secular contexts.” To do this,
I simply wandered the streets, markets, libraries, and other public places of Brixton and
Whitechapel-Spitalfields, meeting young people who might fit my demographic, and
recruiting those who did to join my research study. I met Mahmoud while I was
shopping at the large Sainsbury’s grocery store in Whitechapel. I met Chanel simply by
introducing myself to her on the streets of Brixton. The strategy for the forty interviews from “secular contexts” was to continually develop fresh contacts from a carefully varied set of places. By doing this, I built a sample that more accurately represents the full Bangladeshi and Jamaican youth populations than could have been possible by following referrals through social networks. The sample from secular contexts, then, is a diverse cross-section of “ordinary” youth. I developed it for a different purpose than religious contexts sample, which places sharper focus on youth actively involved in religion. By using the two samples in tandem, I achieve more depth to analyze religious influences and breadth to contextualize these within the overall population.

I conducted most of the interviews in public places such as coffee shops, libraries, or park benches. I paid each youth £10 of participation incentive. Each interview lasted one or two hours and was recorded on a digital recorder. I designed the interviews to be semi-structured, meaning that I tended to ask the same questions in the same order yet had flexibility to let the conversation flow more naturally and to continue with follow-up questions. In many cases, I kept in touch with interviewees over time. I use some of my later conversations with these key informants to refine my analysis. Overall, the youth interviews provide the main basis for my findings about religion and its role in second generation youth civic engagement. My ethnographic observations in churches and mosques contribute the institutional side to my analysis and help to put the interviews in broader social context.

The final component of my research process was a set of about twenty “perspective interviews” with religious and community leaders and other key observers. These included interviews with at least one pastor, imam, or youth worker directly
involved with the young people in each of the religious institutions I studied. I also conducted interviews with a select group of local and national level figures. Some of the perspective interviews I conducted were with “ordinary” locals, such as shopkeepers and teachers. Although these interviewees are not well known on the British national stage, a number of them – such as Brixton CD sellers Reggie and Vernon introduced in Chapter 3 – are astute observers of their local areas and offered insights that would drive my thinking further.

**Plan of the Dissertation**

In the next chapter I provide a baseline comparison of the kinds of British citizens Jamaican and Bangladeshi second-generation youth are becoming. I find that both groups have similar levels of political knowledge which compare positively to the British population overall. Both groups have relatively low levels of identification with Britishness and British citizenship. In these first two dimensions of citizenship – knowledge and identification – the ethnicity and religiosity of youth seems to make not much, if any, difference. However, both religion and ethnicity do appear to have an influence on political participation, the active practice of citizenship. Bangladeshis are much more active than Jamaicans in several aspects of participation, with Bangladeshis who are highly religious being the most active of all. The chapters that then follow each unfold part of a progressive explanation for the surprisingly high degree of difference in political participation.

In Chapter Three, I investigate how churches in Brixton and mosques in Spitalfields-Whitechapel contribute to the socialization of young people into citizens. In
this chapter I present the case studies of two churches and two mosques, varied enough to capture a significant amount of the religious diversity in each of the two local contexts. Through observing religious practices, studying the language used in sermons, and speaking with youth and religious leaders, I am able to compare how religious institutions help shape the citizenship identities of youth. I find that generational differences between youth and their parents are often strengthened by patterns of practice in religious institutions. I also find that young people are encouraged into different understandings of the religious self in the East End compared to Brixton, with a much more communally-oriented self presented in the mosques and a more individualistic, subjective self in the churches. These divergences in religious imagination have implications for the ability of community-level political efforts to be mobilized (or even conceived of in the first place) in the two contexts.

Chapter Four considers the influence of identity and culture on second-generation youth. Almond and Verba (1963) provided a foundational work on culture and politics with their comparative study of several political cultures in the 1960s. Among Bangladeshis, I find the most prevalent cultural phenomenon is a “deculturation,” in which the apparently “impure” influences of Bangladeshi culture are brushed away in favor of a more totalizing vision of Islam. Muslim identity is nearly always valued first and foremost. I do not find the same sort of comprehensive cultural or identity patterns among Jamaicans. Instead there is a fragmentation of cultural influences acting in various directions in the Brixton Jamaican and black community. Jamaican youth more often take situational and hybrid approaches to identity, enabling them to better navigate their diverse environments. Common identity and the reaction against traditional culture,
then, provide fertile ground for political mobilizations in the East End, whereas the various forces at work in Brixton do not consolidate into a single trend or position.

In Chapter Five, I investigate actual religious mobilizations for civic and political change. I profile a march and rally against youth violence led by churches from a Jamaican Christian denomination, and a Bangladeshi Muslim event during Ramadan that raised funds to combat hunger and poverty. The chapter uncovers specific social mechanisms that are building blocks of Jamaican Christian and Bangladeshi Muslim efforts to effect political change.

Chapter Six brings the various strands of explanation together into a conclusion. I reflect briefly on how Black British political participation may have the potential to increase, and on why a Bangladeshi community highly mobilized around Muslim-related political issues can in fact be a mixed blessing. I conclude with profiles of three promising second generation individuals who are opening a new chapter in civic engagement, through their campaigns to become Members of Parliament.
CHAPTER 2
YOUTH AS CITIZENS:
APATHETIC, ALIENATED, OR ATOMIZED?

What makes a good citizen? What are the aspirations and ideals of citizenship in Britain?

According to Prime Minister Gordon Brown, British citizenship should include feeling a sense of patriotism, acknowledging a particular history of Britain, and aspiring to certain “British values,” such as liberty and fairness. In a speech to the Fabian Society before becoming Prime Minister, Brown placed his emphasis on identifying “Britishness” as the nation’s “common glue… which welcomes differences, but which is not so loose, so nebulous that it is simply defined as the toleration of difference and leaves a hole where national identity should be” (Brown 2006). Good citizenship, when viewed with this lens, is built upon a shared foundation of national identity.

Another image of good citizenship is that of the “politically literate” citizen. Sir Bernard Crick, the acknowledged authority on British citizenship for much of the past decade, is well known for developing the concept of political literacy over the course of his career. ‘Political literacy’ might first bring to mind someone who keeps up with current events, perhaps avidly reading *Foreign Affairs* or regularly watching *Question Time*. However, Crick’s conception of political literacy is broader than this. He has written that a politically literate citizen is one who can recognize the political side “of any

---

10Brown first stated these views before he became Prime Minister, in a high profile speech to the Fabian Society and a debate featured in the intellectual, Left-leaning magazine *Prospect*. 
human situation” (Crick and Porter 1978). This means that “whether in a school, factory, voluntary body or party” a politically literate person will be equipped to read the political dimension of the circumstance and respond to it. In his major government policy report in 1998, Crick set Britain’s agenda for developing political literacy through citizenship education. Since its implementation in 2002, citizenship education has accounted for about 5 percent of the secondary school curriculum in England and Wales (O’Toole, Marsh, and Jones 2003). Good citizenship, if viewed in terms of political literacy, is about being informed, articulate, and reasoned in one’s engagement with civic life.

A third image of citizenship is that of the “participating citizen.” Much work on citizenship participation builds on Almond and Verba’s seminal research in *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (1963). Almond and Verba studied the political cultures of five nations with large-scale surveys. Their ideal of a state was one that had a civic culture – a combination of positive elements in the political environment and participation from citizens. The authors wrote very positively about Britain, arguing that:

> The political culture in Great Britain also approximates [this idealized situation of] civic culture. *The participant role is highly developed.* Exposure to politics, interest, involvement, and a sense of competence are relatively high. There are norms supporting political activity, as well as emotional involvement in elections, and system affect. And the attachment to the system is a balanced one: there is general system pride as well as satisfaction with specific government performance. (Almond and Verba 1963, p. 315, emphasis added. Quoted in Whiteley 2003)

Participating citizens are those who willingly take action in order to influence the political system. Voting, campaigning, picketing, or writing a letter to a newspaper editor are among the prototypical actions associated with this kind of citizen. According to Almond and Verba, British political participation in the 1960s was widespread,
heartfelt, and supported by positive cultural norms. Another term used to denote this ideal today is the “active citizen” (Crick 1998). If understood in light of Almond and Verba’s work, good citizenship is largely about this kind of active participation in the political process.

There are, then, at least three common visions of what is most important for good citizenship in Britain: civic identity, political literacy, and political participation. We can bring these three ideals of citizenship down-to-earth with measurable benchmarks. In doing so, we gain leverage in our understanding of second generation youth as citizens. I employ civic engagement in this dissertation as the composite concept to encompass these three dimensions of citizenship. Thinking of civic engagement in this multidimensional way provides for a richer understanding of the alternatives and styles of citizenship among youth, because some youth might be high on one civic dimension while low on another. I will explain the specific measures for each of the three dimensions of civic engagement in the “Data and Measures” section later in this chapter.

My use of civic engagement in such a broad and encompassing way follows the precedent of Kisby and Sloam (2009). These authors acknowledge the close etymological kinship between the words “civic” and “citizenship.” They use a dictionary definition of civic as “Of, pertaining to, or proper to citizens…. public spirited.”¹¹ I understand civic in this same way. By engagement I mean the “actualization” of a person’s citizenship. In other words, engagement refers to the aspects of citizenship that are observable and measurable. There are, of course, many abstract ways in which a

¹¹This definition is from the Oxford English Dictionary (2009). I have only quoted part of definition used by Kisby and Sloam, for the sake of both simplicity and greater focus in definition.
citizen could contribute to society, such as through her career or family life. Yet in the
term civic engagement I refer to the aspects of a person that are unmistakably civic – the
aforementioned dimensions of civic identity, political literacy, and political participation.

Figure 2.1: Major Citizenship Concepts in this Dissertation (Citizen-Side)^12

Global Citizenship

National Citizenship (Britain)

Civic Engagement

- Civic Identity
- Political Literacy
- Political Participation

Other civic contributions:
Career, family, informal volunteerism, social networks / social capital, taxes, obedience to laws, etc.

This chapter initiates my discussion of civic engagement and focuses primarily on
the dimensions of political literacy and political participation. I also begin a discussion
of civic identity that I will continue in more depth in Chapter Four. In this chapter I

^12By ‘citizen-side’ concepts, I am referring to the ways in which individual citizens interact with, identify with, and contribute to the state. In many cases, these ‘citizen-side’ concepts can be thought of in terms of responsibilities. Because citizenship is about a person’s relationship to the state, the other part of the equation is ‘state-side,’ referring to the rights, legal freedoms, and other benefits gained from living in the state. Studies of the state-side of citizenship in Britain are typically based in the work of T. H. Marshall (1950). Although this dissertation is primarily concerned with citizen-side concepts, it will necessarily consider the responsibilities of the state in this mutual relationship.
introduce two young men I interviewed, Mike and Hamid, discussing some of their views on civic identity and on politics. I then briefly review major British academic perspectives on youth civic engagement. Next, I compare the full set of Jamaican and Bangladeshi youth I interviewed in terms of political literacy and participation, presenting these comparisons in clear data tables. Finally, I circle back to Mike and Hamid in order to illustrate some of the general tendencies and findings that are evident in the particular examples of their lives.

The main goal of the chapter is to provide a baseline comparison of how Jamaican and Bangladeshi youth differ in their expressions of British citizenship. Fitting with the overall aims of the dissertation, the discussion in this chapter will be particularly attuned to religious sources of civic difference. Over the course of the chapters that follow, I will build a progressive explanation of sociological reasons for why youth differ in the ways I observe here, which in certain cases will involve the influence of religion.

**Two Young Men**

At 6’3”, eighteen year old Mike¹³ is a tall fellow. Mike is mixed race, with a light brown complexion. When I first walked into Ruach Ministries, a predominantly black church in Brixton with Jamaican leadership, I almost immediately noticed Mike’s towering presence. We stood in the crowded atrium as we waited for the doors of the youth service to open. With an unhesitant smile, Mike reached out his hand to introduce himself. I soon learned that he is half Jamaican and half Greek Cypriot. It was a fortunate coincidence – I had lived in Cyprus myself as a child. We started to talk about

---

¹³ All of the names of youth in this chapter have been changed to protect their anonymity.
the beaches of Cyprus and the warmer weather there ("Seems a million miles from London!"). As the doors opened, we found seats together in the youth service.

My interview recruitment often worked in this way. I would visit a religious service to observe and learn from it, meet someone informally, and then arrange an interview to take place afterwards. In this case, after the youth service Mike and I went across the street to have our conversation over a meal at a Jamaican restaurant. We both ordered the spicy jerk chicken and settled into a relaxed interview that would last almost two hours.

Mike is a charming person who describes himself as a bit shy, but comes across with natural confidence and sincerity. He thinks of himself as mixed race: “I don’t really ‘act black’ like black people do or ‘act white’ like white people do. I’m definitely mixed race. And people can tell that” he said. “I’m interested in other people’s cultures, and I think that really comes by being mixed race.” His Jamaican and Greek Cypriot sides are both significant to him, mainly through the influence of his parents. He can see something of both sides of his family in his personality. Mike thinks of himself, racially, as both black and as white. But black is more prominent “because in this country, people cast you as black.”

However, Mike’s first and foremost identity is as a Christian. He says this means “having a personal relationship with God, in Jesus.” In fact, Mike had gone through major changes in his faith in the year before our interview. A friend had invited him to the Ruach Ministries youth service. Since attending Ruach and regularly reading the Bible for himself, Mike had grown much more serious about his faith. He now goes to the Ruach youth service each week and says that the preaching gives him something to
change or apply to his life “every single time.” He spoke with amazement at the spiritual atmosphere of the youth service: “I have felt the power of God more in that place than anywhere else.”

Mike is very thoughtful and articulate when talking about religious, ethnic, and racial identities. I found it most interesting, however, to talk about the aspect of his identity he was least passionate about – his national identification with Britain. Mike does not think of himself as British. “I’m not going to say I’m British,” he told me, “I’m not a very patriotic person.” I knew that Mike was born in Britain, that he grew up in London, and that he has British citizenship. So I asked what this citizenship means to him: “Not much,” he told me, “Only the fact that I live here.” Mike went on to explain that if he lived in the U.S. he might think of himself as an American. “But British culture is a weird one.”

Mike did choose to describe himself as “English” (rather than British). He ranked this in last place out of nine components of his personal identity.14 In explaining why Englishness was relatively low in his affections, Mike told me:

As I said, I’m not very patriotic. I support England, I guess, in the soccer15 and stuff like that. But I’m not very English. I’m not a very English person. I see what English people do in general. They go out to the pub and stuff. I don’t really do that. There is definitely like a distinct polar opposite between what I’m influenced by in this top part [the core of my identity] and being English.

---

14I will describe the identity ranking portion of the interviews in depth in Chapter 4. Mike’s own choices to describe his identity, beginning with his highest ranked, were: Christian, Mixed Race, Londoner, Greek Cypriot, Jamaican, Black, White, Caribbean, West Indian, and English.

15Mike used the word “soccer” rather than the usual British word “football,” almost certainly because he was speaking to an American interviewer.
At times during the interview, Mike seemed to feel indifferent towards Britishness and Englishness. At other points – as seen here – he distanced himself significantly from the cultural content of these identities, speaking of them as the “distinct polar opposite” to how he understands himself.

Some of the same themes emerged in my interview with Hamid, a twenty-two year-old Bangladeshi. I first met him on the Queen Mary University campus. Hamid has a thin build, a gentle face, and a very easy smile. He is quite intentional about his Muslim appearance. He keeps a beard and wears a prayer cap, attempting to dress “Islamically.” Hamid arrived at the campus by bike. Seeing him other times in the subsequent months, I would learn that Hamid always keeps his bike close at hand. He likes to be ready to cycle in response to meetings, events, and text messages sent from friends all around London.

We met for our interview in late December, the time of year in England when darkness falls early. Hamid and I chose to talk at the Queen Mary University physics building because it was near the campus prayer room. The early darkness meant that the maghrib and isha’a prayers came very near each other. We went first to the prayer room where Hamid and five of his fellow students joined together in the maghrib prayer. He and I then walked to the Physics building to begin recording our interview. About

---

16My usual practice in this dissertation is to anonymize locations such as universities. I include Queen Mary University by name in this chapter because I will refer to a “prayer room controversy” there, which is well known.

17Maghrib and isha’a prayers are the fourth and fifth in the day. These prayers are determined by sunset and by nightfall, meaning that they fluctuate with time of year. For male Muslims, prayers are ideally performed together in congregation.
halfway through the conversation, we took a brief intermission to allow Hamid to leave for the isha’a prayer, returning later to finish the interview.

Hamid, like Mike, thinks of faith as an integral part of his life. He told me that “Islam is a complete way of life, and being Muslim is something that I really hold onto daily.” Also much like Mike, Hamid went through a significant religious change during his young adult years. He says that as a teenager he constantly got into trouble and was expelled from school. “I used to get away with murder,” he told me – and then quickly added: “I don’t mean [murder] literally! You know how the media can twist things.” As he said this to me he laughed. Yet his comment resonated in my mind, as it was a gut reaction from someone who knows media distortion to be a commonplace danger for those of his faith.

Hamid says his life began to turn around when he listened to a tape from black American convert Sheikh Khalid Yasin\(^\text{18}\) about the purpose of life. He reflected on the preacher’s message and then “it was during Ramadan that I really started to get rid of some bad habits and take Islam more seriously.”

Hamid had an interesting way of thinking about how Britishness and Islam fit together in his identity. He says he is inspired to “be like a bee and to take in the good from all the flowers” (see Surah 16 of the Qur’an). By this he means that he can take the best of both worlds. Hamid says that being British is a good thing for him “because I’m

---

\(^{18}\)Sheikh Khalid Yasin is often considered a radical sheikh in Britain due to his preaching on particular topics relating to non-Muslims and to homosexuality. Yet Hamid should not necessarily be viewed as guilty by association from listening to this sheikh. A large number of the Muslim youth I interviewed respect figures such as Sayyid Qutb and Maulana Mawdudi – major ideologues of Islamism – for their pious writings. Yet these youth would not necessarily be willing to take forward the full implications of these intellectuals’ programs of thought. In this case, it was the religious revivalist message of Sheikh Khalid Yasin that struck a chord with Hamid.
allowed to pray, I’m allowed to keep my beard, and at the same time I’m allowed to do certain things that I probably wouldn’t have the chance to do otherwise.” Yet he also sees some aspects of British culture that are in conflict with his own views and actions. “British culture and Muslim culture are very different in a lot of aspects,” he told me. The differences that came to his mind were “drinking alcohol… the dress sense, and some of the foreign policy.” Although he was very generous and diplomatic in our conversation, it was clear that Hamid also saw certain aspects of British culture as the “distinct polar opposite” (in Mike’s phrase) of his own Islamic way of life.

Hamid, like Mike, was willing to identify himself as English (in addition to British). Yet in this case he was not referring to symbols particular to the English nation, such as the national football team. When Hamid identifies with the English he simply means the English language. He told me: “[I relate to] English because I speak the English language most of the time. English is my first language. I actually speak more fluently in English than I am in Bengali, having been born here. So yes, English, in the books I read. Everything’s, like, English.” Elsewhere in the interview Hamid contrasted his own native English with the struggles his parents have with the language. His identity as an English speaker is something in which he takes pride.

We have established that cultural identification with England or Britain was mixed at best for Hamid and Mike. Hamid values British legal freedoms and communicating in the English language. Mike supports England in football. But neither of them, it seems, articulate values, cultural traits, or a history that would serve as a “common glue,” in Gordon Brown’s sense of the term. In fact there are cultural or value-laden aspects of Britain that both young men find personally objectionable – such as
foreign policy (for Hamid) and pub going (for Mike). At most, a cultural Britishness or Englishness can be accepted in a piecemeal fashion, just as a bee would pick and choose the best pollen from a variety of flowers.

If Mike and Hamid’s engagement with cultural Britishness as an identity is a bit lukewarm, then the views they express on political participation in Britain are icy cold. When we reached the section of our interview about politics, Hamid told me several times that he does not trust British politicians, nor does he think or act very politically himself. “I find [politics] a dirty game. The amount of lies, the amount of spin, the amount of stuff that happens in politics – it’s not something I enjoy” he said. Later he expressed this view in more vivid terms: “There’s not a political bone in my body.”

Hamid believes that his distaste for politics is characteristic of Muslims in general: “Muslims tend to be apathetic when it comes to politics,” he said. Similarly, Mike has a negative stance on British politics. He thinks that any potential he has for political involvement “doesn’t make that much of a difference.”

One possible interpretation of Mike and Hamid’s words is that they demonstrate a generalized apathy – an apathy inclusive of national identity, political participation, and perhaps also political literacy. After all, Hamid’s own self-diagnosis is that he is “apathetic when it comes to politics.” I will now further explain the possibility that British second generation youth are apathetic, along with two of the other possibilities available in the current academic literature.
Perspectives on British Youth Civic Engagement

It is commonly acknowledged that, at least on some dimensions, a large proportion of British youth today are disengaged from civic matters. Difficulties and disagreements arise when attempting to specify which dimensions are problems, why these are problems, and how youth disengagement should actually be understood. Is it apathy, alienation, or atomism?

If voting in government elections is considered the “bread and butter” of British political participation, as it traditionally has been, then evidence suggests that British youth have an ascetic political diet. The overall adult turnout for the 1997 British national elections had reached a post-war low, at 77 percent. Yet participation from the segment of youth (age 18 to 24) in that election was far lower, at 55 percent. Youth participation then took a further nosedive in the 2001 election, to 39 percent. The youth turnout continued to dip in 2005, to 37 percent, even though the overall adult figures for election turnout were making a modest upturn. At the time of writing, the next general election has been scheduled by Prime Minister Gordon Brown for May 6, 2010. There is currently little optimism about seeing renewal in the youth vote.

The low election turnout results for youth are in some cases compounded for ethnic minority youth. Several studies have found that people of black African and Caribbean origin have the lowest election turnouts in Britain (Purdam et. al. 2002; Saggar 1998; Anwar 1998a), as well as the lowest rates of voter registration (Saggar 1998). Young people are less likely to be registered or vote than other adults. The youthful age profile of black ethnic minorities in Britain thus produces a particularly low election turnout in this population segment (Purdam et. al. 2002).
Yet the national election studies listed from Purdam et. al., Saggar, and Anwar have actually found relatively robust electoral involvement from South Asians in Britain. In all of these studies, Indians had the highest rates of voter participation among all groups in Britain, including white British. Although Bangladeshis and Pakistanis did not have such high rates, their participation did not appear to be as troubling as those of Africans and Caribbeans. The results of adult electoral participation from Saggar (1998), for example, were Indians 82.4 percent, whites 78.7 percent, Pakistanis 75.6 percent, Bangladeshis 73.9 percent, black Caribbeans 68.7 percent, and black Africans 64.4 percent.

Even if these results bolster confidence in South Asian political participation, other research and policy work has raised concerns about the citizenship practices of Muslim South Asians in particular. The Cantle Report (2001) on the riots in Northern English industrial towns questioned whether South Asian Muslims have been leading “parallel lives” that separate them from British civic life. The Commission for Community Cohesion, created to respond to these issues, has produced several reports over the past decade. These reports raise concerns about South Asian Muslim views and practices of citizenship. For example:

Muslim communities appear to have low levels of civic participation and volunteering, mixed attitudes towards integration and (fairly small) minorities who do not feel loyal or patriotic towards Britain... but this may reflect demographic rather than faith-specific factors. (Commission 2004; quoted in Bail, forthcoming)

If this observation is correct, then British Muslims in the aggregate can be expected to score poorly on all three of the dimensions of civic engagement that I measure in this study –national identification, political literacy, and political participation.
Taking youth civic disengagement in Britain as a problem, several possible descriptions of the situation have been offered. The most common among politicians and media in Britain is the view that youth are apathetic towards politics. Generalized youth apathy is the presumption in Bernard Crick’s spearheading of the ideas of political literacy, active citizenship, and civic education. Crick has sought to intervene in the socialization of youth through these initiatives, deterring them from apathetic tendencies. Pirie and Worcester (1998) also believe that British youth are apathetic, and understand this in generational terms, arguing that Millenials are the first “apolitical generation.” Pippa Norris characterizes the 2001 election turnout as an “apathetic landslide” (2001). She does not necessarily see apathy as a problem inherent to age or to a certain generation. The poor voter turnout was “less a dramatic crisis of British democracy, nor widespread public cynicism, and more the inevitable consequence of a media which, during the run-up to the 2001 election, focussed on the election result being a ‘foregone conclusion.’”

Youth political apathy might have any of various causes, such as negative media influence, age, or generation. Regardless of its causes, there are logical manifestations of apathy that one should expect to observe. The hypothesis of youth apathy is that youth will show low levels of national identity, low levels of political literacy and interest, and low levels of actual practices of political participation. Youth who are truly apathetic are disengaged from and disinterested in citizenship at all levels.

Researchers David Marsh, Therese O’Toole, and Su Jones (2007; 2003) have criticized the youth apathy perspective, however. They conducted their own inductive study of how British young people, age 16 to 25, define the political. Based on open-ended focus groups and interviews, they conclude that youth consider a very broad set of
actions and themes to be political, with many of these themes not well captured by
traditional ballot-box politics. In their initial study and subsequent ones (e.g., O’Toole
and Gale 2009), researchers from this team have argued that youth do have opinions
about government policies, yet at the same time do not believe their voices will be taken
seriously. Far from being apathetic, youth are increasingly \textit{alienated} from British
political institutions and processes. In this youth alienation perspective, the onus is
placed on politicians and policy makers to listen more closely to youth and to re-
enfranchise them, because “political literacy cuts both ways” (O’Toole, Marsh, and Jones
2003). The causal mechanisms for disengagement are most often sited in institutions,
historic processes, and the political system, rather than in the content of youth culture or
the character of young people themselves (Griffin 2005). Academic consensus in Britain
has moved towards the alienation perspective on the problem of youth civic engagement,
with several key studies arguing along similar lines (e.g., Henn et. al. 2002; Sloam 2007;
Purdam et. al. 2002; Fahmy 2005). Government policymakers are also increasingly
taking this view. The Power Inquiry report (2006), lead-authored by Baroness Helena
Kennedy, declares that distrust of politicians and alienation from the political process are
the key issues in Britain and that there is simply a “myth of apathy.”

If youth are alienated from conventional politics, then they will not necessarily
have low levels of national identification or of political literacy. Instead, a lack of faith in
the political system and political actors will lead to low levels of political participation
regardless of their political literacy and identity. In other words, the \textit{hypothesis of youth
alienation} predicts low political participation, but does not have specific predictions of
the other two dimensions of civic engagement. This hypothesis, along with others, is listed in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Hypotheses of Youth Civic Engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National Identity</th>
<th>Political Literacy</th>
<th>Political Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Apathy</strong></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alienation</strong></td>
<td>Any level</td>
<td>Any level</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atomism</strong></td>
<td>Any level</td>
<td>Any level</td>
<td>Any level; Primarily individualistic practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A third and final perspective on youth civic engagement can be found in Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley’s book *Citizenship in Britain: Values, Participation and Democracy* (2004). This book is based on the Citizen Audit, a large nationally representative survey of Great Britain carried out in two waves, one before and one after the 2001 general election. The co-authors studied British citizens of all adult ages (not only young adults). Like other researchers, they find relatively low levels of participation in the 18 to 25 age demographic.

Pattie and colleagues’ most intriguing argument for the present discussion is that British citizens have become more *atomized* in their engagement with politics over the past few decades. They measure 17 civic behaviors, including voting and campaign activities, along with less ‘conventional’ forms of politics such as boycotting products or organizing a group of “like minded people” around a common cause. Their list of 17 civic behaviors clusters into three categories: communal, individual, and communicative.

Pattie and co-authors state in the conclusion that: “This book could have been entitled
‘The Atomised Citizen’ since this reflects many of the trends we are observing in contemporary Britain. The rise of individualistic forms of participation at the expense of collectivistic forms characterises this process.” For example, the authors note the rising popularity of “cheque-book participation” through boycotting products, purchasing products, and financially supporting charities with good brand recognition, such as Oxfam or Christian Aid. This style of participation, based on individual ethics and convenience, contrasts with more collective participatory actions in labor unions or political parties, which have seen sharp declines in membership in Britain.

Although Pattie and colleagues’ observations about the atomized citizen are meant to apply to British adults as a whole, they may have particular relevance to youth. Their observations mirror other work that emphasizes the rise of a life politics that contrasts with emancipatory politics (Giddens 1991), the deepening of contemporary ethics of authenticity in political and life choices (Taylor 1992), and the greater individualization of young people’s connections with the state, especially in terms of the labor market (MacDonald 1997).

If youth are indeed atomized in their civic engagement, we should not necessarily expect low levels of engagement, but rather a particular pattern in engagement styles. The hypothesis of youth atomism posits that youth will primarily participate in individual-level activities, while their engagement in collective forms of participation will be minimal.

---

19See Sloam (2007) for a focused and concise review of these potential trends among young citizens.
Data and Measures

My research sample is composed of a total of 60 young people, 24 of whom are Jamaican and 36 of whom are Bangladeshi. I sampled about one-third of these youth in religious institutions and two thirds from systematic recruiting in secular contexts, as explained in the Introduction. Because I used religious institutions for some of my recruiting, the sample that results has a greater proportion of religiously active youth than could be expected in the Bangladeshi and Jamaican youth populations overall. Even though this is the case, the youth from the secular contexts subsample (16 Jamaicans, 21 Bangladeshis) should approximate a representative picture of the overall populations. Sometimes in my analysis that follows I will refer to the complete sample (from both religious institutions and streets) and sometimes to the systematic sample of youth that I systematically recruited from varied secular contexts.

My main goal in analysis is to determine whether religion has an influence on civic engagement and, if so, to specify which ways it does. To determine this, I compare youth who have “high religiosity” with those who do not. I am interested in whether there are any causal relationships – if being religious (or becoming religious) tends to cause youth to have different citizenship outcomes than the youth who are not religious. The logic here is simple: Youth will most often develop their levels of religiosity before they express themselves as citizens, because religious development typically progresses throughout childhood and adolescence, while the practice of citizenship develops most significantly after reaching legal voting age (age 18 in Britain). Therefore if relationships between religiosity and citizenship are found, they are very likely to work in the direction
of religiosity causally influencing civic engagement. I will now explain, in turn, how I measured religiosity and the three component parts of civic engagement.

Religiosity: My measurement of religiosity is important to the way that I conceive and carry out the analysis. I attempted to define high religiosity in the same way that my youth interviewees did. To do this, I needed to discern the symbolic boundaries in my two fieldwork sites that separate religious people from others. This distinction was extremely easy to make among the Bangladeshi Muslim youth of Spitalfields and Whitechapel. When youth admitted to me that they were not very religious, they almost always used the term “not practicing.” The main standard of Muslim practice in the East End (virtually unanimous among my interviewees) is praying five times a day. Those who did not pray five times a day knew that they were on the deficient side of an acknowledged common standard among local Muslims.

Discerning the boundary that marks high religiosity among Jamaicans was considerably more difficult. Some youth I interviewed could speak in powerful flights of Christian oratory, yet had not been to church in a long while. Others attended religious services every week, but had very little to say about religious matters. I settled on weekly attendance as the standard for high religiosity among Jamaican youth. I did so because 1) the measurement of this is considerably clearer than making gradations of theology or of

---

20The U.S. nationally representative National Study of Youth and Religion finds a strong level of continuity in religion from parents to teenage children (Smith and Denton 2006). It in turn finds substantial continuity from teenage years into the emerging adulthood years of 18 to 25 I am studying here (Smith and Snell 2009). Religious tastes are usually established early, though religious practice may fall off to some degree in teenage years. The age of political consciousness, in contrast, begins around the time youth are able to vote (age 18 in Britain) and develops most significantly through the emerging adult years. The sequence of religious development followed by political development is not static nor is it universal, but it is reasonable to expect that youth religious development will more often shape youth civic development, rather than the other way around.
the importance of faith and 2) as a measure of religious practice, it is more comparable with the Muslim five daily prayer standard. One might argue that attendance once per week is hardly as much evidence of high religiosity as five daily prayers. However, because religious norms are not as strong in Brixton as they are in the East End, regular church attendance is a significant and relatively demanding step. For most of the Jamaican youth attendees I interviewed, weekly attendance meant a substantial time commitment each weekend in church activities that might, for example, include a morning service, community lunch, and then a later youth service.

After defining high religiosity as five daily prayers for Bangladeshi Muslims and weekly church attendance for Jamaican Christians, I was able to classify the complete sample of youth as high, medium, or low religiosity. In total, the proportion of high religiosity to medium/low religiosity was about the same for Jamaicans (14 to 10) as it was for Bangladeshis (21 to 15). Therefore the complete (non-representative) sample had enough cases for a viable qualitative analysis.21

As described in the beginning of this chapter, I conceptualize civic engagement as having three component parts: civic identity, political literacy, and political participation. I measured these three components and I separately compare high religiosity youth and other youth across all three.

21Low religiosity youth were those who showed little or no interest in matters of religion. These ranged from atheists and agnostics (3 Jamaicans) to those who may have some cultural or family connection to religion but are not practicing it now (3 Jamaicans, 1 Bangladeshi). Medium religiosity was the residual category between low and high – all youth who pray sometimes, attend church sometimes, and talk with some connection to faith, but do not show the consistency to be classified as high religiosity (4 Jamaicans, 14 Bangladeshis).
Civic Identity: This component of youth citizenship was the most qualitative and subjective. I used two sections of the interview to investigate the civic identities of youth. The first was an identity section in which I had youth rank and compare various components of their identities. The second was a section at the end of the interview when I asked all youth “What does British citizenship mean to you?” In this chapter I will only report the essentials of the analysis of these components of civic identity, expanding considerably on the analysis in Chapter Four.

Table 2.2: Political Literacy Measure
From Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley (2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Quiz (True or False)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The minimum voting age is 21.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Britain has separate elections for European parliament and British parliament.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The number of members of parliament is about 100.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Britain’s electoral system for Westminster is based on proportional representation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. No one may stand for parliament unless they pay a deposit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The House of Lords has equal powers to the House of Commons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The European Union (The E.U.) is composed of 15 states.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Political Literacy: To measure political literacy, I replicated an authoritative measure from Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley (2004) in their Citizen Audit. Their measure is a seven-question true-false quiz on British politics, shown in Table 2.2. All of the answers on the quiz have remained consistent since it was devised by Pattie and his colleagues, except for question 7, which states “There are 15 countries in the European
Union” (True or False). The answer to this question was True at the time that Pattie and colleagues asked. But due to accession of several countries to the EU including Romania, Latvia, and Bulgaria, the question was False when I interviewed youth in 2008-2009.22

Political Participation: I also replicated Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley’s (2004) measurement of political participation. They include 17 questions on different ways in which citizens might get involved, shown in Table 2.3. These questions can be grouped into three main clusters of civic actions: Contact (1 to 5), Collective (8, 9, 14, 16, 17), and Individual (the remaining questions).

I made one change to the usage of Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley’s questions on civic engagement. They had prefaced the questions with the statement: “Which of these have you done to influence rules, laws, or policies in the last 12 months?” This introductory question could be helpful for emphasising only actions that are motivated by a civic/political purpose. Unfortunately, some of my pilot interviewees found this language confusing. I made the decision in these early interviews to de-emphasise the starting text. I would still read it to my interviewees, but I would say “It is okay to include any time you have done this in the last twelve months.” Because I asked a more generous and open-ended version of this question, it should be expected that the resulting levels of civic engagement will be inflated in comparison to the Pattie, Seyd, and

22This is a valid question, of course, both when asked by Pattie and colleagues and when I asked it. However, if a respondent did not know the answer, the logic of guessing an answer may be somewhat different in both cases. It might seem better to guess ‘False’ because the question asks about an exact number of nations – this would lead to being incorrect in Pattie and colleagues’ research, but correct in mine. In other words, the chances of guessing correctly on question 7 appear to have increased in my research, meaning that the comparability of results for question 7 should be treated with some caution.
Whiteley levels. However, I maintain that because of the potential confusion of their introductory question, Pattie and co-authors’ respondents likely underestimated their own involvement in actions that are civic or political.

**Table 2.3: Political Participation Measures**
From Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley (2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During the last 12 months have you done any of the following to influence rules, laws, or policies?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Contacted a politician (for example, a member of parliament or a local councillor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Contacted an organisation (for example, Shelter or Oxfam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Contacted a public official (for example, a person from housing or social security offices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Contacted the media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Contacted a solicitor or judicial body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Signed a petition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Taken part in a public demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Taken part in a strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Boycotted products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Bought certain products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Donated money to an organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Raised funds for an organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Attended a political meeting or rally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Voted in a local government election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Participated in illegal protest activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Formed a group of like minded people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

*Civic Identity*: When I asked second generation youth about being British or about what their British citizenship means to them, the responses were quite consistent. By far the most common response to these questions was “I was born here” – locating Britain as the place of birth and thus justification for membership in British society. Very often, youth would also speak of British citizenship as a source of legal rights or life opportunities. Rare was the young person who spoke of Britain as a source of their cultural identity or common history. The responses of second generation youth to these questions of civic identity tend to resemble those of Mike and Hamid, as they contain a certain ambivalence to the cultural and political markers associated with Britishness and with the British state. I will examine these issues of loyalty and identity in significant depth in Chapter Four.

*Political Literacy*: Are second generation youth knowledgeable and articulate citizens? Table 2.4 shows how well second generation youth scored on each question and in total on the seven question political knowledge quiz. The results are given for youth as a whole and are broken down by ethnicity, and then by religiosity within ethnicity. As one can see from the table, second generation youth in my sample did remarkably well compared with citizens in Britain at large. The youth outscored the average British citizen on most of the questions and overall, demonstrating a level of political knowledge that is close to the group Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley highlighted as most politically knowledgeable in Britain: high income middle aged men who are highly educated and in professional or managerial positions. Nearly one-half of the youth in the complete sample for which I have full results (26 of 56) would be considered “politically
knowledgeable” by Pattie and colleagues because they answered at least 5 questions correctly.

**Table 2.4: Jamaican and Bangladeshi Youth Political Literacy, by Religiosity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British National Sample</th>
<th>2nd-Gen. Youth Average</th>
<th>Jamaican Low/Med Religiosity</th>
<th>Jamaican High Religiosity</th>
<th>Bangladeshi Low/Med Religiosity</th>
<th>Bangladeshi High Religiosity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum British voting Age is 21?</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British and EU parliament elections are separate?</td>
<td>TRUE</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Members of Parliament is ~100?</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natl. elections by proportional representation?</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must pay deposit to stand for parliament?</td>
<td>TRUE</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal powers for House of Lords and Commons?</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU is composed of 15 States?</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Correct (out of 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why do these second generation youth perform so well in a quiz of political knowledge? One overall factor may simply be their proximity to the British Government, due to living in London. News on political issues may seem directly relevant, or more understandable, because Westminster is not far away. Another factor may simply be age and education. These youth were closer in age to a time when they learned political facts in school, making these easier to remember than they would be for many older adults. Some of the 18 to 25 year olds I interviewed had taken A-Level exams or university
courses in politics, and unsurprisingly these young people usually scored well on the political knowledge test.

There is reason to treat these results with caution. The sample size of youth is small and thus cannot be seen as a wholly reliable indicator of political knowledge. However, taking this objection seriously, it is nonetheless clear that second generation youth score rather well in terms of political literacy.

Table 2.4 breaks down youth into subgroups. Overall Bangladeshis score better on the political quiz than Jamaicans, though not remarkably so. To understand the basis of this ethnic difference, we should first determine if there are religious effects.

As youth have been broken down further into categories of religiosity, we can see that, for Bangladeshis, religiosity appears to have absolutely no relationship with political knowledge. Someone who prays five times a day has no more likelihood of being knowledgeable in politics than someone who does not. In contrast, for Jamaicans high religiosity does seem to match with higher levels of political knowledge.

There are at least two possible explanations for this difference. First, maybe there is something different in terms of the religious environment of church in comparison to a mosque that boosts political knowledge – perhaps a greater emphasis on politics in sermons, for example. Or, to take this in the opposite way, there may be influences with a greater power to disengage youth from political knowledge if they spend time on the streets of Brixton and away from religious institutions. Levels of violent crime and drug use are higher in Brixton than in the East End, for example.

A second explanation, which I find more compelling in this case, is that church attendance for Jamaicans is partly a proxy for social class. The young people that I met
at Ruach Ministries, such as Mike, were most often either middle class or had middle class aspirations. The Jamaican youth I recruited from the streets tended to be from lower income and class backgrounds. The class disparity can partly be explained in this way: The well-known churches of Brixton (e.g., Ruach Ministries and Brixton Seventh Day Adventist) attract attendees from throughout London, who come for the preaching or for the connection with a larger Jamaican or black community. While most Jamaicans living in Brixton have lower incomes and social class, a much greater proportion of the Jamaicans in church on a Sunday are of relatively high class and income. Social class can be highly related to political knowledge. In the case of these young people, religion may simply be a proxy for class.  

The relationship of religion and class in the East End is not the same as it is in Brixton. The Bangladeshi youth I came to know through interviews were, almost without exception, from families that are considered poor by UK standards. The typical Bangladeshi youth I met in an East End mosque was local and relatively poor; the typical Jamaican youth I met in a Brixton church was middle class and not local. The class effect, then, was not present in Bangladeshi youth. Instead, the overall strong scores for Bangladeshi youth on political knowledge may have something to do with the civic culture of the East End. It is an issue we will examine more in the pages ahead.

In summary, second generation youth as a whole are not disengaged from news and information on government. They have relatively high levels of political knowledge, which may in part be the result of proximity to Westminster, student age, or in some

---

23This is not to say that there is no religious effect present. For example, religious services may help to shape working class youth to have middle class aspirations, due to the peers they encounter there or the messages of hope and life success that some churches propagate.
cases social class. Regardless, there is no clear indication that religion or religiosity has a substantial role in political knowledge, except perhaps as a mediator of some other primary cause.

**Political Participation:** Thus far, we have seen that London second generation youth have low levels of identification with Britain, but that their levels of political knowledge about the nation are near those of the average citizen, if not higher. The moderate to high level of political knowledge among youth is a hopeful sign.

Yet with political participation, we begin to see a different story. Results of political participation are shown in Table 2.5. The table compares Jamaican and Bangladeshi youth, and breaks them down by religiosity. There is also a comparison to the British population overall.

As will be clear from a quick glance at the table, the levels of political participation among Bangladeshi second generation youth are consistently higher than those of Jamaican youth. There could be many possible explanations for this disparity. Because this dissertation focuses on religious explanations, I will primarily address the possibilities of religious causes in this chapter. Further into the dissertation I will address the broader set of possibilities for difference between the populations.

First, we should look at a key civic indicator in any democratic nation: Voting. A full 73.8 percent of the British population in the Citizen Audit Survey said that they had voted in a local government election within the past year (in their case this was 2001). Second generation youth do not compare well to this quite high national figure. About 51.6 percent of Bangladeshi youth who were of eligible age claimed to have voted in a
local election in the last year. Yet, remarkably, only 9.1 percent of eligible age Jamaican youth also claimed to have voted.

Table 2.5: Jamaican and Bangladeshi Youth Political Participation, by Religiosity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British Natl. Sample, restricted*</th>
<th>Jamaican Low/Med Religiosity</th>
<th>Jamaican High Religiosity</th>
<th>Bangladeshi Low/Med Religiosity</th>
<th>Bangladeshi High Religiosity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% yes</td>
<td>% yes</td>
<td>% yes</td>
<td>% yes</td>
<td>% yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted in Local Gov Election</td>
<td>74 % yes</td>
<td>0 % yes</td>
<td>18 % yes</td>
<td>57 % yes</td>
<td>47 % yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed Petition</td>
<td>47 55 % yes</td>
<td>25 % yes</td>
<td>64 % yes</td>
<td>80 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Badge or Sticker</td>
<td>24 22 % yes</td>
<td>8 % yes</td>
<td>31 % yes</td>
<td>58 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donated Money to an Org.</td>
<td>64 55 % yes</td>
<td>77 % yes</td>
<td>77 % yes</td>
<td>100 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised Funds for an Org.</td>
<td>30 22 % yes</td>
<td>36 % yes</td>
<td>31 % yes</td>
<td>74 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boycotted Certain Products</td>
<td>34 11 % yes</td>
<td>36 % yes</td>
<td>31 % yes</td>
<td>63 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bought Certain Products</td>
<td>33 33 % yes</td>
<td>15 % yes</td>
<td>31 % yes</td>
<td>53 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a Politician</td>
<td>17 22 % yes</td>
<td>8 % yes</td>
<td>31 % yes</td>
<td>42 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted an Organization</td>
<td>12 11 % yes</td>
<td>39 % yes</td>
<td>39 % yes</td>
<td>68 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a Public Official</td>
<td>31 33 % yes</td>
<td>15 % yes</td>
<td>85 % yes</td>
<td>68 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted the Media</td>
<td>9 11 % yes</td>
<td>15 % yes</td>
<td>31 % yes</td>
<td>53 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted Legal Professional</td>
<td>20 22 % yes</td>
<td>0 % yes</td>
<td>39 % yes</td>
<td>21 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a Public Demonstration</td>
<td>4 22 % yes</td>
<td>38 % yes</td>
<td>21 % yes</td>
<td>15 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a Strike</td>
<td>3 0 % yes</td>
<td>0 % yes</td>
<td>8 % yes</td>
<td>0 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a Political Meeting/Rally</td>
<td>6 0 % yes</td>
<td>17 % yes</td>
<td>0 % yes</td>
<td>28 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protested Illegally</td>
<td>2 0 % yes</td>
<td>0 % yes</td>
<td>0 % yes</td>
<td>0 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formed Like-minded Group</td>
<td>5 22 % yes</td>
<td>9 % yes</td>
<td>15 % yes</td>
<td>16 % yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N (# of respondents)</strong></td>
<td>3120 9 %</td>
<td>14 %</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Differences of 20 points or more are shown in bold underline.

The low percentages of voting among the youth I interviewed are further accentuated because, for most youth interviewees, the past 12 months had included a significant and very high profile election: The election of the Mayor of London. The
Mayor of London is the most powerful directly elected figure in Britain (because the Prime Minister is selected through an indirect democratic process). The Mayor of London election in April 2008 looked to be a tight race between Labour incumbent Ken Livingstone and Conservative Boris Johnson (who was the eventual winner of the election). In fact, I spoke with the Youth Pastor of Ruach Ministries, Mark Liburd, at length about the Mayor of London election in our interview. In a youth service that I attended, I heard Pastor Mark encourage his young people to vote in the election, as he talked about the platforms of the major candidates succinctly without showing favoritism. Yet Pastor Mark’s appeal for voting did not have observable results – none of the six youth I interviewed from his congregation had voted in the Mayoral election. I happened to schedule my interview with one of these youth, Rhona, for the evening of the actual day of the election. Rhona is one of the young leaders of the congregation, and was always connecting with people or helping run the youth service at Ruach when I saw her there. I asked if she had been able to vote. “No,” she said, a bit embarrassed, “because I’ve been at college the whole day and I couldn’t get out.” She was not really sure where to go to vote, “Where is it though?” – unaware that her designated polling location is in the ward in which she lives.

From talking with other non-voting youth about why they did not vote, the reasons of being busy, finding voting inconvenient, or not having enough information were often mentioned. As such, the results confirm the earlier work of Purdam et. al.

---

24The Prime Minister is not directly elected. Rather, Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected by their constituencies, usually on the basis of the party they represent. The party which achieves the majority MPs is then able to form the government and place its party leader as Prime Minister. In the event that no single party achieves a majority, a coalition government may be formed from parties that together amount to a majority, or a new election may be called.
(2002), who found inconvenience to be a major reason for missing an election. Other reasons I heard from interviewees for not voting included not being interested in politics or not thinking that voting makes a difference. These views were somewhat more widespread among Jamaican youth than Bangladeshis, a likely contribution to the large differential in voting numbers. I found it interesting, though, in the specific case of Rhona, that the Youth Pastor’s example and encouragement to vote had not been enough to motivate a young leader in his congregation. Voting rates are clearly a problem for Jamaican youth in Brixton. It seems that, if churches are trying to encourage this element of political participation, the results have been muted at best.

But voting, however important, is only one of many ways to engage as a citizen and in politics. Some other the measures of political participation are quite obviously connected to mosque or church attendance. When I asked youth about whether they had contacted an organization, the religious attendees were more likely to do so, especially mosque-goers. This is unsurprising, due to the close ties many organizations have with mosques, or in the cases that youth interpreted contacting an organization to include their religious organization itself. Likewise, a full one-hundred percent of youth who are high religiosity Muslim youth reported that they have given to charity in the last year. Plastic charity boxes are ubiquitous around East End mosques, and zakat, a form of regular charitable giving, is one of the Pillars of Islam. Likewise, high religiosity Jamaican Christians also gave of finances to organizations at much higher levels than their less religious peers, as they had both more opportunity and inclination to do so in their churches.
Beyond contacting organizations or giving money to them, however, there were many civic engagement activities in the questionnaire that are less obviously related to attendance at a religious institution. Addressing these, first among Jamaican youth, the religiosity pattern is not initially clear. In some cases, youth who are highly religious were more active (e.g., boycotting products, taking part in demonstrations, attending political rallies). In other cases, the youth who did not show a regular religious commitment were more active (e.g., signing a petition, purchasing products for ethical reasons, contacting an official). We are working with very small sample sizes here – only 14 Jamaican youth who are highly religious, and 9 who are not – so there are not enough cases to make a clear judgment on any item. However, it can be said that in the aggregate of the data there is no general trend, and no overall basis to argue for a positive or a negative effect of religiosity on the civic engagement of young Jamaicans.25

For Bangladeshis, in contrast, the influence of religiosity on civic engagement is positive, strong, and fairly consistent. The data set for Bangladeshis is larger than for Jamaicans, though still too small for statistical tests of significance. Instead of statistical tests, I use the guideline of 20 percentage points in difference as a general measure of substantial effects in the data. All 20-point differences are labelled in the table in bold and underline. For almost half of all political behaviors (8 of 17), the proportion of high religiosity Bangladeshi youth involved is at least 20 points higher than for those who are not as religious: Contacting an organization, contacting the media, wearing a badge or

25One possible exception here may be taking part in a demonstration. Of the interviewees I spoke with who had taken part in demonstrations, all five who were highly religious had been involved in demonstrations that were directly church sponsored. Two had been part of the 2008 Seventh Day Adventist LIVE March against gun and knife crime (I profile the 2009 LIVE March in Chapter 5).
sticker, signing a petition, boycotting products, purchasing products, fundraising, or taking part in a political rally. In some of these cases – such as boycotting products or wearing campaign badges – the effects are dramatic.

Also significant is the fact that high religiosity affected voting behavior negatively, even if this effect was modest. Seen in the light of many other positive citizenship behaviours – such as wearing campaign badges or raising funds – it seems strange that voting would not also share in the positive religiosity effect. In a few cases, youth may have abstained from voting out of Islamic principle.\textsuperscript{26} Much more likely, however, is a simple alienation or apathy regarding voting. Yet the fact that highly religious Bangladeshi youth engage so frequently in campaigning activities but not in voting appears, for the moment, to be in tension.

To summarize the results to this point, 1) Second generation London youth have low levels of cultural identification with Britain, yet 2) reasonably high levels of political knowledge. 3) Bangladeshis have higher levels of political participation than Jamaicans and 4) among Bangladeshis higher religiosity appears to influence youth into greater participation. Religiosity does not have an observable relationship with political participation among Jamaicans. Finally, 5) the positive effect of Muslim religiosity on political participation does not extend to the most crucial conventional political activity: voting.

\textsuperscript{26}Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), for example, is an Islamic social movement active in the East End of London and elsewhere in the UK that advocates total separation from the British political process, because the process is not Islamic. HT discourages voting in British elections. The recently proscribed organization Islam4UK, formerly known as al-Muhajiroon, also argues that voting in British elections is prohibited in Islam.
Having reviewed these results, it is now possible to begin a consideration of the three hypotheses of youth civic engagement introduced earlier in the chapter. The first hypothesis was youth *apathy*. The evidence does not provide a basis for arguing that second generation youth as a whole are apathetic towards citizenship and politics, as they have a relatively strong performance on measures of political literacy. Certainly some second generation youth are apathetic towards public affairs. Yet it seems that youth in general are fairly well-informed about the British political system and how it works. This indicates there is a widespread interest in issues that are political, even among some youth who do not directly avow this interest or translate it into participation.

Are youth instead *alienated* from politics? For most youth I spoke with, satisfaction with the British political process and trust of politicians was low. This was often true of youth who demonstrated significant political knowledge. Alienation from British politics, then, remains as an explanation for at least some youth who show low levels of political participation.

The third hypothesis was that although some youth will engage in substantial civic behaviors, they will largely confine these to more *atomistic* activities. A first glance at the evidence does seem to confirm this hypothesis. For all subcategories of youth in Table 2.5, the strongest levels of participation were on individualistic measures. The weakest were collective. The particularly strong individualistic measures were those relating to personal financing of a cause, which Pattie and colleagues have called “cheque-book participation.”
Yet a closer look at youth civic behaviors is necessary before concluding that they are indeed primarily atomistic. A useful way to address this issue is to investigate in greater depth a particular behavior that may seem to epitomize atomism – the consumer
behavior of boycotting products. In the interviews, I asked youth to tell me specifically which products they choose to boycott. I summarize their self-reports of boycotting in Tables 2.6 and 2.7, marking the frequencies each boycotted product was mentioned with Xs.

Jamaican and Bangladeshi youth each mentioned a substantial number of different products which they boycott. The fact that Bangladeshis listed more is in large part simply the artifact of sample size, as there were about one third more Bangladeshis in the sample for which I have complete data on this question (32) than there were Jamaicans (23). More important than the number of listed products are the frequencies that products are repeatedly listed. Seven Bangladeshi youth separately told me that they boycott Starbucks. Bangladeshis also clustered around boycotts for Danone, Coca Cola and, to a lesser degree, the department store Marks & Spencers and the clothing store Primark. What appears at first to be an individualistic behavior – one’s shopping choices – in fact seems to have an underlying collective nature.

When I asked Bangladeshi youth the reasons for boycotting these particular products, the collective organization of boycotting became more apparent. Easily the most common reason Bangladeshis chose to boycott products was the alleged connection of these products to financing Israel, and more particularly with what they consider to be Zionist activities against Palestinians. Second in frequency was boycotting products connected to Denmark because of the Danish Cartoons Affair.27 My conversation with

---

27The Danish daily paper the *Jyllands-Posten* published a set of highly controversial cartoons portraying the Prophet Muhammad, which led to anger and protest in many parts of the world. For a thorough analysis of the Danish Cartoons Affair, see Klausen (2009).
Hamid, the young man introduced at the beginning of this chapter, provides a good example:

Hamid: I’ve boycotted certain Israeli products. I don’t know what your view is on Israel, but certain products. I mean, Israel – I see so much injustice there, a lot that’s happening and while it’s not being portrayed in the media, [Palestinians are] not even getting support. Things like they’re not even being allowed to get medicine because of the blockades. And I think the least we could do is boycott the funds because the Israelis, they do get a lot of funds from big businesses. And I think even companies like Coca Cola. So I try and boycott these things. One person said to me, it’s like you’re paying a penny for an Israeli product, that penny will eventually turn into a bullet and that bullet will actually kill a person…. Also other things, like the Danish – what happened with the cartoons. I decided to boycott Danish products.

Daniel: How do you know which products to boycott?

Hamid: Research on the Internet. But Israeli uses certain barcodes a lot of the times. So you see – there’s a website on there, it’s called InMinds.com about Israeli products or companies that fund Israel.

Similarly, Rubina is one of many young Bangladeshis who boycotts Starbucks due to its alleged ties to Israel. She told me “a lot of [Starbucks’] money goes to the Jewish people to kill the Palestinians.” I wondered why she thought this to be true. She said: “Even though I don’t know for sure if, you know, it does, there’s a lot of Muslim websites I’ve gone on…. Because the Internet anyone could throw anything on it, you know, so you don’t know what to trust. But I say if I’m doubting it, I’d stay away from it.” In addition to Internet sources in general, other youth told me that they knew products to boycott because friends had sent them a text, an email forward, or had notified them through Facebook.
Bangladeshis’ predominant reasons for boycotting products – due to ties to Israel or Denmark – are collective on two levels. First, the behaviors are collectively organized through information and communication technologies. And second, they are collectively motivated, because youth who think of themselves as members of the Muslim ummah are resisting threats to their collective identity.

The highly collective response of Bangladeshi Muslim boycotting can lead to strange results at times. For example, I had the following exchange with Zarena, who spoke first about the clothing company DKNY and then about Nestlé, the food company based in Switzerland:

Daniel: Have you boycotted certain products?
Zarena: Yes – DKNY because they support the Israeli country in war and a percentage of their profit goes to Israel, and they’re at war with Palestinians who are Muslims. So I don’t want to support that. Nestlé’s for a while because of the Denmark….
Daniel: Oh ok. How are they connected to that?
Zarena: Yes, I heard that Nestlé’s were.
Daniel: Because Nestlé’s is – Are they Danish? Are they from Denmark?
Zarena: I have no idea. But I just got texts!

This exchange demonstrates the highly collective nature of these boycotts. Far from being an educated individual consumer choice, boycotting Denmark and Israel is a collective effort that sometimes involves responding to unsubstantiated claims.

Salma, another young Bangladeshi woman, told me that boycotting is quite often based on “rumors.” She said “everyone will just email you. Like all my friends, they’ll hear it from other friends and it just gets passed through email really.” For example “there was a thing about Walkers Crisps having alcohol in them,” which turned out to just be a rumor: “I went on their website and they tell you all the ingredients!” Yet, the high level of sensitivity to collective Muslim issues can lead youth to take a cautious stance to products. In Rubina’s words: “If I’m doubting it, I’d stay away from it.”

As seen in Table 2.6, not all of second generation Bangladeshi youth boycotting is a collective response to a political issue like the boycotts of Israel and Denmark. In some cases, youth choose to boycott companies that allegedly engage in unethical practices such as the use of child labor or the misrepresentation of their products. The overall structure of Bangladeshi youth boycotting, however, is predominantly collective in nature.

Jamaican youth also boycott a wide range of products. These boycotting behaviors do not cluster around any single product more than once. Jamaican youth apparently choose products to boycott out of their individual decisions of conscience rather than in response to collective mobilization efforts.
At times Jamaican youth boycotting decisions can be highly personal and idiosyncratic. For example, Clarise told me about several brands she boycotts in reaction to a recent trend in “blurred gender” advertising:

Well like Calvin Klein, right now they’re promoting this whole line. It’s like they’ve blurred gender. So it’s like when they have their male models, they look very feminine and then when they have their female models they look very masculine. And I notice Selfridges is doing the same thing. I don’t believe in that because to me that means that you, you’re not identifying that a woman is a woman and a man is a man. And so you also promote homosexuality which I… it’s not that I’m against the [homosexual] person, I just don’t believe in that act. So that’s why I don’t buy from certain shops, like Top Shop and Top Man – They’re also carrying that whole thing as well.

Clarise’s reason for boycotting Calvin Klein, Selfridges, Top Shop, and Top Man is one she developed out of her convictions on appropriate representations of gender. Like most Bangladeshi Muslims, her decision to boycott is rooted in religion. Yet the fact that other Jamaican youth did not cite blurred gender as a reason indicates that Clarise’s choice to boycott is an individual one.

Similarly, Michelle told me that she boycotts a significant range of products as a response to the racist policies of their companies. She spoke about Tate & Lyle, the British sugar brand, “in South Africa, they were supporting Apartheid, so I’m thinking I need to get away from these people!” Michelle also boycotts Timberland, Tommy Hilfiger, and Rowntree Candies due to their alleged racism. It might seem that racism is a significantly collective reason for boycotting. Yet Michelle is virtually alone in citing it as a reason for boycotts – only one other Jamaican youth, Thaddeus, mentioned racism as a reason for boycotting. Thaddeus cited a different company that he boycotts as racist, Von Dutch Jeans.
In comparing Bangladeshi and Jamaican youth, I am not making a statement on the relative weight of racism or Zionism as collective issues. Instead, the examples illustrate that the political action of boycotting is organized in a collective manner among Bangladeshis while it is an individually developed choice among Jamaicans. I am convinced by Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley’s analysis that the overall British population’s political behavior has taken a trend towards atomism. Such atomism appears to be mirrored in Brixton Jamaican young people’s political actions. Yet atomism is not a viable description of how East End Bangladeshi youth participate in these political behaviors, as there are clearly collective mobilizations behind them.

**Revisiting Mike and Hamid**

Early in this chapter I profiled Mike and Hamid, and the attitudes they express towards British culture and politics. Both showed relatively low levels of cultural identification with Britain and, at least on the surface, seemed to be disinterested in taking political action themselves. Now that we have reviewed more general statistics in political activity among Jamaican and Bangladeshi youth, we can return to Mike and Hamid to see if they will help us to put flesh on those numbers.

Mike, the Jamaican youth introduced early in this chapter, had told me that any political action he might take “doesn’t make that much of a difference.” When I asked him about specific political actions that he has taken over the past year, his reasons for this attitude became more apparent. He said he would not contact a local politician because “my local politician is Labour, and I’m more Tory for some reason.” He went on
to elaborate why he thought his difference of party affiliation rendered any local political contact ineffectual:

You know the recent fight on the embryo rule? ….They’re mixing like embryos, human embryos, with cow things. For Labour, that was the only party, Gordon Brown said, that is going to whip. Which basically means you have to follow the Labour position. So, because my local MPs is Labour, will [contacting him] make a difference?

Mike’s question was a pointed one. His explanation of British politics revealed considerable sophistication, as he was keeping current with Parliament debates on laws regarding human embryo use in science and he had strong political (and religious) convictions to bring into these debates. Yet the political system, as he understands it, stymies any chance for his influence because the unified Labour whip position is seemingly unchangeable. Mike’s description of the British political system is a far cry from the optimism Almond and Verba observed among Britons in the 1960s, who expressed “general system pride as well as satisfaction with specific government performance.” Mike continued to explain his grievances with the British political system [emphasis original]:

The thing is, when you’re living in this country, the laws that will affect you are already going through and will be implemented. So it’s kind of weird like. You have to vote based on a manifesto that they have beforehand, and then you experience it during their term. And because their term starts here [uses a hand gesture to motion the start], it’s not going to make that much difference. I mean, maybe local councils are more, there’s more of a place where you can have your opinion expressed in a more effectual way. But I wouldn’t do that myself.

Mike’s disaffection with the British political system stretched beyond relationships with political representatives to encompass other forms of conventional politics. His level of political participation is low across almost all measures. He does not claim to sign petitions, wear campaign badges, boycott products, or purchase
products for political or ethical reasons, for example. Mike’s only forms of ‘political’ participation were those that took place firmly within the bounds of his church. He gives money to the church, fundraises for it, and says that he has “organized a group of likeminded people” to attend the church regularly. In fact, his church, Ruach Ministries, is the only voluntary organization in which Mike is involved. Mike did say that he would be interested in voting, but, as he had just turned 18 recently, there was no way to evaluate whether this desire would transfer into practice.

Overall, Mike has no discernible involvement in politics outside church because he feels alienated from the British political system. Interestingly, as quoted earlier, he demonstrates a high level of political literacy when he expresses this alienation. In fact, on the British political knowledge quiz, Mike correctly answered five out of seven questions. His performance on this measure put him in the category Pattie and co-authors define as “politically knowledgeable.” As someone entering the London School of Economics to study law, Mike’s ability to reason and argue in political terms is likely to increase.

Beyond low expectations of the British political system, there may be another dynamic at work. British sociologist David Martin has captured well the conflicted attitude to civic engagement that I saw in Mike – deep convictions about political issues that are juxtaposed with political inaction. Martin (2005: 134) describes how evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, such as Mike, tend to approach the moral and political reform of their societies:

The paradox of evangelicalism (of which Pentecostalism is included for present purposes) turns on the way it embodies secularity and seeks a more thorough sanctification. Evangelicalism is the most expansive element in contemporary Protestantism and yet as it seeks [a] deeper appropriation of faith at the individual
level it erodes the idea of a Christian society by dismissing the uncommitted majority as not Christian. Given that the democratic state increasingly reflects the comparative indifference of the majority, evangelicalism in principle abandons [the state]…. The ‘ideal type’ of evangelicalism has to be constructed in terms of the restriction of religion to a voluntary sector unable and unwilling to propose [political] norms.\(^{28}\)

In other words, evangelicalism is an extremely change-minded religious movement. It has hopes for deep *individual*-level heart changes that culminate in the transformation of society. Yet, when confronted with societies where the vast majority is indifferent to their faith message, evangelicals can become deeply cynical about the actual potential for political and societal change. Therefore, most evangelicals in the West compartmentalize their influence to the voluntary sector (especially to their local church), or in some cases they may campaign on a small set of moral touch point issues. The evangelical faith – which overflows with ambitions for societal transformation – ironically tends to accept a highly circumscribed, and therefore secularized, role in society.\(^{29}\) Thus, Mike, who has strong convictions about the embryo bill in Parliament, is unlikely to express his convictions outside of his own Christian circles. Beyond simple alienation due to weaknesses in the British political system, it may be that Mike is disengaged from political action due to the constraints of his religious imagination for social and political change. In David Martin’s words, Mike has “abandon[ed] the state.”

---

\(^{28}\) It may be helpful to note that Martin is comparing the evangelical mentality of born again conversion and personal faith to what Max Weber called the “church” mentality, where one is automatically born into a national church which extends across the whole society. Those with a “church” perspective might be expected to be more trusting and optimistic about political level change.

\(^{29}\) The original definition of ‘secularization’ refers to the differentiation, or compartmentalization, of religion into a smaller and smaller domain of authority as its previous responsibilities are absorbed by the state, the market, or particular institutions (Casanova 2006).
Hamid, the Bangladeshi youth introduced earlier, also expressed a highly negative view of politics. He had gone as far as to say: “There is not a political bone in my body.” As we began to talk through potential forms of political participation, I realized that Hamid was much more involved and knowledgeable of politics than I could have expected.

Hamid’s political literacy is quite high. On the political knowledge quiz he correctly answered six of seven questions, placing him in the “politically knowledgeable” category. He told me that he regularly watches *Question Time*[^30] on television. Although he primarily spoke negatively about British politicians and media (using words such as “spin” and “politics [is] a dirty game”), it was clear from our conversation that he keeps abreast with current affairs and the workings of the political process.

Most of Hamid’s civic and political actions arise out of his involvement in voluntary organizations. Hamid takes an active role in so many organizations that he had trouble listing them all: He is a leader in the ISOC (campus Islamic societies) for the London region, volunteers at Ummah Welfare Trust and InterPalestine (two Islamic humanitarian aid NGOs), helps arrange Islamic courses with a local organization, assists at an educational trust, helps produce a Muslim children’s magazine, and is active in his locality with a Bangladeshi neighborhood association. From listening to Hamid’s wide range of involvements, I could understand why he needs a bike to rush from meeting to meeting. The contrast could hardly be greater with the singularity of Mike’s voluntary involvement, set exclusively within his church.

[^30]: *Question Time* is a weekly television program on BBC One. The program features politicians from the three main political parties as well as other public figures who answer audience questions on a given topic.
Hamid’s many voluntary engagements form the bulk of the context and motivation for his political participation, which has been extensive. He had recently contacted politicians, including local councillors, to involve them in events sponsored by organizations with which he volunteers. He regularly gives to charities and fundraises, wears campaign badges, signs petitions, boycotts products, and purchases products for ethical reasons. When he is angered by a portrayal of Muslims in a media source, Hamid writes a letter or email to the editor. “It probably seems like it’s gone to deaf ears a lot of the time,” he said, “because a lot of times we get media which is very negative and very unfair.”

Hamid had recently become involved in a charged political issue at Queen Mary University, where he is a student. A “prayer room controversy” had emerged between the university and some of its Muslim students. Hamid told me that the room where I had witnessed him and fellow students praying, just minutes earlier, had been designated a Muslim prayer room for the entire previous academic year. Hamid said that this decision made good sense, because Queen Mary has the largest number of Muslim students of any British university. The Muslim students who prayed in the room appreciated the freedom to keep Qur’ans and other religious books available there. But, Hamid told me, in the current academic year:

Funnily enough, some of us come back and find it’s been made into a multi-faith room. We can’t keep our books there. We can’t have it after six, and stuff. So now, that’s really affected the work of the Islam Society.

The Queen Mary Islamic Society was at that time campaigning to re-designate the prayer room as Muslim-only. Across the Queen Mary campus I had seen prayer room
campaign posters (the posters featured Spiderman in an Islamic prayer position). Hamid described the campaign’s strategy and its challenges thus far:

Hamid: We tried all the political avenues, all the legal avenues. Like over a hundred letters were written by different [Islamic Society] members. We tried many things which are in our power, but it seems like it’s not working.

Daniel: Ok, so you tried writing letters….

Hamid: Petitions, meetings, emails to [the new university Principal].

Daniel: Ok. Did you do things like protest?

Hamid: Not yet, we wanted to avoid that…

Daniel: Or how about going on strike and saying, I’m not going to class…

Hamid: We wanted to avoid this because we thought, you know, there’s peaceful methods of doing it and don’t want to have a hindrance on the relationship we have. Our pressure’s not working so we might have to think of Plan B…. To maybe take it into protest and stuff. Let’s see.

Hamid had recently contacted a legal representative to discuss legal ramifications of some of these further alternatives.

The two cases of Mike and Hamid certainly cannot represent the diversity of civic attitudes and practices among Jamaican and Bangladeshi second generation youth. Yet, as some of the more articulate young people I interviewed, these two young men help to illustrate some of the broader trends observed in the overall data. Both Mike and Hamid express relatively low levels of identification with ‘Britishness’ as a cultural or civic category. Yet this apparent weakness in civic identity does not translate into political apathy, as both young men maintain a strong working knowledge of current affairs and the political system.

Mike and Hamid both express negative attitudes toward British politics. For Mike, this appears to be out of alienation from a system in which he has little faith. For
Hamid, his disaffection with politics seems instead to be an effort to avoid being tainted by the corruption he perceives in the system.

Mike has not found many outlets for political participation, as he is not involved in civil society organizations beyond his church. This was more generally true of the Jamaican youth I interviewed. Some Jamaicans were apathetic towards politics and some (like Mike) alienated from it. Others, like Clarise who boycotts “blurred gender” products, are engaged in political activities. Yet each person’s political activities are not widely shared, meaning that these youth largely mirror the British trend of atomism and individual cheque-book participation.

Some Bangladeshi youth were apathetic and some were alienated. The trend of atomism was not very frequently observed among Bangladeshis. Yet, overall, Bangladesh political participation is much higher than that of Jamaicans. And the level of participation is higher still among highly religious Muslims. Hamid’s case illustrates well an important phenomenon in the civic engagement of East End Bangladeshis: it tends to be an engagement not in the conventional process, but rather in political alternatives.

Hamid participates in political activities in an alternative sphere of Muslim organizations, such as his university Islamic Society and Islamic humanitarian NGOs. He is not taking part in what have traditionally been the major organizations in British politics, such as political parties or unions. When Hamid engages with a secular organization, his motives tend to be expressly Islamic – such as writing a letter to a newspaper about the representation of Muslims or sending a petition about the prayer room to the Queen Mary University administration. Hamid does not wish to be
associated with, or tainted by, politics. Yet he is at the same time a highly politically literate person who can recognize issues of conscience and knows how to take action in various situations.

The emphasis on an alternative politics, exemplified in Hamid’s case, was more broadly characteristic of Bangladeshis as a group. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that while religious involvement motivates East End Bangladeshi youth to participate in a parallel world of Islamic institutions, it does not also make them more likely to vote. We will explore in the next chapter some of the religious institutions in which second generation youth are forming their approaches to citizenship and politics.
CHAPTER 3
SHAPING CITIZENS:
MOSQUES, CHURCHES, AND YOUTH CIVIC SOCIALIZATION

It was one of my first visits to Brixton, in November 2007. I had braved the chilly London afternoon air wandering the local streets and markets. Now at the end of the workday, I made the circuit back towards the main strip of Brixton. I crossed Windrush Square, the central green space that commemorates black immigration to Britain. After walking by the popular Ritzy Cinema, I rounded the KFC on the corner and headed towards the Brixton tube station. Dozens of Caribbean, African, and other workers in coats and scarves were queuing for their buses home. Nearing the tube station, I noticed a thin covered shopping passageway that cut directly through the building to my right. The sign above said “Reliance Arcade.”

The Reliance Arcade is a long passage lined with independent booths on each side, selling items like greeting cards and flashy LED mobile phone accessories. As soon as I stepped into the arcade I was greeted by the familiar sound of African American Gospel music blaring from speakers on the right and about ten yards down. The music came from a booth with the sign “The CD Bar.” Literally set up like a bar for CDs, the booth had headphone stations for customers who could lean against the bar to sample hip hop, reggae, R&B, or Christian music before making their purchases.

There was a black youth leaning on the bar. He seemed to be second or third generation, and at first I thought he was a music customer. But as I walked past I realized he was there for quite a different reason. He was receiving spiritual advice. Behind the
bar stood the CD seller, named Reggie, who I was soon to meet. Reggie was mentoring the young man on a private matter and spoke with a knowing compassion. As I walked by I overheard Reggie give words of counsel about sexual temptation and the spiritual dangers of living in “the World.”

I relate this experience to introduce Reggie, the CD seller, who I came to know in the early weeks of my dissertation fieldwork. Reggie is a tall man in his mid 30s of Nigerian origin, with a warm and easy air about him. He always wears a tan Kangol flat cap. I would come to see Reggie as an example of what Elijah Anderson (1999) calls an “Old Head,” an adult role model that youth in Brixton can look to when facing the moral dilemmas of street life. Reggie sees himself much in this way. He would tell me later that he thinks of his job as a CD seller as a setting for Christian ministry. Reggie is known to have a knack for bringing almost any conversation around to ultimate questions of life, death, judgment, and Jesus.

The main streets of Brixton teem with a diversity of spiritualities. Older dreadlocked Rastafarian men roam the sidewalks, gathering in groups at the benches of St. Matthews Park, sometimes speaking out words of worship to Haile Selassie. An African man stands near the tube station silently distributing business cards for a local witch doctor psychic. Black Muslims stroll in family groups towards the Brixton Mosque and its religious primary school. Evangelists for many causes – Christianity, Falun Gong, or a recent conspiracy theory – can often be seen belting out messages in the main intersection by the KFC. A pair of middle-aged women on the street corner encourage each other that the Lord is faithful.

---

31 In this chapter I use pseudonyms for the names of all people I met in research fieldwork, with exception of religious leaders.
In *Streets of Glory* (2003), Omar McRoberts writes about the Four Corners neighborhood in Boston as an example of a “religious district,” because it contains such a larger cluster of storefront churches within a small radius. Brixton would make the short list of places in London that could be considered its religious districts. The Spitalfields-Whitechapel area in the East End of London, my other case study area, would also make such a list.\(^{33}\) Both places are host to various churches, mosques, or religious charities in

\(^{32}\) Although this is not one of the churches I selected for research, its daily storefront window Bible passage exemplifies the forthright street presence of some Brixton churches.

\(^{33}\) Other potential religious districts in London include Finsbury Park, Southall, and Newham – the last of these which Greg Smith (1996) argues has London’s highest geographic concentration of places of worship.
converted buildings, and street cultures that are highly assertive in spirituality, especially considering Britain’s privatized religious norms.

**Figure 3.2. Whitechapel Road in the East End**

In this chapter I will investigate how religious institutions shape youth citizenship, focusing on two churches in Brixton and two mosques in the East End. My emphasis will be on the particular visions of the citizen that are upheld by each place of worship.

Few studies in Britain have addressed the religious shaping of believers into particular kinds of citizens. An important exception is Nicole Toulis’ book *Believing*  

34Note the turbaned man carrying the picketing sign with the words “Allah is Lord of the Universe” (top center).
Identity (1997), an ethnography of a Pentecostal New Testament Church of God (NTCG) congregation in Birmingham, England. The Birmingham King Street NTCG congregation is predominantly first generation Jamaican and largely female. Yet rather than viewing race, ethnicity, or generation as their common ground, “their identity as Christians serves as the basis for their interaction with others in British society.” Members of the congregation view themselves and each other as “spiritual citizens.” This identity allows the congregation to avoid “debates about how, and on what terms, African-Caribbeans may be included in the British nation, for [their] inclusive spiritual nation is not premised on racial differentiation.” The members of the NTCG congregation feel a satisfying sense of spiritual affirmation and civic belonging.

In a related manner, Peggy Levitt in God Needs No Passport (2007) investigates how spiritual perspectives shape the practice of citizenship, creating citizens with different degrees of tolerance for religious pluralism. Therese O’Toole and Richard Gale (2010) have observed that religion provides British youth (primarily young Muslims) who engage in politics with more globally oriented “grammars of action.” Hussain and Bagguley (2005) investigate what they call “citizenship identity” noting that first generation Pakistani Muslims in Britain tend to think of themselves more as temporary “denizens” whereas the second generation identifies with the rights and opportunities of being British citizens.

I further develop the concept of “citizenship identity” germinating in the work of Toulis and others. Citizenship, in a legal sense, entails rights granted by the state, usually accompanied by concurrent civic responsibilities. My definition of citizenship identity is: “Constructed subjective membership in an imagined community of citizens, providing
one’s frame of reference for civic engagement.” This definition builds on Benedict Anderson’s (1983) thesis that identities are formed in reference to “imagined communities.” Communities, whether imagined or directly experienced, provide the cultural resources and constraints for civic imagination and engagement. Citizenship identities are not necessarily spiritually or religiously based, but religions are important sites of their production because they so often confer transcendent narratives of membership.

I will continue to substantiate the concept of citizenship identity over the course of this dissertation. In this chapter I investigate the moral directives and congregational cultures of religious institutions to discern the kinds of citizenship identities they cultivate. I also, if briefly, look beyond cultural and identity aspects of institutions, to consider the structural side of the influences they have in respective local areas. Constance Flanagan and her colleagues (2007) build from the work of Michael Walzer (1989) to observe that schools are like “mini-polities” from which the opportunities and resources of school-citizenship are templates for state-citizenship. The same may be true of religious organizations (see Foley and Hoge 2007). For many young people, religious organizations will have a more long-standing influence as mini-polities than schools will, simply because religious involvement can extend beyond school age to continue reinforcing civic habits over time. The citizenship identities which institutions propagate (which are cultural) and the resources they offer for civic engagement (which are structural) should in reality be mutually constitutive, and thus the discussion of both at the end of this chapter will necessarily be intertwined (Sewell 1992).
Before delving into the analysis of particular churches and mosques, we will return to the CD Bar in Brixton. It was there that a conversation early into my fieldwork gave me a first view of how to select religious institutions as case studies.

**The Religious Scene in Brixton**

On the cold November day that I first walked past the CD Bar, I had noticed that Reggie and the young man were engaged in a private spiritual conversation. I left the Reliance Arcade, returning ten minutes later to find Reggie alone.

I approached the CD Bar and introduced myself to Reggie. We struck up a conversation about music, culture, and Jamaican young people in Brixton. After a few minutes we were joined by Reggie’s colleague and boss Vernon, age 30, who is a stockier man of Jamaican origin. Vernon is something of a foil to Reggie. He began to lose his Christian faith in early adulthood – around the same age that Reggie had a born again faith experience. Vernon’s winsome personality and ironic sense of humor make him a good match in conversation with Reggie’s relaxed yet steadfast evangelical zeal. Vernon laughs often, with a hearty bellow of a laugh.

I piqued Reggie and Vernon’s interest when I explained my sociology research with second generation youth. Ten minutes into our conversation I asked if I could record it with my digital recorder. They agreed. Then Reggie surprised me by pulling out his own larger, more advanced digital recorder:

Reggie: Yeah, I've got one here as well. *places his digital recorder on the bar*

Daniel: Well, look at you!

Vernon: Mine's bigger than yours! *All laugh*

Reggie: Yeah, but I won't record you all.
Daniel: Your [recorder] is probably a little higher level than mine.

Reggie: Nah, nah.

Daniel: But actually it's got good quality. So don't let that change what we're talking about or anything. And even if there's nothing useful, I'm just gonna keep [it] on.

I began by asking general questions to gain an orientation of the religious landscape in Brixton. Vernon – himself a Jamaican from the second generation – was only five years beyond my chosen demographic. The three of us had a very animated and wide-ranging conversation for more than an hour, speaking loudly to hear each other above the Gospel and R&B tracks playing on the CD Bar’s speakers. Reggie, who was tending the bar at the time, occasionally took a moment to sell a customer a CD.

Vernon told me about his own experiences growing up in a Jamaican-led church that was mostly influenced by first generation immigrants. He spoke of these types of churches as “very Victorian.” This was because “women were expected not to wear trousers or jewellery, expected not to relax their hair or manipulate it or change the texture.” Vernon continued:

I think it’s an old fashioned approach to Christianity. Where you’re supposed to be separated and, you know, “come out from among them.” And you’re supposed to look different from the world. This whole thing about “the world!” People in the world looking a particular way. You know they’re very bejewelled, they’re dressed up in the latest fashion. So the approach to Christianity was very conservative. That as a Christian you should dress “modestly.” Which is a word that is very often mentioned in the Jamaican church.

Vernon spoke with considerable sarcasm about the protective environment of the church in which he grew up. It was a place that required its congregation to dress “modestly” in order to shelter youth from the “bejewelled” influences of the outside world.

In Vernon’s view, churches of this more conservative variety have difficulty retaining the younger generation. He had himself felt his church was too strict and close-
minded. He stopped attending as a teenager. I asked if there are churches today that more effectively tap into youth culture. “It’s a big thing now,” Vernon said, “influenced by Americans like Kirk Franklin,” a gospel music artist. In fact, Kirk Franklin was about to perform a major show that weekend at London’s largest music venue, the O2 Arena. Vernon and Reggie agreed: “He’s a massive influence” on youth.

When I asked about which particular churches in Brixton successfully attract young people, Reggie and Vernon immediately thought of a local megachurch called Ruach Ministries. Vernon explained how this church had a much more relaxed and open atmosphere than conventional first generation churches:

When I was going to church you would wear a suit and tie every Sunday and go. It was showing reverence to God. And nowadays, churches like Ruach are very youth oriented. They allow youth to come as they are. You can come in jeans if you want. You don't have to dress up. They say “it doesn't matter how you come. Just come to church.”

It seemed that Vernon had identified an important distinction in the congregational cultures of black British churches – the difference between the first generation West Indian churches that emphasize reverence and modesty, as compared to the more youth oriented churches that may better reach and retain the second generation.

As we continued to talk, a Trinidadian man with his hair up in a raised dreadlock style approached the CD Bar. He spent some time listening to music on the bar headphones, and then joined our conversation about Brixton youth. Speaking in a lilting island accent the man expressed pessimism about the state of black youth in Britain. He did not believe there are viable role models for young people: “You know who youth look up to?” he asked, rhetorically, without pausing for an answer: “50 Cent, [the
American rapper]…. As a black youth in England, you have nobody who you can say
you aspire to be.”

Reggie agreed with this negative take on the circumstances of black British youth.
As an indefatigable evangelist, he explained the issue in the spiritual terms of the
“doctrine” that young people hear preached by rap and hip hop artists like 50 Cent:

Reggie: To the very impressionable youngsters and the gullible ones, they are
spewing out a doctrine that is a little dodgy. Because, you know, they’re talking
about –
Vernon: It’s just culture Reggie.
Reggie: – [imitating a rapper] “Yeah, we’re popping the champagne! You know
what guys, I’m driving my Ferrari!” And then they’re moving from there and
they’re saying “You know what, I got money! You want money?”

Reggie objected to the “big money” lifestyle of some black music artists, and to its
influence on youth. I noted the irony that posted behind him on the back wall was a list
of the top ten grossing black music artists worldwide (all of them American). In fact,
Reggie is a bit like a teetotaling bartender: He sells CDs from millionaire musicians, yet
he remains wary of the “doctrine” of conspicuous consumption many of them preach.

The Trinidadian man standing with us began to talk about how the “big money”
lifestyle can transfer into black churches in Britain. He mentioned the recent moral
downfall of a Caribbean pastor elsewhere in London. The pastor had been diverting
funds for his personal use: “A Ferrari pop up in the yard, a Porsche. His daughter was on
the director’s board, the wife, everybody.” Reggie and Vernon immediately recognized
this style of scandal. As Reggie put it, “you’re living in a mansion, you have incredible
power.” It is easy for successful pastors with power and charisma to be lured into
exploiting the trust of their congregations.
Our conversation at the CD Bar had established a general pattern in Black British churches. If the more traditional and first generation dominated churches over-emphasize austerity, then churches at the other end of the spectrum – more contemporary churches with a large youth segment – face the opposite danger of excess and conspicuous consumption.

As we neared the end of our conversation, Vernon drew some of the threads together to provide his view of the main problem facing Black British youth:

Vernon: We must ask ourselves why is it that our children are so affected, so influenced by 50 Cent? There's nothing wrong with 50 Cent saying what he's saying –

Reggie: – There's something wrong with it, but it's not really the root of the problem is it?

Vernon: Yeah. Why is [a black young person] so, so vacant that he's occupying his mind so much with 50 Cent to become so influenced by it? And that's a question for our community. He should be in sports, he should be doing his homework, he should be going on some kind of trip somewhere, or in the arts. You know what I mean? And be doing so many other things like so many other black children are doing in the city.

There is a deeper problem among black youth, according to Vernon. It cannot simply be blamed on indulgent black musicians or flashy wayward pastors. Reggie offered his opinion: “The root of the problem starts with the family institution.” Vernon was not so sure about this. But he believes that finding a solution is the collective responsibility of the black community. “The Asians have their lobbying group, the Muslims do,” he said. But for some reason the black community had not been able to organize as effectively around these issues.

“What we need to do is pray!” Vernon joked, bursting into a raucous laugh.

“Black mothers are always on their knees praying for their kids,” he continued, “we need political and financial industry.” For one reason or another, there has been limited
advocacy on the issues that are shaping black youth. Vernon thinks that more direct political action is the best way forward – which might mean taking a leaf from the lobbying successes of South Asian Muslims.

**Case Study Churches and Mosques**

Our conversation at the CD Bar set me in a good stead for identifying case study churches in Brixton. In the months that followed, I visited several churches in Brixton as well as mosques in the East End where I did participant observation. I attended each religious institution during a service or prayer time, took detailed fieldnotes, met youth and other people from the congregation, and informally met lay religious leaders or clergy. The full set of religious institutions that I visited for these initial observations is listed in Table 3.1.

From these first participant observation visits, I went through a gradual selection process to choose two churches and two mosques for in-depth case studies. My criteria for selection are broadly based on the selection logic that Nancy Ammerman has used in her multi-congregational studies (2005; 1996). I sought out congregations that 1) were large enough to be influential, exerting a substantial influence on second generation young people and 2) captured something of the variation in the local area’s religious institutions. The primary basis of variation, shown in Table 1, was between “traditional” churches that largely carry over the preferences of first generation adults from their countries of origin, and more “contemporary” institutions that due to style or offerings have made substantial inroads among second generation youth. This traditional-contemporary continuum was the main difference Reggie and Vernon had identified, and
was a clear distinction I could discern in my initial months of participant observation. The distinction is of great importance to religious institutions’ relationships with, and influence on, second generation youth.

**Table 3.1. Religious Organizations Visited for Participant Observation**
The four case study organizations are each marked with a star (*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Mosque</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church</td>
<td>* Brick Lane Jamme Masjid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Testament Church of God (NTCG), Brixton</td>
<td>Christian Street Markazi Mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Ruach Ministries</td>
<td>* The East London Mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), Brixton</td>
<td>Darrul Ummah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In actual practice, this selection process was at times quite simple and straightforward. It was clear from the beginning that two particular religious institutions are highly influential and youth oriented: Ruach Ministries and the East London Mosque (ELM). Each of these institutions is estimated to draw about 4,000 worshipers during its main religious services day each week (Friday for ELM, Sunday for Ruach). Even if the 4,000 total is overly optimistic, Ruach and ELM undoubtedly draw weekly numbers in the thousands, making them exceptionally large congregations for London and Europe. The East London Mosque is probably the largest mosque in Europe in terms of weekly
attendance. Ruach Ministries is one of a set of dynamic and growing African or Caribbean led churches in London, and it is the fourth largest church in Britain (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2. Megachurches in Britain**
With estimated weekly attendance (Peck 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Church Name</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) *</td>
<td>10,000-12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kensington Temple</td>
<td>5,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hillsong Church</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ruach Ministries *</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Glory House *</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Holy Trinity Brompton</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jesus House</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>St. Thomas', Sheffield</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>New Wine Ministries</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = African or Caribbean led church; ^= Based in London

Sometimes the selection process proved more difficult. At one point, I considered selecting the Brixton branch of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), a highly successful Pentecostal denomination that is known as the IURD in Brazil. The UCKG has a unique basis of operations compared to other British churches: It has established “Help Centres” that are open 24 hours each day, providing prayer, spiritual advice, or other assistance to anyone who wishes to visit. All of the UK church branches also hold four religious services every day of the week with particular themes (e.g., Monday is about financial problems, Tuesday spiritual healing, and Wednesday personal development). I attended the Brixton UCKG church for its largest Wednesday service,
and learned that it has a substantial segment of youth as well as highly developed youth programs. Unfortunately, after a long process of persistent communication with the central church office of the UCKG, I was not allowed further access to the Brixton congregation for research. London branches of the church have been embroiled in various controversies over the past decade. Although these issues were completely unrelated to my intended research with the youth ministry, they may be the reason for the cautious gatekeeping I experienced in my interaction with the church hierarchy. My experience was not dissimilar to Sophie Gilliat-Ray’s (2005) failed attempts to access the “closed worlds” of four Deobandi Muslim seminaries in Britain.

As my knowledge of Brixton deepened, I realized that the UCKG would not have been the ideal case study pairing with Ruach Ministries even if access was granted. Both churches can be classified as Neo-Pentecostal, and it was important to broaden my research to include other potential forms of youth religious experience. I chose to attend the Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church as a more traditional church pairing with Ruach. Seventh Day Adventism is the largest Christian denomination in Jamaica, and the denomination is thriving among British blacks. Because many second generation Jamaicans will be brought to traditional churches by their parents, this particular church allowed me to tap into a common experience for Jamaican youth.

I likewise chose the Jamme Masjid (Great Mosque) on Brick Lane as a complementary case study to the East London Mosque due to its traditional first

[35]The most high profile controversy for the UCKG church was its alleged lack of intervention to help eight year old Victoria Climbe, who died from her parents’ abuse in 2000. The girl had brought problems to the attention of a UCKG pastor. In a much smaller controversy at the time I was doing research, the UCKG was planning to renovate a historic theater in Walthamstow, but received significant opposition from local residents because they believed it is a cult or a “health and wealth” ministry.
generation influence. The mosque is located at the center of the Bangladeshi “heartland” in London on Brick Lane, a street famed for its Bangladeshi curry houses. This mosque is one in which many Bangladeshi youth first learn to pray and attend Qur’anic recitation and Arabic classes. Like the Brixton Adventist Church, it maintains transnational ties with the country of origin, serving as an ethnic community hub in its local area.

I will now profile each of the two churches and two mosques in turn. My goal will be to elucidate the citizenship identities they communicate through their religious messages, and the practices and resources that might constrain or enable youth citizenship, in ways both overt and subtle.

**Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church: The Dutiful West Indian Citizen**

Some residents of Brixton may be unaware of the large Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church. It lies just North of the large Tesco grocery store on Acre Lane, but is nestled within quiet residential streets that have rows of identical Victorian terraced houses. The Adventist church is in a building originally constructed by the Church of England in the early 20th Century. As has become a common story in Britain, the original Anglican congregation aged and declined, providing the Adventists with an opportunity to buy the Victorian style building. Today the main sanctuary does feel like a historic church. It is well kept and spacious, with seating for the choir behind the podium and many rows of dark wood pews for the congregation. The room is carpeted in a regal red color. New flower arrangements are regularly provided to match the seasons. It was in
this sanctuary that the Brixton church hosted Prime Minister of Jamaica Bruce Golding, himself married to an Adventist, to speak from the pulpit in May 2008.  

Adventists celebrate Saturday each week as their Sabbath, or day of worshipful rest. At the Brixton church the main worship service takes place on Saturday morning, followed by a community lunch, and then an Adventist Youth Service (AYS) in the evening. From attending these services and events various times, I would estimate that the church reaches a maximum of about 300 attendees on a regular week. Members of the Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church know it simply as “Brixton.” Their affectionate nickname conveys the church’s intention to represent the best of what Brixton is (or should be) about.

Jamie Gittens is the youth pastor at Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church, a role that she holds in a voluntary capacity. Jamie’s parents came to England from Trinidad. When I met Jamie to interview her about youth work at Brixton, she was in her late twenties. She wears glasses, has her hair back in a ponytail, and has a gentle manner about her. Jamie joked with me that the young people at the Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church can never guess her age, usually guessing older, but sometimes a bit younger.

Jamie said she had first started volunteering as the youth leader because: “I've seen that my generation's left. They're all gone.” For one reason or another, all of her

---

36 At the time of writing, the speech given by the Prime Minister of Jamaica at Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church could be viewed here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xgOyLoK78c

37 I also attended the church during a revival campaign when the numbers can swell to be substantially larger, but the new attendees at these campaigns are not necessarily representative of the regular congregation.
childhood friends of the same age either left for another church or drifted away from faith altogether. “Now that I'm 28,” she continued, “my passion is that as that next generation comes out they don't do the same thing.”

**Figure 3.3: Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church**

The Brixton Adventist Church has a Sabbath School class for teenagers. There is also a more loosely organised set of events for youth in the church which include people in their 20s or early 30s, which is largely organized through Facebook. The Adventist Youth Service (AYS) on Saturday evenings is, in reality, only for “youth” in name. I attended the AYS several times, and each week it seems to function as a somewhat smaller transplant of attendees from the morning service who are choosing to spend their whole day in church activities. The attendees at all services at the Brixton church are
almost all black. At least sixty percent are female. The largest specific demographic
within the church is composed of older, first generation, West Indian women. Women
wear nice dresses and many wear church hats, while most men wear suits. As Jamie had
mentioned, although there are children and adults in the church, there is a noticeable
vacancy of young people in their upper teens and twenties.

I asked Jamie why, in her view, young people so often leave the church when they
reach their late teens. She thinks that generational issues are a big part of this issue.
“Sometimes young people can be very sensitive about comments on their dress,” she said
implying that the modest and fairly formal dress code can be a barrier. I noticed myself
from attending the church that I never saw anyone wearing earrings or other jewellery,
including young women. Jamie believes that there is a generation gap within the church.
She has tried to help heal the divide when possible. She once held an event where
members of the different generations were gathered together to air their differences “but
no one would talk. It didn’t really work.”

Most of Jamie’s work is with the regular teen Sabbath school class, and she
remains optimistic overall that youth ministry can make a difference. She was aware of
my research on citizenship. I asked her about the main goals of her ministry work with
youth. She expressed these partly in civic terms: “First and foremost is on a spiritual
level, that they become closer to God,” she said, “And second of all, that they become
active citizens of the church. And by that, they’ll also be developing their talents that
they’ve been given and use that in the community” [emphasis added].
The core of citizenship, according to Jamie, is located in the church as an institution. It is through involvement in this institution that youth develop skills that they can apply to national citizenship more broadly.

Jamie explained to me further what she means by “active citizenship of the church” and how this can carry over as the use of “talents… in the community” beyond the church walls. Being part of the youth ministry at Brixton SDA “helps you become a good member of society.” In her own experience: “I wouldn't be able to do presentations, or write songs, or write poems, or do public speaking if it wasn't for the skills that I developed when I was younger from the AY" youth program.” Youth ministry is a place in which useful skills can be developed that one can apply to the benefit of society.

How well are Jamie’s civic goals for youth actually accomplished by the youth work and general ministry of the church? To answer this and related questions I visited Brixton Seventh Day Adventist regularly for participant observation.

The first Saturday Sabbath that I visited the church, I planned to attend the pre-service Sabbath School, although I was arriving slightly late. As I approached the building, a street evangelist paced back and forth outside the church. He was preaching a message of repentance and the End Times to convict passers by and draw them inside. I smiled politely as I walked in. Immediately upon entering the church sanctuary I was greeted by a charming middle-aged women wearing a white dress and a black and white scarf. She discreetly funnelled me to Sister Alma’s class for newcomers, already in progress. The sanctuary space had been divided into perhaps half a dozen Sabbath

---

38 AY stands for Adventist Youth. The Adventist Youth Service that takes place in the evenings at Brixton is part of a well-resourced curriculum and strategy for youth work developed by the British Adventist Church.
School classes. Groups sat on pews in different areas of the room to study the Bible together.

Sister Alma is an elderly West Indian lady, with a voice that is both kindly and stern. She was wearing a dress and a large church hat, which perfectly matched in peacock blue. Sister Alma regularly teaches the newcomers’ class. I sat down alongside about ten others who were new to the church. The Bible study was, in large part, Sister Alma’s own spiritual instruction to us. She executed this with aplomb. When she checked for questions at the end, one woman sitting in our section raised her hand to speak. The woman said that she had attended Pentecostal churches in the past and asked if there was any difference. With a motherly concern in her tone of voice, Sister Alma explained that the Adventist Church takes very seriously the authority of the Word of God. She mentioned spiritual practices that might happen in a Pentecostal church, such as speaking in tongues, and chastened our class that we should recognize these as inappropriate in a church setting because (paraphrasing 1 Corinthians 14:33): “God is not a God of disorder. He is a God of order.”

In the several weeks that I attended the Brixton Adventist Church for observation, the theme of orderliness came across consistently. Adventist services were very carefully structured. Following the service plan, different members of the congregation stepped to the podium to lead singing, make announcements, or to give a musical performance. This service structure also provided a sense that the service was a family enterprise, as many different members of the congregation of different ages and were responsible for leading different sections from the podium. Before and after the service, when friends or
acquaintances met they would shake hands and share the common greeting of “Happy Sabbath!”

Services at the Brixton Adventist Church regularly make mention of the West Indian origins of the congregation – usually using this term rather than “Caribbean” or the more specific “Jamaican” (though Jamaicans do compose the largest single ethnic group in the congregation). For example, early into the first service I attended, an Elder came to the front to initiate the service. He reminded the congregation of the importance of being punctual: “They say there’s a ‘West Indian Time.’ Well, there is no West Indian time. There are no excuses for being late to church.”

The model of a good young citizen that is expressed by the church has a particular ethnic character – it is a good, young West Indian citizen. This is because the descriptions, models, and injunctions expressed in church for what is good and right for a young person to do are frequently expressed as West Indian values. There is a cultural specificity to good citizenship within Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church.

The church’s West Indian values are combined with a strong emphasis on being Adventist. Seventh Day Adventists accept the foundational Christian beliefs in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, as outlined in the New Testament. In their scriptural hermeneutic, they believe that Old Testament Law is likewise incumbent upon believers to follow. Adventists are distinctive from most other Christians in their attempt to carry on the Old Testament Jewish tradition of beginning Sabbath at sundown on Friday and celebrating it throughout Saturday. In an effort to uphold the Mosaic Law in scripture, Adventists do not drink alcohol and maintain a careful diet. Several members of the congregation told me that they try to avoid processed foods, while some were vegetarian.
Based in the importance placed on detail in dates and laws by the Adventist founder, Ellen White, there is a frequent message of readiness for the End Times and Jesus’ return to judge the world. The strong emphasis on following particular practices as a minority within the larger stream of Christian tradition can have the effect of “ethnicizing” Adventism. By this I do not mean that Adventism becomes a distinct ethnic identity in its own right, but rather that the symbolic boundaries of Adventism further facilitate the ethnic distinctiveness of West Indian identity.

The emphasis on Adventist distinctions was frequently expressed in church services. On one communion Sabbath that I attended, Head Pastor Hamilton Williams preached about the meaning of the communion meal, as established by Christ himself. Pastor Williams is a tall and broad-shouldered Jamaican man of middle age, with glasses and a meticulously shaven head. He speaks with great force and verbal dexterity, intermixing frequent quotes from the King James Bible with his own words that have a potent Biblical tenor (e.g., “the martyrs were torn asunder!”). In this particular sermon about communion, Pastor Williams took pains to communicate that at the Last Supper Jesus and his disciples “had just eaten bread and unfermented wine.” He made it unequivocally clear that drinking wine and other alcohol is not a permissible indulgence in one’s earthly life. Jesus himself said, in the theme verse of the sermon: “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until the day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:29). The sermon’s resounding message was one of the delay of gratification. It is necessary to maintain discipline and patience until it is time to be reunited with the Lord.
The requirements for self-control, patience, and modesty, as I have conveyed, were communicated often in the Brixton Church both as tenets of Seventh Day Adventist faith and as traditional West Indian values. One example of these values being taught in reference to youth was through a skit in one evening AYS service. Entitled “Imitation of Life,” the skit was performed by young people from the congregation, largely in their mid to late twenties. The skit stars a young man in the role of Johnny, who is growing up in a stereotypical Adventist West Indian family. It is based on the scripture verse Proverbs 22:6, which says “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

At the beginning of the skit, Johnny is a teenager and a good member of his family. He passes an important exam at school. He prays devotedly: “Dear Lord, the only real peace that I have is in You.” His West Indian mother may be a bit overbearing in her faith – when Johnny faces a difficult situation, she advises him to “just praise the hurt away!” Johnny’s father is perhaps too neglectful – he sits at the kitchen table in his bathrobe to read the newspaper, often forgetting his own children’s names. These adult characters, portrayed by youth actors, received much of the laughter from the young people in the audience. But the overall message was serious: Johnny lived in a relatively happy and secure family.

Johnny goes away to university and falls in with the wrong crowd. He spends his time with three young men who portrayed as delinquents: A Rastafarian, a youth in the pan-African movement, and another friend who is into hip hop. “Just forget what your mummy tell ya,” they say. Soon Johnny is smoking weed with these friends and skipping his classes. To uproarious laughter from the audience, he starts to take on Rastafarian
mannerisms, yelling out expressions like “Jang Rastafari!” Johnny, while on a drug high, writes a letter to his mother that reveals the depths of his condition: “Dear Mum, I have decided to become a Rastafarian. Christianity is no longer a thing that I do. Re-spect! Stay blessed in Selassie.” As the skit closes, Johnny remains estranged from his parents. A narrator quotes again the Proverb about training up a child. Perhaps Johnny’s parents had not done enough for him.

After the evening AYS service ended, a middle aged West Indian woman asked if I had liked the skit. I told her yes, I thought it was funny and had a good message. “Oh, you understood it?” she replied, “You know, that really can happen!”

The Imitation of Life skit communicates well Brixton SDA Church’s approach to socializing its youth into good believers and citizens. The Proverb of “Train up a child in the way he should go” that bookends the skit conveys the church’s highly pedagogical and family-centric approach young people. The skit also reveals the main peril that the church perceives to this socializing mission: A permissive youth culture that can steal away young people from Christian faith, life achievements, and parents. The use of Rastafarianism, Pan-Africanism, and hip hop as competitors to the Adventist faith showed the particular symbolic boundaries by which the church defines itself in opposition to others.

The kind of citizenship modelled in the Brixton Seventh Day Adventist church is a dutiful citizenship that honors the place of family and of traditional values. It is a citizenship with the particular ethnic tinge to it, as it is hoped that youth will locate themselves in the heritage and values of the West Indies. Not always distinct from these cultural values are the doctrines of Seventh Day Adventist Christianity, which are
considered the ultimate guidelines to an upright life as a citizen of church and greater society. An ideal youth “graduate” of the Brixton Church, then, will be a dutiful Adventist West Indian citizen. There is much to hold together in this model of citizenship. It faces the challenge of being heavily reliant on intergenerational transmission. As Jamie had suggested – and as the relative lack of youth involvement in the AYS service makes clear – the transmission process has been a tenuous one.

**Brick Lane Jamme Masjid: The Dutiful Bangladeshi Citizen**

The religious building that now houses the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid (Great Mosque) was originally constructed as a French Huguenot church in 1743. The building is frequently noted as an architectural symbol of Britain’s multicultural and multireligious immigrant history. The substantial rectangular brick structure stands on the corner of two streets – stately Fournier Street lined by tall Georgian town houses, and energetic Brick Lane blazing with the neon signs of its curry restaurants. A sundial placed high on the external wall of the religious building bears the inscription *Umbra Sunnus*, or “we are shadows.” Huguenots originally placed the inscription there as a reminder of the fleeting nature of earthly life. The phrase also captures well the historic transience of immigrant communities through these streets.

The Huguenots who built this place of worship in the Eighteenth Century were fleeing persecution from Catholic France. Although initially facing exclusion from British society as well, they incorporated and intermarried within only a few generations. The building spent a decade in the early Nineteenth Century as the home of a Christian missionary society to Jews, and then became a Methodist Chapel in 1819. By the end of
the Nineteenth Century, the Jewish population of the East End had grown rapidly, in large part due to the pogroms that followed the 1881 assassination of Russian Tsar Alexander II. Jews purchased the Brick Lane building, and it functioned as the Machzeike Adass Great Synagogue from 1898 until the 1970s. At one time there were more than 100,000 Jews living in the East End of London. Yet as members of this community also incorporated into society or grew more affluent, they moved to other parts of London. Bangladeshis, who began settling in the East End in significant numbers in the late 1960s, purchased the building to convert it into a mosque in 1976.

*Figure 3.4: Brick Lane Jamme Masjid*

![Brick Lane Jamme Masjid](image)

The same building on the corner of Brick Lane and Fournier Street, then, has been a Huguenot church, a Christian missionary society, Methodist chapel, Jewish Synagogue,
and Bangladeshi mosque. Throughout the years, as Anne Kershen (2005) notes, it has been an important center of both religion and community life. The building has come to represent the part religion can play in rooting immigrant communities in their new home, providing them with spirituality and a secure community space that may facilitate their successful incorporation.

The religious building on Brick Lane is Grade II listed, meaning that its historic structure is protected in British law. When converting the building into a mosque the pews were removed and prayer carpeting was inserted. Rooms in the basement were repurposed as areas for wudu, or Islamic ceremonial washing. The most evident change to the exterior has been the erection of a tall silver minaret at the corner of the building in 2009. Some structural changes have been made in the layout of internal rooms, but the building for the most part retains its historic character. The large main prayer room on the ground floor is covered in a sea of aquamarine prayer carpeting. This carpeting abuts beautiful massive dark oak doors from the Eighteenth Century. As Bangladeshi men bow down to pray, they worship beneath glorious golden candelabra-style chandeliers.

The leadership of the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid referred me to Sajjad Miah, a mosque Vice President, for my questions about second generation youth. On the day I had arranged to meet Sajjad I entered the mosque to find him gathered with the leadership board in their main office. There had been an incident of pick-pocketing at the mosque only minutes earlier and the board was arranging their response. Sajjad is a Bangladeshi man in his sixties, slight in frame, with glasses and closely shaven grey beard. He was visibly preoccupied by the pick-pocketing situation. We realized it would be better to postpone the interview to the following week.
I found Sajjad the next week at the mosque office again. We ascended the dark oak central staircase in the center of the building. Carrying our two English teas, we entered a large and bare multipurpose room upstairs to sit down at a foldable table for the interview.

I asked Sajjad to describe his experiences of coming to Britain and living here. He arrived as a teenager in 1967 with his father. As is true of most Bangladeshis in his generation, his original intention was to stay in Britain temporarily and for economic reasons:

My initial understanding was that after short while we'll go back to the Bangladesh. We'll go back to the Bangladesh after a few years or so. There was no intention of settling here in the beginning. But by the time passed, my other brother and sister and my mother came to this country. By then we realized that [laughing] we'll not be able to go back to the Bangladesh!

His early years in Britain had been exciting times. There was a real pioneering spirit among the men who first arrived to take jobs. At first they would join together for prayer in houses and various places. Sajjad was part of the process of purchasing the building on Brick Lane, which was at that time a synagogue with declining membership. He told me: “The Jewish people knew that this building would be used for a mosque, and because of that it would be used for a religious purpose. So they gave us a discount.”

Yet the times were also challenging for Sajjad and his Bangladeshi compatriots. In the 1970s, skinheads were harassing the growing number of Bangladeshi residents around Brick Lane. Sajjad had helped to form the Bangladeshi Youth Association to organise young men to protect the community. The youth association also bought snooker tables and other recreational equipment to help men pass the time. Over the years, many of the wives of these men arrived and the single men got married. Sajjad
had himself started a family in Britain. His five children now range in age from ten to thirty.

Sajjad has taken an active part in major phases of Bangladeshi history in the East End of London. He told me that he has witnessed changes in the Brick Lane area, especially in relation to youth. The main difference between youth in the 1970s and today is that they are now involved in “drugs and anti-social behavior” to a much greater degree. Sajjad says that some virtuous young people are trying to bring their wayward friends “to the community.” But in many cases, these youth are continuing to smoke or drink alcohol, sometimes in open defiance of their elders. The main problems Sajjad perceives – the substance use, the delinquency, and the generation gap – are almost identical to the issues raised in the Seventh Day Adventist skit “An Imitation of Life.”

At the root of these problems, according to Sajjad, is that “nowadays the youth don’t care about Bangladesh. They are more London or English.” His comment interested me, because at that time I had been asking second generation youth how they prioritize their identities. I asked Sajjad himself about which components of identity are most important to him. He considers “Bangladeshi” to be his core identity. He follows this with Muslim second, and Sylheti (his region in Bangladesh) third. Sajjad spoke with great enthusiasm about the natural beauty of his country of origin. In his heart, Bangladesh remains his home.

The Brick Lane Jamme Masjid maintains continuity with Bangladeshi way of life. Sajjad told me that the primary purpose of the mosque is to be a “place for the community.” It is also, of course, a place of worship. For Sajjad the Bangladeshi cultural and Muslim religious functions of the mosque are closely fused together, if they
can be distinguished at all. The mosque inculcates an image of the good Bengali and the good Muslim through its khutbas (sermons). First generation fathers may bring their children to teach them to pray at the mosque, and religious socialization of children occurs through years of prayer, khutbas, and the social closure of community relationships. The mosque also reaches a youth segment directly through its separate classes for 10 to 15 year-old boys and girls to learn to read and recite the Qur’an. Sajjad estimates that about a hundred youth take part in these classes, where “the imams give speeches on what is right and wrong.” The mosque endeavours to teach young people an integrated vision of the good Bangladeshi Muslim – a kind of model citizen of the local community and also of Bangladesh.

The Brick Lane Jamme Masjid is embedded in the Barelwi tradition of Islam. This means that it tends towards Sufi spirituality and cultural traditions of South Asia. The Barelwis of Bangladesh venerate the great Sufi saints, called pirs. These saints, such as Shah Jalal, first brought Islam into the Bengal frontier. The Brick Lane Jamme Masjid maintains spiritual practices and styles of worship infused Bengali traditions. For example, each year it celebrates mawlid, the birthday of Muhammad, through communal singing. Some Muslims of the East End consider such Barelwi traditions to be actions of shirk (idolatry). Indeed, it is impossible to imagine a Bangladeshi mawlid being celebrated at the more theologically austere East London Mosque.

The cultural continuity of the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid has meant that it is deeply appealing for many men who have immigrated from Bangladesh, especially older men. According to Sajjad Miah, the mosque has space for up to 4,000 worshipers in prayer. In my estimation attendance rarely exceeds 1,000 for the main Friday jumwa
congregation. There is, nonetheless, a steady stream of men entering and leaving the mosque on Fridays and around the prayer times every day. Most of the men I observed at these times were older bearded men in traditional flowing Bangladeshi clothes and prayer caps. It was very rare to see a young person at the mosque of my research demographic of age 18 to 25. When recruiting young people to interview for the dissertation, I would try to approach anyone who could be of the right age. In one early attempt I walked up to a man leaving the Jamme Masjid, who turned out to be in his thirties: “Oh no, mate,” he said, in an attempt to be helpful, “There are no youths here. What you want is the East London Mosque.”

One reason for the relative scarcity of young men at the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid is that the *khutbas* are only given in Sylheti, the regional language of most East End Bangladeshis. This language choice is the natural one for the community that the mosque has traditionally served. Yet because the sermons are not also spoken in English, they may be perceived as somewhat out of touch by second generation youth, who while also being Sylheti speakers have grown up in the language and culture of Britain. In addition, youth older than age 15 have no organized activities available to them at the mosque. The strong influence of first generation parents on the mosque may jar with the desires of youth for more freedom and independence from their parents at this age.

Through continued effort of recruiting young people leaving the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid, I managed to recruit and interview three who fit within my research requirements. Two of these young men expressed no real affection for the mosque. They

---

39 Although it shares words in common with Bangla (the most widely spoken language in Bangladesh) Sylheti is a fully grammatically distinct language rather than simply being a regional dialect.
told me that they were simply there because of its proximity to where they lived, and each was, in fact, more involved in the East London Mosque. The third youth was a 20 year-old named Omar. He did express some appreciation for the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid, as he had experienced the Islamic education sessions there when he was younger.

Omar told me he gets along well with some of the older members in the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid. “One of them is my neighbor,” he said, “He’s good, he’s funny. He’s got his own jokes – classical jokes.” Omar likes to talk with men in the older generation. Yet he believes that they have some limitations: “They haven’t studied Islam,” he said. Omar has gone through “Islamic studies, from the teachers in Whitechapel,” by which he means teachers at the East London Mosque. Amin told me that “older people go local for mosque,” coming to worship on Brick Lane. “Young go more where there’s a nice atmosphere.” One reason he gave for the attraction of young men to the East London Mosque is simply that “There are lots more PFCs [fried chicken shops] down on Whitechapel.” Another youth I met, who sometimes attends the Brick Lane Mosque, more often goes to the East London Mosque because “there’s more younger religious brothers around which can help you, which can guide you. And you feel more comfortable there, because there’s a lot of people around the same age, who dress in the same way. With Brick Lane it’s more like the older generations that came across here first.”

The Brick Lane Jamme Masjid shares many similarities with the Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church, because both are first generation dominated religious institutions. In both congregations the cultural traditions, practices, and values of the first generation are faithfully maintained. Both institutions are transnationally connected with their
countries of origin, bringing dignitaries and guests regularly to join in worship. Perhaps the clearest difference between the two is the gendered maintenance of religious tradition. At Brixton, the congregation is majority female. Women take on much of the leadership in teaching Adventist and West Indian values to the next generation. The Brick Lane Jamme Masjid is, in contrast, an entirely male institution. Although it provides religious instruction to girls, is unable to directly influence young women as they mature in adolescence.

The Brick Lane Jamme Masjid is similar to the Brixton Church in its espousal of an ethnic style of citizenship. The leadership of the mosque attempts to cultivate young people into dutiful citizens of the local Bangladeshi community, believing that this will make them better members of society. Yet, even from my interviewing of youth who I met at the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid, I found clear signals that the mosque has limited influence on those in their middle teenage years or beyond, especially when compared to the East London Mosque. I will return to profile this second mosque, after first giving view into a Brixton church that in many ways seems to share its high level of attractive power.

**Ruach Ministries: Champions and Ambassadors**

In his mid-thirties, Pastor Mark Liburd somehow manages to balance warmth and youthful energy with an authoritative air. Mark is a second generation Jamaican himself. After beginning with a career in car electronics, he is now a Youth Pastor at Ruach Ministries in Brixton. The church has an estimated 4,000 total attendees over its five Sunday services each week. One of these services is the youth service each Sunday
afternoon at 2:00, which draws 150 to 200 young people. This is an impressive achievement in the “rough” streets of Brixton, where it is the largest youth service. Mark is actually one of two staff leaders of the youth ministry, but he acts as its sole representative the church’s senior leadership team.

I met Pastor Mark at his office in Ruach for a 45-minute interview. We spoke at length about the problems faced by young people in Brixton, including gun violence and drugs, and the role that the youth ministry has in confronting these. Pastor Mark and some of the youth from his ministry do mission work and evangelism each summer in the poor council housing estates of the local area. Some of his young people regularly help to staff a nearby youth club.

Early into the interview, Mark mentioned that his youth ministry helps young people become better citizens. I followed up with a question to gauge what he meant by this:

Daniel: What does involvement in the youth ministry, or their Christian faith, do for someone in their British citizenship?

Mark: I think that [question] in itself is problematic…. I don't think anyone knows what being British is! [laughs].... There is a lot of confusion for people, what is Britishness, what does that mean? Is it sitting in the Royal Albert Hall singing Old Britannia, waving your British flags? Or is it just the fact that I'm just here I'm just a part of contributing to the country?

For Mark, the concept of British citizenship is itself worth questioning. He expressed an ironic (very British) skepticism about the expressions of patriotism in the summer concerts at Royal Albert Hall and about the cultural content of “Britishness” in general. He thinks that a sense of national identity is not as important as one’s contribution to society. Mark continued, expressing what he believes to be a superior alternative to a citizenship based on British national culture:
The citizen side of things [for the youth in my congregation] is really making them a better citizen for society, if you sign up to being British or not. It’s more of a God culture. Where your citizenship is really to heaven. And your citizenship is signed up to that. Whichever country you are in you should be the best citizen of that country because you’re an ambassador of Christ. [emphasis added]

Mark’s comments here reveal much about his approach to youth citizenship. He begins by explaining that the environment he wishes to create at Ruach has a “God culture.” It is a sense of congregational culture, a view of the kind of background conditions in which Mark hopes his youth will develop their perspectives on life. “God culture” provides a sense of the kind of polity Mark hopes his youth congregation will be, one in which a consciousness of God is forefronted.

Within the general congregational culture, Mark specifies that his youth should develop a citizenship that “is really to Heaven.” In saying this, he is quoting from St. Paul the Apostle, who wrote to fellow Christians in the early years of the Church that “our Citizenship is in Heaven” (Philippians 3:20). St. Paul was himself a Roman citizen, entitling him to legal protections and privileges that were highly valuable at that time. Yet he considered his spiritual citizenship as a Christian to be more important.

Citizenship in Heaven, as Pastor Mark uses the term, relativizes both one’s loyalties to the nation-state and one’s valuation of a worldly citizenship. Pastor Mark conveyed this approach to identity in a complementary metaphor from the New Testament – that Christians are “ambassadors of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Mark’s view is that spiritual citizenship is the ultimate place of safety and protection, social membership, and responsibility. Yet, being a citizen of Heaven does not necessitate otherworldliness. It has clear and tangible implications for the here and now. As Mark said:
There's no way your country should look down and say “Oh my gosh, why are you tax evading, why are you?” You should be the best citizen of whichever country you are in cuz that's the law of the land. And you don't want to go against that. So for me, the citizenship side of things is to get young people to sign up to being a good citizen regardless of if you believe you're British, if you're not, or if you were born in Ghana. You're here. You may be here for the next five years. Are you British or not, or are you just Ghanaian? *It doesn't really matter.* You come here be the best citizen until you leave…. It's really just making people a better person regardless of denomination, or if they sign up to being British, or Londoners, or Welsh or whatever. Be who you need to be in alignment to Heaven. [emphasis added]

Citizenship in Heaven, as Mark expresses it here, is a radical relativizing of other forms of identity and membership. Mark speaks of “British,” “Ghanaian,” “Londoner,” and “Welsh” as identity options, but more important is that underneath these one is becoming “a better person.” In fact, Mark expresses his view that cultural or national identity “doesn’t really matter” – much more important are one’s actions while staying in one country or another. His view of youth in terms of being British seems more one of ‘denizens’ of Britain than citizens, at least in the national identity sense.

In order to witness the civic environment and “God culture” of Ruach Ministries, I attended the youth service several times beginning in May 2008. The church is located on Brixton Hill, about ten minutes walk up from central Brixton. It is tucked away from the street in an unassuming warehouse-conversion next to a carwash (see Figure 3.5). On my first visit, I entered the foyer a few minutes early for the youth service that was scheduled to begin at 2:00. The foyer was crowded with young men and women socializing in little groups. As it turned out, the noon church service was running over time. Television screens throughout the foyer displayed that service on live video as Bishop John Francis, Ruach’s lead pastor, spoke powerfully and ministered to a very
responsive crowd. As I waited in the foyer that afternoon, I met several young people including Mike (introduced in Chapter 2).

**Figure 3.5. Ruach Ministries**

As the doors of the main sanctuary opened, hundreds of women and men with triumphant smiles streamed out into the foyer. Some exited the building, others lingered in the foyer or the adjoining Christian bookshop. Those who could not wait joined long queues for the restrooms. Although I cannot confirm if four thousand people were attending over the multiple services that Sunday, the building was certainly stretched to capacity.

I had met Mike in the foyer before the youth service. When we were allowed to enter the sanctuary, we went through the main doors and found seats together. The
sanctuary is the main room of the warehouse-conversion, substantially deeper than it is wide. The room is fairly large and nondescript, with blue carpeting, white walls, a main stage with projection screens to each side, and no noticeable Christian symbolism.

Around five hundred seats have been carefully fit into the space. The Sunday youth service fills one to two hundred of the seats near the front.

At Ruach youth services, ages range from 15 to early 30s. On the average week the youth congregation is entirely black or mixed race. Within this seeming homogeneity there is significant diversity. Youth hail from many different Caribbean and African ethnic backgrounds. In my several visits to Ruach I met young people with ancestry from Jamaica, Barbados, Ghana, and Nigeria, among other nations. Sometimes this diversity is celebrated during the youth service itself. On one Sunday a Trinidadian music artist was visiting to perform a few Christian hip hop songs. As the MC introduced him, the two large projection screens displayed Trinidadian flags. The MC started his introduction by riling up the audience: “Are there any Trinis in the house today?! [some audience response]… Are there any Trinis IN DA HOUSE?!? [yells and applause].”

If a religious institution can be a place for cultivating “global citizenship” and expanding one’s vision of the world, then the multiculturality of Ruach is important to how it socializes young citizens. Ruach’s internationally-oriented character was immediately evident as I entered the sanctuary: The walls are adorned with dozens of hanging flags of countries from around the globe. It was an intriguing selection – flags from Ireland, Brazil, Ghana, Belgium, France, Greece, Denmark, Italy, China, Japan, India, Barbados, and Australia – but no Britain, no Jamaica, and no further Caribbean or African countries. The flags display the global mindset that the church hopes to cultivate,
which is simultaneously wide in its extent and unconcerned with specific national boundaries. They are representative symbols of “every nation, tribe, people, and language” (Revelation 7:9) whose histories will all culminate in God’s Kingdom that transcends all boundaries. As Pastor Mark Liburd had told me in our interview, heavenly citizenship is more important than the specificity of national identity on earth: “Are you British or not, or are you Ghanaian? It doesn’t really matter.”

In that first youth service that I attended at Ruach, Pastor Mark served as the preacher. He preached with the title “A Champion on the Road.” The sermon provided a clear message about the kinds of young citizens Pastor Mark hopes to raise in his congregation.

Pastor Mark’s sermon was undeniably funny and given in an inspirational style pitched to his Black British youth audience. The sermon was based on 1 Samuel 16, a section of the Old Testament in which the elderly prophet Samuel visits David to anoint him as the King of Israel. The Biblical episode that breaks with conventional expectations – The Israelites had in fact chosen a King for themselves, Saul, a tall and handsome warrior whom they could picture in that place of leadership. Yet Saul had grown increasingly corrupt and distant from the God of Israel. In choosing his replacement, Samuel visited a very unlikely candidate. David was a mere shepherd boy. He was the youngest of and smallest of his brothers. Pastor Mark illustrated for his congregation just how unlikely and unexpected the Samuel’s anointing was, as he couched it in a contemporary illustration: “Imagine you were being groomed to be king. It would be like if Gordon Brown and the Queen came to you in McDonalds, to groom you to be king.”
“But David was a champion on the road!” Pastor Mark bellowed. Humble he would not remain. Mark used examples that appealed to both young men and young women in his audience. In a saccharine tone, he spoke of the heartbreak David may have felt as he left the lambs he was raising as a shepherd – including, apparently, the especially cute “Larry the Lamb.” Part of the congregation oohed. But, Mark went on, David needed to grow up and face the challenges of life. The big challenger was Goliath, the Philistine giant who was facing down the army of Israel.

“Goliath was not just a big geezer…” Pastor Mark continued, smiling. He paused for a moment, and then continued in his booming voice, “he was a big geezer with demonic powers!” The congregation responded well, laughing and giving each other knowing glances. Mark clearly knew his audience. He knew how to move with street slang and how to place a good rhetorical punch.

Pastor Mark quoted significantly from Biblical scripture in the sermon, and tied these references to life as a youth in London. Mark spoke of how David, the champion, had been the representative of his entire nation when he faced Goliath. He paraphrased the words of David to Goliath in their showdown: “I’m not an ordinary youth, because the Spirit of the Lord is upon me!” Pastor Mark explained that David was victorious because he was favored by the Lord. If you are a champion on the road, Mark told his young people, then likewise “no weapon formed against you can prosper.”

Mark also drew from pop culture and contemporary examples. He played a short film clip from Rocky, in which Sylvester Stallone, training for the big fight, runs through the streets of Philadelphia and up the stairs, ending in his iconic pose with hands in the air. In the same way, Mark told the congregation, youth need a training regimen in
reading and learning the Bible if they are to develop into champions. Mark spoke of debates he has had with atheists and people of other faiths when he has represented Christianity. His training has prepared him for these. There is no need to be fearful about facing such challenges in faith if youth remember that “Goliath won his battles through intimidation.”

The message of triumphant living as a champion was a consistent theme in all preaching I heard at Ruach. The church places an emphasis on the “faith gospel”: That one’s faith in God should to be tangibly manifested through personal victories (Gifford 2004, 1998). The theological core of the faith gospel is that suffering, poverty, and ill health are all evils, and that Christ has defeated these evils through his death on the cross and his victorious resurrection. As believers grow in faith, they can expect to gain more freedom from evil and a greater capacity to achieve God’s personal plan for their lives.

On the week after the sermon on being champions, Pastor Mark preached about how faith grants freedom from evil in a sermon called “Desperate for Deliverance.” In this sermon he asked youth to consider if the struggles in their own lives could be attributed to spiritual forces – particularly demons. Mark identified demons as causes of sinful emotions such as anger and jealousy. He said that these supernatural entities can root into a person’s life in “strongholds” that make them difficult to remove. Mark encouraged youth to be desperate for deliverance from the demons in their lives, praying fervently and fasting for a period of time if necessary. At the end of the service there was a long session of ministry. The whole youth congregation cried out loud in desperation about their struggles, some gesticulating to physically play out personal supernatural
battles. People were encouraged to come forward at this time for prayers for deliverance. Mark spoke over their voices: “Be confident that this is something you can overcome!”

Ruach’s motto, displayed on its printed Sunday programs is “Where Everybody Is A Somebody.” There is a focus on applying faith to the achievement of personal goals (like a champion) and to the overcoming of personal struggles (such as demons). Does the church, then, promote a brand of the prosperity gospel? At the time I was attending, the Ruach bookstore prominently displayed Joel Osteen’s prosperity bestseller *Your Best Life Now* and a book called *Prosperity Gospel: A Defense of the Theology*. Yet, in my experience of attending the youth service several times, the themes of health and wealth were seldom mentioned. Much more common were themes of self-actualization through school success, the use of talents, and career achievements.

The congregational culture in the Ruach youth service is decidedly middle class. As I met dozens of young people in the foyer before youth services, I learned that virtually all who are in the appropriate age bracket are attending university. Although Ruach does not enforce a dress code, youth typically do dress well, and suits and ties are not uncommon. In the first week I attended, a young woman came to the front of the church to give a testimony. She spoke about God’s goodness in helping her achieve beyond her expectations on A-Levels, the British subject exams taken by secondary school students with university ambitions. It is usually ambitions of this kind – modest, bounded, and professional – that are most celebrated in the Ruach youth service.

There is some mismatch between the middle class culture of Ruach and the socio-economic deprivation in some surrounding areas of Brixton, such as the infamous Angell Town public housing project. The mismatch exists because the young people who attend
the Ruach youth service are predominantly not local residents. Most of the youth I spoke with travel by tube or bus to the church each Sunday, some having come from a significant distance. Youth were most often attracted to Ruach by the quality of the youth services or to the spiritual character of the church, including the “anointing” of Bishop John Francis, a figure who has great confidence and power. Yet the fact that youth are not locals themselves has implications for the church’s outreach work in the locality. Similar to the geographically-dispersed congregants that Omar McRoberts (2003) met in Four Corners churches, regardless of how effectively Ruach ministers to its youth attendees, its influence on the local Brixton area is questionable after they have taken their buses home.

The youth that Ruach attracts are pleased, grateful, and often astonished at their encounters with God on a regular basis. Damien told me that he was drawn to Ruach because: “I could just see how God is just moving, and just having this way, and just off the rails, and just having liberty in the church…. I just love Ruach. It’s an outstanding ministry.” The spiritual effects of Ruach on the young people I interviewed were something they spoke about with glowing passion, and these did not seem to reduce down to answered prayers or social connections.

Pastor Mark Liburd spoke of his youth ministry as inducting young people into their “citizenship in Heaven.” The meaning of this phrase at Ruach can be better understood through two of Mark’s specific goals for his youth – that they become “champions” and “ambassadors.” Ruach youth services encourage youth to strive for a victorious life in which faith helps them to meet and overcome challenges as champions. The services also teach them to share the message of faith with others, acting as
ambassadors of Heaven. It seems that Ruach’s youth are mastering the ‘champion’ side of this role, as many are fulfilling aspirations for personal success and emotional adjustment. More questionable is their success in the ambassadorial side of the role – at least if being an ambassador means bringing a faith perspective into politics and local community engagement.

The East London Mosque: Islamicized Citizens

The East London Mosque is the largest mosque in Britain in terms of weekly attendance. It is able to accommodate 4,500 people at a single time for prayer. Over the course of the average week, the mosque estimates that 23,000 people pass through its doors. The number increases to an estimated 47,000 during the holy month of Ramadan (East London Mosque 2010). The East London Mosque is a purpose-built red brick structure with tall minarets, constructed in the 1980s on a busy section of Whitechapel Road. The lineage of the mosque can be traced significantly earlier. A London Mosque Fund had been established in 1910 to rent and then buy different sites in the East End. The directors of the Mosque Fund successfully raised the finances for the current building in part from the much-expanded community of local London Muslims. They were also aided by a generous gift from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. The East London Mosque is a place of many firsts in Britain, including being the first mosque to broadcast its adhan, or call to prayer, over external loud speakers.

A next expansion of the East London Mosque (ELM) took place in an adjoining site to create the London Muslim Centre (LMC), which opened in 2004. The LMC is a six-storey building that has an impressive gate-like main entrance with a curved blue and
white Islamic tile motif above. The completion of the LMC significantly expanded the 
prayer space of the mosque. The LMC building also made new community facilities 
available to the mosque, adding a boys’ school, a day care, office headquarters for the 
major organizations Muslim Aid and Islamic Forum Europe, large event spaces and 
classrooms, a restaurant and café, accommodation, and a gender-segregated gym. The 
LMC is the base for broadcasting the full-featured Muslim Community Radio every 
Ramadan, as well as a radio show called Easy Talk throughout the year (see DeHanas 
2010). The LMC’s many facilities and activities also include various programs for young 
people, work placement assistance, and pro-bono legal advice that was recently 
commended by Britain’s former Chief Justice Lord Phillips (2009). The joint work of the 
East London Mosque and London Muslim Centre led to victory in the Islam Channel’s 
UK-wide “Super Model Mosque” competition in 2009, in which various British mega-
mosques were pit against each other in competitive brackets for public votes. Another 
expansion project for the mosque, called East London Mosque Phase II, broke the record 
for single day fundraising on an ‘ethnic’ television channel, when it brought in more than 
£1 million in a day on the Islam Channel. Phase II will expand the women’s areas, add a 
multi-story parking garage, and provide improved facilities for funerals.
I first visited the main East London Mosque prayer room with a friend in summer 2007. We walked inside through the automatic glass doors of the London Muslim Centre (LMC) entrance under the blue and white Islamic tiles. Inside the grand LMC lobby, my friend and I removed our shoes and set them aside. We walked through the corridor on the left towards the main prayer room of the mosque. The prayer room is a large space about three storeys in height with white walls. The floor is covered in blue carpeting with red decorative motifs at regular intervals. Looking up at the ceiling, one can see the white inside of the mosque dome around which there is a circle of Arabic calligraphy displaying the ninety-nine names of Allah. The main prayer room is reserved for men alone. A women’s prayer room, located on a higher floor, overlooks the much larger main prayer space through a one-way glass. When we arrived, the previous
congregational prayers had recently been completed. There were perhaps two dozen men scattered across the room, most of them older and of the first generation. Some men were prostrating in additional prayers. Others lingered on the sides of the room to read or recite the Qur’an. One elderly man sat with rosary-like beads that he used to guide his devotions. A group of seven young men were seated in a circle at a back corner, quietly engaged in discussion. The atmosphere was still and serene. Men took their own time and space to engage in personal acts of devotion or study.

I began to understand the ideological vision of the mosque by regularly attending public events at the London Muslim Centre. The LMC has a very active calendar, including hosting Open Days and dinner events for the public. These open events are always executed to a high standard in the LMC’s well-equipped seminar suites and public spaces. The events are often designed to educate about Islam, build a reputation for transparency, and aid the mission of da’wah, or spreading the Islamic message. By frequenting such events I was able to meet men with varying degrees of involvement in the mosque. I was particularly fortunate at one LMC dinner event to sit next to Ehsan Abdullah Hannan, an East London Mosque imam.

Ehsan does not match the stereotypical portrayals of imams commonly seen in British media. In his thirties, he keeps his hair at a fashionable medium length and his beard carefully styled and cropped. He was wearing a fine suit and tie when we met. Ehsan had recently started studying for a Ph.D. at the University of London’s prestigious School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), where he has specialized in the writings of Islamic scholar Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyah. Ehsan was a presenter at the LMC dinner
event on the evening that I met him. He is an urbane public speaker, quoting with equal ease from Islamic scholars and western cultural icons like the Beatles.

Some weeks after our first introduction, Ehsan and I met for a recorded interview about the mosque’s work with second generation youth. We climbed the main stairwell of the London Muslim Centre to sit on couches in a modern upper foyer. Ehsan at that time had the position of community relations imam, acting as the main mosque representative for various local outreach efforts and partnerships. His work often involved young people. For example, he was meeting later that day with BLYDA, the Brick Lane Youth Development Association, which does work to break Bengali young men out of drug dealing and gang lifestyles. Ehsan’s own understanding of young Bangladeshis comes in part from being in the “1.5 generation” himself: He arrived in England with his parents at age 9, spending his formative years in British schooling.

Ehsan and I spoke about many of the problems among young Bangladeshis in the local area, including drugs, violence, and low overall levels of academic achievement. To his mind, “the challenges are generally identity challenges.” Problems most often arise when Bangladeshi youth develop “the sense that they have a very distinct culture” from the greater British community around them. Ehsan explained his own theory on how such separationist identities develop:

Many Bangladeshis when they were growing up would have been told “don't forget you're Bangladeshi. Don't ever forget that you're Bengali.” Not necessarily “don't forget you're a Muslim.” I think it's parents using a safety harness, so they don't lose their children. But because it didn't define what being Bangladeshi is or isn't, all it defined was ascribing yourself to a particular group of people…. If a person is told they are Bangladeshi and it’s drummed into them, on an unconscious level they’ve divorced themselves from greater society.
The problem is in large part a problem of self-segregation as Bangladeshi. According to Ehsan, Bangladeshi identity is not filled with a particular moral content, so youth are left both isolated from the mainstream and unmoored from any particular value orientation.

The issue is one of negative self-image because “the large majority of the Bangladeshi community come from the rural backgrounds of Bangladesh and are not very well educated.” Ehsan said that youth who do not have adult role models beyond their parents’ immigrant generation can be mired in thinking: “This is our lot. We’re an inferior class. A race that’s treated in an inferior way. They are not us, we are not they. They are white. We are Bangladeshis.” As such, there is little motivation to do well in education or to contribute to broader society.

Ehsan believes that the solution comes from youth developing a strong core Muslim identity. The East London Mosque promotes Islam as this core, which he thinks will help youth navigate the challenges of growing up in their generation:

If they were to be told “you're a Muslim, keep your faith, be sincere, etc., etc. Remember your mother tongue. It's up to you what you want to call yourself [ethnically]. That's not an issue, as long as you're good to everyone and you respect everyone.” Then they might start seeing people coming off the train, and that they've been working all day, working very hard. That these are also my role models. And life's about working hard. They will start taking experiences of life from a greater pool of people.

Ehsan’s message here closely resembles the words from Mark Liburd at Ruach about being a “citizen of Heaven.” Ehsan, like Mark, thinks of all specific ethnic identities as all equally valid choices. What matters deep down is that “you’re good to everyone and you respect everyone.” Ehsan believes that Muslim identity provides the best way in which to achieve this good internal character.
It is worthwhile to also compare Ehsan’s perspective, as a representative of the East London Mosque, with the words of Sajjad Miah of the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid. Sajjad sees Bangladeshi identity as the source of good values into which children should be raised. In fact, he believes that the erosion of this cultural identity is the cause of youth drifting into delinquency. Ehsan, in contrast, locates the problem in Bangladeshi cultural identity, which he argues leads to segregation and low aspirations. Later into our interview, Ehsan posed the rhetorical question: “After how many generations are you going to say you’re Bangladeshi?” In his view, it is an unsustainable identity. It is much better to realize that “You’re one people now, you’re British, you’re part of society.” Islam can provide a singular and unifying way to do this, eliminating ethnic differences to allow youth to take on role models from “a greater pool of people.” Sajjad and Ehsan – and by extension, the mosques they represent – are on the opposite ends of an East End debate about religion and culture.

The model of a good citizen that is upheld at the East London Mosque is the “Islamicized citizen.” Ehsan’s comments provide a first view into this style of citizenship, which I would see reflected across the many sermons, events, and personal conversations through which I encountered the mosque.

The messages with which a mosque can make its most consistent impact on believers are the khutbas (sermons) delivered for the main Friday afternoon congregational prayers. At the East London Mosque, these are most often given by Senior Imam Abdul Qayyum, although the mosque also hosts visiting preachers. Because Friday prayers are so large at this mosque, drawing more than 4,000 people, I spent significant time getting to know the mosque at other times during the week before
attending Friday prayers for the first time in May 2008. I arrived significantly early for
the prayers, entered one of the large secondary prayer rooms, and sat down on the carpet
at the back of the room. Men of all ages began to enter, some in Arab or South Asian
style dress, others in Western casual or professional clothes. They followed the practice
of filling in the next available space at the front in rows, with men shoulder to shoulder.
Some Bengali boys in their early teens stayed in the back area where I was sitting. I was
not quite prepared for the sheer numbers as the large room filled to capacity. Imam
Abdul Qayyum, a bearded first generation Bangladeshi man, delivered the *khutba* that
preceded the physical act of prayer. He was broadcast to us via live video projection.

Abdul Qayyum’s talk was the first *khutba*[^40] I heard at the East London Mosque,
and I was immediately struck by how different it was in style from sermons at Ruach, a
similar institution in terms of its appeal to youth. The imam delivered a message of about
seven minutes each in three languages: Arabic, Sylheti, and English. He thus did not
attempt to ‘warm up’ his hearers with an introduction, as Mark Liburd often does in his
approximately 40 minute Ruach sermons. Instead, Abdul Qayyum took us straight to the
heart of the *khutba*: “Brothers and Sisters, [this message is about] the *adab*[^41] of the house
of Allah,” he began. Then, raising his voice with an added sternness: “The *masjid*[^42] is the
house of Allah!”

[^40]: Khutba, as explained earlier, is the Arabic word for a sermon given in a mosque. Because this section of the chapter includes many Arabic Islamic words, I will footnote definitions of each in their first occurrence.

[^41]: Adab: Manners, comportment.

[^42]: Masjid: Mosque.
Abdul Qayyum’s sermon concerned the *adab*, or manners, of the mosque. As it was an Islamic message, the version he delivered in English made frequent use of Arabic Islamic terms and interspersed quotes from the Qur’an and *ahadith*\(^{43}\) (also in Arabic). Abdul Qayyum spoke of how small actions to keep the mosque clean are honorable deeds that will be rewarded in the hereafter. He mentioned several matters of Islamic etiquette. He gave an injunction to arrive punctually for prayers, which made the comment about ‘West Indian time’ I had heard at the Brixton Adventist Church seem light and airy. As he put it, quoting from a translated *hadith*: “The Prophet said: ‘There are some people always late, and Allah will make them late everywhere in righteous deeds. Allah will make them so late that they end up in Jahannam!’”\(^{44}\)

The imam’s *khutba* was serious in tone, though not humorless. Later into the talk Abdul Qayyum explained with some exasperation that “The sock is a very big problem. Every summer I talk about the sock! The sock carries a very bad smell. Sometimes one person’s sock can trouble this whole house.” Nor was his *khutba* behind the times – He spoke about how there is usually at least one worshipper who has left a mobile phone on during prayer time, and that if the phone rings it will “nullify their *jumwa*.\(^{45}\)

This first *khutba* I heard from Imam Abdul Qayyum had the same tenor as most others he would give in the weeks I attended. They were messages about the *deen* of

---

\(^{43}\) *Ahadith*: The plural form of *hadith*, which is a compilation of the Prophet Muhammad’s words and deeds. Various *ahadith* are available and Islamic schools and scholars have different judgments of the weight of particular collections.

\(^{44}\) *Jahannam*: Hell. The opposite eternal condition of *Jannah*, or Paradise.

\(^{45}\) *Jumwa*: The main congregational prayers that take place on Friday afternoon each week. It is considered obligatory for Muslim men to perform these prayers together with others at the mosque if they are able.
Islam: The set of religious micro-practices that fit into all areas of life. The concept of *deen* includes the full scope of Islamic practices such as prayer, modesty of dress, manners in the mosque, saying *bismillah* (in the name of Allah) before embarking on any action, and eating and drinking with the correct (right) hand. *Deen*, as the comprehensive blueprint of pious behavior, is an extremely important concept at the East London Mosque. The idea of *deen* was often summed up for me by youth who would say that “Islam is not just a religion. It’s a way of life.” Most of the sermons I heard at the mosque were primarily aimed to provide guidance on correct behaviors in the Islamic *deen*, carefully prooftexting this with Qur’an or *hadith* references.

The citizenship identity that the East London Mosque attempts to cultivate is that of the Islamicized citizen. It is by a daily regimen of following the *deen* that one’s behaviors and outlook will progressively approach their Islamic ideal.

Imam Abdul Qayyum delivered a *khutba* several months later, in January 2009, that sheds light on another aspect of the East London Mosque’s vision of the citizen. The *khutba* was given in the immediate aftermath of the three-week Gaza War of December 2008 and January 2009. Abdul Qayyum spoke about the resilience of Muslims in Gaza through the Israeli incursion as evidence of divine intervention: “Allah *subhanahu wa ta’ala* helped them. That’s why they survived,” he said, “That’s why they defended their land and their people.” He urged his congregation to be steadfast in prayer, in the hope that Allah would intervene further:

> We must pray to Allah. May Allah complete the victory of our brothers and sisters. May Allah make [it so that] the house of Allah – Bayt Al-Maqdis, Al

---

*Subhanahu wa ta’ala*: “glorious and exalted is He,” a phrase often used after the name of Allah that can be abbreviated in writing as swt.
Masjid Al-Aqsa\textsuperscript{47} – is freed from this illegal occupation. May Allah free [this mosque] so Muslim \textit{ummah} can pray there and glorify Allah \textit{subhanahu wa ta’ala}.

Imam Abdul Qayyum spoke to his congregation as members of the \textit{ummah},\textsuperscript{48} the global community of all Muslim believers. He was urging prayer for the Al-Aqsa Mosque, an Islamic holy site of great importance in Jerusalem. The mosque is currently regulated by Israeli authorities, who allow prayers there but reserve the right to restrict entry and times. Abdul Qayyum was making a political statement that fellow believers should petition Allah in prayer, asking that Muslims might regain control of the mosque.

Yet prayer was not the only form of action the imam encouraged in relation to Gaza and Jerusalem. He said that “Allah \textit{subhanahu wa ta’ala} [has] given sincerity to the Muslim population.” Muslims were already acting in various ways to come to the assistance of Palestinian brothers and sisters in the \textit{ummah}. He commended his fellow Muslims for “how they were doing \textit{dua},\textsuperscript{49} how they were generous to donate for their suffering brothers and sisters,” his voice cracking with emotion. He spoke of “how they were participating in all these demonstrations and they’ll continue. This the Muslim \textit{ummah} have shown.”

\textit{Ummah}-membership enjoins political action, especially when others in the global Muslim community are suffering or threatened. Political activism on behalf of Islamic

\textsuperscript{47}Masjid Al-Aqsa (Bayt Al-Maqdis): The mosque on the temple mount in Jerusalem.

\textsuperscript{48}The \textit{ummah}, when used in this sense, is the objectified global community of all Muslim believers. The term \textit{ummah} has different potential connotations. Charles Tripp (2006) explains that the use of \textit{ummah} in this global sense developed in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} Century amid the questions raised by nationalisms.

\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Dua}: Petitionary prayers. Within the highly uniform framework of Islamic prayer, there is a period of \textit{dua} in which personal petitions and devotions are appropriate.
causes is assumed to be the natural outworking of *ummah* solidarity. Abdul Qayyum had spoken of praying, giving charitably, and participating in demonstrations as actions that Muslims take for the *ummah*. Yet these actions must be underwritten by a pious heart. Citing an example of the Prophet’s piety when faced by the territorial struggles of his day, Abdul Qayyum reminded his listeners that “our relationship with Allah is number one. That makes [sure] our financial contribution is accepted. That will make [sure] our participation in all this picketing is accepted.”

The East London Mosque attempts to develop worshipers into Islamicized citizens. A first aspect of this process for second generation youth is the adoption of an all-encompassing Muslim identity. Imam Ehsan had told me that such an identity displaces narrowly defined ethnic identities (Bangladeshi in this case) connecting youth to “a larger pool of people” and to a sustainable moral orientation. A second aspect of the process of Islamicization is the continual practice and development of *deen*, the Islamic micro-practices of everyday life. One’s entire life should be Islamicized, reaching from large life decisions down to the smallest of details in cleanliness or eating. Third, an Islamicized citizenship identity is embedded in a global community, the *ummah*. Membership in the *ummah* is demonstrated by solidarity, including the willingness to take action or make sacrifices for the sake of fellow brothers and sisters. An Islamicised citizenship is a comprehensive one – it reaches deeply into one’s identity, daily practices, and community of belonging as it becomes the main frame of reference for civic engagement.
Concluding Discussion

Classic works such as Oscar Handlin’s *The Uprooted* (1951) and more recent studies by Kershen (2005), Casanova (2007; 2006), and others highlight the role of religion in the historic social incorporation of first generation immigrants. Nicole Toulis’ (1997) study of immigrants in a Jamaican first generation church finds, in line with other recent research,\(^{50}\) that religion is a rich source of meaning, belonging, and social resources for many contemporary migrants undertaking the journey (Hagan 2008) and adapting to a new society (Mooney 2009).

Yet the same religious institutions that serve as secure ethnic hubs for immigrants may be viewed with indifference or even scorn by their second generation children. Will Herberg (1955) observed the phenomenon that while ethnic identification tends to decline in the first three generations, religious identification usually rises. Second generation adolescents and young adults who attempt to “break away” from their parents and adopt their own independent identities are likely to favor institutions that emphasize religious identities over and above ethnic ones.

Indeed, the “ethnic hub” institutions of the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid and Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church struggle to retain youth beyond early teenage years. In part, this is due to the high expectations they place on the young. The citizenship identities upheld in these institutions tend to be too circumscribed and ethnically bounded for youth raised in cosmopolitan urban London. They are based heavily on responsibilities of good behavior rather than on the rights and privileges that could come

\(^{50}\)There is a very significant literature on this topic, well summarized in Foner and Alba (2008).
from being a member. Mabel, a young Jamaican I met on Brixton Road, gave her perspective on the constraints of the Brixton Adventist Church she used to attend:

There’s a church called Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church just around Santley Street, and most people have left there, because of stuff like, they will concentrate more on what a person’s wearing than what’s in their heart or what’s on their mind, or the content of their character. And things like, in Pentecostal church, you can shout “Hallelujah!” as loud as you want to, you can praise God. Whereas in the Adventist church, they’d tell you to be quiet.

The religious institutions that have won the affections of second generation youth are those which have conscientiously sought them. Ruach Ministries has developed a youth service closely attuned to the style and needs of young people. The East London Mosque offers extensive youth activities as well, some of these run by the Young Muslim Organisation or the Islamic Forum Europe. The mosque has further developed its reputation among Bangladeshi youth because of its partnership work to combat drug addiction (Eade and Garbin 2006), its respected scholars and facilities, and its position as dialogue partner for British politicians and host to Muslim dignitaries. It would be difficult for first generation ‘ethnic hub’ institutions to compete with the attractive power of such large and well-financed organizations.

Yet Ruach Ministries and the East London Mosque differ in ways that have implications for the kinds of young British citizens they produce. First, there is a difference in how moral authority is communicated. The youth service at Ruach promotes a “subjectified” Christianity. When the pastor of Ruach’s youth service posits authoritative truth claims, these claims are made relevant to the individual subject in order to show that they are true. The means of this subjectification include idiomatic preaching, contemporary music, and the fact that at Ruach, as Vernon had told me, youth are allowed “to come as they are.” The subjectification of Christianity is most radical in
the ministry sessions at the end of Ruach youth services, when young people are encouraged to verbally and physically express their struggles by yelling, praying, speaking in tongues, and moving about the sanctuary. It is in these sessions that youth communicate personally, and at times physically, with the Holy Spirit.

The subjectification of Christianity at Ruach Ministries is not surprising, given broader developments towards subjectivity that have been noted in Western religion and spirituality (e.g., Heelas and Woodhead 2004; Wuthnow 2000) and in Pentecostalism specifically (e.g., Coleman 2000). Christian Smith, in a study of religion among American emerging adults, observes that young people “simply cannot, for whatever reason, believe in—or sometimes even conceive of—a given, objective truth, fact, reality or nature of the world that is independent of their subjective self-experience” (2009: 46). Ruach youth services do encourage youth to believe in objective realities by faith. But it can be a faith that is tenuously held, and which is reliant on fresh spiritual experiences for its renewal.

The contrast is great with the East London Mosque. The mosque promotes what scholars have called an “objectified” Islam (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Starrett 1998). Objectification is the process of transfiguring the various historic and context dependent streams of Muslim belief into a timeless, changeless, and singular entity of Islam. Whereas experience often dictates the truthfulness of the Pentecostal Christian message, for practicing Muslim youth Islam dictates much of their experience. The Islamicization process is a systematic restructuring of everyday life – one’s daily schedule to meet prayer times, the gender composition of friendships, one’s outward appearance and personal habits – so that these conform to the Islamic deen. Imam Abdul Qayyum makes
little, if any, attempt in his *khutbas* to speak in terms that are “relevant” to young people. He regards the behavioral obligations of Islam as transcendent and immutable.

There is, in fact, a finer line between subjectification and objectification than this discussion indicates thus far. Ruach Ministries does preach a message of objective truth, and certain aspects of this message (e.g., the resurrection of Christ) must be accepted without firsthand experiential knowledge. Likewise, Muslim youth who regularly pray at the East London Mosque may find that prayer is itself a subjective experience which feels so “right” that it confirms the objective truth of Islam. For these youth, the regular body practice of prayer feels right in part because it is a familiar path that has been well worn by repeated travel. Each act of prayer, in the context of thousands of acts before, adds to the internally referential veracity of Islamic experience.

Overall however, the worship experiences at Ruach Ministries and the East London Mosque rely on different underlying logics of the connection between subjective experience, objective reality, and behavioral action. I have diagrammed these differences in Figure 3.7. At Ruach, subjective experience grants youth faith in an objective reality (Christianity), which will in turn motivate them to action. At the East London Mosque the process begins with an objective reality (Islam) that compels youth to perform particular actions that will, over time, restructure their subjective experience.

The objectification of Islam at the East London Mosque gives the Muslim identity propagated there a comprehensiveness and power. At Ruach, because young people’s own experiences are accepted as functional arbiters of truth, there is a greater freedom for youth to take on faith in a self-focused or piecemeal manner. This can mean that young Jamaicans include Christianity as one of many identities, while Muslim identity tends to
be more singular and all-defining – an identity phenomenon that I will explore in the next chapter. It is also true that the implicit logics of belief in Figure 3.7 differ in the grounding they provide for action (and ultimately, for activism). Islamic social activism is grounded in actions that are understood to be instantiations of ultimate reality (prayer, zakat, and so on), while Christian social activism is most frequently based in the faith experiences of individual participants – a difference in the social mechanisms of activism that I will explore in more depth in Chapter 5.

Figure 3.7. Subjective Experience, Objective Reality, and Action

Moving beyond the discussion of moral authority, a second major difference between Ruach Ministries and the East London Mosque is in their notions of community. Muslims at the East London Mosque conceive of themselves as members of the imagined community of the ummah, which is global in scope. Pnina Werber (2002) has written of Muslims in Britain as having membership an imagined diaspora, because their
relationships with other Muslims are imbued with a sense of common ancestry or kinship. Indeed, the “Islamic” styles of clothing worn by many second generation Bangladeshi Muslims connect them globally with Arabian Peninsula clothing styles much more than with the traditional Islamic dress of Bangladesh. Through these clothing styles, Bangladeshi Muslims develop even an outward family resemblance with Muslim communities elsewhere in the world. Communal acts, such as regular prayer and fasting during Ramadan, are central mechanisms by which a sense of a global, diasporic kinship is built and reinforced.

The East London Mosque is quite deliberate in its cultivation of the imagined community of the ummah. A good example of the mosque’s work to develop a unified sense of Muslim community in the East End is its Muslim Community Radio station (MCR, 87.8 FM). MCR is broadcast each Ramadan, with programs in both English and Bengali, including topical call-in shows, youth programs, limited forms of Islamic music, fatwa shows, and spiritual counsel for the challenges of fasting during Ramadan. The radio station is exceedingly popular in the local area. Bangladeshis of all generations listen in their homes or cars, and shopkeepers play it during the day. The broad reach of MCR during Ramadan helps to set the agenda for local activism, to instill a particular stream of Islamic interpretation, and to create a common sense of community, as Muslims throughout the borough listen to the same topics discussed each day (see DeHanas 2010). Throughout the year, the mosque broadcasts a weekly political commentary show called Easy Talk, via Internet radio. The East London Mosque also establishes a sense of community simply through sheer numbers. Every Friday, Whitechapel Road is transformed by the large crowds attending for congregational
prayers. The mosque’s presence is accentuated during Ramadan, when many local residents dress more “Islamically” and attend various events at the mosque.

Because so much of the East London Mosque’s cultivation of community happens through the common actions of believers, the result is probably best termed an enacted community (rather than simply an imagined one). With its strong community presence, the East London Mosque is more analogous to an Islamic cathedral than to a megachurch. It has taken on the local area as its “parish” and now has significant sway religiously, socially, politically, and in public displays of piety.

In Chapter 2 we found that Bangladeshi Muslim youth are highly engaged in civic actions that are communally oriented, such as boycotting Danish and Israeli products, or signing petitions against the war in Iraq. Actions of these kinds are sometimes promoted by the mosque directly, or more often informally through the various social networks and organizations that are based there. As the East London Mosque’s community presence is so strong, its political mobilization efforts are important to explaining the robust levels of Bangladeshi youth civic engagement.

In comparison, Ruach Ministries’ vision of “citizens in heaven” tends towards the otherworldly. It has not taken on a parish-like vision of the Brixton area, working instead on the principle common to (Neo-)Pentecostal churches that “the world is [its] parish”

---

51 There is of course, a long tradition of mosques serving as centers of the community, education, and society. The use of “cathedral” here is simply as an analogy familiar in Western tradition. For Islamic mosques in the same period as Europe’s great medieval cathedrals – with the same grand social and cultural scope – see Daniella Talmon-Heller’s studies of mosques in Damascus, Aleppo, and Jerusalem (2008).
Whereas the East London Mosque’s vision of the ummah as the site of citizenship identity is grounded in particular territories (e.g., Mecca, Palestine, Kashmir), Ruach’s global vision is radically de-territorialized. The Ruach sanctuary is lined with flags of the nations of the world, but the actual choice of nations seems to be arbitrary. Congregants have gathered at Ruach from all around London, drawn by the charismatic leadership of its pastor. Ministry happens within its walls and in the lives of individuals. Ruach’s main aim, then, is not to establish a local presence or imagined community – rather, it cultivates within each believer a sense of individual imagined communion between oneself and God. Pastor Mark refers to this aim as creating a “God culture.”

The difference between enacted community (at the East London Mosque) and imagined communion (at Ruach) is a significant one. A personal faith developed at Ruach can be a powerful motivator for individual change and achievement. However, as much as attendees at Ruach are sensitized to their individual needs for communion with God, they may at the same time be less attuned to possibilities for community change and renewal.

---

This phrase that David Martin uses to describe Pentecostals is, of course, not a Pentecostal one. It comes from the words of John Wesley (1739) in his journal: “I look on all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation.”

On these points I differ from Olivier Roy (2003) who writes of globalized Islam as the pre-eminent example of de-territorialization. This is understandably true of virtual Islamic communities on the Internet, for example, which he has studied. My experience in the East End is that issues of territory are highly salient, both in terms of local mosque competition for “areas” and especially in terms of the global vision of Muslim territories, especially Palestine. The most interesting dynamic is the shift in territorial importance: Bangladesh is the place most often spoken about by first generation Bangladeshis, while territories of the Muslim ‘diaspora’ are much more frequently mentioned in the context of the East London Mosque.
CHAPTER 4
COMPETING ALLEGIANCES?:
SECOND GENERATION IDENTITY OPTIONS

“Many British Muslims have divided loyalties” narrates Jeremy Vine on an episode of Panorama, the BBC investigative journalism show (February 2009). The episode opens with segments of documentary footage: Police in riot gear confront an angry mob of Muslim protesters, radical preachers speak out against democracy, and a troubled white Muslim convert attempts to bomb a restaurant in Exeter. Further into the episode there are various street scenes from British cities, including Brick Lane in East London, where bearded Muslim men, women in hijab, and urban mosques are accompanied by ominous music. The overall message of the program is that radicalism lies just beneath the surface of British Islam. The trustworthiness of British Muslims must be questioned. The title of the episode captures these fears of divided loyalties: “Muslim First, British Second.”

Although the BBC Panorama episode is sensationalist, it is important not to dismiss outright the concerns it raises. Loyalties to radical Islamic causes are a problem in Britain, however small the number of cases may be. Timothy Garton Ash (2006), in a measured article written for The Guardian, argues that the British Muslim youth sense of belonging and citizenship presents a widespread problem. Writing in the aftermath of the 7/7 2005 London bombings, Ash admits: “For anyone who has hoped and believed, as I have, that the British way of integrating Muslim citizens is more promising than the French one, the last year has been discouraging.” He cites a Pew Global Attitudes
Survey of Muslims (2006), which found that 81% of young British Muslims identified as Muslim “first,” above being British. In contrast, only 46% of the youth surveyed in France chose Muslim above their nation of citizenship. In the entire global survey, which included several Muslim majority countries, Pakistan was the only state in which the levels of “Muslim first” identity (87%) exceeded those of Britain. For Ash, these figures are a worrying sign of large scale Muslim youth alienation from British citizenship.

Muslim first, British second? In this chapter, I investigate the dynamics of identity and loyalty among second generation youth. I will seek to determine how youth compose their identities, which identity components they most (and least) identify with, and the implications of these identities for civic engagement.

Identity and loyalty issues are important to British Caribbeans as well. Paul Gilroy’s classic treatise on race in Britain, There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack (1987), takes its name from a British racist slogan. Gilroy argues in the book that British identity has historically been defined on white racial and Christian religious grounds, making it inaccessible for blacks and other minorities. Some sociologists have argued that many ethnic minority youth react against hegemonic white or mainstream identities and develop what they have termed “oppositional culture” (Ogbu 1991) or an “adversarial subculture” (Portes and Zhou 1993), setting them at odds with greater society. Following these arguments, the consistent underperformance of Black Caribbean

---

54 Pakistan’s high percentage of “Muslim first” was probably at least as much due to weaknesses in the provisions of Pakistani citizenship as it was to a resurgence of Islam (see Naqvi forthcoming). Bangladesh was unfortunately not included in the Pew Survey. The full list of Arab or Muslim majority nations included is: Morocco, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, Kuwait, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Turkey.
youth in British education (Sewell 1997) and their lack of participation at the ballot box (Purdam et. al. 2002) may be rooted in their low sense of acceptance by or identification with broader society. Some commentators suggest more generally that Caribbean youth, South Asian youth, and other minorities are not been developing clear articulations of British identity, and that this will have ramifications for British social cohesion and for national success.

Many of the most urgent questions about citizenship and second generation youth, therefore, centrally concern identity. Do second generation youth experience the push and pull of identity influences as competing allegiances, or do they instead develop multiple cultural competencies? What meanings do youth have in mind when they choose “Muslim first” or “Christian first” above other identities? Are second generation youth developing a sense of ‘Britishness’ and a cultural identification with citizenship, or do they instead feel excluded from participation due to race, religion, or ethnicity?

Before proceeding to address these questions, it will be important to define what is meant by identity. There are many theoretical perspectives on identity in contemporary social science, including those found in the influential works of Tajfel and Turner (1979) and Barth (1969), among others. When I speak of identity in this dissertation, I have in mind Manuel Castells’ succinct definition. Castells (1997) considers identity to be:

The process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes that is given priority over other sources of meaning. [emphasis added]

Castells’ definition can be used to emphasize that identity is a process, as Clare Saunders (2008) does in her recent article on identities in social movements. In this dissertation I likewise treat identity as a process. However, I put more emphasis on another aspect of
Castells’ definition – that within identities certain cultural components of meaning are “given priority” over others. To state my perspective a bit differently: *Identity is a process of cultural prioritization.*

**Figure 4.1. The Identity Ranking Exercise**

In this chapter I investigate the prioritization of cultural components in identity through a ranking exercise, which I engaged in with all sixty interviewees. I placed various cards on the table with identities labelled on them (e.g., Muslim, Bangladeshi, British, Londoner). Youth chose cards to describe their identities, ranking them in order of strength and explaining to me why they prioritize identity in this way. The cards I used for this exercise are shown in Figure 4.1, and I describe the method in more depth when I present Table 4.2 later in this chapter.
From the evidence of identity rankings, I will build on the main argument of my dissertation about how religion influences citizenship. In this chapter I will explain the contribution of identity – especially religious identity – to civic engagement. To lay the foundation for this analysis, I begin by reviewing the main approaches to identity composition and prioritization that previous researchers have observed among second generation youth.

**Second Generation Youth: Four Styles of Identity Construction**

**Continuity**

Much previous research on the second generation in Britain, particularly with South Asians, demonstrates a high importance of generational and family influences. First generation Bangladeshis tend to maintain strong ties with their home village, communicating frequently, sending remittances, and maintaining the illusion of eventual return (Gardner 2002; Ansari 2004). Members of this first generation usually bring a traditional Sufi or Barelwi form of Islam. Some may become more conservative in practices (such as adopting a stricter interpretation of *hijab*) as they become aware of their distinctiveness from British society (Ahmed 2005). Several researchers have shown strong links of the second generation to these first generation immigrant parents. These researchers argue that there is a substantial amount of *continuity* between generations. Charlotte Butler (1995), for example, found that families are central to the identity development of young Muslim women. The young women she studied desired independence and education, but not to the degree that these would require a sacrifice of family links. Butler discovered that for Muslim young women Islam can be an important
medium for maintaining intergenerational family ties, communication, and understanding. Jessica Jacobson (1998) finds that second generation Pakistani youth may have any of a diversity of reactions to parents’ religious and cultural backgrounds – from positive acceptance to complete rejection – but that parental influence is almost always important.55

Cultural studies scholar Errol Lawrence (1981) has argued, similarly, that continuity is the dominant trend between first and second generation Caribbean people in Britain. There appear to be limits to his observation, however, at least in terms of religious identity. Studies by Modood and colleagues (1994) and Crockett and Voas (2006) find that second generation Caribbeans are less likely to feel constrained to follow their parents’ religious perspective than are second generation South Asians.

**Between Cultures**

Social scientists studying second generation youth often recognize adolescence and early adulthood as unsettled years in identity formation, when family, religious, and ethnic identities are all open to be questioned (e.g., Lewis 2007). In contrast with perspectives that emphasize continuity, some researchers that include Anwar (1998b) and the various authors in Watson (1977) have argued the second generation finds itself caught between cultures. Youth may experience an identity crisis as they are riven

55Jacobson’s findings about the strength of parental influence on Pakistani youth appear to be corroborated by more general research on parental influence. Nationally-representative research on adolescents (Smith and Denton 2005) and on emerging adults (Smith and Snell 2009) in the United States finds that parents are typically the most pervasive and powerful influence on their children’s religiosity.
between strong parental, community, and religious norms and the usually more ‘Western’ and liberal perspectives of peers, schooling, and media.

There are two solutions often mentioned to a between cultures situation. Some youth will supplant the religio-cultural identities of their parents with a more “Western,” or perhaps “white,” identity espoused in school and by broader society. Other youth will resist the ‘host’ culture and respond with strengthened identities that are based in race, ethnicity, or religion. This second solution is variously termed the development of an “oppositional culture” by Ogbu (1991, 1995) or of an “adversarial subculture” by Portes and Zhou (1993). Gardner and Shukar (1994) argue, in line with this view, that the affirmation Bangladeshi youth fail to receive from British society they may find instead in a strengthened, and possibly resistant, Muslim identity.

The segmented assimilation research tradition (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, Portes and Zhou 1993), which is highly influential in American academic work on second generation youth, can be broadly classified as a between cultures perspective. It follows the same logic that discrete choices and outcomes separate one’s culture of origin from the culture of assimilation. Major research traditions on race, particularly labelling theory, have taken a between cultures perspective because they posit that stark perceived racial differences are internalized by minorities (e.g., Waters 2003). One prominent example is the work of social psychologist Claude Steele who has argued that the fear of “acting white” leads black youth to underperform in school settings (Steele and Aronson 1995), a case of being caught between two races.
Hybridity

While the “between cultures” approach emphasizes the disjuncture between discrete parental and societal identities, other researchers have argued that second generation identities have become blurred and multiple. Christine Sheikh (2007) argues that while Muslim American youth may identify “the West” and “Islam” as discrete cultural worlds, they are most often inclined to “take the best of both worlds.” Gerd Baumann (1996) studied second generation youth of several ethnic backgrounds in the multicultural Southall area of London. He concludes that most youth are skilled in a multiplicity of cultural discourses, often creatively combining cultural influences, such as in Bhangra, a fusion of black hip hop and South Asian musical styles. Similarly, Sanjeeve O’Jahal (1999) finds that British Asians are capable of code-switching at school, donning a “white mask” in the classroom when they find this useful. John Eade’s (1997) work with young Bangladeshis in the East End and Claire Alexander’s (1996) work with young Black Londoners also conclude that youth identities are hybrid, situational, and should not be essentialized as fixed choices. Les Back (1996) studied South London youth of many ethnic origins, including mixed race youth. He argues that their syncretic and situational uses of identity cast doubt on if (in the South London context) a discussion of “British identity” is of any use at all.

The hybridity perspective represented by these researchers usually emphasizes the influence of peers in the social construction of identity. The intellectual underpinnings of hybridity can be found in the cultural studies and post-colonial writings of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and others. It has rapidly grown to be an important, if not the dominant, view of ethnicity and identity within British social
science. It is often thought to be an emancipatory perspective on cultural identity that creates new capacities for human freedom (Werbner and Modood 1997).

Deculturation

Although hybridity perspectives are highly influential within sociology, especially in Britain, they have not gone unquestioned. Jessica Jacobson studied British Pakistani Muslims in East London in the 1990s. In *Islam in Transition* (1998) she writes that a “recurring theme throughout this book has been that theorists should be careful not to overestimate the extent to which aspects of identity are malleable and subject to interpretation.” Jacobson continues:

"It seems to me vitally important to recognize that there are certain limits to the extent to which individuals can redefine themselves and the groups to which they belong; or that, at the very least, even if theoretically it is possible to challenge in countless ways such limits, they are very often accepted and hence, in practice, they exist."

Jacobson found certain consistencies in the identities of her young Pakistani informants that belie what she considers to be an overemphasis on hybridity. In particular, while British, Pakistani, and other sources of identity can be questioned and redefined, for Jacobson’s informants Islam was very commonly perceived to be a source of orientation and stability. Many of Jacobson’s informants appear to be attracted to the comprehensive answers of a culturally purified Islam, and have taken this all-encompassing Islam as their seemingly immutable core identity.

Olivier Roy makes similar observations in his research on global trends in Islam (2004; 2006). Roy argues that the forms of Islam that have gained most ground among second generation youth are “deculturated.” Charismatic sheikhs, often in a Salafi
tradition, claim to preach a universal and pure form of Islam that is unencumbered by the traditionalist cultures of the first generation. Youth who feel distanced or alienated from Western society and from the older generation find this narrative of an all-encompassing Islam very attractive.

The *deculturation* perspective differs from a “between cultures” perspective because it locates the greater share of identity conflict as occurring between generations rather than between the culture of origin and the “host” society. Roy (2004) has extended the perspective to include evangelical forms of Christianity (such as Neo-Pentecostalism) as well. He writes that forms of Christianity and Islam are marketed as though stripped of culture, giving them the flexibility and appeal to second generation youth in a variety of national contexts.

Because deculturation is less often cited in studies of race, ethnicity, and the second generation, critiques of it are not as fully developed. The marked emphasis on *dis*-continuity between generations appears to be at odds with the work of Charlotte Butler and others who find strong intergenerational connections. Deculturation could also be criticised for overstating the influence of particularly “neo-fundamentalist”56 styles of religious institution and ideology, such as Salafi and Deobandi Islam, while virtually ignoring any counterbalancing influence of more culturally-continuous forms such as Barelwi or Sufi influenced Islam. Likewise, the application of deculturation to Christian religious traditions remains anecdotal in Roy’s work, awaiting empirical verification.

---

56Neo-fundamentalism is Roy’s term.
Usually research studies work within a single perspective on identity, whether it is continuity, between cultures, hybridity, or deculturation. However, each of the four perspectives on identity brings forward a particular view of what to expect, empirically, about the ways in which youth construct and employ their identities. I summarize the expectations of these four models in Table 4.1. The table’s columns display 1) the identity component that will be prioritized by youth as first in importance, 2) the degree to which the identity style causes polarizing conflict, and the nature of this conflict, and 3) the kind of language youth of the identity style would be expected to use in an interview situation.

**Table 4.1. Theoretical Models of Youth Identity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuity</th>
<th>Primary ID</th>
<th>Polarisation</th>
<th>Theorized Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ cultural/religious</td>
<td>Low. Insulated from conflict</td>
<td>“My mum always says….”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“We have this tradition every year…”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Cultures</td>
<td>Parents’ cultural/religious OR British/English</td>
<td>High. Polarization of cultural/religious against British/English</td>
<td>“It’s hard to be a Jamaican here….”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I had to get away from Jamaicans to fit in…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid or Situational</td>
<td>Changes with the situation, context</td>
<td>Low. Ease in code switching.</td>
<td>“There’s a bit of everything in me…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“It just depends on the situation…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deculturation</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>High. Polarization of ‘born again’ religious and parents’ cultural/religious</td>
<td>“That’s cultural. Religion is different…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“My parents don’t know real Islam…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Identity Ranking Method

The four major perspectives of continuity, between cultures, hybridity, and deculturation each shed some light on identity construction among second generation youth. Philip Lewis (2007) helpfully points out that there are pitfalls to privileging one theoretical vantage point to the exclusion of others. In particular reference to young Muslims in Britain, he writes:

“[T]oo many social scientists assume that young Muslims are either victims trapped between two cultures, or able to switch effortlessly between cultures. Instead, [research] suggests that Muslims feel the need to initiate a meaningful dialogue among different cultural practices they have internalized.”57

Lewis explains that identity construction is highly dynamic and no single perspective can be expected to illuminate the whole picture. His image of identity emerging through “meaningful dialogue” reminds us that identity formation is an unfinished and intersubjective process that draws on various influences.

I designed my research interviews to capture, as far as possible, the “meaningful dialogue” that occurs as youth piece together their identities. To do this, about halfway through each semi-structured interview I began a section on identity with an identity choice-and-ranking exercise. As I sat down with the interviewee in a public place, like a coffee shop or library, I laid out on the table a set of labels that each displayed a different potential component of identity. The labels included racial, ethnic, regional, national, and religious identity options (e.g., Black, Jamaican, West Indian, British, Christian). The full set of identity labels is shown in Figure 4.1 and Table 4.2.

57Philip Lewis, (2007). Lewis is basing this particular observation on the research work of Sahin (2005).
Table 4.2. Labels Used in Identity Ranking Exercise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>African</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>West Indian</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Londoner</td>
<td>Non-Religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sylheti</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[blank write-in]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[blank write-in]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I had developed the set of labels through the extensive fieldwork and research in my first few months in London. They were intended to capture the most salient group labels among my two youth research populations. In each interview, I would ask the interviewee to select all of the labels that he or she could “personally relate to.” I also included some blank labels that youth could use to write in any identities important to them that I had missed. Once the interviewee had made all of her identity choices, she was asked to rank them in order of strongest personal identity down to weakest. With the identity labels ranked, I asked the interviewee to explain why she had ordered them in this way. We then entered a conversation about the meanings of specific identities and the relationships between them. The interview guide in the Appendix provides the full set of questions I asked about identities.

The primary purpose of this exercise was to generate a good conversation about self-definition and about the interrelationships between identity options. In doing so, I hoped to make some headway into research questions about identity and culture that I listed early into this chapter. I found the identity ranking exercise to be extremely useful for initiating this kind of conversation. It also provided a common language that could be compared between all interviews. Many youth told me the exercise pushed them to think further about their identity. Some really enjoyed it, and said their friends would too:
“Man, I want play this game with my people!” Rahel told me (Bangladeshi male, age 21).

It was the part of the interview that youth most often commented on afterwards.

The identity ranking method captures well what identity construction is. Identity construction is “a process of cultural prioritization” that establishes relationships of relative meaning. Completing the exercise with young people allowed me to witness them actively work through this process. For example, Michelle first chose seven components that she considers part of her identity, and laid these cards on the table. She then added “West Indian” – almost as an afterthought. When I asked her rank the identities in order, Michelle said quietly, as if in a note to herself: “Well, West Indian’s at the bottom.” She proceeded to rank up from there. By watching Michelle engage in the process of ranking, I could see the relative lack of value that she attributes to her West Indian origins, which enabled me to probe further.

The identity choice-and-ranking exercise (when complemented by other sections of the interview) provides a good window into how second generation youth compose their identities, what they prioritize as most important, and what they define themselves against. I will now briefly review broad identity trends I saw among all second generation youth, before focusing on the patterns specific to Jamaican youth and then Bangladeshi youth.

**Basic Youth Values**

I was interviewing Tariq, an 18 year-old Bangladeshi, and we had just started to talk about his Muslim identity. I asked him to tell me more precisely what kind of Muslim he is. I was prepared for him to define himself in relation to an Islamic schools
of jurisprudence such as Hanafi and Shafi‘i, or, at least, in terms of the broader division in Islam between Sunni and Shi‘i. His response took me by surprise:

I: [What type of Muslim are you?]
Tariq: I don’t fit any of those groups. I’m just me. We’re just Muslims, chilled out, go to college, saving up to buy a PS3.

Tariq just wanted to be recognized as an ordinary teenager. Like any other teen might be, he was enrolled in college\textsuperscript{58} and saving up to buy a Play Station 3. His words communicated the very ordinariness he experienced in being a Muslim in the East End. In a sense, I had been asking an improper question – why did I dwell on labels, when he was just being himself?

Tariq’s comments demonstrate his embeddedness in the “ethics of authenticity” that pervade Western culture (Taylor 1993). The value of individual authenticity was expressed by every youth I interviewed, in one way or another. I heard youth in my interviews convey in various different ways the same general philosophy: It is important to be yourself and communicate that self sincerely to others. When I asked youth which types of people they saw as very different from themselves, many expressed a strong distaste for hypocrites, the opposite of authentic individuals.

Because individuality and authenticity are so prized, youth place a high value on identities that they have chosen for themselves. Many talked about coming understand their Christian or Islamic faith for the first time as an adolescent or young adult, through a conversion or “born again” experience. Youth likewise devalued some of the identities that they had not chosen. For example, Jessica, an 18 year old with a Jamaican father

\textsuperscript{58}College, in the British system, refers to an elected period of schooling after age 16 but before university. Tariq was a student in an Islamic college in the Whitechapel area who I met on the street when he was walking home from a local gym.
told me: “I’m not Jamaican. Jamaican is in me, but….” By this she meant that though she has Jamaican lineage, it is not an identity she has chosen and given importance.

Another identity-related value that most London second generation youth share, linked to authenticity, is the positive value of diversity or multiculturalism. Some youth expressed pride that they have a diverse circle of friends. Others told me about how they love the diversity and exciting multiculturalism of London as a city. Shahedul, a 23 year-old Bangladeshi youth, did not choose “English” as an identity when we went through the identity choice-and-ranking exercise together, yet did choose “British” and “Londoner.” I asked him, why not English? “When I hear English,” he told me, “I think of white people. But when I hear London, I think multicultural.”

In a similar vein, most youth expressed a high level of tolerance for people of other cultures. For example, many Muslim Bangladeshis were very careful to stress that, though they believe Islam is the Truth, the Qur’an instructs them that “there is no compulsion in religion.”

Overall, the fact that virtually all second generation youth share values of individual authenticity, diversity, and tolerance simply bears witness to the fact that they have grown up in a modern liberal democracy (and, within that, in a vibrant cosmopolitan and multicultural city). It would be highly surprising, of course, if second generation youth did not positively affirm values such as authenticity and diversity. These values are the very basis for their own acceptance in plural British society.
Race matters to all Jamaican second generation youth. “Black” was the identity most commonly chosen by Jamaicans, chosen by all except one (who first considered it and then replaced it with “brown”). Those who chose “black” routinely ranked it higher than either “British” or “English,” again with only one exception. In two thirds of cases (16 of 24) “black” was either ranked as the first or second component in identity. In most of these cases it ranked higher than “Jamaican.”

Yet the commonness and salience of black identity do not necessarily signal its strength. Thaddeus, age 21, ranked black first. When I asked why he had placed it first, he said: “It’s obvious, it’s just me.” He then explained to me what he meant: “Basically it’s probably the first thing that you might notice from seeing me.” Black identity for Thaddeus is something ascribed to him by the perceptions of others. This conception of being black – that it is an identity given by others – was the most common way I heard Jamaicans speak about it.

Michelle spoke about being black in more positive terms. “I’m very proud of being black, for my culture, for what’s happened in [our] past until now.” For many Jamaican youth, a sense of black history was important. Being black connected them with past courageous generations, epitomized by endurance through the years of the transatlantic slave trade. Michelle mentioned other aspects of being black as being positive, such as the diversity captured within the term: “Some people may stereotype black people for being all one way, but black – the thing is that there’s different shades of black. We cover 500 shades from the very light to the darkest black…. Being black,
yeah, it’s beautiful.” Michelle also mentioned that black people “can just do a lot of different things that I think a lot of the time society doesn’t really celebrate for us. Like we can be academics, great in sports, great entertainers.” Her affirmation of being black, while positive, was nonetheless defined by a relationship with white members of society who may not recognize blacks for their achievements.59

For some youth there was ambiguity as to what “black” means. Naomi told me: “Sometimes I think black is just a skin colour. And sometimes I think it’s a personality.” There was a sense that one could “act black,” but that this was not predetermined. Mike, a mixed race youth introduced in Chapter 1, had said: “I don’t really ‘act black’ like black people do or ‘act white’ like white people do.” Some youth believe that race is declining in significance. Chanel told me: “I used to believe yeah, that being black in England, you’re underneath. Or you’ve got less chance. I used to think that would be a problem for me…. I don’t really think like that no more. I think we’ve got past that stage now.” In her estimation, today “people are more interested in what qualifications you’ve got than what color your skin is.”

The various ways in which Jamaican youth spoke about being ‘black’ captured a tension that has been present in the literature on the topic. In her book Ethnic Options (1990), Mary Waters observes that whites have freedom in choosing “symbolic ethnicities” based in their ethnic heritage. Blacks, in contrast, encounter the additional issue of racial discrimination, which they are best able to face through “oppositional ethnicities” (Waters 2003). Thus, blacks are much more ethnically constrained than whites. Claire Alexander (1996: 18) questions this view in her book The Art of Being

59 As I am a white American researcher, my racial appearance may have sensitized youth to the ways they are viewed by others.
Black (1996: 18), writing that “black youths are concerned with the construction of new cultural alternatives, in which identity is created and re-created as part of an ongoing and dynamic process…. I [portray] an alternative vision of black youth; not as a unified and homogenous, externally defined and structurally constrained entity, but a collection of individual lives, choices and experiences.” Mary Waters’ view is broadly a ‘between cultures’ one while Claire Alexander’s fits within the hybridity research tradition.

Jamaican youth I interviewed seemed to sometimes confirm Alexander’s perspective and at other times Waters’. Samuel, age 25, is a Jamaican youth who tried to articulate a post-racial perspective. He took a blank card and created the write-in identity of “human.” Samuel ranked human first, then brown, black, Jamaican, Londoner, and Christian. He told me why his identity as part of humanity came first: “Human because it’s kind of like, I’m human. So it don’t matter what race I am, what I do, what color. It all boils down to everybody bleeds the same.” Samuel’s positive affirmation as a person was a creative solution that appeared to transcend any concerns of race. Yet, when I asked Samuel if any of the identities he had chosen ever come into conflict, his answer revealed a continuing significance of blackness:

Daniel: [Do any of these identities ever come into conflict?]
Samuel: I think the human and the black. The human and the black, you know. They come as a conflict.
Daniel: Tell me why.
Samuel: Because I think regardless of “slavery’s over” or “racism’s finished,” there’s still an element of it about. I think it’s subliminal. It’s almost subliminal now…. I’m saying, “I’m human.” But they’re saying, “No, you’re black.”

As much as he wants to move beyond race, Samuel thinks that race remains important because racism persists. He speaks of racism as remaining in what he calls a “subliminal” form, perhaps what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2001) has called “implicit
racism.” Samuel continued, speaking of how he thinks racism can be internalized by blacks as self-image. This perpetuates the problem. “Our people do let us down,” he said, “’Cuz it’s like, it’s weird – if you call someone something for long enough, they actually come to be that thing.”

**Table 4.3. Samuel’s Identity Ranking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jamaican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Londoner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other racial options were available as identities in the ranking exercise: “white” and “brown.” Five Jamaicans out of 24 chose white as fitting somewhere into their identity. All did so because they have some white ancestry, including Mike whose mother is white. Clarise is also mixed race, and chose white as important for this reason and also because she was raised by white parents in a foster home. The low number of youth who identify with white is surprising, especially in light of the finding that today one out of every two Caribbean children born in Britain is of mixed race parentage (see Song 2009). Brown was a much more common choice, elected by two thirds of Jamaican youth. I will explain a common reason for choosing brown in the profile of Mabel below.

Most Jamaican youth showed significant creative freedom in their identity composition, as we have already seen in write-in identity of “human.” Yet this generally hybrid and fluid approach to identity sometimes came in tension with a sense of the fixity
of certain identities, especially “black.” I will illustrate this identity tension by first focusing on the apparently fixed cultural boundaries seen in the case of Mabel, before then giving view into the creative and fluid identity composition of four young men.

Mabel

Brixton was sometimes a challenging place to recruit new interviewees. Many of the young people I approached in hopes of interviewing were not actually Jamaican, but instead from Africa or elsewhere in the Caribbean. Yet Mabel broadcast her Jamaican identity to me all the way across Brixton Road. She was wearing a shoulder bag with a large and bright vinyl Jamaican flag as the opening flap. From a distance I knew immediately that she was Jamaican, and proud.

Mabel agreed to do an interview, and we sat down together at a nearby chicken shop. Mabel is short in stature, quick-witted, and very outspoken. She keeps her hair in lots of little braids that she calls twists: “When it comes to hair, me with my twists – no one does that, it’s just me,” she said. She was wearing a small “no guns” campaign badge pinned on the right side of her dark blue denim jacket. The badge resembled a round “no smoking” sign except with an image of a handgun crossed out in red. Mabel was on a gap year when we met. Having just finished high school,\(^60\) she was taking a year off to help at home before pursuing further work or education.

As we sat down, Mabel, unprompted, began talking about her love for Jamaica. I decided to probe further into the topic and to save some of my usual introductory questions for later. Mabel described Jamaica to me:

\(^{60}\)High school is called secondary school in the UK. It is common to take a gap year after completing secondary school, to engage voluntary work or travel, or just to take time off.
Usually people think palm trees and beaches. There really is a lot of that. [But also] there’s no pretences or anything…. That’s why Britain and Jamaica are so different. Like, in Britain you can walk along the street and no one really acknowledges you. And fair enough, because they don’t know you. But in Jamaica, like, they say “good morning” and “good afternoon,” and they don’t even know you. That’s one of the things I love about it, it’s just like the neighborly sort of community spirit.

Mabel contrasted the personal warmth and community spirit of Jamaica with Britain several times in the interview. She elaborated on her statement about Jamaicans having no pretences: “I like people that are real, like don’t pretend to be someone else…. I really admire people who are true to themselves.” In saying this, she was expressing the ethic of authenticity that was common to youth I interviewed. Jamaicans often use Patois, a variant of English, when they speak informally. Mabel likes Patois for the reason of its authenticity: “The way it’s said – the expressions are so straightforward.”

Mabel spoke of “family” and “discipline” as important Jamaican values. Much of Jamaican culture, she said, is captured in little sayings. One saying about discipline she mentioned is “if you want all the bread go get it yourself, and if you want half a bread make somebody buy it” – which means do for yourself anything that you want done properly. When Mabel’s mother thinks that she has sage motherly advice that is falling on deaf ears, she will often say “who don’t hear, must feel.” The saying means that someone who does not hear wisdom will soon feel the consequences. Jamaican parents pass on culture and wisdom through sayings like these. They also use fables of Anansi the spider, which originate in West African oral traditions. Mabel told me: “He likes his money, that spider. He likes his money. But he always gets his comeuppance in the end.”
If any of the Jamaicans I interviewed consider identities as fixed and discrete entities, Mabel is one. She views Jamaicans as having particular cultural traits such as straightforwardness that she highly values, especially being a Jamaican herself. She also has a clear sense of who she is not. Mabel told me “I have a problem with Africa.” Although she identifies with the continent in terms of heritage, she told me that Africans rub her the wrong way in daily Brixton life: “African people – to put it bluntly, Nigerian people – get on my nerves, because I’ve had problems with them in the past. i.e. no one is going to tell me any different when I say Nigerian men tend to be perverts.” She is often approached by Nigerian men on the street: “Even down to like when I was fifteen years old, I’d say, ‘I’m fifteen years old!’ , and they’d still bother me…. And African women like to watch you as well and give you these nasty looks. I’m not the only one that thinks that. A lot of Nigerians are not the most popular people, because of how they are. They’re loud and just leery.” It was true that Mabel was not the only Jamaican I interviewed who perceived strong differences with Africans – Thaddeus and Naomi also expressed negative sentiments. Naomi told me, regarding Nigerians in particular: “They are really, really loud and really, really over the top.” These interviews and others\(^61\) helped me to discern that there is some degree of inter-ethnic rivalry between Jamaicans and Nigerians in Brixton.

Mabel defines herself ethnically as Jamaican, in particular distinction from Nigerians and other Africans. Her maintenance of symbolic boundaries between ethnic

---

\(^61\) A focus group of three youth from Ruach ministries spoke about the rivalry they sometimes felt with Africans. The sense of rivalry is not perceived by all youth. Some interviewees have good friendships with Nigerians. One of my interviewees was dating a Nigerian. However, the issue came up in enough independent conversations to confirm that it is more than Mabel’s isolated point of view.
groups helps keep her world in moral order (see Lamont 2002). She spoke about how sometimes Africans try to breach these symbolic boundaries: “A lot of Africans do try to pass off as Jamaican.” She mentioned a recent issue with her Jamaican flag shoulder bag, which had tested these symbolic boundaries:

Even the other day a man said “Oh, I like your bag. I’d like to wear that.” I’m just like, if you wear that then that’s just going to cause people to misconstrue who you are. Because you are an African, be proud…. I said “thank you” and everything, tried to be polite. But I’m thinking, there shouldn’t be impostors. Be proud of who you are.

Mabel’s perspective of “be proud of who you are” assumes a certain essence to identity. Each person is an African, a Jamaican, or someone of another ethnicity. It is important to know and accept one’s identity, because to pretend otherwise means being an impostor.

Mabel thinks of the racial component of her identity in fairly essentialist terms. She spoke frequently during the interview from a “black perspective.” For example, when we talked about gang violence, she lamented: “Gang culture is just sad. And I speak from a black perspective – it’s all I can do because I’m that. Speaking from a black perspective, it really does sadden me that I will see a group of black boys congregate…. We’re killing each other, as black people.”

In line with Mary Waters’ research, Mabel has developed her black identity partly in reaction to not having a full sense of acceptance from white Britons. She spoke with some frustration about the experience of being black in Britain: “They’ve got this thing ‘There’s no black in the Union Jack.’ And it’s true, we don’t come from here. It is true. But at the end of the day I am here. What are you going to do about it?”

In most of our interview, Mabel spoke of her identity in discrete terms. She finds acceptance in British society to be a problem because she perceives that society as
defined in terms of whiteness, from which she is excluded. She thus appears to be a youth who is caught between cultures – or, more accurately, someone who is stranded on one side of a racial divide.

Table 4.4. Mabel’s Identity Ranking

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brown [or Black]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Londoner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaican</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yet, Mabel’s identity is not as clear-cut as I expected from our initial questions. When she completed the identity ranking exercise, she did choose a racial identity as strongest. When she saw the cards with identity labels on the table, her first thought was to choose “black.” But she instead chose “brown,” explaining this choice to me:

“I suppose the black, I do use that term a lot. I think it’s just a habit. I am brown [-points to the skin on her arm-]. That’s black [-points to a black notebook-]. So I do need to come out of the habit. I am brown.”

Mabel was reconsidering her usual practice of self-referencing as black. In a literal sense, her skin color is brown. Mabel had spoken adeptly about her blackness throughout the interview, but at this she point questioned the very existence of “black.”

I had other Jamaican interviewees who, at least at some point in the interview, spoke of aspects of their identities, such as being “black” or “Jamaican,” as fixed containers of some cultural essence. Mabel did this perhaps more than anyone. Yet all Jamaican youth, even Mabel, at some point showed a flexibility in their self-definition.
Mabel recognizes “black” as an identity that she has been branded with by white Britons. However, when given “brown” as an identity option, she uses it as a tool to critique “black” and take on greater agency in how she defines herself. Thus even within the apparent fixities of Mabel’s sense of identity there appears to be room for movement.

Moving with Music

If Mabel is on the fixed and essentialized end of the identity spectrum among Jamaican second generation youth, then a set of four musically talented youth I interviewed are examples of greater fluidity. In this section I will describe these four young men and ways in which they use music to creatively articulate their senses of identity.

Music is like life-blood to Damien. When we interviewed, he was age 20 and attending a London area university to study Music Management. Damien is aiming for a career promoting Gospel music artists. He has been actively networking on MySpace, Facebook, and industry-specific sites like GOSPELflava. Damien thinks he has reason to be optimistic – one of his brothers is a producer with his own small record label. Another brother lives in the U.S. and has promoted well-known artists like P. Diddy and India.Arie. His large family, it seems, has always been musically talented.

Damien is of medium stature with a soft, gentle voice. He usually speaks slowly and clearly, but sometimes launches into flights of enthusiasm on the topics of music or his faith. When I laid the cards on the table for the identity ranking exercise, Damien labored at it for a long time. When he had made most of his selections, he asked to borrow my pen for a write in identity. On a blank slip of paper he wrote “music.” He
placed this prominently – just below his faith and racial identity, and just above
“Jamaican.”

Damien had placed Christian first: “First of all I’m a Christian. My belief is very
important to me. It keeps me going throughout the day. And my relationship with God,
it’s important, it’s vital for me. It’s what makes me who I am.” He expressed this
“Christian first” identity as the cornerstone in his life. It was not unlike how Asma and
Rubina hold faith as the basis from which they live. Damien grounds this faith identity in
his personal communion with God.

Racial identity for Damien did not seem to require much explanation. He placed
“black” and “brown” as a tie for second place in his identifications. For him, race was a
label given by others: “Black, well, they say I’m black.” And as such, the label had
questionable validity as an actual description of his skin color: “But really, I’m brown.”
He thus approaches race in very much the same fixed-though-fluid terms that Mabel
does.

And then there was “music”: “Music is my heart, it’s my passion, it’s my love.
From ever since I was a child, ever since I could remember I’ve just always been in love
with music. Topics I’ve always loved and I talk about. My family is, especially my
brothers are, associated with the music industry.” For Damien, his write-in identity of
“music” is something he holds as dear as his roots. His choice to add his personal interest
and possible vocation amid a list of ethnic, racial, and religious identities shows just how
strong individuality and authenticity have become as youth values.

Damien’s approach to identity is an unmistakably hybrid one. He combined a
total of twelve identity components together, more than any of my other interviewees.
He sees himself as an amalgamation of many different places and influences. These include British, African, Caribbean, Indian, and white, all of which he is able to trace in his heritage. Damien’s stance on identity seems to be rather carefree and creative, with a sense that the more identity options there are, the better.

**Table 4.5. Damien’s Identity Ranking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Black – Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jamaican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>West Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Damien was far from unique in his passion for music. Making and performing music (rather than just listening to it) was the most common personal interest mentioned by the young Jamaican males I interviewed. Several of them claimed to have real talent. Some go to recording studios, visit open mic events, make CDs to pass around to friends, or set up MySpace pages to promote their own work. I often asked youth if they could perform a sample for me on our interview audio recording. Only later did I realize how much their performed music reveals about their approach to identity. Rap, as the lyrical
component of hip hop music, is particularly revealing of identity because rapping so often involves taking a stand and expressing an allegiance.

Adam is a tall, gaunt young man who wears diamond stud earrings. He was 19 when I first met him at a Jamaican restaurant across the street from Ruach Ministries, after we had both attended the youth service. Adam and I arranged to do an interview a week later, at a local café. In the first few minutes of our conversation at the café, Adam told me that he makes his own Gospel rap recordings. He says he does this to help youth get “in a positive mindset…. So they can see what I’ve gone through, and see where I got it wrong.” While we sat there recording the interview, I asked him to demo his music for me. “What, rap now?” he asked. I said “Sure.” Adam started a Gospel rap from memory, at a brisk pace:

Don't be wise in your own eyes
The Devil is a liar
was my downfall
That's the reason why we backslide,
so be careful
Because he comes your way on a sly
roaming through the world
He'll try to hook you so stay wise
Proverbs in the morning
Psalms in the night
It's warfare
Making sure I'm putting on my war gear
Don't go there, you know there's a hole there
It's a trap
The devil's trying to take you off track
Life
I need to try to get away from this hype
The devil wants me
I see it in my enemy's eyes
Knows I've been fresh born since I got baptized
But he can't touch me cuz I'm covered by the blood of Christ….
Adam’s full rap that I recorded continued on to about three times this length. It followed the daily trials of struggling with the devil and temptations. Adam explained to me his regimen of reading the Biblical book of Proverbs in the morning and of Psalms at night. “Proverbs because it’s a wisdom book,” he said, “when you wake up in the morning it’s good to read something that gives you wisdom for the day.” In comparison, “Psalms is more like a warfare book. So what you do there, it’s when you’re sleeping that the devil tries to attack you.”

With visible regret, Adam admitted: “To be honest to this tape, yeah, I have not been doing that recently [reading Psalms and Proverbs]…. Recently I have backslided.” The term ‘backsliding’ means regressing from the ways of God. He told me that in the past year he’s been smoking a lot of cannabis with his friends. “It’s made me paranoid,” he said. During the interview Adam’s mood shifted like a man with multiple personalities, sometimes quoting scriptures fluently with confidence, and at other moments expressing guilt and anxiety. He asked me to stop the recorder at one point to get himself back together. Adam finds that he is living in a tension between the Christian morality preached by his church and the actions of his friends in “the world.” Although Adam is now clearly troubled in his conscience, he told me “I believe that, by the grace of God, that God will pull me back up.”

Johnny, age 18, is a Jamaican youth I met at a church who had a much more relaxed way about him. While Adam seemed to be in the fringe of his church community, Johnny is the son of a church leader. Every time I visited Johnny’s church he was there. He seemed to know everyone. Johnny is musically talented and he invests much of his time and energy in writing and performing. When we interviewed, also at a
café, I asked him to demo his music on my recorder too. Here is what I heard from
Johnny, in a smooth and slower R&B sound that is more like the band Boyz II Men:

I'll be everything you need
And I'll be more
If this love wasn't for you,
Then what would I be doing this for?
That I love you God*, that's what I want your heart to see
Think of nothing else, but makes me think of you and me

Johnny has a melodious and powerful voice. I told him that liked what I heard.

Then I asked: “So that’s a worship song of some kind, like a spiritual song?” He
answered, “That’s a song I made. Most of the songs are based around the people I know,
so it’s a lot of girls I know.” I realized then that I had misheard the song: “Oh, that’s a
song about a girl!” Johnny had sung the words “I love you girl” but somehow I heard “I
love you God” (marked in the song with an asterix, *).\(^62\)

Although my misinterpretation of Johnny’s song was a small one, it revealed to
me the kind of lens I had taken into our interview situation. Because Johnny was very
involved in his church and is known there for his musical ability, I had assumed that he
would demo a Gospel song for me. Johnny told me that he does write a lot of religious
songs too. But his choice to share a song about a girl with me showed the great ease he
has in moving between the social worlds of church life and ‘secular’ life. The fact that
Johnny has written many songs – both sacred and secular – demonstrates his skill at what

Samuel, age 25, is a final young Jamaican who gave me a demo of his musical
talent during an interview. He is the one who wrote in “human” as his foremost identity.

\(^62\)I misheard the word “girl” in the song as “God.” I also misheard the last line of the
song, which should say “Think of nothing else, but baby think of you and me.”
I first met Samuel at the public library in Brixton. He comes from tougher circumstances than Damien, Johnny, or Adam. Samuel grew up an orphan, moving between boys’ homes and shelters as a child. In his teenage years, he spent his days stealing mobile phones and wallets on the streets of Brixton to survive. He told me that he remembers what it was like to always be “looking for victims.” But one day when he stole a man’s phone and ran, that man chased after him. The man and a friend, both large and well built, caught Samuel when he was hiding behind a car. He was sure they were going to beat him up. Instead, the man talked with Samuel to understand his situation. He decided to take Samuel in, to live with him and his wife at their home, and he became Samuel’s mentor. Samuel says he has been living as a Christian since around that time. He credits all of the events to the intervention of God. When I met Samuel at the library, he had been coming there regularly to search the Internet for jobs. Although still dealing with issues of anger and impatience from his younger years, he thinks he can now hold down a steady job.

Samuel’s transition from a street life to greater stability has not been easy, but music has played a part. For a while after his Christian conversion, Samuel volunteered at the Raw Materials Music Academy in Brixton. He was trained to mentor young people. He would help them develop their talent while also counselling them into a positive lifestyle. Sadly, the Academy closed in 2007 after it was robbed several times of its equipment. Samuel wishes he could take up this kind of mentoring again, but does not know of a place where he could do so.

When I asked Samuel to sing a sample of the music he writes, he sang two “rhymes” for me. One of the rhymes had an evident Christian content:
Life's short, even shorter when you dis-tort
reality, take it for jokes or for rash thoughts
Instead of clowning around like you're a fool
Just check yourself before you wreck yourself for good
I know my date of birth but not by time of death
That's why I'm in God's hands, I'm a part of God's plan
Don't know the word "can't" cause I know that I can
For I'm giving you extra like the Halifax man

In this rap, Samuel brings across the life and death reality of the streets. With crime and
gang violence, you never know your “time of death” – it could be any moment. It was a
message I often heard in Brixton churches, the need to turn to God in the face of death.
As Samuel put it “That’s why I’m in God’s hands.” Yet his rap is not only about
otherworldly concerns, but also the immanent and everyday. God enables success in
worldly things: “Don’t know the word ‘can’t’ cause I know that I can.” Samuel had told
me that in his own life, God is with him “like a friend.” “He’s taken me out of
situations,” he said. The rap ended with a humorous reference to Howard Brown, the
black spokesperson for Halifax Bank in Britain, who sings in television commercials
about “giving you extra.”

Samuel’s take on Christian faith, as seen in this first rap, seems very close
to Adam’s. The Christian faith is a struggle, an adventure that requires the right moves to
persevere. The adrenaline pumping style of his first rap came across also in the second
one he sang for me. The second rap had no religious overtones:

Everyday I live this
I move with this
I have to take my chances, flow…
Flows never boring
To the skies soaring like a bird that flies
Looking down at the earth my view's bird's eye
And I ain't talking captain, about macky, just mackin'
Engineering the sounds, we make crazy hits man
Studio's so hot, turn on the rotating fan
This second rap is about “flow.” It is about moving with the current and the rhythm.

Samuel told me that it is a rap he created while free-styling at an open mic event. The very act of free-styling – creating fresh spontaneous lyrics in front of an audience – is about flow. Young black men judge each other at open mic events based on speed, style, and wordplay.

From listening to Adam, Johnny, and Samuel demo songs that they have written, I could discern two styles by which Jamaican youth bring cultural references together to compose rap and R&B music. The first is flow, the quick-witted, natural movement from one thought or situation to another; a fluid ability to adapt. The other style could be called steadfastness. It is the style of Adam’s rap or Johnny’s R&B, with the single-minded devotion to God or to a girl. Both styles are important to how second-generation Jamaican young men express themselves and earn respect from their peers (flow) or communicate their loyalty (steadfastness). Yet the master style is flow. All of my Jamaican interviewees who sang their own original songs for me had written diverse repertoires of music, both Christian and secular, which gave them the adaptability to choose the right song for the right moment.

Natasha Warikoo (forthcoming 2011) writes about second generation youth who demonstrate “multiple cultural competencies.” She argues that young people in urban New York and London schools who are simultaneously skilled in the cultural symbols of school and of hip hop are poised to succeed in both contexts. Youth who are not able to achieve the “balancing act” between these situational contexts tend to suffer either in the esteem of their teachers or the esteem of their peers.
Rapping is a verbal demonstration of a youth’s multiple cultural competencies. Johnny and Samuel both show the ability to feel at home in the cultural worlds of church and of hip hop infused street life. Adam has honed these skills as well, but in his time spent with peers he has developed habits that make it harder to sincerely perform the cultural scripts of church. Adam feels guilt in contexts where he must demonstrate his faith, and for this reason does not attend church consistently.

These examples from young men and their hip hop music provide important clues about the nature of Jamaican second generation youth identities. These are not young men caught between cultures, but instead they show dexterity in moving smoothly between cultural worlds. Yet hybridity may not be the ideal description of their identities either – at least if hybridity implies a mixing, or syncretism. The youth tend to keep songs about Christian faith distinct and unpolluted by street life. There may be some overlap, as in Samuel’s first song, but in general the street and Christian symbols are part of different genres of music. Skill lies in developing one’s repertoire and choosing the right song for the right time. Perhaps a better term than hybridity for these youth is *situational identities*. Jamaican youth build repertoires of identity scripts that are each appropriate to particular situations or contexts.

Anne Swidler (2003) describes the process of moving between cultural scripts or frames, relating this to changing vessels on the sea:

"[A] person operating within one set of assumptions comes to a problem he cannot handle within his dominant scheme. Then, after floundering for a while trying to adapt his frame to unexpected difficulties, he may quite abruptly jump from one frame to another. This does not signal a loss of confidence in the first vessel, but simply a temporary abandonment of one craft while one navigates choppy waters in another."
In Swidler’s view, the ability to use different cultural frames to match situations is not a sign that one has lost confidence in a particular frame. In the same way, the fact that Jamaican youth can code-switch in different contexts is not necessarily an indication that they are insincere or not steadfast in any of their identities.

The situational nature of many Jamaican youth’s identities – especially young men – became clear to me when I had completed the identity ranking exercise with all youth. I had recruited six young men in church contexts, and seven in secular contexts. Five out of six that I first met in a church situation told me that they rank Christian first in their identity. All seven that I recruited in secular situations instead chose an identity other than Christian to rank first. Of course a strong variance is to be expected – I was much more likely to select highly religious people in a church. Yet it seems also that the church context heightened in youth the awareness of the Christian part of their identity, leading them to forefront it in the interview situation. Adam would not have been as likely to place Christian first as an identity if we had met in a different situation, such as in a local gym. The church context of our first meeting gave him a sense of obligation to act and speak as a Christian.

Jamaicans overall showed a high level of flexibility in composing their identities. Even Mabel, who had quite “fixed” views about identity, was able to step outside the bounds of her black identity and question it. In most cases identities appeared to be situational. In some cases, such as mixed race youth, identity was also hybrid. Interesting also was the relative lightness and creativity when composing identity. Damien had chosen “music” as central in defining himself. Johnny, also mentioned earlier, chose various ethnic and racial identities in the ranking exercise that included
Asian. He told me that Asian fit into his identity because “I actually like a lot of Asian stuff…. I’m a big fan of manga, from Japan, and like Chinese stuff.” Identity Johnny’s case does not have an organic, assumed nature to it. It is very much the product of individual choice and composition, in which personal hobbies are seen as legitimate options alongside race and ethnicity.

Claire Alexander (1996) found that the “art of being black” in Britain is an “ongoing and dynamic process.” My findings closely resonate with hers. The process is so dynamic, in fact, that I found it almost impossible to predict which identities a Jamaican youth would forefront when we reached the identity ranking exercise. Table 4.9 provides a summary of which identities were chosen as “first” by second generation youth. Whereas Bangladeshis predominantly chose Muslim first, Jamaican youth made many different choices for their prime identity, such as black, Jamaican, Christian, or brown.

Mary Waters (1990) found that white Americans have a broad freedom in defining themselves because they can choose ethnic identities that are symbolic of their own personal affinities. Blacks, she argued, do not have the same freedom but are instead constrained by racialized society to respond with a race-based identity. In more recent work, Waters (1999) has found that second generation West Indians in New York have greater freedom from American racialization because they are able to ground themselves firmly as West Indians, distinct from African Americans. The Jamaicans I interviewed in Brixton also seem to be less constrained by racial definitions. Brixton’s

63I make this statement in particular about Jamaican youth I recruited in secular contexts, who chose a wide variety of identities as first in importance. The youth that I first met in churches (particularly males) more often chose Christian first when asked.
second generation Jamaicans represent well what Stuart Hall has called “new ethnicities,” as they have more situational and hybrid ways of defining themselves and great identity freedom. Perhaps less clear is who Jamaican youth have been freed to be.

Table 4.6: Identities Chosen as “First,” Youth Subsample from Secular Contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jamaicans (N = 16)</th>
<th>Bangladeshis (N = 23)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black (4): 25%</td>
<td>Muslim (19): 82.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian (4): 25%</td>
<td>Asian (1): 4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown (2): 12.5%</td>
<td>Bangladeshi (1): 4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaican (2): 12.5%</td>
<td>Bengali (1): 4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British (1): 6.25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human (1): 6.25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Londoner (1): 6.25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bangladeshi Identities**

**Muslim First**

Bangladeshi identities formed a distinctly different pattern. Most resounding from the interviews was the strength of Muslim identity among my Bangladeshi informants. A full 31 of my 35 Bangladeshi interviewees, or 89%, ranked Muslim first in the identity exercise (82.6% of youth recruited from secular contexts chose Muslim first, as seen in Table 4.6). The result matches quite closely with the Pew survey percentage mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that 81% of British Muslims choose Muslim
first. Here is how Asma, an 18 year-old Bangladeshi female, explained the pre-
eminence of her Muslim identity:

“For me, religion is really important. So I would say I’m a Muslim first. It
doesn’t matter what culture I’m from, what country I’m from. Because the person
I am is I’m a Muslim person. And that’s how I live my life.”

Several of the points Asma makes in this brief quote are worth elaboration because they
express attitudes common to Bangladeshis I interviewed. Asma found religion “really
important.” She shared this feeling with about half of her Muslim peers, who had high
religiosity (i.e., they were praying five times a day and expressing positive regard for this
level of practice). When Asma looked at the identity labels on the table and noticed
Muslim, it did not take her any time to think about putting it on top. In this quote she
speaks of how Muslim identity relativizes all other identity commitments: “It does not
matter what culture I’m from, what country I’m from.” Other identities may fall second
or third, but their actual distance to Muslim is great because Muslim is qualitatively
different. Muslim defines a type of person, with a particular moral orientation: “the
person I am is I’m a Muslim person.” And this seeps into all areas of daily experience
and action: “that’s how I live my life.”

Virtually all Bangladeshis, like Asma, chose Muslim immediately from the
identity options and placed it first. A frequent theme in describing Muslim identity was
its permanence. Shah told me “Muslim is first due to the fact that it’s my religion and
nothing can ever change that.”

However ‘Muslim first’ meant somewhat different things to different people.

64 As explained in Chapter 2, my sample of interviewees was not random and therefore
the 89% figure should be taken with caution.

Quoting Shah again, he thinks of Muslim identity primarily as an inheritance from his
parents: “You know my family were Muslims, and followed the religion. So it’s literally that’s why it comes first.” Another young Bangladeshi, Mahmoud, spoke of his Muslim identity in more spiritual terms: “I’ve put Muslim first because my main goal in life is my relationship with God.” Mahmoud referred to his Muslim identity as having ultimate importance: “As a Muslim, I believe in the afterlife, so my plans go beyond just the future in this life. They go to the future in the hereafter as well.” Youth most commonly identified with Islam for one of these two reasons – its connection to parents and family, or its Truth as a spiritual doctrine.

For some youth, Muslim identity was more problematic. Shahedul is a thin young man who was wearing a tan English flat cap when we spoke. In our conversation he would often tap the table with his finger when he was making a point. Shahedul placed “Muslim” first in his identity ranking, almost as a default. Yet as we spoke more about religion a few minutes later, Shahedul asked if we could change his ranking. He said “I’m not really practising anymore or going to mosque” and asked if we could shift Muslim down to fourth place, putting it below British, Londoner, and Asian. He was one of only four youth who did not place Muslim first – although he only did so after reflecting on it more.

Another youth who did not place Muslim first is an 18 year old named Karim. I met Karim in a park off of Whitechapel Road where he was loitering with four of his friends. He is about 6’3” and very skinny, with dark skin. He was wearing a white Nike hoodie and a light blue baseball cap covered with hundreds of small New York Yankees logos. Karim’s identity ranking was unusual: It began with Sylheti first, and then progressed to Non-Religious, Muslim, Asian, British, English, and finally Londoner.
Karim’s first identity, Sylheti, comes because his parents are from that region. At his young age they largely define his sense of roots. He included Non-Religious because he is currently not practicing Islam by attending prayers. Karim placed Muslim third, and spoke to me about the identity with visible guilt. He said: “I can’t put it first because I’m smoking weed all the time.”

Muslim identity was “first” for almost all second generation Bangladeshi youth I interviewed. Even in the few cases where Muslim identity did not rank first, most youth acknowledged that they thought it should. Muslim is the main orienting identity for the Bangladeshi young people of the East End. In significant part, this is due to what Coleman (1987) has called social closure: Muslim identity (of one kind or another) is socially propagated from all sides, by Bangladeshi parents, by mosques, and by peers. The saturation of the identity in these various social contexts means that coming to terms with being Muslim is inescapable for East End Bangladeshis.

The pervasiveness of Muslim identity in various social relationships helps to explain why it is so often chosen as a component of identity. However it does not explain why youth choose Muslim first so often, rather than relegating it to the background. An explanation for this phenomenon began to crystallize for me during two particular interviews. Yasmin and Rubina are highly articulate Bangladeshi young women. Both are University of London educated, both are creatively inclined, and both consider Islam important to them. However, the styles by which they understand relate to Bangladeshi culture set them apart as quite different from each other, and reveal underlying identity processes. I interviewed the two young women within months of each other, in two coffee shops that lie along the same road.
Yasmin

I met Yasmin for an interview at the Starbucks on Whitechapel Road, a chain coffee shop situated somewhat awkwardly near the heart of Banglatown. Yasmin has deep olive skin and wore dangling gold hoop earrings. She had her hair up in a black headwrap, which at the time I thought of as an African style.

Yasmin was 22 years old when we talked. In the first few minutes of our interview I learned that she is a professional dance performance artist. She was doing a solo performance that evening at an open mic night in the Whitechapel Art Gallery, just a few buildings along the road. She told me that dance allows her to connect with and explore her Bengali, British, and other cultural identities. In her own words: “It’s about looking at myself as a young Bengali living in Britain and being in a city life…. It’s about how you express [that] in narrative. The narrative of living in London, the narrative of being a woman, being a Muslim. It’s all these things.” Yasmin attempts to articulate these various layers of cultural narrative through movement. For example, a dance performance might involve Western contemporary dance fused with South Asian styles, such as the North Indian storytelling dance form called kathak.

Very few second generation youth make the exploration of cultural identity into a career vocation, as Yasmin has done. I tried to discern where she had developed her profound interest. A major influence has been her mother. Yasmin’s father died when she was young, and she has had a very close relationship with her mother throughout life. Her mother is a very artistic person who writes Sylehti poetry and sings traditional songs to maintain a living memory of Bangladesh. Because she does not speak English, she has relied on Yasmin and the other daughters in the family to be her points of connection into
British life. In a reciprocal way, Yasmin links to her own Bangladeshi heritage through her mother. As she puts it: “Being a second generation, my connection to my ancestors has my parents between the two.”

A turning point in Yasmin’s life was her first and only visit to Bangladesh with her mother and sisters. It was through this visit that she really realized her emotional connection with the country as “home”:

I was eleven when I went. We initially said we were going to stay there for six weeks, for the whole summer break, but it extended to six months. And that was purely because we didn’t want to come back. Myself, my two sisters and my mum, we were in a house, and going there and seeing my father’s grave, which is over there, and being in the village that my parents grew up in as husband and wife. That for me was a place that I needed to be at that particular time of my life. My sister felt exactly the same. I was eleven, one of my sisters was twelve and my other sister was eighteen. The gap is quite large between myself, my other sister, and the eighteen year old. But we had a common ground, which was “We’re home!”…. It was really just seeing another life that was ours.

Although Yasmin was born and raised entirely in London, upon visiting Bangladesh she experienced “another life that was ours.” Her close connection with her mother and her longing for her father may help to explain why Bangladesh resonated so deeply with her then. A sense of not fully fitting in among her peers in Tower Hamlets, as she would explain later into the interview, may also have played a part. As Yasmin spoke of the Bangladeshi countryside and the senses it evoked, her whole countenance brightened: “It was about walking the distance along the road,” she told me, “It’s where the wheat, it’s where the mustard seeds are growing, it’s where the cows are, the sheep, and the goats. For me that was the experience! It was so hot when we went. The smell is very particular.”

Yasmin identifies herself as a Muslim as well, but speaks of this in an interesting way. She told me: “Muslim is a part of my identity that I can’t deny.” Her response of
“can’t deny” was much more passive than most of my Bangladeshi interviewees, who spoke with an active enthusiasm about being Muslim. As we spoke more, I learned that being Muslim is indeed significant to Yasmin, although not in the ways I was accustomed to hearing from other East End Bangladeshis.

Table 4.7. Yasmin’s Identity Ranking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Brown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Yasmin is a Sufi Muslim. She says that Sufi spirituality has deep roots in her father’s side, and it is now quite actively maintained by her mother. She told me that in her view “the essence of Sufism is a spiritual sense, a perspective on how you see life…. And that for me is something I’ve got and will always carry.” Her general life philosophy and her aesthetics as a performer are infused with this spiritual sense. Although Muslim religious practice is important to her too, she made clear to me that she does not follow this dogmatically. She prays three to five times each day “depending on how I’m feeling or depending on what I’m doing…. Prayer is like the center. [But] if I have to do something else, I don’t create excuses.”

Despite Yasmin’s significant identification with Sufi Islam, she does not feel fully included among the Bangladeshi Muslims of the East End. I asked all interviewees to list their five closest friends. Yasmin’s were two Jamaicans, a Nigerian, a Pakistani, and an
Irish/Indian – making her stand out from other Bangladeshi interviewees, all of which at least had a majority of friends who were Bangladeshi. Yasmin had met her diverse set of friends she in university or through her performances.

Yasmin feels like something of an outsider in the East End Bangladeshi community. It is for this reason that she says she “can’t deny” being Muslim. Her differences with the local community are rooted in differing views of religion and culture:

Their perspective on the Bengali culture and their perspectives on religion are completely different [than mine] because there’s a separation. There’s a separation between what religion is and what culture is. In my mother’s household we embrace the two, but in their household they divide the two. As I was growing up and connecting with other families they’ve always said that there’s a contradiction in culture and religion. Coming from my own background I knew that there wasn’t.

Yasmin believes that her family heritage and time spent in Bangladesh give her insight into the richness of Bengali cultural expressions of Islam. She contrasts this with the view of Islam that she thinks pervades the East End, which separates Bengali culture from Muslim religion and sets them against each other. She says of Islam in the East End: “In terms of culture, the food is there, the [Bengali] clothing is there underneath,” she told me, “but things are getting diluted.”

Yasmin’s own cultural style seems to be a combination of continuity and hybridity. She works diligently to maintain continuity with Bangladeshi culture through her relationship with her mother and through performance art. Yet this continuity is not simple nor is it direct. Yasmin has consciously interpreted Bengali influences and blended them with other cultural influences in performance art. The dance style she uses to convey her Bengali heritage, kathak, is actually a North Indian form rather than being
directly Bengali. Yasmin’s way of dressing is likewise hybrid. She wears a black headwrap, jewellery, and flowy clothing, a sort of compromise to keep her hair covered in *hijab* yet also maintain a creative, artistic persona. Yasmin appears to be quite at home with her own “hybrid-continuity.” Yet it seems to have come at a price: she has found her uniqueness isolates her from peers in the East End.

**Rubina**

Rubina is a fitting comparison with Yasmin because they are similar in many respects, but have markedly different identity styles. I interviewed Rubina in August 2008 at the Fair Factory coffee shop, just a few stores away from the Starbucks. The Fair Factory was opened just a week before our interview as a fair trade coffee shop to support the work of Muslim Aid, a humanitarian NGO. The coffee place was located across the street from the main headquarters of Muslim Aid, nestled in the shadows of the East London Mosque’s red brick minarets.

When we conducted the interview, Rubina was 19 and about to start her second year studying at the University of London. Thin and youthful in appearance, she was wearing a black headscarf. The black cloth of the headscarf came down to cover the front of her neck where it was embroidered with an attractive bright floral pattern. Rubina is an inquisitive young woman who, like Yasmin, has found a creative medium for exploring her culture and identity. She is an English literature major and a prolific writer. She happened to be writing a short story the night before we met, simply because she is motivated to improve her writing. Rubina also contributes regularly to an online
blog. She told me: “I write on a lot of things. I write on a lot of finding yourself, finding identity…. A lot of soul searching and balancing the life and stuff like that.”

Rubina, like Yasmin, had visited Bangladesh once when she was a child. She told me about her experience:

I was 13 and I went for three months…. It’s nice. It’s very different to think that my home is on a farm – like my original home where I come from. I’m actually a countryside girl and not a city girl the way I imagine myself to be!

Rubina’s visit to Bangladesh had helped her to identify with her rural heritage. Her experience was in some respects similar to Yasmin’s discovery of “another life that was ours.” Yet the trip to Bangladesh had also confirmed to Rubina that some aspects of the culture remain alien to her:

You know it’s very different. I couldn’t live there now…. None of them are educated. We’re from, you know, quite a poor area. So you can’t afford to go to school and they’ve got a very narrow-minded way of thinking.

Rubina had experienced narrow-mindedness in Bangladesh. She told me that it this was most evident in terms of religious faith. “Islam is very different to them, because Islam is for them just a bunch of cultures, like tradition,” she said. This contrasted with her own practice of Islam: “Whereas me… my Islam that I learnt here is a faith.”

Rubina’s efforts to distance herself from the traditional culture of her parents demonstrate that her approach to culture is one of deculturation. Whereas Yasmin had told me she “can’t deny” being Muslim, Rubina described herself as a “very strong Muslim.” In our interview Rubina frequently contrasted her view of Islam as a pure faith with what she saw as the corrupted, Bangladeshi form of Islam that is “just a bunch of cultures, like tradition.”
It is interesting to compare Rubina’s description of her visit to Bangladesh with how she describes her visit to Mecca in Saudi Arabia a few years later. Rubina travelled on the “mini-pilgrimage,” or *umrah*, a shorter visit than the *hajj* that is nonetheless significant. In our conversation she had maintained a critical distance in tone when talking about Bangladesh, but when described the *umrah* she glowed with excitement:

I think [visiting Mecca is] why I’m a very strong Muslim. Because I saw it with my own eyes and I know what I felt in my heart. And I knew that it was complete peace. I reached that when I was there and, you know, it was enough for me.

Rubina and Yasmin are both second generation youth who know that they have some distinctiveness and connection that reaches outside of Britain. Yasmin has made a transnational connection to Bangladeshi culture through her parents. Rubina, in contrast, derives meaning from her connection to the transnational community of the *ummah*.

**Table 4.8. Rubina’s Identity Ranking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Londoner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylheti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Olivier Roy’s terms, Rubina is a “born-again Muslim” because she has re-adopted her faith for herself after a journey of personal discovery. Roy (2006b) observes that “The bulk of born-again Muslims want to establish something which could be close
to a faith community… people who share the same beliefs and can live together in the purity of their religion.”

The glories of the global Muslim unity that Rubina tasted while in Mecca have made Bengali cultural Islam seem small and provincial. She spoke of the difference between “pure,” global Islam and Bengali Islam as not only evident when she has travelled abroad, but also when she is home in Britain. Rubina had recently visited the nearby city of Luton to campaign for Muslim Aid. She told me that in Luton “it’s still quite traditional, still quite backwards in the sense that Muslims still haven’t moved with the British culture…. It was like being transported back to Bangladesh, because people were, they were dressed in their [traditional] clothing [and] they couldn’t speak the language properly.” It is important, as a Muslim, to have “moved with British culture.” Bengali culture will often impede this.

In fact, Rubina felt that her childhood as a Bangladeshi in East London was “like a cocoon.” It had been very sheltered: “I know how my mum brought me up. The neighbours were all Bengali. They had Islamic circles in the house, we had Bengali lessons and stuff like that. Our parents tried very hard to keep us away from things of western culture. Like even things that are allowed in Islam.” As a deculturated Muslim, Rubina believes that Islam is a system that transcends all cultures. A Muslim can keep pace with British culture as long as she or he carefully follows what is allowed in Islam. Although her parents had good intentions in trying to raise her in a Bengali and Muslim environment, Rubina found the experience as overly restrictive. In a sense, Rubina’s parents had not been Islamic enough because they did not understand Islam as an abstract, transcendent system that can be applied anywhere.
These differences are revealed most starkly in issues of gender and marriage:

They don’t understand the concept of [Islam] being a faith rather it’s a, you know, a bunch of obligations that you must do…. Like you have to do this, you have to do that. Oh no, you can’t marry someone lower class than you! But Islamically of course you can.

By purifying her Islam of Bengali culture, Rubina is able to do away with key cultural restrictions on her choices. When her parents attempt to control choices in marriage and family, Rubina can find in Islam empowering arguments. The issue of marriage is close to home for Rubina. She has already debated with her mother about Islamic and Bangladeshi conceptions of marriage, in relation to marriage choice for her brother:

My mum’s looking for a bride for my oldest brother, because he doesn’t have a girlfriend. So she wants to do an arranged marriage for him. And I think that there’s plenty of [suitable] people, but they’re not Bengali. I go “What’s wrong with it then? Islam is saying that they need to be a good Muslim!” But [my mum is] like “Yes, but you know people are going to point fingers and say your son married out of the race.” Like [I say] “Mum there’s only one race which is the human race. You know that’s what unites us all. You know there is no differentiation, you know we’re meant to follow the Prophet Mohammed, you know he didn’t differentiate between people. Why do we do it?” She goes “Oh you don’t understand, you wouldn’t understand. We lived here too long.”

The mutual exasperation of Rubina and her mother show just how wide the gulf between generations can be, for young Bangladeshi women in particular. Rubina appeals to Islam as a source of transcendent values, hoping to resolve their dispute. Islam has become for her a source of empowerment. It provides the most comprehensive, reasoned, and community-sanctioned solution for gaining control from her parents. Rubina’s use of Islam as a faith system is a resource for living confidently within the modern sensibilities she has developed while growing up in London.
Deculturation in Action

The identity style of deculturation is very widespread among Bangladeshi youth in the East End. My estimate based on fieldwork and interviews is that half of East End Bangladeshis are consciously decultured, like Rubina. Although not all are as articulate as she is, Bangladeshi youth often raised the same concerns about freedom from parents and the impurities of Bengali culture, while expressing their faith in a comprehensive, transcendent vision of Islam.

Young Bangladeshis tend to perceive deculturated Muslim identity as a source of empowerment, much as Rubina does. A Muslim young woman named Shany explained her “Muslim first” identity as one that is free from any culture, thus breaking down barriers between people:

[I chose] Muslim first because it is my most strong identity and I think it breaks down all barriers of every other identity. As a Muslim I don’t have a color, I don’t have a language, I don’t have a nationality. It kind of bonds me to billions of other people without those barriers…. It pretty much is quite an all-encompassing entity.

Islam provides an all-encompassing identity for Bangladeshi youth, connecting them to others around the globe. Bangladeshi identity can seem small and provincial in comparison.

The ways in which deculturation is adopted and used tend to differ among young women and men. Many young women, like Rubina, find Islam to be an empowering resource when they face their parents, especially in the issue of arranged marriage. Even Zahera, a young woman who does not habitually wear the headscarf or consider herself to be a practicing Muslim, sees Islam as providing freedom from oppressive cultural norms. Zahera says: “Within the Bengali community I’m told ‘why are you not married?’ and
‘let me find you a husband.’ Whereas from an Islamic perspective, I don’t have to get married. I can actually choose to abstain from marriage.” Another dynamic that often attracted young Bangladeshi women to strong Muslim identities was the acceptance in relationships of sisterhood.

Bangladeshi young men tended to contrast religion with Bangladeshi culture not on issues of marriage and family, but instead in terms of Islam being more educated, more Western, or even more fun than a traditional Bangladeshi lifestyle. As Bangladeshi parents usually come from poor and rural backgrounds, many youth see them as not having the requisite knowledge to fully comprehend Islam.

Table 4.9. Farouq’s Identity Ranking

| Muslim | Bangladesh | Sylheti | Asian | British | Londoner |

When I met Farouq, he was standing in front of a Chicken Shop on Cannon Street Road, smoking a cigarette. He has spiked black hair and wore an oversized white puff jacket to look more intimidating. Farouq does not consider himself a devout Muslim, as he usually only attends mosque to pray on Fridays. He does rank Muslim first, however, and thinks of his Muslim identity in a deculturated way. Farouq told me that people in his parents’ generation “are confused and mix tradition and religion together.”
comparison, “the young kids nowadays are more focused on everything, more wise.”

Farouq said that Islam frees him from the constraints he would have felt to “make my parents happy, be a good boy, wear certain clothes, have certain haircuts. Like, don’t have fun.”

Another youth, Amin, does not think of himself as particularly religious either, though he does also identify as Muslim first. Amin expressed a similar view to Farouq’s that the Islam of his parents is outmoded:

Our generation’s more westernised. Whereas our parents generation, they’re more into the culture thing and everything. They’re more into image and bad publicity and everything. They want to keep that under control… We want to have fun basically, we’re westernised.

Amin told me, further, that the Islam practiced by young people is a more knowledgeable one. “There’s big scholars just studying religion and everything,” he said, “We’ve learnt from them basically, and we know what’s wrong and what’s right.” When I asked him who these “big scholars” are, he mentioned Sheikh Abdur Rhaman Madani of the local Darrul Ummah Mosque and Imam Abdul Qayyum of the East London Mosque.

It is a tribute to the savvy youth programs and informal peer networks of Darrul Ummah and the East London Mosque that even “non-practicing” young men, like Farouq and Amin, take a deculturated view of Islam and associate it with knowledge and having a good time. Almost all Bangladeshi youth I interviewed had similarly superlative associations with Islam, regardless of how much they themselves fulfilled religious obligations.

Yet deculturation, if taken to its logical extreme, can challenge more than just Bangladeshi cultural identity. I met 19 year old Khan on Brick Lane. We walked to the popular Sweet & Spicy Bangladeshi restaurant for some warm nan bread and an
interview. Khan had shortly cropped hair and a modest beard, and was dressed professionally. His accent exudes an air of educated confidence. Early into our interview, Khan took a more confrontational tone than I usually experienced in interviews. He spoke frequently and with disdain about “Orientalists,” who he defines as “people who are anti-Islam… who would like to distort the message of Islam.”

In the identity ranking section, Khan asked “Can I choose just one?” He selected “Muslim” and placed that identity alone on the table. To explain his choice, Khan contrasted it with identity combinations like Bangladeshi Muslim and Black Muslim:

You [could] have Black Muslim. So why do you need to put something ahead of Muslim? Before or after, there’s nothing. You shouldn’t put anything before or after Muslim. That’s it. It’s simple – you just worship your Lord, you do everything he has commanded you to do, stay away from everything that is forbidden for you to do, and that’s it. That’s why you’re Muslim.

Khan supports the views of Anjem Choudary and the Islam4UK organization, which have advocated the enforcement of Shariah Law in Britain. Khan explained to me in the interview why he finds a future British Islamic state appealing, including the harsher punishments for criminals and the idea that women will be safer from men if they are required to wear hijab. Islam4UK, since the time of our interview, has been proscribed in the UK as a radical organization (in January 2010).

Table 4.10. Khan’s Identity Ranking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muslim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Deculturation is a process that can take many forms. Khan was one of three cases of Bangladeshi young men who expressed their support for radical organizations. One of these youth, Zain, had taken part in a Hizb ut-Tahrir protest march to advocate Shariah law in the UK. In cases such as these, a deculturated Muslim identity has undermined all others, making a common purpose or basis of communication with non-Muslims a challenge.

Not So British?

Having grown up in London, the youth I interviewed typically spoke with the same London accents and mannerisms as their British peers. Some were quintessentially British in their interests – playing cricket or watching television shows such as *Eastenders*. None of this should be surprising. All of the youth I interviewed are full-fledged British citizens, educated in London schools, and exposed to British media and public culture.

I provided youth with “British” and “English” as options in the identity ranking exercise. Virtually all youth chose at least one or the other. Only two Jamaicans and two Bangladeshis who could not relate to either English or British. This very high level of general identification with the nation of citizenship suggests that (besides a few exceptions like Khan) these are not youth who hold completely oppositional identities, or who live ghettoized lifestyles that fully separate them from the state.

Identification with “British” was especially widespread (20 of 24 Jamaicans, 33 of 35 Bangladeshis). The actual ranking youth gave to this identity varied considerably. Only one, a Jamaican 20 year old named Martin, chose “British” first. On the other end
of the spectrum was Damien, mentioned earlier, who placed “British” 11th and “English” 12th in his list of twelve identities. Identification with “English” tended to be less likely than “British.” 15 of 24 Jamaicans chose “English,” while only 11 of 36 Bangladeshis did so.

Although almost all youth chose “British,” “English,” or both, their actual levels of attachment to these identities could be quite low. Mike had told me “I’m not a very patriotic person…. Coming from a mixed race background, I like everywhere.” Leonard likewise did not take much pride in his British identity, saying that: “Being patriotic don't seem to really hit home with me about British, or being British. It more seems to hit home with me about Jamaican.” Almost all youth were like Mike or Leonard: They either identified a bit with “everywhere” or, more commonly, had other identities that meant more to them than being either English or British.

When I asked youth who chose “British” why they had done so, easily the most common response was “because I was born here.” For many, “British” was primarily an indicator of geography – the context in which they were born and have grown up.

Near the end of the interviews, I also asked a related question about Britishness: “What does your British citizenship mean to you?” Youth tended to be surprised by this question. Most paused or fumbled around for a while. Chanel told me “It’s just the color of my passport really. I got a British passport, that’s what it means.” Amin’s view was very similar “I’ve got the red passport, that’s it…. And you get to go to European places without a visa.” When asked about British citizenship, in most cases youth either had nothing to say or associated citizenship with their passport, their freedom of travel, or their protected status when visiting another country.
If Britishness tended to be greeted with indifference, Englishness was more often problematic. Some thought of “English” simply in terms of the language, and in these cases could identify with it strongly. Yet those who consider “English” to be cultural identity tended to feel excluded in some way. Shany, a young Bangladeshi woman, told me that she is “definitely not English.” She said “I think it’s just because I’m not white…. It’s more of an ethnic thing that I don’t relate to, because I don’t look the part.”

Frequently youth spoke of how racism or labelling from others shapes their access to English and British identity. Shah told me that “I’m Asian rather than being British…. I was born and brought up here, but people would label me as [Asian] before I’m British.” Mabel had expressed her frustration that in Britain “they’ve got this thing ‘There’s no black in the Union Jack.’”

When youth tried to give cultural content to Britishness or Englishness, the most frequent image that came to mind was the English pub. Bangladeshi Muslim youth often singled out the pub as an English institution that would remain alien to them, due to Qur’anic prohibitions on the consumption of alcohol. Some Jamaican youth, particularly churchgoers, felt equally unable to relate to pub culture or binge drinking. Mabel said that she could appreciate British culture, but that British history tends to be one-sided: “I resent that they do not teach about people like Marcus Garvey and Immanuel VII in history classes, but they’d rather talk about Henry VIII.”

While most second generation youth did not evince much interest in English culture or history, there were a few who were enamored with all things English. Shany was studying English Literature at university. She told me that her favorite books tend to

---

65 Marcus Garvey and Immanuel VII are both founding figures in the Pan-African movement.
be from Victorian authors: “I think I’m a bit of an old fogy. I like reading traditional things. I like reading my Charles Dickens, and my Jane Austen, and my Mark Twain and stuff like that.” Belal is a devout Muslim young man who grew up in the Bangladeshi community in Whitechapel. As a child he devoured English literature, his favorite book being Roald Dahl’s *Danny, Champion of the World*. Belal had managed to develop a highly intellectual English accent from watching BBC television. Although he did not identify himself as English, he spoke with a distant admiration of the English culture of a bygone era:

I am not an Englishman. [But] it is a culture I really like… The way their culture used to be. I’m talking about a post-war Britain, where cricket used to be played in the long summer hazy days. Boarding schools – I’m a really big fan of that. Manners, family, strict discipline. I really love it. I’ve never done the hunting before, but all that tweed jacket thing with the hunting – I’m a big fan of that.

In a similar vein, Clarise told me she thinks Jamaican values are British values.

Underneath Jamaican culture she said there is an “infrastructure” of British values that has carried over since the days of the slave trade. “Watch old movies and you’ll actually see what old Britain was like. Very rigid, and very ‘this is what’s right’ and ‘this is what’s wrong.’ And if you look at Jamaicans now and their culture – like back home Jamaicans, not the ones here [in Britain]…. They’re very ‘this is what’s right’ and ‘this is what’s wrong.’” It is notable that for these youth it was the Englishness of days past – whether portrayed in old movies, Victorian literature, or men in tweed hunting jackets – that resonated most. This nostalgic Englishness seemed carry a greater weight of discipline and moral responsibility that they could readily identify as connected with their own.
The questions from the beginning of this chapter are important to raise again.

Second generation youth tend to rank other identities above British and English – whether these are religious, racial, or ethnic. Are these youth “Not so British?” Are issues of civic loyalty, like those raised by Timothy Garton Ash and the episode of Panorama, actually well founded?

It is important to recognize, first, that Caribbeans and South Asians actually have higher rates of identification with Britishness than the native white population. When given choices of only national (and not religious) identities in the Government’s General Household Survey (ONS 2002), most white people selected English, Scottish, Welsh, or Irish identities instead of British. Most Caribbeans and South Asians identified most strongly with British. Ian Bradley (2007: 177) has shown that a full spectrum of surveys reveal strong British identification among Britain’s black and Asian ethnic minorities. It is when the choices are broadened beyond national identity, particularly to include religion, that identification becomes more complex.

Britain is, of course, a political union of four nations: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. It is difficult to conceive of a cultural content to British identity because Britain has historically been a political-legal entity more than a self-consciously cultural one. It is for this reason that Gordon Brown’s suggestion to define a cultural substance to British values eventually fell flat. As Lord Anthony Giddens (2008) argued in the House of Lords debates about Britishness and British values (emphasis added):

I suggest that we drop the dead donkey; that is, drop the idea of Britishness. The very term “Britishness” is odd…. [W]e should speak of Britain as a citizenship nation. That is what holds the nation together and gives us a coherent identity. If you speak of Britishness, you are looking for an elusive, essential identity which does not really exist.
Giddens recognizes that Britain is a citizenship nation, where citizen status is the “glue” that holds together a wide range of diverse people. Just as English and Scots bring their own cultural content to the table as British citizens, the same can be expected of other ethnic and religious groups in Britain. Britain as a citizenship nation is fundamentally a polity of dialogue between multiple perspectives (Modood 2007).

The fact that Britain is a citizenship nation helps to explain why my interviewees often had difficulty articulating the value of their “Britishness,” beyond a set of rights and opportunities (see also Hussain and Bagguley 2007). Britishness – if it is anything – is a set of citizen rights, opportunities, and responsibilities. Yasmin, the young Bangladeshi dance artist, told me that she thinks of being British as a “space to develop.” It is within the norms and rules of the British state that one is freed to develop an identity, and eventually to make a civic contribution.

If “British” is a civic definition that joins together people with other identities they hold as core, then it is not problematic if British youth choose “Muslim first, and British second.” In doing so, they are following the accepted norm by which most Scottish would choose “Scottish first, British second.” Accepting that this is a valid way to prioritize identity, it becomes important to understand the various meanings youth may have if they choose Muslim first, Christian first, or black first (for example), as I have attempted to do here.

Second generation youth approaches to identity range from Damien’s all-inclusive list of twelve identities down to Khan’s singular and all-encompassing Muslimness. Jamaicans tend to have more open, flexible, and situational identities, while Bangladeshis were somewhat more sparing in their choices, almost always placing
Muslim first. These broad trends have implications for what youth will bring to the table as British citizens and for their potential levels of political participation.

Islam is an orienting identity for East End Bangladeshis. The process of deculturation, spearheaded by the East London Mosque, the Darrul Ummah Mosque, and other local organizations, is a reflection of broader currents with global revivalist Islam. Deculturation has spread to different degrees among different youth, but I was struck in my interviews that virtually every young Bangladeshi recognizes the argument that pure Islam should not be mixed with Bengali culture. Deculturation, and other overlapping processes like da’wa (missionary activity) and political mobilization, have largely eliminated the competition for primary allegiance in the East End. While Bangladeshi youth may interpret or practice Islam differently, very few would question its ultimate truth or its enjoining of particular actions. Muslim identity is therefore broad, and sometimes deep, as a foundation for collective political action in the East End.

Youth like Rubina from this chapter and Hamid, from Chapter 1, have grown to be highly articulate in their Muslim identity. Young people such as these are often highly active in the “alternative politics” that centers on the mosques and NGOs of the East End. Other youth, such as Farouq and Amin, may be further from the center of political activism, but the common ground of Muslim identity can often be enough to gain their signatures on a petition or their donation in a charity box. When I asked Farouq if he had voted, he told me that he had previously, for George Galloway of the RESPECT Party in 2005. However, at that time he was mainly responding to pressure: “I thought I had to [vote],” he told me, “I didn’t want to.” Direct pressure is unlikely to be applied often, but the culture of local political activism is strong and at times may be hard to resist. More
religiously extreme youth such as Khan can actually exert the opposite form of pressure. Khan takes the view that voting is forbidden, unless a nation is under Shariah Law. However, it is clear that in the East End today Khan is part of a small minority. Overall, Muslim identity has been effectively mobilized for political participation.

The dynamics in Brixton are significantly different. Brixton Jamaican youth can choose from a wide array of possible identities. Jamaican youth identities take the form of ‘new ethnicities’ which are more situational and hybrid than those of most Bangladeshis. Young men such as Johnny and Damien are skilled in multiple cultural contexts, and as such they may be well poised to succeed in different social worlds (Warikoo forthcoming 2011).

Yet the freedom and flexibility of “new ethnicities” makes for a shifting terrain of identities, in which common political agendas are elusive. Brixton is a place that is fragmented into various ethnic communities, some – such as Jamaicans and Nigerians – which exist in a certain rivalry or tension. The 1970s and 1980s were years of commonality in a black political agenda. In more ethnically complex times, no common identity, whether political, religious, or otherwise, has been able to carry the same unifying power.
CHAPTER 5
RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM:
BUILDING BLOCKS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

At noon on Saturday August 22, 2009, about three hundred people gathered at Westminster in London to march against gun and knife crime. The event was planned by the South London regional Seventh Day Adventist administration to take place on the Sabbath Day. It also included some participants from other denominations and religiously unaffiliated supporters who felt passionate about the issue. The protesters marched silently past Parliament carrying signs emblazoned with the acronym LIVE: “Living Intentionally Versus Existing.” Some larger banners had pictures of knives and guns. Hundreds of camera-toting tourists, finding their route to Big Ben and Westminster Abbey temporarily obstructed, waited by the road with quizzical stares.

The march continued from Westminster across the River Thames, on a three hour course into South London that followed blocked roads and police escorts. Although they remained silent through the Westminster portion, the marchers sang Christian worship songs together for the rest of their journey. The destination was Kennington Park in South London. There they were greeted upon arrival by free vegetarian food, a variety of booths and outdoor activities, and a program on the main stage of worship music, speeches against gun and knife violence, and the memorializing of victims.

---

66Seventh Day Adventists practice a Sabbath of rest and worship from sunset each Friday evening until sunset on Saturday. This includes holding their regular worship services on Saturdays, unlike most churches in the Christian tradition.
In this chapter I continue the discussion of how religious beliefs and practices contribute to the development of young citizens in London. In particular, I consider the ways in which religion influences youth to take different approaches to bringing *change* to their personal lives, to their communities, and (in some cases) to politics. In Chapter 2, I found that the political participation of most Bangladeshi youth in the East End is significantly higher than that of most Jamaican youth, according to well-accepted measures from Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley (2004). By profiling the LIVE event and a comparable grassroots event in the East End, I will argue here that religious conceptions of change are a key component of the political participation disparity.
The LIVE Event: Opposing Gun and Knife Crime, One Person at a Time

The Seventh Day Adventist LIVE march on Parliament, and the community event that followed it in Kennington Park, were geared primarily towards teenage youth. These events provided an ideal setting in which to observe young people engaging in faith-based civic activism. I had originally heard about the event from some of my Jamaican interviewees at the Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church. Johnny, an 18 year-old I interviewed months before, told me about the previous year when he had marched: “It was amazing! We had so many people ask us what we were doing it for. We were making them think about how they live their lives.”

The event in Kennington Park included various performances and activity booths that were run by the youth ministries of South London Adventist churches. The vast majority of congregants in these churches are African or Caribbean in origin, and this composition was mirrored that afternoon. In good Adventist tradition, the youth emphasis of the event was paired with an emphasis on family. Family members of crime victims were asked on the main stage to speak about how they keep going in light of tragic loss. An Adventist youth group performed a mime to dramatize the toll that gun crime takes on friendships and on families. A memorial service was held for the last half-hour of the afternoon, giving families time to process and remember together.

The main aim of the LIVE event, captured in the acronym “Living Intentionally Versus Existing,” was to encourage youth to think through how they live their lives, rather than blindly sliding into peer pressure and violence. A plywood wall at the back of the park had been painted sky blue. Youth were invited to put their handprints on the wall in white paint, pledging that these hands would never touch a knife or gun.
Alan James, a Caribbean man affected by gun crime, gave a spoken word performance. His assertive, powerful lyrics were wrought with emotion. They captured some of the tenor of the event:

…Put down the gun. Don’t want another brother die.  
Put down the gun. Don’t want another mother cry.  
Put down the gun. Don’t want to kill another wife.  
Put down the gun. Don’t want to spill another life.  
Put down the gun. Don’t want another sister dead.  
Put down the gun. Don’t want another Mr. Lead.  
Put down the gun and stop acting like a clown.  
Put down the gun… before the gun puts you down.

The crowd roared with applause.

I wandered through Kennington Park, visiting the LIVE event booths and speaking with young people in the crowd. I spoke with a group of three young black men, all age 19, who told me that they attend Adventist churches in Peckham and Kennington. I asked if they could relate to the message of the event. How much of a problem was gun and knife crime in these areas of South London? The flurry of responses from the young men came so quickly that their replies interrupted each other:

A: It’s ser-i-ous—  
B: —It’s got worse—  
A: —You wouldn’t believe it.  
B: It’s like, its normal. Before when we hear of it we were shocked, but now it’s normal…. You just get used to it—  
A: —It’s nothing new—  
C: —I’m not surprised at all—  
A: —It’s everybody. Very dangerous.  
B: That’s why I’m glad this sort of activity is happening.

The three young men went on to tell me that they each have friends or acquaintances who had stabbed or shot someone else. They see youth violence as an urgent problem that is only getting
worse. Even so, they expressed optimism about the LIVE event. I asked: What kind of lasting effect is it likely to have?

A: I hope this event really changes people’s minds.

B: Pray, not hope, pray.

For these three young people and others I met, the significance of the LIVE event was both the stand it took against youth violence and the power it had to change the lives of those gathered there. It is worth noting that they did not see it as part of an ongoing program of lobbying or activism, but rather as a day in which minds would be changed.

A talk delivered by Sam Davis was the centerpiece of the day’s events, and essential to understanding their intended purpose. Davis, a second-generation Jamaican man in his fifties, leads the South England Conference of Seventh Day Adventists (SEC). He was dressed in suit and tie and was introduced on the main stage as an honoured guest. When approaching the microphone, he held out his silver mobile phone PDA. He would look down at the PDA as his speech prompter.

Davis’ speech was, in fact, a sermon. It was delivered in a confident preacher’s cadence.

He began by reading Matthew 13:24-28, from the New King James Version:

Another parable he put forth to them, saying: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seeds in his fields. But while the man slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him: ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then, does it have tares?’ And he said to them ‘an enemy has done this.’”

In these New Testament verses, Christ tells a parable of a man who sowed good seeds. Only later does the man discover that tares – or weeds – have sprouted up alongside his intended good wheat. Sam Davis began explaining the parable to his Kennington Park audience by describing
the good world God created in the Garden of Eden. He said that God’s intention was only for
good to be sown in human lives:

   Everything that God had provided was just right. It was never God’s plan that sin and
death would enter that environment. It was never God’s plan that mothers and fathers
should weep for their children. Never in the script that young men should mow down
each other over turf warfare. Never in the script that drugs and violence should mar this
planet. God sowed only good seed in the earthly garden.

   By preaching in this way, Davis was connecting with street life experiences and stories
that would have been familiar to his audience. He was retelling these stories into a spiritual
grand-narrative of epic struggle between God and a deceptive enemy. Just who was the
interloper who had sown weeds in the field? Davis explained that this was the Devil: “We need
to de-mythologize the Devil,” he said, “We need to say he is real. We need to say the Devil is
not someone with horns and a tail, but he is real, and he wants our kids.”

   Davis recognized the Devil as an agent actively at work in society, an agent with a
cunning personality and evil motives. The Devil had sown bitter weeds of sin and death on
God’s territory. These weeds were the underlying cause of youth violence and the other social
problems in South London. To solve the social problems, therefore, one had to get personal.
One had to take on an alternative life free from the Devil’s influence. Davis explained the
solution in this way:

   Until we begin to teach our children that they have been made in the image of God, that
God loves them and that they need to love their fellow brothers and sisters, society will
have lost it.

Standing there in the crowd, it was at this moment that I realized what the anti-crime rally was
deep down. It was a revival meeting. The central purpose was to change hearts and minds, one
by one, so that they would come into a right relationship with God. If this sort of conversion was
achieved, then social change could be expected as a natural outflow. I will return to how Davis
expressed this view on change a bit later. For the moment, however, it is worth considering more generally if religious revival movements can be harbingers of real social change.

Some of the most powerful social movements in history have had a religious revivalist character. David Chappell (2003), in *A Stone of Hope*, argues the American Civil Rights movement was primarily a religious revival in the eyes of many of its participants and central figures. God was freeing His people from yokes of segregation and oppression. He was setting them in right relationships with their fellow men. It is well known that many of the other leaders of the Civil Rights movement were preachers, including the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., and that the movement gained momentum through networks of churches, such as those in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (Morris 1986). In the words of one of its towering figures, the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, the Civil Rights Movement was “a religious crusade, a fight between light and darkness, right and wrong, good and evil, fair play and tyranny. We are assured of victory because we are using weapons of spiritual warfare” (Shuttleworth 1963, quoted in Chappell 2003).

Just how does religion contribute to social action, both in Black Majority Ethnic Church settings and elsewhere? Over the past few decades, American sociologists have been particularly engaged in this question. Some of the earlier studies from Morris (1986) and from McAdam (1982) demonstrated the importance of church networks and resources for providing the structure that channels social movement growth. Mary Patillo-McCoy (1998) extended the research scope beyond structure to include church culture. She found that cultural practices in Black Churches – including prayer, call-and-response, and the Christian imagery of songs and sermons – provides the motivation and meaning for community actions. She perceived that behind these cultural
practices was a belief in an all-powerful, immanently active God who could galvanize change to surpass human limitations.

Richard Wood (2002) builds upon these previous research studies of structure and culture in his comparative book *Faith in Action*. Wood compares faith-based activist organization PICO with race-based activist organization CTWO, both in Oakland, California and both advocating for the disadvantaged. CTWO attempts to unify the interests of members of various races, as expressed in its organization leaflet: “We are Black, Latino, Native American, Asian, and White people of all ages and economic backgrounds who demand… power over issues that affect our lives.” The language here demonstrates CTWO’s recurrent challenge to create common purpose and unity from diversity. For faith-based PICO, in contrast, the cultural work of purpose and unity has already been accomplished within its partner network of religious congregations. Wood concludes from the comparison that religious congregations provide advantages to social movement organizing. Congregations are advantageous both because they are pre-existing reservoirs of social capital and because they gather around beliefs and symbols that are rich sources of human motivation. Confirmation of Wood’s research can be seen in the significant history of social movements that were at least partly congregation-powered. Twentieth Century examples in addition to the American Civil Rights Movement include the Solidarity Movement in Poland, the 1979 Revolution in Iran, and Anti-Apartheid in South Africa. Michael Walzer has argued for an even greater influence of religion, tracing the origins of political activism to the Calvinist revolutions and reforms of early modern Europe (Walzer 1982).

There may be, therefore, reason for optimism as we project the potential impact of the LIVE Event. Sam Davis’ speech certainly seemed to capture the imaginations of the audience that day. Returning to the speech, we have already seen that it took the form of a sermon in a
revival church service. Casting everyday problems into a spiritual cosmology, it gave the
audience evocative cultural resources and motivation that they might potentially use to resist gun
and knife violence.

Yet the speech and event were, at the same time, inherently self-limiting. The limits were
most evident as Sam Davis brought his sermon to its rhetorical crescendo [emphasis original]:

The politicians are looking for a solution, and they are saying that what we need is better
social housing, we need more mentors, we need better education, we need more youth
schemes and so on. But I want to say that we have tried it all and it has failed repeatedly.
We have tried these things and found that none of them have been successful. And so my
friends, I want to say to you today, having tried everything – having tried more social
work, having tried to put more policemen on the streets, having tried better education,
having tried better youth schemes – why don’t you try Jesus Christ! [crowd cheers]

Davis was presenting Jesus Christ as the ultimate resolution to youth violence. Within the terms
of the spiritual narrative he had presented thus far, this solution fit perfectly. But Davis’ words
also set boundaries on the process of social change, suggesting that Jesus Christ cannot work for
the good of society in mentoring relationships, improved education, and youth schemes.

Underlying Davis’ words is a particular perspective on how change can be produced. He
was arguing for personal faith as the causal mechanism that generates real and lasting change. I
have already observed the importance of personal faith when discussing Ruach Ministries in
Chapter 3. In the Brixton Seventh Day Adventist Church as well, faith was preached alongside
discipline as an approach to change. I have diagrammed the logic of the personal faith approach
in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 follows what has been called the DBO model of human action – desires (D),
beliefs (B), opportunities (O), and action (A) (see Hedström 2008). The figure shows the
internal states and external actions of two people, who are labelled with subscripts i and j.
Personal faith begins with a desire (D) for some outcome or some state of relationship. This
desire then shapes what the individual believes (B) is attainable in the outcome or relationship. The beliefs and desires are then able to work in concert and, if all goes well, they enable the action that the person desires. The mechanism is structurally equivalent (though not necessarily ultimately equivalent) to what sociologists have called “wishful thinking” (see Hedström 2008). A person with the lived experience of “personal faith” will perceive that there is a transcendent element – that God is at work in social change.

**Figure 5.2. Personal Faith as a Causal Mechanism of Individual and Social Change**

In the example of gun and knife crime, youth at the individual-level are expected to take their desires (D) for a safe and non-violent society and to combine these with a faith that this is attainable (B). In doing so, they become capable of achieving social change through their actions (A). Religious conversion is a related variant of the personal faith mechanism and may influence violent crime more indirectly: An individual’s desire (D) for God becomes a faith-held belief (B) that may influence later actions to be less violent (A). In both of these cases, the individual must place significant faith (B) in something not yet entirely substantiated to move the process forward. I have diagrammed the personal faith mechanism of two individuals separately in Figure 5.2, to emphasise that it is an atomistic process.
With personal faith as the individual-level building block, change occurs as more and more individuals act in faith (see Smith et. al. 1998). The many small actions of individuals aggregate at the social level into what can be called revival-activism. The narrative of revival-activism – that as more people take hold of faith they will make society better – is one that I often heard among Jamaican youth and in their churches. I also heard a Muslim variation of the narrative in some of my interviews with Bangladeshi youth.  

The revival-activism strategy for social change is certainly well intentioned. Personal faith and social revival were important in the powerful social movements for freedom and civil rights mentioned earlier in this chapter. Yet, those who believe exclusively in social change through revival-activism are blinded to structural factors. They are less likely to seek partnerships with other organisations, to initiate a long-term strategy of influence and activism, or to advocate for the structural changes (e.g., in education, the police force, or employment opportunities) that are almost always necessary to produce lasting change (Tilly 1999). Even if personal discipline is added to personal faith (as it will often be in an Adventist approach to activism) the neglect of structural factors in the revival-activism strategy will still be a weakness. 

As the LIVE event neared its end, I spoke with an official representative at the information booth. I learned from her that the Seventh Day Adventist Church was partnering with a charitable organisation called FAME (Families Against Murders Escalating) and sending donations from the event to further their work. This partnership has potential to make a positive

---

67 For example, the revival-based model of change is a recurrent message of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), a radical political activism organization which seeks the re-establishment of a Muslim caliphate. HT’s propaganda and events frequently invoke a utopian vision of life under a caliphate, as a much more Muslim populace governed by Sharia law finds itself free from crime, hunger, poverty, and other evils caused by not living under God’s given system. A few of my Bangladeshi youth interviewees held similar views on the caliphate. Many others expressed a general faith that personal conversion or renewal in Islam made one into a better member of society.
impact. When I asked the representative about how the gun and knife crime initiative would be
continued, however, the limits of the revival-activism strategy again became evident:

Daniel: What are you guys going to be doing to carry this forward from here?

Representative: As you see, all of these booths [at the sides of the park] are from different
churches.

Daniel: Oh – these are all from different churches?

Representative: Yeah…. Depending on the area, we could connect you with the church in
your area. And you could see whatever extra-curricular activities they have. For
example, tomorrow in the Hatfield area, at Hatfield University, we are organizing a
basketball tournament. We’ve done one earlier this year, and a lot of people who are not
necessarily Christian have come and played. So at least we are making connections with
them. And, you know, they can see that “I don’t have to be drinking, or carrying guns to
make friends, or doing drugs to have a group of friends.” You can have fun without
being into one of those. You can be sober and still enjoy life. So we’re at least
connecting through events like that.

A strategy of personal faith and revival as the basis for change can build personal
connections with youth susceptible to criminal involvement. Yet, with its exclusive reliance on
this “one person at a time” approach to change, the Adventist Church dramatically under-realizes
its potential influence on the violent crime issue. Reflecting on the LIVE march and event
overall, one can see a strange ambivalence. The march resembled a typical protest on Parliament
to demand political change. Yet any message of such change was somewhat neutralized by the
event at Kennington Park, where the main speaker and the organizers expressed little faith in
political action.

**The Big IFtar: Breaking a Ramadan Fast for the Hungry and Homeless**

The Saturday of the LIVE march against gun and knife crime also happened to be the
first full day of Ramadan 2009. As Seventh Day Adventists protested at Parliament, Muslims
throughout London were fasting from food and drink. The East End areas surrounding
Whitechapel Road and Brick Lane, where I was doing research fieldwork with Bangladeshis,
dramatically changed in atmosphere during the month of Ramadan. Friday prayers overflowed with people. Some of the normally non-practicing Muslim young men I knew begin to wear prayer caps and to dutifully attend evening Qur’an recitations and prayers. After sunset, there was a tangible sense of relief in breaking the fast with iftar meals together as crowds of the grateful descended on local curry houses and chicken shops.

During Ramadan 2009 I attended the Big IFtar, a Muslim civic activism event concerning the issue of homelessness. The community iftar meal was held outdoors on a cool Friday evening in early September. IF Charity organized the event to raise donations towards meals for “homeless people in London as well as displaced communities around the world.” The event took place in Altab Ali Park, a modest park near the Western edge of Whitechapel Road that has monuments commemorating Bangladeshi history. A crowd of about 200 people of all ages, largely Bangladeshi and Muslim, stood in the park for the introductory program. Most remained afterwards to share in the iftar curry.

IF Charity had invited celebrities to serve as honorary chefs at the large white cooking tents. Baroness Pola Uddin, reality television star Syed Ahmed, and other notable Bengalis momentarily stirred pots of iftar dinner and posed for photographs. Across from the cooking tents stood the main stage, the focal point for the introductory program of speeches and

---

68 IF Charity is a young charitable organization whose first sponsored event was the Gaza 100 of summer 2009, a 100-meter relay run that raised money to assist children in Gaza. The IF website provides little information about the organization’s aims or ethos, but it is a Muslim organization at least partly intended for joining together the work of other Muslim charities in London.

69 Altab Ali Park has an emotional resonance for many Bangladeshis. It is named after a 25 year old Bangladeshi man who in 1978 was murdered in a racist attack on his way home from textile work on Hanbury Street. Altab Ali is commemorated by a sculpted iron gateway at one entrance to the park. In a corner of the park is the Shaheed Minar, a replica of the monument in Dhaka to martyrs of the Bengali Language Movement. These martyrs set in motion the violent struggle in East Pakistan that culminated in independence for Bangladesh.
performances. These included a stand up comedian, a personal testimony from a black Muslim convert, various speeches from politicians and charity workers, and musical acts.

Figure 5.3. The Big Iftar Charity Event, 2009

The white English Muslim music artist named Naseeha performed on stage in white hip hop style baggy clothes and a cap. He sang two nasheed⁷⁰ songs with a vocals-only R&B sound. The first song resounded with a message of person-based faith change. It closely resembled the main message I had heard at the LIVE march:

---

⁷⁰Nasheeds are a contemporary form of Muslim music that is sung without instrumental accompaniment (except percussion, in some cases). The music takes this form to match particular Muslim views on the forms of music are Islamically permitted. Nasheeds have grown in popularity among Muslim youth in the West, especially those from popular artists such as Zain Bhikha and Yusuf Islam (formerly Cat Stevens).
Al-lah, help us change,
to make the world a better place.
Al-lah, help us see,
the error of our ways.

Naseeha mentioned that his second song, “Peace, Justice, and Harmony” has been played on the Islam Channel. In the course of the song he told a biography of the Prophet Muhammad. The song’s chorus flows from the example of Muhammad’s life to put Islam forward as the only way to achieve the changes the world needs:

Peace, justice, and harmony,
that’s what we need today.
Peace, justice, and harmony,
it’s the only way.

Performances at the Big IIftar were largely, though not exclusively, aimed towards young people. Along each side of the park stood additional booths of information and activities. Most of these booths also had a youth theme. One booth advertised an Islamic comic series called *The Adventures of Hakim: Streetwise Champion* with the tagline “The hero for the Ummah is back!” Another provided print resources from the Young Muslims Organisation (YMO), such as manuals for students seeking to improve their school’s or university’s Islamic society.

I spoke with the Bangladeshi young man running the YMO booth. As with the LIVE event, I was hoping to discern the lasting effects this community event might have. The youth told me about his organisation’s partnership with IF Charity:

The main thing is that all of this [event today] is for IF. They’re a Muslim organisation that’s trying to feed the homeless people. We set up a meeting with this organisation, to come and join with them and work together. So that’s what we’re doing.

Organizational partnerships were an important contrast between the Big IIftar and the LIVE event. At the LIVE event, the only partnership outside the Seventh Day Adventist denomination itself was with FAME. In comparison, the Big IIftar was facilitated by an enviable
list of organizational partnerships. IF Charity had brought together various organizations for an overall initiative called IFtar 10,000 that would distribute 10,000 meals for displaced or homeless people around the world. Flyers explained that a gift of £10 would provide 10 meals over the next 10 days in 10 world “countries”: The United Kingdom, Somalia, Bosnia, Sudan, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Palestine, and Kashmir. In order to accomplish this sensitive global task, seven partner Muslim NGOs71 had been enlisted as iftar meal distributors. For example, Muslim Aid provided meals in Somalia and Bangladesh, while Human Appeal did so in Afghanistan. The beginning of the UK meal distribution took place at the Big IFtar itself for homeless people from the local area. Additional UK meals were supported at four Christian and secular London charities for the homeless: The Salvation Army, the Whitechapel Mission, Providence Row, and Thames Reach.

How was social change on the issue of homelessness understood, and practiced, in the context of the Big IFtar event? In part, social change was seen as an outcome of a personal faith put into action, as expressed in Naseeha’s song “Allah Help us Change.” In this way, change could be achieved through a kind of revival-activism. A second component of social change was through partnership with existing non-governmental organizations, demonstrated by IF Charity’s distribution of meals through a globally-linked network of NGO affiliates. The third component, mostly left implicit during the event, was social change through what I call “pillared activism.”

By pillared activism, I am referring to actions for social change built on the rituals of Islamic practice, particularly the Five Pillars of Islam. The Five Pillars are shahada (confession of faith), salah (prayer), sawm (fasting during Ramadan), zakat (alms giving), and hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). Most of these pillars are repeated each day (prayer and confession during

71The seven Muslim NGOs who distributed iftar meals were Muslim Hands, Muslim Aid, Islamic Help, Muslim Charity, Islamic Relief, Human Appeal International, and InterPalestine.
prayer) or each year (fasting and alms giving). Therefore if Pillars are a basis for activism, the activism can have the consistency of being undergirded by regular practice. I will highlight two mechanisms of pillared activism: 1) solidarity through ritual and 2) social change through ritual.

**Figure 5.4. Solidarity through Ritual as a Causal Mechanism of Individual and Social Change**

The causal mechanism of solidarity through ritual was difficult to perceive at the Big IFtar simply because it remained in the background. I have diagrammed the mechanism in Figure 5.4. It begins with a collective ritual action (A) that is repeated regularly, as shown by the repetition arrow. The action (A) in the diagram has two subscripts together, for person i and person j, to demonstrate that it is collective. Muslim prayer is the archetypal example of a repeated collective ritual action. Many East End Bangladeshi Muslims perform prayer five times each day, with men being more likely than women to have the opportunity to do so collectively. A collective ritual action produces common desires (D), beliefs (B), and opportunities (O)\(^72\) in the persons who engage in it, and the similarity of these DBO’s is reinforced by the repetition of

\(^{72}\)The capacity of collective ritual action to form common desires and beliefs is easy to understand, but perhaps the formation of common “opportunities” is not. Some common opportunities can come out of collective action simply because participants are in the same place at the same time. For example, men who attend the same mosque for prayer may have a common opportunity to sign a petition as they leave the mosque, or their conversations after mosque may lead to other joint opportunities.
the action. In other words, participants in the collective ritual develop solidarity with each other. The developed desires, beliefs, and opportunities are likely to cause further actions \((A_{ij})\) that are taken in solidarity, as well as to produce some independent actions for each person \((A_i, A_j)\).

Although prayer is the most obvious example of the development of Muslim solidarity through ritual, other Pillars of Islam can contribute to this solidarity as well. The common experience of fasting during Ramadan can draw Muslims together and provide an added social significance to breaking the fast in a communal *iftar* (Winchester 2008). *Hajj*, though many Muslims will only experience it once in a lifetime, has a high potential to contribute to solidarity through the ritual actions that are performed in Mecca. Interestingly, the feeling of internal solidarity does not necessarily lead to intolerance of outsiders. A recent study of Pakistanis returning from *hajj* determined that they had developed both a greater solidarity with fellow Muslims *and* a greater tolerance for diverse others, because in their practice of common rituals they had been exposed to a great diversity of people (Clingingsmith et. al. 2008).

A sense of “kinship” (see Ebaugh 2000) develops as Muslims participate in collective rituals together over the course of years. Each additional collective action may further reinforce the feeling of brotherhood or sisterhood, which can be felt even more strongly than kinship within the consanguineal family. Because of the feeling of common kinship, many actions taken in solidarity do not need a rational motivation beyond the sense of common connection with others.

Solidarity through ritual, experienced by many Muslims as kinship, was an underlying mechanism of the civic action at the Big IFtar. Immediately prior to the event, many of the Muslims attending had engaged in Friday congregational prayers together at the nearby East London Mosque. As the *iftar* feast ended, it would be time to join in prayer again. The presence
of prayer before and after the Big IFtar event seemed to draw individuals into a similar frame of mind. Solidarity could also be seen in the practice of the common iftar meal at the event, down to the small detail that everyone broke the fast together with the customary eating of a date.

The second mechanism of pillared activism is social change through ritual. While solidarity through ritual can motivate actions for social change, in some cases Islamic rituals are themselves vehicles of social change. Zakat is a good example of social change through ritual. Finances given through zakat contribute to social change because they are part of an Islamic system of redistributive justice. Zakat can thus be thought of as a form of obligatory activism (if this is not too paradoxical).

Because Bangladeshis in the East End are so far from their country of origin, many give their zakat to British-based Islamic NGOs who redistribute it to the poor around the world (De Cordier 2009). This contrasts with Bangladeshis who live in Bangladesh, or even Maghrebi immigrants in France, who can more easily send funds to the poor at home through traditional means. Partly for this reason, the UK has the most well-developed Islamic NGO sector of any Western country (Adamson and DeHanas 2010).

The main collective civic outcome of the Big IFtar was voluntary charitable giving, a practice known in Islamic terms as sadaqa. Young IF Charity volunteers with donation boxes roved around the event soliciting £10 charitable gifts. Event speakers invoked kinship solidarity frequently to mobilize charitable giving. Local Councillor Abjol Miah’s speech at Big IFtar showed his particular skill at mobilizing action through kinship solidarity.

Miah is a medium build second-generation Bangladeshi man in his late thirties. He rose to prominence in Tower Hamlets politics when as a RESPECT Party candidate he defeated talented Labour politician and professor Michael Keith in 2006. Miah is a regular personality on
the local Muslim radio program Easy Talk. He identifies himself and his political stances primarily with Muslim issues. As Miah took the Big IFtar stage, he began his remarks by acknowledging the diversity of the crowd and stating that the occasion was significant:

[Today’s iftar is] a great opportunity for us to break our fast in an open way, remembering and sharing our meal with the homeless people in London…. Today this iftar is a unique iftar, where we will be able to share with each other, people of all backgrounds, people of all faiths and no faith, where the concept of Ramadan will be shared.

With these opening words, Miah described iftar as a community meal that had brought together local ethnic, religious, and socio-economic diversity. Miah’s words cited unity in a common humanity, using the term “people” to represent everyone in the crowd at Altab Ali Park. In his next section of the speech, the word “people” would undergo a subtle but significant shift in meaning, as Miah’s frame of reference moved from local to global:

But most importantly, let us not forget the thousands of lives who don’t have shelter in the UK and around the world. And many who suffer under tyranny, under oppression, many who will have to break their fast in open cold, where there’s no home for them to shelter. When we break our fast we know that there is room for many of us. But there are many around the world with no guarantee they will get their meal. So in solidarity with people around the world, for the people who suffer, for those who are homeless, this is a unique opportunity to break the fast.

Miah was now speaking the language of kinship solidarity. Although he said broadly that he sought “solidarity with people around the world,” it was safe for him to assume that most of the audience understood these people to be fellow Muslims. At an iftar event that sponsored meals in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Kashmir, the images Miah evoked were of the effects of tyranny and oppression on the Muslim poor. These words may have ignited in his listeners deep emotions of family connection and collective urgency. Kinship solidarity, which had been built through the communal practices of prayer, fasting, and fast-breaking, could now be channelled into charitable giving.
Miah’s rhetoric of kinship solidarity mirrored what I had frequently heard in other Muslim fundraising and political events. The event provides an example of pillared activism (the conjoining of Islamic practice with political practice), which has influenced the high rate of Bangladeshi youth political participation in the East End. As Abjol Miah concluded his speech about global poverty, he brought forward its implications for local area politics:

I have with me Councillor Mamun Rashid from Shadwell Ward. We are RESPECT Councillors working hard, to bring respect back into politics, to bring respect back into the community, to make our charities successful. And IF Charity is our number one charity at the moment. It has had the opportunity to unite all the other charities together.

Sam Davies at the LIVE event had eschewed calls to political action. Abjol Miah, in contrast, directly connects Muslim activism and charity with the agenda of the RESPECT Party. Unlike the revival-activism of LIVE, Miah and other Muslim RESPECT Councillors have a sustained presence in local Tower Hamlets politics, ensuring that representation of their activist agenda remains ongoing.

The collective action of the Big IFtar had been built on the solid support of pillared activism through fasting, prayer, and charitable giving. The giving that resulted was channelled through effective organizational networks. As such, the results of the Big IFtar event were tangible: It contributed to the delivery of 10,000 meals worldwide. Islamic practice and the solidarity that results had been central to enabling this effectiveness.

The Queen Mary University (QMU) prayer room controversy, described in Chapter 2, has also developed into an example of pillared activism. When I interviewed Hamid in December 2008 he was helping to spearhead the Islamic Society’s (ISoc) efforts for prayer room policy change. The QMU administration had designated the former Muslim prayer room as a multi-faith room, an action that Hamid said has “really affected the work of the Islam Society.”
The ISoc had tried many methods of advocacy, including writing letters and signing petitions, but at that time did not believe it was ready for more confrontational measures such as protests.

Hamid has since finished his studies at QMU. In Autumn 2009, under new leadership, the Queen Mary ISoc took the prayer room controversy to a new level. The ISoc began to protest the administration’s decision – through protests of a uniquely Islamic style. They organized outdoor prayers to take place in front of the main university administrative building. Dozens of young Muslim men stood together to prostrate in rows, praying in the public space to communicate their need for consistent prayer space. The prayer room campaign adopted the slogan: “The right to pray, throughout the day.” The argument was that space for Islamic prayer is intrinsic to the human right of freedom of worship.

The prayer protests were part of a coordinated campaign, organized through Facebook, YouTube, a campaign blog, and grassroots personal contact. By the end of the semester, a compromise was reached with the university. The administration granted more Muslim-specific prayer time in rooms around campus, but it retained the multi-faith room. The Queen Mary ISoc published an open letter on January 4, 2010, to explain the compromise. I include part of the letter here:

After a semester of activities directed towards increasing access to prayer rooms for brothers and sisters, we would like everyone to be aware of what progress has been made… [listing of specific agreements with the university about prayer times]

We are working with the College, Student Union and other faith societies to ensure there is as little conflict as possible. This is not the final step; our goal [is] to expand opening hours, have a Qur’an rack and display posters. These are all goals which we will continue to work towards, via the multifaith centre user forum et cetera.

Most importantly we would like to express our gratitude to Allah (‘azza wa jal)- without Whom no good is possible. And after that, every single brother and sister who spent their time, money and effort- be it with their du’a, selling cakes, making banners, organising jumu’ah, printing flyers, publicizing the campaign blog or even just by being there and voting with your feet. May Allah reward you all….
The Queen Mary prayer room controversy is an intriguing microcosm of Britain’s broader challenges with religious pluralism and the participation of Muslims in civil society. It provides an example of a creative, multi-faceted, and pillared campaign for policy change. As the ISoc letter states: “This is not the final step.” The issues at stake involve the regular religious practice of prayer, which in the British context has been imbued with the significance of a fundamental human right. These are issues that are unlikely to fade in the foreseeable future.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION: BELIEVING CITIZENS

What kinds of citizens are London’s second generation youth becoming? The answer, in part, is “believing citizens.” Most of the Bangladeshi youth I interviewed devote at least as much time and energy to religious faith as their parents do. In many cases they devote far more. Likewise for a substantial number of Jamaican youth religion is an important and prioritized part of life. In fact, religion had some relevance to every one of the young people I interviewed\(^{73}\) – whether it was taken for granted, questioned, reacted against, or wholeheartedly accepted.

The emphasis on religion in this dissertation should not obscure the ordinariness of second generation youth lives. As 18 year-old Tariq told me, he thinks his life is quite average: “We’re just Muslims, chilled out, go to college, saving up to buy a PS3.” To an outsider, five daily prayers might seem like an overwhelming load, or the supernatural dimension of Pentecostalism may be hard to comprehend. But to many children of immigrants in London’s East End or in Brixton, these religious elements are a regular part of life experience. Regardless of religiosity, the youth I interviewed had strikingly similar worries and concerns. When I asked young Bangladeshis and Jamaicans about the biggest problem in their respective local areas, the three most commonly cited responses from both groups were an urban triad of drugs, gangs/violence, and

\(^{73}\)I know this because all youth either ranked a religion related item as part of their identity during the identity ranking exercise in Chapter 4, or explained to me why they do not relate to religion. All youth mentioned religion in one way or another before any direct prompting from me about it.
unemployment. Religious problems did not feature as prominently (e.g., Islamophobia, radicalism, religious discrimination), at least not as local area issues. Many of the personal life concerns voiced by youth were simply those common to people who are coming of age in the West: Getting a job or building a career, making good friends, finding a life partner, or starting a family.

Yet “believing” does make a difference to the kinds of citizens young people become. The three main visions of the good citizen that have been put forward by the British state in recent years are the participating citizen, the politically literate citizen, and the patriotic citizen (à la Gordon Brown). In Chapter 2, I demonstrated that second generation Bangladeshi Muslims (as a group) are model citizens in terms of both their political literacy and participation. Bangladeshi Muslims with high religiosity have highest rates of political participation of any subgroup in this study.

Why are young Bangladeshis, particularly the most religious ones, becoming politically literate and participating citizens? There are at least two main reasons. The first is that British foreign policy (in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere) and British domestic counterterrorism policy have both provided strong impetus for seeking political change. The second reason, which explains the particular strength of political participation in the East End, is that Bangladeshi youth are mobilized by local mosques and organizations, which are simultaneously transnationally connected and locally savvy.

I explained the process of Muslim youth mobilization in Chapters 3 to 5. In a nutshell: Many second generation youth feel ashamed of, emotionally distant from, or constrained in choices by their parents from Bangladesh, who usually have humble origins and a limited grasp of English language and culture. Well-resourced mosques in
the East End, particularly the East End Mosque yet also Darrul Ummah, promote a
community-oriented, global-revivalist, and deculturated form of Islam that these youth
find attractive, especially as they attempt to define themselves in distinction from the
traditional cultural Islam of their parents. Muslim identity becomes the primary
citizenship identity of nearly all Bangladeshi youth in the East End, providing moral
orientation and a community of reference for civic activism. Coincident with these
developments in identity is Islamic practice, which buttresses political participation.

Youth activism is ‘pillared’ by Islamic ritual, because repeated practice – especially of
the Islamic Pillars of prayer, fasting, and alms giving – creates in youth a sense of kinship
solidarity. Islamic practices are also often political acts in and of themselves (e.g., *zakat*
is an action of redistributive justice). Thus, it is the combination of unrivalled Muslim
identity, the pillaring support of practice, and widely available political opportunities that
cultivate young Bangladeshis into politically participating citizens.

Bryan Turner (2008) insightfully summarizes the global forces that contribute to
Islamic revival and deculturation, and is worth quoting at length. The macro processes he
outlines have shaped the character of East End civic engagement:

The globalization of the migrant labour market has been one cause of the
globalization of world religions, especially Islam, and the creation of new
diasporic religious identities. Many diasporic Muslim youth, once outside their
original homelands, have abandoned the traditional religion of their parents and
have embraced various forms of renewal and revivalism. These religious changes
often involve a greater emphasis on personal piety and stricter religious adherence
to the reformed standards of modern Islam. Social and geographical mobility
have produced a redefinition of Islam as a modern, transnational identity in a
context where citizenship identity is often denied or delayed (Roy 2003). These
changes have been reinforced by the growth of literacy, the expansion of higher
education, and the introduction of women into the formal labour market. In
general, this amounts to a 'pietisation' of religious practices, indeed to a new urban
imaginary of anti-secular spirituality.
A sizable proportion of young Bangladeshis are highly articulate like Hamid (Chapter 2) and Rubina (Chapter 4), and they have been at the forefront of Islamic youth activism in the East End. For these youth, Islam has become a meaningful source of belonging and morality from which they proactively contribute to British life. About half of East End Bangladeshis are more like Farouq from Chapter 4, who also considers “Muslim” to be his most salient identity. Yet Farouq holds his faith tacitly, being more concerned for the moment with meeting girls and having a good time. Young people like Farouq are not activists, but many of them can be called upon to sign a petition or perhaps to vote. Finally, there are youth like Khan (Chapter 4) whose hyper-Islamist identity has eliminated any allegiance to Britain or to the Bengali community. Extremist youth such as Khan are a very small minority in the East End (2 or 3 out of my 36 Bangladeshi interviewees). However they can be a vocal minority through groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir or Al-Muhajiroon and its offshoots, and sometimes they may influence or intimidate youth like Farouq.

Today in the East End, the more constructive forms of Islamic engagement that Hamid exemplifies are having greater traction among the second generation than extremism does. Yet all of the youth I have mentioned here – Hamid, Rubina, Farouq, and Khan – have developed their views of Islam in the context of the East London Mosque, demonstrating both the broad reach of this mosque and the divergent ways in which its deculturated message can be adopted.

74I sampled more than a third of my Bangladeshi interviewees from mosques. It can be expected that a sample taken entirely from street recruitment would find a lower proportion of “extremist” Muslims.
Jamaican second generation youth in Brixton also show rather high levels of political literacy. Yet their participation in political activities is much lower than the average for Bangladeshis. Religiosity does not have a demonstrable impact, positive or negative, on Jamaican political participation.

Second generation Jamaicans have in large part left the traditional first generation religious institutions of their parents, much as Bangladeshis have. For the Jamaican young adults who do attend church, the most popular choice in Brixton is the megachurch Ruach Ministries or one of many smaller Pentecostal or Neo-Pentecostal churches. My observations at Ruach demonstrate that its youth ministry is a welcoming place for young people to come “as they are,” bringing both their personal struggles and life ambitions. Ruach’s youth ministry can galvanize young people to significant achievements. In some cases, such as Samuel in Chapter 4, involvement in a church like Ruach provides youth with the identity, mentoring, and motivation to escape delinquency and move into an entirely new lifestyle.

The individual-based ministry at Ruach, however, does not provide a strong motivation for political action. Although Youth Pastor Mark Liburd is commendable for mentioning political candidates during election seasons and for encouraging voting, his message has not been taking root. In part the issue is that the individual-based ethos of the church – “where everybody is a somebody” – does not provide for much youth engagement with the community outside church doors. Local engagement is limited also because the majority of attendees do not live in the local area. Likewise Mike (Chapter 2) is representative of the many Jamaican youth who do not think that British politicians or political structures serve them well, especially on moral and faith issues.
In large part, the difference between Bangladeshi and Jamaican political participation comes down to identity. The 1970s and 1980s were the height of black identity politics in Britain, including significant activism in Brixton. The black identity consensus has since faded, in part due to the rise of hybrid and mixed race identification in Britain. Indeed, among the young Jamaicans I interviewed there were various identity options which individuals might value, and these did not cohere into a clear pattern. The Brixton area is highly diverse, perhaps even ethnically fragmented. The background conditions for a strong identity-based politics do not exist in Brixton like they do in the East End, whether that identity were to be based on faith, race, or ethnicity.

Of course an absence of identity politics is certainly not a problem in itself. There may be other ways of motivating young Jamaicans into political participation. One possibility would be to develop a greater sense of locality politics in Brixton. There are currently efforts towards this, including the Brixton Pound introduced in September 2009 by TransitionTown Brixton. The Brixton Pound is a local currency accepted by many stores that features pictures of famous former residents on the bank notes, and encourages the localization of commerce. However, the political boundaries of the wards that compose Brixton mitigate the development of a local political identity. The four wards in Brixton slice right through its center, dividing it into three different electoral zones for Parliament. It is thus difficult for MPs or local Councillors to claim to “represent” Brixton.

The four former residents on the Brixton Pound notes are Olive Morris (Brixton Black Women’s Group activist), James Lovelock (environmentalist who developed Gaia Theory), C. L. R. James (Trinidadian socialist thinker), and artist Vincent Van Gogh, who lived in Brixton at age 20 and was marked by his experience of poverty there.
Present Realities, Future Hopes

This dissertation began by referencing Christopher Caldwell’s (2009) *Reflections on a Revolution in Europe*. Caldwell’s book raises the question: “Can [Britain] be the same with different people in it?”

Britain, of course, will never return to its bygone days of Empire. As a postcolonial nation, it has transformed into a multi-ethnic one. While British investment in former colonies dissolved, migrants travelled to the “Mother Country” in search of economic opportunities. A well-known anti-discrimination slogan pithily expresses the present realities: “We are here because you were there.” In somewhat different words during an interview in Brixton, 18 year-old Mabel turned Caldwell’s kind of question around: “It’s true, we don’t come from here. It is true. But at the end of the day I am here. What are you going to do about it?”

Caldwell’s concern, of course, is not with immigration or religion broadly speaking, but with Islam in particular. He believes that Muslim youth are becoming adversarial separatists in European societies. However, Caldwell’s analysis is built upon reactionary news coverage of radicalism and terrorism, resulting in arguments that are overly-alarmist. As Caldwell’s writing relies so heavily on particular radical strains of Islam, it amplifies the words of a small and vocal minority at the expense of presenting a balanced perspective.

76For example, Caldwell includes sections in the book called “Hyper-Identities” and “Dual Loyalty” (pages 129-135) that cover the same thematic ground as Chapter 4 on identity and loyalty in this dissertation. Most of the quotes Caldwell uses on these pages to substantiate his views are from British Muslims. Yet he has selected quite a skewed sample of spokespersons: Imran Waheed of the radical organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, Omar Abdullah of the radical organization al-Muhajiroon, and “a Syrian trained exile from Birmingham.” Inayat Bunglawala of the Muslim Council of Britain is the sole voice
My attempt in this dissertation has been to give voice to a broad segment of second generation youth in London, while investigating how religious faith influences their approaches to citizenship. The research methodology I used to recruit my interviewees – composing a broadly representative “street” sample and complementing this with a more in-depth religious institutions sample – have been designed to help re-balance our perspective. Likewise, the comparative dimension of this dissertation helps to expand questions of faith and civic engagement beyond the usual ‘suspect community’ of British Muslims.

This dissertation’s title, *Believing Citizens*, has a dual meaning. It refers not only to the types of citizens I encountered, but also to the need for listening to and “believing in” these citizens (see Back 2007). While British policymaking on South Asian Muslims has been uneasy and circuitous (Bail Forthcoming), Afro-Caribbean faith institutions have simply had little political consequence (Muir 2010). It is hoped that this dissertation will facilitate taking young citizens more seriously and that it could encourage investment in increasing their participation.

There are already encouraging signs of the potential for increasing the political involvement of London’s ethnic minority youth. The role of London’s black churches in politics has increased in only a few years, and these could provide new avenues for youth participation. The Seventh Day Adventist LIVE March in August 2009 was an impressive sign of church civic engagement. Even if the message of the march was politically minimalist, it nonetheless brought many young people out for their first ever public demonstration.

included in these sections who might be expected to express concerns common to a large segment of British Muslims.
Black British church involvement in politics was symbolically validated in March 2006, when Prime Minister Tony Blair invited a select group of black church and community leaders to a meeting at 10 Downing Street. The meeting was followed by the Power of One Conference held at Ruach Ministries, Brixton, where Blair was the keynote speaker. From the podium of Ruach, the Prime Minister praised black churches and encouraged them to action:

“Churches such as yours have long been the bedrock of our local communities…. Your organizations have a crucial campaigning role. They are not political in the sense that the parties are. But they do engage in the important issues of their day – they cannot but do so. They are political but with a small p.”

Tony Blair’s recognition of black churches was a milestone in British politics. Yet it is clear that these churches remain in early stages in terms of effective political engagement. Councillor Lorna Campbell, a local politician in South London, is one of a small number of Black British politicians who openly integrates her faith into politics. Campbell notes that: “In terms of political influence in respect to policy formation, there has been little if any indication that churches with Black leadership are playing a significant role, both at national and local level” (quoted in Muir 2010). In part, this is due to a low level of black representation in significant political positions. In a Parliament of 643 members there are currently 15 ethnic minority MPs. Five of these are British African or Caribbean and ten are British Asian. A total of 51 ethnic minority MPs would be needed for representation to reach parity with the Britain’s 8% minority population (Meer and Modood 2009).

According to Ashok Viswanathan of Operation Black Vote, “There is a direct link between people seeing Black faces in high places and feeling that the democratic process is something that belongs to them and something that they want to take part in” (quoted
in Meer and Modood 2009). It seems that the issue of representation may be accentuated for black youth, who are doubly distanced from typical British politicians by their ethnicity and age. With such issues in mind, Operation Black Vote has launched a national campaign with twenty (mostly youthful) black male role models, such as politicians, business executives, and a Royal Navy engineer, who have been commissioned to speak to young people across Britain (Woolley 2008).

At the time of writing (late April 2010), there are intriguing developments in the upcoming British Parliamentary elections on May 6th. Besides the much publicized rise of third party politics led by Liberal Democrat Nick Clegg, this could be a watershed year for ethnic minority representation. By one estimate, the total number of ethnic minority Members of Parliament could double from 15 to about 30 (Umunna quoted in Ogongo 2010). Some of the most prominent MP election battles in the country are currently being waged in the South and East London areas I studied in this dissertation. I will now profile three prominent Parliamentary candidates in these areas, all of whom can be considered young members of the second generation.

Chuka Umunna is the 31 year-old Labour Party Candidate running for the Streatham seat in Parliament. The Streatham constituency includes the wards of Brixton Hill and Tulse Hill, covering much of my fieldwork site in central Brixton. Umunna is presently an employment lawyer with strong Labour Party connections. He is considered an up-and-coming figure in British politics.

Umunna is mixed race, with a Nigerian father and an Irish/English mother. He says of his racial background: “Being mixed race, I can operate in any environment, but I don’t walk into a room and think, ‘I am the only black person here.’ It’s not something I
generally think about. When you open your mouth people tend to be interested in your ideas rather than what you look like” (quoted in Shah 2009). Having grown up in the constituency he is highly articulate about local issues and seems at ease when speaking with the press. Umunna was chosen by *The Independent* (2010) as one of the British politicians who most successfully uses Twitter to communicate with his supporters.

Unsurprisingly, Chuka Umunna’s post-racial politics and shrewd use of social networking media have led to speculation that he could have the eventual makings of a “British Obama” (e.g., Bright 2009). These dreams are quite premature, as Umunna has yet to win his first political election and himself downplays the Obama comparison (Umunna 2008). Perhaps more important is Umunna’s ability to relate to young people, his own youthfulness, and his mastery of local issues. He says “I am part of a new generation which, contrary to popular myth, is not apathetic about politics but disdainful of party politics and the traditional ways of doing things” (quoted in Ogongo 2010).

Umunna spoke at Ruach Ministries in June 2008 as part of the church’s celebration event for Bishop John Francis’ 25th year in ministry. Ruach, on Brixton Hill, sits within the Streatham constituency. Because Umunna has developed a bridge-building persona, he praised the church but did not elaborate on his specific faith convictions.

Chuka Umunna’s broadminded approach to politics could indeed be well suited to the diverse area that he hopes to represent. Candidates like Umunna, who can connect with black and mixed race youth and with people of many other backgrounds, may over time play a critical role in diminishing the Black British youth deficit in political participation.
Looking to the East, the Bethnal Green & Bow constituency in London’s East End has become a fiercely contested election battleground in 2010. The constituency fully encompasses the East End areas of Whitechapel and Spitalfields where I conducted fieldwork. The four main candidates for the seat are all Bangladeshi. The winner will become the first Bangladeshi Member of Parliament. Rushanara Ali of the Labour Party and Abjol Miah of the relatively new RESPECT Party (founded 2004) are the two electoral favorites.

Labour Candidate Rushanara Ali grew up in the East End and attended its well-known Mulberry School for Girls. A strong student, Ali continued on to study at Oxford and has since then held various positions in policy institutes and in local initiatives, such as helping to form the Tower Hamlets Summer University. Ali would be the first Muslim female Member of Parliament. Her policy credentials, fluency in communicating with locals of various backgrounds, and very solid support from the Labour establishment would seem to give Ali the edge in the election.

Yet Abjol Miah’s election campaign has become a force to be reckoned with. Miah is the Local Councillor who was introduced in Chapter 5 as a speaker at the Big IFtar rally. He grew up in the East End, where he has been a youth worker and martial arts teacher. Miah’s political ambitions developed out of his reputation for activism against the U.S.-Britain led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the 2005 General Election, Miah helped to orchestrate maverick politician George Galloway’s appeal to Muslims in the Bethnal Green & Bow constituency on a strong anti-war platform. Galloway won the

---

77The two candidates not profiled here are Liberal Democrat Ajmal Masroor, a charismatic young imam and Islam Channel Presenter, and Conservative Zakir Khan, a community affairs coordinator. Neither candidate has a realistic chance of winning, but both could affect the outcome.
Parliament seat, primarily due to the Muslim protest-vote, ousting veteran incumbent Oona King. Abjol Miah is a fighter. He won his own battle for a local Council seat against Labour Party sociologist *cum* politician Michael Keith to take a leadership role in the Tower Hamlets Council. Now that George Galloway is stepping aside from Bethnal Green & Bow to run for a neighboring seat, the street smart Abjol Miah has a plausible chance of becoming a Parliamentarian himself.

Abjol Miah’s political ascendancy is interesting because it has been built upon the social forces explained in this dissertation. Miah’s family moved from Sylhet to the East End when he was six months old. He has grown up in British schooling like any member of the second generation and speaks with an East End cockney accent. Miah is a key figure in the East London Mosque, presenting on the weekly radio show Easy Talk that is broadcast from the mosque’s London Muslim Centre. He is also a frequent speaker at activism and charity events associated with the mosque. In his speeches, Miah connects with young Bangladeshis on the basis of all-encompassing “Muslim first” identities and by casting Islamic practices, like fasting and alms giving, as political actions.

Miah’s communitarian approach to Muslim identity politics has limited cross-over appeal. To explain his bid for Parliament to a non-Muslim journalist, Miah said:

> We pride ourselves that we have Muslim councillors, and why not? For the last 15 years you've said we're isolationist, ghettoised, unwilling to engage and now that we engage we're fundamentalists and extremists. You can't have it both ways. (quoted in Brooks 2010)

If Abjol Miah wins the MP election, his victory will be demonstration of a remarkable mobilization of Muslim voters, especially second generation youth. Bangladeshi Muslims account for about 40% of registered voters in the constituency. Thus those who
support Miah will need to punch well above their demographic weight, turning out at the polls in disproportionately high numbers.

Rushanara Ali is a viable choice for many Muslim voters as well. She is seen as an inspiring role model for Muslim women in the East End. Yet, as a Muslim female, Ali has faced a dilemma of self-presentation that her male opponents do not. She does not wear a headscarf. The simple symbolic act of hijab has strong, polarizing connotations in the East End (positive for some local residents, negative for others). On the more pietistic end of the spectrum, Ali lacks legitimacy. Ali’s association with former Bethnal Green & Bow MP Oona King, who supported the war in Iraq, is also a frequently mentioned issue.

Yet Rushanara Ali has never sought the ‘Muslim vote.’ Her campaign has instead been run on the basis of drawing together the diverse voices and strands of history in the East End. Ali’s campaign embodies ideals that contrast with Abjol Miah’s:

This is a really diverse community and, broadly speaking, people try and get along and respect each others' backgrounds. It’s a community with a rich cultural heritage, as well as a proud religious heritage. That's how people see it – they're proud to be British, proud to be Bangladeshi, proud to be Muslim, proud to be east enders – and that's how I see myself. (quoted in Brooks 2010)

The two candidates have different conceptions of the role of religious identity in politics – one particularistic and the other more universal. The Bethnal Green & Bow campaign has been hard fought. The election promises to be a memorable one.

As much as they may differ, the three Parliamentary candidates profiled here are all exemplars of an important kind of democratic progress. Chuka Umunna, Rushanara Ali, and Abjol Miah have lived the second generation youth story of growing up in inner
In recent decades, ethnic minorities have participated most visibly in British politics through their actions of protest or dissent – the Brixton Riots, the Salman Rushdie Affair, West Indian activism, and protesting the war in Iraq. Anger and critique, whether democratically channelled or not, will continue into the foreseeable future. Yet these young political candidates are forerunners of a new phenomenon within the second generation. There has been a fundamental shift from protesting against British government decisions, to becoming elected participants in the political decision making process itself.

---

78 Chuka Umunna is a mixed race member of the second generation. Abjol Miah and Rushanara Ali both arrived in Britain as children (six months old and seven years old respectively). Although technically part of the “1.5 generation,” Miah and Ali were both socialized in British schools among largely second generation peers, giving their life histories a second generation character.
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Note: The first level of bullet points are essential questions asked of all interviewees, while the second level are follow-up questions and probes that may not have been asked in all cases. The interviews were semi-structured, and therefore the wording of questions and their order sometimes differed to fit the interview situation.

Life
- Describe for me a typical day in your life now, starting from morning and going till evening.
  - Follow up on current school or work situation
- What would you say are the most important things in life?

Friends
- Could you write down the names of your five closest friends for me? You don’t need to show them to me – they are just for your memory.
  - Tell me about them. What do you have in common? How are you different?
  - How did you first meet these friends? From the same place?
  - What kinds of things do you do together?
- What would you say is the biggest problem facing the local area at the moment? In your opinion, what should be done about it?

Transnationalism
- Could you give me a basic timeline of your life? Have you always lived in this area? Or did you live in some other places when you were growing up?
- Have you ever been to [Bangladesh/Jamaica]? IF NOT: Would you like to go there?
- IF LIVED IN OR VISITED COUNTRY OF PARENTS:
  - How often do you go there? What do you do? Do you like it?
  - Do you keep in touch with friends or relatives there?
  - Do you or your family ever send money to support relatives there?
  - Would you like to live there some day? Or do you want to keep living here?
- How would you describe Bengali/Jamaican culture?
- Do you speak a language other than English, or are you learning one? Which one(s)? Who do you speak or study with?
Household
- Let’s talk about your household and family here. Who lives in your household with you? [clarify relationship of each person.]
  - Do you have any immediate family [brothers, sisters, or parents] who don’t live with you? Where are they now?

Family
- Tell me a bit about your parents. How would you describe them to me?
  - Are they working here? What job(s)?
  - How long have they been here? Do they fit in well? Are they happy here?
  - Describe your relationship with your mum.
  - Describe your relationship with your dad.

- I’ve heard some people say that there is a “generation gap” between people your age and your parents’ generation. Would you agree or disagree with that? Why?

Identity
- I have some different terms on cards here. Please take all of those that you personally identify with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>African</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>West Indian</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Londoner</td>
<td>Non-Religous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Sylheti</td>
<td>Jamaican</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Are there terms missing? If so, we can make some new cards.
- Please put the cards in the order that you would most identify with them.
- Why did you rank the cards in this way?
- [For each card, starting with most important] What does it mean to be _____?
- [If not asked] What does it mean to be British? What does it mean to be English?
- [Choose pairs from the cards chosen to ask all relevant questions of this type]: Think about the identities you chose for a moment. Do any ever come into conflict with each other? How?
- Have you ever experienced prejudice or been excluded because of any of the identities here? Which one(s)? From whom? Can you provide examples?
- Which of these types do you think you are most different from? Why?

- You wrote down your five closest friends earlier. [Confirm religion, ethnicity, gender of each]
Religion

- Let’s talk about religion. [Follow up on the identity cards that relate to religion]

- Could you summarize your religious beliefs for me? [PROVIDE TIME, PROBE AS NEEDED]
  - [IF NEEDED] What are your beliefs about God? About Muhammad/Jesus?
  - What are your specific beliefs about the Qur’an/Bible? How often do you read the [Holy Book]? Do you believe that there could be errors in the text of the [Holy Book]? Should it be interpreted literally, word-for-word?
  - Do you believe in Heaven or Paradise? How does someone get there?

- What is your type of Islam/Christianity (Sunni/Shia/Wahabi/Salafi/Sufi or Pentecostal/Seventh Day Adventist, etc.).
  - Are there some [Muslims/Christians] you would disagree with, or would say are not living out their faith properly? Which ones?

- In the course of your life, have you changed your religious views or how religious you are? Describe when and how you changed. What were the reasons for this change?

[IF NOT RELIGIOUS]

- Do you believe in God or some higher power? What are your beliefs?
  - Do you generally feel positive or negative towards religion? What has led you to feel this way?
  - Do you think you may become more religious someday? Why or why not?

[IF RELIGIOUS]

- Describe the role of religion or faith in your everyday life. How important is it?
- Are there certain actions or practices you do because you are a Christian/Muslim?
- How often do you pray?
- Does religion ever limit what you can do? In what ways?

- Do you attend [mosque/church] in London? Which one(s) do you go to?
  - How often do you go in a typical week?
    - Tell me about your [mosque/church]. What’s it like?
    - Compare your [mosque/church] to others in this area.
    - Tell me about the leaders of your [mosque/church]. How well do you know them?
    - How well do you know other people who attend? How much do you spend time with them outside of [mosque/church]?

Additional Religion Section [IF RELIGIOUS]

- Do you ever [take part in dawah/share your faith with others]? What are some specific ways you are involved in [dawah/sharing your faith]? Have you seen it be effective?
If you want to learn more about something related to your religion, what do you do?
Is there someone you would talk to or a place you would go for information?
Do you read books or listen to talks on [Islam/Christianity] to develop your knowledge? Which authors/speakers do you like? Why?
How do you view yourself in relation to other [Muslims/Christians] around the world? Do you think about this often?

Culture, Fashion, Street Life
- Let’s talk about people your age. What sorts of things are they into at the moment?
- How do you choose the clothes you wear? Do you have a particular taste in clothes or reason for dressing the way that you do?
- Do you like listening to music? What kinds of music do you listen to? What are your favorite artists/bands? Why?
  - Do you watch or read the news? What source do you use for news?
- Are gangs common in this area? What is the scene like? If someone your age just moved here, what advice would you give them about gangs?
- Are drugs common in this area? Who is involved with them?
  - Do you ever use drugs? What types? How often? Why or why not?
- How about alcohol? Who is involved with that?
  - Do you ever drink alcohol? How much and how often? Why or why not?
- Are there issues on the streets here that I haven’t mentioned? Tell me about them.

Involvement
- What does British Citizenship mean to you?
- Are you involved in any organizations other than school, work, and [mosque/church]? Describe your involvement.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION SURVEY
- Finally, What are some of your plans for your future? How do you think your life will turn out?

---

79The political participation survey (from Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley 2004) is included on page 45 of this dissertation.
REFERENCES


Bawer, Bruce. 2006. While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West from Within. New York: Doubleday.


