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

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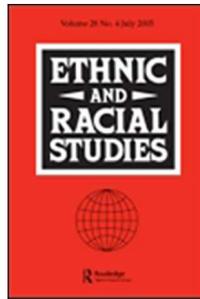
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**Living the multicultural city: acceptance, belonging and young identities in the city of Leicester, England**

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5 **Living the multicultural city: acceptance, belonging and young identities**  
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7 **in the city of Leicester, England**  
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11  
12 **Abstract**

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14 Drawing upon research conducted with young people in the city of Leicester,  
15  
16 England, this paper explores what it means for those from black and minority  
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18 ethnic backgrounds, particularly more recent arrivals, to live within and adapt  
19  
20 to specific multicultural urban contexts. After introducing prevailing racisms  
21  
22 and accommodations, the paper examines how forms of belonging are  
23  
24 expressed, re-produced and negotiated through the spatial trajectories of  
25  
26 everyday life. This includes the value of emerging versions of place through  
27  
28 community, religious practice as a form of social capital, the importance of  
29  
30 routine, and the construction of multifaceted identities. Such experiences  
31  
32 relate to contingent hierarchies of acceptance and legitimacy, histories of  
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34 settlement, economic marginalisation, as well as gendered and generational  
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36 roles. These young people negotiate everyday life and belonging by  
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38 retaining, extending and forging local and trans-national ties; highlighting the  
39  
40 relationship between socio-spatial positions, everyday practice and identity  
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42 formation.  
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49 **Key words**

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51 identity, multiculturalism, racism, community, place, youth  
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## Introduction

This paper looks to re-connect discussions of multiculturalism with the everyday experiences of those who have come to represent this often demonised condition of diversity (Phillips et al., 2007; Hopkins, 2007). By illustrating how practices of belonging play out, it addresses what it means for young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities to live in a city with a reputation for progressive civic multiculturalism, but which is not immune from racism and forms of inequality. Going beyond a simplistic characterisation of place and minority identities, the paper highlights the experiences of young people with diverse biographies and geographical trajectories, particularly focussing on the experiences of more recent arrivals and their relative positions within localised hierarchies of racialisation. The manner in which young people negotiate their own identities, the power of racial and social hierarchies and those socio-spatial contexts which actively re-constitute their daily lives are explored.

The aims of the study were to understand how young people related to the notion of Leicester as a successful multicultural city and how belonging to place and ethnic identities was expressed, re-produced and transgressed. In order to *understand* lives as they are lived out, a range of qualitative methods were required (Cook and Crang, 2007). For all the attention given to the concept of 'the everyday' (Jacobsen, 2009), insufficient consideration has been given to the significance of everyday experiences in constructing identities through fieldwork (Latham, 2003).

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3 These included both performative aspects of social relations, but also  
4  
5 what was *said* by participants (Back, 1996; Gregson and Rose, 2000). A  
6  
7 series of methods in youth-based settings over one year were employed.<sup>1</sup> In  
8  
9 addition to ethnographic immersion (Bauman, 1996) and interviews with key  
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11 informants, a total of 14 group discussions, 30 one-to-one semi structured  
12  
13 interviews and 7 further interviews mediated by photo-diaries were conducted  
14  
15 with young people.  
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20 Employing a selection of qualitative 'sketches' (Amin and Graham,  
21  
22 1997), no claims of representativeness are made. Rather, this paper looks to  
23  
24 illustrate the situated experiences and encounters which constitute places  
25  
26 through the generation of inter-subjective and 'warranted knowledge'  
27  
28 (Graham, 1997:7). Material reflected upon here most clearly illustrates one of  
29  
30 the key themes to emerge; the way in which racialised young people work  
31  
32 with and respond to their socio-spatial positions, forging identities,  
33  
34 relationships and connections through the contexts explored below.  
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### 40 **Spaces of (not) belonging**

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42 In understanding these experiences and the reconstitution of racial and ethnic  
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44 identities, the role of space is recognised as key (Dwyer and Bressey, 2008;  
45  
46 Clayton, 2009). Identities and everyday opportunities are constrained by the  
47  
48 requirement for BME young people to negotiate and adapt to dominant  
49  
50 spaces of whiteness (Nayak, 1997; Back, 2005). Situated experiences draw  
51  
52 upon and reinforce wider understandings of 'race' and national belonging, but  
53  
54 make sense in relation to everyday moments of isolation and encounter that  
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56 result from positions of economic and cultural marginality (Valentine, 2008).  
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5 This involves the dynamic performance of complex identities by those  
6 subject to processes of racialisation<sup>2</sup>; whereby communities are in formation,  
7 rather than ever complete (Ahmed, 2000). However, the (re)production of  
8 identities are rarely intentional moves enacted by un-constrained individuals,  
9 but are influenced by multiple axes of power including 'race', class, gender  
10 and sexuality (Anderson, 1996). While the dynamic possibilities of identities  
11 are understood, the ability to 'become anybody' is restricted (Nash, 2000).  
12 The constraining forces of racisms play a crucial role in fixing and stigmatising  
13 the identities of those identified as 'ethnic minorities', reinforced by structures  
14 of socio-economic stratification and class division (Skeggs, 2004). An  
15 emphasis on the fluidity of identities therefore may bear little resemblance to  
16 the realities of contemporary multicultural urban life, where despite cultural  
17 cross-overs, strict ethnically based allegiances remain stubbornly intact.  
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35 *'I went to my mates' house and they took me to the family pub*  
36 *because they were watching a [football] match and because it*  
37 *was like mainly white people they were really racist towards me*  
38 *and I didn't understand why because I was the only Asian, it was*  
39 *just really stupid. And they just started to be really racist. And*  
40 *sometimes you've got these little areas just full of one group and*  
41 *it's really weird when you enter it because you just feel like*  
42 *everyone's eyes are on you like they've never seen a person like*  
43 *you.'*  
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3 This is emphasised above by one young female (aged 14, identified as a  
4 British Muslim) living in a predominantly Asian neighbourhood in the centre of  
5 Leicester, describing an occasion when she entered a pub in a predominantly  
6 white neighbourhood of the city. This demonstrates the extent of localised  
7 inter-ethnic negotiation and the re-configuration of diasporic identities (Dwyer,  
8 2000), but also the 'double consciousness' (Du Bois, 1903) of being black and  
9 living within a society that has not eliminated a hegemonic racial grammar  
10 (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). The respondent entered this space with her white  
11 friend's family as a shared social experience, but soon discovered to be  
12 recognised as an outsider in a gendered and racially demarcated space (the  
13 traditionally white and masculine space of the public house) and social activity  
14 (watching the football match) over which she had little control. The  
15 significance of this narrative in relation to themes of acceptance, belonging  
16 and identity are apparent, but in interpreting such experiences an  
17 appreciation of context is also crucial.

### 38 **The significance of place: questioning context**

39  
40 While it by no means escapes the negative racialisation of urban space  
41 (Sibley, 1998; Keith, 2003),<sup>3</sup> the city of Leicester in the English Midlands, has  
42 been held up as a model of progressive managed 'race' relations (Osborne,  
43 2001), where the presence of a substantial BME population (predominantly of  
44 Indian heritage, but increasingly diverse),<sup>4</sup> has not witnessed tensions  
45 experienced elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Leicester has not been immune from the efforts of  
46 far-right organisations to whip up conflict,<sup>6</sup> but a number of factors are  
47 identified as explaining a relatively unique history. Most of these are based  
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3 upon developments following the arrival of a significant number of East  
4 African Asian refugees from Kenya and Uganda in the 1970s (Martin & Singh,  
5 2002) and continued formal and grass roots efforts to celebrate diversity and  
6 promote racial equality.  
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14 As Philips et al., (2007: 230) observe, factors including ‘...local  
15 histories, myths, economic structures, politics, cultures and urban and  
16 housing policies’ mean that distinct processes of racialisation emerge in  
17 specific locations. In the case of Leicester, these include; early opportunities  
18 seized by some sections of the BME community for political representation,  
19 links established between the local authority and community led/faith based  
20 organisations, the growth of multicultural projects, regular large scale  
21 celebrations of diversity, shifting approaches taken by city institutions  
22 (including the police and newspaper) in dealing with community relations and  
23 the middle class and character of a significant proportion of an East African  
24 Asian (largely Indian Gujarati) community, migrating as extended families and  
25 placing limited demands on services (Winstone, 1996). The relative absence  
26 of dominant single industry economic collapse, the out-migration of some of  
27 the most vocal racists, the rejection of far-right political parties by white  
28 working class communities and the role of a strong and visible anti-racist  
29 movement in the city are also recognised as contributing to this picture  
30 (Singh, 2003). However, the growing diversity of the city’s population, has  
31 also thrown up new dynamics and tensions (Bonney and Le Goff, 2007),  
32 leading to concerns that it may be the *multicultural* as opposed to the  
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3 *intercultural* character of relations that may be the city's greatest 'threat' to a  
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5 peaceful and progressive future (Hussain et al., 2003).  
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10 For some young people in this study, 'race' and racism were not  
11  
12 conscious social concerns, but part of what Bourdieu (1972) calls the doxic or  
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14 the taken for granted. As Patrick (male, aged 18, identified as Sikh) points  
15  
16 out: 'I'm not sure that people think about 'race' here, I mean they just get on,  
17  
18 talk to each other...they don't think about it'. This reflects some of the more  
19  
20 positive discourses surrounding this place, but may also suggest that racism  
21  
22 takes other less obvious forms and may not be uniformly experienced. While  
23  
24 difference is to some extent an accepted part of everyday life, as Patrick later  
25  
26 commented, friendship groups still broadly tend to reflect strict ethnic  
27  
28 affiliations and for some participants racism did form a major part of their daily  
29  
30 experiences.  
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### 33 34 35 36 **Contingent hierarchies of acceptance**

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38 Given that there may be something specific about 'race' relations in this place,  
39  
40 identities and experiences are viewed through contingent hierarchies of  
41  
42 racialisation (Garner, 2007), stressing that racial identities are contextually  
43  
44 constructed, multiply experienced and that whiteness as a tool for securing  
45  
46 privilege is differentially enacted across time and space. Whilst all BME  
47  
48 communities in Leicester are exposed to the possibility of racism and  
49  
50 associated socio-economic disadvantage, those who meet certain criteria  
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52 appear to be especially vulnerable to becoming 'othered', through which  
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54 dominance of one group over another is reinforced and differences become  
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3 stabilised (Said, 1978). These markers particularly include non-white  
4 appearance, those with limited economic resources, the practice of Islam and  
5 those who have more recently arrived in the city, including those who are, or  
6 are perceived to be asylum seekers and/or refugees. While those exhibiting  
7 any combination of such characteristics do not form a coherent group and  
8 these markers are subject to disruption, translation and re-appropriation, there  
9 are key aspects which mark individuals and communities out as  
10 *unassimilated*, by those in *relatively* powerful positions.  
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23 For many young white people involved in this research, specific  
24 communities were picked out as 'too different' - seen to pose threats to the  
25 integrity of the city in ways which others did not. Here, one group of (white)  
26 school pupils, attending one of the poorest performing schools on an outlying  
27 estate, identify the presence of Somalis (distinguished from those identified as  
28 'black') within *their* school and country as responsible for tensions and  
29 difficulties. For these young people they were the embodiment of a racially  
30 threatening 'other'. Many of the young Somalis attending this school did not  
31 necessarily live in the surrounding area, making the presumed imposition of a  
32 new racial group the basis for frequent physical confrontations between *male*  
33 white and Somali students.  
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50 *'Fiona: They just come over and they think that they own the*  
51 *place...They get really lary*

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

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56 *Fiona: Like having a go at you for no reason*  
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3 Interviewer: Does anyone have a go at you?  
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5 Fiona: No  
6

7 Jonathon: I was going down the corridor and there were some  
8 black, white and there were some Somalians and he walked past  
9 and they were like pushing him through and it's like it just gets on  
10 your nerves. Kick 'em back down to their country innit and they  
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treat us like that, do you know what I mean?'

The Somali community, who have witnessed major international displacement in the context of an ongoing and brutal civil war (Berns McGowan, 1999), were often the target of local racialised hostility.<sup>7</sup> As was recognised by key informants within the city council, this is one of the defining characteristics of inter-ethnic relations: '...basically it's everybody against the Somalis and I mean everybody'. Some of this community have arrived as refugees directly from Somalia, while many others have moved as EU citizens from other northern European countries. They also tend to be initially located in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods of the city, often wherever social housing or cheaper rented housing is available. As a result they are often thrust into direct experiences of conflict with marginalised white working class communities and deprived locations with reputations of danger and criminality.

For Ali (male, aged 17, identified as Somali), and other young Somalis who find themselves in these very situations, clashes with white neighbours and strangers in more public spaces, who do not recognise their rights to

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3 belong are regular occurrences: ‘...we have this British neighbour, she lives  
4 between, she lives exactly between two Somalian people, and she’s a racist  
5 and we all know that. She hates us, but we don’t hate her, because we don’t  
6 care’.

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14 Animosity towards this group was not limited to those who identified  
15 themselves as white. As is noted by Msoni (aged 19, who identified as Indian  
16 and Hindu and had moved from Tanzania to Leicester three years previous),  
17 the Somali community is seen on the very bottom rung of a local hierarchy.  
18 This does not significantly disturb the fact individuals such as Msoni, continue  
19 to be marked by their non-whiteness and by their more recent arrival, but it  
20 does add complexity to processes of racialisation and the recognition of  
21 specific communities as unestablished – with an emphasis on cultural  
22 distinctions, but viewed through the lens of racial difference (Blaut, 1992).  
23 Despite his experience of living in Eastern Africa, Msoni indicates that  
24 Somalis were not included in his definition of what it was to be African, largely  
25 due to their Islamic faith.

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

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3 It is possible for some young people who have arrived more recently in the  
4 city to hide or re-interpret certain aspects of their identity seen as most  
5 threatening to the local cultural order; adopting styles that meet established  
6 standards of compatibility. As Dev (Aged 16, identifying as Portuguese and a  
7 Muslim) indicates here, his European heritage and westernised appearance  
8 often leads to confusion over his 'true' identity. There are various  
9 consequences for Dev in this regard – his misrecognition as an unauthentic  
10 Muslim by some within his faith community, but also a reduced likelihood of  
11 receiving unwanted racist or Islamophobic attention.  
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25 *“A lot of people they don't say that I'm Muslim because you know*  
26 *gel and everything, you don't see like, now you can see more*  
27 *people with gel but, you don't see it too much. They're saying that*  
28 *you're not Muslim, you are a Hindu or something like that.”*  
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36 For some young people, however, the ability to adapt is restricted by the  
37 colour of their skin, their area of residence, their dress or speech –  
38 reproducing a complex but broadly hierarchical system of local acceptance.  
39 Such hierarchies form a key element of experiences of acceptance, belonging  
40 and integration and as such have an effect upon the manner in which young  
41 people adapt to the contexts in which they live. This is particularly the case  
42 for those who are more recent arrivals in the city. The paper now examines  
43 the manner in which young people in these communities negotiate the terms  
44 of their identities and their relations with others in a city which both values  
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3 difference but is not immune from divisions along racial, ethnic and religious  
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5 lines.  
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### 9 **Valuing diversity: community connections**

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14 *'We talked to a few Somalian people and some relatives and they*  
15 *said it's better if you go to Leicester, you get housing very fast*  
16 *rather than from London...So that's the main reason [for coming to*  
17 *Leicester], and the Somali community in Leicester is very big and*  
18 *it's a very small city and it's better for the children.'*  
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27 As Omah points out, for those who have more recently arrived in the UK  
28 and in Leicester itself, there were several key factors involved in re-location.  
29 In his experience these included seizing improved education and housing  
30 opportunities, but also the presence of family and friends living within the city  
31 and the sense of security this provided. Reliance upon, and the reproduction  
32 of these communities can be seen as both a motivation for migration, but also  
33 as an ongoing response to positions of marginality. This is identified as an  
34 important source of stability and is one of the main ways in which participants  
35 negotiate a sense of identity in the face of an unknown and potentially  
36 threatening environment (Clayton et al, 2009).  
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51 For those with experiences of other places in the UK, Leicester provides  
52 a contrasting environment in terms of the *relative* absence of overt racism and  
53 greater ethnic diversity. As one respondent, Yasmin (female, aged 19,  
54 identified as British Asian) explained, growing up in white and monocultural  
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3 Lancaster in the north-west of England, she experienced extreme racist  
4 attitudes: ‘...on one occasion the bus driver wouldn’t let me on the bus, it was  
5 that bad!’ Yasmin’s ethnic identity and spatial trajectory differ enormously  
6 from that of Omah – she grew up as a British Asian and saw herself joining a  
7 well established Asian community in the city. However, life in Leicester is  
8 similarly represented as a more positive experience, particularly as it offered  
9 greater community protection. In contrast to recent commentaries pointing  
10 towards a fear of segregation (Phillips, 2005), diverse and distinct  
11 communities are framed here as reducing isolation. As Yasmin put it:  
12 ‘Leicester, I mean its like everybody’s here, it’s no different because you are  
13 so used to seeing Asians...where I was born I felt like an alien really’. It is this  
14 sense of belonging and not standing out as different which defines more  
15 positive characterisations of multiculturalism.  
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34 For those participants who more recently arrived from outside the  
35 country, the maintenance of a transnational sense of belonging routed through  
36 community networks, is of the utmost significance. This distinguishes their  
37 experiences from those young people whose families are more established.  
38 The city can be seen as a forum for the maintenance of a sense of belonging  
39 which is not just based upon an attachment to the locality or to the nation  
40 (Alleyne, 2002). The symbolic and lived value of Leicester is conceived in  
41 relation to other places and transnational affiliations, which as Rohit (male,  
42 aged 20, identified as Indian who recently moved from India with his family to  
43 join his father) indicates, makes life more comfortable:  
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3     *John: Is there anything negative about living there [in his*  
4  
5     *neighbourhood], or is it all positive?*

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7     *Rohit: Not really, I can't say anything negative because it's all Indian*  
8  
9     *community there [in his neighbourhood] so it makes it a lot easier to*  
10  
11     *live there'*

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16     As Ali (who had experience of living in both Somalia and the  
17  
18     Netherlands) reflects, the more negative aspects of life in England were the  
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20     aggressive attitudes of some of the English people he came into contact with.  
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22     However, for him this is balanced with the ability to maintain important links to  
23  
24     his country of birth, the presence of some of his immediate family and of  
25  
26     those with common connections, experiences and understandings. These  
27  
28     links were maintained through apparently prosaic activities such as walking,  
29  
30     talking, eating and watching movies, but played a crucial role in reinforcing a  
31  
32     sense of transnational belonging that is routed through the locality but is  
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34     connected to distant places (Fortier, 1999).  
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40     *'So that's what I hate actually about this place and how do you call*  
41  
42     *it, the mood in England, it's like everyone's angry. It's bad and*  
43  
44     *good, because in here I kind of hate it, but I kind of love it a little bit*  
45  
46     *too because I have here people from my own country, where I can*  
47  
48     *laugh about just our things, you know. How people, how things are*  
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50     *in Somalia or things how we eat or we walk or how we laugh or*  
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52     *something like that. And my uncle, my brothers, my sisters, my*  
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3 *aunties, my family, I am always with them, talking about them,*  
4  
5 *watching movies or, I kind of love it.'*  
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### 10 **Territoriality and spatial routines**

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12 Research suggests that for many young people, especially young males in  
13  
14 more deprived urban areas of England, territoriality is an engrained 'cultural  
15  
16 expectation' which is often based upon ethnic distinctions (Kintrea, 2008;  
17  
18 Webster, 1996). While this is not uniformly the case in Leicester, the power of  
19  
20 the racial coding of distinct areas, particularly of poorer neighbourhoods,  
21  
22 illustrates the continued significance of such divisions (Clayton,  
23  
24 2008). Specific areas were identified as dangerous, mostly according to  
25  
26 popular reputation. These were amongst the most deprived parts of the city  
27  
28 located on the outskirts, where the majority of the population identified as  
29  
30 white. Unless individual respondents lived in such areas, these were  
31  
32 neighbourhoods that were often avoided. This was not only because of  
33  
34 perceived threats of racism and conflict, but often because there was little  
35  
36 necessity or requirement to visit these largely residential areas.  
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43 Neighbourhood geographies were also often identified – not solely in  
44  
45 terms of 'race' but, particularly in contexts of deprivation, in terms of what  
46  
47 Cohen (1988: 32) identifies as 'nationalism of the neighbourhood'. Such  
48  
49 modes of territoriality and belonging were part of a local vernacular which was  
50  
51 learnt over time and not recognised so clearly by more recent arrivals. This  
52  
53 could be seen for example in the adoption of post-code identities by more  
54  
55 established young people. The names of many of the garage/hip-hop music  
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3 based 'crews' (including those identifying as white, Asian and Afro-Caribbean)  
4  
5 encountered through youth club settings, (friendship groups formed around  
6  
7 exclusively male MC collectives) were largely based upon geographical  
8  
9 distinctions. Interestingly though such groups would be willing and able to  
10  
11 travel into neighbouring territories to access facilities where they could  
12  
13 practice and perform their music. The fact that safe routes had been carved  
14  
15 out over time helps to understand the ability of such young people to navigate  
16  
17 such everyday trajectories whilst retaining a distinctive identity based upon  
18  
19 their neighbourhood affiliations.  
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25 For other young people, forms of competition and fragile ownership of  
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27 physical spaces within ethnically mixed residential areas were recognised,  
28  
29 particularly by male participants. In mostly centrally located areas, inter-  
30  
31 ethnic tensions and negotiations of co-existence were played out around key  
32  
33 sites of encounter. This was particularly the case in terms of the relationships  
34  
35 between communities at different stages of settlement in the area. Ali here  
36  
37 discusses the significance of 'the cage', a shared public recreational space  
38  
39 where impromptu football matches were played in his central multi-ethnic  
40  
41 neighbourhood. He explains how ownership of 'the cage' is up for grabs, that  
42  
43 various groups defined by their ethnicity make claims on the site and that this  
44  
45 weakly marked out space became a site of contestation. When trouble flares  
46  
47 up and relationships become fraught due to the competitive nature of this  
48  
49 encounter and the scarcity of such resources, the primary point of distinction  
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51 is through ethnicity.  
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3 *'That's one of the main places because everyone likes to play*  
4 *football down there and last summer, Somalian people, black,*  
5 *white people, all playing together in the cage and if one Somalian*  
6 *people just trips one black guy up or white guy then everyone gets*  
7 *mouthng and they are gonna fight, it's that simple, yeah. And*  
8 *then I, and now it's like this is ours and other days it's yours and*  
9 *sometimes when they both want to play.'*  
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21 While conflict is not always so easy to escape, the avoidance of danger  
22 and risk is a key form of protection and contributes to the development of  
23 routines of everyday activity (Watt and Stenson, 1998). In addition, the  
24 ordinary demands of everyday life means that these routines revolve around  
25 key spaces such as educational institutions, the home and religious sites. As  
26 Dev details here:  
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36 *'I wake up at nine o'clock, come into school, like my timetable is*  
37 *always like nine to two, till two o'clock, something like that and*  
38 *then sometimes twelve. Then I am going home, I have a lunch*  
39 *there, then I'm going to pick up my nieces in the school and*  
40 *coming back and I'm going to pray, because I need to pray*  
41 *everyday, every day of the week I'm going to pray from half past*  
42 *four till half past five and coming back home and I'm just playing*  
43 *with the computer'*  
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3 While helping to reinforce a sense of security, routine practices were not  
4 always valued by respondents. One of the key differences articulated by  
5 young people who had more recently arrived in the city, was the notion of  
6 limited opportunities. While, older generations may appreciate the fact that  
7 young people have fewer social opportunities which allows them to  
8 concentrate on their responsibilities to family and religious adherence, young  
9 people may resent the levels of constraint which results. Despite an  
10 admission that living in Leicester had allowed her to practice her religion in  
11 new ways, given the fact that she had lived more of her life in Kenya than  
12 Somalia, this did not mean that Samantha (female, aged 18, identified as  
13 Kenyan and Muslim) also valued the presence of a coherent Somali  
14 community in the same way as her mother. There are competing and co-  
15 existing interests displayed in this account which reflect the management of  
16 multiple aspects of identities in relatively new situations.  
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36 *'Older people think Leicester is perfect, that's only, I'm talking*  
37 *about my mother and them. She thinks that Leicester is the best*  
38 *city in the UK and I think that Leicester is the most worst place*  
39 *ever in the UK (laughs)...if I want to do something Leicester's a bit*  
40 *boring, especially Highfields, a bit boring than when, when I was in*  
41 *London, we used to do some funny things and my mother thought*  
42 *that was very bad for me, she will say that is the reason I took you*  
43 *to Leicester so you have to calm down. No, I mean it was a bit, it is*  
44 *a bit boring here for me, but it's more fun for her because she's*  
45 *seen that there are more Somalis in Leicester, so she goes to*  
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3 *them and they communicate and talk...when the Somalis come to*  
4 *my house and talk to my mother, I find it very boring. I don't even*  
5 *understand your language! (Laughs)'*  
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12 The possibility for geographical mobility was enhanced for those whose  
13 families had been established in the city, for those of an older age group  
14 (particularly young men) and for those with access to cars or their own  
15 financial resources. However, for young people such as Omah, who lived in  
16 London before moving north to Leicester, opportunities and time to forge new  
17 friendships and social activities were more limited. While some of his peers  
18 had turned to casual drug taking and low level criminality as a way around  
19 this, he found solace in his main passion, that of playing football and watching  
20 Chelsea FC (See Figure 2). While he regularly spoke with his closest friends  
21 in London via MSN messenger, he clearly missed life there and the  
22 opportunities afforded to him in a bigger city, a place with a more established  
23 Somali community and more importantly established friendship groups. The  
24 maintenance of community through routine, is not something which was  
25 always cherished, at times it was also resented as a brake on possibilities,  
26 especially for young people whose level of autonomy was more restricted.  
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### 47 **Religious practice and the re-formation of community**

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49 While religion remains an important aspect of the lives of the young people  
50 within this research, its significance and adherence varied most clearly  
51 between those whose families were more established and those who were more  
52 recent arrivals in the city. For Nav (male, aged 18, identified as British-Indian  
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3 from a Hindu family), the distance between himself and his family in terms of  
4 strict religious and 'traditional' cultural adherence is growing. As someone  
5 who was born and had grown up in the UK, he stresses a sense of rebellion,  
6 of breaking free from the controls his family have imposed on him. In so  
7 doing he expresses his own ideas about identity and his place in the city.  
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16 *'I mean like me I can just go out whenever I want because I can*  
17 *give them the finger and that. I'm being rebellious against my*  
18 *parents because of the childhood that I had with them and*  
19 *because I'm in the second generation to come yeah, they're all*  
20 *like traditional and strict right and I'm like laid back'*  
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30 For some respondents the practice of religion formed a central aspect of  
31 their daily activities and senses of belonging. For the participants involved,  
32 this particularly related to the Muslim faith, which has recently witnessed  
33 increasing visibility in the wake of global events and rising levels of  
34 Islamophobia (Abbas, 2007; Poynting and Mason, 2007). However, overtly  
35 political aspects of religion did not come through strongly. Rather, it was the  
36 visibility of an Islamic community and the relative permissiveness with which  
37 individuals could practice their religion which were valued. For Dev this was  
38 an important part of the decision of his father to send him to live with his  
39 sister, attending the FE college initially and perhaps in the future to university:  
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54 *'My father is not saying always keep the religion but, going like,*  
55 *sometimes 2 or 3 times a week, praying once a day. So in Leicester*  
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3 *that's easy because when you are going on the streets, you can see*  
4  
5 *10 people, maybe 5 people are...not white people, like another*  
6  
7 *religion. So my father he says look a lot of Muslim people here, so*  
8  
9 *my father he sends me here'*  
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14 A recent survey of the Muslim population in Leicester suggests that this  
15 diverse social group feels a strong sense of attachment to the city (Open  
16 Society Institute, 2010). The evidence here also suggests that positive  
17 experiences of the city may not necessarily refer to relations between ethnic  
18 groups, nor does the city represent a great place to live for those on the  
19 economic margins.<sup>8</sup> Rather, for those towards the bottom of local hierarchies  
20 of acceptance, the ability to live with a strong sense of community in a context  
21 of relative dis-location is more important.  
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34 In the case of Omah, although he doesn't always adhere to regular daily  
35 prayer, attendance at his local mosque for Friday prayers is a very important  
36 part of his weekly routine as indicated by his choice to include a photograph of  
37 the mosque in his photo diary (See Figure 1). The mosque is at the heart of  
38 his neighbourhood, close to other important social spaces such as restaurants  
39 and flats and was mainly attended by those originally from Somalia. Unlike  
40 more established mosques in the city, this was not purpose built or funded by  
41 wealthy donors, but was a converted industrial unit, indicating the extent to  
42 which this is a community in the making. Not only was attendance here a way  
43 in which Islam remained an important part of Omah's life, but it also acted as  
44 a means of socialisation through which he could reinforce relationships with  
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3 those who were also becoming accustomed to establishing themselves in a  
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5 new city.  
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10 *'For me it is the closest [mosque], mostly Somali people there, but*  
11 *there are other Muslims there from like Kenya, Iraq. But it's mostly*  
12 *Somali people because St. Matthews is mostly a Somalian*  
13 *community and they all come because there's a Somali restaurant*  
14 *down there and they may go and hang with their friends there after*  
15 *the Jumu'ah'*  
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25 **[Insert Figure 1 here]**  
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30 The ability to freely and openly conduct religion was an important  
31 element of views of the city expressed by new arrivals. For Samantha, given  
32 her unique spatial trajectory (mentioned above), it was the presence, not of an  
33 identifiable Somali community, but of a strong, visible, pan-ethnic Muslim  
34 community which was significant. This has allowed her to re-affirm her beliefs  
35 and re-enact religious adherence in a new context, no longer standing out and  
36 surrounded by others also practicing their faith.  
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47 *'Because in Kenya, all my friends was Christian and I had no*  
48 *friends who was Muslims, so I was like, no if I wear scarf and*  
49 *things like that I'm gonna be different from my other friends. I*  
50 *didn't wear a scarf so my parents accepted that, but when I moved*  
51 *here I wanted to wear because I saw many people who was*  
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3 *wearing and it was all right with them, and they would, yeah, so I*  
4  
5 *started to wear a scarf and practise Islam more then.'*  
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10 Ali also indicated how coming to live in Leicester had resulted in him  
11 taking much more seriously the role of religion in his life. While living in  
12 Holland he admitted that he was much more relaxed about his religion, he had  
13 began to re-assert this aspect of his identity, thus dismissing more linear  
14 models of acculturation over time (Heibert, 2002). There were several  
15 reasons given for this including the idea that he had 'grown up', the  
16 responsibility that he had towards his family as the oldest male in Leicester,  
17 the absence of strong relationships outside the family or the Somali  
18 community, the lack of physical resources available to him in his  
19 neighbourhood to direct his energies towards and the importance of religion  
20 as a common grounding with others. This has all taken place within a context  
21 of 'not belonging':  
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38 *'I don't feel like I belong here, and in Holland I do, I did, you know*  
39 *because I knew everyone and I just knew everything in Holland and*  
40 *here I have to do it all over, you know like, it's like new like here. So*  
41 *I think this means, the thing that I find better in England is because*  
42 *I'm focussing more on my religion in England and not on just*  
43 *amusing myself. In Holland all I did was try to amuse myself with*  
44 *girls (laughs) or, you know just hanging around with people playing*  
45 *basketball or whatever, swimming and the thing is there are no*  
46 *swimming pools here.'*  
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### Complexities of community

However, practices of community are not stable or uniform and do not operate in isolation from wider power relations. An appreciation of this undermines the essentialised and narrow construction of communities. Below, Ali outlines what he sees as one of his key responsibilities as the senior male in order to maintain honour within his community. He discusses this role of protector in the face of the difficulties posed by everyday co-existence with other ethnic groups, as an important function of community life.<sup>9</sup> But what his narrative also points towards is the position of young women who make the 'choices' outlined, being subject to male control.

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

Further mundane schisms can be identified through the intersection of gender relations and embodied markers such as clothing. In conversations with Rupa (female, aged 17, identified as Indian), for example, appearance

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3 and style adopted by individuals helped constitute the boundaries of identity  
4  
5 and relative integration (Nayak, 2003). She discussed how some young  
6  
7 male Indians would cause problems for her close friend by calling her names  
8  
9 such as 'freshie', due to her more 'traditional' style of clothing. This justified  
10  
11 her dislike of Indian males, explaining that she preferred spending her time  
12  
13 with Somali male friends, whom she saw as more friendly.  
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18 While various attachments to place expressed through the language of  
19  
20 community can be seen as a response to cultural and economic marginality,  
21  
22 it is also necessary to move beyond an understanding of social relations in  
23  
24 terms of discrete social groups. Such attachments lay the foundation for  
25  
26 emerging and multiple identity performances. For example, Omah took pride  
27  
28 in his identity as both a Muslim and an ardent Chelsea supporter and  
29  
30 regularly wore his replica shirt when playing football with friends in his  
31  
32 neighbourhood. Chelsea FC were the first team he saw on TV after arriving  
33  
34 in London and he has followed them ever since. As part of his photo diary,  
35  
36 he had a picture taken of him watching the FA Cup Final in his family flat  
37  
38 (See Figure 2). This is a young man with links to both Somalia and London  
39  
40 and fascinated with the game of football, but also proud of his Islamic faith  
41  
42 and heritage, indicated here by the Islamic style clock displayed on the wall  
43  
44 of his flat. Unlike the opening excerpt in this paper, Omah is not watching  
45  
46 the football match in the culturally distant and threatening environment of the  
47  
48 public house. He chooses to watch this important match in an environment  
49  
50 in which he feels secure; reflecting and reinforcing his specific socio-spatial  
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52 positioning within this place.  
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5 **[Insert Figure 2 here]**  
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10 Recognition of the liminality of identity (Bhabha, 1994) does not merely entail  
11 the fracturing of bounded ethnic ties, implying a reduction of affiliation, but  
12 also the creation of new forms of solidarity. There is potential for those fixed  
13 within contingent hierarchies of racialisation to negotiate the terms of  
14 difference by challenging versions of themselves as narrowly defined.  
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16 Community may be important for those on the margins of society, but how  
17 such identities are lived out, adds an important layer of complexity to  
18 understanding the dynamics of urban multiculturalism.  
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### 28 29 **Summary: Finding a way through** 30

31 This paper has shown that in understanding the experiences of young people  
32 in a specific urban context, we must consider enduring forms of racialisation,  
33 the relative positions of individuals within local hierarchies of acceptance and  
34 inclusion, the dynamics of place-based inter-ethnic relations and the manner  
35 in which community is re-formed as a mode of security and attachment. The  
36 construction of identities and modes of belonging for these young people is  
37 not just a simplistic response to racism, but about making the best of their  
38 various situations - drawing upon a range of resources and identities from the  
39 immediate to the global, within everyday contexts of relative powerlessness.  
40 They are seen to navigate landscapes of risk and opportunity, and in doing so  
41 challenge prevailing discourses of national belonging and essentialised  
42 notions of 'race' and ethnicity, in order to 'find a way through' (Back, 2005:40).  
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5 A focus on the lives of a range of young people from BME  
6 communities also illustrates that places are experienced heterogeneously.  
7 All young people in this research are possible targets of direct and indirect  
8 racism (Rupra, 2004, Sallah, 2007), which an image of multicultural diversity  
9 and celebration in this place often conceals (Westwood, 1991; Clayton,  
10 2008). However, we cannot speak of a coherent experience in the light of  
11 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007) and the voices presented. Histories of  
12 settlement and accommodation, geographical trajectories, socio-economic  
13 marginality and the practice of certain religious identities make some appear  
14 vulnerable - but also determined, in their own ways, to carve out a better life.  
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31 While there are shared understandings amongst those recognised as  
32 new arrivals such as the significance of religious adherence, the value of  
33 transnational connections and limited knowledge of place - even amongst  
34 this group there are frictions over the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1968) and  
35 complexities to bounded notions of community. These young people occupy  
36 a paradoxical position of inclusion and exclusion - while the diversity of the  
37 city offers a sense of safety, they also find themselves towards the bottom of  
38 local hierarchies of acceptance. Everyday life therefore involves a  
39 negotiation of the contours of power and disadvantage within the constraints  
40 of place (Noble, 2009). In addition restrictions placed on them by material  
41 conditions, the racialisation of legitimatised belonging and cultural practices  
42 entail that this is by no means a place free from restriction, division or  
43 conflict. The profile of new arrivals in the city is marked not only by  
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3 geographical diversity, but also by various degrees of economic marginality  
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5 and competition over resources. This reminds us that despite our  
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7 perceptions of place, cities are dynamic entities and that past  
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9 accommodations established over time, do not ensure the absence of future  
10  
11 exclusions.  
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4 1 This included 5 secondary schools, 2 neighbourhood based youth centres and a centrally  
5 located college of further education<sup>1</sup> (FE College).

6  
7 2 The attribution of fixed and often negative qualities to bounded racial and ethnic groups as  
8 an ongoing process through which 'race' becomes meaningful (Garner,,2010). This process  
9 both reflects and reinforces entrenched power relations.

10  
11 3 This was particularly seen in this research through the distinction between an 'Asian city'  
12 (Leicester) and a surrounding 'White county' (Leicestershire).

13  
14 4 According to the 2001 census 36 per cent of Leicester's population were categorised as  
15 'non-white'. Leicester also has the largest 'Indian' population of any local authority in England  
16 and Wales – 25.73 per cent of the total population.

17  
18 5 The most recent large scale urban disturbances along racial and ethnic lines were  
19 witnessed in 2001 in the North West towns of England: Bradford, Burnley and Oldham  
20 (Cantle, 2001).

21  
22 6 Seen most recently in confrontations between the EDL, Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and  
23 the Police in October 2010.

24  
25 7 Most of this community have arrived since the last national census in 2001, therefore  
26 figures are vague. It is estimated that there are between 13,000-15,000 Somalis living within  
27 the city, approximately 5 per cent of the population (Mistry, 2006).

28  
29 8 For example, in recordings obtained through a local youth arts organisation, one group of  
30 young Somalis, explained their dislike for the UK in terms of weather, the lack of social  
31 activities and problems of 'trouble' and racism.

32  
33 9 This is significant as some fathers have remained in Somalia to look after property and  
34 businesses while the rest of the family have fled abroad for safety. In this context the young  
35 men have taken on increased responsibility.  
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Figure 1: The Masjid Al Huda Mosque in St. Matthew's estate, Leicester.



Review Only

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Figure 2: Omah in his home watching the FA cup final



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