



**A University of Sussex DPhil thesis**

Available online via Sussex Research Online:

<http://eprints.sussex.ac.uk/>

This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Please visit Sussex Research Online for more information and further details

# **Growing up Glocal in London and Sylhet**

**Anthropology Dphil Thesis**

**Benjamin Zeitlyn**

**University of Sussex**

**February 2010**

# Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Contents   | 2   |
| Acknowledgements   | 4   |
| 1 Introduction   | 7   |
| Themes   | 9   |
| Background   | 19  |
| Thesis Outline   | 24  |
| What does this thesis say?                                   | 32  |
| 2 Methods and Ethics   | 36  |
| Entry into the field   | 36  |
| Methodology  | 60  |
| Ethics   | 78  |
| 3 The British Bangladeshi Social Field                       | 84  |
| Bangladeshis in Britain                                      | 84  |
| Theories and concepts  | 91  |
| Conclusions  | 131 |
| 4 Transnational Practice                                     | 134 |
| Marriage   | 135 |
| Transnational technology                                     | 140 |
| Visits to Bangladesh   | 143 |
| Translations and Ambivalence – <i>Desh Bidesh</i> Revisited  | 159 |
| Conclusions  | 169 |
| 5 Childhoods, Space and Place                                | 173 |
| Childhood as a category - Children and Adults                | 174 |
| Stages of childhood?   | 182 |
| Bangladeshi Childhoods                                       | 185 |
| Constructions of Childhood – Apollonian and Dionysian        | 187 |
| Work and Play  | 194 |
| Explanations for deviance                                    | 197 |
| Inside and Outside   | 203 |
| Home and Belonging   | 217 |
| Conclusions  | 224 |
| 6 Languages and identities                                   | 227 |
| Bangla and Sylheti   | 229 |
| Language practices and attitudes among children in Islington | 234 |
| Ranking languages and elements of identities                 | 242 |
| The differences between Tower Hamlets and Islington          | 250 |
| Language in Bangladesh                                       | 253 |
| Language vitality  | 256 |
| Habitus or Social Field Vitality                             | 262 |
| Conclusions  | 264 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 7 British Bangladeshis in Education                           | 268 |
| From the National to the Local                                | 269 |
| Teachers and staff  | 273 |
| Parents   | 279 |
| Pupils  | 297 |
| Education and cultural reproduction                           | 319 |
| Conclusions   | 323 |
| 8 Islamic Identities  | 327 |
| The emergence of Islam in identity politics                   | 334 |
| Global events   | 339 |
| The Muslim <i>umma</i>  | 342 |
| Islam in London   | 347 |
| Islam in Islington  | 355 |
| The Qur'an  | 362 |
| Conclusions   | 366 |
| 9 Conclusions   | 371 |
| Power   | 376 |
| Power relations and British Bangladeshi Children in Islington | 383 |
| Ambivalence and Contradiction                                 | 390 |
| Power and Transnational Childhoods                            | 395 |
| References  | 400 |
| Appendix 1: Family Trees                                      | 415 |
| Appendix 2: Mr/Ms Successful                                  | 418 |

# Acknowledgements

I am indebted to everyone who helped me planning, researching and writing this thesis. I was extremely lucky throughout the process and have been able to research and write this thesis only with the help of many people, some of whom are named below.

My research has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, under their Diasporas Migration and Identities Programme. I am grateful to the AHRC and to Kim Knott and Katie Roche for their support. I have had four supervisors for this doctorate and all of them made significant contributions. Filippo Osella was important in introducing me to anthropological ways of thinking and helping me to frame my research. Paul Basu helped me during my fieldwork and Raminder Kaur helped supervise my writing. Throughout the whole process Katy Gardner has been my principal supervisor, gently introducing me to the cultural practices of the anthropology Dphil.

In the kinship system of the anthropology department, along with the supervising uncles, aunts and parents are a host of grandparents, cousins and siblings. I have been advised and helped in many ways by Kanwal Mand. Simon Coleman introduced me enthusiastically to ethnographic writing. I also benefited from the support of Ann Whitehead, Ben Rogaly, Russell King, Richard Black and Julie Carr as well as that of my peers in the anthropology department and Dphil seminars. I am also indebted to Hanna Thompson and William Radice from SOAS for their help teaching me Bangla and about Bangla.

In the field I was helped in the early stages by my old friend Jamie Pike and staff at Arts for All in Shoreditch. I was introduced to a helpful youth club in East London by Aiyaz Ahmed and welcomed by all the staff there. Perhaps most influentially of all throughout the fieldwork was the help of Chris Mooney, she helped me throughout my research, introducing me to people and putting in a good word for me. I could not have asked for a more highly respected and better liked 'native' guide to Islington than her.

Staff and students alike in the school that I did research in were friendly and patient and helped me enormously. Special mentions should go to Nicole Neocleous, Richard Dunn and Fiona Gunn Stokes, in whose classes I spent most of my time. I was endlessly impressed by their patience, skill as teachers and generosity of spirit. Numan Auddy, Kim O'Mara and Troy Ellison kindly allowed me into their classes.

Jahanara Begum and Shimole Mostafa also welcomed me into their classes, as did their enthusiastic pupils. Among the women who came to their classes and eventually to classes and workshops that I organised, Nazma Rahman and Shajeda Begum Ali were particularly engaging, interesting and interested in my work. All the women in the classes I ran were important interlocutors and great fun to be around. In class, in school and in their houses, the families I knew were always friendly, hospitable and intelligent company. The children who this study is about were fantastic, they had a lot to say, they were always interesting and surprising. Their endless inventiveness and energy kept me going when I was flagging and their honest appraisals of me and my research kept my feet on the ground.

Once in Sylhet, the families I went to visit were incredibly hospitable and friendly. Their extended families, neighbours and friends made a huge effort to make me feel comfortable and at ease in their homes. Here I was most grateful to Lilu Miah and Alom Khan and their extended families. I also counted on help from others in Sylhet, principally Jahid Bin Matin and Engineer Rashid, their companionship made my stays in Sylhet enjoyable and fruitful.

Beyond my field sites, many people provided me with valuable insights, practical help, contacts and ideas. Ann Jones, Delwar Hussain, Julie Begum, Muhammad Ahmedullah, Georgie Wemyss, David Garbin, Ayub Korom Ali and Zia Haider Rahman all made significant contributions. My time in Dhaka was informative and enjoyable due to Chowdhury Abrar, Tasneem Siddiqui, Hannah Jennings (and family), Delwar Hussain (again), Sam Strickland, Halima Begum and Indranil Chakrabarty. In Brighton I survived thanks to the hospitality of Ana Rosales and Alistair Patrick, Sam Duby and Elin Lindhagen among others.

Last and possibly most importantly, I've had continuous and crucial support from my mum, Sushila Zeitlyn and my girlfriend Naomi Haywood.

# 1 Introduction

Shirin<sup>1</sup> was the first child I got to know during my fieldwork. As my work progressed, she and her siblings posed many of the important questions and themes in this thesis. She was a friendly if slightly awkward eleven year old girl who I got to know during my first few months in school. She worried about her exams, getting into the secondary school that she and her friends wanted to go to and her popularity in the class. Initially she was very friendly and eager to sit next to me, but she went through phases of being sullen and quiet. I got to know other children in class and at break in these phases. One day I heard her complaining about how her father had made her study for an hour a day during the holidays. Then she made fun of him, because he had to look up the answers to her work. On some occasions she teased her dad and on others they shared a joke, sometimes she went too far and was told off by him. Meanwhile, she was fiercely protective of her mum, whose English was poor.

At home Shirin was always welcoming when I came round although she asked me several times not to mention aspects of her school life in front of her parents. Once or twice we had whispered conversations about her friendships and feuds at school, or scandals that were erupting among her peers. I visited Bangladesh with her and her family; we all had experiences that we will remember for many years to come. In Bangladesh, however, Shirin hardly spoke more than a few sentences to me. She enjoyed being with her cousins and aunts, among her extended family, but this enjoyment seemed to involve shutting me out.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> All the names of people and most places that I will use in this thesis are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> I will discuss this in more detail in chapter 4.



Shirin's little brother Rafique was in some ways more successful than her at school: he won competitions, was a competent sportsman and an excellent student. He had more friends than Shirin and better report cards which he gloated over on report day. Rafique was a 'good boy' at school and at home and was rewarded for his achievements with glowing praise. His earnest questions and pronouncements were generally taken quite seriously for a boy of 8. So when he complained bitterly to his parents about how much he disliked the Qur'an classes they sent him to, they had some explaining to do about the importance of the classes. He enjoyed the family's visit to Bangladesh, but had suffered from the heat, the insects and some bewildering and occasionally hostile relations with boys he had met in and around the family home in Sylhet.

Shirin and her brother demonstrated the ambivalence and contradictions in the lives and identities of many of the British Bangladeshi children I met during my research. The overlapping spheres of their lives were shot through with simultaneous acceptance and rejection, love and hate, reverence and resistance. These relationships are not really binaries but complex webs of occasionally contradictory and haphazard children's experiments with identities and positionalities. Shirin for example, was simultaneously loyal to her parents and mocking of her father's ability to understand her school work. Meanwhile she protected and compensated for her mother's lack of English. She loved school and made strenuous efforts to fit in and make friends, but also suffered from occasional rejection and loneliness; she worried about failure in exams and peer group acceptance. Shirin had a lot of responsibility for her younger siblings but also resented her brother's academic success.

Shirin and Rafique reacted both positively and negatively to their visit to Bangladesh. They loved some of the experiences they had, but found elements of the visits unpleasant and unsettling.

Shirin was occasionally one of my most important informants but sometimes provided a sulky subplot. As it turned out; this very ambivalence became a theme of my thesis. Rafique was universally praised for his studious, earnest and honest behaviour, widely revered as a 'good boy'. This was a status he enjoyed and yet he resisted his Qur'an classes, finding both the material and methods of instruction difficult to appreciate. Their changing and contingent relationships with different spheres and elements of their identities raised difficult questions. Which was the 'real' Shirin and which was her attempt to behave as she thought she should? Which expressions of reverence or resistance were to be taken most seriously and how could they all coexist? This snapshot of two British Bangladeshi children hints at some of the central themes of this thesis.

## **Themes**

This thesis is about children and transnationalism. It is about the way in which children develop their identities in transnational communities in societies being transformed by globalisation. It is about the reproduction of societies through the socialisation of children and the tension inherent between this reproduction and social change. I set out to study children but became interested in adults' interactions with children and the nature of transnational communities and identities. As my fieldwork progressed I was drawn away from children into a study of families and societies. So, while children are the empirical focus of this thesis, there are many complementary sections which draw on evidence from adults or only discuss adults. As my description of Shirin and her brother above illustrates, processes and tensions are mediated by children often through seemingly contradictory attitudes and practices. I will investigate this phenomenon of contradiction and

ambivalence as it characterises the experiences of the British Bangladeshi children I focus on and is key to understanding way in which identities are formed and experienced.

Katy Gardner's (1995) book *Global Migrants, Local Lives: Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh* links the lives of the residents of a small village in rural Sylhet with global flows. It is set in the fast changing Sylhet of the 1980s. The transformations it refers to are driven in part by the phenomenon of migration from Sylhet to the UK. While Gardner's fieldwork took place principally in Sylhet, my research, also on diasporic Sylhetis, is based on fieldwork done 20 years later and based mainly in London. This thesis analyses the lives of a group of families and their children in light of local and global flows, influences and identities. In each community, in every village all over the world there are multiple, interacting identities. No 'culture', community, ethnicity, nation or race is pure and homogenous. 'Mixing' or 'hybridity' is inherent, but is realised and manifested differently in every location.

Roland Robertson's uses the term 'glocalisation' to discuss these types of relationship between the global and the local (Robertson, 1995:30). Global ideas and forces are interpreted differently and uniquely in different locations and cultural milieus rather than being homogenised by globalisation (which itself is a heterogeneous process). Robertson cites the example of the nation state, an idea which has suffered many challenges in recent years. Nation states tend to copy and borrow ideas from one another, but are all different, becoming agents for diversity and hybridisation (Robertson, 1995:41). Local conditions mediate what might be thought of as 'foreign' or 'global' ideas, translating or adapting them for local use.

I hope to shed light on the way in which glocalisation occurs through examining the everyday realities of children. Through the 'everyday' we might see how global, transnational, national and local issues, identities and ideologies interact in a particular community to create unique interpretations and combinations of influences. Children do not receive much attention in the general literature on globalisation<sup>3</sup> (Fass, 2003:963). I will examine and describe the transnational, national and local influences of religion, family and the school on the lives of British Bangladeshi children. I will describe how these factors interact and influence the identities and practices of these children in a transnational community in Islington.

This study, like Gardner (1993, 1995, 2002a, 2002b, 2006, 2008), is about a community in connection, about the global and the local. It is about a small group of children and their families living in London who in their everyday lives draw upon influences from a variety of sources. However, it is also about how these different influences interact to form the identities of British Bangladeshi children. While it therefore must take in expanses of physical and social space, examining interactions between the global and the local it is important to remember that identities are not fixed. Change over time is inevitable. Cindi Katz's (2004) book *Growing up Global* deals with some of these issues. Katz analyses the tension between the reproduction of societies and social change. She emphasises children's learning and interpretations as agents of social change as they mediate and translate the socialisation they are receiving. Her longitudinal ethnographic material on Howa, a small village in Sudan and her analysis of the competition and relative influence between different socialising forces is relevant to this study. School, the household and peer group are the principal arenas of socialisation for children in Howa (Katz, 2004:113). Katz

---

<sup>3</sup> Katz (2004) and Fass (2003) are exceptions.

critiques Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's (1990) work on the reproduction of societies but does not draw upon Bourdieu's (1977) idea of social fields and habitus (Katz, 2004:111).

Much of this thesis is influenced by the work of Bourdieu (1977), particularly his concepts of 'social field' and 'habitus' and ideas about *Reproduction in Education and Society* (1990). Using his theories and terminology I have called attempts to teach different ideologies to children through socialisation 'reproduction' and analysed the social spaces or societies which influence their identities as 'social fields'. Bourdieu calls them 'fields' as well as 'social fields', but I refer to them as 'social fields'. This is in part to distinguish them from other types of field, such as the ethnographic one and it is also to emphasise their social nature. While this thesis does not provide a detailed analysis or critique of Bourdieu's work<sup>4</sup>, it uses some of his concepts as a way of talking about the complex interactions of what might elsewhere be called 'cultures'. A review of these concepts can be found in chapter 3. Bourdieu's (1977) notions of 'social field' and 'habitus' have in them the potential for heterogeneity and change. They allow us to analyse global or transnational flows and influences without missing out the local specificities that derive from the precise mix and value given to social fields in each location and by particular people. Multiple overlapping social fields and habituses create complex, unique societies, even if these societies may be influenced by the same global forces or even inhabit the same physical space. Using Bourdieu's (1977) ideas about social field and habitus in combination with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) ideas about social reproduction allows an analysis of the reproduction of societies and the way in which reactions to this reproduction creates social change.

---

<sup>4</sup> For more analysis of Bourdieu's work and concepts see Jenkins (2002), on social fields see Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), on habitus see Reay (2004), Kelly and Lusius, (2006) and Friedmann (2002), on education see Carrington and Luke (1997), Willis (1977), Brooker, (2002), on gender in Bourdieu's work see Silva (2005).

Importantly, the social fields that I will discuss are not limited to local and national boundaries.

Influenced by Bourdieu's (1977) ideas of social fields and the Manchester school of anthropology, Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller (2004) set out an approach to transnationalism using social fields that are not limited to national boundaries, what they call a 'transnational social fields perspective on society'. 'Simultaneity' is the word they use to express the simultaneous involvement of transnational migrants in 'ancestral homelands' and 'host' societies (Levit and Glick Schiller, 2004:1008). Georges Fournon and Nina Glick Schiller (2002) also used this approach when discussing 'long distance nationalism' among Haitians in the US.

Steven Vertovec (2004b) also favours this approach, but emphasises the importance of a focus on the daily lives and practices, the habitus of people. He suggests four areas in which transnationalism has transformed the lives of people in migrant sending and receiving contexts. Telephone calls, families, norms and habitus are all areas of transformation which I will discuss in this thesis. Vertovec cites Guarnizo (1997) when describing the way in which Bourdieu's concept of habitus has become 'dualistic' or 'bifocal' among transnational communities (Vertovec 2004b:20). I have been influenced and encouraged by Vertovec's contention that this perspective is particularly relevant for the study of how second and subsequent generations are affected by transnationalism (Vertovec, 2004b:22). However, I have conceptualised habitus as being more than 'dualistic', I see many overlapping habituses corresponding to many overlapping social fields.

In the chapters that follow, I will suggest that people belong to and engage with many social fields or groups, societies, institutions, ideologies and spheres. Applying these concepts to the different

arenas of socialisation, the different societies or social spaces in which people live and attempt to reproduce their systems of belief in children offers a solution to several thorny problems.

The recognition that all people inhabit multiple societies or social spaces reconciles the problem of conceptualisations of 'cultures' as 'pure' or 'hybrid'. This is an attempt to reconcile studies which have been criticised for the reification of cultures or religions (cf. Watson 1977) and those that deconstruct culture and religion to the extent that they are no longer useful concepts (cf. Baumann 1996). Watson's (1977) edited collection conceptualises South Asians in the UK as 'between two cultures', promoting 'cultures' to objects in and of themselves. Baumann's analysis of culture meanwhile undermines the concept to the point where it ceases to be a useful analytical concept (Baumann, 1996:12). Instead Baumann analyses the way that ideas about culture are used and invoked by people in different situations.

In this study, in contrast to Katz (2004) and based on my research into language which I discuss in chapter 6, I identified three influential social fields – 'the British Bangladeshi social field', the school and Islam. These three social fields have the greatest influence on the socialisation of British Bangladeshi children in Islington. That is not to say that there are not other important influences, or problems with this model. School for example is the site of learning the curriculum, but also the site of a lot of unofficial learning, the 'diffuse education' identified by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990:5). Diffuse education comes not only from the school and its staff but also from peers. The peer group is an influence that I have not focused on in great depth. The children in this study did not have much time to spend with groups of friends unsupervised. The British Bangladeshi children in particular seemed to accept the authority and legitimacy of the school more than they embraced peer groups or the type of 'anti-school culture' described by Paul Willis (1977).

Joan Grusec and Paul Hastings (2007) insist that socialisation be considered *the way in which individuals are assisted in becoming members of one or more social groups*. The word assist is important because it recognises that socialisation is not a simple one way process, but that new members of the group such as children are active in the process and selective about what they accept or reject from older members of the group (Grusec and Hastings, 2007:1). This approach to socialisation is one that seems particularly relevant to this study, recognising the agency that British Bangladeshi children have in learning how to become capable social actors in several social fields. Theories of socialisation such as Bourdieu's (1977) analysis of habitus and Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) *Reproduction in Education Society and Culture* explain ways in which people become members of their group or 'culture' and that they do what they have been brought up to do. In the case of habitus, regular, routine performances and practices introduce strong dispositions which become inculcated beyond the realm of consciousness. Through socialisation within families, schools and by peers, habitus and identities are formed (Rogoff et al, 2007:491, Nash, 2003:44, 50). Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) maintain that the function of the education system is to conserve existing social relations, inculcate a particular habitus and consecrate the current arbitrary system of meaning (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990:198). The education system therefore has a powerful socialising function, assisting individuals to become members of a particular society.

Media and television are another powerful socialising force that is not discussed in this thesis. Indian, Bangladeshi, British, American, Chinese and Islamic television programmes, films, computer games and channels were all popular and influential on the children in this study. While I touch upon these themes briefly, the effects of media and those of peer group interactions are subjects for further research.



In chapter 5 I describe some of the physical spaces of home, the school, the streets and those encountered on visits to Bangladesh. In chapter 3 I consider the nature of transnational social space. Through socialisation within these spaces children learn to be successful, moral and competent people. However, some of these spaces are new, or very different from the spaces that the children's parents grew up in. Katz (2004) describes how children reinvent space and practices. I have also tried to take account of change by collecting stories of childhoods in London and Sylhet in the 1970s and 1980s from parents and encouraging them to reflect on the differences between their experiences and those of their children now. I have asked children and parents about their aspirations for the future. Through an analysis of the 'vitality' of the different social fields that the children inhabit, I am able to comment on social change in the British Bangladeshi community in Islington.

While this thesis is not about modernity, inevitably in the discussion of change, 'progress' and globalisation, modernity is invoked. While the 'West', the so called 'core', London, or *bidesh*<sup>5</sup> are often associated with modernity, there are other cores and other modernities (cf. Appadurai, 1996). Cores of economic and symbolic power in the Middle East and other parts of Asia disturb a neat core periphery model of capitalist relations. Cultural flows and flows of different types of capital do not flow only from core to periphery but among these multiple cores and between them, being continually reinterpreted (Gardner, 1995:273). Ideas about progress and modernity from Sylhet are reinterpreted by British Bangladeshis after living in the UK. Ideas about progress and modernity flow to and from the Middle East, India, Britain and among diaspora groups living in London. Changing interpretations of Islam, Islamic practices and the role of Islam in everyday life are a

---

<sup>5</sup> *Bidesh* means 'away' or 'abroad' in Bangla and is used by Sylhetis to refer to London (Gardner, 1993).

good example of this. British Bangladeshis in Islington look to Islam as an alternative modernity to the 'Western model' helping them to progress from what they see as the 'backwards Bengali culture', to a better future (cf. Gardner, 1995:274).

The 'British Bangladeshi social field' is comprised of different elements which are inherently unequal. Its principal physical locations are Sylhet, in Bangladesh and London in Britain. Wealth and power are distributed unequally between these two locations and people within the British Bangladesh social field therefore have different relationships to the people and places at each location. What holds these people and places together as a single social field in my eyes is the importance of influences and identities from both locations on British Bangladeshis. The unique power relations that British Bangladeshis have in London and Sylhet distinguish them from other groups in both locations. Socialisation in both places has produced a unique habitus and a social space in which certain types of capital are valued in ways that they are not in other social fields. In chapter 4 I discuss the role of visits in the socialisation and identity formation of the British Bangladeshi children in my study.

The status of Islam as a social field is less clear, but I will argue that this conceptualisation is more apt than that of a diaspora (cf. Sayyid 2000). The idea of a worldwide Islamic community or *umma* includes Muslims who are migrants or live in diasporas as well as many who do not. Non-migrant Muslims are in the majority and having shared none of the diaspora experiences, it is a misleading term to use for them. Using Bourdieu's terminology fits Islam into the model along with the other sources of identity that I am analysing. This is not to say that different elements of identities are considered equal by people, but that it is fair to give these elements even treatment in order to analyse the way in which they are considered, ordered and deployed.

Identities then, are complex interactions of contingent factors that vary over space and time. Interactions between the global and the local, physical and social spaces and change produce a complex web of influences on identities (cf. Hall 1992a:276). Beyond time and space, another realm opens up, the realm of fantasy, dreams and experimentation with identities that children enter into as they work on the project of identity. These elements of identities are perhaps more pronounced in transnational people, where contradiction and ambivalence are almost a defining feature of the transnational psyche (cf. Gardner, 1993, Rushdie, 1988). The contradictory elements of the identities of British Bangladeshi children and their ambivalent relationships with many people, places, practices and ideologies emerged from my field notes, interviews and recollections. One way I have expressed this is by pointing out elements of resistance to the socialisation practices that adults try to impose on children.<sup>6</sup> This contrasts with the reverence that children (and adults) occasionally expressed for certain people, places, practices and ideologies. Another way I have attempted to explain ambivalence and contradiction is by highlighting the differences between practices, or ways of being and beliefs, identities or ways of belonging (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1010). The interactions between practices and the meanings attributed to them is dynamic and ever changing, but the differences between what people, especially children, do and what they believe helps to explain some of the contradictions in their lives.

I have tried to consider the various social fields and influences on the lives of British Bangladeshi children in Islington as having comparable influence in order to assess reactions to them. It is clear however that this is not the case; all social relations are mediated by relations of power. In the final

---

<sup>6</sup> I use the term 'resistance' in the sense of Scott's discussion of the 'ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups' most commonly involving: foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance and feigned ignorance (Scott 1986:6). I will discuss this more in the concluding chapter.

chapter of this thesis I will discuss these power relations, specifically regarding symbolic power – ‘the ability to structure the possible field of action for others’ (Foucault, 1984 cited in Wolf, 1990:223, Bourdieu, 1977:168). Both Bourdieu (1977) and Michel Foucault’s (1977) conceptualisations of power have been enormously influential in anthropology as they are in this thesis. However I have left until the end an analysis of their theories in order to evaluate the way in which power relations within and between social fields act and interact. Their theories do not take transnationalism and globalisation into account, so in the concluding chapter I will outline how a transnational social fields approach disrupts and augments their nation-state bound models.<sup>7</sup>

## **Background**

This thesis was conceived as part of the research project ‘Home and Away: South Asian Children’s Representations of Diaspora’, which was managed by my supervisor, Dr. Katy Gardner and Dr. Kanwal Mand. One aim of the project was to address a gap in research on the views of transnational children on issues of culture, belonging and identities. The project aims to investigate and bring to the fore the influence of the life course in migration research. This thesis contributes to these aims, but on its own can make only a partial contribution to this field. It is a snapshot of just over a year in the lives of a group of about twenty British Bangladeshi children between the ages of 8 and 12. Added to this material is additional data collected from a wider group of children in less depth, from younger and older siblings and from parents and other adults.

This research and that conducted by Gardner and Mand (2008, forthcoming) must be set into the context of other research on childhoods, British Bangladeshis, migration and transnationalism.

---

<sup>7</sup> The children I studied would not have understood the influences on them in terms of ‘symbolic power’. However I believe that this ‘emic’ analysis is useful for fitting their experiences into a wider context.

Gardner's work on Sylhet (1993, 1995, 2008), British Bangladeshi marriages (2006), old age (2002b) and death (2002a) along with John Eade's work on Tower Hamlets (1989) and young British Bangladeshis (1997) give us a body of research with which we can contextualise and compare this research. There have been numerous other pieces of research on various aspects of the British Bangladeshi experience, mainly in Tower Hamlets. Many of these, such work by John Eade and David Garbin (2002), Halima Begum and John Eade (2005), Sarah Glynn (2002), Ed Hussain, (2007) and Delwar Hussain (2007), deal primarily with aspects of politics and Islam. I have included a chapter on Islam in combination with other socio-cultural currents that run in British Bangladeshi children's lives. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate that religion is not the only factor which orientates their lives – a common understanding in mainstream media (cf Alexander, 2002, Sen, 2006).

Most research about Bangladeshis in Britain is based on fieldwork in Tower Hamlets. This thesis is based primarily on research in Islington in north London. This was for practical reasons but will lead to what I hope is an fruitful contrast with research in Tower Hamlets. There is a limited amount of scholarship on Bangladeshis in other areas of London, Clare Alexander's (2000a, 2000b) work on *The Asian Gang* is a notable exception. Philly Desai (1999) and Sarah Salway (2008) have done work on young British Bangladeshi men in Camden.

Angry young men seem to be the focus of much recent work on British Bangladeshis in London (Alexander, 2000a, 2000b, Salway, 2008, Desai, 1999, Glynn, 2002, Hussain, D., 2007, Hussain, E., 2007). In contrast, this thesis looks at childhoods and on the way identities are formed during childhood. Dealing with multiple intersecting aspects of identities such as age, class, area of London, ethnicity, gender, language and religion, one runs the risk of neglecting one or other

aspect. I have chosen to concentrate most on those categories which emerged from my fieldwork as important. School plays a large role in the lives of these children, as do their families and homes in London and Sylhet. Religion is also important in the beliefs and practices of the children and families in this study.

The fieldwork focuses on a group of families whose children all attended a primary school in Islington in north London. Through research in the school, in the houses of these families, in Qur'an classes and on visits to Bangladesh with two families I have built up a picture of the major influences on the identities and socialisation of the children. Themes that arose from my data were the attempts of different societies, ideologies and institutions to impose or teach their systems of meaning and logic to the children and the responses of the children to this socialisation.

For anthropologists, the study of childhood is a fractured and contested field. Some accounts describe it as neglected (Hirschfeld, 2002) whereas others point to the many anthropological studies of childhood (Lancy, 2008). David Lancy (2008) makes the point that studies by anthropologists working in apparently separate disciplines such as education, linguistics or agriculture make important points and offer insights into childhoods (Lancy 2008:ix). Typically, as Lancy's (2008) review of the anthropological literature on childhoods demonstrates, they focus on the obscure and faraway communities in places such as Papua New Guinea (Lancy and Strathern, 1981) and Samoa (Mead, 1962) but there is less material on childhoods in Europe or the United States. Sociologists however have focused on childhoods in Europe and the US, so the work of Alison James (1993), Chris Jenks (1996) and Alison James, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout (1998) has been influential in my theorisations about childhood and methodological ideas. James (1993, 2001) informed my approach to researching and conceptualising children as competent

interlocutors and respondents. She also highlighted the socially constructed nature of childhoods. James (1993) draws links between the social construction of childhoods and children's everyday realities. Jenks' (1996) history of the social construction of childhood and the influence this history has had on practices further illustrated this and set it into historical and theoretical context.

Studies of education have made important comments both about childhoods in general and about British Bangladeshi childhoods in particular. I have been especially influenced by Willis's (1977) ethnography and theorisations of class and education. Elizabeth Brooker (2002), Abdul-Hayee Murshad, (2002) and Gill Crozier and Jane Davies' (2006) studies of British Bangladeshis in education in the UK were also important for my understanding of ideas about education and pedagogy. These studies shed light on how education is socially constructed by different groups, entailing various contents, ways of teaching and outcomes. They also discuss the ways in which learning happens both inside and outside school.

This thesis is about transnational children so it draws on research about childhoods in the UK and Europe, in the US, in Bangladesh and about migration from and to numerous places. The subjects of this research are not migrants, but as they are the children and grandchildren of migrants and members of transnational communities my work is also situated within and informed by migration studies. It reviews, is relevant to and comments on research on a wide range of issues. It will be, I hope, of interest to those researching childhoods, British Bangladeshis, migration, education, multiculturalism, linguistics and ethnic minorities in the UK.

My research began with a focus on language. It was supposed to be a study of 'code switching', a concept drawn from linguistics which describes participants in a conversation jumping between

different languages in the course of a single conversation (Ng and He, 2004:29). On further reflection I felt that this concept was not appropriate for extrapolation to 'cultures' as it implied that there were bounded discrete cultures to switch between. The work of Renato Rosaldo (1993) and Gerd Baumann (1996) was influential in unpicking the notion of 'culture' and revealing it to be fluid rather than bounded and fixed, although it is often constructed as such. Nevertheless, metaphors and parallels between language and 'culture' are useful. Scholars such as Roger Ballard (1994:30) and Miri Song (2003:107) have used the term 'code switching' to talk in a metaphorical way about 'different arenas' or 'ethnic options'.

Despite abandoning the idea of code switching as a way of explaining identities, my research into language yielded important insights. Through investigations of attitudes towards the different languages that children spoke and learned, I identified different social fields which corresponded to these languages. In chapter 6 I discuss the findings of research into language and identity and these social fields. I found that children speak and associate English with school, Bangla/Sylheti with home and Arabic with religious (Islamic) activities. These three social fields provide the majority of the influences on the children and form the principal three arenas of socialisation that I analyse.

In the same chapter I discuss the language Bangla, which in English is called Bengali and its regional dialect Sylheti. 'Bengali' can refer to people, the language or cultural practices, so I have used 'Bangla' to refer to the language except when I am quoting literature or speech. There are similarities, differences and power relationships between Bangla and Sylheti, but I found that many of the children and people in Bangladesh did not attribute them much importance. In reality most



people speak a mix of the two variants of the language. Therefore I began to use the terms Bangla and Sylheti quite interchangeably.

I was introduced to another concept from linguistics, that of 'language vitality' in Sebastian Rasinger's (2005) paper on speakers of Bangla/Sylheti in Tower Hamlets. This concept attempts to capture how, in competition with others, languages gain or lose strength and speakers. UNESCO (2005) uses the concept to discuss endangered languages. In chapter 6 I apply this to a discussion of the 'vitality' of social fields. Speaking about social fields and habitus using these terms evokes their fluid, overlapping and competing nature. People often speak more than one language or variant of a language and employ each variant as and when they feel it is appropriate. The multiple social fields and habituses interact in a similar way and their vitality is affected by similar factors that affect languages.

## **Thesis Outline**

After this introductory chapter, there is a chapter on methodology (Chapter 2) which introduces my 'field' in London. I describe some of my initial points of contact with important people and places in my fieldwork in London. I evaluate some of my own positionality regarding my fieldwork site and subjects. I then discuss the methods I used during my fieldwork and some of the ethical considerations that arose.

Researching children and childhoods was one of the central theoretical and methodological concerns of my research. I was influenced by James (1993, 2001) who argues for the use of

ethnographic research on children to access children's 'secret worlds' independently of adults. I soon realised however that to move beyond the school and playground into the homes and out of school activities of the children, I would have to make contact with adults. The more contact I had with adults and the more I understood ideas about childhood and Bangladeshi childhoods the more my research became about the reactions of children to socialisation and the reproduction of societies or social fields rather than focussed on 'children's cultures'.

Adults such as parents, teachers, social workers and older siblings became important informants and research subjects. One older sister of a girl from the school intervened importantly in my fieldwork when she explained to her mother and her friends what a PhD was and why I was doing research on them. This helped to reassure the parents about my motives. Literature on Bangladeshi childhoods such as Therese Blanchet's (1996) book and interviews I conducted convinced me that the very category of childhood is less clear and well defined in Bangladesh. Other fault lines in society are more important and children are well integrated into extended family activities rather than limited to 'children's' activities and places. In Chapter 5 I discuss this at greater length.

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss British Bangladeshis, the 'British Bangladeshi social field' and some relevant transnational practices. In Chapter 3 I briefly review of the history of migration from what is now Bangladesh to the UK, based mainly on literature such as Adams (1987), Choudhury (1993), Carey and Shukur (1985), Gardner and Shukur (1994) and Eade (1989). I also engage with some of the literature on South Asians in Britain. Moving chronologically from the idea of British Asians being 'between two cultures' (Watson 1977) and analysing concepts such as 'hybridity' (Bhabha,

1994), transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al., 1992, Levit and Glick Schiller, 2004) and the ethnographic work of Clare Alexander (2000) and Daniel Burdsey, (2004).

This review helps to place my own approach in context and explains my decision to use Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1986, 1990) concepts in an attempt to bridge the gap between studies which are theoretically and conceptually clear but include essentialist accounts of 'cultures' with studies which are so specific and context dependent that theorisation becomes impossible. My review of some of Bourdieu's concepts in Chapter 3 returns to the issue of transnationalism, where, influenced by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) I use the idea of transnational social fields to describe transnational communities such as British Bangladeshis. The issue of social spaces that span across and beyond national boundaries expresses the idea of transnationalism well. Phillip Kelly and Tom Lusius (2006) discuss the idea of a transnational social field and corresponding habitus. Using these ideas I describe the British Bangladeshi community as the 'British Bangladeshi transnational social field', this is one of the social fields which is a major influence on the children I studied.

In Chapter 4 I analyse ways in which this transnational social field is maintained and reproduced. Through marriages between members of Bangladeshi communities in Bangladesh and Britain, networks of families and neighbours between London and Bangladesh are maintained (cf. Gardner, 2006). Communications technology such as mobile phones and the internet have strengthened the ability of geographically distant people to keep in touch (cf. Gardner, 2008, Vertovec, 2004c). Visits to Bangladesh provide an important point of contact for families from London with people, places and practices in Sylhet. They play an important role in the socialisation of children into the British Bangladeshi social field. Practices which help to reproduce the British

Bangladeshi social field occur both on visits to Bangladesh and in the homes of British Bangladeshi families in the UK.

Through socialisation, British Bangladeshi children learn a British Bangladeshi habitus that makes them unique and different from other children in Bangladesh or London. This socialisation is resisted and the habitus abandoned when children are at school, away from their parents. The deeply ambivalent relationship with Bangladesh that the children and many of their parents have means that the British Bangladeshi social field's vitality may weaken in Islington.

Transnational social spaces are, in some senses independent of physical boundaries or borders, linking places that are not geographically close and creating a social field that is not limited to one nation or region. However, the use and attitudes towards space in rural Sylhet are very different from those in urban London. In Chapter 5, influenced by the work of Bourdieu (1977) and John Friedmann (2002) on the Kabyle house and the migration of Kabyle to Frankfurt, I analyse some changes in British Bangladeshi practices related to the distinction between inside and outside and other aspects of the use of space.

Chapter 5 starts with a review of some studies of childhoods. James (1993), Jenks (1996) and James, Jenks and Prout (1998) demonstrate the way childhood is socially constructed by academics and in popular discourse. They are influenced by Philippe Ariès' (1962) seminal work on the way childhood was created as a category in Europe in the Enlightenment. He analyses the development of the idea of childhood in Europe and the separation between adults' and children's worlds and roles. Jenks (1996) takes up his analysis and explains the development of the ideas that children play and adults work, the expulsion of children from the workplace and the creation of

children's places in schools through compulsory education. He discusses various ways in which childhoods are analysed and conceptualised such as the distinction between Dionysian and Apollonian ideas about childhood. This enduring binary points to ideas of progression from tradition to modernity.

According to Mead Cain (1977) and Therese Blanchet (1996) some of these distinctions are not made in Bangladeshi notions of childhood. Children in Bangladesh are not considered to be either Dionysian or Apollonian nor are play and study considered to be the preserve of children. Adults are involved in play and mischief with children, who are also involved in work. Children are not considered to be such a distinct category in Bangladesh, but are integrated into family and neighbourhood groups (Blanchet, 1996:16). The British Bangladeshi children in my study rarely played outside their houses or saw friends after school. This made them well integrated into family life, but also created a desire on their part for more interaction with peers and the outside world.

In chapter 7 I analyse the school and the attitudes of teachers, parents and children to education and school. School is the main place of social interaction for these children where they learn not only what is on the curriculum, but also the reproductive messages of 'British society'. They learn about the 'correct' legitimate dispositions towards 'culture' and to make distinctions between more and less desirable objects and practices (cf. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, Bourdieu, 1984). Children also learn from their peers and may participate in the 'anti school culture' at the school (Willis, 1977).

I found that British Bangladeshi children enjoy school and are receptive to the curriculum and social education in the school. They find the pedagogy and meritocratic systems in the school

satisfying and enjoyable. Crozier and Davies (2006) draw on Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) idea of *gemeinschaft* (communal society) and *gesellschaft* (associational society) to describe the differences between the Bangladeshi and Pakistani families in their study and the schools the children attend. Children enjoy the *gesellschaft*; logical, market-like systems in the school which are easier for them to grasp and succeed in compared to the mutual dependence and dense social networks of their *gemeinschaft*. The legitimacy that the school with its formal and informal education enjoys means that it has a strong vitality among British Bangladeshi children. This is reinforced in part by parents' enthusiasm for education.

The children in my study were relatively protected outside school and did not engage much with the 'anti school culture' in the school. Due to their lack of participation in after-school activities and out-of-school social activities they did not have the networks and social capital to be part of peer groups or participants in the 'anti school culture'. The reasons they do not participate in after-school activities, sports and school trips are linked to ideas their parents have about what education is and what it should involve. Their children participated in fewer sports and after-school activities than their non-Bangladeshi peers. The parents in my study valued education but did not value these extracurricular activities. Like the middle class parents in Blanchet's (1996) account, they prioritised academic performance over sports, music, drama or other activities. They also favoured a stricter approach to discipline, not understanding the role that extracurricular activities play for teachers as treats to be withdrawn if children behave badly. British Bangladeshi parents' understanding of pedagogy was informed by their own experiences of school in Britain or Bangladesh in the 1970s and 1980s which involved more memorisation and didactic learning. As Brooker (2002) shows with relation to British Bangladeshi children starting school in a small British

town, they are often poorly prepared by their diligent parents for the 'learning through play' approach of British early years' education in recent decades.

The idea of education that British Bangladeshi parents have includes stricter discipline; more memorisation and an element of moral or religious education (cf. Brooker, 2002, Murshad, 2002). These ideas are not consistent with the beliefs that teachers and policy makers in the education system hold and which the children generally enjoyed and trusted. This undermines the socialisation effects of the school, but in the instances where the children see school as legitimate and logical it also undermines the socialisation attempts of the parents, which in turn are resisted by children. Parents worry that at school their children are becoming 'secularised' or 'Christianised'. Many parents supplement their children's education with extra lessons in core subjects as well as Bangla classes or most commonly, Qur'an memorisation classes. The children in my study did not respond very well to the methods of teaching in the stricter classes. However, they took on board elements of an Islamic habitus without much complaint. In chapter 8 I discuss Islamic learning and the place Islam plays in the identities of British Bangladeshi children.

I found that Islam was significant to the British Bangladeshi families in my study. In chapter 8 I have reviewed some of the literature about Islam and on Islamic groups in Britain which helps to explain why this is. Analysts such as Eade and Garbin (2002), Glynn (2002), Hussain (D., 2007), Hussain (E., 2007) and Begum and Eade (2005) have described the tense and competitive manoeuvrings in the politics of Islam among British Bangladeshis in East London. This is set against complex and contradictory relationships between the British Government and British Muslims. On one hand many Muslims in the UK feel angry about British foreign policy in the Middle East. Simultaneously, in response to this anger, there have been concerted attempts by the British

Government to engage with religious groups and provide support for these groups to get involved in social work.

I will argue that while Islamic identities do not have 'domains' or much correlation with physical space, they do have enormous influence on many aspects of the children's habitus. While there is some resistance to the Qur'an memorisation lessons, the practices associated with Islam are followed carefully by many of the children. The vitality of the Islamic social field is strong, drawing strength from various global processes, such as the sense of a worldwide Muslim community or *umma* and the status a certain form of Islam has as an alternative modernity for British Bangladeshi in London. This form of Islam has become popular in London for a variety of global and local reasons.

Many of these reasons draw upon large scale struggles for power both in the sense of the rule of nations and in the sense of symbolic power that Bourdieu (1977) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) discuss. Drawing several of the themes of my thesis together in the final chapter I discuss how a transnational social fields approach can provide a useful critique of Bourdieu (1977) and Foucault's (1977) influential conceptualisations of power. The transnational British Bangladeshi children in this thesis provide a case study for the workings of symbolic power in the era of globalisation.



## **What does this thesis say?**

Each chapter of this thesis makes a particular point and develops an argument. Overall, however, what does the thesis as a whole tell us about British Bangladeshi children in Islington? Or, to turn the question around, what do British Bangladeshi children in Islington tell us about the experiences of transnational childhoods and their impact on identities? Studying children enabled me to examine the workings of identity formation as children learn to become competent members of societies. Agents within societies or social fields attempt to reproduce their worldview and systems of logic and behaviour through socialising children. This highlights the way in which different societies or social fields compete and interact in a way that is hard to observe in adults. This thesis then, describes the way in which competing social fields influence the identities of British Bangladeshi children. The chapters of this thesis give detailed ethnographic accounts of the various social fields which the children engage with. Finally I suggest ways in which this case study shows how transnationalism and globalisation are changing the workings of symbolic power. Studying the way children react to multiple sources of symbolic power can give us some clues as to the nature of social change.

Studying transnational children in this way captures and encompasses a global range of interactions between societies; a diverse cast of practices, places, people and ideologies. This sheds light on the influence of globalisation on the identities of transnational communities in London. I have tried to analyse British Bangladeshi children in a way that any other children or adults could also be conceptualised. I tried not to let the 'ethnographic dazzle' (Fox, 1997:3), the differences between the lives and practices of the British Bangladeshis from my own, mean that I analysed them in ways that other children, families and communities could not be. Some of the

theoretical ideas and insights I have gained from this research could therefore apply in other contexts.

The application of Bourdieu's concepts of social field and habitus to the study of transnational communities and multiple, intersecting identities is theoretically useful and conceptually elegant. In order to conceptualise the way in which the social fields which influence the identities of British Bangladeshi children interact and compete I have used a concept from linguistics, 'linguistic vitality' to consider the vitality of social fields. This approach has enabled me explore the socialisation and identities of British Bangladeshi children in a way that has not been done before. This emphasises the competition between intersecting strands of identities and the power relations in which they are embedded.

This thesis focuses on a community that has not been the subject of a study so far. Bangladeshis in Islington have not been studied in their own right and as my thesis makes clear, while their families may originate from the same places as many Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets, their experiences in Britain are significantly different. In Islington the feeling British Bangladeshis have of belonging to a British Bangladeshi community is less than in Tower Hamlets. They have fewer British Bangladeshi neighbours, peers or services nearby. The way they express their sense of belonging and the practices that they engage in are becoming less 'Bangladeshi' and more tied to other local and global sources of identity and influence. There are fewer Bangladeshi shops, mosques, Bangladeshis on the street and less Bangla spoken in Islington. In Tower Hamlets British Bangladeshis dominate the council and many of the most prominent local organisations; in Islington by contrast they are a minority among a diverse groups of minorities.

The recognition that the sense of belonging to a 'Bangladeshi' identity is diminishing in favour of a greater sense of being Islamic is not new (cf. Gardner and Shukur, 1994, Eade, 1997). Through my analysis on the British Bangladeshi transnational social field, I will investigate this process further. My research indicates that this social field is weak in some senses, but strong in others, practices such as visits to Bangladesh and transnational marriages are still popular for example.

Identification with the ideologies and practices of certain forms of Islam is increasing among British Bangladeshis, but ethnic boundaries remain important. What this thesis sheds light on is how these processes happens, how seemingly contradictory practices and ideas coexist in individuals or communities and how the ambivalence that is a feature of the experiences of many transnational migrants comes about. Separating out practices and ideologies helps to explain this complex phenomenon. Through an analysis of children's reactions to different social fields and a consideration of the way symbolic power works I hope to demonstrate the way in which these types of transitions occur. Religion is important to British Bangladeshi children in Islington's lives but it is not the only influence upon their lives and identities, as is often assumed about many Muslims in Britain (Sen, 2006:77,163). That is why I have focused on several social fields and habituses with reference to children's lives with religion being the focus of one of my chapters (chapter 8).

By definition, transnationalism, like the concept of childhood, embodies elements of change.

Transnationalism is associated with contacts, flows, combinations and interactions between people from different geographical locations. Children meanwhile are fast developing, learning and changing. They represent the future of the society that we live in now and the one they are creating now. Children are the subject of attempts by people to impose, spread and reproduce their world view, but inevitably, they interpret, translate and change these worldviews. Unpicking this tension

between the reproduction of societies and the way in which social change happens is one aim of this thesis.

## **2 Methods and Ethics**

### **Entry into the field**

This chapter will set the scene for my ethnography and the context for my research. I will describe the methodologies I used, some of the practical and ethical issues I faced and how I dealt with them.

The first sections describe some of the key sites and moments in the early stages of my research that shaped my fieldwork. This includes some background information about Islington, where most of the fieldwork was based. This material will hopefully give some context for the field site in London. Next, I will discuss the main methods that I used during the fieldwork. I will also include a discussion of power relations and ethical issues that arose during the fieldwork.

### **Finding and following my research subjects**

Initially I pursued contacts in various different parts of London, Tower Hamlets, Islington, Newham and Camden. I tried to make contacts with both children and adults, aiming to work 'down' to the children from adults and 'up' to the adults from children. I had most success working through a primary school in Islington and as I will describe below, this became the focus of my research.

One important aspect of this process was the willingness of children, families and institutions to take part in my research. I got to know some of the children at the school and found that I got on well with several of them. I explained my research to the staff, to children and when I encountered

them, to the parents and they seemed willing to help me in my study. Once this contact had been established and a relationship settled, I began to drop other research activities that were not within this group of families, who were all connected to the school and living within a small area, in a ward of Islington. Many of the families knew each other and I was able to get to know them fairly well. I spent time with them at school, in their homes, in the local community centre at Qur'an classes, further a field in other parts London and with some of them, in Bangladesh.

Working with families and in a school had advantages and disadvantages to me. I will discuss these in this chapter, examining the locations of my research and the methods I used. My research was multi-sited, both within London and internationally. Sylhet is an important place in the lives of transnational Bangladeshi families and formed a vital part of my research. I wanted to '*establish a presence*' among the '*chains, paths, threads, conjunctions or juxtapositions of locations*' in the lives of my research subjects (Marcus, 1995:105). Following Marcus' ideas about multi-sited ethnography; I accompanied these children and their families around different sites in London and Bangladesh. I observed children across a range of locations within their daily lives in London and in the more extraordinary setting of family visits to Sylhet (Marcus, 1995:106-108). Observation of families on visits to Bangladesh provided an interesting contrast to their lives in London. I was able to connect the local lives of children in London to global patterns of migration and see different locations within a 'transnational' community. In addition, many of the sites of my fieldwork were intimately tied up with my own life.

### **Finding my 'fieldwork' site**

I did not so much find my fieldwork sites as much as they found me. In 1986, while some of the parents of my research subjects were arriving in the UK as teenagers, I was six. I stood in Heathrow airport, looking out of the large windows at the giant planes arriving and taxiing, the tiny little men waving what looked like table tennis rackets as we waited for our plane. We were leaving London and going to Bangladesh, a country I had never heard of. Perhaps it was all a dream I mused, that I would one day wake up from, perhaps Bangladesh did not exist after all.

In 1986 in Sylhet, Halima boarded a plane for the first time in her life. She was 16 and had spent her youth watching her father board planes to go to London. She had seen the planes lift high up into the clouds to London. London, what manner of place was it? What kind of place could be up there in the clouds she thought? Eventually on a grey day, just like the one on which I stared through the windows of Heathrow airport, she landed in London. How grey it was and how strange that the houses were not painted, she thought. She was disappointed.

My family lived in Bangladesh for 8 years between 1986 and 1994, while my parents worked for development agencies. Bangladesh has a large presence in my life and my experiences are something of a mirror of the experiences of the Bangladeshi children growing up in London. Now after university, some travel and work in Bangladesh, I was back in London, getting to know the city of my birth. Bangladesh and London were now established for both me and Halima as real and meaningful, not dreams or cities in the clouds.

It was snowing the first time I went to the school, bitterly cold and icy. It was early spring, March 2007; I had yet to complete my research outline and was making contacts to set up my research which was due to start in the summer. Poynder Primary School stood on a corner, a tall handsome red brick Victorian building. After some exploration in East London and experimentation with a drama group in an arts charity I had made contact with the school, after hearing through a friend that they had an after-school club for Bangladeshi children. Feeling out of place, cold and nervous I locked up my bike and rang the buzzer to be let in. In the reception, I signed the visitor's book and asked for Patricia Lowe<sup>8</sup>, my contact at the school.

I sat and waited in the reception, looking nervously at the headmistress' door in front of me, feeling as if I had been summoned for a meeting or a telling off. Busy teachers and children passed through as I waited. Patricia appeared and took me in, through the brick corridors, painted with thick glossy cream coloured paint, covered with the artwork of the children and up one of the stone staircases, winding up through the brick tower to the second floor and into the large, light, high-ceilinged staff room.

We arranged ourselves and some cups of tea on some institutional furniture and talked about my research ideas and plans. I said that I was interested in coming to the after-school Bengali club to see what they did. We drank our tea, adding to the patterns of brown rings on the plastic table and I showed Patricia my Criminal Records Bureau<sup>9</sup> (CRB) form. Patricia explained that the school was to move to a new site. The new school would be called Poynder Primary School and it would be

---

<sup>8</sup> Both Patricia Lowe and Poynder Primary School are pseudonyms.

<sup>9</sup> The Criminal Records Bureau check helps organisations to vet staff by identifying candidates who may be unsuitable for certain work, especially that involve children or vulnerable adults.



ready for next term in April. We went along to the Bengali club and met Mr. Akram the new Bangla teacher that Patricia had just hired.

Patricia was responsible for the ethnic minority achievement (EMA) in the school; she worked there part time as the EMA officer and headed the school's environmental activities. She had her own classroom in the old school, with tall windows, high ceilings and old Victorian features. The high, very vertical room contrasted with the low grey plastic desks and mini plastic chairs which all the children sat on. Mr. Akram stood in front of a whiteboard, a friendly man with a beard and *paan* stained teeth who must have been in his mid-thirties.

He was teaching the names of various types of food in Bangla to a class of 9-11 year olds, writing the words in English script on the board and drilling the children in the pronunciation. I introduced myself and we talked for a bit about how I had lived in Bangladesh as a child. The children were not that struck by the idea and seemed more interested in knowing which football team I supported and what my role in the classroom was to be. I sat at one of the tables with two of the most outgoing and mischievous boys. Patricia read them part of a story about a family from Bangladesh who had been forced to leave their house because of floods. She had a large collection of books in a variety of languages. The club lasted for an hour and we agreed that I should come back every week.

After the Easter holidays, I came back to the new Poynder Primary School having negotiated a larger role for myself, as a volunteer teacher's assistant. I now knew some of the children and got on well with Patricia or Pat as I now knew her. I was also getting to know the area a bit more. Two teachers had agreed after an introduction from Pat that I could come into their classes to observe

the Bangladeshi children and volunteer in their classes. The shiny new school with brightly coloured metal pillars at jaunty angles supporting the glass plated entrance looked welcoming and exciting. The building had two long wings centred on a large round assembly/sports hall. The playground was small, with some space dedicated to new flats and some to a tarmac sport pitch.

Everyone was happy with the school, the children felt special and a sense of ownership of something new and valuable. It was packed with gadgets and everything worked. The staff were happy too on the whole, saying that the design seemed to work well and that it enabled greater access and communication. The design helped me as there were rooms and spaces in the corridors where I could sit and conduct interviews with children without having to be on my own in a room unobserved. I had been warned that due to child protection issues it was better not to ever be alone in a room with a child.

As I got to know the area I could see why the children liked the school and felt safe and free there. I also felt safe in the school compared to the sense of fear that existed on some of the streets nearby. I was often struck during my fieldwork by the deprivation in the area and obvious signs of many social problems. The children too noticed and often commented upon the signs of decay and 'dodgy' people hanging around. These feelings disappeared once we were safely in the shiny new school.

In the early stages of my research, I had my bike stolen from outside the school; some of the children told me that there was a gang of teenagers that hung around further down Pendlebury Road who must have done it. Pat took me looking for the bike in her car and as we cruised around, I saw a house with some of what looked like the gang of teenagers hanging around outside it. It

was in a nearby square with a playground in the middle and low red-brick modern houses around it. The house had junk strewn around outside it and quite a few bikes, but not mine. There were some spaced-out teenagers hanging about on the pavement and out of the first floor windows. It did not appear to be a family house and I wondered what was going on there. They were, predictably, not very helpful about the whereabouts of my bike.

I found some of these discoveries about the area and its inhabitants shocking. How often had I been past these estates or others similar to them without considering what life must really be like on them? I was born in this city and considered myself a 'Londoner' but as much as I now felt it my home and loved its rich cultural world and diversity, I had to admit that I did not know it as well as I thought. Now, as I scratched the surface, I was an outsider again, a visitor from a different social world, one of privilege and perhaps, ignorance. Having grown up in Bangladesh, I had not shared many of the experiences that the children and families I was getting to know were having. After more research, both in person and on-line, I was to discover more about Islington and these estates in particular.

I started working in Year Five and Six classes, spending a few hours in each. Both had female teachers. I found the experience of being back in a classroom, sitting on the back row, with the lads quite unsettling and intimidating at first. When I spent my first lesson in Ms. Anthony's class, she was telling the whole class off for not having done their homework. I sat in silence with the children and felt guilty. We were in two rows facing her at the front, as she sat in her chair behind her desk in front of the interactive whiteboard. Squeezed into a tiny red plastic chair in the back row between two children I tried to look sensible during this telling off.

The other class I visited in my first period at the school was taught by Ms. Noyes. These children were more unruly. I would sit and help the two boys I had met in the Bengali club with maths and English. I was shocked by the extremely poor English one of them had – he could not read or write well at all. He seemed so far behind all the other children. I come from a family populated by academics, psychoanalysts, archaeologists, civil servants, teachers and other highly literate, well qualified, middle class types. I had been encouraged by my parents to read and write from an early age and had largely enjoyed it so I was susceptible to these moments of ‘culture’ shock.

I was used by the teachers to break up, supervise and help children who were struggling in class or behaving badly. They would ask me to sit with children they thought needed help or on a table with children who were chatting too much. I gradually became a teacher’s assistant and would help with many aspects of the class. In some sessions I would sit and watch, but sometimes I would actively help the children with maths, English or some other project.

I tried to help all the children equally, not just the Bangladeshi ones, but often tried to station myself with or near the Bangladeshi children in the class. My role as a teacher’s assistant was a mixed blessing. It allowed me to blend into the class in an inconspicuous manner that teachers and children felt comfortable with, but it gave me a measure of authority that I was a bit uncomfortable with. I had to work hard to keep both my role as a researcher and ambiguous role within the class. I explained many times to the children what I was doing and that I was not a teacher, not being paid by the school and would not tell on them.

The Year Five class all seemed to like having me around, I was new and perhaps they found me more intriguing than the Year Six class did because of their younger more impressionable age. My

initial reaction to Ms. Anthony amused me; I had grown unused to the authority and naked power relations between children and teachers. I had almost forgotten the battles I fought against my own teachers. I came to realise that Ms. Anthony was a very good teacher, her uncomplicated authority and clear means of explaining subjects and instructions worked well and she was well liked by all her pupils. In classes where there was a confident teacher with a firm grip on discipline it was easier for me to go about my work, be helpful and not get drawn into dealing with discipline myself. It was her class who would become the new Year Six class in September who I was to stick with and get to know well through the next academic year.

### **Summer at the Lansbury Centre**

During the summer of 2007 I embarked on a pilot project of art based research at a youth club in Tower Hamlets. The 'summer school' at the Lansbury Centre was designed for me to practice using art and participative research techniques as an ethnographic research method with children. I planned to run a series of workshops on different themes around the ideas of self and relationships with other people (to examine issues of identity) and places (to examine notions of home and belonging). These were designed for about 15 Bangladeshi children between 8 and 12 years old, who would sign up at the beginning of the course and attend all or most of the sessions. I hoped that some of the artwork would contribute to a mural at the Lansbury Centre and that the sessions would be entertaining and educational for the children involved.

The 'summer school' happened very differently than I had expected. I encountered several difficulties in carrying out my plan. Early on in the workshops I decided that come what may, I would continue with the workshops and carry out as many activities as I could. I decided this in

order to learn from the process, gather some data and deliver on the arrangements I had made with children and staff at the Lansbury. As a carefully organised set of art research workshops the sessions were not a great success, but they were entertaining for some of the children and a steep learning curve for me.

The Lansbury Centre is on a newly built site, on what was an older youth centre and part of a series of several youth clubs which were amalgamated into one site in the new building. It has a sports hall, offices, a seminar room, an art room, a garden with a playground, paddling pool and some artificial sports pitches for football, basketball and badminton. The art room was a long thin room which doubled as a corridor leading to the temporary offices of the Lansbury Foundation, in what will one day be an IT room. It was well equipped and a pleasant working environment.

The Lansbury has a policy of allowing children to do what they want when they want and use the facilities freely, as long as there are sufficient adults to supervise them (2 per space, minimum) and they abide by the simple and effective rules of the centre. This policy seemed to work well, allowing an organised chaos to prevail. *"This is not school, the children can do what they want and will move on if they are bored"* I was told in my introductory chat with Anika Kabir, the senior member of staff at the Lansbury. The staff at the centre were enthusiastic about my project and kindly allowed me to use the centre and its facilities for my research.

Anika's enthusiastic and relaxed attitude convinced me that I could manage the workshops on my own and that there would be staff from the centre around who would be able to help me with any problems. I was also reassured by the calm, professional attitude of the staff and the sensitive no-nonsense atmosphere of the club. I found that the way the club was run encouraged play in a safe

and respectful environment for the children, I did not have many 'disciplinary' problems with the children. However, I did find that the freedom given to the children did not allow me to run the workshops as I had intended.

The children who attended were almost exclusively Bangladeshi. Two or three children of Somali origin attended occasionally and one white British boy was present almost every time I was there. Many of the children who attended lived nearby and walked to the centre alone, or were picked up by their parents. Some came from further a field and a few of these children stayed over for lunch. This meant that despite the club having many hundreds of members there was a regular group of about 20 - 30 children who were there several days a week.

These children knew the centre and each other relatively well. This helped the centre to run smoothly without need for direct management by staff. The children mainly knew what was on offer, how to get it and what they could not do. I am sure that with me around, not really knowing the rules and the centre as well as they did, that they tested me and bent the rules when and where they could. I found them sometimes in the art room, before I had arrived creating havoc, knowing that they were not supposed to be there without an adult, but that I would soon arrive to take responsibility.

Depending on what activities were going on and how the weather was, the children arranged and entertained themselves. Popular activities were playing pool, badminton, playing in the playground, on the zip-line slide, playing football, playing in the paddling pool, chatting, making jewellery or listening to music. There were gender and age divides in many of the activities, football was dominated by the older boys, as were the pool tables, although girls participated in both

enthusiastically when they could. On several days the paddling pool was open and was popular among the older girls and younger boys.

My art club was popular with younger boys and some of the girls who were present. The oldest girls and boys were not so keen on the project. Many of the children who came to the art club were 7 or 8 years old and therefore had a less sophisticated understanding of themselves, their 'community' and of maps than the children aged 10-12. The art club was not seen as 'cool' or attractive to the older children. They were reluctant to participate in any of the organised activities, preferring to chat, play pool, video games or listen to music. My art club also had to compete against the West Ham Football Academy players who definitely were cool, with their aloofness and impressive array of skills and tricks. I also found myself in competition occasionally with good weather and the paddling pool.

Children attended on an ad hoc basis, which threw my plans into disarray. It was extremely difficult to get signed consent forms returned. I managed to get them for three children, who were the most regular attendees. One girl who was enthusiastic and contributed well to activities was visiting from Coventry for a few weeks. Children sometimes attended for part of the session, grew bored or distracted and left to do something different, or they wandered in halfway through and joined in with whatever was happening.

Two of the younger women staff wore headscarves, as did the two volunteers. The two volunteers seemed to be the most devout. In an early session with one of them present, I tried to get the group to draw self-portraits, or portraits of their partners. The volunteer said she could not do the activity as drawing pictures of people was 'unIslamic'. This prompted the children to all declare that



they could not do the activity either. I therefore decided to move on to drawing pictures of houses and areas, annotated maps and to work towards a large map of London which we could all work on together. There were several other occasions when religious rules were discussed and Islam was often referred to in conversation.

English was spoken almost exclusively in the centre, only occasionally did I hear snatches of Bangla. These more often involved staff than children. On the street outside the centre I once came across a group of teenage boys waiting for the centre to open who were speaking in Bangla sprinkled with barely recognisable 'English' words borrowed from Jamaican patois.

Another problem I came up against was the lack of enthusiasm that drawing maps and houses inspired in the children. People, cars and animals were seen as much more exciting if difficult practically and spiritually. The artistic media were also important - pencils, paints and pens were considered a bit boring and basic, the children wanted something a bit more innovative, tactile and gratifying to work with. My experience as an art teacher was limited so I was not that confident leading children through a challenging, messy session making something exciting and beautiful. Using interesting artistic media seemed to be an important part of getting the children to engage in the project, so I decided to use papier mache to make a three dimensional map of London and any other places that the children wanted to include on the map. This idea was greeted with enthusiasm and after some preparatory drawings and discussions; work began on a table covered with cardboard. Old boxes, toilet roll tubes and other useful rubbish were gathered dutifully by friends and the staff at the centre. The layout of the map was agreed with the children who were present on that day, setting out London and the rest of the world as most of the reference points

were in London. There was space for Bangladesh, France (several of the children had visited), a beach (Margate) and provisionally Wales, although this was later abandoned.

Initially I had wanted to film children discussing their artwork and fielding questions from me and other members of the group. This had mixed success; it was hard to convince children to stand in front of the camera and talk. The children were shy and unforthcoming, the space did not allow us to sit around and discuss and other children did not have questions that they wanted to ask about each others' work. Without the structure of a set group and timetable it was hard to convince children to stay for this part of the session. The children who did explain their work to me provided good explanations and interpretations of their work and interesting asides.

In retrospect I should have filmed more rather than less to get the children accustomed to the camera. However, I started to film less, as the papier mache making ensued. I was too busy helping with the techniques and eliciting locations to include on the map. Squeezing in my questions and anthropological enquiries between the glue and mess and arguments over who would paint the London Eye proved difficult enough without trying to hone my camera skills at the same time. I did film occasionally at the end of sessions or in calm times but did not get enough footage of children making art based on their lives and discussing their work.

When it was complete I filmed a group of confident boys explaining the map and its construction to Anika who had come especially to see the map. This was fun and informative but included only some of those involved in my research. I hoped that through explaining their work to Anika, who asked lots of questions, they would provide a guide to how they had made the map and why they had made it as it was. This also got around a previous problem of the children thinking it was

ridiculous answering questions I asked them from behind the camera, which they knew I knew the answers to.

One of the unexpected successes of the experience was asking questions while we were engaged in another activity. While drawing, pasting paper on boxes or painting, in the calmer periods, conversations yielded interesting material in unselfconscious exchanges. These were much more natural and relaxed than other methods of questioning and approached what I thought participant observation should feel like. Responses did not feel tailored to the situation or designed to impress me or others in the room.

Several times during the summer school, I thought that I may have been better off just volunteering at the centre and observing the children in a more 'natural' way while supervising or participating in their play. This would have suited the Lansbury Centre, as they are understaffed and would have allowed for more casual, unstructured interactions. However I had committed myself to the art club and I felt that it was a worthwhile experiment, so I continued. These experiences influenced my approach subsequently when I returned to school. I decided to try to fit into the school hierarchies and systems in order to see it running as it normally does rather than creating new systems and encounters.

Despite the lack of consent forms that I managed to get signed by parents and children and returned to me, consent was largely given or withdrawn by the children's attendance and participation in my workshops or lack of it. Children came and went and did as they pleased. Four or five children participated in the London map from the early stages until the end, but not in every session. It was important to have a core of people who understood the aims and structure of the

project to help guide newcomers who just dropped in for a session. Two children, a boy and a girl whose mother works at the Lansbury centre came regularly throughout the month and signed consent forms. I had the feeling though that despite the signed consent form and the regular attendance, they often came unwillingly, encouraged by their mother to do something other than play pool or hang around outside.

I thought a lot about consent issues during this time as it had been virtually impossible to get a group of children to attend my art workshops regularly. I offered an attendance prize to anyone who attended every session. I had planned to give some art materials and a bar of chocolate to regular attendees, but no one won the prize. In the school setting I did not encounter such problems, as the children are compelled to be there by law or by their parents sending them to after-school classes. They had no choice but to participate in whatever their teachers thought was appropriate and mandatory to the curriculum. I had little trouble convincing teachers to let me into their classrooms and after-school clubs, where I was allowed to observe and enquire of an entirely captive and non-consensual set of subjects.

Signed consent forms did little to ameliorate the problem of informed consent and it was really left to my judgement of individuals and groups of children whether they want to participate or not. Groups of children often try to subvert or disrupt activities of the classroom. Is this a sign that they are withdrawing their consent to participate in the activity, resisting adult impositions, or simply young people acting up, showing off, or the effects of one or two 'troublemakers' in the group? It is very hard to say.

The summer school helped me to formulate ideas about how I would conduct my research, position myself and tackle problems such as informed consent. I got a feel for how I might conduct different types of research with groups of children and how feasible these were. I decided that it was important to get to know people first, to approach my research using more observation first and then use participative methods once issues of my role and informed consent had been settled by negotiation and discussion and a good rapport had been established.

I felt that participative methods, such as those I had experimented with, needed to be well planned, they were not as easy to deliver as I had expected. They also needed to be targeted and designed to elicit particular information. I decided to start my research with a more 'traditional' type of participant observation, without asking specific focussed questions in order to find out what issues British Bangladeshi children and their families thought were most important. I planned to return to participative and arts based techniques later.

What I found during the initial stages of my research and my shock at aspects of the lives of my research subjects also made me reassess the extent to which I understood my 'field'. Some of my assumptions about childhood, education and about London and Islington had been challenged and needed rethinking. These were childhoods very different from my own and this was a London with the same grey sky as mine, but inhabited and experienced differently.

### **Back to Islington**

After the summer I returned to Islington and to Poynder Primary School. The teachers had agreed to let me stay for the new academic year. After the mixed results at the Lansbury Centre I decided

that I would concentrate on the school and Islington rather than look for more research sites, while staying in contact with the Lansbury Centre in case I needed a comparison or secondary site. The structure of the school, with its certainties and hierarchies and the good relations with staff and children that I had developed there in the spring made it feel like the best place to base my research.

Common perceptions of Islington as a desirable, wealthy privileged part of London are misleading. The Islington of Tony Blair and the cappuccino culture exists side by side with a very deprived and overcrowded Islington, meaning that many of the Bangladeshis living in council estates in Islington are not much better off than their counterparts in Tower Hamlets.

Islington is the 8<sup>th</sup> most deprived local authority area in the UK, one of 4 local authority areas in London that are the top 10 most deprived in the country. Around 65% of Islington's Super Output Areas (SOAs - small areas of between 1000-3000 people used in demographic calculations) are in the top 20% most deprived SOAs in the county (Government Office for London, 2007).

Almost one in four (24.7%) of Islington residents belong to an ethnic minority group. This is high nationally but is below the average for Greater London and only two thirds that for Inner London. The most significant self-reported local ethnic categories are 'Black African', 'Black Caribbean' and 'Bangladeshi' in that order. However, Islington has the eighth highest proportion of residents in the 'Other White' group. This group almost certainly includes the many local Turkish, Kurdish and Cypriot origin residents. Islington had 4,229 residents of Bangladeshi origin according to the 2001 census (London Borough of Islington, 2003).

As well as high levels of deprivation, Islington also has very high levels of prosperity by national standards, with an average (residence-based) annual income of £35,400 compared to an average of £22,623 nationally. Nationally, the borough is ranked 14th (where 1st has the highest income) and 7th in London. The presence of such a high average income and such high levels of deprivation would seem to suggest that the average has been skewed by some very high incomes and that the borough is very unequal. However, measuring the difference between the most and least deprived SOAs in the borough produces a low inequality score, indicating that deprivation is spread across the borough rather than in concentrated pockets (Local Futures, 2007).

### **The neighbourhoods**

Most of the children in Poynder Primary School come from estates on the borders of Islington and Hackney. All the Bangladeshi children from the school lived in nearby council or housing association homes. Several of these estates have recently been the subjects of major regeneration efforts. One was found not to comply with building regulations and had to be totally refurbished to make it safe. The De Vere Estate, a pioneering work of architecture designed and built with much award-winning fanfare in 1973, became a notorious crime hot-spot and no-go area for the police and was totally redeveloped between 1997-2005 and renamed the Amwell Estate.

Some of the other council properties were large blocks containing many flats. These are quite cramped and families of six or seven are sometimes crowded into two or three bedroom flats. These were the buildings that seemed the most grim to me, the stairways often smelt of urine or marijuana smoke, they had broken glass and dog shit lying around or had signs of vandalism, burnt off signs and graffiti. The council made attempts to keep communal spaces clean or make them

look more presentable, but similar properties I visited in Camden were noticeably in better condition.

In the Amwell Estate and around Northampton House residents had the advantage of some open spaces, quiet streets and a small garden which were available for children to play in. These were relatively free from traffic and close enough to home for parents to keep an eye on their children. Since the redevelopment a housing association has taken over the management of some of the new properties. Housing association properties are newer and generally in better condition than the older council-owned properties.

Like much of London, old and new co-exist side by side; Essex Road has old pubs and shops alongside new cyber cafes, estate agents and a new Tesco supermarket. A few hundred metres to the north of Essex Road runs the New River, an old canal built in 1613 to bring fresh water from the River Lee in the East to the heart of London (Holmes, 2003). On the north side of the New River are some of the most exclusive and desirable streets in Islington. The large elegant Georgian houses in these streets are worth millions of pounds. Bomb damage from the Second World War, increased traffic and demand for housing in the overcrowded borough led to the construction of large estates replacing or set among the old terraces and shops of the area, this means that today, sought after roads and terraces are side-by-side with deprived estates (Baggs, et al., 1985).

### **The New Year - Fieldwork**

In September 2007 I was back at the school, I had followed the Year Five pupils up to Year Six and negotiated a role for myself, two days a week in their class. They had a friendly teacher called Mr.



Gregory. He was unthreatened by my presence and I was reassured by the rapport and respect he had from the children.

Ramadan seemed to slow everything down and delay my entry into the homes of the families I had met. Everyone said that 'after Ramadan' they would talk to me or we would do this or that. I visited the Bengali maths group at the school which had been set up by Islington Council Education Authority, which also funded the Bengali after-school club, to teach parents maths. The parents who came were always mothers. They said that as their husbands were at work or worked late, they could not attend the morning classes. The mothers were taught the same maths as their children using the same techniques by bilingual teachers.

Two young Bangladeshi women, Fatima and Seema, led the classes. They had a great relationship with the group of mothers, who obviously looked up to them. The mothers had their hair wrapped up in scarves and their bodies covered by tent like robes. They were polite but unforthcoming to me at first, perhaps thinking that I was inspecting the class for the council, but with Pat's introduction I was allowed to attend their classes.

They seemed to negotiate the fact that I was a man by referring to me as a kind of fictitious son or nephew. I pointed out once or twice that I was the same age as a few of them and not much younger than most of them. The construction of me as a son or nephew to them seemed to reassure them about spending time with me. At the beginning of my research I had worried that I might be confined to the world of boys and men, I found that I got to know girls as well as boys and formed good relations with the group of mothers.

Eventually one day, I made my first visit to the house of a family from the school. They were not the family of one of the mothers from the maths club, but another family who I had got to know through their daughter, Shirin. I explained my research to Abdul, Shirin's father one day after school and asked if I could come to their house. To offer them something in return I suggested that I could help his children with their homework.

I met Abdul and his children a few weeks later after school and as they drove home I followed them on my bike. Their flat was on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of a block of flats. It was a tall rectangular block set in a car park with some small sections of lawn around it. We went through the heavy steel doors with a magnetic lock and into the concrete corridors; Shirin and Rafique seemed excited that I was there with them. We went up in the lift to the 9<sup>th</sup> floor and along a dark grey concrete corridor lit with strip lights to their flat. Inside the flat I was suddenly transported to a Bangladeshi home. I think it was the smell of the kitchen that struck me most: a mixture of frying, hot oil, spices, mixed perhaps with the smell of hair oil. We went into the sitting room, two children were already there when we arrived and a baby was crying from behind another door. Abdul asked me to sit down and we chatted about Bangladesh, London, his life and my work. He told me a bit about the history of Bangladesh and about his life. He said that he loved London and could not imagine living anywhere else.

I sat in a very soft armchair with a silvery velvet covering that was smoothed and matted in places by the excessive attentions of children's hands. The whole room was scarred by the five children of the family, the beaten-up suite of sofas, crumbs on the floor, a biro-decorated plastic cover on the table and walls covered with marker pen. A few framed religious inscriptions in Arabic decorated the walls; there was a cabinet with china in it and a large television in one corner.

Abdul went next door through the door of the living room into the kitchen and fetched the crying baby. A little while later his wife Sumaya appeared. She greeted me politely, wearing the loose robe and headscarf that the other women I had met wore. After a brief chat with Sumaya, I continued talking to Abdul and the children. We discussed the children and their education. I told him that Shirin was doing pretty well at school and that Mr. Gregory was a very good teacher. Shirin said that she was nervous about her SATS<sup>10</sup>, so I said that I would help her.

I wondered how many bedrooms they had. Sumaya kept on going back into the kitchen, perhaps preparing some food. Then the computer sounded the call to prayer and she went into the kitchen again to pray. I asked Abdul if he wanted to pray and insisted that I did not want to disturb them. He told me not to worry, that his wife would pray now, but that he would wait until later. Eventually Rafique stopped using the computer and Abdul asked me if I would help him edit a letter to the council about his housing benefit. I helped him edit the letter into a clearer form: the children laughed when they saw me correcting it as they had already been through it.

A picture emerged in my head of Abdul at school aged eleven, recently arrived from a Bangladeshi village and struggling to understand. He probably left school five years later, still struggling to read and write well. While we were writing the letter Sumaya offered me tea and biscuits from Bangladesh. The smell of their house, the taste of the sweet stewed tea, the biscuits, the tired furniture and busy wife all conjured up memories of visits to the houses of families in Bangladesh.

---

<sup>10</sup> SATS (Standard Assessment Tests) tests exams at the end of Year 2, 6 and 9. They are used to measure a child's progress compared with other children born in the same month.

Sumaya thanked me as I got ready to leave for helping to write the letter and we agreed that I should come back every Friday afternoon to help the children with their homework. They seemed happy with this and while we chatted I helped Shirin with some homework she had to do. I left feeling a mixture of conflicting emotions, pleased that it had gone well, that I had managed to get to their house and make friends with them and that they seemed to like me. I also felt sad for them in their tiny flat and obvious poverty and slightly ashamed of my own relative wealth.

More than cultural or religious differences I felt a wide class gap between us. While I was doing my PhD, Abdul was less well educated than most people I knew. This was the family that I got to know best during my research and who I would meet in Bangladesh on their family holiday just under a year after this first visit to their house (see chapter 4).

Every Friday I went to their house and would often leave to go to dinner at a friend's house or out for drinks. Unlike many anthropologists, my 'other' life, my friends and 'home' were never far away. My 'field' was close enough to my life that I could commute daily. I tried as much as possible to be involved in the world of my research subjects and the field, to feel as if I was 'doing fieldwork'. I did not go to university often, spending as much time as possible with Bangladeshi children or families. I would never achieve the measure of entering the subjectivities of my research subjects that some anthropologists are able to (cf. Abu-Lughod, 1988:20). As an adult, (re)entering the world of children is difficult, if not impossible. My ethnicity and non-Bangladeshi origins were also obvious and remarked upon. Although I was adopted on some occasions as a member of communities such as the school or as fictitious kin by Bangladeshi families, I was not able to enter into a community as I might have been had I lived with them far away from my home. The proximity to

my home and constant involvement in my personal life made it difficult for me to 'escape' that either.

How much was I to reveal to my research subjects of my life, my personal views and activities? It was difficult. Sometimes I felt that as Bangladeshis and devout Muslims, they might not approve of some aspects of my life and that it was better to simplify or be vague about. I decided that in order not to patronise or deceive people to whom I would be asking so many questions, it was better to be honest as much as possible. I had time to get to know people to discuss our differences and similarities and arrive at a mutual understanding of each other. I wanted my research subjects to be unashamed and honest and felt that they should expect the same from me. I am sure, however, that we all protected each other from opinions that we thought the other might disapprove of.

## **Methodology**

Only in-depth qualitative research can unpick such fluid issues as identities and the meanings of notions such as 'home', 'away' and 'childhood'. These methods allow a focus on lived experiences, whereas quantitative methods lend themselves to identifying causal relationships between variables rather than processes or meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:13). Doing in-depth qualitative research with a small group of research subjects allows the researcher and methodologies to be more open and involved with the subject(s) of study (Flick et al., 2004:5). In this way the research and the methodologies can develop together and the research of fluid contingent topics can be undertaken using fluid and contingent methods. The methods can be determined by the object of study and not the other way around (Flick et al., 2004:15).

My fieldwork was not started with a hypothesis or a theory to prove or disprove. No researcher can truly claim, however, to have gone to the field with 'an open mind' as a blank canvas to fill with evidence and theory. I certainly approached my research with some expectations, prejudices, political and theoretical ideas framing my approach, much as I tried to avoid them.

I tried to use many pieces of information collected in different forms and by different methods to piece together a subjective, interpretive reality. This interdisciplinary approach lends itself to flexibility and to a 'blurring of genres' which has helped to create new disciplines (such as migration studies):

*which are hybrids of intellectual concerns and issues, frequently with borrowed, appropriated, adapted, and bricoleur-style methods crafted on the spot for particular tasks.*

(Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:3)

## **Ethnography**

Ethnography is the central practice of social and cultural anthropology (Marcus and Fischer, 1986:22). It is a form of writing about a group of people aimed at giving a holistic account of their 'culture' and at eliciting the 'native point of view' (Marcus and Fischer, 1986:25). Geertz (1973) described 'doing an ethnography' as more than a matter of methods. Geertz's famous idea of 'thick description' gets at the heart of how he saw ethnography. Thick description goes beyond a description of physical movements, places and events ('thin' description) and into the realms of meaning, or as Geertz puts it, "*a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures*". Not only what happened, but what that happening meant. Citing Ryle's 1968 lecture, 'The Thinking of Thoughts,

what is 'Le Penseur' Doing', Geertz reflects on the meanings involved in winking in a group of schoolchildren. This engaging account shows that far from just being "*several rapid contractions of their right eyelids*" the series of winks exchanged by the children in the account have complex emotions and meanings connected to them and different styles and effects on their peers (Geertz, 1973:10).

Ethnography tries to achieve an understanding of the meanings of social actions. Geertz said that it involves the reading of cultures or social actions as 'texts'.

*Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript--foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour. (Geertz, 1973:10)*

The symbols 'read' in these actions by both researcher and the research subject, must of course be interpreted for meaning (Marcus and Fischer, 1986:26). Detecting the meaning ('reading') of these symbolic acts is tricky and Geertz compared it to reading a poem, getting a joke or understanding a proverb (Geertz, 1974:45). In the interpretation, the variety of readings that one can make of a single action, poem or text lies the space for the researcher's subjectivity.

*...what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to... (Geertz, 1973:9)*

James (2001) has made some powerful arguments for the use of ethnography as a way of researching children, arguing that “*ethnography has allowed children to become involved in research – as such it is becoming orthodoxy in childhood research*”. Methodologies for research with children mirror changing attitudes towards them and social constructions of childhood. This has seen a shift from seeing children as the passive subjects of research, to active participants within it (James, 2001:246).

To understand properly the ‘experience of childhood’, insights into children’s own views and actions independent of adults are important, to access the “*separate and secret world of childhood*” (James, 2001:250-251). This is the challenge and it is why James recommends ethnography as a methodology. In order to access the ‘separate and secret world of childhood’ to see the ‘natives’ point of view’ requires the researcher to spend long periods of time with the research subjects. It gives the researcher time to understand their languages, their meanings and subjectivities and to gain their trust.

James focuses upon children’s acquisition of ‘personhood’, taking children’s words seriously, interpreting her ethnographic data as one would for adult subjects. She emphasised children’s own definitions, words and ideas, recognising children as competent social actors and thinkers. She also made a point of not asking children questions, which might have framed information in a way laden with adult assumptions. This, she claims, helps make sure information given to her by children is meaningful to them (James 1993:102).

James’ (1993) ethnography draws heavily on quoted conversations and excerpts from field notes. Through these she describes relations between the children’s embodied experiences and identities



(James, 1993:102). James refuses to draw conclusions from her ethnography however, maintaining that the:

*... project of seeking out identity and personhood remains inevitably incomplete, for it is through the process of social life and engagement, rather than as its product, that personification takes place. (James, 1993:234).*

Alongside the detailed ethnography, James' account includes a great deal of fascinating theoretical analysis and review of other literature. Ethnography is well-suited to understanding the subjectivities of a group of people, as I will discuss later, the views and voices of children are often not included in research 'on' them. Ethnography, as James explains, helps to give children a voice.

### **Participant Observation**

Most of my fieldwork was spent doing 'participant observation' in various contexts. In the school for example, I worked as a volunteer teacher's assistant and had varying degrees of interaction with children. On some occasions I was active in helping children with activities, supervising small groups of children for reading sessions or project work. On some occasions I led whole class discussions or activities. During other sessions when the class teacher was leading activities or children were working on their own I sat at the back of the class and observed the class with little or no interaction. I participated in break time activities such as football and other games, ate lunch with pupils or teachers and also helped supervise PE lessons.

In the home of British Bangladesh families I visited I helped children with their homework. This was one of the ways in which I secured regular visits to families' houses. However I was careful not to push children too much to doing work they did not want to do and felt justified in this as I had been clear with families about what my role and intentions were and in not accepting the money offered to me in return for 'tutoring'. When children were bored or reluctant to do their homework we simply chatted.

As time went on and my relationships with the children and their families deepened and became more 'natural', these interactions became less formal and I would spend most of my visits talking to the children or their parents. This is one of the aims of participant observation, the length of contact allows 'natural' interactions to be observed and participated in (Ostberg, 2003:33). However, these visits were 'artificial' and I was often the centre of attention. I was aware that the behaviour of people in the household was different as a result of my presence. However they did afford me the opportunity to observe the households and the behaviour of children and their parents at home.

I made two visits to Bangladesh with families from the school, one in winter and one during the summer holidays. On each visit I spent time staying in a different family's home in Sylhet. I spent a month in Sylhet in the winter of 2007/2008 and two months in Sylhet in summer 2008. These visits were important for me to see the workings of a transnational family and the experiences of transnationalism that the children had. On visits to Bangladesh I was a guest and a visitor. I felt awkward in this role sometimes and a little intrusive. I spent a lot of time simply observing the activities and comings and goings of the households I stayed in. However I was also the subject of a great deal of attention and curiosity as the local family enquired about me, my research and my welfare. Whereas in London I had to be proactive to get into the houses of families and join in

activities, in Bangladesh it was often most fruitful for me to opt out of activities and stay in the household observing or playing with the children rather than visiting local shops and relatives with the adults.

Participant observation lends itself to blurring boundaries between researcher and subject, insider and outsider (Spradley, 1980:57). This can lead to vitally important insights and increased reflexivity but can also lead to ethical dilemmas. Like Ostberg (2003:33) I became involved in my research subjects' daily lives without ever attempting to 'go native' in the sense of being more 'Bangladeshi'. I was of course already a 'native' in the sense of being a 'Londoner'. I was interested in Islam but never pretended this was because I was interested in becoming a Muslim. I was potentially more of an 'insider' in the world of teachers, where I could conceivably have incorporated myself, there being no unassailable barriers of ethnicity or age. I was often aware of the issue of my role and position in different situations.

The balance of openness about the role and intentions of the researcher and vagueness about his/her thoughts and findings is important. It is especially important when working with children to be clear and repeat often your motives and reasons for your interest. On several occasions I felt that I had an ethical responsibility to end conversations or provide an opinion or intervention during participant observation. I will discuss these in the section on ethics.

## **Interviews**

While James' (2001, 1993) arguments for the use of ethnography as a method for studying children are convincing, straightforward interviewing also proved informative. In keeping with the idea of

giving children's voices and consciousness the same value as we might accord adults, there is no reason why the same type and format of interviews cannot be used with children as with adults.

Eder and Fingerson (2001) make a strong case for the use of various interviewing techniques with children either alone or in groups (Eder and Fingerson, 2001:181). They outline the ways in which various types of interviews can be used and which topics or situations might suit different types of interviews. Interviews do not have to be formal or static; they can be 'embedded' into larger common activities to enhance their naturalness, during play or through activities such as 'show and tell', role play or telling stories (Eder and Fingerson, 2001:183). They can also be conducted while on walks or travelling as conversations, perhaps stimulating discussion through cues on the route of the journey (Eder and Fingerson, 2001:184).

I used one on one interviews in school, conducted just outside the classroom with children and also interviewed a number of adults. Eder and Fingerson emphasise several positive aspects of working with groups of children, in the 'naturalness' it inspires, the possibility for observing peer relations and the shift in power relations when dealing with a group of children rather than a child on his/her own (Eder and Fingerson, 2001:183). I will discuss working with groups next and power relations later, but I experienced none of the problems of shyness or unequal power relations that Eder and Fingerson (2001:183) or Punch, (2002:330) allude to when dealing with individual children.

I found interviewing children on their own to be very rewarding and valuable. In the often hectic scenes of most of my research there were hardly any opportunities for quiet, confidential conversation. There were always friends, teachers, siblings or parents on hand to pressure, tease, chide or influence children in their responses to me. At home, in class in the playground I was

hardly ever alone with a child. The one on one interviews I conducted with children gave me valuable insights and allowed the less confident to speak their minds.

I avoided being alone with a child partly due to concerns about child protection issues and accusations of abuse. I also found that it was rare for the children to spend long periods of time alone. At home their parents were attentive and most of the children had several siblings. In Bangladesh there were many curious relatives on hand where ideas about privacy are very different from British ones (see chapter 5).

Children were happy to come and be interviewed by me as it was an escape from class. With permission from the teacher I took the Bangladeshi children out of the class, individually, during a period negotiated by the teacher and pupil. They did not miss classes where they were falling behind, but neither did they miss classes that they particularly enjoyed. Indeed one girl was very happy to skip PE.

The interviews were conducted after I had already spent quite a lot of time with the children in the class, so they were all familiar with me and my work. This helped them not to feel awkward with me when we were alone in the corridor outside their class. The recordings I was able to make during these interviews are some of the best recordings I have of children speaking about themselves. Recordings from families or group situations are harder to decipher and of lower quality. This helped me to represent the words and interpretations of children accurately.

I was unable, despite wanting to, to conduct interviews on walkabouts in the area as Eder and Fingerson (2001:184) suggest. This was because of a lack of unsupervised time outside the home

or school that the children had. The street was not considered a safe place for children to be unsupervised by teachers or parents.

After the interviews, when I came to transcribe the recordings I had made and started to select quotes to illustrate my thesis, I noticed stylistic aspects of the conversations. Some of the quotes seem occasionally repetitive or to include a lot of my own questioning. During the transcription of interviews I was aware that the way children had responded to my questions was different to the way adults spoke in interviews. Children seemed to speak in short phrases and looked for prompts and qualifying questions. Adults, more articulate and confident, spoke in paragraphs.

This led me to many dilemmas about asking leading questions or signalling to children in the way I responded to children's answers. I tried to be accepting of their answers without pushing them in one direction or the other, even when asked to qualify the questions. I found that children often asked for clarification or guidance when they were unsure exactly what I meant by a question or wanted in the answer. In an interview with Faisal, aged 11, which I have cited in chapter 5, I asked him where he lived. In the conversation that followed he asked me several times for clarification about what I meant by the question. I wanted him to reflect on where his home was so I was unwilling to tell him whether I wanted him to talk about his home in London or in Bangladesh, I wanted him to decide. He, meanwhile, was looking for some clarification from me.

On the basis of interviews such as the one with Faisal, where afterwards I felt that I had asked leading questions or framed questions in such a way as to lead to certain responses, I modified the way I asked questions slightly. At the beginning I had aimed to make interview questions sound conversational and not scripted or prepared them much. After transcribing interviews and

considering the answers children gave I tried to ask questions which attempted to clarify of what I was asking without revealing my own expectations. I also accepted the artificiality of the interviewing process and rather than attempt to make it conversational, I used the interview and recording as part of the theatre and fun of interviewing, which the children seemed to enjoy. They enjoyed turning the tables on me and asking me a few questions at the end of the interview and listening back to the interviews on my recorder.

On other occasions when I was not interviewing children, but just talking to them I felt that they were seeking my approval or disapproval of their opinions. One boy told me about a playground vendetta and his violent plans for one of his enemies. I listened, fascinated by his accounts and plan to cut this boy's head off. I felt that as a responsible adult I should at this point show my disapproval of his violent ideas. I did not want to stop the flow of his ideas or openness with me, but felt at the time that he was looking for some judgement or response from me.

### **Group Interviews, Discussions and Focus Groups**

Schools are very hierarchical settings and there are lots of formalised power relations. Overcoming the power relations between adults and children was one of the challenges of research with children. However, the school setting was good for activities such as workshops, focus groups and discussions. These have advantages over participant observation in terms of consent issues as it is very clear who is and is not participating (James, 2001:259).

I held group interviews and discussions with children and parents about topics that I was particularly interested in. During the spring and summer term of the year I was at the school, I led

sessions in an after-school club for Bangladeshi children and ran a computer class for Bangladeshi mothers. In the after-school club, children would spend every other week's club with me and the other week they would be learning Bangla. The class was split into two based on Bangla ability as the Bangla teacher was having trouble teaching the group, which had varying abilities.

These discussions helped me to understand children's and parents' views about certain issues, and the differences between children. Group discussions enabled conversation between children with differing views and this was often illuminating. As Eder and Fingerson (2001:181) note, group interviews help redress the power imbalance between children and adults. Children can feel emboldened in groups and their interactions with each other and with the researcher can be more 'natural'. Discussion can flow more freely onto topics that the group finds interesting.

However, having said that, there were often one or two dominant members of a group who directed conversation and others had a tendency to follow or copy confident and articulate peers. This was certainly true of both the children's and parent's group discussions and was an element of this methodology that I had to make a conscious effort to counteract. It was difficult to avoid leading children in these discussions, where I could see them being led by pressure from their peers. There was a high degree of conformity in some responses to questions.

In the extract below from a discussion about languages spoken by the children Tasneem and Shirin give very similar answers to my questions. Shirin is clearly influenced by Tasneem's choices in a pile-sorting exercise and responds to my questioning saying 'same reason as Tasneem'. This was common as children were influenced not only by the responses of other children but also my



responses to other children. If they thought that I approved of the answer, that it had been the 'correct' answer, they wanted to conform to it.

Benji: *Tasneem, would you like to go first? Why do you think Arabic is the most important language in the world?*

Tasneem: *Because Allah said if you don't learn Arabic and all that he's gonna punish you.*

Shirin: *How do you know that?*

Tasneem: *Cause, mehsab yeah.*

B: *Mehsab, what's that?*

Tasneem: *A Arabic teacher.*

...

Tasneem: *Yeah and um English because in school when you have to do maths an all that yeah how am I going to understand what's what and what to do and SATS and all that.*

B: *Yeah.*

Tasneem: *And then I put Bengali because at home I HAVE to speak Bengali.*

B: *You have to? Why do you have to?*

Tasneem: *My mum knows half of Bengali, I mean half of English so she don't understand all the high words.*

...

B: *Ok, so Shirin.*

Shirin: *What?*

B: *Why have you put Arabic first?*

Shirin: *Same reason as Tasneem.*

...

B: *So Shirin, going back to you Shirin, why have you put Arabic as the most important?*

*Shirin: same thing what Tasneem said.*

...

B: *Why did you put Bengali second as the most important language?*

*Shirin: Because in my house I have to speak Bengali<sup>11</sup>.*

I tried to incorporate play and art to provide alternative ethnographic material to more conventional methods such as pile sorting (cf. Barrett, 2005:194). With the parents, I mixed discussions with lessons on basic computer skills and story writing. These techniques yielded some interesting material and a lot of valuable discussions. Rather than concentrate on my own efforts as art critic and interpreter I tried to get children to discuss their own artistic impressions of events or concepts (cf. Toren, 1993:463). This elicited descriptions and interpretations of drawings by children and addressed the problem of my own interpretations and representation.

### **Participative Research Methods: Writing, Photography and Art**

I experimented with using art and participative methodologies. Once in the school I concentrated my efforts on building rapport with children and families. I returned to these methods in the second half of my fieldwork. During some of the sessions I described above, in classes in London and in a school in Sylhet, I ran activities with children designed to elicit information about their aspirations. I used a series of exercises called 'Mr. or Ms. Successful' with a Year Six class, the Bengali after-school club, the group of mothers in my computer class and with a class in a school in Sylhet. This involved a discussion of the meaning of success with the group followed by a drawing exercise.

---

<sup>11</sup> Discussion about Language, older group, conducted at Poynder Primary school, 07.05.08

I gave each person a piece of paper with the basic outline of a human form on it and the heading 'Mr./Ms. Successful. On one side of the page it read 'is' and on the other 'has'. I asked the participants to draw and colour in the picture, thinking about how they imagined a successful person to be. Under the headings 'is' and 'has', I asked them to write down five things that their Mr. or Ms. Successful would have and be. These led to some revealing and amusing results and conversations about the aspirations of children and parents. The symbolism of success and the class and ethnic/racial dimensions of the ideas that the respondents came up with were also revealing. An example of one of these exercises is in Appendix 2.

More successful than drawing was the writing of diaries and recollections by children and parents. Baumann (1996) used essay writing with children in Southall. Using some form of writing to do research with children developed into the idea of producing a book of stories, suggested by my supervisor. As the after-school club sessions and computer class ran simultaneously, I asked both groups to write essays, stories, memories and diaries about similar issues. The parents wrote about memories of their childhoods and the children wrote tales of everyday life. This prompted some good discussions comparing the mothers' childhoods in Sylhet and their own children's experiences in London.

The mothers either wrote at home and then typed up their stories in the computer class or typed them up in the class with some help from more computer literate peers or from me. I asked children and parents not to worry about spelling and grammar and tried to encourage them to express themselves and communicate their feelings and ideas as clearly and frankly as possible. Inevitably this meant that some editing was required before the essays or stories were in a finished form. I felt

uneasy editing the words of children and parents, but tried to balance communicating their stories effectively, presenting 'correct' English and being true to their account.

I also contributed stories to the collection and wrote about my recent visits to Bangladesh on fieldwork. Children and parents wrote about their own visits to Bangladesh and with the participant observation notes that I have from my visits and discussions of visits, these formed an important part of my data. The children and parents wrote on the theme of what childhood is, what the meaning of being a 'child' and 'adult' is and what relations between children and adults should be like. The stories were eventually collected into a small booklet, each child or parent who had contributed to the booklet received a copy, along with several copies which were kept for the school.

I had planned to use photography more than I eventually did. However, I resolved that if I was to use it, it would be in properly designed way, rather than simply to produce some gimmicky images. I had found that as someone who is not a photographer or artist, it took all of my attention and effort to design and run art workshops with children. This left me little or no time to spare for any ethnography. Luckily the chance to participate in a professionally run art/photography project came up and I organised a school trip from Poynder Primary school and a trip from the Lansbury Centre to an art gallery in East London where an exhibition examining Londoners' relationships with London was running. As part of the exhibition a photographer was producing digital montages of people dressed up in whatever costume they wished (she had a dressing up box) set against the London backdrop of their choice.

I took two groups of children to see her and the results were mixed. It was logistically difficult organising the trips and the outcomes were basically some very professional, but not very revealing photographs. I had ended up with the cute gimmicky images that I had wanted to avoid from the start. As I had found with the art workshops, the process of taking the children from the school to the gallery and watching them dress up and goaded by the photographer, pose for photos was more revealing than the actual photos are.

### **Power relations, differences, insiders and outsiders**

Children's views and perceptions are increasingly recognised as valid and valuable independent of their relations with adults (James, 1993, 2001, Hirschfeld, 2002, Toren, 1993). Migration studies and anthropology have tended to neglect children in research. Anthropology's aversion to children and childhood is mystifying, particularly since anthropologists insist that culture is learned and not inherited (Hirschfeld, 2002:611). While gender, race and class enjoy centre stage in contemporary research, childhood is left abandoned (Hirschfeld, 2002:613). When childhood is studied, it is studied and constructed in terms of relations with and the influences of adults rather than as a cultural phenomenon in its own right (Hirschfeld, 2002:614, Toren, 1993:461).

As I outlined earlier, numerous differences and boundaries lay between me and my research subjects. As Ostberg (2003) found in her own research into Pakistanis living in Norway, there were many instances in which I was an outsider. There were also several important senses in which I was an insider, or considered as such. I was variously a non-Muslim among Muslims, an adult among children, a man among women and an English speaker among Bengali or Sylheti speakers. I was also an insider on occasions, a fellow Londoner and British person, a supporter of Arsenal

Football Club, someone with a personal connection to Bangladesh and a friend. With several of the parents, political issues became points of inclusion and exclusion. For example, we sometimes disagreed in our ideas about crime and punishment. But we agreed in our opposition to British Government foreign policy and attacks on civil liberties in the UK.

The various ways these differences and similarities, divergences and convergences occurred and changed with the context of a meeting were instructive in themselves. As Ostberg notes, they increase the researcher's awareness of the positionality and contingency of all of us (Ostberg, 2003:26). Children were friendlier and more open with me in certain circumstances than in others. Some were shy in front of their friends, afraid that they would be teased for talking too much to me, while others were overconfident and attention-seeking in front of their friends. Some did not want to say certain things in front of the teacher, or were afraid that I might tell on them. Sometimes there were anecdotes or events at school that children did not want me to tell their parents about, or things they did not want to discuss in front of their parents.

I tried to speak in a way which was easy to understand and would help bridge some of the 'distance' between me and the children I studied (cf. Eder and Fingerson, 2001:184). I made an effort to learn Sylheti/Bangla. However, the children I met mainly conversed in English anyway and many could not understand the standard Bangla I learned. The Bangla I learned was useful when I was in Bangladesh for practical purposes and for communication with relatives of the British families who could not speak English. My efforts at learning Bangla also helped me build rapport with the families I got to know. They felt that I was making an effort to understand them and it did help me communicate with them. My errors and the comedic value of poor language ability helped break the ice with mothers who were often not very confident in their English ability. This helped

bridge the gap between my position as an 'educated person' and 'teacher' and their status as my students and as having poor English abilities. I tried to reassure them that they had valuable information that I wanted to know and could not learn from reading any book.

## **Ethics**

Issues of child protection, consent and the power relations between researcher and research subjects were an important theme in my research. Influenced by Starn (1994) and Scheper-Hughes (1995) I believe that anthropological research can and should aim to have a positive impact on the people it studies and that it is counterproductive for a researcher to try to be 'cold' and 'objective'. The debates surrounding this issue are fascinating and run deep into what anthropology itself means. I do not wish to enter into a discussion of the relative merits of so-called 'scientific', 'post-modern', 'barefoot' or 'militant' anthropology. I do feel however that in the type of intense personal relationships and interpretive research that anthropology demands it is impossible to separate the 'facts' from emotions.

Research must attempt to help rather than harm its subjects. Luckily, many of the problems which Starn (1994) discusses did not arise during my fieldwork. I was not viewed as a government spy, partly due to the timely intervention of the older sister of some of my research subjects who explained to her mother and to other parents what research, a doctorate and anthropology were. I hope my research will not inform any policies about 'fighting terrorism' in the sense that it is now fought by the British government.

Protecting the physical and psychological well-being of my research subjects and the trust they gave me were my most important ethical consideration. Along with teachers and social workers, I had to work within a tightly regulated framework of child protection legislation. One important principle was to always report any child protection issues that I was concerned about to a relevant teacher or other professional. This was to raise concerns to professionals, set my own impressions in context and to make sure that I was not inadvertently helping to conceal abuse. I had a Criminal Records Bureau check, which reassured teachers and helped me to gain access to the school and youth club where I conducted fieldwork.

The next group of issues concerned informed consent. It was sometimes difficult for me to communicate accurately and clearly to children and parents what my research was about, what I was doing, why I was doing it and what the outcomes or effects were likely to be. As I outlined above, in my pilot project I was put off using consent forms as they tended to represent the consent of the parents but not the children. Indeed on some occasions children gave consent when their parents withdrew it and on others the parents gave their consent when children were clearly not enthusiastic about participation.

I did not press children who were not interested in my research to participate, preferring to concentrate on those who were interested in the research. Many children were enthusiastic on some occasions and in some activities but not all children were interested all the time. I tried to be sensitive to the contingent giving and withdrawing of consent. A few parents withdrew consent for photos of their children to be used in the research. I have not used photos of those children, using only photos of a few children who did give consent.



The issue of informed consent is complicated and I feel, best solved by more than just a form sent to parents and given to children (Ackeroyd, 1984:147). Children are likely to feel compelled into either agreeing or disagreeing to participate in the research based on the advice of their parents or teachers. Without a chance to see what participation in the research was actually like, many did not fully understand it. I also observed many more children than eventually became 'subjects' in my research. It was simply impossible for me to obtain consent from every child I observed or played with. Often, during the early stages of my research I was unaware which children I would ever see again. I observed hundreds of children in different settings. The time and disruption of obtaining informed consent from every one and their parents would have been a full-time job. Once I narrowed my research down to a smaller number of people, I constantly negotiated relationships using both continuous verbal requesting of consent and an official, written process of consent forms. I also worked within institutions who agreed that I could visit their classes or activities and could observe or participate to the degree they were comfortable with.

More ethical problems arose with regards to my subjects in the representation of them in this thesis and any further publications that result from my research. There is the potential for the children in this study to be represented in a way that they or their parents do not wish them to be, or details of their lives to be revealed that they do not wish to reveal. I discussed my findings with parents and children along the way and used these discussions to inform my own findings and qualify my perceptions of the children and their families.

One solution advocated by James, (2001) is to include a lot of actual quotes from transcripts of recordings of research subjects in the text of any writing that results from the research. This is a way of representing people directly and free from too much interpretation. It allows the reader to

see the raw data from which interpretations have been drawn, in order to *move away from ethnographic authority*. It must be acknowledged that the selection, the manner and context in which quotes are used are still under the control of the author (James, 2001:32-33).

I have included many quotes from interviews and discussions, although many of the most revealing interactions I had were unrecorded. In some cases therefore accounts are presented based on my own recollections and field notes rather than actual quotes. Quotes are included with a minimum of editing. This is to preserve the authentic voice of my research subjects just my own interpretation of events or interviews.

### **Adults and roles**

I had to balance the time and access given to me by parents or professionals who helped me along the way with my desire to be independent. I had to respect the wishes of carers or parents about what they saw as appropriate behaviour towards or with children, even when the children themselves had other ideas. For example, while many children were happy to be photographed, some of their parents were not happy with me using the photographs for my research.

I also had to act within the rules of the school. I felt that it was important that my research did not disrupt activities in class or undermine the work or authority of teachers. This had an impact on the level of participation or observation that was appropriate and my position regarding the children. My role was often unclear and constantly negotiated. I was sometimes called upon or looked to as an 'authority' and 'leader' based on my status as an adult. I tried to restrain the desire to maintain discipline or teach, assuming roles and positions with children that seemed appropriate for me and

that children and teachers assumed I would fulfil. At times I had to consciously allow myself to enjoy and observe some unruly misbehaviour, resisting the urge to control it.

I did sometimes slip into the role of being a teacher and at times it was an effective way of being part of a group in a 'natural' way. It was more 'natural' for me to be a teacher's assistant than try to 'blend in' with the children. The children seemed comfortable with my position and soon learned through experimentation what that meant in terms of the level of authority that I did or did not have. As a researcher rather than a qualified teacher I was not allowed to take classes on my own. I did help teachers with small groups of children within the class, with individuals who were struggling in certain subjects or with supervision during PE for example.

Outside of school I had to repeat over and over again to parents and children that I was not a teacher or in the paid employment of the school. My help with children's homework was appreciated by parents and helped me gain access to families' houses. It did have the effect of enhancing my reputation as a teacher, but also as someone they wanted to be around. Several of the families offered to pay me for my services as a tutor, which I refused in order to keep my autonomy and independence as a researcher.

I had to restrain my desire to (re)enter the world of being a 'naughty' school boy. I did not want to build rapport with children through behaviour which might undermine the purposes of the class of which I was a participant. I felt that this would damage relations between me and the staff at the school and lead to poor relations with children in the long run. I witnessed teaching assistants who tried to be 'cool' to befriend the children and ended up with a few admirers but also a lot of

unwanted banter and teasing. I wanted to avoid that trap and also felt that I did not possess the correct social and cultural capital for 21<sup>st</sup> century pre-teen 'cool'.

Consulting gatekeepers and relevant adults helped to make them feel that they were involved and valued as part of my research and keep them informed of my progress. I learned a lot about children and their families from teachers, social workers and parents. As my research progressed I increasingly included parents in my research. This gave me important insights into attitudes towards childhood and how childhoods in London are different from childhoods in Sylhet. While initially influenced by James (1993), I wanted to concentrate on 'children's cultures' independent of adults. I became interested in the socialisation of children and the reproduction of societies. I have focussed on the relationship between their lived experiences and ideas about childhood and education; this meant that the input of adults was crucial to the research.

Before focusing on my empirical data, I will discuss some of the historical and theoretical background to the British Bangladeshis I studied. The next chapter introduces the 'British Bangladeshi social field'.

### 3 The British Bangladeshi Social Field

#### Palm Tree

*Palm-tree: single-legged giant,  
topping other trees,  
peering at the firmament -  
It longs to pierce the black cloud-ceiling  
and fly away, away,  
if only it had wings.*

*The tree seems to express its wish  
in the tossing of its head:  
its fronds heave and swish -  
It thinks, maybe my leaves are feathers,  
and nothing stops me now  
from rising on their flutter.*

*All day the fronds the windblown tree  
soar and flap and shudder  
as though it thinks it can fly,  
As though it wanders in the skies,  
travelling who knows where,  
wheeling past the stars -*

*And then as soon as the wind dies down,  
the fronds subside, subside:  
the mind of the tree returns.  
To earth, recalls that earth is its mother:  
and then it likes once more  
its earthly corner<sup>12</sup>.*

#### Bangladeshis in Britain

Tagore's palm tree dreams of flight, of escape. Once allowed to escape its land, it journeys far and wide. It never forgets its land however and when the rushing of the wind subsides, it returns once

---

<sup>12</sup> Poem by Rabindranath Tagore, translated by William Radice (1987)

more to earth, its mother. The poem seems like an apt metaphor for the adventures of the early Bangladeshi migrants to Britain. In its imagery we can see elements of space and time, of travel, history and life courses. Many of these early migrants took extraordinary risks during their 'daredevil' youth on roundabout journeys to Britain. Across the oceans they heaved and swished on ships to London, via Singapore, New York, Sydney and Buenos Aires. As the storms and winds of a youth on the high seas during the dangerous war years subsided, they settled down to a family life, some in Britain. They dreamed of a return to the land of their birth, their earthly corner, to Sylhet. Many, however, as I will describe, stayed in Britain.

This chapter is the first part of my introduction to the idea of the 'British Bangladeshi transnational social field'. Here I will review the history of Bangladeshis in Britain and some of the theoretical approaches to the analysis of South Asians in Britain. In the next chapter I will discuss transnational practices within the British Bangladeshi social field and in chapter 6 I will discuss the role of language in ideas about identity among British Bangladeshis in Islington.

I will begin with a short history of the Bangladeshi community in the UK and these early adventurers. This will be followed by a review of the literature and theorising of South Asians in Britain. Finally, by way of offering a solution to some of the problems with these theorisations, I will discuss the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1986), especially his ideas of 'habitus' and 'social fields' and different forms of capital. I believe that a 'transnational social fields approach', influenced by Bourdieu and elaborated by Fouron and Glick Schiller (2002) and Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) best describes the experiences of transnational migration and diaspora. It goes beyond simplistic dualisms of 'here' and 'there', beyond migrants to their children and those who do not migrate but are affected by migration. This section will contextualise the history, theory and nature of the social

field and relations within it. The aim is to develop a theoretical approach to set later chapters in context.

In the final section of the chapter I will discuss 'second generation transnationalism' among British Bangladeshis, making a comparison with literature from the US, primarily Fournon and Glick Schiller's (2002) work on transnationalism and the idea of the second generation. I will also examine the issue of poverty, both absolute and relative, within the British Bangladeshi social field. Based on Bourdieu's (1986) ideas about different types of capital and Gardner's (2008) ethnographic work in Sylhet I will describe the idea of 'security capital' to describe a powerful form of capital that British Bangladeshis have and Bangladeshis desire to move to the UK to acquire.

### **A Short History of Bangladeshis in Britain**

The history of migration from what is now Bangladesh to the UK is linked to British colonialism. Bengalis worked as *lascar* or seamen from the late nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century. Bengali seamen mostly originated from Chittagong, Noakhali and Sylhet. They found jobs on British ships, which carried goods from Calcutta all over the world. People from Sylhet, in the north east of Bangladesh joined the British merchant navy, working mainly as 'bunkermen', 'agwallahs' (fire men) or 'telwallahs' (oil men), in the engine rooms as well as, cooks, cook's-mates and cleaners (Adams, 1987:22-23, Dench et al, 2005:38, Siddiqui, 2004:16). The work was amongst the hardest and most unpleasant on board, many working in severe heat stoking and tending the steam engines, work that Asians were deemed more suitable for than British crews (Adams, 1987:22, Dench et al., 2005:38).

From Sylhet, young men went first to Calcutta and then through *ghat serangs* or agents they found work on ships. At first, Asian crews were limited to the southern trade routes, restricted from northern seas to protect the jobs of European crews (Adams, 1987:25). During the war years however, the demand for crews and for fit men to fight and the extreme danger of the merchant navy meant that Asian and Sylheti crews were in high demand. Thousands of *lascar* died anonymously at sea during the Second World War and have never been recognised or commemorated (Adams, 1987:32).

During this time a small number of Sylhetis jumped ship in Britain, although many worked throughout the war years and only settled in Britain later. It is unclear why Sylhetis worked on and then jumped ship more than other Bengalis, although there are many interesting theories and myths. Siddiqui (2004) cites research that speculates that Sylhetis were not true seafarers like those from Noakhali and Chittagong and so jumped ship at the earliest opportunity (Siddiqui, 2004:16). Adams' (1987) book has it the opposite way round, with several of her respondents saying that Sylhetis are natural born seafarers, travellers and adventurers, '*very daredevil types*' (Adams, 1987:1, 153). Certainly the remarkable stories in Adams' (1987) book support the 'daredevil' nature of some of these men, although most of them later ascribed their 'bravery' to their strong faith. Some of Adams' respondents cite the legacy of the Sufi traveller saints, such as Shah Jalal who brought Islam to Sylhet in 1303 as the reason for Sylhetis' adventurous nature (Adams, 1987:145). Religion certainly seems to have played a part, as Hindus apparently would not go to sea because the rations were mainly meat rather than vegetables. Other Hindus were concerned about the effects of seafaring on their caste status (Adams, 1987:128). So, for some of these reasons, the Bengalis working on ships leaving from Calcutta were largely Muslims from what is now Bangladesh and some of those who jumped ship were from Sylhet.



Seamen established small communities in major ports around the world in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These communities were largest in Britain due to the colonial ties and the possibilities of finding further employment on ships. They were centred in major ports such as London, Cardiff, South Shields and Sunderland (Carey and Shukur, 1985:406, Siddiqui, 2004:16). There were also communities of Bengali seamen in Burma, Singapore, Hong Kong and the US (Siddiqui, 2004:16).

Many of these men, the 'pioneer' migrants, considered themselves British for their entire lives. They grew up in British-administered India and many of them left before the idea of Pakistan or Bangladesh was even considered. The first and only 'nationality' they had known was British (Adams, 1987:52,155). In the sixties and seventies many became involved with Pakistani and then newly independent Bangladeshi politics.

Many Bangladeshi immigrants came to Britain in the 1950s and 60s. They were single men, and were helped by friends or kin amongst the earliest arrivals. The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act reinforced this pattern. Under the new regime, those already in the UK helped their family members and neighbours from villages in Sylhet to get employment vouchers to come to the UK (Choudhury, 1993:135). During the 1960s and 70s, British immigration policy became more restrictive and citizens of Commonwealth countries could no longer enter, live and work in Britain. The 1962 Act restricted the rights of non-citizens to live in Britain. It meant that Bangladeshis living in Britain could not return to Bangladesh for long visits without losing their right to live in the UK. Some, feeling nervous about their increasingly unclear legal status took British citizenship, while others lost their rights to live in the UK by staying too long in Bangladesh (Choudhury, 1993:135).

Those already in Britain acted as modern day *ghat serangs*, obtaining employment vouchers for their relatives or friends. They acted as agents, just as they had been recruited by agents from their village or district in the docks of Calcutta (Adams, 1987:66). This social network effect led to the high number of migrants to Britain from very concentrated areas of Sylhet (Dench et al., 2005:40). The new migrants at first saw themselves as temporary work migrants rather than settlers; the 'myth of return' was ever present in their minds. They came in search of high wages rather than as a response to poverty (Dench et al., 2005:38, Gardner and Shukur, 1994:147).

The increasing legislative restrictions paradoxically resulted in more immigration to Britain and more permanent stays. Immigrants from the Indian subcontinent were nervous about returning home in case they were not allowed to come back to Britain. The type of immigration from Bangladesh that followed these changes in legislation and continues until the present day is mainly family reunification. First sons, then wives and other children slowly started to arrive to join the early arrivals (Carey and Shukur, 1985:407, Eade, 1997:149).

The 1962 act stipulated that children could not come to the UK unless they were accompanied by their mothers. To acquire a stable unified family, wives and children of Bangladeshi men in the UK started to come to the UK (Choudhury, 1993:140). Due to the employment voucher system, the vast majority of new migrants were now friends or relatives of those already in Britain. Most of them came from Sylhet and many settled in Tower Hamlets in East London (Eade, 1989:27) as well as in northern industrial cities. The 1962 act stipulated that only children under the age of 18 could be brought to Britain as part of family reunification schemes. By 1970 many of the early arrivals had children in Sylhet approaching that age and sought to bring them to Britain (Dench et al., 2005:43).

A massive cyclone in 1970, the Bangladesh War of Independence in 1971 and the ensuing political instability hastened many families' decisions to relocate to Britain. Many British Bangladeshis had been upset with the way the Pakistani government handled the aftermath of the devastating cyclone. The danger of war and the turmoil of early Bangladeshi politics convinced many returnees to Sylhet to come back to the UK or to bring what family members they had in Sylhet to the UK if possible (Choudhury, 1993:173).

East Pakistanis, or Bangladeshis as they were to become known, in Britain at that time played an active role in supporting the Bangladesh War of Independence. They lobbied the British and other governments, raised awareness of the war and its consequences, some went to Bangladesh to fight and others raised and sent money, medicines and even arms for the struggle (Glynn, 2006:18-20, Choudhury, 1993:167).

In the early seventies, two more factors shaped the nature of the Bangladeshi community in Britain. The decline of the textile industry in the north of England meant that Bangladeshis who had initially found jobs in the mills, moved to London, mainly to Tower Hamlets. The 1971 Immigration Act further restricted immigration, reducing the flow to family reunifications (Dench et al. 2005:44).

According to an Office of National Statistics report there were 283,063 British citizens of Bangladeshi origin recorded in the 2001 census (ONS, 2005a). 153,893 (55%) of all British Bangladeshis live in London (Piggott, 2004:5). A quarter of British Bangladeshis, about 65,000 people, live in Tower Hamlets (Piggot, 2004:5). Bangladeshis in East London were mainly employed in the local garment industry, but as this has declined due to foreign competition, more have moved into the restaurant trade or shop keeping (Eade, 1989:29, Barker, 2004). Brick Lane in

East London is still full of Bangladeshi restaurants and has been dubbed 'Banglatown' by the press and the Bangladeshi community (Barker, 2004).

Three quarters of British Bangladeshis, however, do not live in Tower Hamlets, a further quarter, (63,000) of all British Bangladeshis live in other inner London Boroughs. After Tower Hamlets, the highest populations of British Bangladeshis live in the boroughs of Newham and Camden. In Islington there are just over 4000 Bangladeshis (Piggott, 2004:15).

## **Theories and concepts**

Social scientists have debated different ways of understanding the 'culture', transnationalism, multiculturalism, ethnicity and identities of groups such as British Bangladeshis. Many of these theories and approaches have come to be seen as flawed or problematic. The issue I will discuss is how to conceptualise transnational 'cultures' and the meeting and mixing of different 'cultural' or ethnic groups. Through this discussion, much of my subsequent empirical writing will be framed and set within an analytical framework.

I will first discuss work on South Asians in Britain and then move on to discuss the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1986) and other writers who have been influenced by his work. I wish to review the development of ideas about ethnic minorities and transnational communities in the UK and provide a critique of some of these. I will propose the use of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and social fields, arguing that they are useful for analysing British Bangladeshis and overcoming some of the shortcomings of other theoretical approaches.

Early work on South Asians in Britain in the 1970s, such as the papers in Watson's (1977) edited collection, conceptualised 'culture' and 'identity' as fixed and essentialised. South Asians in Britain were described as falling between two established and discrete cultures. This discourse of a 'clash' between two different cultures and the people 'caught in the middle' is now considered too simplistic and essentialising by most academics (cf. Alexander, 2000, Brah, 1996 and Gardner, 2002). While currently their approach is criticised, it is important to remember the significance of the work of Watson (1977), Anwar (1977, 1979) and the Ballards (1977); empirically and theoretically their work has started debates and new fields of enquiry.

Much of the work reviewed or discussed here is the result of debates and research that emanated from these theoretical analyses. In the 1980s and '90s work describing the cultural differences between ethnic minorities and the 'mainstream', the 'between two cultures' idea, was criticised for its essentialism by writers such as Gilroy (1987), Hall (1992b) Cohen (1994), Bhabha (1994), and Baumann (1996). The work of these writers, among others, led to ideas of 'culture' and identity being seen as more blurred and fluid.

### **Hybridity**

Bhabha (1994) used the notion of 'hybridity' to describe complex post-modern influences on identities. Writing about nationalism in the West he described it as (among many other things):

*...more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism (Bhabha, 1994:140).*

His use of the notion of hybridity is an attempt to describe the almost indescribably complex array of influences, forces, inspirations and catalysts for change in a post-modern, post-colonial, globally connected world. Hybridity emerges from Bhabha's writing as a description of the way in which multiple representations of the same events, contestations, re-writings, re-mixings and unexpected evolutions lead to change. It is, Bhabha says, '*how newness enters the world*' (Bhabha, 1994:227).

*Here the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements which are **neither the One ... nor the Other ... but something else besides**, which contests the terms and territories of both.* (Bhabha, 1994:28, his emphasis)

Werbner and Modood's (1997) edited collection provides a critique of the notion and use of hybridity (Werbner, 1997:13, Werbner and Modood, 1997). Friedman (1997) attacks the idea of hybridity and its proponents such as Bhabha (1994). Citing Rosaldo's (1993) observation (which also influenced Baumann's thinking on culture) that:

*... the notion of an authentic culture as an autonomous, internally coherent universe no longer seems tenable, except perhaps as a useful fiction or a revealing distortion* (Rosaldo, 1993:217).

Friedman accuses proponents of hybridity of gross simplifications of notions of culture. The idea that 'once pure' cultures mix or collide to create a hybrid, he points out is ridiculous, for were these cultures ever pure? Are all cultures not inherently hybrid? (Freidman, 1997:73). The reference to 'once pure' cultures carries undertones of racism and eugenics, smearing the idea of hybridity with

out-dated biological concepts. Bhabha's (1994) use of the term hybridity does seem to allude to genetics, inspired by the way in which mixtures of ideas carry influences from multiple sources and an element of chance, much like the process of biological reproduction. It seems like an apt metaphor in his work but does not assume that what is being mixed was not already inherently mixed. Indeed Bhabha is passionate about the politics of understanding that 'cultures', 'nations' and 'communities' are always heterogeneous:

*The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or organic ethnic communities – **as the grounds of cultural comparativism** – are in a profound process of redefinition. The hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism proves that the very idea of a pure 'ethnically cleansed' national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative of the complex interweavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood. This side of the psychosis of patriotic fervour, I like to think, there is overwhelming evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities. (Bhabha, 1994:5, his emphasis)*

Bakhtin (1981), whose work on languages influenced ideas about cultural hybridity, drew a distinction between conscious and unconscious hybridity. Unconscious hybridity is a feature of the evolution of all languages and does not disrupt their coherence or continuity. Werbner (1997) demonstrates what this means when discussing culture, "organic hybridisation casts doubts on the viability of simplistic scholarly models of cultural holism" (Werbner, 1997:5).

Friedman (1997) maintains that the idea of a 'mixed culture' is the result of identification or ordering from above or outside; by 'hybridisation theorists' rather than ethnographers (Freidman, 1997:81). Friedman describes a global elite of rich, professional cosmopolitans, the 'media intelligentsia' who dominate interpretations of the world. He questions the position of 'third world diasporic intellectuals' who claim to be 'voices from the margins' arguing that they have vested interests in celebrating hybridity (Friedman, 1997:79).

Hall (2000) claims that the idea of hybridity has been widely misunderstood, that it was never a reference to racial mixing, but rather a "*term for the cultural logic of translation*" and that it was never meant to refer to hybrid individuals to be contrasted to 'traditionals' or 'moderns', but a process of never-completed cultural translation (Hall, 2000:226). While Hall defends the idea of hybridity, Gilroy (2000) seems to have given up on the term as a useful concept (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk, 2005:73). Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk (2005) explain a variety of ways in which the idea of hybridity has been used (and abused) in different disciplines. They end their discussion with recognition of the ubiquitous nature of hybridity:

*If everything is hybrid, there is nothing gained by knowing this, so the coherence of other agreed terms begins to fade. The centre is also co-constituted with the periphery; the pure is muddled more in the breach than in itself. The truth is illusion, born of classificatory agreements without solid foundation.* (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk, 2005:85)

This message contains within it both the power and weakness of the notion of hybridity. Everything is inherently hybrid so the concept is not that useful conceptually, but it is an important reminder against essentialism and simplification. The British Bangladeshi social field



is no more homogenous than other social fields or spaces and contains within it a variety of positions, tensions and dispositions towards everything. When I talk of a 'British Bangladeshi social field' and 'habitus' it is important to remember that these are inherently hybrid, drawing inspiration and influence from many locations and processes.

### **Transnationalism**

Complex patterns of migration have led scholars to describe some migrants as 'transmigrants' or 'transnational migrants'. Immigrants who "*build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement*" are 'transmigrants' (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, 1992:1). Transnational communities develop through migration, where migrants from one country of origin are present in one or more 'host' countries. Transmigrants are involved emotionally, physically and "*develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously*" (Glick Schiller et al., 1992:2).

Transnationalism has allowed scholars to move beyond national comparisons. It has allowed studies of migration to take into account both migrants and non-migrants. Transnationalism enables a conceptualisation of the way migrants (and others) are embedded in more than one society simultaneously. Recent scholarship on transnationalism conceptualises it as taking place within fluid social spaces, which I will discuss in greater depth later. Social spaces are multi-layered and multi-sited; they include influences and locations that are not limited to the 'home' and 'host' countries but take in other sites and societies around the world (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007:131).

Transnationalism has suffered from what Vertovec describes as 'conceptual muddling'. He identifies several conceptual premises for defining and analysing transnationalism as a 'social morphology', a 'type of consciousness', an 'avenue of capital', 'a site of political engagement' or 'a (re)construction of place or locality' (Vertovec, 1999:448-455). Scholars such as Perlman (2002) find transnationalism too broad and all-encompassing, rendering the concept almost meaningless (Perlman, 2002:217).

Levitt and Jaworsky (2007), like Vertovec (2004a), describe various conceptualisations and uses of the notion of transnationalism. They identify economic, political, social, cultural, and religious domains for transnational interactions. They review different scholars' attempts to distinguish temporal and spatial aspects as well as the intensity and different types of transnationalism. Transnationalism 'from above' or 'below' (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998), 'weak' and 'strong embeddedness' in societies (Faist, 2000), 'narrow' and 'broad' (Itsigjohn et al. 1999), 'core' and 'expanded' (Guarnizo 1997, 2000) (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007:132).

Levitt and Glick Schiller's (2004) use of the idea of 'social fields' to discuss transnational spaces is a compelling way of integrating the transnational with other national and international social spaces. I will discuss the idea of transnational social fields in more depth later. Another insight offered by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) is the difference between ways of being transnational, the actual social relations and practices and ways of belonging, of signifying or enacting, demonstrating an identity or connection to a particular group (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1010).

Levitt and Glick Schiller maintain that it is possible for a person to be embedded within a transnational community and engage in transnational practices or 'ways of being' without

identifying with labels, values or cultural politics of the community (or social field). Transnational 'ways of being' refers to the social relations and practices that people engage in rather than the identities associated with their actions. People within a social field may not identify with the symbols or cultural politics associated with the field. They can, if they want, manifest their sense of identity at any time because they live within the social field, but they may choose not to. For example, it is possible for a person to have many family, friends and business contacts with people who live in their ancestral country of origin but not identify as belonging to that country. Or they may eat certain foods or follow religious practices because that is what their family has always done. These practices do not constitute a conscious identification with a particular group or place; they are not expressing a transnational way of belonging, just a habitual transnational way of being (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1010).

Transnational 'ways of belonging' combine actions with a conscious awareness and employment of symbols to demonstrate a connection with a particular group. If they consciously engage in practices that symbolise their identity or demonstrate a connection to a transnational group then they are showing a sense of transnational belonging. This may be through the display of religious symbols or certain clothing or through consuming certain foods. Some people have relatively few or no social relations with others outside the country where they live, but they may consciously assert their identification with a particular group or place. These people identify with a sense of belonging through memory, nostalgia or imagination. They can employ their knowledge to engage with the social field whenever they want (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1011).

*If individuals engage in social relations and practices that cross borders as a regular feature of everyday life, then they exhibit a transnational way of being. When people*

*explicitly recognize this and highlight the transnational elements of who they are, then they are also expressing a transnational way of belonging.* (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1011).

Levitt and Glick Schiller's distinction reveals that practices are not the same as the identities and meanings that are ascribed to them by different groups. This is a useful way of analysing transnational communities and helps us to explain some of the apparent contradictions and ambivalence that many transnational people express.

Transnationalism involves the creation and maintenance of links, flows and networks that stretch over national borders and often across the globe. A 'community' or family need not live in close proximity to one another to have a common arena of activity, especially in the era of relatively cheap telecommunication, flights and internet access (Vertovec, 2004c). Families can be 'close', decisions made, relationships maintained, goods and money exchanged and people can move between remote sites. Bryeson and Vuorella (2002) draw links between the conceptualisation of families and nations as 'imagined communities'. Thus transnational families exist as emotionally close units or communities despite their physical separation. However, families may be imagined differently by their members than the way they are defined by national policies. Policies limiting the number of relatives or dependents allowed to join migrants through family reunification lead to transnational families (Bryeson and Vuorella, 2002:10). Studying transnational families reveals transnationalism 'from below' as experienced in the daily lives and practices of ordinary people rather than the transnationalism of corporations or financial flows (Bryeson and Vuorella, 2002:7).

These relationships and networks muddy the neat waters between modes of being and belonging, practices and identities become intertwined through human contact. Real and close relationships with family or friends can be maintained at a very great distance. The experience of space and time becomes 'distantiated', as distant events are communicated instantaneously on television, over the telephone or through the internet. Distances in space and time are 'compressed', accelerating connection, communication, conflict interaction and change (Giddens, 1990:14, Harvey, 1989:241)

In the next chapter I will describe some transnational practices, activities and flows within the British Bangladeshi social field. Through a discussion of the influence of technology on transnationalism, marriage practices and the role of visits in the identity formation of British Bangladeshi children I will explain further the complex interactions of practices or modes of being and identities or feelings of belonging. The maintenance of transnational networks through communication, marriage and visits is crucial for the maintenance of the British Bangladeshi social field.

### **Ethnographic insights**

Alexander (2000a, 2000b, 2006), avoids the essentialisation of earlier work by describing the complex interactions of race, age and gender, with further links to ethnicity and religion that inform the identity of the young men she studied (Alexander, 2000a:12). She shows the effects of dominant discourse about young Asian men in the press to construct the very notion of the 'Asian gang' and the essentialising effects of these racial and gendered accounts (Alexander, 2000a:4-12). Using a personal and subjective approach and avoiding the restrictions of overarching theories, Alexander gives a nuanced and convincing account of her subjects and the influences on

their lives. Alexander's account also emphasises the contextual nature of these multiple elements of identity, showing that they may melt into insignificance or sharpen into importance depending on the circumstances.

*Rather than a simple picture of identities forged in the intersection of multiple pathologies, what emerges in this arena is a more contextual and performative set of identifications in which there are no guarantees (Hall, 1992b, cited in Alexander, 2000b:125).*

Alexander's approach to issues of identity, culture and ethnicity seems to be well-balanced, recognising the power of social constructs such as ethnicity, whilst acknowledging their place alongside other influences on identity such as gender, class and age. Influenced by Hall's (1992b) work on identity, Alexander emphasises the 'fragmented', 'contested', 'shifting', 'partial' and 'contingent' nature of identity (Alexander, 2006:269).

Alexander claims that the 1990s witnessed the positioning of ethnicity as the most important element of identities (Alexander, 2006:264). This shift saw an assertion of cultural and religious difference regarding British Muslims, separating them from a wider 'black' identity (Alexander, 2006:265). Alexander shows that ethnicity has been prioritised over other aspects of identity, such as class, gender and region (Alexander, 2006:261). Influenced by Hall's (1992b) concept of 'new ethnicities', she aims to take all these aspects into account, ethnicity being but one 'axis of identity' intersecting with many others (Alexander, 2006:269).

Sen (2006), in his critique of the 'clash of civilisations' thesis proposed by Huntington (1993, 1997), questions why conservatives and liberals alike have come to see the world as organised by

religious groups. Indeed there does seem to be a promotion of religion as a source of identity. This promotion has been encouraged among British Bangladeshis by an increasing sense of belonging to the Muslim *umma* (or world wide community, which I will discuss further in chapter 8) and by British government policies supporting the idea of the conflation of Bangladeshi and Muslim identities (Sen, 2006:163).

Alexander (2000a) recognises this pattern too, deconstructing the history of the way in which British Asians have been portrayed by the media and academia. The 'Rushdie Affair', controversy and protests over Rushdie's (1988) book *The Satanic Verses*, ushered in a new phase of this conceptualisation. British Muslims were seen as problematic, as 'the enemy within' and different from other British Asians and minority groups. Muslims, she says, have become the 'new black' (Alexander, 2000a:14-15). What Alexander (2000a) and Sen (2006), among others are saying is that ethnicity or religion form just part of our complex identities and an undue focus on one of these elements does not help our understanding. Alexander's (2000a) notion about Muslims being the 'new black' situates them as the new community of urban racial oppression and misrepresentation, but also points to the heightened interest in all things Islamic in the media and in academia.

Alexander's (2002) discussion of the differences in the way Asian and African-Caribbean communities in Britain are constructed by academia and popular perceptions reveals the different ways in which they are essentialised (Alexander, 2002:563).

*Whereas African-Caribbean cultures are defined as forward looking, individualistic, late- or post-modern, Asian cultures are placed as anachronistic, collective, pre-modern. African-Caribbean identities have been wrenched free of any ties of community, but Asian*

*identities remain mired in questions of authenticity. It is interesting to reflect that while African-Caribbean cultures are primarily defined through youth, Asian cultures are envisaged through age (Alexander, 2002:563).*

Alexander argues for equality in the way different groups are treated and discussed and recognition that while differences exist between groups and within groups there are commonalities between different 'Black' and 'Asian' experiences in Britain. The commonalities between and internal variety in these groups may depend for example on regional affiliations or class identifications (Alexander, 2002:567).

Alexander's (2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2006) and Burdsey's (2004) work both emphasise the multiple influences that inform young British Asian men's identities. Ethnicity becomes one of many factors that can become important, emphasised or played down depending on the context. Context, contingency and positionality are revealed by these ethnographies as being vitally important. 'Contingency' captures aspects of identities as dependent upon the context and circumstances of individual encounters. Different aspects of identity may assume new importance or be minimised depending on the situation. This phenomenon is neatly described by Burdsey (2004) in his ethnography of young British Asian footballers. Burdsey shows how these footballers' expression and suppression of different aspects of their identities affects their success in the world of football. Footballers who have one White parent, although seen as 'Asian' footballers, are much more successful than those who have two Asian parents. Their degree of parental support, 'Anglicisation' and 'cultural capital' are all influential in their success (Burdsey, 2004:764).



Baumann's (1996) work in Southall also brought these themes to the fore. Baumann decided to study the cultures and communities of an area (Southall) rather than one group in particular. This allowed a detailed account of the intersecting histories and relations between groups in Southall. Baumann describes the different 'communities' as they are defined by 'Southallians' in normative speech. The five cultural groups (Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Afro-Caribbeans and Whites) reflect the reified view of culture as an 'ethnic' heritage; there were apparently five cultures and five communities. This view feeds and is fed by the media, politicians and many 'community leaders' (Baumann, 1996:98).

Baumann questions the dominant discourse on 'cultural communities' through a re-evaluation of the five cultural communities of Southall. Highlighting the divisions within some 'communities' (such as Sikhs and Hindus) and the cross-cultural nature of others (such as Muslims), he shows that there are other ways of interpreting and analysing the ideas of 'culture' and 'community' and that the dominant equation of 'culture' and 'community' does not really work. Socialist and political challenges to this equation such as ideas of 'black consciousness', the complexities of caste, Sikh and Hindu ideas of religion and the paradox of the White population of Southall who had no 'cultural community' all throw the neat dominant discourse into doubt (Baumann, 1996:109).

Baumann's discussion of 'culture' and 'community' are a convincing deconstruction of the carefree and vague uses of the words.

His distinction between 'dominant' and 'demotic' (or popular) uses of notions of culture and community is useful. Baumann maintains that ethnographers' one point of consensus about culture is that it is not a real thing; it is an abstract, analytical idea. It does not cause behaviour, but:

*... summarises an abstraction from it, and is thus neither normative nor predictive. ...*

*Culture thus exists only insofar as it is performed, and even then its ontological status is that of a pointedly analytical abstraction. (Baumann, 1996:11).*

Baumann acknowledges that this understanding of 'culture' is from within anthropology; outside anthropology the word is used in very different ways. Reified cultural ideas are deliberately constructed and used to unify and mobilise communities, usually for political ends (Baumann, 1996:12, 196). Baumann, like Friedman (1997) cites Rosaldo's analysis of the untenability of culture, except as a 'useful fiction' (Rosaldo, 1993:217, Baumann, 1996:13). Baumann describes 'Southallians' subscribing to and believing this 'useful fiction' where they need to and at the same time 'making, remaking and changing' it (Baumann, 1996:13).

From Alexander and Baumann's work we can see that rather than feeling 'British' or 'Bangladeshi', or some form of mixture, affiliations vary depending on the context and may be rapidly interchanged, contested or reinterpreted. The identities of young South Asians in Britain are negotiated in a range of settings, in the family, with peers, at school or work and on visits to the country from which their family came. In each of these locations of interactions, a range of influences and vectors of identity come into play.

Many of the concepts and theories invoked to discuss ethnic minorities in Britain, migrants, and even the very idea of 'culture' seem to be unsatisfactory, discredited, or fall into one of two traps; in one they run the risk of essentialising, reifying or simplifying practices or ideas; in the other the precise context, moment and subjectivity is elevated to such importance that comparison and theorising becomes difficult. It is impossible to talk objectively about the practices, ideas and

systems of meaning of a large group of people. Such matters are inherently subjective and subject to variation between individuals and contexts. It is equally artificial to reduce everything to the subjective and not engage with the patterns of behaviour and subjectivities. An absence of theory also makes it difficult to discuss, analyse and compare case studies. Theoretical approaches and concepts can give us, at the very least, useful terminology with which to discuss empirical data.

### **Bourdieu: Some Key Concepts and their Relevance to British Bangladeshis**

Bourdieu sought to link the objective, the material realities facing a person, which he called the 'field' with the subjective, the dispositions, inclinations and reactions of that person, which he called the 'habitus'. These ideas provide an alternative to other theoretical approaches that are potentially useful for the analysis of transnationalism. Bourdieu's notion of a field bears striking similarities to the work on transnational communities I have reviewed above. He defines a field as:

*...a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (Wacquant, 1989:39).*

A 'field' is the site of struggles over resources or stakes in and access to them. Fields are defined by the different types of resources over which these struggles take place (cultural goods, housing, intellectual distinction or education, money and employment, land, different types of power, social class, prestige etc). The defining features and struggles of a field give it its unique and specific logic, rules and structure which are both the product and producer of the 'habitus' which relates to that field. (Jenkins, 2002:84)

The material conditions and histories in each field and among different classes and groups of people produce different habituses among them. Habitus is a “*system of durable, transposable dispositions*” (Bourdieu, 1977:72). These are so ingrained and instilled in people that they regulate behaviour unconsciously without people appearing or feeling like they are obeying rules. It is:

*... an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions and all the actions consistent with those conditions ...* (Bourdieu, 1977:95).

In this sense, unlike the idea of ‘culture’ that Baumann (1996) analysed, habitus causes behaviour. It is a product of collective and individual histories and contexts and perpetuates itself by producing practices and events based on its principles and dispositions which in turn inform the habitus. Habitus is both structure and structuring, determined and determining, producer and product (Bourdieu, 1977:82). Habitus makes possible but also sets limits to thoughts and behaviour. It is a template setting out acceptable behaviour for specific positions within a social field (Friedmann, 2002:316).

Power dynamics and hierarchies structure the individuals or institutions within a field. This power is based on the access each agent has to the resources which are at stake in the field. One of Bourdieu’s most influential ideas was the notion of different types of capital. Bourdieu (1986) stated that there are four principal types of capital at stake in each field: economic capital, social capital (valuable interpersonal relationships), cultural capital (knowledge) and symbolic capital (prestige and honour) (Bourdieu, 1986, Jenkins, 2002:85,).

There are three forms of 'cultural capital'. The '*embodied state*' is the formation of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body. In the '*objectified state*' cultural capital is 'cultural goods' such as pictures, books, dictionaries and instruments, but crucially these objects must have a symbolic as well as economic value. In the '*institutionalized state*', cultural capital in the form of education is recognised officially by institutions and through awards and qualifications, people gain cultural capital that is neither embodied nor a symbolic object (Bourdieu, 1986:242).

The existence of a field assumes that the capital at stake in the field is valuable to the agents in the field and through its existence creates the value and legitimacy of the capital. The historical processes that produce the field also create this interest in it (Jenkins, 2002:85). The field is the mediator of objective change upon individual practices and institutions. The logic, politics and structure of the field influence the way in which 'external determinations' or factors affect what is going on in the field. Fields may be overlapping or have similarities in them and their boundaries are often imprecise. Similarities in practices or habitus between two fields may be due to the similar environment they occupy and thus the similar habitus that their objective context produces, or due to the effect of power relations between fields, with dominant fields influencing weaker ones. The weaker and less autonomous fields suffer from 'overdetermination' by more powerful fields (Jenkins, 2002:86).

Returning to consider the social fields (in the Bourdieu's sense) that exist in part of the 'field' (in the ethnographic sense) in London, we see the complex way in which social fields exist side by side and overlap with each other. London is vast and contains many ethnicities, classes, areas and strata of society. Different areas vary greatly in their wealth, conditions, ethnic and social mix.

Within and across areas, social and ethnic groups occupy the same space but often have very little contact with each other. Parallel worlds or 'fields' exist in the same space. Other, more fragmented 'fields' stretch between spaces, places, nodes or individuals across wide areas of the city.

The journey from my house to my 'field site' crossed in twenty minutes, the boundary of one borough to the next, from a Victorian terrace to a deprived estate, across boundaries of ethnicity and class into a world that I had very little experience of before I embarked upon this research. Across these boundaries, material conditions are different and the relationships with space and the city are also markedly different. The 'subjective expectations of objective possibility' are different and this causes the 'habitus' to be different.

Carrington and Luke's (1997) work on Bourdieu's theories and education provides an explanation of the way in which the field of the school interacts and overlaps with other fields in a child's life:

*School institutions constitute just one amongst any number of intersecting and/or competing social spaces which an individual may encounter. Family and community structures, corporations and businesses, government departments and agencies, community and fraternal organisations, traditional intellectual 'disciplines' — both virtual/electronic, intellectual/representational, and empirical/physical spaces for institutional life — all constitute fields through which individuals may pass as they play out individual life trajectories. Each of these fields forms a semi-autonomous social universe constructed and maintained in a state of continuous reconstruction. (Carrington and Luke, 1997:100).*

Carrington and Luke explain how people move between and adjust behaviour in the different fields that they encounter in their daily life.

*Bourdieu's conceptualization of the social space indicates that individuals move continuously through numerous social fields and are therefore constructed to have competence in the practices of multiple social fields. In relation to literacy, it follows that multiple literate practices will be required, incorporated into habitus, and enacted in the life path of each individual. Bourdieu's sociological model ties the social efficacy of any and all of these literate practices, including those of school, to other social characteristics and relationships. (Carrington and Luke, 1997:107).*

This characterisation of the way in which people, in this case children, move between social fields and acquire competency to participate in the practices of the habitus in each different field is reminiscent of Ballard's notion of 'skilled cultural navigators' (Ballard, 1994:31). In fact the language that Carrington and Luke (1997) and Ballard (1994) use to describe this phenomenon is strikingly similar. Ballard's depiction has people who "*have the competence to behave appropriately in a number of different arenas and switch codes as appropriate*" (Ballard, 1994:31). Kelly and Lusius (2006) come to a similar conclusion, stating that:

*It seems quite possible that an individual could occupy multiple habiti simultaneously as different sets of taken-for-granted rules of practice, and evaluation of capital, are activated in different contexts (Kelly and Lusius, 2006:846).*

While, as I have noted above, migrants may occupy and move in and out of different fields and habituses, this is not limited to migrants. Through socialisation in a 'primary' and 'secondary' habitus, one taught at home in the early years of a child's life and another at school, through the pedagogic action of the school children develop distinct modes of behaviour (Brooker, 2002). Habitus may be replicated easily and neatly through this pedagogic action in a field that reproduces its dispositions, or it may be transformed by processes that either raise or lower an individual's expectations (Reay, 2004:435). For most people in the UK, these expectations and possibilities are adjusted slightly by the passing years and social change. In the cases of migrants there may be a radical shift in possibilities and expectations that may transform their habitus or lead to the formation of new habituses.

The dispositions of habitus are durable and transposable not only across generations but across continents to such a degree that the habitus acquired by a mother in a village in Sylhet will survive the journey to London. It may also survive many years of life in the UK and the material conditions of an estate in Islington, to be passed on to her children as part of a British Bangladeshi habitus. The effects and perceptions of their Bangladeshi habitus may be changed or have unintended side effects in London. They may be re-interpreted and take on new significances, depending on whether they enhance or diminish aspects of capital, but their durability is still in evidence many years later. This is how parents who are migrants gradually acquire a British Bangladeshi habitus, through adaptation of old practices and adoption of new practices. British Bangladeshi children, as I will describe in the next chapter, require exposure to people, practices and places in Bangladesh as well as London to learn the British Bangladeshi habitus.



In chapter 5 I will argue that the importance of the space is such in the formation of habitus that it is impossible or difficult for a person to acquire the British Bangladeshi habitus without having grown up or spent considerable time in the UK. It is this environment that gives British Bangladeshis (or *Londonis*) their particular habitus, in combination with socialisation within their homes and as I will discuss in the next chapter, on visits to Bangladesh.

Friedmann (2002) challenges some of Bourdieu's ideas and shows several situations in which habitus can be changed. Through social mobility in modern societies, people can change their behaviour, tastes, speech patterns and even bodily forms through exercise (or lack of it) and diet. This can involve learning a whole new habitus to 'overlay' the old one. Migrants, says Friedmann must learn a new habitus, in the new place they go to. They may be transformed by new patterns of behaviour, rhythms and timetables diets and languages (Friedmann, 2002:318-319).

Friedmann claims that the transition from one habitus to another is a challenge that all migrants must make. Children of immigrants, he says will find this easier than adults. Friedmann appears to fall a little into the trap of seeing neatly bounded social fields and habituses. He assumes that there will be a 'transition' between the 'old' and the 'new' habitus and that this may lead to conflict between parents and children (Friedmann, 2002:319). As scholars such as Baumann, (1996) and Rosaldo (1993) have noted however, no such bounded, discrete categories exist. Rather, people such as British Bangladeshi children move between different arenas, spheres or social fields which are fluid and overlapping. The parents of the British Bangladeshi children in Islington did not fit neatly into a transition, while some were relatively recently arrived in the UK, others had been in the country for many years, or been born in London. Some, even among those who had been in the UK for a long time, spoke very little English, or ate only Bangladeshi food. The transition

between an old and new habitus is not simple or teleological, it may be partial, gradual and contextual.

British Bangladeshi children are acquiring several habituses and at least one set of these dispositions and generative schemes is influenced by a set of material conditions which exist or existed thousands of miles away from where they now live. In the partial and contingent nature of the habituses that children acquire from parents, school and other sources, we can see similarities with work on identity by Alexander (2000:269) and Burdsey (2004). Burdsey (2004) explains how Asian footballers adjust their behaviour to participate in the dominant cultural habitus of the football club, by being 'one of the lads' (Burdsey, 2004:764). These British Asian footballers can, in Bourdieu's terms acquire social and cultural capital by behaving in a suitable way. Work on literacy among bilingual children in British schools has similarly used Bourdieu's ideas about capital and habitus to explain linguistic phenomena. Pagett's (2006) work on code-switching and parallel speech in a primary school found that children were very keen to speak English in school as their home or first language was at variance with the habitus of the school and speaking good English helped them to build social capital as it was rewarded institutionally and socially in the school setting (Pagett, 2006:143).

While there are many social fields in London, such as the school, in this research I observed another location within a transnational social field. This social field stretches from London to Sylhet, in Bangladesh. The experiences of British Bangladeshis in London and Sylhet are unique, they are different from the fields and habitus, of those inhabitants of both locations that are not British Bangladeshis or family members of British Bangladeshis. This is the 'British Bangladeshi transnational social field'.

The extent to which habitus is tied to a place, where the objective conditions and experiences produce it, is not clear from Bourdieu's work. Bourdieu used his concepts to discuss classes of people, but most subsequent work using his concepts has centred on particular places. Kelly and Lusius (2006) argue in their article about Filipino immigrants in Canada that habitus need not be confined to one place and that immigrants may continue to react to new conditions using the rules of their place of origin. They venture a step further and maintain that habitus itself may become transnational, encompassing the two (or more) locations (Kelly and Lusius, 2006:836). Kelly and Lusius argue that the *"lived spaces that contain the habitus are thus more social than physical"* (Kelly and Lusius, 2006:845).

These lived spaces could be described as a social field, not linked to a place, but to experiences and histories that straddle two or more locations. Other scholars such as Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) Guarnizo, (1997) and Vertovec, (2004a and 2004b) also favour the approach of a transnational habitus and/or social field. Guarnizo (1997) expresses this well:

*The transnational habitus incorporates the social position of the migrant and the context in which transmigration occurs. This accounts for the similarity in the transnational habitus of migrants from the same social grouping (class, gender, generation) and the generation of transnational practices adjusted to specific situations. (Guarnizo, 1997:311)*

Bourdieu is not explicit on how a field is to be identified or who it is identified by. Is the social field only an analytical construct or do they exist in the consciousness of the people who inhabit them? If they are only analytical constructs, how can we define and distinguish one

social field from another? (Jenkins, 2002:89). Following the example of Kelly and Lusius (2006) and Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), I believe we can analyse a transnational community as a single transnational social field and define its admittedly fluid boundaries by the commonalities in habitus that emerge among its occupants or agents through their shared experiences and subjectivities (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1008, Kelly and Lusius, 2006:845). The importance of place and space is such in the formation of habitus that it is impossible or difficult for a person to acquire the British Bangladeshi habitus without having grown up or spent considerable time in the UK. I will discuss the importance of lived spaces further in chapter 5.

The British Bangladeshi social field has its own logic, rules and habitus. It has two principal locations of action and struggles over the various types of capital that are created and exchanged by its members. It is closely related to and overlapping with other fields at its two locations. Agents within this field may in their lives move in and out of the field and have practices which come from the habitus of other fields. Gardner (2008) argues that this transnational habitus is attractive to people in Sylhet partly due to the poverty and insecurity in Bangladesh. The dependence of many people in Sylhet on remittances from London means that acquiring the right forms of social, cultural and symbolic capital and adopting a British Bangladeshi habitus are key strategies of survival and social mobility (Gardner, 2008:488).

Central to Bourdieu's ideas of different types of capital is the idea that they are convertible and contingent, dependent on the value that they are given by different habituses (Bourdieu, 1986:241, 249). Capital of various types may be evaluated differently in different places. Kelly and Lusius (2006) describe this phenomenon with regard to their research on Filipinos in Canada:

*Most obviously, economic capital in one context may have a very different purchasing power in another, and particular assets may have a symbolic worth in one context and not in another. But less obviously, social contacts may become more or less active and significant depending on context: a casual acquaintance or a neighbour's distant relative may take on a far more important role when they represent a key contact in a distant city. Conversely, knowing the local mayor and congressman in a Philippine provincial setting will yield few benefits after migration. Cultural capital too is highly contingent. A university degree from a prestigious institution in the Philippines can be rendered worthless in a Canadian setting, as can the norms of self-presentation in a Philippine job interview or workplace. There is, therefore ... an exchange rate between one habitus and another on every form of capital possessed by an immigrant. (Kelly and Lusius, 2006:835)*

The relationships between agents in the field depend on a division within the field between the different locations and the material and symbolic values of these locations. In the British Bangladeshi transnational social field, economic capital is accrued largely in London, but social, and cultural capital are acquired in both locations and may translate and magnify or diminish depending on the 'exchange rate'. Different types of capital take on different meanings on either side of the field, due to the interaction with other locally based fields. In some senses then, the British Bangladeshi social field is weak and not very autonomous, but in others it is strong, its members united by shared ambivalent relationships with other local and transnational social fields.

Gardner's (2008) paper examines some of the ways in which young men in Sylhet adopt styles, patterns of consumption and behaviour in line with a transnational British Bangladeshi habitus and

with the aim of acquiring or producing symbolic capital. These practices, such as setting up or running a business (which may not be viable), working in non-agricultural jobs, consuming fast food and wearing 'Western' fashions may be economically expensive in the short term, but if successful, they may lead to the eventual marriage to a British Bangladeshi and migration to the UK (Gardner, 2008:487). A whole set of symbolic and social capital, along with often quite considerable economic capital, will be exchanged for another set of economic and social capital and eventually British citizenship.

Links, experiences and relationships with places and agents from both locations in the field are necessary to maintain and reproduce the unique British Bangladeshi social field. Those who abandon links with one location in the field or large parts of the field's habitus risk being at the very edge of the field, perhaps engaged more with other fields and linked to the British Bangladeshi field only through relationships with family members.

Analysing the British Bangladeshi transnational community in these terms, as a transnational social field has several advantages. Transnational fields include both migrants and non-migrants, including in the analysis those 'left behind' by migrants and subsequent generations, children of migrants (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1010, Vertovec, 2004b:22). This approach is clearer than others about how multiple orientations and loyalties emerge and affect practices (Vertovec, 2004b:22).

Vertovec (2004b) is convinced that this 'Bourdieuian' perspective on transnational communities and transnational habitus is particularly useful for understanding how members of second and third generations of 'immigrants' are affected by and involved in transnationalism. There is an

alternative, he maintains, to the thesis that over time transnational practices among second generation youth will gradually cease (Vertovec, 2004b:23). We can see, especially with an understanding of the maintenance and influence of a transnational habitus, that there are:

*... strong influences in the transnational social fields in which the second generation is embedded. This view stresses the importance of the sending-country individuals, resources, and ideas that are a constant presence in the lives of the second generation and holds that even selective, periodic transnational practices can add up* (Levitt and Waters 2002:4, Cited in Vertovec, 2004b:23).

Vertovec explains that a wide variety of transnational activities are most intense at particular stages in life among the second generation. These activities are influenced by parents' transnational habituses, local contexts and conditions and second generation youth's own habituses (Vertovec, 2004b:23). In the next section I will examine the transnationalism of the so-called 'second generation' in more detail.

### **'Second Generation' Transnationalism**

The practice of marriages between British Bangladeshis and Bangladeshis from Sylhet, which I will discuss in greater depth in the next chapter, interrupts the neat idea of first, second and third generations of 'immigrants'. The British Bangladeshi children in this study, except for one or two, were born in the UK. Those that were not came to Britain before they could speak. They are what is referred to as the 'second' or 'third generation' or in some cases 'immigrants'. This way of conceptualising immigrant or minority 'integration' into a host society is problematic theoretically. It

also breaks down in practice in the case of the British Bangladeshis in Islington, as most of the parents of the children include one born and/or brought up in the UK and one who arrived recently, marrying a British Bangladeshi.

Levitt and Waters' (2002) edited collection outlines debates by scholars of immigration in the US about whether the second generation of new migrations to the US will follow older migrations and 'integrate into society' or maintain strong ties with their 'homeland' and be 'transnational migrants'. In their introduction to the volume the authors insist that the two are not mutually exclusive. Indeed in different ways most of the scholars writing in the book come to that conclusion. Transnationalism can exist beside integration into society and both have multiple dimensions that do not rule each other out (Levitt and Waters, 2002:3).

In this attempt to reconcile two seemingly contrary positions on the 'second generation' the book interrogates both the meaning of transnationalism and that of the 'second generation'. Levitt (2002) shows how engagement with transnationalism can change, wax and wane over the course of a lifetime. Through three case studies, she shows the causes and effects of very different life stories and their transnational practices. These occasional bursts of transnational activity mean that 'second generation transnationalism' may not be picked up by surveys or research.

Engaging with debates about the meaning and limits of the concept of transnationalism, and strongly influenced by the idea of social fields, Fouron and Glick Schiller (2002) have a broad and all-encompassing idea of what constitutes transnational migration and the 'second generation':



*Transnational migration is a process of movement and settlement across international borders in which individuals maintain or build multiple networks of connection to their country of origin while at the same time settling in a new country. (Fouon and Glick Schiller, 2002:171).*

The authors believe that the idea of transnational migration offers a critique to the way earlier migrations were understood and the dominant model of 'immigrant incorporation' as a linear process of acculturation and assimilation that takes place over several generations. The very notion of a 'second generation' points to the step-like, inevitable way the incorporation of immigrants has been conceived. In this model, children of immigrants are socialised only by influences from within the country of their birth (Fouon and Glick Schiller, 2002:175).

An imagined sense of belonging and constructing social fields of relations which stretch beyond national boundaries is crucial to the idea of transnational migration and social fields used by the authors. They draw upon Anderson's (1991) notion of 'imagined communities' and talk about an 'imagined generation'. What they have actually done perhaps, influenced by their empirical work on Haitians in the US, is reconstruct the meaning of the 'second generation', which was an artificial construction all along.

Factors such as race, class and where immigrants live can lead to a wide range of trajectories and identities among the so called 'second generation'. In the US, this has been realised due to recent immigrations from Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. Second generation Haitians in Miami may assimilate rapidly into a 'Black American identity' which involves a rejection of White mainstream culture. Others may respond to the racialisation of identities by being drawn to a sense

of belonging to the country of their parents' birth. (Fouon and Glick Schiller, 2002:175). When they return to Haiti they experience a relative lack of discrimination compared to that which they experienced in the US (Fouon and Glick Schiller, 2002:182).

Transnational migration patterns have been dismissed as a 'phenomenon of the first generation' by some scholars. Fouon and Glick Schiller (2002) point out that among their Haitian informants, the process of raising children is often transnational. Haitian parents have children born in Haiti and brought to the US when they are in their teens, some children born in the US are sent back to Haiti to be raised there while others are raised with their parents in the US (Fouon and Glick Schiller, 2002:177).

Fouon and Glick Schiller make a case, using the idea of a transnational social field which links the 'homeland' and 'new land', for including children born in the 'homeland' in what we describe as a 'second generation'. Using the case of Haiti and the US, they show how many young people in Haiti are also the children of migrant families, just as are children born to Haitian families in the US (Fouon and Glick Schiller, 2002:169). These children and young people, born and raised in Haiti, often with several members of their families living in the US, are also influenced by transnational forces. We consider households in the 'homeland' formed by and benefiting from economic and social capital from abroad to be 'transnational', Fouon and Glick Schiller argue that we should also consider the children of these households part of the 'second generation' (Fouon and Glick Schiller, 2002:194). All children born within a field of social relations which links 'home' and 'host' countries of their parents through economic, social and religious networks and transnational media should also be included in this transnational second generation. This is the generation born into a transnational social field which did not exist a generation before their birth. This social field will then

be influential on their upbringing and subjectivities, regardless of where they were born or whether they ever migrate (Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2002:195).

Responding to a wide range of findings and the multiplicity of ways in which 'second generations' of immigrants to the US have been theorised, sometimes based on contradictory findings, Eckstein (2002) makes a case for understanding the political and material context within which these identities are formed. The variable historical conditions of groups of 'first' and 'second generation' immigrants are the reason why the experiences of some are characterised by assimilation and others by transnationalism (Eckstein, 2002:212).

Eckstein argues that common experiences during youth can create a common worldview or frame of references which will influence subsequent subjectivities. "*Cohorts that differ in their pre immigration backgrounds can thus be expected to differ, in certain respects in their post emigration experiences as well.*" The historical conditions of early migrations to the US were very different to some more recent migrations and technological advances have made transnationalism more accessible and possible (Eckstein, 2002:213).

Eckstein's point is that Fouron and Glick Schiller's 'imagined generations' do not exist, as Marx would have put it, in 'thin air' but are 'historically grounded'. The biological idea of a second generation, linked to land or as one generation removed from the land does not explain the wide variance of experiences of the 'second generation' (Eckstein, 2002:215). Fouron and Glick Schiller's chapter does place their idea of the second generation within its historical context, but it is important to remember that other historical contexts will be very different. Thompson and Crul (2007) point out that many US scholars have not compared conditions in the US, the national

context, with other immigrant receiving countries. In Europe, by contrast, different nations' regimes and policies are regularly compared (Thompson and Crul, 2007:1031).

Connections with the 'Haitian diaspora' are consciously constructed and maintained by Haitian politicians and public as a response to the poverty and unstable political situation in the country (Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2002:189). Fouron and Glick Schiller show how through media such as radio shows, Haitian nationalism is maintained among Haitians in the US. They maintain that through these types of connections, the idea of the second generation needs to include an entire generation in both 'homeland' and 'new land'. They accept that not everyone in Haiti is connected to networks which link them to transnational activities, but say that those who are must be considered 'second generation'. Importantly they maintain that influences on identity within the US should be placed alongside influences from and their positionality to people 'back home' (Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2002:193-194).

Fouron and Glick Schiller describe this phenomenon, influenced by Anderson (1994), as 'long distance nationalism'; this is the ideology of belonging constructed within a transnational social field. These ideas about belonging link people at various geographical locations with an ancestral country and its government. Through this type of ideological network, the territory, government and people become a transnational nation-state. Long distance nationalism may be confined to a sense of belonging, in the imagination and emotions, but it may also be an influence on practices and actions. Long distance nationalists may vote, demonstrate, contribute money, create art, fight and die for a 'homeland' in which they have never lived (Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2002:172).

Fouron and Glick Schiller concede that the geographical position of a member of their extended notion of the second generation, either in the US or in Haiti, is important for that person's educational, social and political experiences. For a transnational second generation to participate in 'long distance nationalism', they must not only grow up within the transnational social field but also identify with and take action for their ancestral homeland (Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2002:198).

Perlman (2002:217) and Jones-Correa (2002) find Fouron and Glick Schiller's ideas about the 'second generation' and transnationalism too broad, rendering an already vague concept meaningless. Jones-Correa worries that current fascination with transnationalism risks ignoring the integration of 'second generations', reversing the mistake made by a previous generation of scholars of immigration in the US who focused only on integration and not on transnationalism (Jones-Correa, 2002:223).

Jones-Correa uses evidence from the other studies of 'second generation transnationalism' in Levitt and Waters' (2002) edited collection to show that, in fact, the majority of the 'second generation' do not engage in much 'transnational' behaviour. Citing a wide range of studies of 'second generations' in the US, he makes a case for the idea of the linear assimilation of the generations of immigrants into the 'host' society. They are just as likely as previous immigrants to stay in the US rather than return to their 'ancestral homeland' and are increasingly integrated into the social and political life of the country (Jones-Correa, 2002:226).

Jones-Correa goes on to discuss how 'second generation transnationalism' may peak or occur most at certain times of life. Using evidence from other studies, he speculates that second

generation transnationalism peaks in a persons' teens and twenties, fall off with the pressures of work, marriage and having children and re-emerge again when some of these pressures have decreased (Jones-Correa, 2002:227, cf. Vertovec, 2004b).

Among the children in my study, nearly all had one parent who had been born in the UK or had come to the UK as a child and one who had come to the UK as an adult to marry a British citizen of Bangladeshi origin. It was common for migrants from Bangladesh to the UK in the 1950s and 60s to come alone to work and then return to Sylhet to marry in Bangladesh and come back to the UK alone (Adams, 1987:66, Gardner, 2006:378). Some men moved with brothers, cousins or in the case of one of my research subjects a father and son came together. Are both father and son members of the 'first generation'?

Eventually, due to various legislative and social factors many of them brought their wives to the UK along with any children they had, who may have been two years old or seventeen years old (Eade, 1997:149). What age they moved at has had an enormous impact on their subsequent schooling, socialisation and integration into British society. What generation are these people? And what generation are their children? This points us towards the idea of transnational social space rather than an isolated community gradually integrating into the UK.

Many British Bangladeshis are very 'well-integrated' in various ways into aspects of 'British society'. A significant number of British-born Bangladeshis maintain transnational links with Bangladesh and these two phenomena are not mutually exclusive. Many British Bangladeshis go through peaks and troughs of transnational behaviour. Certain times in the life course may see a

heightened sense of belonging to a transnational community and periods of more transnational activity.

Many of my research subjects had occasional intense periods of transnational activity around visits to Bangladesh, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Parents said that they maintained closer links before they had children and hoped to have more contact after their children were grown up as the cost of taking children to Sylhet was prohibitive and the demands of school terms made it difficult for them to take extended holidays in Sylhet. Young Bangladeshis reported enjoying Bangladesh more as teenagers than they had as children. All these findings correspond with Jones Correias's (2002) analysis.

A comparison between Fourn and Glick Schiller's (2002) Haitians and British Bangladeshis is problematic for several reasons. One is distance. Bangladeshis must travel further to visit Bangladesh and therefore there is perhaps less contact with their 'homeland'. Secondly there has not been the kind of concerted government effort to encourage 'long distance nationalism' among British Bangladeshis as there has been for Haitians. Indeed, as I noted earlier, many British Bangladeshis' parents or grandparents came to the UK long before the country Bangladesh even existed. However, many British Bangladeshis were involved in various ways in Bangladesh's independence struggle. The length and complexity of relations between India, what is now Bangladesh and the UK influences the historical relationship between the two locations of this social field. The legacy of British imperialism has created a complex array of ambivalent relationships on both sides.

The extreme disparity of wealth between Bangladesh and the UK, particularly in the area of publicly provided health and education, coupled with the distance and the effects of long stays in the UK mean that British Bangladeshis grow up with very different experiences and expectations to their kin in Bangladesh. The welfare state does not exist to such an extent in the US. Haitian families with relatives in the US are closer together and can more easily maintain contacts and a similar way of life than British Bangladeshis and their Bangladeshi kin.

This distance and differences between the locations of the British Bangladeshi social field lead to divisions between those who inhabit the social field and those who come into contact with it and would perhaps like to join. The differences in the realm of the possible, in wealth and subjectivities are too great for Bangladeshis growing up in Sylhet in migrant families to be truly considered part of the British Bangladeshi transnational social field, as Fouron and Glick Schiller (2002) argue in their case study.

The access British Bangladeshis have to health care, education, benefits, jobs and the psychological and material effect of these differentiates them from their kin in Bangladesh who have limited access to these resources. British Bangladeshis experience being in a minority, racism and poverty in Britain whereas they have power and wealth in Bangladesh, where their ethnicity and religion put them in the majority. The combination of these unique positions and experiences mark them out from Bangladeshis at home who do not have those experiences. As I will discuss in chapter 5, Friedmann (2002) explains that the spaces and places they inhabit influence the 'habitus' of groups such as British Bangladeshis. The urban flat in London leads to a different socialisation than the rural homestead in Sylhet. This, along with other influences,



excludes Bangladeshis in Sylhet from truly being part of the British Bangladeshi social field as they do not have the relevant habitus.

The notion of first, second and subsequent generations of 'immigrants' is not helpful for the analysis of British Bangladeshis and it is probably not relevant to many other minority groups. It does not accurately portray groups of people or provide any descriptive utility. The variety of situations and contexts among my research subjects show that few, if any, families correspond to a neat model of immigrant integration. Marriage practices and the practice of bringing families up in Bangladesh before bringing children and wives over to the UK for family reunification disrupted this neat model. Peaks and troughs of transnational activity and variation between individuals and families mean that it is hard to predict or measure the extent of transnational activity of a whole group of people. The idea of the 'second generation' as a coherent group does not hold up.

Fouron and Glick Schiller's (2002) idea that this 'second generation' includes children of families in the country of origin who receive remittances does not stand up to scrutiny in the case of British Bangladeshis. Such are the material and social differences between life in urban London and rural Sylhet that the socialisation of children in London gives them a different habitus than the one of their kin in Bangladesh. It is always possible for people in Sylhet to spot a *Londoni* because of the many tiny differences in the way he or she behaves compared to the locals. Similarly, British Bangladeshis can tell if someone is a *freshi* (recently arrived migrant) even if they try to behave like a *Londoni*.

There are significant differences between those brought up 'here' and those brought up 'there'. However it is not useful to talk about 'second' or 'third generations', rather the evidence points

towards a transnational social field with various forms of capital, exchanges, flows and power unevenly distributed within it.

### **Relative poverty and 'security capital'**

As British Bangladeshi families have become embedded in social and economic networks in London, the security of life in the UK has become increasingly important to them. In many ways this 'security capital' is a combination of social and economic capital. Free healthcare, schooling, effective policing and the justice system save money and also make acquiring social capital as a form of insurance in an emergency less important. Networks of friends, professional contacts and family are increasingly based in the UK. Competencies and ways of behaving are geared towards succeeding in British-based and transnational British Bangladeshi social fields rather than in Bangladeshi-based social fields.

Economically, politically and environmentally, life in the UK is more secure than in Sylhet and there is a high value placed on the security and stability of life in London (Gardner, 2008:479). Older British Bangladeshis become increasingly reliant on the free care and medicine that they are entitled to from the National Health Service (NHS) (Gardner, 2002b:154, Adams, 1987:178). Despite the relative poverty of many British Bangladeshis, life in the UK is seen as more secure than life in Bangladesh. Despite the feeling that many British Bangladeshis have of suffering from unfair persecution and prejudice as Muslims; rules, laws and institutions are more reliable in the UK, the infrastructure works and justice is seen to prevail most of the time (Gardner, 2008:487).

This security is valued and the reliability and predictability is something that people in Bangladesh yearn after. The corruption and impunity of political classes in Bangladesh, coupled with political and environmental insecurity, leads many to despair of their chances there. The 'security capital' of being a British Bangladeshi has emerged as one of the most powerful and sought after forms of capital in the British Bangladeshi social field.

When seen from a British perspective British Bangladeshis are a relatively deprived group. While they are seen as wealthy and successful in Bangladesh and their security capital much sought after, statistics in Britain tell another story. From the 2001 census data, four indicators of deprivation have been developed, covering employment, housing, education and health and disability. Bangladeshi households are more likely than the average to be deprived in terms of housing, health and disability and employment (Piggott, 2004:62)

70% of Bangladeshi pupils in UK schools live in the 20% most deprived postcode areas defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation devised by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2004. A large proportion (45%) is actually living in the 10% most deprived post code areas. Compare this to White British school children, of whom 20% live in the 20% most deprived post code areas (DfES, 2006:19). Considering the data on deprivation in Islington that I described in chapter 2, many of my research subjects are among that 70%.

68% of Bangladeshis live in low-income, often overcrowded households that rely more on benefits than any other community. Over 40% of Bangladeshi men under the age of twenty five are unemployed, compared with 12% of young White men. British Bangladeshis are more likely to be victims of racially motivated incidents than most other ethnic groups. They are also four times more

likely than others to describe their health as 'bad' or 'very bad'. British Bangladeshi pupils have the highest percentage eligibility for free school meals of any ethnic group (Ofsted, 2004:5). Free school meals are used as an indicator of poverty and while they may not be the best indicator, combined with the other data presented here, they contribute to a picture of deprivation and disadvantage.

From a Bangladeshi perspective, the council housing, benefits and free school meals that are markers of poverty in the UK are almost unimaginable luxuries. When I discussed the issue of relative wealth with the Bangladeshi cousins of a man from London, explaining how he worked two jobs seven days a week to feed his family and send those in Bangladesh remittances, they denied that he could ever be poor, as he could claim benefits.

## **Conclusions**

A unique British Bangladeshi transnational social field has developed over the years, with its own logic, rules, values and habitus. This social field includes extended networks of family, neighbours and friends in Sylhet, those who have moved from Sylhet to London and British-born Bangladeshis. The most important physical locations in this social field in terms of size and symbolism are in Sylhet and London. Within Sylhet and London however there are many people and places not touched by this social field. This is a social field not limited by or fixed to space. A family in Islington surrounded by non-Bangladeshi neighbours, shops and services remain linked to it via communication technology, transport, relationships, ideologies, imaginaries and memories.

So-called 'second' and 'third generations' of British Bangladeshis continue to engage in transnational activities and practices, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. However, the very terms 'second' and 'third generation' do not accurately reflect reality due to a combination of marriage practices and the terms' artificially neat model of integration. Bangladeshis in Bangladesh have such different life experiences and socialisation that they cannot be considered part of the British Bangladeshi social field or the 'second generation'. British Bangladeshis are involved in the British Bangladeshi transnational social field but are also engaged in other local and transnational social fields. After some more discussion of life within the British Bangladeshi social field in the next chapter, I will describe in later chapters how these different social fields interact with each other.

The distinction made by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) between ways of 'being' and 'belonging' transnational helps to unpick these complex and at times contradictory identities and practices. As we shall see in the following chapters although many British Bangladeshi children do not have a strong sense of belonging to Bangladesh and have ambivalent feelings about the UK, they engage in transnational ways of being that encompass the two locations. Indeed I will suggest that their involvement with the British Bangladeshi transnational social field is practical and habitual, rather than ideological. In the next chapter I will discuss how transnational practices relating to communication, marriage and visits to Bangladesh help maintain and reproduce the transnational social field and create complex and ambivalent feelings of belonging.

Through these transnational practices, children develop feelings of belonging and identifications with people, practices and places in both London and Sylhet. Transnationalism has led to social fields and corresponding habituses that are not linked only to one location. In the next few chapters

I will explore the complex interaction of global, transnational and local influences on the practices and identities of British Bangladeshis.

## 4 Transnational Practice

In the previous chapter I introduced the British Bangladeshi social field through a brief history and a review of approaches to transnational identities. In this chapter I will describe some transnational practices which create and maintain the transnational social field. While the last chapter was concerned with history, theory and notions of identity, this chapter will discuss relationships, practices and networks in the transnational social field. These transnational ways of being do not always create a sense of transnational belonging in British Bangladeshi children. In fact, as I will describe, many children have ambivalent feelings about Bangladesh.

Practices related to communication technology, marriage and visits to Bangladesh play a crucial role in maintaining the social field and reproducing its habitus. As I noted in the previous chapter, the practice of marriages between partners based in Bangladesh and in the UK has disrupted the sense of neatly integrating generations of immigrants. In this chapter I will discuss these practices and their implications in greater detail. While marriage linking a family in one place with one in another is a very old practice, transnationalism has been aided and intensified by the use of technology. Communications technology has played a role in 'distanciation' or 'space-time compression' and the 'disembedding' of social relations from physical places which makes current modes of transnationalism distinct from previous ones (Giddens, 1990:14, Harvey, 1989:241).

Returning to my own research on transnational childhoods and to the movement of people around the world, the final part of the chapter deals with practices during visits to Bangladesh. I will describe the ambivalent experiences of children during visits, where discomfort and disorientation

leads to a feeling of belonging in London more than in Sylhet. Visits play a crucial role in the socialisation of children into the British Bangladeshi habitus through exposure to Bangladeshi dispositions, attitudes and ways of behaving. These are important aspects of the reproduction of the British Bangladeshi social field.

Flows of gifts, remittances, food and memories are important in the maintenance of a transnational social field and its 'imagined community'. Reactions and attitudes towards these flows are changing and transforming the meanings attached to places and practices. This is apparent in discussions I had with young British Bangladeshis and parents of children about marriage. It is also leading to new understandings of the relationship between food, the land and ultimately identities. In the last section of the chapter I wish to discuss these relationships, revisiting the idea of '*desh bidesh*' (Gardner, 1993).

## **Marriage**

In the early years of the British Bangladeshi social field (1950-80), the wives of British Bangladeshi men often stayed in Sylhet. Beginning in the 1960s due to the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act and continuing until the current day, families have been reunited, where possible, in the UK (Gardner, 2006:374). In the earlier phase, women played a crucial role in Bangladesh in managing families and households. In general their lives were characterised by hard work in their in-law's household and the loneliness of long periods of absence from their husbands (Gardner, 2006:377-378). Once in the UK after family reunification, loneliness and isolation accompanied their confinement to the household and distance from friends and relatives (Gardner, 2006:382).



The common practice of marriages between British-based Sylhetis and Bangladeshi-based Sylhetis maintains links between families in the UK and Bangladesh. The reasons for the preference for these marriages are complex. In a marriage between a British-based Bangladeshi and a Bangladeshi partner, the British Bangladeshi family has power over their new Bangladeshi son or daughter in-law, due to their dependence on the success of the marriage to get British citizenship. In return, British-based families are able to maintain links with Bangladesh and secure what they see as a suitable marriage partner for their child. As Charsley (2007) shows in relation to British Pakistanis, marriage to kin or neighbours from Pakistan or Bangladesh is partly to reduce the risks of marriage to an unsuitable spouse, marital problems or shame being brought upon the family (Charsley, 2007:1119).

The practice of patrilocal households is reversed in the case of a Bangladeshi man marrying a British Bangladeshi woman. Bangladeshi men who relocate to the UK live with their in-laws or as couples and work in the UK. Bangladeshi partners are perceived to be 'loyal' and less 'canny', more 'moral', more 'traditional' and less likely to abscond, divorce or cheat (cf. Charsley, 2007:1124). Through cousin marriages, British-based families can find someone upon whom they believe they can rely, consolidate wealth and land and also fulfil obligations to help members of their family migrate (Gardner, 2006:385).

Bangladeshi-based families can secure a connection with London and the transnational community through marriage. Here the flow of economic capital is in the opposite direction to that normally assumed, with the marriage to a British citizen likely to be very expensive for the Bangladeshi citizen's family. Often cash, land and/or goods worth tens of thousands of pounds are transferred. Years of savings and acquisition of social and symbolic capital may be transferred in such an

arrangement (cf. Gardner, 2008:487). In return, the family hope to start a process of remittances, meaning increased security in Bangladesh. If everything goes well they can look forward to increased social capital, meaning perhaps future marriages for members of their family and relative security and wealth for children of the marriage in the UK.

Marriages form one of the strongest ways of maintaining transnational links between Sylhet and the UK. They interrupt the neat and artificial notions of a 'second' and 'third' generation, continuously bringing new arrivals and Sylheti subjectivities to the UK. Transnational marriages are very common now, but there is evidence that attitudes towards them may be changing.

British Bangladeshi parents have less say over the marriage partner of their children than their parents had over their own marriages. Partners from Bangladesh are not such a priority as they were before. Parents brought up in the UK are influenced by British and Islamic ideas about marriage. A group of mothers I spoke to about the issue of marriage emphasised that their children's decision would be the final one. Many of the mothers themselves had not had a choice about their marriages and had come to the UK after marrying a British Bangladeshi man as teenagers. They were adamant that their children could choose to marry anyone, Bangladeshi or otherwise, based in the UK or elsewhere, as long as they were Muslim. One mother, Halima, emphasised the gaps in communication and employment potential that might exist between her own academically successful and articulate daughters brought up in London and a groom from Sylhet.

*B: What about your children marrying ... someone from ... Bangladesh?*

*Ruby: Yeah it's ok..*

Halima: *If they like it.*

Nadia: *If they like it, if they don't...*

B: *But what would you prefer?*

Halima: *I would prefer if they find a good Muslim person in here.*

B: *In London, not from Bangladesh?*

Halima: *Not from Bangladesh.*

B: *Why not?*

Halima: *Because again its problem with the language barrier, communications.*

B: *Communication...*

Halima: *Because if my daughter saying 'hello', he might think she said 'stupid'.*

B: *Yeah...*

Halima: *Because that's what's happening sometimes. So, that's why I think, and more thing she will be more advanced she will have a job and ... he doesn't know nothing he have to go straight away Indian restaurant and the girl won't like it.*<sup>13</sup>

Many young British Bangladeshis have weak links to neighbourhood and family networks in Bangladesh. They are more familiar and comfortable with their network of friends and acquaintances brought up in the UK. Some are influenced by ideas of 'love marriage' and reject practices of arranged or cousin marriage. Where their parents may have seen a Bangladeshi partner as more 'traditional' and 'moral' than British based Bangladeshis, young British Bangladeshis may regard them as cynical and interested only in money.

---

<sup>13</sup> Education and Marriage discussion with mothers, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 27.11.2008

Where their parents may have thought a suitable Bangladeshi partner for their child would help them to build social and symbolic capital, marriages between British Bangladeshis and Bangladeshis are now seen as slightly embarrassing, especially for some high-achieving British Bangladeshis<sup>14</sup>. The social and cultural capital gained by someone within the British Bangladesh social field and linked to social fields in London are different from those gained in rural Sylhet. They may not translate well and young British Bangladeshis confronted with potential marriage partners from Sylhet sometimes find the choices their families expect them to make nonsensical by their standards as this quote from Nazma, a 21 year old British Bangladeshi woman whom I met and chatted to with a group of her friends in Dhaka reveals. She criticises her extended family for pressurising her into marrying a young man from their village in Sylhet:

*They wanted me to marry this guy yeah. He's got no education, he hasn't got a job, and he's never really worked yeah. He can't do anything, he's not even good looking, why would I want to marry him?*<sup>15</sup>

Despite these attitudes, the practice of transnational marriages remains common and the ties that lead from these marriages are long lasting (cf. Charsley 2007:1117). Of the children who were my research subjects, all had a parent who had migrated to the UK in adulthood specifically for marriage. So while change may be on its way, it will not come very fast. In some areas however, there has been a revolution in the scale and accessibility of transnational connections that has transformed the nature of transnationalism for diaspora groups.

---

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to Delwar Hussain for this insight.

<sup>15</sup> Discussion with British Bangladeshis and Bangladeshis from Dhaka, conducted in Dhaka, 21.08.2008

## Transnational technology

Technology has been used to define new ways and transform old patterns of being transnational. The increased availability and affordability of telecommunications has meant that economic, political and social networks between Bangladesh and London are stronger and denser today than ever before. In the 1980s, communication by telephone between Bangladesh and the outside world was difficult and unpredictable. Most households did not have a telephone, especially in rural areas. Transnational Sylheti families mainly communicated through letters, which took weeks or months to reach their destination (Gardner, 2008:477). New mobile phone companies, many of which are joint ventures between Bangladeshi companies and foreign investors, have leapfrogged the old land lines. Grameen (village) Phone, a joint venture between a Bangladeshi NGO and a Norwegian telecommunications corporation, is the largest such company. Their motto is '*stay close*'<sup>16</sup>. Cheaper and more reliable than the old land lines, mobile phones are now the preferred mode of communication.

Mobiles are now affordable to many who previously would not have had telephones; they work in remote rural areas which previously had no telephone lines. This revolution has been driven by the tumbling cost of making international phone calls and demand not only from within Bangladesh for cheap and reliable calls, but from outside Bangladesh for ways to 'stay close' to friends and family. Improved international phone lines, technical improvements, the massive market, intense competition and the rise of international phone cards have brought prices of international calls down sharply. Research on telephone traffic shows remarkable recent increases in calls from many countries that send and receive migrants and Bangladesh is no exception (Vertovec, 2004c:220).

---

<sup>16</sup> see: [www.grameenphone.com/index.php?id=64](http://www.grameenphone.com/index.php?id=64) (website accessed in April 2009)

Increased contact changes the lives of families separated by huge distances, brings people closer and allows the kind of discussions over family issues that would take place in a non-migrant family. These enable people in London to be involved in the day-to-day affairs and decisions of their families in Bangladesh (Vertovec, 2004c:220). The majority of British Bangladeshis are now not separated from their wives and children as they have been reunified in Britain, but families have branches in Bangladesh, uncles, grandparents, siblings or cousins.

As providers and remittance-senders, families in Britain want to know where their money is being spent. They want to keep tabs on activities, work and expenditure in Bangladesh. They convert the economic capital they have earned in London into social and symbolic capital in Bangladesh. Their pounds may go towards building a new mosque, homes for relatives or charity work and they must ensure that the social and symbolic capital is attributed to them. Telephone communication enables them to be intimately involved in the buying of a new fridge, in preparations for a marriage or a business venture which they may have funded. British Bangladeshi women in London can also feel the sense of companionship with other female relations in large joint families in Bangladesh that they miss, living relatively isolated lives in London through frequent communication with relatives in Bangladesh (Gardner, 2006:374).

Young men in Sylhet, eager to get to London and join the transnational community, engage in the production of symbolic and social capital, through practices that link them with transnational, 'British' lifestyles. Fast food, fashions, trips to the British High Commission and the internet café are all part of this, but so is the possession of the latest model of mobile phone. These young men hope to convert this symbolic capital and the social capital they gain by maintaining close contact

with British kin into economic capital for themselves and their family through marriage and migration to the UK (Gardner, 2008:487).

Mobile phones acquire a special totemic meaning: they are the 'social glue' of transnationalism (Vertovec, 2004c) and they are the tools for the construction of social and symbolic capital (Gardner, 2008:487). In transnational networks the holders of these tools are the 'gatekeepers' to access. Through them flow messages, money, relationships, power, social and symbolic capital. Sylheti families in my research in Islington reported that mobile phones are requested by their relatives in Bangladesh more than any other gift. They bemoaned the cost they had to bear of buying three or four of the latest mobiles from London to give to relatives in Sylhet. When I went to Sylhet for my fieldwork I was asked to carry mobiles to Sylhet to give to the relatives of people I knew in London.

While mobiles and cheap telephone calls are important, other forms of modern communication are also influential. Satellite television brings news from Bangladesh to London and from the East End of London, 'Banglatown', to the rest of Britain and back to Bangladesh. British Bangladeshis can see the suffering of cyclone victims on television and contribute to relief funds with a telephone call. Money and clothes were collected among my research subjects in different parts of London in response to Cyclone Sidr<sup>17</sup>. Bangladeshis in Sylhet can watch the festivities at the annual *Boishaki Mela* near Brick Lane on television.

Importantly, television and the internet bring access to other transnational spheres and influences from other locations: Hindi dramas and Bollywood movies are popular both in London and

---

<sup>17</sup> A very powerful and destructive cyclone that hit Bangladesh on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2007

Bangladesh and unite Bangladeshis with other transnational South Asians. Islamic satellite television channels and websites based in London, the US and India help the maintenance and spread of a sense of an Islamic identity.

Children and young people, as one might expect, are at the forefront of these technological developments. I was taught things about my own mobile phone that I had not known by an eight year old boy. I sat and watched as a class of eleven year olds worked on their IT projects, surreptitiously streaming music videos while the IT teacher was not watching. In a session for parents on internet safety the IT teacher said that try as he might he could not effectively block the children in the school from chat and video websites as they always found a way round the controls on the school's computers. The children's mastery of these tools of communication and interaction will produce networks and effects more diverse and complex than those which exist now. No book, computer, website, film or television show these children have experienced however can compare with the physical and emotional multi-sensory rollercoaster of a visit to Bangladesh.

## **Visits to Bangladesh**

The visit is a big event in the life of most British Bangladeshi families and similarly to the British Pakistani families in Mason (1994) and Bolognani's (2007) accounts, they help to '*sustain narratives of kinship networks*'. They are the source of careful preparation, planning and imagining for months before and of reminiscences long afterwards (cf. Mason, 1994:423, Bolognani, 2007:61, Salih, 2002:221). Families save up for many months to raise the considerable amounts of money necessary to pay for the air fares, gifts for relatives and expenses of the visit. One family who I



visited in Sylhet raised thousands of pounds on a credit card to pay for their visit and paid back the debt for many months afterwards.

Visits to Bangladesh are a crucial meeting place for families, an opportunity for British Bangladeshi children to meet and get to know the Bangladeshi branches of their family. 'Being there' and 'being seen there', reconnecting with the people and places of their ancestral village and bringing relatives and neighbours up to date with developments in the family are crucial elements of the visit. For the children in my study this was especially relevant as they met aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents who they had never met before. Catching up with family, local events, births, marriages, neighbours and gossip helps to maintain a sense of belonging to a family and locality in Bangladesh. Children became involved in networks of family and neighbour relations in Bangladesh.

Visits can also be about being there at key moments. Weddings, deaths, funerals and religious celebrations are all occasions where a visit might occur. Visits are arranged, where possible to coincide with these events and in some cases the events are arranged to coincide with visits. The traditional wedding season in Bangladesh is during the autumn and winter months. Due to the timing of British school holidays when children and parents can get time off to visit Sylhet, many weddings in Sylhet are held during the uncomfortably hot summer months. In an Interview Seema, a British Bangladeshi woman explained this to me:

*B: ... Because having a wedding in the summer then would be convenient for families from London.*

Seema: *Yeah, yeah, I mean my brother-in-law could get married any time but we specifically said you know; if you want to get engaged or whatever, then do that but if you want us there, we can't be there except December or in the summer holidays*<sup>18</sup>.

Children's accounts of weddings and other functions were mixed; some found them tedious, while others enjoyed them. I spent Eid on their farm in Sylhet with a family from London and the young boy of the family found the sacrifice of bulls and distribution of meat to the poor quite disturbing. He found the jostling poor at the distribution of meat unsettling, telling me that Bangladesh was 'like a bad dream'. In other accounts, children found weddings fun, recounting them as unexpected events during visits, as if they had occurred spontaneously. In this account Ishrat explains how her cousin's wedding took place while they were visiting Bangladesh and how much she enjoyed it:

Ishrat: *We went to Bangladesh and ... suddenly it turned out that our cousin was getting married in Bangladesh ... we never even thought that she's going to get married ...*

B: *So did you go to the marriage?*

I: *Yes.*

B: *What was that like?*

I: *It was fantastic, we had a spray fight, we had a cake fight.*

B: *A cake fight?*

I: *Yes, like a cake food fight.*

B: *Wow, a food fight that sounds brilliant.*

I: *... My cousin got a custard pie and threw it in my face.*

---

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Seema, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 27.11.2007.

B: *She threw it in your face?*

I: *Yeah, and it went tthpppltt, like that!*<sup>19</sup>

At other times, events in Bangladesh are funded by those in London, but experienced only through descriptions, photos and video. When the grandfather of some of my research subjects died in London, his daughter paid for a bull to be slaughtered and the meat distributed to poor people in his village in Sylhet. This practice, known as *shinni*, is described by Gardner (2002a). These rituals, difficult and less pertinent in London are lived out even in the absence of key participants in Sylhet. In Bolognani (2007) and Salih's (2002) accounts of visits by migrants to Pakistan and Morocco, family members who could not travel to attend marriages in their ancestral villages were sent photos and videos of the event (Bolognani, 2007:62, Salih, 2002:221).

Bringing children to Bangladesh is seen as important, as it is for the Pakistani families in Mason's (1994) account and parents 'want them to want to' visit. Visits home are sometimes constructed by British Bangladeshis and their peers in the UK as 'family holidays', (cf. Mason, 2004:427) perhaps reflecting British ideas of travel and tourism. Some, such as Seema, express a desire to visit parts of Bangladesh such as the beach resort of Cox's Bazaar on holiday:

B: *... So apart from family events and visiting your grandparents what else do you do when you visit?*

S: *... Well it's mainly for the family visits but I think the last few times we've made efforts to kind of do other things ... we go to Cox's Bazaar we try to go there for at least a week because the kids really like it, because obviously it's you know it's a nice beach.*<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Ishrat, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 12.02.2008

British Bangladeshi families make an effort to look their best during visits. New clothes, jewellery and gadgets are brought for the event to signify their wealth and success. Bolognani describes similar practices among Pakistanis in Bradford (Bolognani, 2007:61). Salih's (2002) work highlights the role these displays of wealth or of variations in the performance of 'traditional' rituals during visits in asserting difference between visiting families and their non-migrant kin (Salih, 2002:223).

Being seen in Bangladesh is important to families. One family who I visited in Bangladesh spent months before the visit collecting new clothes to wear, scouring mail order catalogues and websites, buying jewellery, a laptop, phones and other gadgets. They excitedly brought new luggage and clothes which were saved to be worn during the visit. The display of wealth, or progress and success is an important element of the visit.

For months the whole family were excited about the visit. The parents had high hopes, to see friends and family, reconnect with their villages and show their children Bangladesh. Bags were packed months in advance with presents and clothes for the trip. The children were excited and nervous. They were looking forward to meeting their family members in Bangladesh and seeing the country but they were also unsure about what they would see and who they would meet in Bangladesh. In some ways the visit satisfied their hopes and anticipation but in others they were disappointed and disillusioned.

---

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Seema, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 27.11.2007.

## Ambivalence

Staying in Sylhet in December 2007 with a family from London I was able to observe their visit first-hand. The train journey to the family's farm was beautiful as the morning sun gradually cleared the mist from the paddies, clumps of bamboo and tea gardens all cool and lush. Once I arrived, we went on a series of visits, social calls and inspections. To fields, shops, houses, uncles', cousins' and colleagues' houses, past more farmland and busy workers, a relative's farm and finally to their town house for a sumptuous lunch. At every stop we were offered tea and snacks until I was quite overwhelmed.

The parents, Tarique and Lima, seemed to enjoy the visit. Tarique was born in London, but his wife Lima grew up in Bangladesh. Tarique and Lima spent their time in different ways: Tarique rushed around on his social and business visits and Lima got some time off from cooking, cleaning and childcare for which she is solely responsible in London. Both spoke Sylheti easily and Tarique seemed to enjoy the banter and company of the men on the farm.

Their son, eight year old Saiful enjoyed the visit less. He did not enjoy the dirt, the hardness of the beds, the animals, the other children of the *bari*, the prying hands and the attentions of the many relatives we had to see. We wandered around the farm together and he had no idea what most of the activities were and no inclination to find out or participate. He was followed everywhere by a minder whom he played with and ordered about. He refused to play with the other children, preferring only to play with adults. The other children of the *bari*, excluded by him and unable to communicate with him, resorted to making fun of him and me and engaging in what Wilce called '*hangtang foreigner talk*' (Wilce, 1998:12). This Bangladeshi form of speech, which is a reaction to

foreigners, took the form of mimicking and deriding the sound and flow of our English in a mock conversation.

Saiful and his family's wealth and power relative to the locals was obvious. They called the shots, owned the farm, paid for everything and dished out presents and meat at Eid (cf. Gardner, 1995:134). They were well looked after and respected in their *bari*. While his father enjoyed these relationships, Saiful shrunk shyly to what he knew best and felt clumsy and awkward in this unfamiliar environment and language. His association only with adults and English, willingness to speak directly to elders and occasional hostility towards Bangladesh and some Bangladeshis created a sense among the local children that he considered himself somehow superior. While Tarique confidently honed and updated his Sylheti through conversation and reconnected with friends and relatives; Saiful, feeling out of place, missed the opportunity.

The wealthy *Londonis*, who show little regard for the unwritten rules and hierarchies of Bangladesh, having been brought up in London, play into many Bangladeshi peoples' ambivalent ideas about the West. Yes, they were materially wealthy, healthy, educated and powerful, but there was also something decadent, amoral about them and the nature of their wealth (Gardner, 1993:9). Their ways are becoming less in tune with Bangladeshi ones; they are more 'foreign'. In the case of Saiful, this was not deliberate, having more to do with his shyness and culture shock. *Habitus* marks out the *Londoni* from his local kin, a combination of many small things which everyone can see and yet is hard to pin-point.

Saiful's mixed feelings towards Bangladesh were not unusual. Many British Bangladeshi children I spoke to said that they missed television programmes, such as children's programmes and

*Eastenders*<sup>21</sup> and the food in London. An ambivalent attitude towards Bangladesh develops in many young British Bangladeshis during these visits. They enjoy some aspects of the freedom, company, luxury and power they have in Bangladesh, but find other aspects uncomfortable and unsettling. They realise that many of their competencies and the social and symbolic capital they possess are best suited to London and useless in rural Bangladesh. Much of what British Bangladeshi children learn at school and are encouraged to be good at, they cannot express in their limited Sylheti/Bangla or demonstrate in rural Sylhet. Their prowess in the latest slang and knowledge of music, pop stars and footballers from the UK does not register in Sylhet. They enjoy engaging in games and activities with relatives or local children, but are generally less capable than the locals at most games or activities. Their version of football, practised on the school's playing surface, does not translate well to the verandas and courtyards of the *bari* in Sylhet. This feeling of not having the right types of social and cultural capital and the consequent disorientation reinforces young people's sense of belonging to London.

Children on visits complained about the heat, the mosquitoes, illness, the food, television, the smell of the toilets, the hard beds and the overwhelming attention of relatives and acquaintances.

Mohamed, aged 9, wrote this plea in his essay about visiting Bangladesh:

*I don't want to go to Bangladesh because I don't want to eat rice and I don't want to smell like fish. I don't want to go to Bangladesh because I don't want to use the toilets. I don't want to go to Bangladesh because I don't want to see my dad cutting a cows head. It's going to be boring in Bangladesh because I always have to get food and work. It's boring*

---

<sup>21</sup> A popular, long running British television series set in the East End of London. It is popular among British Bangladeshis although ironically it depicts an East End of London without them.

*in Bangladesh because you can't take your Playstation or television and if there is television it will still be boring because you have to watch Bangla TV. It's going to be really hot there and I'm going to melt. I am not going to Bangladesh because people are going to hit me with a bamboo stick.*<sup>22</sup>

Worst of all, young people on visits have many of the worst stereotypes they have heard about Bangladesh confirmed for them. It is really hot, they are confronted by very poor people, there is a chaos and dirt that shocks many young Londoners, the mosquitoes bother them and there are many unpleasant smells. These are images of Bangladesh that abound in the media in the UK. Bangladesh is the subject of pity and charity, it has floods and cyclones and many poor people. It is not a source of pride for many British Bangladeshis, who have been taught very little about Bengali culture; Islamic ideas and practices have been prioritised as I will discuss in chapter 8. On returning to London, many British Bangladeshis express relief at being back in the familiar and safe environment of London. They may have returned in one piece, enriched by the experience and happy to be 'home', but their sense of belonging to anything Bangladeshi is in tatters.

Rafique, aged 9 and his sister Shirin, aged 11 reflected on this in a discussion in their home in London reminiscing about their visit in summer 2008:

Rafique: *I didn't feel like I was at home.*

B: *You didn't?*

Rafique: *No.*

B: *Not in Bangladesh?*

---

<sup>22</sup> Extract from 'Visiting Bangladesh' by Mohammed, March, 2008.



Shirin: *I couldn't bear that hot.*

Rafique: *I felt like I was in some different place.*

Shirin: *Like America.*

B: *Where do you think is your home?*

Rafique: *Here!*<sup>23</sup>

For Rafique, going to Bangladesh was a visit or a holiday to a foreign country rather than a journey 'home'. Shirin compared it to visiting America, picking the name of a different country to indicate the status of Bangladesh as a foreign country.

In my experience however, children from urban environments in London enjoyed the space and companionship the large *bari* in rural Sylhet offered them. In London they were relatively isolated and confined in their flats. In rural Sylhet they were able to play outside feel the dirt between their toes, climb trees and play with farm animals or in the fields. I will discuss the relationships with inside and outside and ideas about childhood in chapter 5. In this extract from an interview, Ishrat, aged eleven, explains this difference:

I: *Like in London, stay in your house do work, go out, go to school, come back, sleep, finished.*

B: *But in Bangladesh you feel different?*

I: *Yeah we're outside, playing outside, 24 7, going to the swimming pool, playing around with my friends*<sup>24</sup>.

---

<sup>23</sup> Discussion on visits with Shirin, Rafique and Nasrin, in their flat, 28.11.2008

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Ishrat, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 12.02.2008

Ishrat, who enjoyed the outdoors and the food fight at her cousin's wedding, felt that she was treated differently in Bangladesh. The possibilities for play and fun were more, the approach to discipline was different and the presence of her extended family and doting uncles allowed her to get away with things she wouldn't have in London. After we had discussed the food fight at her cousin's wedding, we discussed this difference:

*B: That sounds brilliant, that sounds like really good fun. Better than most weddings anyway.*

*I: No it's because it's in Bangladesh of course, if it was in London it would be like, "don't touch nothing, it's gonna break" like that.*

*B: So in Bangladesh you can do whatever you want?*

*I: Yeah.*

*B: Really?*

*I: Yeah, I get spoilt in Bangladesh, because I've got all my uncles down there so like, everyone will start shouting at me. Everyone will come, "stop hitting her", like "superman to the rescue".<sup>25</sup>*

### **Visits as Socialisation**

I spent a month in Bangladesh with Rafique and Shirin's family in August 2008. During this visit I learned a lot about the meanings and functions of family visits for children. Unlike Saiful, whose visit I described above, Rafique (8), Shirin (11), their younger sister Nasrin (6) and little brother

---

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Ishrat, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 12.02.2008

Tanvir (3) enjoyed many aspects of the visit, especially the companionship of their cousins and neighbours. I had been particularly looking forward to spending some time playing with the children in the relatively unstructured environment of the *bari*, where we could speak to each other unhampered by teachers, parents or peers.

I was disappointed in this ambition as Shirin, the oldest sister steadfastly refused to talk to me while I was there. In school and at her home in London she was usually friendly to me and often an enthusiastic participant in conversations. I had anticipated that here in Bangladesh she would talk to me openly, away from teasing peers, prying teachers and judgemental parents. However, once in Sylhet, she withdrew herself from conversation with me, preferring the companionship of her *apa* (older sisters or older female cousins). I tried to talk to her, to no avail, I asked her brother what was up with her and he just shrugged and said that he did not know. I alternated between believing that she was upset or angry with me, perhaps for intruding on her family and believing that there was something else at play. Had she been told by someone, one of the *apa* perhaps, not to talk to me?

The house was arranged with the more public formal and high status bedrooms and meeting or eating rooms at the front of the house, around a courtyard where during drier seasons, rice was dried in the sun. On the other side of the courtyard from the main house was the *fukur ghor* (pond room) the building facing the rather neglected pond at the front of the household. In the *fukur ghor*, male visitors were received and four to six male relatives, hired workers or guests would sleep every night. I spent most of my time in these rooms around the courtyard, speaking to Abdul, the father of the family, playing with his children and meeting visitors. When it was very hot I sat in the *fukur ghor* with some of the men, or on the veranda of the main house.

When I had first arrived, the women of the household, including the *apa*, had scurried off around the nearest corner to hide from me wherever I went. If I strayed too far into the dark recesses of the house, through a room full of drying bedding, or near the kitchen and bathroom at the back of the house, a fleeing mass of young women would rush off in front of me. I felt guilty for having interrupted the work they were usually engaged in. As I played with the rest of the family, ignored Shirin and tried not to intrude on the *apa* and their secret business at the back of the house, I noticed other things.

I played out at the front of the house with Rafique and the other boys of the *bari* as they tested themselves against each other in sports and games. Nasrin desperately wanted to be part of these activities and occasionally participated in running races and cow-chasing with her brother. She wanted to climb trees with him and feel the mud of the squelchy track leading from the road to the house between her toes and wash it off at the tube well.

Her youngest uncle, who everyone called *chotto bhai* (youngest brother), a boy of 16, had been instructed to keep an eye on the children as they played. *Chotto bhai* disapproved of Nasrin's adventurousness and curiosity. He told her off several times for these transgressions. She was not to stray outside the front of the house or even into the *fukur ghor*. Nasrin was sent back to the household, crossing the courtyard in tears, back to the comforting arms of the *apa*. They sat in the house or on the veranda and oiled her long black hair. Here, I thought, was a form of training or socialisation, teaching Nasrin how to be a young Bangladeshi woman. This was how she would learn which activities were considered acceptable and which were not.

As I settled in, the *apa* became more tolerant of my prying and naïve blundering into their activities. They stopped rushing out of my view and occasionally asked me questions or allowed me to ask them questions. I watched them cook and tried to retrieve my clothes from their labyrinthine drying system. I found Nasrin in the kitchen learning how to use the *boti* (a type of knife) under the supervision of one of her *apa*.

I started to look out for these activities, where the children were being taught, either by their parents, or by other family members, how to behave and be good Bangladeshi children. I noticed that all of the children were undergoing this training. With their extended family around them in the *bari*, there was time, space and the will available to teach them these valuable lessons. The youngest baby, Nahar had cried incessantly at first when she was left in the care of one of her fictive or real *apa* (older sisters) as her parents went shopping and visiting relatives. After several such inconsolable absences, she learned that they would come back eventually and relaxed slightly even in her mother's absence. In London she had not spent more than a few minutes away from her mother yet. Here was a valuable lesson for her and some much needed relaxation for her mother.

The next youngest, the mischievous Tanvir, was being toilet-trained. His parents were trying to get him to stop using his nappies and use the toilet like everyone else. This inevitably occasionally involved an unpleasant cleaning job that would have been more difficult in the cramped carpeted flat in London. Here, not only was there more space, but plenty of helpers on hand to do the cleaning and washing when Tanvir did not make it to the toilet. This training programme was less successful; Tanvir resisted many of the entreaties to good behaviour during the visit. His behaviour was worse in Bangladesh than in London and he showed fewer of the convincing flashes of charm

that he used to counterbalance his mischief in London. The following autumn he quickly got to grips with the toilet and other social skills as he entered school for the first time. He got on well with his new teacher and was also influenced by how other children behaved or were expected to behave.

Nasrin was prevented from playing the games her brother played and *chotto bhai* tried to keep her in the confines of the *bari*. At her school she played football twice a week during breaks and lunch and found this restriction on her activities bitterly unfair. Rafique, by contrast, was allowed out and played games with the other boys of the *bari* and neighbouring houses. He learned some new games, sharpened up his Sylheti and made some friends. These encounters were not without their frustrations, however since he sometimes found communicating difficult. He lost consistently at most of the games set up by the local boys, which they excelled at and he was a novice. These frustrations boiled over into a heated argument and fight at one point, with jealousy and resentment running both ways. These unfettered social interactions were new and exciting for him, as they are non-existent in London either at school or at home. Although he enjoyed the interactions and intense holiday friendships, he found it hard to relate sometimes. His social and cultural capital was useless here, the rules to his games hard to translate to the language and space of the *bari*. He found it hard to impress or succeed with the local boys, except in his status as a *Londoni*.

I had resisted investigating Shirin's refusal to talk to me for fear of upsetting things, but towards the end of my stay I decided to ask some direct questions about it. She was as evasive as ever and seemed to enjoy refusing to speak to me and dodging my enquiries. Finally, I asked Abdul about it, carefully raising the subject as I did not want to get her into trouble. Abdul cheerfully told me that his daughter was easily led and followed what people told her to do too readily which worried him

and his wife. He told me that she was under the influence of the *apa*, who had cautioned her against talking to men and perhaps she was taking their advice a bit too literally. He did not seem to mind this and chuckled as he considered his daughter's zeal.

I discovered the source of his mirth: he and his wife had specifically asked the *apa* to speak to Shirin, who at eleven was entering a crucial and dangerous phase of her life. They had asked the *apa* to teach Shirin the 'facts of life', to educate her in the important facts about being a woman. Through her close interaction, gossip, chatting, mimicry and direct lessons, Shirin would learn on this visit about menstruation, about sex, about men and how to relate to them, the correct way to behave as a 'good' Bangladeshi woman.

'*Sharam, sharam*' (shame) they had chanted at Tanvir to induce a sense of self-awareness in him as he enthusiastically showed us his penis one day. The *apa* were trying to instil in Shirin the same sense of *sharam*. The shame and modesty that made the young women flee from my gaze. They giggled and looked down when I tried to speak to them and stayed away from visitors and strangers (cf. Gardner, 1995:206). Nasrin's curiosity and precociousness were not encouraged by her older cousins. These crucial dispositions of the British Bangladeshi habitus were instilled in the children on the visit.

Bolognani (2007) describes visits to Pakistan by British Pakistani families as rites of passage. Children returning from visits were more mature, seemed to have learned and changed on their visits (Bolognani, 2007:61). On this visit to Bangladesh, I witnessed the same phenomenon, part of the reproductive activity of the British Bangladeshi social field. Through this socialisation, British Bangladeshi children learn modes of behaviour and dispositions, their habitus; they learn to value

and exchange the correct forms of capital in the British Bangladeshi social field. They learn hierarchies and correct modes of behaviour for adults and children, men and women, boys and girls. Some children however, refuse to participate in socialising activities. Saiful and Tanvir did not react well to the attempts of adults they met in Bangladesh to teach them how to behave. They resisted training and the invitations to play or share with other children and they disobeyed and were cheeky to overbearing adults. Neither of them expressed this resistance verbally, but both found the experience of the visit disorientating, disrupting their embodied, unconscious habitus in a way that they could not logically explain.

The lessons and experiences of the visit and other transnational practices help to reproduce the British Bangladeshi habitus. Now I wish to return to the issue of how these transnational flows and connections are affecting attitudes towards the people, the land and the practices they associate with Bangladesh.

### **Translations and Ambivalence – *Desh Bidesh* Revisited**

Gardner, (1993) explains the way locality is used to discuss and express change over time and people's desires. In Sylhet, where migration to Britain is a major feature of the region's economy and identity, the terms *desh* and *bidesh* are the principal articulation of this. *Desh* refers to the home, land or country (as in Bangladesh); while *bidesh* refers to foreign countries, in this case Britain (Gardner, 1993:1). Connected to these two expressions of geographical locations are sets of meanings and discourses that feed off and reflect each other.



*Bidesh* is a source of economic capital and political power, in a country that is dependent on remittances from migrants and development aid. *Bidesh* is used and idealised to contrast with the poverty and insecurity of life in rural Bangladesh. *Desh* meanwhile is important for group identity and belonging and also as a source of spiritual power. It is rich in meaning and resonance for Sylhetis, containing a spiritual power of ancestry, nourishing food, belonging and personal histories as well as an Islamic spiritual power derived from the saint Shah Jalal who brought Islam to the region in 1303 and was buried in Sylhet (Gardner, 1993:6).

So while both *desh* and *bidesh* are powerful and would appear to be opposites, they are regarded with ambivalence and continually renegotiated. Migration and transnationalism lend themselves to these types of ambivalences and contradictions which emerge in Gardner's work and also in my own fieldwork. Both *desh* and *bidesh* provoke reverence and resistance, likewise, school, Islam and a host of other themes conjure up complex responses among British Bangladeshi children.

British Bangladeshis in London grow up relatively poor in a rich country where it is necessary for everyone to work in order to earn enough money to be comfortable. Two parent working families are common in London; all girls go to school and have higher educational attainment than boys. Individualism, self-reliance and independence are valued by many of the children I studied. Remittances are seen by some British Bangladeshis by their own standards as a form of charity. This leads to misunderstandings of Bangladeshi systems of family support which some young British Bangladeshis understand through the framework of charity.

Many young British Bangladeshis do not really know much about their large families in Sylhet and do not understand why they are so reliant on remittances. The visits that I have described above

enable them to meet and get to know their families, but they are infrequent. Poor in London, they do not see why they should scrimp and save as their relatives in Bangladesh live from their remittances. They want to succeed in London and need their money to achieve the educational and material standards they can see around them.

The teenage children of one family I knew complained bitterly to me and their parents about the laziness and greed of their relatives in Bangladesh. They yearned after things that they could not afford in London such as trainers, computers and foreign holidays. They also worried about the cost of going to university. Employing London-learned interpretations of the family's situation they complained to me: '*Our family in Bangladesh have servants, while we work hard here*'<sup>26</sup>.

They told me about arguments over remittances and money. Older children or teenagers, the older brothers and sisters of my research subjects got involved in family disputes and played an active role in relaying or blocking messages between Sylhet and London. This 16 year old girl's responses to telephone calls from Sylhet requesting money reveals her role and agency: "*When they ring I tell them my mum's out or asleep, I can't understand what they're talking about anyway*"<sup>27</sup>.

Her mother recounted heated discussions between herself, her daughter and husband. The husband, a relatively recent arrival who had married into a British Bangladeshi family, wanted to send money to help his brother in Sylhet. His wife and daughter were vehemently against the plan,

---

<sup>26</sup> Discussion about family in Bangladesh with Halima's daughters, conducted in their flat, 19.06.2008

<sup>27</sup> Discussion about family in Bangladesh with Halima's daughters, conducted in their flat, 19.06.2008

citing the lack of work that the brother and his family did in Bangladesh and the fact that they had servants while the family in London worked hard to afford their modest lifestyle.

This attitude is not universal; many British Bangladeshi children and young people in London have good relationships with members of their extended families in Sylhet. However, in group discussions and interviews some conceptualised their families in the way that their non-Bangladeshi peers at school did, as including parents and siblings and few others. Here, Faisal a 10 year old boy describes his feeling of being somewhere strange and foreign in Bangladesh. He also says that he lives with his family in London, but conceptualises it as a small nuclear family rather than an extended family.

*B: So did you feel, did you feel different when you were in Bangladesh? How did you feel?*

*F: Like weird, like I didn't know that much people from there.*

*...*

*B: Ok, but did you feel special?*

*F: No.*

*B: Why?*

*F: Because I'm new to the place.*

*B: Ok, you're new to the place. So did you feel like you were going home or did you feel like you were going somewhere new and strange?*

*F: Somewhere new and strange.*

*B: Ok, interesting. So in your house in Islington, who do you live with?*

*F: Just my family.*

*B: Who's that?*

F: *My brother, my sister, my mum and my dad and my grandma*<sup>28</sup>.

In another case, while I was visiting Sylhet with Abdul, he introduced me to his older sister and brother-in-law (*dulha bhai*) who had not come to London despite being given the opportunity many years before. Abdul introduced me to their nine children, mentioning that not one of them worked, all were supported by remittances from London. The two men paid each other extravagant and ironic complements. Joking and teasing is a traditional part of the relationship between a man and his *dulha bhai* so I may have misinterpreted some of the proceedings, but from the seriousness of some of the conversation, interspersed with jokes though it was, I was sure that there was some resentment in their relationship. Perhaps Abdul was using the joking relationship as cover to let out some of the resentment he felt towards his dependent relatives.

*Dulha bhai* could not work because he had suffered an accident. One day as he carried sacks of rice to his house, he had collapsed. He was treated by a local *kobiraj* (traditional healer) who beat him about the head to exorcise him of demons, the accident and treatment had left him permanently weak and dependent on medicine. All his treatment had to be paid for by the family in London who had taken out a loan of several thousand pounds for it. In the garbled mixture of English and Sylheti that we spoke, *dulha bhai* told me ostentatiously how “*brilliant, clever and incredibly wealthy*” Abdul was. In fact, as Abdul and I knew, in London he was relatively poor, living in cramped conditions. Abdul was also occasionally ashamed of his academic failure and the fact that his young children were increasingly better at reading than him. Here was an example of the ‘clever talk’ and double meanings that British Bangladeshis had complained to me about people using in Sylhet.

---

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Faisal, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 13.02.2008

Despite these barbs, relayed through me, *dulha bhai*, although he was older than Abdul, nonetheless acted with respect and caution towards his younger relative. The remitters assumed the prestigious masculine roles of provider and protector, despite in this case, their younger age. Abdul, mobilising his better command of English, recounted to me the story of how *dulha bhai* had passed up the opportunity to come to England and how this had led to poverty and illness for him, Abdul's sister and their children. Now all their daily needs, medical treatment and medicines had to be provided by money from those who worked in London. They had missed out on the precious security capital that life in London entails.

Despite the ill-feeling which occasionally surfaces, gifts and remittances flow from London to Sylhet to support extended families in Bangladesh. Gifts such as branded clothes and electronic goods are common. These gifts, like the mobile phones I discussed earlier, are practical but also have symbolic value. They connect their owners with the transnational community, with London and increase their status locally. The power of London and *bidesh* is an influential force both materially and symbolically in Sylhet.

British Bangladeshis visiting Sylhet are struck by the obsession with *bidesh* that exists among Sylhetis (cf. Gardner, 1993). Symbols of London, migration and travel abound and are powerful signifiers of desirability. Planes, urban scenes, tower blocks, the word 'London', or 'UK' and images of David Beckham are all common manifestations of this. As well as the material wealth which London has in an objective sense when compared to Bangladesh, associations with London have powerful symbolic capital value (Gardner, 2008:408). Economic capital is converted into a form of symbolic capital which evokes this wealth and power.

The vision which adult British Bangladeshis have of a peaceful, rural, agricultural place is upset by the aspirations of modernity, urbanity and wealth of many people in Sylhet. Older British Bangladeshis report being shocked by the ambition, greed and cleverness of people in Sylhet. Several have had their dreams of a peaceful retirement in Sylhet interrupted by constant requests for money, requests for help with immigration, family politics and propositions for business plans (cf. Adams, 1987:175, Choudhury, 1993:219, Gardner, 2002b:217). One lady told me emotionally that her father had been forced to return to London after retiring to Sylhet, due to constant harassment. He had eventually died in London despite his lifelong desire to return to Sylhet in retirement. The construction of London as a 'secure', 'clean' and 'wealthy' paradise by people in Sylhet and its contrast with life in Bangladesh increases the fever of desire for all things London (Gardner, 1993:9).

These attitudes are perceived as being naïve, jealous, grasping and overwhelming by many British Bangladeshis. They have grown unaccustomed to Bangladeshi forms of speech, complaint and request. Like Abdul did in his conversation with *dulha bhai*, they feel outmanoeuvred in family discussions by 'clever talk', insinuations and persuasive pleas for help. Many British Bangladeshis like Abdul find the entreaties of their families difficult to counter and resist, but at the same time see the behaviour of many in Sylhet as being symptomatic of a lack of local aspiration and an over-reliance on remittances.

The strong feelings of belonging that British Bangladeshis feel for the UK, for London or their local area are not understood by relatives in Sylhet. They conceptualise their family as a large joint family with its base in rural Sylhet and some members living in London to earn money. In contrast,

British Bangladeshi children like Faisal are starting to conceptualise their families as an urban family based in London, with some relatives living in Sylhet. A visit to Sylhet is conceptualised by British Bangladeshi children as a holiday. In a conversation with Abdul's nephew, *choto bhai* he did not seem to acknowledge how deeply embedded Abdul and his family were in social relations in London, saying that they were there, '*only for money*'.

By consuming water or produce from the *desh* one is strengthened and nourished and gains a closer connection to the land and the community. Rice grown on the family's land and fish caught in the pond rather than brought in the market are considered to nourish one with the nature of the *desh* and the people who inhabit it (Gardner, 1993:6). The symbolic value of the land and the produce of the *desh* continues today, but in a different form than it took among British Bangladeshis and their families in the 1980s. Food and products in Bangladesh are no longer considered to be superior or especially nourishing by those based in the UK. Many British Bangladeshis compare food available in the markets of rural Sylhet unfavourably with the high quality spices, vegetables, meat and fish brought from all over the world and available at a price in London.

On a visit to Sylhet with Tarique's family, I noticed that they had brought huge bags of spices in the UK to give to their family there. Tarique handed out handfuls of cardamom pods, cinnamon sticks and cloves to each branch of the family. What seemed initially like a strange direction for the spices to travel in is a manifestation of new subjectivities about food. British 'scientific' ways of considering the value, healthiness and meaning of food have supplanted the power of a sense of belonging to the *desh* through consuming its produce. The spiritual connection between food and land is not as

strong any more as practical considerations around its cost, quality and the convenience of ready ground spices for rural women.

Nevertheless, British Bangladeshis are impressed with some of the fresh food they eat in Sylhet which may have been cultivated on their land, caught in their pond or slaughtered or picked in front of them. This feeds into discourses in London about fresh, local and 'organic' food, which legitimise many of the old beliefs. The farm fresh produce compares favourably for adults with the frozen processed food from the supermarkets of London.

Children and young people, stereotypically, do not see so much value in the freshness of vegetables or fish and prefer processed or fast foods. Many children said that they liked fast foods, pasta, pizza, fried chicken and burgers. Some said that they were sick of eating Bangladeshi food, the ubiquitous 'rice and curry'. Seema, a British Bangladeshi woman with two children explained to me in an interview how she had felt about this as a child and how the pattern is being repeated with her own children.

*S: Rice and curry, rice and curry, growing up I remember I'd always be you know, "not rice and curry again" and ... if we had fish and chips it would be such a novelty and funnily enough even though I used to hate it when I was younger, I find I'm cooking rice and it's actually easier to do rice and curry than do something different every day and my children will nag at me and when they do, I just think oh my gosh I used to say the same.*

*B: So what kind of food do they want?*

*S: They want, well they don't mind actually, they don't mind if it's healthy stuff, they like grilled fish, pasta, pizza, fish fingers, the usual stuff ... I do try and do some healthy you*



*know some grilled fish or grilled chicken with ... vegetables and stuff and they enjoy that..  
And you know if it's anything else but rice its called 'special dinner' so ... I don't have to  
make much of an effort.<sup>29</sup>*

In this extract from a story about her childhood, written as part of a series of stories by Bangladeshi women in my computer class, Halima, a Bangladeshi lady reminisces about the fresh food she and her family ate in rural Sylhet. The extract also illustrates the evocation of a place (and time) of cleanliness, innocence and peacefulness – a rural idyll.

*When I was a child I was so happy. I had many caring relatives around me, my grandma, aunties, uncles, mama [maternal uncle] khala [maternal aunt], chacha [paternal uncle], chachi [paternal uncle's wife], fufi [paternal aunt]; - these are some of the names of relatives that we use in Bangla. In this way I was richer than my children are now in London. They have most things that they want and we can afford better clothes and food. In my village in Bangladesh we could not afford these things, but we had our extended family around us.*

*My mum and aunty cooked fresh organic food for us. ... I used to come home go to the fukur [pond] have swim. In Bangladesh every house has a pond, for swimming, washing, washing food, clothes and drinking. We used to drink water from a tube well.*

*We used to collect many fruits like tal and custard apples. We had to hide the tal under the ground for 3 months, then it was very nice to eat, like a coconut flower. The older ladies used to steal and eat our hidden fruit!<sup>30</sup>*

---

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Seema, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 27.11.2007

<sup>30</sup> Extract from 'My Childhood in Bangladesh' by Halima

Halima's recollection of life in Bangladesh, the *desh*, evokes many of the values traditionally associated with the *desh*: family, good fresh food and wealth, of a kind. Having witnessed the trend for 'fresh' 'organic' in London, she uses this as a way of expressing the value of food from the *desh*. So while the *desh* has lost some of its allure and power, elements of life in rural Sylhet are seen positively through the lens of contemporary London subjectivities. I will return to the issue of the power of the land in the *desh* in chapter 8.

## **Conclusions**

Through this discussion of transnational practices I have shown various ways in which a transnational social field is created and maintained. Flows, relationships, networks and exchanges create a web of connections between people and places in different locations. Family activities are carried out transnationally. In many cases these are funded and participated in by people from London but located in Sylhet.

The neat step-like model of integration suggested by the idea of generations of immigrants is disrupted by continuous movement of children and marriage partners between London and Sylhet. Rather than a simplistic notion of integration, what this helps to create and maintain is a transnational social space or field. Technological advances in communications and transport and their tumbling cost have helped to intensify and facilitate the maintenance of transnational ties and networks. This increases the disembedding of social relations from physical place.

Visits to Bangladesh play a number of roles in the socialisation and identity formation of British Bangladeshi children. The unique historical trajectory and lived experiences of British Bangladeshis has created a British Bangladeshi social field and a corresponding habitus. On visits, children become aware of the other locations and people within the social field. Sylhet and the rural homesteads where their extended family lives and where their parents may have been born, become a reality for them. They become aware of physical as well as social spaces which they have not experienced before.

Visits may not be altogether pleasant for them and for some children they can be profoundly unsettling and uncomfortable. Aspects of the visit and the time they spend in rural Bangladesh are fun and they experience a liberty, companionship and relationship with nature that they do not in London. These mixed feelings lead to ambivalence about Bangladesh that children find hard to reconcile. They also lead children to see themselves as belonging more in London than in rural Bangladesh. This 'de-links' them from Bangladeshi social fields and places them firmly in a transnational social space.

In Bangladesh, their exposure to the spatial arrangements of the rural homesteads, the way of life and habitus of their extended families has an important role in their socialisation. This may be consciously requested as in the case of Shirin. Or it may be more circumstantial as in the case of her brother Rafique. Through these lessons they learn how 'Bangladeshis' or more specifically, members of their extended family are expected to behave. This rite of passage and socialisation sets them apart from their non-Bangladeshi peers and affects their habitus back in London. This helps to recreate the British Bangladeshi habitus. These transnational practices introduce the children to transnational ways of being, but they do not necessarily lead to a transnational sense of

belonging, many children find that the experience of visiting Bangladesh confirms for them their status as belonging to London. Visits are also important times for the exchange of different types of capital. Through these experiences during visits to Bangladesh, children become aware of boundaries of difference between them and their peers in both locations.

This chapter is about the links between transnational practices, ways of being and the relations they have, if any with feelings of belonging. In terms of children we can see that despite their participation in transnational practices such as visits many of them do not develop a transnational sense of belonging. That may develop later, but now their sense of belonging is tied up with their everyday practices and familiar environment – their habitus. Using the conceptual framework I developed in chapter 3 I have shown how these practices point to, create and maintain the British Bangladeshi transnational social field. Marriages, communication, gift exchange and visits are some of the most influential transnational practices in this process. What we can see from studying how children and young people engage with these practices is that through their translation and reinterpretation of some practices, such as marriage, their domination of others such as communications technology and the ambivalent, contradictory and unpredictable reactions to Bangladesh on visits, children make transnationalism a dynamic and ever changing phenomenon. Transnational social relations like all social relations are subjective and subject to change, power relations and the exchange rates of different types of capital may change rapidly and radically.

This chapter deals with the British Bangladeshi social field, but this is just one of the social fields in which the children in my study are competent agents. In chapter 6 I will explain using my research on language how children identify different spheres, domains, or fields within their lives. In chapter

7, about education and 8 about Islam I will discuss other spheres and influences on their identity formation.

## 5 Childhoods, Space and Place

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Balokkal gelo,</i>    | <i>Childhood passed,</i>                    |
| <i>hashite, khelite,</i> | <i>in laughter and play,</i>                |
| <i>jaubonkal gelo,</i>   | <i>youth passed,</i>                        |
| <i>ronge,</i>            | <i>in pleasure and amusement,</i>           |
| <i>briddhokal gelo,</i>  | <i>old age passed,</i>                      |
| <i>bhabite, chinite.</i> | <i>in thoughts and wisdom.<sup>31</sup></i> |

This song cited by Blanchet (1996) has a vision of childhood that is full of laughter and play.

Blanchet says that this is a “*romantic reminiscence of what no longer is*” (Blanchet, 1996:44).

Childhood may be constructed as a time of freedom, innocence and play, but in Blanchet’s account this no longer seems to be the case. In this chapter I will discuss how childhood is conceptualised and socially constructed in the UK and in Bangladesh. I will review the work of social scientists on the social construction of childhoods. I will relate these discussions to my own findings and attempt to find some explanations for the *romantic reminiscence of what no longer is*.

Central to this discussion are binaries between adults and children, ‘Apollonian’ and ‘Dionysian’ ideas about childhood, ideas of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, ‘public’ and ‘private’, ‘work’ and ‘play’ and ‘home’ and ‘away’. It must be clear from the outset that these are academic conceits aimed at grouping and analysing attitudes towards places and practices and the behaviour of children.

---

<sup>31</sup> Collected and translated by Blanchet, (1996:44), I am grateful for amendments to the translation and transliteration made by Dr. Hanna Thompson from SOAS.

Indeed, many of the insights of this and other studies challenge such simplifications. Their essentialising effect is recognised and unpicked here but they can be useful for describing and categorising behaviour. What I will show through a discussion of these dichotomies is their relevance or lack of it to British Bangladeshi children.

Other chapters in this thesis deal with some of the physical and social spaces, places and ‘fields’ that the children inhabit. This discussion, showing how the lived experiences of children reflect ideas about childhood, will provide some background to the way in which children inhabit these spaces. Through this discussion I will describe both the way in which childhoods are constructed by British Bangladeshis and the way in which these constructions manifest themselves in the use and relationships they have with space.

This chapter introduces the importance of the way in which buildings and public and private spaces are arranged and used. Spaces and the meanings attributed to places have had an important relationship to the transfer, abandonment and translation of practices from Bangladesh among British Bangladeshis and the adoption of new ones. However, spaces and places are part of a range of factors which I discuss in this thesis, rather than an overriding deterministic influence.

### **Childhood as a category - Children and Adults**

If we think back to the debates about identities that I reviewed in chapter 3, a common theme of writings from the 1980s and 90s onwards was critiques of essentialist notions of identities. Identities have been revealed to be socially constructed. Childhood is in some ways biologically defined, children have yet to reach biological and social maturity. Childhood is also a period of

socialisation, learning to be 'full' adult humans (Holloway and Valentine, 2000:2). However, there are important ways in which the very idea of childhood is socially constructed. One example of this is the very idea of children as a distinct social category from adults. Children in the West are assumed to have a right to a 'childhood' of innocence and there is thought to be a need to protect them from 'dangerous' adult knowledge (Holloway and Valentine, 2000:2).

Debates about childhood within many disciplines centre on the 'nature versus nurture' or 'biology versus culture' debate. Anthropologists are suspicious of biological and psychological models of 'child development' and 'stages of development' and tend, like James (1993) and Holloway and Valentine (2000), to stress the socially constructed nature of childhood. It is important to recognise the way in which child development ideas from psychology have informed popular and professional ideas about the meaning of childhood and 'stages' of childhood. James' insight that the way childhood is constructed has a direct impact on how it is experienced reveals that however constructed or 'artificial' these ideas may be they can be very influential on the lived experiences of children (James, 1993:72).

One of the strengths of James' work is the way in which she demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between widely held stereotypes and ideas, constructions of childhood and the experiences and practices of children. On the 'embodied child' she writes:

*The qualities held to be characteristic of childhood, such as sexual innocence, physical and emotional vulnerability, lack of autonomy and physical and social dependency ... both constitute and are constituted by a particular cultural perception of the child's body.*

(James, 1993:102).



One of the central messages of her book is that: "... *ideas about children directly impinge upon the experience of childhood which children themselves have.*" (James, 1993:72). She discusses the failure to see childhood as being socially constructed and the effect this has had on notions of childhood in developing countries through the export and globalisation of Western ideas of childhood. This also applies to many migrant communities in Europe and the US. This has happened through the media in representations of 'idealised childhoods' and through conventions, standards and notions of universal human rights distributed by international organisations, NGOs and aid agencies (James, 1993:73).

James argues for studying childhood in a culturally and contextually specific way (James, 1993:74). However, she uses an approach described by James, Jenks and Prout as the 'tribal child' (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:28). This approach seeks to study the separate world of children and their 'cultures'. It seeks to analyse children and their peer relations separately from the world of adults. It is one of James' and others (such as Hirschfeld, 2002:614, Toren, 1993:461) critiques of most research 'on children' that it focuses too much on the relationships adults have with children and adult perceptions of children, rather than on children's own ideas. Through her ethnography, James enters, analyses and presents the conversations and relationships of her subjects and her work centres determinedly on the children.

While this approach is certainly a strength of James' work, I would like to draw links between the ideas and practices of the children and wider social and structural forces surrounding them. This approach, referred to by James Jenks and Prout (1998) as the 'social structural child' approach, is the one I have taken in this thesis. Children are considered a formative component of all social

structures. This approach takes certain universal ideas about childhood and relates them specifically to the societies in which they live. For practical and theoretical reasons I have chosen to take this approach to studying childhood. My findings indicated that the lives of the children I studied were intimately linked to the adults around them. Taking a 'tribal child' approach would have been unrealistic and impractical. I consider childhood to be a phase of life that is socially constructed and while I recognise the specific and separate children's worlds, I have chosen to concentrate on the reproductive practices of societies through the socialisation of children. As we will see, this correlates more closely with the way in which children are seen among British Bangladeshis.

James' theoretical observations on the 'embodied child' are linked with her detailed analysis of teasing and self-perception based on physical traits. Relations between children of different ages and genders are drawn out through children's ideas of their bodies. Age and gender, James maintains, are the most important categorisations that children adhere to (James, 1993:21). Teasing based on infantile traits such as being short, having a runny nose, incontinence, being helped coming to school, was one of the main ways in which children asserted their maturity and superiority to each other (James, 1993:114-115).

Physical traits such as size, attractiveness or athletic prowess are shown to be connected by children to social success (James, 1993:135). Social 'success' at being a child, recognised by a child's peers can be independent of the world of adults (James, 1993:136). 'Good' and 'bad' behaviour, regulating and being seen to regulate the body and learning about which contexts require which behaviour are vital parts of learning to be social. Children learn to become at ease with themselves and with others. James describes conformity, competition, inclusion and exclusion

through quoted conversations, as the social world of children is examined. Children experiment with different personas, which results in what appear to be unpredictable turns of different identities or responses to contexts. Varying positionality by children can reflect their developing and experimental projects of identity.

Play and learning are also examined in the same way, with James analysing the meanings and ramifications of playground games. The skill needed to succeed in playing them, both in physical and psychological terms is considerable and play is shown to be an important site of identity formation (James, 1993:180). Performance during play is closely related to social status, good performances can forge reputations in the playground (James, 1993:181,183). Gender relationships are formed and maintained by such performances. Gender roles are influenced not only by adult origin ideas and stereotypes, but also through the examples, observation and peer pressure of other children (James, 1993:184,185). In an account of children's interactions in the classroom and playground in chapter 7 I touch on many of these topics.

Many contemporary writers such as James (1993), Jenks, (1996) and Holloway and Valentine (2000) cite Ariès (1962) as being an early demonstration of the socially constructed nature of childhood. Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood* narrates a history of childhood through cultural artefacts such as paintings and poems. The central argument of this influential book is that in the middle ages, the idea of childhood as a separate developmental or cultural stage did not exist; children were regarded as miniature adults (Ariès, 1962:31, 395). The ancient world's conceptualisation of childhood had been forgotten in the Middle Ages and only re-emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Ariès, 1962:396). James (1993), in her discussion of Ariès' work, concluded that whatever the truth or otherwise of the claim, the 'Western notion of childhood' is a "*historically*

*specific institutional form*" (James, 1993:72). James describes the 'Western idea of childhood' as "*a period of lack of responsibility with rights to protection and training but not to autonomy*" (James, 1993:31).

Family and school, Ariès argues, together have steadily removed children from adult society throughout the centuries. The emergence and gradual universalisation of education was crucial for this, confining children where they had previously been 'free'. The emergence of European middle class ideas of the family contributed to this pattern. The desire of the emerging middle classes to separate and distinguish themselves from the poor, the desire for privacy, safety and distinction led to ever increasing segregation and intolerance of variety. Houses were designed for comfort and privacy, free from the contamination of the poor, which increased the material differences between their lives. Conventional models of behaviour and ideal types (*habitus*) emerged for each class and deviation from these could lead to social exclusion (Ariès, 1962:399).

As I will discuss later, the ideas of 'inside' and 'outside', 'public' and 'private' have emerged from my research as important factors in the regulation of children's behaviour and freedoms. Ariès (1962) and Jenks (1996) trace the emergence of children as a different category as 'other' to adults in the Enlightenment (Jenks, 1996:65, Holloway and Valentine, 2000:3). The spatial separation of children and the specific rules and prohibitions associated with places are one of the features of Western childhood (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:37).

In this respect, childhoods in Bangladesh are different to childhoods in the UK. Divisions between the worlds of adults and children are less stark, children are well integrated into society and social

events are designed to accommodate them. Seema, a British Bangladeshi mother of two, who works for Islington council's education authority explains:

*Children aren't as openly accepted, you know, in a lot of Western countries ... even in urban Bangladesh, I wouldn't say it's just a rural thing. You know, whenever I go to Bangladesh, I'm usually in the city for the main chunk of my time and you know, children, you will go out every evening and children will be out with you. Obviously if it's a school night then parents aren't going to let the children stay up until 12, but you know, generally, when it's acceptable to, children will be out there as well. You won't go out somewhere and not see a child. ... I think the social thing, the view that people have on children is certainly very different to how the Bengali people see children, you know, children are part of everything ... socialising revolves around your family and your kids, in Bangladesh definitely.<sup>32</sup>*

I asked a group of children in the after-school club that I ran to write down their ideas about the differences between children and adults. The results were often idealised accounts, but were nevertheless revealing. In this extract from an essay entitled 'Children and Adults', Shirin, aged 11, describes some of the rights and responsibilities that children and adults have. In her account, the relationship is based on adults, especially parents, being responsible for the proper instruction and discipline of children:

---

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Seema and Mary conducted at Islington Education Authority, 12.03.2009

*I think that the responsibilities of children is to study and look after their homework and help their mum and dad. The most important thing is to listen to their mum and dad and respect people and not to be rude to other people and to respect adults.*

*I think children have the right to play with good friends and they should help each other out if they need help or if they are in trouble. I think children should have the right to go outside themselves if they can be trusted.*

*Children don't have the right to shout at their parents or to be rude to other adults. Children should not be allowed to bully other children or be rude to or hit their brothers and sisters. Adults need to listen to children and to explain to them what is bad and what is good for the children. The most important thing is for parents not to hit or smack children because they are still young and when they go to school the teachers will ask questions and the parents will get the blame.*

*Parents shouldn't shout at other parents or to tell other children off. They shouldn't shout at little baby children or to argue in front of the children in case they get scared and start to cry. Parents do have the right to tell their children off and to tell children what is good for their life. Parents must also care for their children.<sup>33</sup>*

The account reveals some interesting issues around discipline and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. In Shirin's view adults should not smack children, although the reason she gives for this is because the parents might get into trouble if they are found out. This is influenced by the school's ideas about discipline which are often contrasted by teachers and children with 'traditional' methods of discipline such as smacking. Her account draws upon ideas about childhood she has learned at the school, from her parents and from Islamic ideas

---

<sup>33</sup> Extract from 'Children and Adults' by Shirin, April 2008

about the importance of obedience and respect for one's parents. I will discuss discipline in the school in chapter 7 and attitudes towards deviance and discipline of children later in this chapter. Shirin also emphasises the right she believes children should have to play with friends and outside. This is something that many children in Islington are denied as I will discuss later.

The category of childhood is further subdivided in many analyses into 'stages' (cf. Piaget, 1963, Erikson, 1977, Aziz and Maloney 1985). Child psychologists use the idea to discuss the development of cognitive functions in children. In the next section I will discuss attempts to compare these ideas with ideas of stages of childhood and life in Bangladesh.

### **Stages of childhood?**

The idea of 'stages' of childhood, cognitive or symbolic periods of time is not consonant with anthropological thinking. These stages are in themselves constructions, but as such they have an effect on the way in which children are seen and see themselves.

Aziz and Maloney (1985) considering the Bangladeshi context, define '*shishukal*' as "*a stage of non-reason corresponding to infancy and preschool childhood and covering an age span from birth up to 5 years.*" (Aziz and Maloney, 1985:8, 16). A comfortable and well provided for child may remain a '*shishu*' until the age of 12, but to call a 12 year old a '*shishu*' would have negative connotations, a 15 or 17 year old would never be referred to as a '*shishu*' (Blanchet, 1996:38). Cain (1977) reported that children of both sexes in a Bangladeshi village begin to be economically useful around the age of 6, male children become net producers rather than consumers around the age of 12 (Cain, 1977:201).

These descriptions contrast with the use of the word '*shishu*' in official discourse, which is similar to the way the word 'child' is used by international organisations such as the UN and in Britain (Blanchet, 1996:38). In Britain the notion of childhood is so governed by ideas from psychology, legislation and education that they affect our understanding of childhood and youth. Bengali language and culture recognise different life stages but the years of age are not counted with precision, Blanchet emphasises the 'flexibility and tolerance' of attitudes towards child development (Blanchet, 1996:46).

Aziz and Maloney call the age group that is the focus of this study '*balyakal*'. '*Balyakal*' is the 'beginning of partial reason'; when work and school begin, between the ages of 6-10. Contact between the sexes is casual, but sex and gender roles start to be learned. Aziz and Maloney also identify a stage called '*kaisorer prarambha*', which is a pre-adolescent stage mainly used for girls aged 11-12, as they begin to learn gender roles and start puberty. Blanchet describes Aziz and Maloney's neat divisions as rather artificial and not really used in everyday speech, as they belong to an archaic and upper class Bangla, (probably alien to Sylhetis) (Blanchet, 1996:46). Blanchet instead uses the terms '*balok/balika*' or '*kishor/kishori*' to refer to youth older than '*shishu*', which are gender-sensitive words (hence the two versions) (Blanchet, 1996:38).

Aziz and Maloney sought (rather unsuccessfully) to compare their findings with Erikson's (1977) eight stages (Aziz and Maloney, 1985:16, Blanchet, 1996:46). The work of Erikson (1977) and Piaget (1963) has been hugely influential on ideas of child development and pedagogy in Europe and the US. UK education is heavily influenced by notions of stages of child development, which is why children of the same age are put into the same class, despite differences in ability.



Piaget's (1963) theory outlines four stages of development. The 'sensorimotor stage' from birth to 2 years, where the child experiences the world through movement and senses and learns that objects are permanent. The 'preoperational stage' from 2-7 years when the child learns to move effectively. The 'concrete operational stage' from 7 to 11 where the child begins to think logically about concrete events. Finally the 'formal operational stage' when the child develops the ability for abstract reasoning (Piaget, 1963, in Campbell, 1976:3-12). Piaget developed a series of tests to show the development of cognition in each stage. While Piaget's work is dated and many more studies have emerged since, he has been proved right as often as he has been proved wrong and his influence on psychology, education and studies of childhood in Europe and the US has been huge (Boden, 1994:133)

One thing Piaget (1963), Erikson (1977) and Aziz and Maloney (1985) agree on is that there is a stage in childhood, roughly between 6 or 7 to 10 or 11 years old which is described as being the 'concrete operational stage' (Piaget), 'middle childhood' (Erikson), '*balyakal*' the 'stage of partial reason' or 'school age' (Aziz and Maloney). This is the stage that corresponds most directly with the group of children in this study, although it is important to acknowledge that 11-12 year olds may be entering a different 'stage' in all these three models, of adolescence, or the 'formal operational stage'. So, while we recognise the socially constructed nature of these models of development and their limitations as generalisations, the different models seem to regard as unproblematic the age range which is included in this study.

I discussed the 'stages' of life with a group of British Bangladeshi mothers of children at Poynder Primary School. They did not find the term problematic but, like most psychologists, insisted that

the transitions between one stage and another were not rigid. In their scheme, a 'baby' or *shishu* was between 0 and 2 years old. Toddlers or *baccha* was between 3 and 5. They used the term *kishor/kishori*, as Blanchet does, to refer to children between 5 and 13 – those in this study.

In conversations, parents also made reference to the significance of the ages 11-14 for children, this was a 'dangerous time', when children might be led astray or be 'spoiled'. The father of a family who I met in Sylhet blamed this on the 'bad people' in his neighbourhood. He had taken his sons to Sylhet to keep them safe from drugs, sex and crime in London. He said he wished to keep them there at school until they were 14 or 15 when they would have emerged from the dangerous period. The parents at Poynder Primary school referred to teenagers, 13 to 18 years old as *torun/toruni* and young adults, below the age of 30 were referred to as *jubot/juboti*.

## **Bangladeshi Childhoods**

Among the limited anthropological literature on childhoods in Bangladesh, Blanchet's (1996) book *Lost Innocence, Stolen Childhoods*, stands out. The book contains a range of ethnographies of children in Bangladesh. Other significant studies such as Cain (1977), Aziz and Maloney (1985) and Kotalova (1993) have also examined aspects of Bangladeshi childhoods.

Blanchet and other researchers conducted a series of ethnographies in a variety of settings; among middle class families, child domestic servants, children working in a factory, street children, children growing up in brothels and children living in a slum (*bustee*). As the name of the book suggests, Blanchet's book is a grim account of beatings, rape, work, corruption and abuse. The notion of *samaj*, "a moral society which upholds *dhorno*" (Blanchet, 1996:225), which is "the life-

*path attributed to an individual's gender, rank, family (lineage) occupation and status in a god-ordained world"* is all important (Blanchet, 1996:224). Blanchet shows how the relationship with the *samaj* is important for the value of children to themselves and others as persons (Blanchet, 1996:225). Although very different for the different groups, these concepts affect the identity of children in all settings and drive the practices which she describes. Perhaps there is some similarity between the idea of the *samaj*, a society with its own logic and rules or morality and Bourdieu's idea of a social field. Following this analogy we can liken *dhorno*, an individual's life path which draws upon their gender, rank and family to the habitus.

What emerges throughout the book is the sense of responsibility felt by parents and by the children themselves to abide by the norms of the *samaj* (in all its shifting meanings through space and time). It is these relationships with the *samaj* which determine the behaviours and practice of the children and parents described by Blanchet. So for example, the *bidi* (a type of cheap cigarette) factory workers described are from poor families, but despite their lack of resources they are determined to hold onto their honour and remain within the rural *samaj*. Sons are sent to the factory while daughters are kept at home, reducing the family's earnings, but safeguarding the honour of the family (Blanchet, 1996:225). Among middle class families, for both boys and girls, study is the primary activity and responsibility of the child. Rank and status are vitally important and mixing with the 'wrong' people is frowned upon. These children are under extreme pressure to achieve high academic results and professional success. Children's success reflects well on their parents and confirms their class position (Blanchet, 1996:226).

The children living and working in the brothel are outside the *samaj*, a position which entails some freedoms, but attracts scorn from the rest of society. Blanchet maintains that an essential part of

children's integration into the *samaj* is that they are under the control and authority of their guardians. Blanchet's fascinating account of the different relations with the *samaj* inevitably hinges on the conceptualisation of morality and what is appropriate behaviour. Ideas of what constitutes appropriate behaviour for children govern the way in which they are seen and treated. These ideas are varied and fluid, as I will explain in the next section.

### **Constructions of Childhood – Apollonian and Dionysian**

Influenced by Rousseau, Freud and Foucault (1977) Jenks (1996) identifies two ways in which children are socially constructed. The 'Dionysian' and 'Apollonian' child are archetypes of childhood that survive influentially today. Dionysian ideas about children see them as 'little devils' inherently mischievous and unsocialised. They are in need of strict discipline and guidance, to curb their wild insatiable nature. If not carefully guided by adults along the 'correct' path, they can easily fall prey to bad company or acquire bad habits. If they are not kept busy with suitable activities they may be overcome by the demonic forces within them (Jenks, 1996:71).

The Apollonian child by contrast is seen as an angel, innocent of the inherently corrupt ways of adults. The Apollonian child is idealised and worshipped; their naturally good traits just need coaxing into the open. In an interesting discussion of social control, discipline and modernity, Jenks is influenced by Foucault's (1977) ideas about discipline and the panopticon. Whereas the Dionysian child of the *ancien regime* has to be strictly disciplined and punished, the Apollonian child self-regulates through the internalisation of surveillance and guilt (Jenks, 1996:79). These conceptualisations, contradictory images, rather than literal descriptions of children, continue to exist in Western ideas about childhood (Jenks, 1996:74, Holloway and Valentine, 2000:3).

Jenks goes on to argue that the Dionysian child exists in relatively homogenous societies where influences are external and consensual. Ideas about socialisation of children are influenced by the desire to affirm their similarities. Deviance from the correct forms of childhood behaviour threatens the community. Children therefore sacrifice their 'childhood' for the cause of collective adult well-being. Socialisation teaches children respect for society through the experience of shame. The Apollonian child occupies a different type of social structure that is more diverse, the rules less clear, uniqueness is valued and children are taught to express their individuality. Controlling this diversity is the internalised discipline of the panopticon, through observation and self-observation children learn to watch over themselves and feel guilt rather than shame (Jenks, 1996:79).

In these two portraits we can see how they might correspond to stereotypical accounts of the 'traditional village society' and the 'modern cosmopolitan city'. Jenks draws on Foucault's (1977) work on discipline and punishment in this way. He also draws upon Bernstein (1975) and Durkheim's (1964) work on different forms of social organisation and ideas about education. The transition to modernity involves moving from a conceptualisation of the Dionysian child to the Apollonian child, from a closed curriculum with a focus on discipline to an open curriculum with a focus on individual learning (Jenks, 1996:80). Although very simplistic and stereotypical, this portrait expresses some of the differences I describe between British Bangladeshi ideas about education and those expressed by the teachers and other staff at the school and education authority. This distinction does not hold true in more general ideas about children among British Bangladeshis in my study, whose ideas about childhood included elements of both what might be described as Dionysian and Apollonian constructions drawn from British, Bangladeshi and other sources.

Blanchet (1996) demonstrates the socially constructed nature of childhood that James (1993) and others explain. By explaining the variety of practices that different groups have with reference to the idea of the *samaj*, she shows how childhoods are constructed differently in different sections of society. Blanchet explains that the phrases 'childhood' or 'rights of the child' do not translate easily or directly into Bangla. There is no Bangla word to describe a person from their birth until the age of 18. The Bangla word '*shishu*' evokes a small child, toddler or baby (Blanchet, 1996:37). '*Shishu*' however does not refer only to age or physical development, it also refers to life circumstances such as that the eldest child may have to take on more family responsibilities and have a shortened '*shishukal*', other factors that may shorten '*shishukal*' include working at a young age, 'knowing too much', or fending for one's self (Blanchet, 1996:38).

The key element of the idea of '*shishu*' is being innocent, protected and dependent. *Shishu* do not understand or have problems of their own to solve (Blanchet, 1996:38). This seems to correspond to elements of both the Apollonian and Dionysian ideas of childhood that Jenks (1996) and Holloway and Valentine (2000) discuss. The child must be protected and guided by parents but also is innocent and pure and to be shielded from the corruption of adults. 'Understanding' is the measure of growing up, but:

*... it is not expected, denied or recognised as an automatic consequence of physical growth or the accumulation of years of age – it is tied with one's 'jati' ... what it is that one should 'understand', or know as morally good and practice according to one's life path and duty in life (Blanchet, 1996:47).*

For example, an orphaned child is expected to rapidly develop a state of 'understanding' (Blanchet, 1996:48). In Blanchet's account a 'Dionysian' approach is taken to discipline; exuberance, curiosity, indiscretions and deviance are repressed and punished. This seems to be supported by Jenks' (1996) ideas about attitudes towards education and discipline, Brooker (2002) and my own observations in chapter 7.

In these accounts, fun, precociousness and mischief are not seen by Bangladeshis as inherent parts of childhood. Blanchet's account of 'spoiled (*nosto*) children', either those who have been victims of sexual abuse or who are badly behaved, immoral, lazy or decadent shows the 'Dionysian' view of children of the *samaj*. The 'spoiled' child is a failure in the socialisation of a moral person (*manush corano*) - this may result in exclusion from the *samaj* (Blanchet, 1996:69). 'Bad' behaviour or laziness is conflated with moral corruption. Blanchet's later account of middle class parents' attitudes towards play and sports confirms this view; the playful, mischievous, curious, side of childhood is not encouraged and has to be strictly regulated (Blanchet, 1996:153).

Some accounts of childhoods in rural Sylhet that I collected from mothers in a computer class that I ran seemed to correspond with this pattern. They were full of lessons, canings, chores and strict teachers. Nadia's diary style account reminiscing about a day in her life as a child in rural Sylhet explains the routine:

*My mum woke me up 7am today because I had to go to the mosque to learn Arabic. After I ate my breakfast, some bread and milk, I put on my clothes and my headscarf. Then I went to the mosque near my house with my big brother, my little brother and my sister. The*

*class at the mosque starts at 8am. If I didn't learn my homework today I would have been beaten with a stick by my teacher, my teacher is very strict.*

*I came back from the mosque at 9am, had a shower and then I got ready for school. My school uniform is a long white dress and a blue scarf to go over my neck with black shoes.*

*Today I learnt all my homework so I was not hit with the shiny, green stick for the whole day! The subjects in my school are maths, English, science and Bengali and lots more. We have to walk to the school. When there are floods we have to go by boat<sup>34</sup>.*

Halima's account of childhood that I cited in chapter 3 includes an account of collecting and hiding fruit, which was subsequently stolen by mischievous older aunties rather than other children. Older relatives and grandparents are constructed as mischievous and are often the ones who play and tease young children. Another woman, Rashida, from the same group who was taking a course to be a childminder which included a section reflecting on the meaning of childhood wrote this in her essay on the meaning of childhood:

*Children in Bangladesh don't have a childhood like those in the UK. They don't get to play or behave like a child as they need to help with house work. From the age that they can walk and talk in Bangladesh they are expected to help out with family chores, look after younger siblings, or go to work with their fathers. Children in the UK, on the other hand are looked after by their parents, enjoy playing games with friends, sports and receiving gifts, therefore the children are happier. They don't have any stress to deal with and they have more encouragement to achieve their potential<sup>35</sup>.*

---

<sup>34</sup> Extract from 'My Story in Bangladesh' by Nadia, April 2008

<sup>35</sup> Extract from 'Childhood' by Rashida, April 2008.



Rashida appears to support the idea that children in the UK are conceptualised as Apollonian, encouraged to fulfil their natural potential while ideas about Dionysian children in Bangladesh lead to strictly disciplined childhoods. She clearly identifies childhoods in the UK with play and freedom and childhood in Bangladesh with work and stress. Not all the accounts of childhoods in Sylhet were so negative however and many of my observations of childhoods in London did not seem to confirm Rashida's views. Another woman in the class, Shaju, described her early childhood in these idyllic terms:

*I liked living in the village because every child can play and go out anywhere by themselves. In the village there is always someone who can watch the children. There are lots of joint families living together and children always grow up together*

*In winter harvest time school was closed, we played outside made tree houses and pretended to cook things and sometimes really cooked ourselves little snacks, like a picnic.*

*We liked to play with mud in the canal bank; we made lots of different shapes pots, pans and fruits. In the evening time we played hide and seek, kabadi (which is a traditional Bangladeshi game) and ran around all over the village.*

*Bangladesh is a very hot country, at that time we liked to play in water, splashing, swimming in the pond that belonged to my family and eating fresh fruits and vegetables from the fields and trees near my house. On rainy days we liked to play with our hand made dolls, we liked to pretend that the dolls were getting married and have parties for them<sup>36</sup>.*

---

<sup>36</sup> Extract from 'My Childhood' by Shaju, April 2008.

In Shaju's account, childhood in the village was associated with play and fun. She linked this to the way in which the space and society in the village is arranged, allowing space for children to play safely, while being watched by relatives or neighbours. In Halima's account of her childhood in rural Sylhet, she compares it favourably to the lives of her children in London. The innocence and blissful ignorance of the affairs of adults made it a carefree and happy time for her. In contrast to Rashida's account she believes that childhoods in the UK are more stressful than her own childhood in Sylhet:

*When I was young in Bangladesh I never worried about my future. I never worried about money or even knew the value of it. I thought everything grew on trees and plants and my parents would take care of me forever. My daughters here in London worry more about their futures and think about money, working out the value of things<sup>37</sup>.*

Perhaps the Dionysian elements of the way childhood is conceptualised in the Sylhet of Halima's memories, for all its strict discipline, freed children from the panopticon of responsibility and guilt. In the complex and diverse society in London, Halima's children were more competent and understanding of things than she was, the Apollonian elements of their childhoods are encouraged. Halima's daughters worry about work, about studying and their futures in a way that she never did. Attitudes towards work, play and study reveal some interesting differences between ideas about childhood.

---

<sup>37</sup> Extract from 'My Childhood in Bangladesh' by Halima, April 2008.

## Work and Play

Blanchet's ethnographic accounts are revealing about attitudes towards childhood and parenting in Bangladesh. The children in her study's lives are filled with long hours of work and/or study. Blanchet effectively questions the supposed positive connotations of children's study over the negative connotations of children's work (Blanchet, 1996:168). The middle class children in Blanchet's account are encouraged to study so much that they do not have time for play. The studying they do consists of rote learning and memorisation of enormous amounts of information. This is a common critique of Bangladeshi and South Asian attitudes towards education and knowledge, which Brooker (2002) describes in relation to Bangladeshis living in Britain.

This is not to say that children in Bangladesh or of Bangladeshi origin do not play or are not naughty. My own observations and common sense indicates that they do and are. However where British education and parenting encourages play and sees it as an important developmental tool, Bangladeshis in Blanchet's account see it as potentially corrupting. James Jenks and Prout (1998) see '*Play as Childhood Culture*', Katz (2004) sees play as a means of transformation, renegotiation and development (2004:97). It is hard to find evidence that British Bangladeshis see play as so integral to the lives of children. This is accentuated and exaggerated by practices relating to the use and ideas about space that I will describe later.

James, Jenks and Prout (1998) unpick the binary of play and work and the corresponding categories of children and adults - children play while adults work. As Ariès (1962) noted, the lives of children and adults have become gradually more separated over the centuries (Ariès, 1962:399).

The Factory Acts<sup>38</sup> in Britain removed children from the world of adult work and created legal guidelines for separate adult and child spaces (James Jenks and Prout, 1998:91). As Cain (1977) notes, the separation between the worlds of adults and children into work and play has not happened in rural Bangladesh (Cain 1977:201). Similarly Katz's ethnography of the lives of children in a village in Sudan shows how work and play are mixed and intertwined; children's work is often playful and their play often based on work. Children played at work that they would do as adults and also at work that they might help with as children (Katz, 2004:97). As a result, in contrast to Western ideas of childhood, Blanchet claims, the concept of 'otherness' to describe the relationship between children and adults (James, 1993) does not apply in Bangladesh (Blanchet, 1996:16).

Seema, who argued for just such a view of Bangladeshi ideas of childhood, described how children in rural Sylhet participate in work activities and how adults may play with them. She contrasts this with the situation in London where people do not live in extended families due to the small flats.

*I think in Bangladesh, I mean, if you're talking about rural Bangladesh ... its quite hard graft ... if you're farming the field and everybody has to survive on that then there is a lot of work and everybody has to kind of ... put their hand into it, you know everybody has to do their part and a lot of the time does go in making sure that everything gets done, but then people do have time to sort of chill out, socialise and you know, relax at the end of the day and I think in this country and especially with the Bengali community sometimes people end up being shut off because they haven't got all their family around them or they haven't*

---

<sup>38</sup> The Factory Acts were a series of acts passed by the British government regulating the amount of hours that women and particularly children could work. The first act was in 1802 and the last in 1961.

*got all their friends around them or you know the block of flats that they live in might not have somebody that is you know is from the same culture or whatever so its sometimes people do end up being more isolated and they don't get that chance to do the relaxing or the playing as the children always do, whereas in Bangladesh its you know, once you've done your chores ... you sit around and you socialise ... the elders are usually quite mischievous so ... you'll have a joke around with your grandma or ... whoever it is.<sup>39</sup>*

'Children' and 'adults', 'work' and 'play' do not have the same separations, connotations and roles for Bangladeshis as they have in the UK. Other social divisions, such as class or family, seem to have more importance in Bangladesh. Ideas of developmental psychology have had very little impact on ideas about childhood in Bangladesh, leading to highly variable rather than universal ideas of 'children's needs'. The very different childhoods outlined in Blanchet's book show the importance of class and social status in the different relations people have with the *samaj*. This makes Bangladeshi childhoods difficult to generalise about and the idea of children as a category less powerful in Bangladesh than in the UK (Blanchet, 1996:16-17).

James Jenks and Prout (1998) discuss a 'north – south' divide in attitudes towards children's work. Where children are not supposed to 'work' in the north, in the south, their work is often celebrated and is a necessary part of the household economy (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:106-107). Blanchet, (1996) makes a similar point to James Jenks and Prout when she critiques the notion that study is good for children but work is not (Blanchet, 1996:168). This pattern is certainly true of the rural Bangladesh of the 1970s where Cain (1977) was doing his research and many of the parents of children I have studied were growing up.

---

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Seema and Mary conducted at Islington Education Authority, 12.03.2009

Play has become a fixation of British analysts of childhood. The meanings and functions of play are a major source of debate and study. However, as I describe in chapter 7, the main site of British Bangladeshi children's play was at school. At home and on the street in London there is almost no play. Play is associated with British ideas of childhood and the British-based social field of school. In the interactions I studied and describe in this thesis, children were either learning or playing in an ethnically mixed school or interacting with adults and other children in the British Bangladeshi social field. On visits to Bangladesh which I described earlier, there were opportunities for out of school play, in which the children were generally enthusiastic participants.

### **Explanations for deviance**

One day as I sat chatting to eight year old Saiful at his house, he began a long and rambling account of his dreams, interactions with friends and religious teachings. He recounted a particularly violent dream to me. He attributed the source of the bad dream to *Shaitan*. *Shaitan*, 'the whisperer' is a figure from the Qur'an (Sura 7 and 114, Yusuf Ali, 2004:87 and 384). Saiful's Arabic teacher, whom he hated with a slightly unnerving passion, had told him about *Shaitan* and how to counter the influence of *Shaitan*'s whispering.

Saiful recounted a playground incident in which *Shaitan*'s whispering had almost got the better of him and he had been on the verge of lashing out at another boy. Saiful was angry with the boy who he thought was trying to drive a wedge between him and a friend of his. *Shaitan* had entered his thoughts and was trying to convince him to kill the boy until he uttered the prayer taught to him by his Arabic teacher to counter *Shaitan*'s influence:

*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most merciful. Say: I seek refuge with the Lord and cherisher of mankind, The King of mankind, The God of mankind, From the mischief of the whisperer (of evil) [Shaitan] who withdraws (after his whisper), Who whispers into the hearts of mankind, Among Jinns and among men (Sura 114, Yusuf Ali, 2004:384).*

Saiful provided a graphic re-enactment of the scene, how he had become enraged and eventually calmed down under the influence first of *Shaitan* and then the Qur'anic prayer. He rushed around his living room in a fury of fists and kicks, attacking the sofa and pillows, he tensed his muscles, rolled his eyes and flexed his neck, closing his eyes as he reached the peak of his performance and then subsided into a meditative calm.

Saiful's account demonstrates something which is instructive. *Shaitan* is often blamed for bad behaviour where perhaps sociological explanations such as 'problems at home' or pre-sociological explanations such as the 'Dionysian' elements of childhood might be invoked in 'Western' explanations. However, despite the seriousness of *Shaitan*'s potential interventions and the 'Dionysian' attitudes towards discipline among British Bangladeshis, such deviance is often tolerated to a remarkable degree among young children and toddlers (*baccha*) who were allowed to 'get away' with bad behaviour and not told off or punished.

I was surprised by this phenomenon, given the strictness with which parents treated their older children, the non-negotiable nature of their edicts and the punishments they gave their children for relatively minor misdemeanours. It seemed to me that they were incredibly tolerant of toddlers and young children. They did not seem to want to 'train' them from the earliest possible age in right and

wrong and the correct forms of behaviour. I had witnessed attempts at complex socialisation by parents in the UK of toddlers and babies, believing that even (or especially) at the youngest age children were capable of learning important lessons about correct practices or morality.

In a similar way, Cain (1977) was “*struck by the apparently abrupt transition in children’s status from completely dependent recipients of parental indulgence and affection to subordinate, responsible economic actors*” (Cain, 1977:209). This transition does not happen at a particular age and varies depending on the context but it will influence the net economic value of children to parents. Like Blanchet, Cain distinguished between poor families and relatively wealthier ones, noting the earlier age at which children from poorer families begin working (Cain, 1977:213). Cain concludes that the high fertility rates in the village he studied in Bangladesh in the 1970s have an economically rational cause, as children were valuable sources of labour (Cain, 1977:224). These types of transitions may have been common in many of the villages in Bangladesh where Sylhetis in Britain originate from.

I asked Abdul, the father of five children who I had spent a lot of time with, at what age he thought the transition should be made, from a regime of total indulgence to one of strict obedience. He told me that as soon as a child could understand the difference between right and wrong, when they could communicate well and understand what their parents told them they should be subject to discipline. He said that Nasrin, his six year old daughter was old enough but Tanvir, his three year old son was not. This correlates with Blanchet’s idea of ‘understanding’ as the measure of growing up (Blanchet, 1996:47) rather than the passing of years or physical size.



Abdul was growing tired with his son Tanvir's bad behaviour however and looked to advice he had received from *Supernanny*, a British television programme. He was trying to ignore his son's bad behaviour, attributing it now to attention seeking behaviour rather than *Shaitan*. His use of the tactic of ignoring attention seeking behaviour, borrowed from *Supernanny*, is a classic 'Western' solution based on a sociological/psychological explanation for behaviour. Of all his children, Abdul said, Tanvir, the naughty one was the most 'British'. '*He will grow up to be totally British*' Abdul said with a chuckle. British children were often constructed by parents as being naughtier than Bangladeshi ones.

Abdul's answer to my enquiries stressed the children's grasp of social concepts and their ability to communicate. Gardner's (1993) work on Sylhet and the relationship between the people, their land and its produce put a focus on more biological and functional aspects of child development. In her account, the consumption of produce from the household (rice) is linked with the socialisation and teaching of rules to children. Gardner describes how children are '*thought to be incapable of disobedience until they start to eat rice*'; consuming household produce makes one subject to household rules (Gardner, 1993:6).

Abdul's ideas about parenting were influenced by his experiences in London, where he himself had grown up. His household no longer 'produced' rice, although the family did eat rice every day. Rice still played a major practical and symbolic role for his family, but the link between production and obedience to rules and authority was weaker in contemporary London than in Sylhet in the 1980s. The inflexible realities of rural, biological, agricultural life have been replaced by a more urban, social, negotiable set of principles from diverse sources such as *Supernanny*, social workers, the Qur'an, the school and Abdul's Sylheti wife. British ideas about childhood from developmental

psychology and sociology have influenced Abdul, but had not influenced Gardner's (1993) subjects. As Blanchet notes, these ideas have had little impact on policies and ideas about children in Bangladesh (Blanchet, 1996:16-17).

Blanchet's discussion of the 'rights of the child' and child protection reveals the very different situation in Bangladesh compared to the UK. Rights of the child in Bangladesh are connected to being fed and having their innocence preserved, or honour intact (Blanchet, 1996:39). The combination of differences of opportunity and resources with differing notions of childhood means that the lived experiences of childhoods and the strength of legislation on the 'rights of the child' in Bangladesh are different from those in the UK.

As Blanchet's ethnography shows, protecting the 'honour' and 'innocence' of children and their families can entail practices which in the UK would amount to child abuse. In some examples she gives, children are beaten or given powerful medicines to 'cure' them of their deviant ways (Blanchet, 1996:68). In the UK and in 'Western' idea of childhood, the rights of children also involve 'innocence' but this includes elements of play and mischief. The rights that children in the UK have to play and create mischief could be considered immoral and risking social standing in relation to the *samaj* in Bangladesh.

Sports, for example, are considered to be beneficial to the physical and social development of children. And while they are not explicitly encouraged by British Bangladeshi parents, they are not considered to be corrupting or detrimental in the way in which some of Blanchet's subjects in Bangladesh considered them to be (Blanchet, 1996:153). Common activities at school in the UK such as mixed sports, swimming and eating with children of different genders, races, religions and

class backgrounds might also risk the wrong type of associations in Bangladesh (Blanchet, 1996:154)

Ideas about discipline in Blanchet's account and among my own research subjects fell somewhere between the self-regulating Apollonian panopticon and the strict regulation of Dionysian uncontrollable mischief. Children were not seen as sources of constant deviance and mischief, but neither were they seen as containing a kind of ideal pure goodness which could be coaxed out. Sin and deviance were constructed as emanating from sources quite separate from the individual (cf. Blanchet, 1996:68). In addition, attitudes towards discipline changed at different stages of childhood based upon a combination of social, intellectual and contextual factors. Younger children were treated in a much more Apollonian way than older children, who were often treated as though they needed to be protected from their own urges.

Seema and Mary, who work for Islington Education Authority, disagreed with this idea. They put a greater emphasis on changing attitudes towards public space and the perception of danger. They insisted that this phenomenon affected all children in London, not just Bangladeshi children.

Working as they do with children from diverse backgrounds they have a valuable perspective and a view which is beyond the scope of this thesis. I agree with their point, my narrow anthropological focus on British Bangladeshis perhaps leads to explanations of phenomena based on the experiences and constructions of my research subjects rather than drawing upon wider issues.

*I think children are shut up a lot more and ... it's not just Bengali children, children in general, you know people are scared to let their kids out or you know ... times have changed, I know it sounds like an old fuddy thing to say but times have changed you know*

*even I was talking to another parent a few weeks ago and she was saying ... you know I feel bad that I don't let my son go out and play and I think its just a culture you know and sometimes it's just what parents do, but sometimes maybe we are being over protective<sup>40</sup>.*

As Seema, Mary and Blanchet (1996) make clear, the wider social context is influential on the way in which childhoods and relations with the *samaj* are conceived and manifest themselves in practices. In the next section I want to look at the way in which the use and conceptualisations of space interact with ideas about childhood. Cities and buildings, spaces and places, structure and are structured by the way they are understood and used. This emerged from several of the accounts from parents and children about their lives and also from my own observations in London and Sylhet.

## **Inside and Outside**

Benji: *Do you like living in London?*

Tasneem: *Not that much.*

B: *Why not?*

T: *Because there's too much um thingy, cars and when you're about to come and you don't see the car um, say like you thought the car's going to turn that way, it actually comes your direction and you can hit yourself, like Zain did.*

B: *OK ... cars are dangerous.*

T: *And then and there's what's it? killers and all that.*

B: *Killers?*

T: *Yeah and bad boys, around Islington and Arden.*

---

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Seema and Mary conducted at Islington Education Authority, 12.03.2009

B: *There's bad boys on your estate?*

T: *Yeah.*

B: *OK, and what do they do?*

T: *They like put on loud music, and then when we're trying to sleep they go on and on. We call, call the police and say that everyone's putting on loud music in the night.*<sup>41</sup>

Tasneem, like Ishrat, who I have quoted below, has the perception that the streets and public spaces of Islington and London are not safe. These girls have been taught by parents, relatives and teachers that the world outside their homes and school is full of people who mean them harm and dangers to their lives and morality. School and home were seen as safe spaces, where children spent most of their time and through repetitious practices of socialisation learned how to behave. The streets and spaces of their neighbourhoods were constructed as being inappropriate places for children.

A 'wall' separating the 'inside' and 'outside', the home and the world is, according to Blanchet, a core value of Bengali culture and society. This principle, which affects rural women's lives in particular, has been translated into urban life in Bangladesh and Britain. In the city it is not only women and female children who are at risk; young boys are also seen as needing protection from moral corruption (Blanchet, 1996:156, cf. Gardner, 1995:208). The middle class children in Blanchet's account are moved between home and school in rickshaws or private cars; they rarely set foot outside the gate of their house or block of flats (Blanchet, 1996:157).

---

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Tasneem conducted at Poynder primary School 12.03.2008

Like the children in Blanchet's (1996) study and those in New York City in Katz's (2004) study, many British Bangladeshi children in Islington are rarely allowed out onto the street unsupervised (Blanchet, 1996:157, Katz, 2004:174). Home and school are seen as safe islands in the midst of the unsafe urban landscape. The home and school are contrasted by children and parents with the street – outside which is seen as dangerous. For the children in my study, the fun and safety of school compared favourably to the routines of life at home and the dangers of the streets. The excerpt below from an interview with Ishrat, an 11 year old girl, shows how the perception of danger and moral corruption of the streets and public areas of their estate limits the possibilities of play and confines many children to activities in the home.

Benji: *So, when and where do you play with your friends?*

Ishrat: *I don't really ... play in London because I'm not allowed to go out because of my area, you know, drugs and all everything.*

B: *So you're not ...*

I: *My mum's scared.*

B: *You never have your friends round or go round to their house?*

I: *No, because my mum's a bit, protective.*

B: *Yeah?*

I: *Like she says not to go there and that something will happen.*

B: *Ok, ok, so you only play with your friends at school?*

I: *Yeah.*

B: *And so when you're at home, what do you do in your free time? You were saying, reading...*

I: *Reading, watching television, do homework when I feel like it. Do mosque homework when I feel like it.*

B: *Mosque homework?*

I: *Yeah, if I want I play Playstation, sometimes, 'cause its fun, sleep.*

B: *Ok, and what do you watch on TV?*

I: *Um, Indian dramas, uh, films<sup>42</sup>.*

Ishrat and other children in my study had very limited contact with other children outside school. The street was considered dirty and dangerous, not a good place to play (cf. Blanchet, 1996:158). Friendships with children at school were not considered particularly important or encouraged by their parents. Most peer contact outside school was with siblings, cousins and children of families known to the parents (Blanchet, 1996:159). Parents were also worried that children might make the 'wrong sort' of friends and learn bad habits or become 'corrupted' in some way (cf. Crozier and Davies, 2006:687, Blanchet, 1996:153).

Things were not always like this, however, and nor are they the same when the children visit Bangladesh. In chapter 4 I cited Ishrat's depiction of the differences between being in Bangladesh and her life in London. She associated her visit to Bangladesh with playing outside. Seema reminisced about her own childhood in London in the 1980s and how protected her children are now:

*... one of the things I really, especially the last few years I realised because my daughter's going to go to secondary school next year is that they've had such a sheltered life, really*

---

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Ishrat, conducted at Poynder Primary School 12.02.2008

*you know, I don't let them out and play by themselves as often as I used to go out. I remember ... even at the age of like 6 or 7 me and my sister were down, we had a playground at the bottom of our block of flats and you know we'd just be out playing all the time. Or um, we used to live near Chalk Farm, my mum and dad would send us out to do the shopping in Camden town which isn't really for a ten year old and a seven year old to go up to Camden by themselves, we used to do that ... I remember, because you know my mum was always busy with the younger ones, my dad was working so me and her we actually had quite a lot of responsibility and we always you know do lots of things and when I think about it now I probably at that age, would not have, if my kids were that age now, I wouldn't allow them to go from Kentish town to Camden town by themselves<sup>43</sup>.*

Seema's parents had let her and her sister out to play by themselves and had sent them to run errands, whereas Seema never let her children out of their flat unattended. Her children enjoyed visiting her family back in Sylhet partly because, like Ishrat, they enjoyed the opportunities to play outdoors. However, she put this down to a difference between living in the city and the countryside and also mentioned differences between parts of London. Her sister, who lives in a more suburban area of London, affords her children more freedom to play on the street. These experiences of inner London life are not limited to Bangladeshis, as Seema mentioned in an interview, other families in London are similarly protective of young children.

When she visits her husband's family in Bangladesh, in a built-up part of Dhaka, the children are restricted in the way that Blanchet describes and play outside only on the roof of the house. Earlier I cited part of Shaju's idyllic account of childhood in rural Sylhet. Later in her account she explains

---

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Seema, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 21.11.2007



how this playful early part of childhood came to an end when they moved to the city of Sylhet for her and her brothers to go to school.

*When I was eight I went to live in the city – Sylhet. I liked living in the city because there was a good education available there. I missed out on my childhood in the city because I couldn't go out by myself and there was no space to play in. Compared to the village it wasn't so much fun and I didn't have so much freedom<sup>44</sup>.*

In the translation of attitudes of families from rural Sylhet to the realities of life in urban Sylhet, Dhaka or London and the transition from one generation to the next some of these freedoms have been lost. Across space and time, the interaction between rural Bangladeshi practices and London's urban landscape has created new practices and relationships with space that have placed the 'wall' between 'inside' and 'outside' much closer to 'home'. Rozario's (2006) article deals with this issue regarding the interactions between modernity, urbanity and practices of *parda/purdah* and wearing *burqa*<sup>45</sup> among Bangladeshi women.

*The ideology of parda implies that women should remain within the private sphere as far as possible. Any deviation, such as taking a job that involves interaction with unrelated men, compromises their honour and the status of the family as a whole. Thus while Bangladeshi women at all levels are at present experiencing substantial changes in their lives as a result of the forces of modernisation and globalisation, there is a disjunction*

---

<sup>44</sup> Extract from 'My Childhood' by Shaju.

<sup>45</sup> Loose fitting clothes covering the head and body.

*between these broader (structural) changes and persisting Bangladeshi gender values.* (Rozario, 2006:370)

Rozario's analysis of young women in urban settings in Bangladesh, who are increasingly choosing to wear the *burqa*, has some parallels among British Bangladeshis in London. I will discuss *burqa* or headscarf wearing further in chapter 8. The interactions of Bangladeshi values concerning gender and childhood, the idea of inside and outside, private and public spheres and the realities of living in an urban setting are behind both the practices that Rozario describes and some that I have observed. In some ways, regarding children, these practices correspond with common practices and ideas in London; they are not just linked to being British Bangladeshi. In the next section I will analyse the effects of the spatial arrangements of houses on the lives of British Bangladeshi families.

### **The Sylheti *bari***

Bourdieu's ethnography of the Kabyle house which informed his (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* presents some of these binaries in the organisation of space:

*Thus, the house is organised according to a set of homologous oppositions – fire:water :: cooked:raw :: high:low :: light:shade :: day:night :: male:female :: nif:hurma :: fertilising:able to be fertilised. But in fact the same oppositions are established between the house as a whole and the rest of the universe, that is, the male world, the place of assembly, the fields and the market.* (Bourdieu, 1977:90-91)

Space, says Bourdieu is influential, contributing to the durable imposition of schemes of perception, thought and action – the habitus. Space is made by these actions as much as it makes them; it is part of the process of socialisation (Bourdieu, 1977:90). Leaving aside a comparison between Kabyle and Sylheti households, I wish to draw upon Bourdieu's ideas about the role of the household in socialisation, in the creation of habitus to speak about the effects of living in very different housing in London on behaviour and the socialisation of children.

Morley (2000), unpicking the symbolism of the home and its role in acculturation, cites Wood and Beck (1994) on children and rules in the home. Wood and Beck's analysis sees children as outsiders in the home, barbarians who dirty and disrupt it. Parents must teach children a huge number of rules to bring them in (and up). These rules are latent, but are 'disrobed' as they are explained to children. This both maintains the values of the adults by protecting the room and its contents from the children and reproduces them by instilling them in the children. The home thus becomes a 'field of rules' for the child and is where they learn to behave 'properly'; learning the 'habitus' (Morley, 2000:20).

I described some aspects of the Sylheti *bari* (household) in chapter 4. Within the Sylheti *bari* there is a division between public and private, male and female. This follows the practices of *parda* or *pardah* (literally meaning curtain) where women retreat behind curtains, screens or into spaces where they cannot be seen, into the private, feminine part of the house. When the women of the household I stayed in fled from my gaze as I blundered into their private space, it was because the male, public and outside, in the form of an inquisitive foreigner, was entering the feminine, private, inside space (cf. Gardner, 1995:206, Rozario, 2006:370).

The 'back' of the house, where the women, especially young unmarried women, spent most of their time was where the kitchen was and where laundry was hung out: it was dark, hot, airless and humid. There was also a bathroom which the family used, but I was not encouraged to use it. The 'front' of the house was more open and airy and many different people wandered through the rooms which doubled as bedrooms and reception rooms. Each of these rooms had furniture which corresponded to a particular marriage in the family in it and was used by that marriage's couple. Across the courtyard was the *fukur ghor* (pond room) which opened out onto the pond and the outside world beyond. It caught the occasional breezes and was cooler than the other parts of the house, an ideal place for the men to sit on hot afternoons and chew *paan* (betel nut) as they chatted. Young male guests slept, three to a bed, in the *fukur ghor*.

The house did not totally surround the courtyard, other houses of the *bari*, which is really a collection of houses, lived in by an extended family, lined the long courtyard. The other families of the *bari* were all related to the *Londoni* family and their members came and went through the courtyard and outer rooms of the house as insiders within the private domain.

Most of the time the private inside parts of rural households such as this one do not have unannounced visitors. The members of the *bari* have quite a lot of space to use, even if like the women and children of the *bari*, they are not allowed to leave. There are boundaries and space outside the actual house within which women go without being veiled and children could play in. The *bari*'s tight knit network of family and neighbours are a large in-group considered part of the inside, the private sphere. The pond and surrounding fields make a sufficient barrier between the inside and the outside. There is usually space for women and children to fulfil most of their daily needs without going beyond these boundaries and into the 'outside' 'public

sphere'. The track outside the *bari* was the site of many games and energetic playing with other children from the *bari*. The pump in between one part of the *bari* and another was the location for fun for the British Bangladeshi children and chores for some of the children of other less well off families in the *bari*.

When women did venture out, on essential visits to the doctor, to school or occasionally shopping they were usually accompanied by male kin and wore *burqa*. The men did most of the shopping however and many tradesmen would come to the house to sell products or provide services. Living in large extended families meant that the women of the household provided a lot of the support and services in terms of cooking, healthcare and cosmetic treatments for each other without ever needing to leave the *bari*.

### **The *Londoni* flat**

Friedmann (2002) describes the transition an imaginary Kabyle family make from their rural traditional Kabyle house in Algeria (as described by Bourdieu, 1977) to a 'tenement' flat in a working class neighbourhood of Frankfurt, Germany in the 1960s. The housing and spatial arrangement of the city bore no resemblance to their old housing. "*The cosmic order that had always given meaning to their lives has been shattered for good*" (Friedmann, 2002:323). The Kabyle habitus was dealt a severe blow by this migration, as it could not be sustained in the physical space which did not lend itself to the rhythms of their old lives (Friedmann, 2002:329).

Friedmann describes the gathering of Kabyle and other North African and Turkish families in particular areas of Frankfurt, creating what he calls an 'affinity environment'. The disorientated

foreigners helped each other with the struggle to make sense of their new lives. Visits to the mosque and a local festival welcoming migrants to the city involved awkward, especially for the women, encounters with strangers. In time and in turn the Kabyle turned their neighbourhood into an 'ethnic enclave' which the local German working class resented, their use and understandings of the space disrupted by the unfamiliar activities of the Kabyle *gastarbeiter* (guest workers) (Friedmann, 2002:326). The German working class' habitus was in turn disrupted by the arrival and settlement of the Kabyle and other migrants in the neighbourhood. This led to resentment and hostility which hindered the integration and fostered increased transnational activity among the Kabyle (Friedmann, 2002:330).

The story of British Bangladeshis in Islington is not so fractious or so simple, although parallels do exist with Friedmann's account. His account is a parable, illustrating how habitus may change or be challenged by a new environment. If we consider the '*Londoni* flat', council or housing association flats in this case in Islington in a similar way it will help to explain some of the phenomenon I describe in this thesis.

In London, space is arranged in completely different ways from the *bari* in rural Sylhet, both within the house (or flat) and outside the house in the immediate surroundings. Lives have different patterns which have created the spatial organisation and are, in turn created by them. Within the cramped living quarters of British Bangladeshi families in Islington it is not very practical to practice *purdah*. The small kitchen is not built for several women to gather, cooking and eating in the private sphere; it is attached directly onto the main reception room of the house which is designed for receiving guests.

There is no courtyard, no separate spheres for activities, for public and private social milieu to run simultaneously. Any courtyards or public spaces there are between blocks are not semi-private like the Sylheti *bari*, they are open and observed by all. Indeed on the De Vere Estate, in Islington the small pathways and passages so beloved of the original celebrated architects had been opened up into public roads in a total redevelopment of the estate as they had become crime hotspots. There is precious little private outside space, although many of the flats have a small balcony. On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> floor of a concrete block of council or housing association flats, the idea of outside is immediate and close.

From the window of one flat was a spectacular view of the East End of London, an urban panorama of tower blocks and construction sites; there was no space there that could be considered in any way 'inside' or 'private', no track or field or pond or scrap of land that was a buffer between the intimacies of the household and the outside world. On the other side of the flat was the door to a dark concrete corridor lit only with strip lights. Off that corridor were the doors to other flats, so the space was shared, public and not very inviting. The lift and stairs sometimes smelt of smoke or urine and occasionally had a cigarette butt or broken bottle in them. The cold stale air and sharp *haram* smells are the antithesis of the soft, warm, oily *halal* fragrances of 'inside'. While outside it is often bitterly cold, inside the thermostats are turned up to a Sylheti twenty five degrees centigrade.

The emphasis in reception space was on comfortable seating, sofas and chairs and on watching television. The size and sophistication of televisions in the *Londoni* flats I visited surprised me. In line with Islamic ideas there was little decoration on the walls and few if any images of people or animals. Most houses had some sort of Qur'anic inscription on a poster

hung on the wall. A large television usually dominated the communal space. This seemed to satisfy several desires. There was the love of electronic gadgets among British Bangladeshi men and boys which I have mentioned elsewhere and ranged from televisions, to computers to mobile telephones. This seemed to be an association with modernity and status. This obsession was not unique to British Bangladeshis, however; many of the other children in the school were fascinated with computer games and gadgets and clearly watched a lot of television. The cramped private sphere made the lives of women and children at home more restrictive in the *Londoni* flat than in the Sylheti *bari*. The television was a window to the outside, a stimulating, ever-changing antidote to the monotony of the small private, undecorated space.

Bangladeshi eating patterns mean that the whole family rarely eats all together sitting at a large table in the European ideal, so there were no large dining tables. One family I visited regularly, had a curtain between the kitchen and the living room, which separated this space within the household. In the small kitchen there was a table where the husband would eat alone or with his oldest son, the children would be fed when they returned from school, or I would eat, alone or with the oldest son, on visits to the house. In another flat, the door to the kitchen remained closed throughout my first visit. Later it opened and as I became closer to the family the headscarves, modified *purdah* and privacy were abandoned.

In the flats in Islington, the bedrooms were in the deepest recesses away from the entrance, not at the front as they are in the Sylheti *bari*. Outside the door is the cold, hard, public world of the corridor and street. There, one may be observed by any stranger or run into any kind of person. Before leaving that door, headscarves were positioned and the private world left



behind. Rather than an expanse of field, a pond and a track between the private and the public spheres there was a narrow wooden door.

The flat is small, designed for a nuclear family, so however close by friends or kin may be, a visit to them requires passing through outside, public space. The dangers of the street and potential for observation by strangers are present as soon as one steps over the threshold. Any shopping or visits to local services also require entering into public space. This arrangement is structured and structuring. Systems have been designed to fit with patterns of behaviour and in turn reinforce them; the centralised services of the state healthcare and education system for example, like in Frankfurt, require interaction in the public sphere.

The practices of confinement to private, inside space for women and children present in the Sylheti *bari* are highly restrictive when applied to the *Londoni* flat. In chapter 7 I will explain that the children in my study found school stimulating and liberating. They participated eagerly in whatever activities they could. This is in part because of the restrictive nature of the ideas of inside and outside in Bangladeshi notions of childhood applied to inner city London architecture. In chapter 6 I will describe the shrinking space of the Bangla speaking sphere and British Bangladeshi habitus. Alongside the strong vitality of other languages and social fields, this is because the dividing line between the inside and outside is so thin and the space inside so small. In chapter 8 I will show how this has impacted on Islamic practices.

The *Londoni* flat and London's public architecture, structured by centuries of Londoners' practices are (re)structuring the lives, practices and habituses of British Bangladeshi children. Places, as Olwig and Gullov (2003) observe, are cultural constructions, they do not exist in and

of themselves. They exist as a result of social life, as a result of the meanings which people ascribe to them. Conceptions of place are constantly negotiated and reformulated based on changing material conditions contexts and positionality (Olwig and Gullov, 2003:7). Transitions such as the one from the Sylheti *bari* to the *Londoni* flat create social change. The way children negotiate these changes and the way practices relating to children interrelate with spaces influence this change. Space and the meanings ascribed to them proved to be an influential factor in British Bangladeshi children's lives. Next, I want to discuss ideas about that very special place, built out of a dense mass of meaning and social construction - 'home'.

## **Home and Belonging**

The idea of home, it has been argued, has been altered by huge changes in patterns of communication and physical mobility in a deterritorialised, transnational or globalised world (Morley, 2001:428). Home can be seen both as a physical place, the house, and as a more symbolic concept, what Morley (2001) refers to as '*heimat*', the 'spaces of belonging' which can be at different scales; local, national or transnational (Morley, 2001:425). For people who move during their lifetimes, as nearly everyone does now; home can have a variety of meanings: where one usually lives, or where one's family lives, one's native country, but that concept can have different interpretations; where one was born, where one now lives, or where one grew up could all be in different physical places (Ahmed, 1999:338).

Morley (2000, 2001), Ahmed, (1999) and Brah (1996) all point to a distinction between the idea and practice of home. Brah writes specifically about diaspora groups. The idea of home is as a '*mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination*', the place of origin, a place so romanticised and

mythologized that it is impossible to return to because it does not exist. I discussed this briefly in chapter 3 with regards to the disillusionment some British Bangladeshis feel upon their return to Sylhet. Home is also the '*lived experience of a locality*', the sensory, physical experiences of living in a particular place. This experience is, Brah reminds us, '*mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations*' (Brah, 1996:192). This sounds like Bourdieu's link between habitus and home that I described above.

Brah is influenced by Gilroy's (1993) contention that the idea of home is simultaneously about *roots* and *routes* (Gilroy, 1993:190). Gilroy's play on words (also used by Clifford, 1997) describes both the mythic place of origin, the roots and the lived experiences, the daily physical realities and practices, the routes (Brah, 1996:192). The mythic place of desire that Brah discusses, applies not only to diaspora groups or migrants, but to all of us, who to varying degrees have an imaginary of our own and other nations that develops during childhood (cf. Piaget and Weil, 1951). Who inhabits or shares our imaginary of the home or homeland is an important part of this concept. As Brah argues:

*... the question of home ... is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion and exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging'.* (Brah, 1996:192).

'Primordialist' approaches to belonging see the nation as linked to race, kinship, blood ties and land binding people together, conflating a territory with a group of people. In contrast, Anderson (1983) shows how belonging and connections are socially constructed through the consumption of

similar print media, books, newspapers as well as television and internet media (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk, 2005:31). Morley (2000) shows how the concept of the nation and of home are constructed and maintained by 'coordinated choreographies'. These must be performed at specific times in specific places, which create not only the sense of community, knowing that every family is doing the same (eating a thanksgiving meal in one example) but also contribute to the meaning of the home as the place where this ritual takes place (Morley, 2000:16,19).

The 'apprenticeship' which children go through that I discussed earlier, teaches them how to behave in a way appropriate to their 'culture', class and gender. This apprenticeship, principally carried out in the home, is heavily gendered (cf. Silva, 2005:94). The division of space into male-public and female-private and the construction of home as the space for interactions between mother and child have been instrumental in the strong relationship between ideas of the 'home' and of the 'child'. However, the home is not always an ideal space for children; it is the most common site of abuse by adults for example. The strict regulation of space, surveillance and control by adults at home is also problematic for many children (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:53).

In chapter 7 I will discuss the socialising and reproductive attempts of the school and education system. This raises interesting questions for transnational families, whose lives and 'homes' are not limited to one state, education system or 'church'. In chapter 4 I described the socialisation of British Bangladeshi children, aimed at reproducing the British Bangladeshi habitus, on visits to Bangladesh. In chapter 8 I will discuss the effects of Islamic ideas on the identities of British Bangladeshi children. In a society containing many transnational social fields the powers of the state or other national institutions to define 'normalcy' with regards to gender roles, morality or anything else can be curtailed if these ideas of normalcy are not accepted as legitimate. In this way

there are rival modes of behaviour, sets of dispositions, or habituses that correspond to different social fields within societies and across the world in transnational social fields. In Chapter 9 I will discuss the disrupting effect that transnational social fields have on national systems of symbolic power.

The symbolic importance of objects and places is discussed by Gardner (1993) in her explanation of the meanings behind '*desh*' and '*bidesh*' to Sylhetis. The spiritual importance of the *desh* is expressed in practices such as consuming produce from Bangladesh and burying the dead in Sylhet, even when the people in question have lived in Britain (Gardner, 1993:5). The binary of *desh* and *bidesh* and the ambivalent relations that Gardner's subjects have with both, express many of the personal and global struggles that underlie the discussions in this thesis. As Gardner and Mand (2008) have found in their recent research about British Bangladeshi childhoods in Tower Hamlets and as I discussed in the last chapter, the meaning of the binary of *desh bidesh* is not clear to many British Bangladeshi children.

In conversations with children, the idea of their 'home' or what *desh* and *bidesh* represent was complex. Many families and their children referred instinctively to Sylhet as their home but when pressed to explain, said that London or Islington was their 'real' home. Like Olwig's (2003) respondents they identified with local sites of belonging as much as national or international ones (Olwig, 2003:232). London, the school, the local football team, Islington, their estate and even the postcode were sources of identity as much as England or Britain. In Bangladesh, Sylhet, their village and *bari* were more a source of a sense of belonging than the idea of Bangladesh.

Following Brah's (1996) discussion of the roots and routes of a sense of 'home'<sup>46</sup>, it seems that for the moment the routes, the repetitive practices and lived experiences of the habitus and home are more important for these British Bangladeshi children than the 'mythical place of desire' or their 'roots'. Perhaps later in life, with more searching and intellectualisation in addition to a sense of rejection of and from aspects of British society, these children will examine their roots, their mythic places of origin in more depth. As Hebdige (1987) notes, a person's 'roots' can be made and re-made, mixed and re-mixed within their lifetime (Hebdige, 1987:157). The significance and meanings of home to these children may change dramatically over the next few years of their lives.

Trying not to ask leading questions in interviews at times muddled the picture yet further. I began an interview with Faisal, aged 11, trying to ask him where he lived. Apart from demonstrating my poor interviewing technique it reveals some of the complexity of the idea of 'home'. I have discussed this and other methodological issues arising from interviews in chapter 2.

B: *Where do you live?*

F: *I live in Maulvi Bazaar*

B: *In Maulvi Bazaar? Isn't it quite a long way to come to school every day from Maulvi Bazaar?*

F: *Oh, where do I live now?*

B: *I don't know, where do you live?*

F: *In Bangladesh?*

B: *You live in Bangladesh?*

---

<sup>46</sup> Brah (1996) uses this distinction in a different way from Clifford (1997) who uses the idea of routes to talk about mobility rather than just daily lived experiences.

F: *What, are you talking about London?*

B: *I'm just talking about you.*

F: *I live in, well what do you mean?*

B: *I mean where do you live normally.*

F: *Now?*

B: *Yeah now.*

F: *In Islington.*

B: *In Islington, but would you say you also live in Maulvi Bazaar?*

F: *I live, when I go Bangladesh I live there.*

B: *Aaah, how often do you go to Bangladesh?*

B: *Eer, I only went two times.*<sup>47</sup>

When I asked children about the meanings of *desh* and *bidesh*, the results were often tortuous and complex. Discussions of the meanings of *desh* and *bidesh* led to some interesting revelations in a discussion with Shirin and Rafique about their visit to Bangladesh:

B: *Do you know what desh means?*

Shirin: *Yeah.*

B: *Where's your desh?*

Shirin: *Er, London.*

B: *What about bidesh?*

Shirin: *Bidesh – Bangladesh.*

*Laughter from Sumaya [mother]*

---

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Faisal, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 13.02.2008

Rafique: *I don't know.*

Shirin: *Oh no no, bidesh is this one and then desh is the other, Bangladesh.*

...

B: *What do you think, what is the desh, what does desh mean?*

Abdul [father]: *For them, which is they're describing which is correct. For me as I grew up in Bangladesh so for me, my country is ... already Rafique said it, because he's saying that, that, he feels in Bangladesh wasn't his home, he felt it he was in holiday so he can't call that as a home.*

Rafique: *I know why, I was born in London and I wasn't born in Bangladesh, I was already settled in London, which I felt comfortable with, but in Bangladesh, I was not born there, I was not settled, it was a holiday<sup>48</sup>.*

In this excerpt from the discussion, Abdul summarises his children's feelings of belonging in London which they and especially Rafique expressed on more than one occasion. His understanding of *desh* and *bidesh* is based on the literal meaning of the words, so he says that the children are correct in saying that London is their *desh*. His understanding of *desh* and 'home' is based on the 'primordialist' notion that I discussed earlier. He says that Bangladesh will always be his *desh* as he was born there and lived there until he was 11. An individual's relations with Britain and Bangladesh, factors such as the length of time spent in each place and the sense of belonging they have to each place are influential in determining their understanding of the terms *desh* and *bidesh*. Semantic understandings of the terms also vary and these variables create different interpretations of their meanings. Gardner and Mand (2008), for example, encountered quite different interpretations of *desh* and *bidesh*, 'home' and 'away' (Gardner and Mand, 2008:12).

---

<sup>48</sup> Discussion about visits with Shirin, Rafique, and Nasrin, conducted in their flat, 28.11.2008



Feeling 'comfortable' and 'settled' are things that Rafique appeals to in his idea of what home means. As I described in chapter 4, many of the children on visits to Bangladesh felt distinctly disoriented. The familiar, learned routines and dispositions of the habitus, intimately bound up with the inhabited space of London are what create a sense of 'home' for them. The embodied, unconscious nature of this habitus also contributed to the contradictions in Faisal's, and other children's interviews. Trying to express in words something that just feels right is hard. In this way the logic of interviews and ethnography runs the risk of distorting embodied elements of habitus by attempting to reduce and communicate them through words.

## **Conclusions**

James' (1993) argument that the way in which childhood is constructed influences the way in which children are seen and see themselves and their experiences is convincing. This leads us to consider how these constructions manifest themselves in practices. We have seen that the binary of 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian' archetypes of childhood appears not to exist in Bangladeshi notions of childhood. While innocence, play and fun are undoubtedly elements of Bangladeshi childhoods, they are not considered an essential part of childhood, or to be limited only to people of certain ages. British Bangladeshi ideas about discipline fall somewhere between Jenks' (1996) dichotomy, requiring both strict monitoring of deviance and self-regulation. Rather than being seen as an inherent part of childhood, mischievousness and naughtiness are sometimes attributed to external, evil influences. However, we can qualify this by noting that below a certain age or stage of development children are not subject to the same rules and are thought to be incapable of wrongdoing. Attitudes towards mischief and discipline change at different ages or stages,

determined by parents. These ways in which childhood is constructed have impacts on British Bangladeshi parents' attitudes towards education which I will discuss in the chapter 7.

Like ideas about gender, we can see how notions of childhood are manifested in the way in which space in the rural Sylheti *bari* is used and access to space is restricted. Through socialisation in the home, among these spaces children learn their habitus. As I described in chapter 4, British Bangladeshi children learn elements of a Bangladeshi habitus on their visits to the Sylheti *bari*.

However, British Bangladeshi children learn different habituses in their flats, schools and neighbourhoods in London. The arrangement of space leads to different practices and awkward translations of practices from rural Sylhet. The translation of practices from Sylhet has led to some new practices emerging in London and the spatial restriction of the lives of women and children. They are confined to the inside, private space of their flats in London. The importance of spatial arrangements should not be overplayed; it must be set alongside diverse local and transnational influences on the habituses of the children which I outline in other chapters.

Like many of the children in Blanchet's (1996) accounts of childhoods in Bangladesh, the material realities of the children in my study have influenced practices relating to childhood. This, in part helps to explain why it appears that the idea of childhood as being a time of laughter and play is a *romantic reminiscence of something that no longer is*. The influence of the architecture and spaces in London and the transfer of practices from a rural homestead into the urban environment are at least partly responsible for this.

Despite the confinement children feel in their small flats and the frustrations this leads to, British Bangladeshi children, socialised in this space, feel comfortable in it. The routine, repeated, everyday practices of socialisation into their habitus have been influenced by the spaces they inhabit and also influence the nature of the space. The awkward translation of practices from Bangladesh makes some of them seem inappropriate for the material reality. As I will explain in chapter 6, due to the vitality of rival habituses, the spatial and temporal reach of the British Bangladeshi social field and habitus is diminishing. The different use of space, practices and systems of logic in Bangladesh leads them to feel disorientated when they are on visits to Bangladesh and consider the familiar spaces of London their 'home'.

## 6 Languages and identities

আমি বাংলায় গান গাই

আমি বাংলায় গান গাই  
আমি বাংলার গান গাই  
আমি আমার আমিকে চিরদিন এই বাংলায় খুঁজে পাই।।

### I Sing Songs in Bangla

I sing songs in Bangla,  
I sing songs of Bangla,  
Forever, I find my identity in this Bangla<sup>49</sup>

In chapters 3 and 4 I discussed the history and theoretical approaches to the 'British Bangladeshi transnational social field' and some of the transnational practices within this social field. Here I will discuss language practices and attitudes to language among British Bangladeshi children. This was an early focus of my research and led me to several important insights.

---

<sup>49</sup> This is the first verse of the song, 'Ami Bangla Gan Gai', by Mahmuduzzaman Babu, from the album 'Chokh Bhese Jai Jole', lyrics by Julia Choudhury. The song was used in 2007 in an advert for a popular Bangladeshi Satellite television station. Translated by Dr Hanna Thompson.

As the song *Ami Banglai Gan Gai*, (I sing songs in Bangla) which I have cited above indicates, Bangla (Bengali) is a key identifier of Bangladeshi identity, alongside 'ethnic', 'cultural' and religious practices. Speaking Bangla and other 'Bangladeshi' practices are largely confined to the home in Islington and there they are occasionally contested and resisted to some degree by children. Through a discussion of British Bangladeshi children's attitudes to different languages we can see the shape and boundaries of the elements of their identities that they see as important to themselves start to emerge. We can also see a relationship between the physical demarcation of space and aspects of these identities.

First, to clarify the languages spoken by these children I will discuss the distinction between Sylheti and Bangla. I will discuss language practices in Islington in London and parents' attitudes towards language. I will then describe a language ranking exercise I conducted with a group of children and what the insights that exercise gave me into the languages spoken by children, where they are spoken and what meaning and value they are invested with. The distinctions arising from the discussion of this ranking exercise gave me the idea of different social fields. While the language practices, behaviour and spatial arrangements corresponding to these social fields are fluid, overlapping and contested, the idea seemed useful as a way of analysing the different influences and social fields. Using the idea of 'language vitality' and proposing its use to analyse social fields I will show how they grow and shrink in size and importance and how change occurs through the increasing vitality of one social field or another.

The insights I gained from my analysis of language helped me to conceptualise my data and organise my thesis. That is why I have kept this as a separate chapter. Through this discussion,

the way in which the British Bangladeshi social field interacts, overlaps and is in 'competition' with other social fields will become clearer.

## **Bangla and Sylheti**

*Gunga-Jamuna is the name given to a particular type of silverware in Bengal. One side of the object is gold-washed, giving a lustre to the silver and providing a pleasing contrast. The name derives from the two mighty rivers of Bengal, the Ganges and the Jamuna. Where these two converge it is said that the different confluences have identifiably different colours, hence the name of the gold-washed silver. The Muslim Bengali psyche, too, can be likened to this phenomenon, for within it Islam and Bengali customs converge and flow together like the intermingled streams of the Ganges and the Jamuna. While these two streams contribute to the richness of the culture, they are also the source of an ambivalence which can, in its worst manifestations, be likened to a sort of schizophrenia. (Sobhan, 1994, cited in Thompson, 2007:35)*

This extract from Sobhan's (1994) essay aptly illustrates the importance and complexity of language in the identities of Bangladeshis. It also eloquently demonstrates the idea of 'unconscious hybridity' that is present within all languages and 'cultures' proposed by Bakhtin (1981). Language and religion were invoked, used and abused in forming Bangladesh, first during the division of Bengal under British rule in 1905 and then by dividing the newly created Pakistan in the war of independence in 1971. Bangla had been 'Islamicised' and 'Sanskritised', reformed and contested to varying degrees throughout its history (Thompson, 2007:37). Today the intermingled streams of

Bengali and Islamic languages and practices continue to form the basis of important identity issues.

Language can be one of the most important factors in creating and maintaining group identity and for drawing boundaries between social categories (Lawson and Sachdev, 2004:56). In Bangladesh this is certainly true, as the campaign for Bangla became a central part of protest and resistance against the Pakistani oppression of Bangladesh. The language movement, starting in 1952, eventually led to the war and independence for Bangladesh in 1971 (Thompson, 2007:40).

While it became a factor that unified people of different classes and religions, Bangla, like all languages is not homogenous. Within Bangladesh and West Bengal in India there are many varieties and dialects of Bengali (Thompson, 2007). Sylhet has its own dialect or regional language known as Sylheti. Roughly seven million people speak Sylheti in Bangladesh and it is also spoken by about 200,000 people in Britain, where 95% of Bangladeshis are Sylheti (Chalmers, 1996:6).

Whether Sylheti is a language in its own right or a dialect of Bangla is much debated. Chalmers (1996) points out that the distinction comes down to a semantic definition, made in Western terms which do not see multilingual societies as natural (Chalmers, 1996:6). In Bangladesh, Sylheti is one of several related speech varieties and is thus considered a dialect of Bangla. In the UK by contrast, Sylheti is the ordinary means of communication for a large group of people relatively uninfluenced by standard or *shuddho* Bangla and could thus be seen as a distinct language (Chalmers, 1996:6).

The reality is more complicated, most Sylheti speakers can understand a great deal of Bangla and vice versa. They are very closely related and speakers of Sylheti and Bangla in Bangladesh are exposed to each other and learn to communicate. No one in Bangladesh only speaks standard Bangla exactly as it is written and taught. Standard Bangla is the language of the majority of literature, education, film, media and official communication in Bangladesh. Almost everyone in Bangladesh can get by in standard Bangla even if they speak a very different dialect or language at home (Chalmers, 1996:6).

Lawson and Sachdev (2004) point out that these issues are rarely decided based on linguistic grounds alone, there are significant political and status based issues which further cloud the picture. In Bangladesh Sylheti is a 'diglossic' 'low' variety and standard Bangla is the 'high' variety (Lawson and Sachdev, 2004:50). Standard Bangla is regarded as the language of a tradition of literature and culture which Bengalis are proud of, while Sylheti is seen as a dialect or language with a relatively limited vocabulary and literary history. Sylhet is seen by many Bangladeshis as a conservative rural backwater compared to more sophisticated, liberal and dynamic urban centres such as Dhaka (Kabeer, 2000:195). Standard, *shuddho* Bangla is closely associated with Tagore's writing and the Calcutta dialect of Bangla (Chalmers, 1996:6).

This power balance is reflected in the international attitude towards Bangla and its dialects or regional languages. In Britain services and language lessons are offered in Bangla but rarely in Sylheti. Lawson and Sachdev's (2004) research was carried out with pupils studying for a GCSE in Bangla. Needless to say there is no GCSE in Sylheti and their respondents valued Bangla over



Sylheti. At Sylheti lessons in Tower Hamlets<sup>50</sup>, there were no course materials and the course relied on Chalmers' (1996) book 'Learning Sylheti'. The teacher of the Sylheti course said that Sylheti 'did not have grammar' and that it had a very limited vocabulary, we constantly mixed and were encouraged to mix, English into our sentences. The course was limited by a lack of resources and expertise for teaching Sylheti. It was also designed for use in the UK and made no reference to Bangla, no text was used, only a rough transliteration.

The SOAS Bangla course, on which I subsequently enrolled, was markedly different. Setting aside the huge differences in the resources, expertise of the teachers and cost, two interesting factors were revealed. One is the importance to Bangladeshis of how Bangla is portrayed and perceived in the outside world. People I met and discussed the course with in Bangladesh and Bangladeshis in Britain were very impressed that I was being taught by *the* William Radice. I was surprised that they had heard of him, but their association with the language and knowledge and admiration for SOAS's Bangla scholar were revealing. Once on the course, the hierarchy within Bangla was also made clear. Sylheti is near the bottom of the pile of dialects and versions of Bangla, with other Bangladeshi types just above it and the Calcutta-influenced standard Bangla firmly at the top. Rural Bangladeshi dialects were sometimes compared to archaic forms of Bangla now only found in poetry, but generally dismissed as rather coarse, rustic and undesirable.

The respect with which Bangla was treated at SOAS contrasts with the generally dismissive attitude towards Sylheti, which was reflected by the teacher in Tower Hamlets. He did not have

---

<sup>50</sup> This Sylheti course run by Tower Hamlets Council is perhaps the only Sylheti course in the world, which indicates the relative independence and importance of Sylheti in London compared to other places.

much reverence for Sylheti, it had no grammar, no beauty, no literature or poetry and it was often combined with English when required – it was only used for practical communication.

The contrast between the attitudes toward Sylheti and Bangla mirrors the status and the relationships between Sylhetis and other Bangladeshis and each group's relations with other groups. Many people say that animosity between Sylhetis and non-Sylhetis really only exists in the UK. In the UK this animosity is probably due to snobbery by elite urban Bangladeshis about British Bangladeshis from rural origins. This has become a Sylheti issue because these British Bangladeshis are predominantly Sylheti. In Bangladesh most of the interim government<sup>51</sup>, the founder and board of the influential Bangladeshi NGO, BRAC and many other prominent national figures are/were Sylhetis. British Bangladeshis that I spoke to found it surprising that upon visiting Bangladesh, the animosity towards them from other Bangladeshis did not materialise as they had expected. They were not looked down upon; *Dhakaiah* (people from Dhaka) did not hate them or treat them with contempt as they had believed they would.

This relationship is dynamic and is changing. Sylhet's links to London have brought in money. *Londonis* have become wealthy powerful people in Bangladesh and their power challenges some of these hierarchies. Sylhet is developing as education, international travel and communication become more common. Meanwhile, in London, British Bangladeshi children are growing up not exposed to standard Bangla or the hierarchies of language use in Bangladesh. Children in Islington ranked Sylheti very low in a ranking exercise for languages, which I will discuss below. They did

---

<sup>51</sup> Between 2006 and 2009 there was an interim, 'caretaker' military backed government in Bangladesh. Elections scheduled for 2006 were cancelled due to fears that they would be rigged. Eventually after just over two years of the interim government, elections were held and the Awami League won a landslide victory in December 2008.

not see much difference between Bangla and Sylheti. In discussion they did not believe that they were different languages, or that one was more or less important than the other. They did not recognise any antagonism or difference between Sylhetis and non Sylhetis. They were also unsure about whether Sylheti or Bangla was what is known as '*shuddho basha*' or the standard language.

Two things are at work here. The distinctions which academics and commentators make between Bangla and Sylheti, do not appear to be recognised by many people in Bangladesh or in London. Perhaps they are artificial or overblown, or perhaps like many issues, more of interest to academics than to anyone else. Still they may be indicative of important social change. Bangladeshi children in Britain see the Sylheti dialect spoken by their parents as the authentic Bangla and do not realise that it is a variety or dialect of Bangla. They are not taught Bangla at school and for them English and Arabic are the languages of culture and literature, not standard Bangla. I will discuss these attitudes and practices in more depth in the next section.

### **Language practices and attitudes among children in Islington**

Most of the children from my study communicated with peers and siblings at school, in the street and in other public places entirely in English, as did those in Ofsted's 2004 research about British Bangladeshi students (Ofsted, 2004:4). They used Sylheti with specific people in specific locations. When I attempted to speak Bangla to them in class they were sometimes embarrassed and told me not to. Pagett's (2006) study of children from different ethnic backgrounds at a primary school found similar attitudes. Children preferred to speak English at school and hardly spoke any of their parents' first language, were reluctant to talk it or found it hard to at school (Pagett, 2006:137). Citing Bourdieu (1986) and Carrington and Luke (1997), Pagett explains this in terms of cultural

capital. Speaking English allows children to 'narrow the social field' between themselves and their peers at school, giving them "*access to cultural and subcultural institutions, social relations and practices.*" (Carrington and Luke, 1997:143) This in turn gives them more chance of success socially, at school and later in life.

Sylheti was spoken mainly at home and in a few predictable phrases usually around issues of food and domestic activities. Some of the children hardly spoke any Bangla or were unwilling to, but understood everything their father or mother said to them in Sylheti. Often they understood their parent's Sylheti dialect, but responded mainly in English. Similarly, many of the mothers I met understood nearly everything said to them in English but found it difficult to respond fluently in English. Some families spoke more Sylheti at home than others - this depended to a large degree on parents' ability to speak English.

Rasinger's (2005) study of Sylheti and English usage in Tower Hamlets found that adults were most likely to use Sylheti in the home. He also found that there was an increasing use of English at home especially in conversations with children, speculating that this might be due to the desire to teach children English or due to children's refusal or inability to talk Sylheti (Rasinger, 2005:6). This was certainly the case among children in Islington. They found communicating in Sylheti hard and limiting, responding to their parents in English or switching to English after a short conversation in Sylheti. There is a strong possibility that while I was present, more English was spoken in the home and it is hard for me to tell whether more Sylheti was spoken when I was not there. However, I asked children about their language use at home while I was not present which I will discuss later.

Rasinger speculates that English is increasingly introduced to the home by children and that families with children use English more both at home and in interactions outside the home. This is a pattern that applied in Islington: children were more fluent in English than their parents, spoke it at home and helped their parents understand, read and write in English when they struggled. Ishrat explained how she sometimes helps her mother with words she does not understand.

B: *Ok, what about your dad?*

Ishrat: *My dad, he speaks Bengali.*

B: *Mainly Bangla?*

Ishrat: *Yeah.*

B: *When you speak to him do you speak in English or in Bangla?*

Ishrat: *Yeah sometimes when I speak ... he's not really born in England. He was born in Bangladesh and then he came to England so he doesn't know that much but he does know a bit, like normal.*

B: *So you speak to him in Bangla?*

Ishrat: *Yeah, mainly Bangla.*

B: *But do you have to help your um, um, do you have to help your mum and dad translating things for them?*

Ishrat: *No, like when we, like when my mum hears a new word she asks me 'what does that mean', like when she's reading something and she says 'Ishrat what's that?' and I say, 'this and that'<sup>52</sup>.*

---

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Ishrat, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 12.02.2008

Speaking English at home was one way in which the phrases, behaviour and relations of school entered into the home of British Bangladeshi families. Between siblings rapid conversations in English littered with slang would be hard to follow and totally incomprehensible to parents. These were a source of frustration for some parents feeling that their children were learning things that they themselves did not understand or that sounded like profanities learnt from peers or the television. This type of language was a means of resistance to parents by children who could communicate between themselves and had access to alternative sources of legitimacy and knowledge. Ishrat explained how her mother did not like her and her brother speaking 'slang'.

*B: So your brother speaks more Bengali than English?*

*Ishrat: No, he speaks English, but when my mum's not around because he speaks slang and my mum doesn't like that.*

*B: He speaks Bangla slang or English slang?*

*Ishrat: No, English slang. Just like my mum doesn't like it, he goes 'Yo, whassup' like that, ha ha<sup>53</sup>.*

Islington council provided an after-school Bangla class for the Bangladeshi pupils at the school. This was encouraged by parents and was provided free to pupils who wanted it. Mr. Akram, The teacher of the class was Sylheti, but as a well-educated Bangladeshi, he preferred to speak and teach the children *shuddho* Bangla and corrected what he thought was their 'incorrect' Sylheti. While one or two of the children were very competent at speaking and writing Bangla, there was very little Bangla spoken and most of the children struggled to write even the most basic letters. It

---

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Ishrat, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 12.02.2008

was very difficult to teach a group whose abilities and enthusiasm varied so widely. Some of the children clearly did not want to learn Bangla and did not afford it much importance. They found the class boring and unimportant, the low vitality of Bangla for them made them give the classes a low priority.

When we watched Bangla television channels at the children's homes they told me that they could not understand what was being said. They also claimed not to understand some of the 'standard Bangla' that I spoke, the children said things like 'oh we don't understand that *Dhakaiah*' (Bangla from Dhaka). Of course, this may have been because my Bangla was poor and difficult to understand for anyone, but in Sylhet I found that people understood my 'standard Bangla'. People in Sylhet spoke Bangla and Sylheti or a mixture of the two and probably were not aware of the distinction.

All of the children in my study (about 20 children, see the family trees in Appendix 1) were born and brought up in the UK. All of them had one parent who was the child of a migrant from Sylhet and had been brought up in the UK, or partly in Sylhet and partly in the UK and one who was brought up in Bangladesh and came to the UK for marriage. Like Ishrat, they usually spoke Sylheti with the more recently arrived parent. These parents who had come more recently for marriage had a variety of levels of ability in English. Some I met spoke almost no English whereas others were fluent and enthusiastic English speakers. Zakir, a ten year old from the school explained this regarding his parents:

B: ... *Do you speak Bangla or English at home?*

*Z: A bit of both, to my dad I speak, um Bangla because ... he can't really understand English but to my mum I sometimes speak Bangla but mostly I speak English and to my big sister I speak English as well.*

*B: Sorry, so you speak Bangla to your dad 'cause he can't understand very good English?*

*Z: Yeah, and he can't speak, um I think he can yeah but he can't speak in good English, then I don't really feel comfortable telling him in English so I start to speak Bengali.*

*B: Ok.*

*Z: But everyone else, yeah, they understand.*

*B: And so with your mum do you speak mainly English then?*

*Z: Yeah mainly English, sometimes I speak Bangla but because she can speak English.*

*B: So you usually speak Bangla with your dad,*

*Z: And the rest of the family mainly English but sometimes Bangla<sup>54</sup>.*

Zakir and his siblings spoke English most of the time and he usually spoke English with his mother. However, as his father had been brought up in Bangladesh and arrived in the UK more recently, his English was poor, so Zakir felt more comfortable speaking Bangla to him. With these parents, at home, children speak more Bangla than anywhere else, apart from on visits to Bangladesh. There were some surprising words that I found children did not know in English, usually words for South Asian family and food vocabulary. In interviews and discussions children would often get confused when discussing their cousins and uncles. They found translating the very specific names for kin in Bangla into English hard and in many cases did not know the correct Bangla terms for family members. They learned these terms during visits as they were in use, but once back in the UK, the terms became hazy and confusion between brothers, male and female, maternal and

---

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Zakir, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 29.01.2008



paternal cousins and uncles was common. One boy forgot how to say 'onion' in a conversation with me repeating the Bangla – '*piaz*' over and over again trying to remember its translation. Very young children often learn Bangla first or equal amounts of Bangla and English in a mixture as they learn at home with their parents and siblings, then they immerse themselves totally in English when they start school and often ignore Bangla. Many of them may come back to Bangla when they are older, taking GCSE's or learning it in their twenties.

The age group I have studied in this thesis may be the exception rather than the rule in this respect. I have seen groups of teenagers interchanging between English and Sylheti, but this was unusual among the primary school children in my study. In fact, there were differences between the attitudes towards language between the older and younger children aged between eight and twelve. Before they started school, children just learning to talk mixed their languages almost unconsciously to communicate as effectively as they can. Between the ages of 8 to 12, children like those in my study concentrated on improving their English and rejected Bangla, perhaps they will go on to rediscover Bangla later.

Seema, a Bangladeshi mother who worked for Islington Education Authority, talked about her children's abilities in Bangla and the change that came over her daughter when she started school. Seema grew up in London and usually talked English at home but wanted her children to learn Bangla.

*B: ... At home do you speak Bangla or English?*

*S: Oh, it's really bad actually, I probably speak English more than Bengali. Which consciously I try not to but it just comes out, I think I've just sort of grown up with*

*English ... and I sort of have to make an effort to speak Bengali but I really do want to because I mean, my son now, because I think I've realised that I, if I'm not speaking enough Bengali at home, his Bengali is a lot more better because I realised that with my daughter you know ... once she started school ... all the Bengali words completely went out the window. 'Cause at home you know at least it was a bit of both but once she got to school she'd always be talking to me in English and I'd be talking to her in English and then when she got older I realised actually she's not picking up enough of Bengali and sometimes when I'm speaking to her in Bengali she wasn't understanding me so, it's really important that I try, but it's easier said than done.<sup>55</sup>*

Parents were keen for their children to learn Bangla and some taught them at home or, like Seema, sent their children to private classes. When I interviewed Seema for a second time, later in my research she told me that her children had resisted the Bangla lessons she had sent them to and were now not attending them. Many were keen for their children to keep speaking Bangla at home to maintain a basic level of competency. They saw it as part of their 'culture', a link to Bangladesh and being Bangladeshi. As I mentioned before, there were free Bangla classes at Poynder primary School, so some parents were satisfied with those. However, most of the parents in Islington spent more time and money on their children's Arabic lessons than they did on learning Bangla.

Most of the children learnt Arabic and could often speak or write more Arabic than Bangla. Many British Bangladeshis increasingly identify more with Islam than they do with Bangladesh. The corruption of Bangladeshi politics, the association of Bangladesh with poverty and disaster and some of their experiences during visits turns young people away from identifying with Bangladesh

---

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Seema, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 21.11.2007

and Bengali traditions (cf. Gardner and Shukur, 1994:163). The increasing 'Islamification' of British Bangladeshis has created what Hussain (D., 2007) calls the 'Islam vs. Bangla division' where Bangladeshi (and Bengali) cultural practices are constructed as being in opposition to Islamic ideals (Hussain, D., 2007:202, cf. Glynn, 2002). This is something I will discuss in more depth in chapter 8.

## **Ranking languages and elements of identities**

In the language-ranking exercise and discussion, Arabic featured prominently. With two groups of six children, I conducted a ranking exercise for the various languages which, in discussions the children said that they spoke or knew. First, I had a general discussion about what languages the children knew and then I gave each child five cards, marked English, Bengali, Arabic, Sylheti and other. The children could designate the card marked 'other' as any other language.

I asked them to rank the languages first in terms of which language that they considered most useful and then which they considered most important. I recorded the discussion and the results of the pile sorting exercise. After the exercise I asked each child to explain why they had ordered the languages as they had. The discussion was interesting; I was taken a bit by surprise at the inclusion of Hindi, which I should have included from the start as an explicit choice. Hindi was mentioned in relation to films and drama series, which were loved and derided in equal measures. They were very popular with the mothers of many of the children and some of the girls but they were criticised for their Hindu religious content.

B: ... *So that's how you learn Hindi?*

Shirin: ... *It's like there's this drama, drama and then you watch it, there's like subtitles, subtitles on it and you can watch it.*

...

Faisal: *Star Plus and all that crap.*

...

B: *Star Plus and what?*

Faisal: *All of them crap.*

B: *D'you reckon they're crap?*

Tasneem: *Them Indian crap yeah.*

B: *Why are they crap?*

Faisal: *Because they do that, that whatever, this Hindu god thing...*

Tasneem: *Hindu thingy... eeeeeeeee.*

Faisal: *Hindu gods.*

B: *Hindu gods and you think that's crap?*

Faisal: *And they have eight legs.*

B: *Eight legs?*

Shirin: *Eight legs? No.*

Faisal: *Yeah.*

Tasneem: *Yes that's the Durga thingy.*

B: *What?*

Shirin: *Durga and the rituals.*

*(Laughter<sup>56</sup>)*

---

<sup>56</sup> Language pile sorting discussion, Older Group, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 07.05.2008

Whenever the topic of Hinduism came up in conversation there were mystical sound effects, rolled eyes, derision, disapproval and mock fear. The children reflected the attitudes perhaps of their parents and others in Bangladesh who are hostile towards Hindus and Hinduism. They made fun of the representations they had seen on television of Hindu gods and rituals but many of them enjoyed the dramas. Clearly the British Bangladeshi families associated with the storylines and entertainment of these dramas and Bollywood films, but drew a firm line between themselves and the Hindu characters and practices in the dramas.

The various languages the children spoke were associated with different spheres of their lives and different uses. Hindi was associated with watching television, with relaxing fun and also with the idolatry of Hindus. Arabic, as the excerpt from a discussion below shows, was associated with religion and with the Arabic classes many of them attended after school and on the weekends. Arabic was regarded with respect for its religious associations, but not associated with fun or relaxation. The children told me that Allah would punish them if they did not learn Arabic to read the Qur'an. English was the language of their academic work, school, siblings and friendships. Bangla speaking was confined to the home and to visits to Bangladesh. In the excerpt from the discussion below, Tasneem expressed clearly the boundaries that many of the children drew between these spheres of their lives. She also said that she had to speak Bangla at home as her mother did not speak very good English.

*B: Tasneem ... why do you think Arabic is the most important language in the world?*

*Tasneem: Because Allah said if you don't learn Arabic and all that he's gonna punish you.*

*Shirin: How do you know that?*

*Tasneem: Cause, mehsab said.*

B: *Mehsab, what's that?*

Tasneem: *A Arabic teacher.*

...

B: *Yeah, so your Arabic teacher told you.*

Tasneem: *Yeah and if you don't learn he's going to punish you in such a way that you'll, um that even, even [inaudible] that they won't be able to replace the skin and all that.*

B: *Oh, sounds horrible, who told you that?*

Tasneem: *Arabic teacher.*

B: *Your Arabic teacher?*

Tasneem: *Yeah and um, English because in school when you have to do maths and all that yeah how am I going to understand what's what and what to do and SATS and all that?*

B: *Yeah.*

Tasneem: *And then I put Bengali because at home I HAVE to speak Bengali.*

B: *You have to? Why do you have to?*

Tasneem: *My mum knows half of Bengali; I mean half of English so she don't understand all the high words.*

B: *High words? What's a high word?*

Tasneem: *Like hard words like big, big words.*

B: *Oh hard words. So do you know long words that she doesn't know?*

Tasneem: *Yes.*<sup>57</sup>

Bangla and Sylheti were associated with the British Bangladeshi transnational social field. In Islington the behaviour and language practices of this field do not extend much outside the houses

---

<sup>57</sup> Language pile sorting discussion, Older Group, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 07.05.2008

of the British Bangladeshi families. For the children, the 'Bangla speaking sphere', marking the rough boundaries of the British Bangladeshi social field, included their families, parents and households and their extended families who they saw on visits to Bangladesh, or in other parts of London and the UK.

Several of the children's parents could not speak very good English and so, like Zakir, Ishrat and Tasneem, the children talked Bangla or Sylheti to them. Some children's parents obliged or encouraged them to speak Bangla at home so that they would not 'lose it'. Here Laila, aged eight, explains why it is important to speak Bangla at home. For her it is not essential to speak Bangla at home, but she knows that if she does not she will not be able to speak Bangla when she goes to visit Bangladesh.

*Because if you keep on talking English every day at your house and then when you go Bangladesh you can't speak, you're going to keep on speaking English in Bangladesh so no one would really understand you.<sup>58</sup>*

The children seemed not to see Sylheti and Bangla as distinct. They did acknowledge that there were some words in the two dialects/languages that sounded different. There was some confusion about whether Sylheti or Bangla was *shuddho basha* (standard language) although it was agreed that *shuddho basha* was the best form of the language.

---

<sup>58</sup> Language pile-sorting discussion, Older Group, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 07.05.2008

B: ... *What about Sylheti, do you know what Sylheti is?*

..

Faisal: *Yeah.*

B: *What's that Faisal? What is it?*

Faisal: *It's another way of talking Bengali.*

...

B: *You think the same as him, Tasneem what do you think? What's Sylheti?*

Tasneem: *Sylheti's the way you speak like there's, if you come from Sylhet, some people talk Dhakaiyah [from Dhaka] and some people talk Sylheti.*

B: *What's the difference between Dhakaiyah and Sylheti?*

Laila: *Dhakaiyah is like shuddho basha and Sylheti's like normal.*

B: *What do you think?*

Tasmia: *Same.*

B: *But what's the difference between Sylheti and Bangla?*

Tasmia: *Same because Sylheti's shuddho basha.*

Jasmin: *No.*

Shirin: *No.*

Tasmia: *Yes, Sylheti's shuddho basha<sup>59</sup>.*

---

<sup>59</sup> Language pile-sorting discussion, Older Group, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 07.05.2008



### Languages pile-sorting results

Below are the results of the pile sorting exercise followed by a short analysis.

#### Which language do you consider the most useful?

|   | Faisal  | Laila   | Tasmia  | Shirin  | Tasneem |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1 | English | Bengali | Bengali | English | English |
| 2 | Arabic  | Arabic  | Arabic  | Arabic  | Arabic  |
| 3 | Other   | Sylheti | Sylheti | Bengali | Bengali |
| 4 | Bengali | Other   | English | Sylheti | Sylheti |
| 5 | Sylheti | English |         |         |         |

#### Which language do you consider the most important?

|   | Faisal  | Laila   | Tasmia  | Shirin  | Tasneem |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1 | English | Arabic  | English | Arabic  | Arabic  |
| 2 | Arabic  | English | Arabic  | Bengali | English |
| 3 | Bengali | Bengali | Bengali | Sylheti | Bengali |
| 4 | Italian | French  | Sylheti | English |         |
| 5 | Sylheti | Sylheti |         |         |         |

After the ranking exercise I added up the 'points' of each language. The lowest scores (for the highest ranks) represent the most useful and important languages. I omitted the category of 'other' if the language was unidentified as it led to such diverse responses and some participants left it out. French and Italian both featured once, so they accumulated very few points but are not actually considered that important or useful by the group.

Arabic: 17

English: 22

Bengali: 26

Sylheti: 41

In this ranking exercise the children (9-11) rated Arabic as the most important and useful language. English, Bangla, Sylheti and other languages of their choice trailed behind. They selected Arabic because of its associations to Islam. The wisdom and enlightenment they might receive through study and understanding of the Qu'ran and the punishment they believed they would receive if they did not learn it. Younger children (8-9) ranked English as the most important and useful and were not so preoccupied with Arabic. One boy in the younger group said no other languages were as important as English. They ranked Bengali as the second most important language. I have not included a full analysis of the younger group's ranking exercise and discussion as they seemed not to understand the process so well and produced a less sophisticated discussion than the older group.

Interestingly, English and Bengali top the most useful piles, with Arabic coming second for all the children. English and Bengali or Sylheti are the most spoken languages for the children so the

analysis makes sense. In the most important category, English and Arabic top the piles, with Bengali and Sylheti generally appearing lower down. This reflects the high status of English and Arabic even though Arabic is not often spoken or used apart from in religious contexts. This pattern reflects conclusions about the vitality of the different social fields that the children engage with that I have drawn from other sources.

Some of the older children said that English was not as important as other languages because it was 'easy', it came automatically to them. The banality and everyday, automatic nature of English and the contrast between this and the perceived important religious and cultural functions of Bangla and Arabic led them to see it as unimportant. The younger children, however, were still adapting to school and learning to be competent with and feel comfortable with English. For them it was an important and relatively new step. Their engagement in this process of learning English meant that they were not concentrating on learning Arabic or Bangla.

### **The differences between Tower Hamlets and Islington**

Raising's (2005) research in Tower Hamlets found that despite socio-economic indicators which would indicate the contrary, the 'language vitality' of Sylheti in Tower Hamlets was quite strong. He also found that there was relatively little inter-ethnic contact among Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets; many of his informants complained about not having many White British friends (Rasinger, 2005:6). In his study as I have mentioned before, the home and family was the principal place where Sylheti was spoken.

Language vitality is a concept from linguistics that uses social elements to explain language maintenance and shifts in language use. The higher the 'vitality' of an ethno-linguistic group the greater its chances of survival: if its vitality is very low it may cease to exist as a linguistic group altogether (Rasinger, 2005:2). The status of a group within society can help its 'language vitality', so a group with many high status members will have higher language vitality. The status of a language internationally also influences language vitality. A group speaking a language considered important internationally will have higher language vitality. Finally, the absolute and relative number of speakers of a language is influential on language vitality. A large group of speakers of one language gives it relatively high language vitality. Institutional support for a language can also strengthen language vitality (Rasinger, 2005:2). I will return to the concept of language vitality in more depth later.

There are significant differences between Bangla or Sylheti use outside the home in Islington and Tower Hamlets. In Islington there are fewer Bangladeshi people around to speak Bangla or Sylheti to. There are fewer Bangladeshi shops or businesses to visit, Bangladeshi staff in official positions or Bangladeshi children at school to be friends with; there were no Bangladeshi teachers at Poynder Primary School. The lack of inter-ethnic contact that Rasinger mentions in his work in Tower Hamlets is likely to be reversed in Islington where there is a lot of enforced inter-ethnic contact and Bangladeshis have relatively few fellow Bangladeshis to speak to. For these reasons the vitality of Bangla or Sylheti is likely to be considerably less in Islington.

In Islington, Bangladeshis are a minority among other minorities. Poynder Primary School is ethnically very diverse. Turkish and Somali children are more numerous than Bangladeshis. Other children in the school from Somalia and Yemen attend the same Arabic classes as the

Bangladeshis. In this way, language use in the ethnically diverse neighbourhoods outside the home is limited to transnational languages such as English – for education, employment and practical use and Arabic, for spiritual or religious education use. Bangla or Sylheti are even more confined to the home and family than they are in Tower Hamlets.

The socio-economic status of Bangladeshis in Islington is roughly equivalent to that in Tower Hamlets and the international status of Bangla is unchanged. The Bangladeshi community in Islington may have a lower status regarding the local authority in Islington as their number and proportion of the population is lower. They also probably receive less institutional support for Bangla as in Tower Hamlets as they make up a relatively small proportion of the borough's inhabitants. However, there was a concerted effort made by the education authorities in Islington to meet the needs of Bangladeshi heritage pupils.

Raisinger's speculation that English was increasingly being spoken in homes with children is true in Islington. Children may also have a greater effect on language use in the home in Islington than in Tower Hamlets. Children encounter fewer Bangladeshis in their daily lives and speak less Bangla/Sylheti as a result. Their use of Bangla/Sylheti is limited to some family encounters about specific issues. In many families they may speak as much English as they do Bangla/Sylheti, or speak mainly English with one parent. For almost all practical, official and social events they use English. As Seema points out above, English comes most naturally to many parents who are born in the UK. Their children are also likely to find English the easiest language to converse in as they use it all day for academic and social interactions at school. Children may still use Bangla for communicating with parents and grandparents who do not speak much English, but their interactions may be limited.

The home as part of a Bangla speaking sphere is weakening, but due to the associations with people and practices that children have, the home is still considered part of the British Bangladeshi transnational social field. The same types of capital are exchanged and valued and the same rules apply, even if they are sometimes discussed and contested in English rather than Bangla. Language practices may symbolise change however, Ishrat's brother uses English slang, unintelligible to his mother as a means of communication, a symbol of his knowledge and understanding of a world of which his parents have little or no knowledge and a means of resisting their Sylheti hegemony. Children may start to introduce other modes of behaviour and values to the home when they are older and able to be more assertive, but in the lives of my research subjects they were still subject to parents' rules. Many children reported having to speak Bangla or Sylheti in order to communicate with parents who spoke poor English. In Bangladesh, British Bangladeshis often speak Bangla/Sylheti and behave in similar ways to other Bangladeshis but due to practices and practicalities which distinguish them from other Bangladeshis they are still in the British Bangladeshi transnational social field. Alternatively, they may employ English like Saiful and Abdul did to symbolise their distance and superiority over locals, or attempt to attune their Bangla/Sylheti like Tarique did to build affinity with their family and friends.

## **Language in Bangladesh**

Visits to Bangladesh can be a source of frustration and/or progress in learning language and this can be crucial in fostering a sense of belonging or rejection. British Bangladeshis practice their Sylheti or Bangla with relatives and friends and in practical interactions during visits. Young British Bangladeshis get a chance to improve their speech and bring their language up to date with trends

in Sylhet. They may also feel excluded by their lack of ability and the archaic or simplistic way they have learned to talk in their home in London and this may heighten their feeling of not belonging.

On a flight from Dhaka to Sylhet I was sitting next to a young Sylheti man, who lived in Manchester. As the plane settled onto a steady course after its steep climb through the haze over the delta, he smiled at me, sucked on a sweet and unplugged the earphones of his ipod. He said hello and asked what I was doing and where I was going. Next, he tried talking in Sylheti to the air-stewardess. She told him in English that she could not understand what he was saying and that she could speak English. He was quite irritated by this and replied to her in his Manchester-accented English that he could not understand her English (her Bengali accent was quite strong). This interaction, apart from the simple mutual incomprehension, revealed many of the power relations and attitudes that are characteristic of the relations between *Londonis* and Bangladeshis.

The air stewardess, a well-educated young Bangladeshi woman, would have been required by her job to speak English. She acted out of professional helpfulness to the young man, who tried to speak to her, telling him that she could not understand him, but that he could talk to her in English if required. He had been speaking the kind of Sylheti he presumably normally talked with his relatives and friends in Manchester. Was the way he spoke as different from standard Bangla as to be incomprehensible, or was he just bad at Bangla? Either way, the air stewardess' incomprehension irritated him; he responded by casting aspersions about her grasp of English. Her English was not perfect, but neither was it bad, although it sounded very different to his Manchester English.

Air stewards and stewardesses are often rude to Bangladeshis on flights to and from the country. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable on flights to Middle Eastern destinations where Bangladeshi migrant workers go in their millions. There is an element of class snobbery and unequal power relations between the upwardly mobile air stewards and the working class labourers on flights to the Middle East in the condescension of the air stewards in those cases. However, I did not think that this was occurring in the same way on this internal flight in Bangladesh.

Perhaps the air stewardess found that visiting *Londonis* always expected Bangladeshis to speak Sylheti. Like many rich visiting foreigners they expect locals to speak and act in a way that suited them. Perhaps the man from Manchester felt that Bangladeshis were always derogatory about his Sylheti when he spoke it in Bangladesh. Both presumed that they were speaking the local language and both presumed that they were being expected to talk a language considered superior by the other. Their mutual incomprehension was not really about language but reflected the changing power relations and hierarchies among Bangladeshis both in Bangladesh and in London.

Bangladesh is developing economically and is increasingly connected to global media and trends. Levels of participation in education have been rising. In Sylhet more people speak English and standard Bangla than ever before. Many urban well-educated Sylhetis are quite shocked by the 'rough' rural old fashioned Sylheti that some *Londonis* speak. The perception is that *Londonis* still spoke Sylheti as if they lived in a remote village in the 1970s. The Sylheti or Bangla that middle class people in Sylhet speak is influenced by education and developments in Bangla. The Sylheti spoken by young *Londonis* is 'fossilised', as their contact with Bangladeshi society is limited; they learn and speak Sylheti mainly within their families and speak English with friends and siblings. They sound to locals like rough uneducated people from the country rather than residents of a



'world city' such as London. A teacher at a school in Sylhet where some *Londonis* had sent their children said that some of the children from London spoke Sylheti '*like farm labourers*'. In London, Bangladeshis told me how they were ridiculed upon their return to Sylhet for their old fashioned ways of talking.

## **Language vitality**

Earlier I introduced the concept of language vitality, discussed by Rasinger (2005) in his paper on language use among British Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets. Rasinger uses the idea of language vitality to assess the relation between Sylheti and English among his research subjects.

Rasinger's (2005) and my own observations seem to point to decreasing vitality and use of Bangla or Sylheti and increasing vitality of English and Arabic. In Islington, the relative vitality of English and Arabic is even higher than in Rasinger's research in Tower Hamlets due to the much smaller numbers of Bangladeshis. Is Bangla in Islington endangered?

UNESCO and other organisations use the concept of language vitality to assess endangered languages. UNESCO's (2003) ad hoc expert group on endangered languages outlines the evaluative factors for identifying an endangered language. It is clear that globally Bangla is not an endangered language and that British Bangladeshi families will continue to speak Bangla or Sylheti for the foreseeable future, but I think the evaluative factors set out in UNESCO's paper can help us to think about how languages are used or abandoned in certain settings and contexts. The work on language vitality that Rasinger (2005) and UNESCO (2003) review enables us to identify languages that have high or low vitality and speculate as to the reasons for this. In a multi-lingual

society several languages may exist side by side and may 'compete' on the basis of their vitality for common use. I would like to propose that a similar type of evaluation could be used to analyse the 'vitality' of different social fields and their habitus among a group of people.

According to UNESCO's international group of experts, language vitality should be analysed by six principal factors. These are: intergenerational language transmission, the absolute number of speakers, the proportion of speakers within the total population, trends in existing language domains, response to new domains and media and materials for language education and literacy. None of these factors should be considered alone as a telling sign of endangerment, but in combination they provide a guide to identifying endangered languages (UNESCO, 2003:9).

Taking Bangla/Sylheti speaking in Islington as an example, I will use some of UNESCO's scales to evaluate its vitality. 'Intergenerational language transmission' is the most widely used factor in evaluating language vitality. UNESCO's experts use a scale of six levels, from 'safe' (5) to 'extinct' (0) to assess this (UNESCO 2003:8). From the data that I have gathered among British Bangladeshi families in Islington, I would place most of my research subjects between levels 4 (unsafe) and 3 (definitely endangered). Many parents still speak Bangla or Sylheti to their children but the children often respond in English. Some parents find it easier to communicate most of the time with their children in English.

The phenomenon of speakers in the same conversation using different languages in the same conversation is known as 'code switching'. 'Code switching' or jumping between two or more languages in the same conversation is a very common practice. Code switching may fulfil many functions: to translate, clarify, elaborate or emphasise (Ng and He, 2004:29). Studies of

transnational communities in the US and New Zealand show that bi-lingual ability is strongly correlated to generation. By the 'second generation', people from non-English speaking backgrounds were bilingual and by the 'third' they only spoke English. In Ng and He's (2004) study of people of Chinese origin in New Zealand, all three generations spoke Chinese and English, but the 'grandparents' were far more comfortable with Chinese and the 'grandchildren' with English. This required code switching for different reasons and in different ways by the three generations (Ng and He, 2004:29).

As I discussed in chapter 3, the idea of second and third generations of immigrants does not apply very well to British Bangladeshis in Islington. Nevertheless, Ng and He's (2004) work is relevant to this discussion of the intergenerational transmission of languages. Ng and He (2004) describe two types of code switching in conversation - '*between turn*' code switching and '*within turn*' code switching. Between turn code switching is when someone replies to another person in a different language, switching languages in their 'turn'. It is also possible to switch languages within a turn, speaking two languages in the same sentence for example. Interestingly Ng and He (2004) link their analysis with the work of Giles, Coupland and Coupland (1991) and their 'communication accommodation theory' which deals with how people adjust their communication behaviour towards one another, why and with what effect. They make a distinction between 'divergent' and 'convergent' accommodation strategies. Language divergence is a sign of social disapproval, distancing or dissatisfaction, showing a lack of respect and solidarity. Ng and He suggest that within a family there will be a social pressure towards convergence and away from divergence and one would expect code switching to reduce as it is inherently divergent. However in many cases code switching may be unavoidable and other strategies employed to encourage 'convergence' (Ng and He, 2004:31).

Ng and He found that 90% of between turn code switching (ie responding to someone in a different language) by grandchildren was in English and 91% by grandparents was in Chinese.

Grandchildren directed their between turn code switching mainly at their parents and grandparents rather than their English speaking siblings. Code switching between generations was more often between turn code switching rather than within turn code switching. In Ng and He's study, parents acted as the bridge between the two monolingual generations and often 'mismatched' their between turn code switching, responding for example to children's conversation in Chinese so that the grandparents could understand what the conversation was about or to teach the child Chinese (Ng and He, 2004:37-44).

British Bangladeshi children in Islington speak Bangla/Sylheti out of respect to parents, grandparents or other relatives, a 'convergent accommodation' strategy. Otherwise they engage in code switching due to a lack of ability in Bangla/Sylheti. Bangla/Sylheti is used by these children in specific domains, their 'home' and on visits to Bangladesh and with specific people. How often and where this happens depends on the numbers of Bangla-speaking people British Bangladeshi children in Islington encounter. Earlier in a discussion of Rasinger's (2005) work I discussed the effects of the absolute and relative size of the community. In the case of the Bangladeshis in Islington, they are a small (about 4000 people) community living among a diverse range of ethno-linguistic groups. This reduces the vitality of Bangla or Sylheti as a language (UNESCO 2003:8-9). Of course, in London, there are many other Bangladeshis in other areas and many of the families I studied had family members in other parts of London. However, most of the children travelled around Britain and London or had contact with Bangladeshis from places other than Islington only very rarely.

The use of language in what linguists call 'domains' (spaces) provides another interesting set of factors for evaluating language vitality. Language use in existing domains will affect intergenerational transmission of a language. Where, with whom and about what topic the language is used are crucial to this. The UNESCO paper's scale on the domains of languages use, running from 'universal use' (5) to 'extinct' (0) is thought-provoking in terms of my own findings (UNESCO, 2003:9-10).

Bangla or Sylheti use among British Bangladeshis in Islington is a case of 'dwindling domains' (level 3). Other languages such as English and Arabic have gained ground on Bangla/Sylheti. British Bangladeshi children are now often 'receptive bilinguals' or semi-speakers of the language. Bangla/Sylheti is used in a limited set of domains for a limited set of purposes. Even in the home domain it is losing ground to Hindi through the television and to English through interaction with increasingly English speaking children.

In terms of the response to new domains and media, the picture is mixed; it would appear that most new domains are dominated by English. However, globalization and new technologies have linked relatively isolated British Bangladeshis in Islington with Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets and Bangladesh. As I explained in the last chapter, satellite television, the internet and mobile communication have enabled British Bangladeshis greater contact with Bangladeshis in Bangladesh. Bangla is not under threat in Bangladesh where a large population of native speakers makes it one of the most spoken languages in the world. Some of this vitality can be transmitted to British Bangladeshis through new media and domains created in the last few decades.

However, these new media, especially on television and on-line were used in a limited way by the British Bangladeshi children in my study. None reported watching Bangladeshi channels, preferring English or Hindi speaking television programmes. Their favourite sites on the internet, such as chat rooms, music and video streaming websites are also largely in English. The new domains and media that children use are clearly not mainly in Bangla/Sylheti. On UNESCO's scale this would be a level 1 (minimal) or 2 (coping) in terms of a language's use in new domains (UNESCO, 2003:11)

The UNESCO paper also mentions the use of the language in education and attitudes towards it from official bodies. As I have explained above, there is some provision of Bangla by the Education Authority through the school. There are some resources and curricula available for Bangla teaching, but they are quite poor. This gap is recognised by many Bangla teachers in the UK and attempts are being made to create more resources. Policy towards Bangla and other languages spoken by minority groups in the UK is vague. While some are examined later in education as GCSEs and A-Levels, they are not generally given the same priority as other languages in British schools such as French, German and Spanish.

Attitudes towards a language from within its community of speakers are also an important factor in its vitality (UNESCO, 2003:14). As I have outlined above, Bangla/Sylheti is facing stiff competition from English and Arabic in terms of the importance it is given by British Bangladeshi children. Despite the high esteem with which Bangla is held in Bangladesh, in the UK and certainly in Islington it is not considered that important. Children have little inclination or reason to speak it outside the home and attach greater symbolic value to speaking Arabic or English than Bangla/Sylheti.

Clearly Bangla use among British Bangladeshi children is under some threat from competing languages in Islington. Based on a comparison of my own ethnographic research with UNESCO's ways of measuring endangered languages, the experts would have reason to worry about Bangla in Islington. Clearly this comparison is false, contaminated by many links to areas and populations where there are much larger populations of Bangla speakers and Bangla has high language vitality. However this realisation raises some interesting questions about the associations that Bangla has to the children's ideas of their identities.

How much does the relatively low language vitality of Bangla in Islington correspond to a weak vitality for British Bangladeshi habitus, when compared to other competing habituses? The obvious use of English and the esteem for Arabic are indicative of a pattern in British Bangladesh children's identities away from Bangla and a sense of belonging to Bangladesh. Language and habitus are clearly different but I believe that using the concepts that I have outlined above to discuss the way in which different social fields overlap and interact may be useful.

### **Habitus or Social Field Vitality**

Rasinger's (2005) description of language vitality and UNESCO's (2003) application of the concept to endangered languages could be extrapolated to thinking about the interaction between different social fields and their corresponding habituses. Like a language, the size and relative status of a social field to others are important in its 'vitality'. The international status of a social field as well as the level of institutional support they receive also helps them to flourish or cease to be significant. For example in India's diverse population, small but high status groups such as Parsees have

survived while larger but lower status groups such as many *adivasis* (indigenous groups) have ceased to exist as coherent groups.

The extent of the domains in which the habitus of a particular social field are used, entirely, partly or not at all depend on the vitality of that social field, just like a language. Certain domains are associated strongly with certain social fields and languages, so that for example it becomes difficult or embarrassing for a British Bangladeshi child to speak Bangla at school; they associate Bangla with their 'home' and family either in London or in Bangladesh. Similarly, 'Bangladeshi' ways of behaving associated with home or with Bangladesh are deeply embarrassing to children when employed by their parents in the wrong context at school. The overbearing, doting parenting that many British Bangladeshi boys enjoyed at home, as their mothers waited on them, hand fed them, cleared up their mess and performed even the most basic of tasks for them, became deeply embarrassing at school where as James (1993) describes, autonomy and capacity to perform basic tasks oneself are markers of maturity and status (James 1993:114-115).

There is an element of competition between languages and social fields. When the vitality of a particular language grows stronger than others it starts to intrude upon the domains and topics usually associated with these languages. In the same way the habitus associated with social fields with a strong vitality may start to encroach upon weaker social fields. There are no hard edges to these overlapping and competing social fields. These are vague and fluid terms and the habituses of different social fields may be very similar except for certain specific practices or dispositions. Practices and dispositions (habitus) from one social field can co-exist happily with those from another in the same space or domain. Children learn when to use different elements of each habitus and when not to. One habitus, having a higher vitality, may start to become more common



in the domains associated with another social field and slowly erode the vitality of that social field. Just like UNESCO's (2003) scales, there may be a gradual decline in the range and frequency in the use or expression of certain practices and dispositions.

Like languages it is possible for people to be fluent in several habituses and employ them when and where they feel it is appropriate. They may also be more comfortable and skilful at employing certain elements of one habitus than others. They use elements of certain habituses to show respect or 'convergent accommodation' towards others who share that habitus. With other people who are familiar with the finer details of two or more habituses, people can 'switch codes' using references and modes of behaviour from several different social fields in the same interaction. Elements of a different habitus may also be used, like language, to distinguish one group of people from another, a 'divergence strategy'. This analogy allows us to neatly conceptualise, using the language of linguistics, the way in which different social fields interact.

## **Conclusions**

Through studying the language practices of British Bangladeshi families in Islington I have been able to analyse attitudes towards elements of their identities. English and Arabic dominate children's ideas of which languages are important. Bangla and Sylheti are not considered to be different and the hierarchy assumed in Bangladesh and among Bangla scholars between Bangla and Sylheti is not recognised by these children.

Languages are associated with different social spheres of fields and physical domains. The children in my study associated English with school, Arabic with religion and Bangla/Sylheti with

their homes in Islington and Bangladesh. They reported speaking English to friends and siblings during play, either in the playground at school or in public. This rough idea of the physical and social spaces which correspond to different but overlapping social fields has helped me to organise my analysis and thesis around these social fields.

English and Arabic and Hindi are encroaching upon the subjects, people, times and places where Bangla and Sylheti had dominance. In the homes of British Bangladeshis in Islington English is increasingly used for conversations involving children. Hindi is used to understand television programmes and films but this interaction is limited. Children expressed disapproval of some of the religious practices associated with Hindi such as the Hindu rituals that they had seen dramatised on television. English is used for an increasing range of interactions in school and in public for education, business, peer and sibling relations. English is also used in the home in conversations with parents, where they speak English and/or the subject matter is beyond the ability of the children in Bangla/Sylheti. Children felt comfortable with English and in discussion either recognised its importance to their lives or relegated it to an automatic, banal language.

Parents are keen for children to learn and maintain their levels of Bangla as they see it as a key component and marker of Bangladeshi identity. Parents born or brought up in the UK often use English with their children and acknowledge the difficulties of learning and maintaining Bangla/Sylheti in Islington. The concept of language vitality helps us to understand why other languages apart from Bangla/Sylheti are considered more useful and important for British Bangladeshis. In terms of status and the relative and absolute size of the British Bangladeshi community in Islington, Bangla/Sylheti is relegated behind other higher status and more widely spoken languages. In other contexts however Bangla/Sylheti may rise in status, the hierarchy of

languages and habituses depends on the place and context. As power relations between groups and identities shift in different places so the practices and languages that are associated with them also shift and realign themselves.

The concept of language vitality helps us to analyse the extent to which languages gain or lose ground to competitors in a multilingual environment. Endangered languages are measured by UNESCO using a series of indicators which inform an analysis of the vitality of Bangla among British Bangladeshis in Islington. We can see from this analysis that Bangla has a relatively low vitality compared to other languages. Using UNESCO's scales we can see that Bangla is 'endangered' in that it is losing ground to English and Arabic among British Bangladeshis in Islington.

We can draw an analogy from language to wider cultural factors. The status afforded to the topics, places, people and ideologies associated with certain languages is informative. We can use the concept of language vitality to speak about the way in which different social fields and their associated modes of behaviour or habitus compete, gain or lose members and social or physical space relative to one another. We can also understand the way in which several habituses can occupy the same physical space and be employed by one person depending on the circumstances.

In the chapters that follow this I will discuss two other social fields that the children in this study occupied and engaged with, the school and their Islamic identities. Through these ethnographic accounts I will discuss how and why these social fields have such vitality for the children and/or their parents. I will also explain the attempts of people within these social fields to reproduce the

ideologies and habitus through socialisation of children and the way in which the responses of the children, their resistance, ambivalence and reverence makes social 'reproduction' actually the production of social change.

## 7 British Bangladeshis in Education

In this chapter I will describe attitudes towards education among British Bangladeshis in Islington, based on my research in Poynder Primary School in London. I will describe the dynamic between pupils, staff and teachers, the atmosphere in the classrooms and the staffroom. I will compare these attitudes and findings with other similar research. I will discuss attitudes among British Bangladeshi parents towards the school, the education system and more broadly the idea of education.

One argument of this chapter is that the British Bangladeshi parents from Poynder primary School do not share the same ideas about education and pedagogic techniques as the teachers and education authority staff. They have an understanding of pedagogy, schooling and the education system that does not value the social elements of education such as extra-curricular activities. They do not trust the school to deliver a 'moral' education and see that it is not delivering Islamic religious education. They, therefore, seek to supplement their children's education and counter what they perceive to be the secularising effects of the school with private religious education, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Using the example of extra-curricular activities, which Bangladeshi pupils do not attend as much as other pupils, I will describe the effects parents' ideas have on relationships with teachers and their children's education. I will argue that while British Bangladeshi parents in Islington do not see the school as a legitimate source of knowledge and guidance beyond strictly academic subjects, their

children do. The British Bangladeshi pupils in my research generally found school enjoyable and stimulating; they accepted its rules and logic and had good relationships with their teachers.

Due to this uneasy relationship, British Bangladeshi children miss out on some of the reproductive effects of the education system. This has an ambivalent effect, at once inhibiting them by limiting their chances of learning social skills, but also freeing them from some of the class subjectivities learnt by other children in the school. However, my research indicates that the British Bangladeshi children in this study would like to be more involved in the school. They enjoy both the official learning and unofficial interactions they have in the school with teachers and peers. They readily accept the legitimacy of the pedagogy and the messages of the education system and find the system of rewards and punishments easy to understand and fair. This is important because it strengthens the vitality and legitimacy of the social field of school even in the face of some criticism from parents.

I will discuss pupils' experiences and feelings in class and in the playground. I will also discuss the attitudes of teachers and other staff towards the pupils and parents and the views of the British Bangladeshi parents from my study. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), and Bourdieu (1984) I will describe the function of the school in reproducing British society and ideas about class and taste.

### **From the National to the Local**

British Bangladeshis are a disadvantaged group in more ways than one, as I discussed in chapter 3. One manifestation of this disadvantage is their relatively poor performance in education. Until

recently, the attainment of Bangladeshi pupils was below national averages at all levels of education. Ofsted's (2004) report on the achievement of Bangladeshi heritage pupils explains that from the early years of school in key stage 1, through key stages 2 and 3 and in GCSE results, Bangladeshi pupils are below the national average. After the age of 16, British Bangladeshi participation in adult education and job-related training is less than for other groups. In higher education, British Bangladeshis and especially women are significantly under-represented. (Ofsted, 2004:9).

### GCSE figures from the National Pupil Database 2001/2002

#### Bangladeshi pupils

| Gender | Total no. of pupils | Total average Points | % of pupils With 5 A*–C | % of pupils with 5 A*–G |
|--------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Male   | 2,458               | 35.63                | 39.7                    | 91.2                    |
| Female | 2,391               | 41.65                | 50.5                    | 95.2                    |
| All    | 4,849               | 38.60                | <b>45.1</b>             | <b>93.2</b>             |

#### All other pupils

| Gender | Total no. of pupils | Total average Points | % of pupils With 5 A*–C | % of pupils with 5 A*–G |
|--------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Male   | 263,957             | 38.42                | 46.2                    | 92.4                    |
| Female | 259,146             | 43.44                | 56.6                    | 94.6                    |
| All    | 523,103             | 40.91                | <b>51.4</b>             | <b>93.5</b>             |

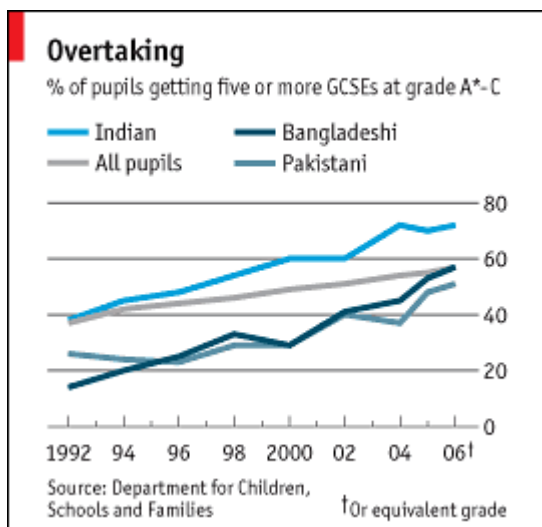
Table taken (and modified) from Ofsted, 2004:25

The report points to the fact that many Bangladeshi pupils have to learn English as a second language when they first enter school at the age of 5. They usually make rapid progress in English and are on a par or ahead of their English speaking peers by the end of Key Stage 2, at age 11. The report acknowledges that local and individual factors are as important as ethnicity in these respects and Bangladeshi pupils show as much variation between schools as other groups (Ofsted, 2004:9).

There is evidence that the attainment of British Bangladeshi students is improving and has risen above the national average (The Economist, 2007). The graph below illustrates this and shows that since 2004, attainment has risen significantly. In Islington, Bangladeshi attainment throughout school education is rising steadily, overtaking other ethnic minority groups. Attainment by Bangladeshi pupils in Islington is also higher than that in other boroughs of London (Islington Education Authority, 2008). What the graph below shows and the Ofsted report also shows is that Bangladeshi pupils are often compared with pupils of Indian or Pakistani origin and their comparison with Indian pupils, in particular, is often unflattering.

The Ofsted report shows that compared to pupils from similar socio-economic backgrounds, Bangladeshi pupils perform well. The correlation between free school meals (FSM) eligibility and attainment at GCSE level is less strong for Bangladeshi girls and boys than for other groups (Ofsted, 2004:9, DfES, 2006:18). Brooker, (2002) emphasises this point and claims that FSM and other indicators of poverty and low educational attainment may not be very effective. There appears to be a weaker correlation between disadvantage and educational attainment and a weaker correlation between FSM and deprivation among British Bangladeshi students (DfES, 2006:17). As I have observed in my own fieldwork, some pupils may not eat the free school meals they are entitled to for religious reasons, believing them not to be *halal*.





From The Economist, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007

Bangladeshi children's national and local attainment figures were discussed at a meeting in December 2008, the 'Bangladeshi Education Forum' at Islington Education Authority's administrative building. We ate curry from a local restaurant and a member of the Education Authority staff gave a presentation on the 2008 attainment statistics. In January 2008 Bangladeshi pupils made up 7.3 % of the pupils in Islington schools – 1606 pupils. Students of Bangladeshi origin have shown considerable improvements over the last three years and have outperformed 'Turkish', 'Black African' and 'Black Caribbean' students (Islington Education Authority, 2008). When compared to these groups Bangladeshis seemed to be doing well.

I asked why Bangladeshi children were being compared statistically with these three particular groups, thinking that they were being compared to low attaining groups in order to paint a rosy picture. The presenter replied that the groups selected represented the largest ethnic minority groups in the borough's schools. Turkish, Bangla and Somali in that order were the main languages other than English spoken by children at home. The attainment of all these groups and

indeed of Islington schools, although they are recently much improved, is some way below the national average (Islington Education Authority, 2008, DCFS, 2008).

Poynder Primary School is a relatively new school, so figures only exist for the last few years. The school has a very high percentage of ethnic minorities (79.3%) and English as an additional language (EAL) pupils and the highest percentage of pupils of any primary school in the borough eligible for free school meals, almost 70%. This is well over the local authority average of 43% and more than four times the national average of 16%. Bearing these statistics and the deprivation of Islington as a borough in mind and the negative effect that low social status has on exam results nationally (National Statistics, 2004), it is unsurprising that the school does not perform well by national standards. However, along with other Islington schools, attainment at Poynder Primary schools is rising. In the year I was at the school, results of the Key Stage 2 SATS were very good, and Bangladeshi pupils performed very well.

## **Teachers and staff**

The teachers and other staff at Poynder Primary School were quite a mixed group. There were more women than men, although there were several very nice male teachers. There were several Australian members of staff and many of the temporary supply teachers who came from an agency were also Australian. The most senior teachers taught the oldest classes. There was a range of teaching support staff, teaching assistants, reading volunteers and visiting teachers. I was made to feel welcome in the school. The staff were intelligent, committed and kind and they created a supportive, caring and well-organised system in the school. I heard many tales about the children

and life as a teacher over cups of coffee or a sandwich in the staff room. I learned a lot from these interactions about life in a school and attitudes towards children and the education system.

On several occasions staff shared horror stories about children or families they had known either in Poynder Primary School or at other schools. Just as I had initially been shocked by some of what I had seen and experienced in the area (see chapter 2), they too had been shocked by some of what they had witnessed as teachers. They told me stories of bad behaviour, strange parents and child abuse they had come across. I realised that I was experiencing emotions and issues similar to those that many of these teachers had experienced before. Many of us were from similar White, middle class backgrounds and we shared a lot of references and views, what Bourdieu would call our 'class habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984:101).

Working as a teacher's assistant undoubtedly helped my research, as I managed to get good access to the school and the children. I quickly realised that I would have to guard against becoming 'one of the teachers', a danger I have discussed in chapter 2. I had to be aware that I was not one of the teachers, that I was studying the children, the school and its staff, not working in it. I had to maintain good relations and trust with children and parents as well as the staff. I also tried to maintain a level of 'objective' distance.

The education system and teachers at the school were dominated by White middle class people. The whole system had been designed and run by White middle class people. Books by Jacqueline Wilson, Shakespeare, Roald Dahl and Phillip Pullman were on the shelves and the curriculum. Songs from *Oliver* the musical, abstract art, Turner's paintings and 'The Highwayman' by Alfred Noyes were taught. Trips during the year included going to the opera, ballet, London Zoo and to

see a Shakespeare play. Magazines, comics, r'n'b, hip hop and grime music were frowned upon, winced at and banned. Football represented perhaps the biggest challenge to this middle class monopoly, although football and the local team Arsenal have become middle class obsessions now. There were other good reasons why Arsenal Football Club was popular among the students and staff; they provided coaches for PE once a week.

Environmentalism was another staff-led phenomenon in the school. In the year I was at the school, there were numerous environmental activities. In one of these, a visit from a local theatre group, the children were encouraged to '*reduce, reuse, recycle*' and to chant this mantra at anyone they saw wasting unnecessarily. I was on the receiving end of this a couple of times, my hand guiltily above a rubbish bin.

The 'legitimate' culture described by Bourdieu (1984) in *Distinction* about class and taste, was what was being taught by teachers, along with some of the more acceptable types of popular culture. The attributes of culture, food or music deemed excellent by the ruling class are 'legitimate' (Bourdieu, 1984:2). According to Bourdieu, social class is determined by these tastes and the resulting 'cultural capital' more than social or economic capital (Bourdieu, 1984:69). These internalised tastes or cultural capital are 'inherited' from family and learned in early childhood or learned in education (Bourdieu, 1984:80-81). In the case of British Bangladeshi children, while they learn a set of tastes at home before starting school, many of the references and distinctions that they have learned to make do not apply in wider society, so they are influenced by their teachers' or peer's tastes and the school plays an important role in teaching them not just the educational curriculum but also cultural capital. They may have a different inherited cultural capital from their parents but can learn about 'legitimate' tastes and dispositions at school (Bourdieu, 1984:81).

While Bourdieu claims that attempts to learn or change cultural capital over the course of later childhood or life can lead to unconvincing social displays (Silva, 2005:87), in the case of British Bangladeshis, class is not the only type of differentiation applied to them. Race, ethnicity and religion emerge as important elements of identity and boundaries between British Bangladeshis and other groups in British society. Any 'unconvincing' displays of taste and cultural capital can be explained by a mixture of late acquisition of cultural capital and 'cultural' differences.

Just as I fitted neatly into the school's fold, White middle class children find the system coherent and easy to understand. Those from other backgrounds may find it difficult, or counter-intuitive. I will discuss this further in a review of Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) ideas about cultural reproduction. Children would sometimes flaunt their love of some particularly distasteful music, fluorescent food, violent computer game or mindless television programme to wind up staff. Staff were horrified at some of the packed lunches the children ate and disapproved of the television, websites and computer games they were obsessed with. How can you live on bread and butter and what is the big deal about *High School Musical* anyway? These games, ideological battles and disapproval sow the seeds for class distinctions, intergenerational conflict and hierarchies of 'cool' early on.

There was sympathy from the staff for children who they felt were not given the 'proper' support that they needed. There was anger about the mistreatment or neglect of children by parents. Teachers had access to confidential social services files on children and families, so that they were aware of the specific issues and needs of children. There was also fear, as some parents occasionally became angry with teachers. Parents' evenings were held communally in the school

hall to avoid teachers having to be alone with parents in case of attack. Several attacks had occurred in years gone by and this policy had been adopted as a result.

This atmosphere of mutual mistrust and misunderstanding was not universal; it arose occasionally. On most occasions teachers were positive and full of praise for children and parents whom they knew and liked. On others they sympathised with parents who had naughty children. They felt that they had the best interests of the children at heart. They had good training, rules and regulations to back them up and that they were legally obliged to follow. The rules were sometimes resented but generally acknowledged to be for the best. As I have said, the atmosphere in the school and among the staff was positive and effective. Here I am concentrating on class dispositions as it is relevant for my thesis rather than because class animosity between parents and staff was a problem at the school.

One aspect of the relationship between the staff and families attached to the school was the disapproval that occasionally surfaced from teachers about the care given to some of the children or the behaviour of parents. The teachers were a well-educated group, specialists in children and education, trained in how to create a safe and beneficial environment for children. They could be critical of parents who were 'doing the wrong thing' or not caring for children 'correctly'. There was, for example, a campaign about lateness and parents could be prosecuted and fined for persistent lateness.

I was struck by this atmosphere of disapproval and judgement in the 'Harvest assembly' in October 2007. The whole school had gathered in the hall of the school to watch performances from each class about harvest, food and express gratitude for the plenty that we enjoy. It was the middle of

Ramadan and most of the Bangladeshi parents and some of the children were fasting. Still they attended, filing in quietly; I helped them secure good seats. There were two rows of seats at the back of the hall for parents. The children sat in their classes in rows on the floor in front of them. Teachers sat to the sides on chairs beside their respective classes. Each teacher led his or her class up to the front to perform a song or act about the harvest.

There was a conscious attempt to be multicultural and take a global perspective. Year one sang along to a music video from the BBC website based on a Bollywood song tune - 'Welcome to the Autumn Harvest'. In the video Punjabi dancers and musicians in turbans and a multiracial cast of children sang and danced to the song all set in the English countryside. I sat there taking the scene in; there was so much to see and such a cocktail of different messages and influences. After the Punjabi harvest song, another class sung the Isley Brothers' 'Harvest for the World'. Then a priest, who is a governor of the school, stood up and led a prayer, quickly and apologetically mentioning Jesus towards the end. The audience, who were mostly Muslims, ignored him.

Throughout the assembly the parents sitting at the back were by far the worst behaved group in the hall. Such was the constant cacophony of chatting, whispering, crying babies, mobile phones going off, waving video cameras, comings and goings, that at one point the headmistress stopped the whole assembly to tell the parents off. There were rolled eyes and sighs from the staff as she told the parents that the children had worked very hard on their performances and please to stay quiet so everyone could hear. Compared to some of the parents, the Bangladeshi mothers in attendance were relatively well-behaved. They confined their mischief to whispering to each other occasionally and giggling at some of the acts

## Parents

Evidence from my research and other research indicates that British Bangladeshi parents generally have high aspirations for their children and value education. Despite, or perhaps due to their own often limited educational experience and qualifications, they see educational achievement as a means to better job opportunities and greater social status for their children (Ofsted, 2004:5, Murshad, 2002:107).

Crozier and Davies' (2006) research about Bangladeshi and Pakistani families and education in two towns in the North East of England is an attempt to challenge stereotypes about parents from these communities as being uninterested in education or as having unrealistic expectations of their children (Crozier and Davies, 2006:679). In their research, fathers of the families tended to have more involvement in the children's education and contact with schools than the mothers (Crozier and Davies, 2006:681). Among the families in my study the reverse was true, although the deciding factor was not really gender or a lack of interest but time, ability to speak English and understanding of the education system. Many of the mothers of children were more involved with the school because they spoke better English than their husbands, understood the school better, perhaps having spent some time in British schools themselves and had more time to bring children to school and collect them in the afternoon. In some families, the fathers were more competent in English and/or had jobs which allowed them time to come to school at the relevant times. In those cases they were often involved in contact with the school more than their wives.

Bangladeshi parents from Poynder Primary school were well-informed and opinionated about education and the school. They had their own ideas about education and were often critical of the



school. In this excerpt from a discussion with Bangladeshi mothers from the school they discuss academic standards.

B: *Do you think the academic level, maths, science, English is good?*

Shaju: *I don't think so.*

Husnahena: *No.*

B: *No? It's not good enough?*

Halima: *No it's not good enough.*

B: *It should be higher?*

Shaju: *More help....*

B: *More help?*

Halima: *No homework class, nothing.*

B: *So you think the academic thing is not high and you would like more?*

Halima: *Yeah, that school is one of the lower level....*

Husnahena: *I heard this school...*

Shaju: *44 schools in Islington, primary schools and Poynder is coming, this school is number 40.*

Ruby: *It's not good.*

Shaju: *I don't like this position, you know<sup>60</sup>.*

As well as being concerned about the academic performance of the school, some parents were concerned about the ethos and morals demonstrated by adults in the school. One mother complained to me at an Eid party, that the staff smoked and took drugs. In a long and wide-ranging

---

<sup>60</sup> Discussion about Education and Marriage, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 27.11.2008

complaint she attacked the British government, the history of colonialism and oppression of Indians and Bengalis, police racism and the school all together:

*I know most of the teachers smoke and the volunteers take drugs ... Why should we feel ashamed to be on benefits when the British were stealing from our people, sucking our blood in the empire?*<sup>61</sup>

Most of the mothers at the party did not share or outwardly express these views. Many, however, shared a lack of faith in the altruism of the school and educational authorities in general. These complaints were part of a general mistrust of the British state, from the Prime Minister and parliament down through the local authorities to the school and some of the staff from the school. The specific complaints about smoking and drinking were manifestations, confirmations of this mistrust. At one point several of the parents were convinced that some Islington schools had disproportionate numbers of ethnic minority pupils while others were reserved for White children. This feeling extended into discussions I had with parents later about Britain's imperial past and present involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Among the staff in the school, often shocking tales of neglect or negligence by parents were shared and some felt that they were the 'real' carers of 'their' children. On one occasion a teaching assistant bossily told the Bangladeshi mother of a child at the school that she was perfectly capable of taking proper care of the child in question for the day and the mother's 'interference' was not welcomed. The mother had been telling the teaching assistant to make sure that the child wore her coat out to play as it was cold. The teacher's assistant felt that she could judge the

---

<sup>61</sup> Quote from a conversation at an Eid Party, 17.10.07

weather and communicate with children about whether they needed to wear their coats. The mother was angry at the teacher's assistant's attitude, which she perceived to be blasé and haughty and complained bitterly to me later. Both felt their competence and legitimacy as the carer of the child was being undermined by the other. The legitimacy of being an official, professional carer highly valued and taken seriously by the school's staff was not respected by the parent who assumed a more primordial claim to legitimacy over decisions about her child's welfare.

Many of the British Bangladeshi parents were very concerned that the education of their children should include some element of moral education and be in line with Islamic principles (cf. Crozier and Davies, 2006:687, Murshad, 2002:107). This was one of their main worries about the school and its activities. It was also the source of some of their dissatisfaction with the school, a dilemma which Murshad (2002) explains based on his research:

*Parents wanted learning and education to cater for the requirements of this life as well as the life hereafter with a strong emphasis on the teaching and learning of their own religion and culture. (Murshad, 2002:107)*

Bangladeshi parents from Poynder Primary School were very sensitive to cultural and religious issues, continuously guarding their children and checking the appropriateness or *halal* status of school activities. Islamophobia and racism were issues which worried them constantly. In the very mixed environment of Islington, there was not the provision for Muslims that there might have been in schools dominated by British Bangladeshis, such as those in Tower Hamlets. Local secondary schools in Islington do have a specifically Muslim dress code for girls in their school uniforms and this was appreciated by parents. Even so, some parents chose to send older children to private

Islamic schools, either in Tower Hamlets or further afield. I asked them why this was. In part, one said it was in response to bullying at a local secondary school; another said that she wanted her daughter to be 'more Muslim' and receive an Islamic education. I will discuss Islamic education and identities further in chapter 8.

Parents were positive and appreciative of the Bangla lessons offered by the school. In many parts of the UK British Bangladeshis arrange Bangla lessons privately in community centres or mosques for their children, but Bangla was offered as an after-school club in the school and was taught in local secondary schools, so there was not such a big market in this part of Islington for Bangla tuition.

Some parents with poor levels of English and a poor understanding of the education system found the activities, stories and communications from schools hard to understand. Some, for example were unable to understand school reports and this was a barrier to good communication about their children's progress and attainment. In one family there was confusion about the complex grading system used by the school, which gave grades for both progress and attainment. These were confused with each other and on one occasion when I was present, assumed to be SATS results. This resulted in a tearful argument between parents and children over the report. Some parents relied on their children to interpret reports for them or translate at parents' evenings (cf. Crozier and Davies, 2006:683). Many parents felt that even though they wanted to, they could not help their children with homework or school work as they did not properly understand the language or tasks.

Like Murshad's (2002:107) respondents in Tower Hamlets, the parents in my study found it difficult to effectively communicate their views and perceptions about education with teachers. I witnessed

a parent attempting to ask a teacher whether there had been any homework set for her son's class in the last week and if not, why not. The exchange was not very successful, mainly due to the teacher taking offence at what she perceived as a bossy and critical tone from the mother, who found hitting the right balance between the correct levels of assertiveness and politeness difficult.

The pupils surveyed in Ofsted's (2004) research knew that their parents wanted them to achieve at school and noted that: "*people look down on you if you are not educated.*" The Ofsted report opines that the prestige and opportunities for material and status improvements offered by education were prioritised more than "*its intrinsic value or its capacity to open doors to rewarding life choices*" (Ofsted, 2004:14). This is an interesting finding which strikes at the heart of the relationships between British Bangladeshis and the British state and British Bangladeshis' understandings of education, success and ultimately identity.

In my own research, I was stuck by the high regard for education among British Bangladeshi parents which is also noted in the Ofsted report. However, I found, like Murshad, (2002:107) and Brooker, (2002), that what constitutes 'education' for teachers, educationalists and perhaps a White middle class group in British society, is different from what British Bangladeshis understand it to be. A good example of the way in which expectations of education among Bangladeshi parents and the realities of ideas and practices in schools do not match is described in Brooker's (2002) book following a group of reception class children (aged 4) during their first year of school.

Brooker investigated how young children starting school learn to adapt to the 'culture' of learning, of the school and of pedagogy. She looks at the influence on this 'successful' adaptation of the

home experience. Half the subjects of Brooker's study were Bangladeshi, making it an interesting comparison of how Bangladeshis fare in the education system and why many of them struggle. Brooker uses Bourdieu's (1977) ideas of primary and secondary 'habitus' to describe two stages of children's socialisation. The primary socialisation takes place within the family and involves learning to be a child and the development of a primary 'habitus' between 0-4 years. The secondary socialisation or learning to be a pupil and member of a society happens after 4 years and develops the secondary 'habitus' through the pedagogic action of educational institutions. Both socialisations can involve explicit teaching and direct instruction or implicit acquisition of knowledge as Bourdieu outlined (Brooker, 2002:90).

Many of the Bangladeshi mothers in Brooker's study spoke very limited English and several had spent only a few years in schools in Bangladesh, very different to the school in a small town in the UK. Brooker insists that problems of poor understanding of language or the curriculum can be overcome through good dialogue and contact between parents and the school (Brooker, 2002:121). Brooker did not find an explicit link between ethnicity and literacy attainment, but her analysis is revealing. She cites research that draws a distinction between learning the *uses* and the *mechanics* of literacy (Brooker, 2002:58). One of the main findings of Brooker's work is the effect of attitudes towards teaching, knowledge and school that parents express on the progress of children at school. Brooker's description mirrors the analysis of Blanchet (1996:150) of middle class childhoods in Bangladesh. Both Brooker and Blanchet explain how the idea that knowledge acquired informally, through playing or doing contrasts with 'didactic, sit-down' methods of teaching. Long hours spent copying or rote learning, common in Bangladeshi households do not prepare children very well for the informal, liberal pedagogy of British reception classes (Brooker, 2002:58).

The 'kindergarten' schools that the middle class families in Dhaka in Blanchet's study sent their children to prioritised school work without play. Classes were big and schools had little or no playground, play equipment or games. At age five or six, children were being prepared for entrance exams for the next stage of education. The pressure and stress on the children over performance in these exams and entrance into prestigious schools was extreme (Blanchet, 1996:150). Memorisation of information for examinations has become the dominant focus of these schools. Ethical and cultural aspects of teaching have been removed by pressures upon teachers in commercial education institutions which are measured by results (Blanchet, 1996:152). Tutors complain that if they want to keep their jobs their students must achieve in exams. They are not allowed to discuss extracurricular issues which may be of interest to the children (Blanchet, 1996:153). Similarly, students complain of the stress and persecution they may face if they fail in exams (Blanchet, 1996:150). Blanchet sums this approach up as '*knowledge is in books, memory is intelligence*' (Blanchet, 1996:151).

This 'old fashioned' model of learning runs contrary to the 'cultural' assumption that young children's learning should be '*caught rather than taught*' (Brooker, 2002:55). Using the idea of 'cultural capital' and drawing on the work of Bourdieu, Brooker attempts to explain why Bangladeshi children whose parents invest time and energy in preparing them for school struggle to adjust to the pedagogic model employed (and the habitus) in reception learning. Children from 'Anglo' families understood more clearly that they were supposed to learn through play. Bangladeshi children arrived at school thinking they were supposed to study and then came to believe that the point of school was for them to 'play', not understanding that through the play they were supposed to learn (Brooker, 2002:161).

Blanchet discusses middle class Bangladeshi parents' attitudes towards sports and physical activities. These were not encouraged, as they distracted from the serious business of academic achievement. Sports and play were not seen as complementary to study, but were seen as being positively detrimental to it. Children were also not allowed out as parents did not like letting them out of their sight and worried that they might mix with the 'wrong sort' of children (Blanchet, 1996:153). This was especially true for girls, with sport seen as being damaging and unfeminine for them (Blanchet, 1996:154).

Ofsted's (2004) report notes that:

*Out-of-school classes were an important element in schools' efforts to boost achievement. In some cases these included major investments in staffing, funded typically through initiatives such as Excellence in Cities<sup>62</sup>. But poor attendance by Bangladeshi pupils, as well as by some others targeted, plagued many such initiatives. (Ofsted, 2004:20)*

While it is not spelt out explicitly, the implication is that Bangladeshi pupils are not participating as fully as they might in extracurricular activities.

I had noted that Bangladeshi pupils tended not to attend after-school clubs, did not go on trips and were not allowed to stay late at school for after-school events. I asked why this was on a number of occasions to children and parents and met with different responses, some specific to the particular

---

<sup>62</sup> Excellence in Cities was a Department for Children Schools and Families programme which ran between 1999 and 2006 aiming to raise attainment among the most disadvantaged children in the most deprived cities and towns.



event and some more general. An 8 year old boy said that he was not allowed to visit Neasden Hindu Temple even though he had wanted to, for religious reasons, as his parents had forbidden him. His father denied this and said that he always allowed his children to go on trips and outings. An 11 year old girl had to fight hard and lie to her parents to be allowed to stay late after school to perform in the school play. Trips to the opera or to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the theatre were also problematic for some families for 'religious reasons'.

In discussions with Bangladeshi mothers from the school I asked them about these issues. Not all the mothers agreed with each other. It was agreed that academic subjects should take precedence, but the group could not agree on the significance of extracurricular activities. They thought the school handled these activities well and were impressed by the range of activities on offer. Extracurricular activities such as sports and drama were seen as being good for the health of children, but of little pedagogic value.

*B: OK, what about the other things that the school does, non-academic things. What do you think of those?*

...

*Halima: It's not important.*

...

*Shaju: I think other things they done very well.*

*Husnahena: Yeah I think so.*

*Shaju: They give awards or prizes or lots of things.*

*B: OK...*

*Shaju: And they have a teacher's award.*

B: *But do you think that's important?*

Husnahena: *Important is academic.*

Halima: *Academic.*

Shaju: *Academic is more important.*

B: *OK, but for your children?*

Husnahena: *Yes.*

B: *Do you think those things are important?*

Husnahena: *Yeah, for every children it's important.*

Ruby: *It's important but, first academic, then non-academic.*

B: *Ok, why?*

Ruby: *Because it's education.*

B: *So, but, art, sports is not education?*

Shaju: *That's education, it's part of education.*

Halima: *It helps, but this is more important for your future. English, maths, for good job.*

Shaju: *It's not only for good job, for your future, life, you need more of this, academic, that's the part of education and non-academic, is just for contact with each other.*

Halima: *This is for your body, the PE and drama and it will keep you healthy<sup>63</sup>.*

While the importance of academic activities was not questioned, the extra-curricular or 'non-academic' activities in the school were considered in a variety of ways. Shaju considered that these activities were part of education, while others seemed to consider them as not 'education'. For others such as Halima, non-academic activities in school were for health, for the body, while academic activities were aimed at getting a good job. The fact that non-academic activities

---

<sup>63</sup> Discussion about Education and Marriage, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 27.11.2008

involved what Shaju called 'contact with each other' is crucial to the reason why they are considered potentially damaging by some British Bangladeshis, who believe that they may entail contact with the 'wrong sort' of person, corruption by other children or inappropriate contact between girls and boys.

I finally managed to put my hunch to the test, having obtained some unofficial statistics kept by a teacher at the school. The statistics include which pupils went on which trips and participated in various events and sporting tournaments throughout the year. They may have been kept to ensure that it was not always the same children who attended these activities and see which children were left out. The data are not a complete record of after-school and extra-curricular activities at the school and is probably skewed towards sporting activities. This might explain a gender bias in the data for all the children in Year Five and Six showing that boys participate more than girls in these activities. However many of the sports competitions have specific girl's events or teams or quotas for the number of girls who must be included.

Each child in Year Five and Six at the school can do a certain amount of sports, trips, activities and outings - up to a maximum of nineteen, although no child had more than ten as it is not possible for everyone to do everything. Obviously not every trip has equal value, some such as a visit to an opera workshop were designed for the whole class to go on (although not everyone did) and others such as a visit to the David Beckham Football Academy were more exclusive, with a lucky few being selected somehow. For the sake of this simple statistical test I treated them as equal.

There are also issues of who decides whether the child will go on the trip or take part in the activity which differs for different activities. These depend a bit on the level of desirability and exclusivity of

the trip and what the alternatives are. In some cases the child is selected as a member of a team by a teacher assessing his/her ability (this privilege could also be withdrawn for bad behaviour). In others the child may actively try to include him/herself in a group that is not selected by ability as it is seen as an attractive trip and a way of having an interesting day out of school instead of staying in school. In other cases children may not want to go on a trip designed for their whole class and may actively try to get out of it, where for example they may get to stay at home rather than go on the trip. The children's desires can obviously influence the willingness of parents to encourage them to go on or exclude them from trips.

Using the statistics, I calculated the average number of activities participated in per child, which for all of Year Five and six (89 children) is 3.28 activities per child. Boys (40) participated in an average of 3.45 activities and girls (49) in 3.08. The average for a Bangladeshi child (11) is 2.18 activities, significantly less than average, mainly due to the fact that Bangladeshi girls (6) participate in an average of 1.67 activities each.

When I showed my statistical analysis to Bangladeshi parents, they were horrified. They denied that they had ever forbidden their children to attend after-school activities or school trips. They cited several other reasons why their children might not have attended school trips or activities. They said that the trips were always to the same places, or that their children did not want to attend the trips. I felt that the reasons they gave me were genuine but did not explain the significant statistical results I had found. The discussion centred mainly on school trips rather than after-school activities but several interesting issues arose. They felt that their decisions as parents were being questioned so I had to be sensitive in my discussion.

The parents felt that they were being offered the 'wrong types' of after-school activities and were enthusiastic about local homework clubs and of extra lessons for their children. As they noted in the discussion cited above, some parents would have preferred homework clubs at the school rather than one of the other 'non-academic after-school clubs'. Crozier and Davies (2008) also came across low attendance by British Bangladeshi students at after-school activities and musical and drama groups in their research in the North East of England. They put this down to ethnocentric activities that do not reflect the wishes or tastes of the Bangladeshi students or parents. Teachers in their study maintained that they had tried to include students of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin but had not succeeded in attracting them (Crozier and Davies, 2008:297). In my research and in the school and area where my research is based there was less racism and segregation between ethnic groups than in Crozier and Davies' example. The children in my study were younger and on the whole wanted to attend the activities, even (and indeed especially) if they were not 'culturally sensitive'. Their tastes were not different from their non-Bangladeshi peers simply because of their ethnicity. London is perhaps very different and more diverse than the towns in the North East where Crozier and Davies' (2008) research was based.

Many Bangladeshi children attended Arabic lessons/Qu'ran memorisation classes or Bangla classes as well, which is one reason for their poor attendance of other activities. I will discuss these more in chapter 8. In an interview with Faisal, a 10 year old in Year Six, he described the range of after-school activities that he attended. Faisal did not mention it in this interview but he also attended Arabic/Qu'ran memorisation lessons twice a week after school:

Benji: *What after-school activities or clubs do you attend?*

Faisal: *There's one, Bengali class I used to go.*

...

B: OK, *that's the only one?*

F: *Yeah because I normally do it at my house.*

B: *What?*

F: *I normally like play out at my house.*

B: *Yeah, so do you attend any other clubs or classes or organised activities? Not in school, like any other kind of classes or...*

...

F: *Parkway.*

B: *Parkway, what's that?*

F: *That's like a park yeah, but it has like, a kind of, this house, like little place that you can play and everything.*

B: *And what do you, what kind of clubs or classes do you have there?*

F: *We have PE, ICT, English, maths, science.*

...

B: *Wow, what after school?*

F: *Yeah.*

B: *So you have extra school.*

F: *Yeah. Not extra school, but like it's only for one hour<sup>64</sup>.*

The extra lessons in the club in Parkway were not the only after-school lessons Bangladeshi children attended. Some went to other schools as part of an Ethnic Minority Achievement Service<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Faisal, conducted at Poynder Primary School, 13.02.2008

scheme to help children who might be high achievers. There were other private classes which children attended and parents were prepared, where necessary, to pay for them. The Arabic classes I attended were organised by parents who charged a small fee for each child, just enough to cover the cost of the teachers pay and some resources. Several parents paid for private tuition for their children and some even offered to pay me. The point is that all of them involved targeted 'academic' or 'spiritual' types of learning rather than more general 'extra mural' types of activities of which there were many on offer at the school. I discussed this with Seema and Mary from Islington Education Authority and they agreed that British Bangladeshi children in Islington were often busy with private after-school classes.

*Seema: Last week I was saying something to one of the parents about you know I think her daughter wanted to go to one of the after-school clubs and she was like, oh it does sound good but we've got the Arabic classes and the Bengali classes and so you know how it is, we're always busy doing the other things and you have to do them.*

*Mary: It's true, do you think sometimes it's a matter of choice, in other words, they are involved in other after-school activities, which they privilege over what they see as less important activities?*

*Seema: I think so, and it's not necessarily what the children's interest is in. It's more that the parents see religious education and you know the mother tongue is a lot more important than ... going to cricket club or music club.*

*Mary: Maybe, its possible isn't it that that's had to be displaced because it's outside the education system. There's no space for Arabic or Bengali classes in the English education*

---

<sup>65</sup> The Ethnic Minority Achievement Service is part of Islington council's education authority. Many other boroughs have a similar service attempting to tackle low achievement among 'ethnic minorities'.

*system as it stands, therefore those things are being done after school and they are taking at least some of the time that could go towards doing these art or music or trips<sup>66</sup>.*

The mothers speculated that some parents might not understand the forms sent home or children may forget to take them to their parents. There was a bias evident in the group; the discussion was dominated by those parents who were more confident and able in English and more knowledgeable and less sceptical about the education system. It took place after an English class with a small group of mothers. None of those who I knew resisted their children's attendance to school trips and after-school activities were present. Another issue they expressed was a fear of the dark, or of leaving the house in the dark, which was especially relevant in the winter months. This, they said had stopped them from allowing their children to take part in after-school activities that went on late.

Mary recounted the experiences of the Bilingual Community Officers (BCOs) that the Education Authority had recruited to help communication between the school and parents from ethnic minorities. There were several working at Islington schools, although not at Poynder Primary School. Despite the efforts of the bilingual community officers, who helped parents and schools communicate very effectively, some parents still were not convinced of the value of extracurricular activities.

*One of the very first BCOs who started in Islington found that parents didn't particularly want their children to do musical activities you know, so she said: "Well you know, your son is very, very good at guitar". But parents said: "What's that, what use is that to me?"<sup>67</sup>*

---

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Seema and Mary conducted at Islington Education Authority, 23.03.2009



The way extracurricular activities, such as art, activities, films, trips and after-school activities are integrated into the curriculum and their use by teachers as educational aids and 'carrots' to be granted to pupils in return for good behaviour is so integral to the system of discipline in the school that it would struggle without them. 'Golden time' (lessons where children can choose an activity), merits, activities, sports teams, trips, art and extra PE sessions become currencies to be gained or lost by pupils in the school market. They are important educational aides, breathing life into dry topics on the curriculum, providing inspiration for creative writing or vivid demonstrations of science.

Extracurricular activities provide children with important lessons in life skills and opportunities to build social and cultural capital. They teach pupils how to participate in team sports, share passions, learn about useful or useless pastimes such as gardening or cricket and generally to succeed socially. I believe that the low participation of British Bangladeshis in extracurricular and social activities, particularly among girls, means that they will miss out on some of the less tangible but vitally important aspects of education. The emphasis, which British Bangladeshi children put on school as the centre of their social world, would indicate that they see the value of these interactions and networks to their success in life. Their exclusion from extracurricular activities will affect their lives and choices in future years.

Katz (2004) makes some interesting observations on this topic based on research in rural Sudan and in New York City. In Sudan, her detailed longitudinal research captures the changing kinds of knowledge that are taught and needed and the role of formal schooling in this. (Katz, 2004:108).

---

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Seema and Mary conducted at Islington Education Authority, 23.03.2009

Formal schooling, she says, involves more abstraction of knowledge from its employment, whereas the 'diffuse education' the children receive in the home and among peers is practice-led, taught through doing and observation (Katz, 2004:116-119). In New York City Katz observes the restrictions on the abilities of children and young people to play together outside (something I have discussed in chapter 5). The loss of this peer interaction she argues, like I have regarding extracurricular activities, leads to a de-skilling and a loss of crucial 'culture building' (or cultural capital building) play (Katz, 2004:174).

## **Pupils**

Ofsted's (2004) report on Bangladeshis in education is based on research in nine UK secondary schools in areas where there are high concentrations of British Bangladeshis. The vast majority of British Bangladeshi pupils interviewed said that they valued school and wanted to do well. They felt that despite their enthusiasm, their parents were sometimes able to offer little more than moral support because of their limited understanding of the education system and of English. Older brothers and sisters who had been through the education system were often more helpful and served as an example and inspiration to younger pupils (Ofsted, 2004:13, Crozier and Davies 2006:683).

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2006) report contains a section on attitudes towards school and subjects at school among different ethnic groups. Their research found that 'Asian': Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils; were the most positive about school. Over 90% said that they were happy at school and liked going to school and the lowest percentage said that they did not want to go to school most of the time (DfES, 2006:78). The same pattern emerges in attitudes

to school work, with Bangladeshi pupils showing enthusiasm for school work and considering it 'worth doing' and reporting working hard at school (DfES, 2006:78).

Many of the findings in the Ofsted and DfES reports, despite focusing on secondary pupils, are reflected in my own findings in a primary school. The centrality of school to the social lives of children, which I have noted from my research subjects, seems to continue into secondary education, as reported in the Ofsted study:

*Girls valued school because it widened their horizons, socially as well as educationally. Many did not have an independent social life outside school, often being confined to the family home while their brothers were allowed outside to play football and to meet their friends in other ways. The girls enjoyed seeing friends at school. Boys also enjoyed school for both social and educational reasons, but the greater freedom they had outside school meant that school was not the core of their social life to the same extent. (Ofsted, 2004:13)*

Within the age range of my research subjects, there was not such a difference between the freedoms afforded to boys and girls. The location of the children's homes relative to suitable playing areas seemed to be more important than gender in determining whether children were allowed out to play or not. Below the age of 11 few children are allowed out alone in London. School formed the central location in their lives for peer relations, play and socialising. Relations with teachers were also important and largely positive, becoming a measure for children of their success in a society whose indicators did not register at home.

School represented the most important part of their social life for British Bangladeshi children at Poynder Primary School. Outside school, contact with friends was rare, limited to meetings in Arabic classes or other after-school classes, a few children were allowed to 'play out' on the streets between the blocks of their estate with other children. Most children's descriptions of their routine at home after school involved homework, television and eating before bed. I asked a group of British Bangladeshi pupils at the school to write accounts of aspects of their daily lives. In an excerpt from a piece of writing called 'All about My Daily Life', 11 year old Shirin explains what she does when she gets home from school.

*When I come home from school I eat rice with curry and after that I do my homework. Then I read my revision books and after that I read three chapters of my school book. Once all that is finished I watch television, when someone finished on the computer, I ask permission to play on it.*

*When it is 8 o'clock, my mum makes pita bread and when my mum finishes making it she gives it to us with some curry. When we have finished, it is time to go to bed and go to sleep<sup>68</sup>.*

School, by contrast, was a dynamic world of constant stimulation<sup>69</sup>, interaction and interest in a safe environment. There were routines, but these were sufficiently varied as to provide constant

---

<sup>68</sup> Extract from 'All about My Daily Life' by Shirin, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Ofsted's report found that pupils saw diversity in the school as an encouragement to higher attainment. *Girls in one ethnically mixed school, for example, felt that if the school had been largely mono-cultural – meaning predominantly Bangladeshi – they would have had less incentive to do well.* (Ofsted, 2004:14). This is a very interesting finding that it would be worth following up on. My research is based in a very ethnically diverse area and school; it might be worth comparing this account with research in more 'mono-cultural' environments.

stimulation and excitement. Mohammed, aged 9, explains this difference in his piece of writing 'My name is Mohammed'.

*Mostly I'm at my house. I'm always bored because there's nothing to do in my house. For fun I draw pictures, play on my Playstation 2, play on my Nintendo DS and play on my computer.*

*My school is called Poynder Primary School. At school we learn literacy, maths, geography, science, R.E and history. In literacy we are watching a movie called Mulan, in maths we are learning perimeter. My teacher's name is Alison Boyle. For fun at school I play on the computers, make something and draw silly stuff on the whiteboards.*

*On Monday and Thursday I play football. On Friday we have free time which is called golden time. On Tuesday I go swimming and I am one of the top at swimming<sup>70</sup>.*

At home Mohammed was bored and spent most of his time playing on computers or games consoles. He recounted the routines and diversions of school, where he engaged in a mix of academic and non-academic work, peer interaction, creative activities and physical exercise.

## **Aspirations**

The children in Year Six were explicitly encouraged by their teachers to aim high and expect to go to university. Aspirations were high for Bangladeshi children due to encouragement and pressure from their parents as I explained earlier. I asked children in interviews what they would like to do when they were older. Biologist, psychologist, accountant, architect, doctor, fashion designer,

---

<sup>70</sup> Extract from 'My Name is Mohammed', by Mohammed, 9

police man and footballer were some of the careers that the Bangladeshi children aspired to. A few children had very specific ideas about being dermatologists or paediatricians based on personal experiences in their lives. Mostly their aspirations aimed at well-qualified and well trodden career paths. Among the non-Bangladeshi pupils, some of the same professions were popular choices, along with scientists, computer programmers, managers, business men, but there were more nurses, footballers, mechanics and policemen, especially among the White British or Irish origin children.

I conducted an exercise called 'Mr. or Ms. Successful' with several groups of children. In this exercise each child was given a piece of paper with a simple outline of a human being on it, the title 'Mr. or Ms. Successful' and subtitles: 'is' and 'has' on either side of the sheet. I asked the children to decide whether they were going to draw a man or a woman and cross out the title as appropriate and draw what they saw as a successful person<sup>71</sup>. Then they had to write five things that Mr. or Ms. Successful 'has' and five things that they 'are'. I did this exercise with the Year Six class at Poynder Primary School, with a class in a school in Sylhet that I visited and in the Bengali after-school club. I also did the exercise with the group of mothers who attended my English class.

The results were thought provoking, although I am hesitant to draw many conclusions from them. Most of the children's drawings were of people with white skin or no pigment added to the skin. None of the Ms. Successful images drawn by Bangladeshi children were shown wearing a headscarf, which nearly all the Bangladeshi girls wore. Ms. Successful was often described as 'pretty' or 'beautiful' whereas Mr. Successful was never described on the basis of his physical attributes, apart from a few references to hairstyles. Mr. Successful was more likely to be described

---

<sup>71</sup> You can see an example of one of these sheets in Appendix 2

as 'clever', 'brave' or 'good at football'. In terms of the things that Mr. or Ms. Successful has, there was less of a gender divide, money, a big house, stocked with plasma televisions, clothes, friends and family were included for both Mr. and Ms. Successful.

On several occasions I was struck by the similarities between non-Bangladeshi and British Bangladeshi children I was studying. The results were not that different in the exercise with the non-Bangladeshi pupils, many of whom were from Turkish or Somali families. There were more ironic and silly responses from non-Bangladeshis. A girl called Amber described Mr. Successful as a 'geek', and showed him in a dull suit. The Year Six class were fixated with the idea of a self-made man, rising up from nothing to earn a great fortune, mentioning Sir Alan Sugar who at the time was on the television with his show, *The Apprentice*. It might have been useful to compare the British Bangladeshi children with a White British sample. Perhaps the British Bangladeshi children's very safe and sensible aspirations and ideas about success might have stood out more.

Thinking back to the analysis I drew from attitudes toward extracurricular activities, we can see a pattern of risk adverse choices emerging. Parents and children seem to favour sensible subjects and choices that are more likely to lead to stable well-paid employment. Mary from Islington Education Authority summed this up:

*I think that a lot of ethnic minority parents who have had to make their way in a world that's fairly inhospitable have stressed skills that are useful in the market place, like computer based skills for example or highly paid skills like the law or medicine over creative skills*

*which they see as less reliable and less well paid and they often make this quite explicit in conversations with their children, if you have a choice you know, don't do textiles*<sup>72</sup>.

On one of my visits to Bangladesh I spent a day in a school in Sylhet talking to pupils and children. I was asked to take a class of children to practise conversational English and decided to do the exercise on success as a topic of discussion. After a general discussion about the meanings of success I did the same exercise I had conducted in London. The pupils enjoyed it, as it was a diversion from their normal lessons. One boy in the class, a returnee from London, subverted the exercise completely, describing Mr. Successful as 'ugly' and as being 'a drinker and a smoker'. Other children described Mr. Successful's wealth, his 'fresh mind' and often his size; he was described as 'fat' by several of the children. Being fat in Bangladeshi is associated with being wealthy and healthy, having plenty of food. In Britain it has very different connotations and no one, Bangladeshi or otherwise said that their Mr. or Ms. Successful was fat. In Bangladesh Mr. Successful was often shown with the latest mobile phone. He was also often described as being 'honest', 'hard working' and 'respectful'.

I asked children in Poynder Primary School both in interviews and group discussions what they considered 'good' and 'bad' jobs. One girl told me in a discussion that her father had told her to get an education so she would not end up washing plates in a restaurant like he did. Crozier and Davies' (2006) study found that older siblings, who had dropped out of education early to work in restaurants, similarly warned their younger siblings against taking that route (Crozier and Davies, 2006:685). Shop or restaurant work and 'serving' other people were considered 'bad' jobs.

---

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Seema and Mary conducted at Islington Education Authority, 23.03.2009



Ten year old Faisal linked his status in the UK closely with his father's managerial role at a local company. He proudly told me that his father's employees called him 'sir'. The prestige and financial advantages his father's position brought him were reflected in his confidence and in teasing, playful exchanges of insults he had with other children. I was struck by the cruelty of these types of conversation between children whose families knew each other well. Their intimate knowledge of each other's situations enabled them to be particularly judgemental. In a conversation in the Bengali after-school club, Faisal and Rezwan competed over the extravagant electronic gadgets, flat screen televisions and sportswear that they owned. They each did this knowing full well that while Faisal's father was a manager in a local company and he had the latest gadgets and tracksuit, Rezwan's father was unemployed.

Several of the children had older siblings who were in university. Among the families I knew, there was a group of very high-achieving girls, one of whom was interviewed for a place at Cambridge during my research. She helped me immeasurably when she explained to her mother what 'research' was and why I might be spending my time with Bangladeshi children.

### **In Class**

Within the school, various sub-cultures and subversions of the official discourses exist. On one level the school is highly regulated by rules, professional modes of conduct and child protection laws. Between the rules and below the threshold for teacher action there are a multitude of subversions of the school rules. In the spaces outside the control of adults are separate rules and systems that run parallel to the school's. Correct procedure is seen by the school and education

authority as incredibly important to ensure attendance, performance, child protection and health and safety.

The register was an official obsession, kept with an almost religious attention and rigour. Its carefully marked code in different coloured biros yielded attendance statistics upon which the school was judged by the local authority and inspectors and supplied important information to the school. In the case of a fire, the register would provide a list of all children supposed to be at the fire muster point and those whose absence could be explained. If a child had unauthorised absences from school, the school had powers to compel or punish parents to bring children to school on time. The first ten minutes of the day were spent carefully filling in the register and a list of which children were eating school or packed lunches. During this time the children in the Year Six class did a daily task – ‘ten for the day’, usually ten maths questions. Meanwhile the register ritual would be going on in the class with the class teacher, Mr. Gregory its concentrated leader.

*“Good Morning Ishrat”*

*“Good Morning Mr. Gregory, packed lunch”*

*“Good Morning Adam”*

*“Good Morning Mr. Gregory”*

*“School dinners or packed lunch Adam?”*

*“School dinners”*

*“Good morning Adnan, packed lunch?”*

*“Good Morning, no, school dinner”<sup>73</sup>*

---

<sup>73</sup> Excerpt from the ‘register ritual’ performed daily in the class.

The Year Six class was organised in two horseshoe rows of desks facing the teacher and the interactive whiteboard. To one side of the board was Mr. Gregory's cluttered desk and computer and on the other, shelves with supplies of stationary. Each class had a library, with reference and reading books suitable to the age group. Younger age groups often had tables arranged in blocks with four to six pupils on a table. Sometimes these tables would be grouped by ability. The white plastic tables each had blue plastic trays underneath, one for each child, full of their books, pens, pencils and other things they brought to school. Each child had a small whiteboard and marker to use for notes or calculations. There were calculators, rulers, markers and pencils and various art materials. Everything seemed so well supplied, designed and provided for.

The composition of the class was designed to mix the previous year's classes and separate tight knit groups of friends. A conscious effort was made by teachers to mix children up and bring them into contact with children of different genders, abilities and dispositions. Teachers occasionally experimented with different seating plans designed to improve behaviour or punish pupils with a lack of concentration. Children seen to be difficult or disruptive, were spread evenly between the two classes of each year group, as were the more able and well-behaved children.

Amber, a sassy and attractive girl, one of the most popular in the year, both with boys and girls, was sat next to a studious workaholic Bangladeshi boy called Zakir. He looked two or three years younger than her, in his glasses and practical, unfashionable clothes. At one time he went through a stage of leaving his glasses off, but was rumbled by Mr. Gregory when he struggled to read what was written on the board. While he busied himself with his maths and Arsenal magazines, his neighbour pouted and did her hair, looking around the class at her domain and her adoring subjects. She would see if she could catch the eye of a co-conspirator or have a flirtatious face-

making battle with one of the likely lads of the class. The faces, expressions, phrases and postures she and others of the more mature and image-conscious girls and boys made were heavily influenced by hip-hop and pop culture.

Wiggles of the head, 'kissing teeth'<sup>74</sup> pouts and signs emulating hip hop artists' gangland posturing were popular in these exchanges. These rarely involved Bangladeshi children, usually being dominated by Afro-Caribbean, White and Turkish children. Those with older siblings or friends were more knowledgeable of the correct form and use of these symbols and phrase. Contact with a world of older adolescents was one of the messages this posturing was intended to communicate. Knowledge of music, gangster rap such as Soulja Boy, the specific dances to accompany the songs, good websites for streaming music and music videos were also important markers of maturity and connections with wider subcultures.

Just as the girls had a leader in the form of Amber, mixed race, with some Afro-Caribbean heritage, attractive, clever, athletic and articulate, so did the boys and he also matched up to these traits. Christophe was black, the best football player, the strongest and most macho; he could do the dance and knew the song. He was 'cool', charming, 'bad', a bully and clever. He excelled at maths and held his own with teachers in debate when he got in trouble. These two held such sway over their classes that others would do their bidding without question and would reference them in discussions with others to convince and persuade. Arrangements for working partners for an exercise or seating would be dictated by careful negotiations of status, seat position and reference

---

<sup>74</sup> An originally West Indian way of expressing "*annoyance, displeasure, ill nature or disrespect*" (Figueroa and Patrick, forthcoming:8) that has become quite common among school children in London.

to Amber. *“Zakir’s working with Tuba, so I can work with Amber. No you move there to that seat and I’ll sit here”*<sup>75</sup>.

Back’s (1994) article about the intersections of race and gender among children unravels some of the complex constructions of young black people in London. Back shows the dual, contradictory way that black males are constructed, both as objects of desire and cultural innovation and as folk devils to be feared (Back, 1994:177). Back’s account of young people in South London helps to explain some of the origins as well as the simultaneous veneration and fear that Christophe’s behaviour instilled in the classroom. Back shows how young black people play up to these constructions or feel constrained by them (Back, 1994:178) as several of the other black boys in the class seemed to, unable to keep up with Christophe’s hyper-masculinity.

Alexander’s (2000, 2000a) work shows how Asian and particularly Muslim men have come to occupy the same position in the public imagination once reserved for Afro-Caribbean men. Where they were once perceived, as Back (1994) notes, as passive, in recent years Asian men have become associated with ‘gangs’ violence and ‘hyper-masculinity’. They have become the inheritors of the mantle of being a ‘problem’. The combination of class, race and religion has rendered them triply deviant (Alexander, 2000a:16).

At Poynder Primary school, the two leaders of Year Six were in separate classes, their power recognised by their teachers. They were each seated in special positions in the class, Christophe on a table by himself at the front of the class. While he and several of the more rebellious boys

---

<sup>75</sup> Example of a conversation about seating arrangements for an exercise requiring work in partners, Poynder Primary School, 31.10.07

emphasised their prowess at sports and athleticism, their knowledge of music and 'gangs', others took different approaches to peer interaction and satirical, subversive conversations with teachers and adults. Some would mock and parody the macho culture, unsure or unconfident in their own prowess and aware of the ridiculousness of the genre, they gained admirers for their witty portrayals of 'gangsta' posturing. These demonstrated both their knowledge of the genre and their own wit and rose above the macho posturing, which at any rate only Christophe pulled off with any degree of credibility.

Others rejected this striving for maturity and adult characteristics. A popular mode of conversation among some of the more intelligent boys in the class, including a Bangladeshi and a Somali boy and two White British boys, was a kind of infantile baby talk. They exchanged jokes, attempted conversation with non-participants and undermined the earnest attempts of teachers and teacher's assistants to explain things to the class. They affected ridiculous babyish accents and styled their hair and clothes to look deliberately ridiculous. Unable to posture as 'hard' and 'cool', without crucial knowledge of hip hop or local gang culture, from which they were generally more protected by their parents, they resorted to a demonstration of their wit, irony and rejection of both the seriousness of school and the discourse of 'cool'. They were hard to tell off, as they were generally ahead of the class in their work and were not breaking any rules. In their more serious moments they were more likely to be discussing Cesc Fabregas (Arsenal's star midfielder), Pro Evo Soccer 8 (a game for the Playstation) or the top speed of a Bugatti Veyron (a car) than music, girls or gangs.

The girls valued the ridiculous less. They were generally less demonstrative of their status but no less concerned with it. Like the boys, much of their status was generated by knowledge and mastery of adult issues and modes of speech. Older siblings and permissive parents were

therefore crucial sources of this powerfully symbolic information. The Bangladeshi pupils in the class were all relatively protected and, by chance, none of them had older siblings who might pass on some of this important knowledge. They giggled manically or covered their ears at the very mention of 'sex', even when it was mentioned in a word such as 'sexism', confidently used in conversation by a precocious White British girl. Style, fashion and music were important to some of the more confident girls, starting to assert themselves as individuals and objects of the attention of boys.

Many of the girls in the class from Bangladeshi and Somali backgrounds played no part in this, wearing baggy clothes and headscarves and discouraged from any hint of flirtatiousness or contact with boys by their protective parents. They participated in the discussions and arguments, vicariously enjoying the feuds, fashions and romances of their peers. However, they played a full part in the life of the school and were encouraged by the staff to do so. These girls were less inclined than others to be cynical or sullen with staff or refuse to participate in activities. They threw themselves into most activities that they were allowed to with enthusiasm. Here they were valued, challenged, their intellect appreciated. In a more or less meritocratic environment they were allowed to enquire, question, express themselves and succeed. This is not to say that they were never allowed these things at home, but the combination of peer relationships, well-educated teachers and attempts to be gender and racially egalitarian benefited Bangladeshi and Somali girls particularly at school.

Shirin and Ishrat were very enthusiastic in class. In different ways they enjoyed school and most lessons enormously. For questions and any errand the teacher had, they would raise their hands immediately and begin a series of grunts, sighs, huffing and attention-grabbing waving of the arm

and often their whole body. Soon the arm had to be supported by the other hand and a new round of huffing and puffing began, until the teacher chose some unassuming girl in the front row who had been silent all morning to come and demonstrate something on the interactive whiteboard.

With the majority of the class, any opportunity to use the technology hands-on was considered a treat, as was running errands. They could walk, (not run), carefree through the corridors of the school, looking into other classrooms as they went to deliver a folder, the register or a message to another room of the school. They had a few minutes of freedom from the discipline of the class and a feeling of importance. Such was the demand for these activities that new rotas and systems had to be devised to manage them so that each child would get a turn. One of Shirin and Ishrat's favourite games was watching the computer to see when the screensaver came on. Both sat at the ends of the two horseshoes closest to the teacher, Ishrat, the more mischievous one in the front row. When the Poynder Primary School screensaver came on, the race to the mouse would begin, to reactivate the screen and the projector for the interactive whiteboard.

In serious discussion with or subversion of teachers, the most articulate girls would often join forces with Amber. Their wit could be put to good use dissuading a teacher from splitting up a group or forcing them to work with unpopular boys. There was much debate between children and teachers about the way in which activities should be conducted. Indeed, many activities were impressively participatory, with teachers putting their foot down only on certain key points; the demands of strict guidelines around health and safety and child protection, coupled with the curriculum and impending SATS tests being the bottom line for these non-negotiable points. Perhaps due to the rigidity of this framework, the teachers enjoyed some spontaneity.



Teachers can, of course, not hit or physically punish children any more, but more subtle curbs on their range of disciplinary options are also in place. Sending children out of class was quite rare, seen, like shouting or severe telling off, as counter-productive. The phrase 'shut up' was taboo, as I found out on several occasions when I was wound up to the point of using it. Children recoiled in mock horror and threatened to tell on me. Red ink was also out, seen as too severe and disheartening and replaced by green ink. In this environment, teachers employed a constant subtle range of pressures, carrots and sticks, to encourage the children to participate.

Things were different to how I remembered them when I was at primary school in the late 1980s and very different from Willis's (1977) account of a group of working class 'lads' in school in the Midlands in the 1970s (Willis, 1977:78). Along with all the 21<sup>st</sup> century gizmos had come new ideas about adult-child relationships. Many of these ideas were refreshing, like the politeness demanded from both pupils and staff. No student was told that they were stupid, to shut up or humiliated in front of the class. Students were encouraged to treat others with respect regardless of race, religion, or ability. Of course, this was not always the case, but there was an earnest effort on the part of teachers and much of it was taken up by the children.

Some teachers had systems of merits, some had raffles, point systems, lists of names who might miss break, be banned from football or some other activity. There was usually something the teacher could ban or withdraw from the child to ensure compliance. Usually only the threat of taking away a child's golden time, PE, lunch break or football was enough. Christophe had exhausted most of his privileges and was on the verge of being withdrawn from a prestigious football tournament by the end of the year.

My presence in the class was not unusual. There were many teaching assistants with different levels of authority. In the Year Six class where I spent most of my time there was a volunteer teaching assistant, a retired teacher who came in unpaid twice a week to help in the class and read with children who needed help. A senior teaching assistant sometimes took the class for numeracy (maths) or took a group of the most able maths students away for separate tuition. Other staff came from time to time to take children or small groups of children out of the class. These were usually children who found either numeracy or literacy (English) difficult. One boy in particular was always being taken out for extra tuition in reading and writing as he struggled even to read and write the most basic words. He had severe learning and behavioural problems and staff struggled to integrate him into class activities, control his worst behaviour and protect him from the bullying that he suffered at the hands of more articulate peers. I often found myself with him, after he had been shunned by others when working in groups or at the request of the teacher. I felt sorry for him and had to balance my feelings against the demands of my research – he was not Bangladeshi. I tried to balance a general ethnography of the class with a focus on the British Bangladeshi children, an issue I have discussed in Chapter 2.

### **In the Playground**

Before school, during break and lunch and sometimes after school, the playground is the site of many of the children's most important interactions with friends. It is the scene of some of the least controlled interactions between children. This, ironically, is because of the safe, controlled environment of the school. At break and lunch there are two staff on duty in the playground, which is closed to the outside world by locked gates and a first aid box is on hand at all times. Outside the

school they would not be subject to the rules of the school but they would probably be monitored more by parents or police themselves more in the face of the real dangers of the street.

The playground at Poynder Primary School has two main parts, the sports pitch and the rest. For many of the children the sports pitch, principally used for football, occupies the larger part in their lives, even if it is geographically smaller. For others, the games, conversations and interactions they have in the playground apart from organised sports are more important. Both loom large in the accounts children gave of friendships, feuds and their social lives in general. As I noted above, the school and to a large extent this means the playground, forms the major part of the social lives of British Bangladeshi children.

Pellegrini and Blatchford (2002) emphasise the importance of break time for both social and educational development. Breaks for physical activity in between periods of intense work distributed throughout the day help to increase concentration and cognitive ability (Pellegrini and Blatchford, 2002:60). Play at break time is also crucially important for children, helping to form peer relations and informing social hierarchies in an independent environment. Organised games and sports are especially important, as they provide frameworks for early interactions between children who do not know each other well. Prowess at these games can lead to very high social status among peers for the most competent and confident 'key players' (Pellegrini and Blatchford, 2002:61).

Football was king on the sports pitch and was universally popular. Girls and boys enthusiastically played football at break and lunch on a rota system for each year group and usually one class of each year group plays the other in these games. I had underestimated the passion for football I

would encounter here and was surprised at the extent to which girls were enthusiastic players of the game. I also had to be reminded of the seriousness with which such games are imbued for children. What initially seemed like to me like a casual game of football, which I eagerly participated in, revealed itself to be the very serious manifestation of group dynamics and playground politics. Once or twice when I tried to console a tearful member of the losing team I saw in their quivering lip and gritted teeth the deep seriousness of the game at that moment. My mind went back to tantrums, arguments and vicious disputes I had had as a child over what I now regard as the most trivial of things.

There were fights, tears and injuries, in almost every match. The girls were not so often involved in these, seeing the games more for their social value than prioritising winning. Still, they would enthusiastically celebrate a victory along with the boys chanting "*weee wooon, weee wooon*" all the way back to class. They would play and participate as much as they could and as the boys who dominated the games would let them. The football pitch and break times were the scene of the worst bullying that I saw and this often spilled over into class. The Bangladeshi children that I paid the most attention to were not usually involved in disputes or fights.

The rules of the game were negotiated and dominated by a small committee of boys who were the strongest, most vociferous and knew the most about football. When the committee went against one of its members or someone's claim to a foul or goal, there were often long and painful negotiations and implications. Girls were excluded from these debates usually, preferring to ignore them or take their grievances against violence to the teacher on duty. Gradually I stopped playing so much, as I was often sucked into angry disputes or asked to referee or adjudicate. When there were fights or what I perceived to be nasty teasing I felt compelled to act. 'Bullying' did occur and

was unpleasant although it probably was not much worse than in most playgrounds. Despite these occurrences, life in Poynder Primary School was not characterised by bullying and violence.

I felt that I had to draw a line about when I would intervene and communicate to the children and to an extent the teachers what that line was. It was not clear, but there was an understanding with children that I did not “tell on them”. This role was tested several times in different ways. I would intervene and report fighting or teasing that I could see was causing real hurt. I made it clear that I would not intervene or tell teachers about trivial things. In the case of the football games, I felt that my presence was interrupting the game and its associated interactions and hierarchies and eventually stopped playing so much.

I was struck by the lack of a code of ‘honour’ among the children regarding telling on peers to teachers. They seemed to play events against the teachers at every opportunity. Many would have no compunction telling teachers the minor misdemeanours of even their friends and allies. Perhaps this is linked to the relatively subtle micromanaged discipline system described above, which has relatively few harsh penalties. More serious things would be kept from the teachers but there was usually someone in the class who would spill the beans or tell a secret. The teachers had encouraged honesty and owning up. This was something that was unrecognisable from my time at school and from Willis’s (1977:30) account where such behaviour was taboo.

Even some of the naughtier children used the teachers as a weapon to get at enemies. The school rules on behaviour and politeness were ignored in many of the routine playground games. Most of the children could find something to tell the teacher about someone else in the class. *“He fouled me in football”, “Adam was running on the stairs”, “Adnan said ‘shit’*. After break Mr. Gregory was

sometimes besieged with claim and counter-claim about football fracas. These accounts were often breathlessly told, convoluted and confusing. In an interview with Shirin, an 11 year old girl, I got an account of a playground dispute, which gives an idea of the nature of these complaints.

*I don't believe Nazreen and her brother, because her brother is always lying about my brother and Fawzia, she gets involved in everything. My brother yeah, he was playing with Saiful and um thing, Peter and Omar were fighting yeah, he, Pete, Omar head locked Peter, so my brother went, went, Saiful pushed my brother but then my brother never said nothing to Saiful and when my brother saw Omar head locking Peter, he tried to stop it, but then Omar goes like this with his feet, tripped over my brother and then my brother got hurt so he, so Om, so Omar, just started fighting with my brother. That's how it started.<sup>76</sup>*

Mr. Gregory was impressively calm and fair. I thought at first that he seemed unconcerned about some of the fighting. As the complaints and tales mounted, I saw that he could not possibly respond to them all and had to make quick judgements about which were really serious. At break the children were not his responsibility, being under the supervision of the break supervisors, but as their class teacher he could control most of their access to privileges such as golden time. He regarded the break supervisors, usually working class mothers of children at the school, with a little bit of scepticism. They were sometimes a bit out of touch with the children as they only saw the children at break times and tended to believe their children or children they knew over others. Sometimes he would listen to their tales of the misdemeanours of a child and pleas for punishment and then ignore what they had said.

---

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Shirin, Poynder Primary School, 01.04.2008

Occasionally Mr. Gregory would take a child outside for a chat about their behaviour. This was usually to get them to calm down and try to make them see the error of their ways. It was rarely loud or angry. The school had a counsellor who was in charge of discipline as well as caring for children who were upset and child protection issues. She had a special room where children would be sent if they had been very badly behaved or were upset.

I found myself more than once in the unenviable position of having to give Mr. Gregory my account of an incident in front of the class. I tried always to be fair and seen as fair, not to fall into the trap of the break supervisors, with their favourites and overreactions and not to get anyone in trouble unnecessarily. Mr. Gregory listened earnestly to my account and probably ignored me too. Luckily and tellingly, I was never in the position of having to choose between winning the trust of a Bangladeshi child by concealing their misdemeanour and treating them equally to others by telling a teacher about it. On the whole they tended to be well-behaved.

When they were not playing football, the children ran around the playground, playing and chatting. There were lots of balls, bats and various toys, although football was confined to the pitch. Children engaged in a wide range of interactions and games and some of the older girls even sat down and talked. In these intense gossip sessions, rumours, vendettas, personal problems and crushes were discussed, although I was seldom allowed into these circles.

As the year progressed, the Year Sixes became more unruly and flirtatious. The separation of the genders became more complex as they interacted in new ways. Bangladeshi boys and girls did not play a major role in flirtatious games or discussions and were seldom the subject of teasing or egging on to some romantic endeavour. They seemed happy to stick to the gender roles that they

had learned so far in school, without pushing into new and risqué patterns of gendered behaviour. Without the correct language and behavioural tools to participate which they might have learned from peers or older siblings they also found it hard to overcome inhibitions and participate even when they might have wanted to.

## **Education and cultural reproduction**

Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) work on 'symbolic violence' and cultural reproduction gives us terminology and a convincing model to explain some of the attitudes and dispositions towards school and education in general among British Bangladeshi communities. These ideas explain the way in which British Bangladeshi children, born in Britain, learn practices and ideas at school and begin to see them as legitimate and normal. This learning may be supplemented and/or juxtaposed with Islamic learning which I will discuss in chapter 8 and socialisation by British Bangladeshi families, teaching Bangla/Sylheti language and cultural practices which I discussed in chapter 4.

'Symbolic violence' is achieved mainly thorough 'pedagogic action' – the imposition of a set of cultural values, dispositions and practices which Bourdieu and Passeron maintain are arbitrary. In Bourdieu's conceptualisation there are three modes of pedagogic action: 'diffuse education' which occurs during the course of normal interactions with 'competent' members of society, 'family education' and institutionalised education, such as that conducted in schools. The strength of pedagogic agency, its ability to successfully transmit its system of meaning is derived from its position relative to power relations (Jenkins, 2002:105).



Pedagogic action reproduces 'culture' and also inevitably the power relations which allow it to continue. Pedagogic action therefore reflects the interests of dominant groups in society and reproduces the uneven distribution of cultural capital and the social structure. One of the most effective means of pedagogic action is therefore the exclusion of certain ideas or ways of thinking as 'unthinkable' (Jenkins, 2002:105).

The authority of the cultural reproduction in schools is not accepted or understood by all groups equally. Ideas are most enthusiastically taken up when they encounter and reinforce pre-existing dispositions. The success of pedagogic action in schools is a result of the differing 'pedagogic ethos' that each group has – their attitude or disposition towards pedagogy/education. This in turn is a result of the level of education in the family and the possible material value of education to members of the group. Here the idea of 'subjective expectation of objective probability' is relevant, if possibilities change or the chances of improving one's lot in life through education improve, the pedagogic authority is enhanced. If there is little possibility anyway of getting a good job through following education and it is judged that more may be gained through unskilled labour, the pedagogic authority will be undermined (Jenkins, 2002:106, cf. Willis, 1977).

The possibilities for gainful employment in London have led to a change in British Bangladeshi habitus which takes in a range of possibilities for children's future employment. Indeed, it was observed by British Bangladeshi parents whom I spoke to, that to be materially comfortable in London, it is usually necessary for both parents in a family to work. The pedagogic authority of the school and British education system has been enhanced by the obvious correlation between educational attainment and stable, lucrative employment. British Bangladeshis have enthusiastically entered higher education inspired by success stories from within their community

and among South Asian people in Britain. British Bangladeshis compare themselves and are compared in public discussion, such as in the Ofsted and national statistics, to other South Asians rather than to Afro-Caribbean or Turkish groups<sup>77</sup>. This has led to a 'pedagogic ethos' among British Bangladeshis that values education and qualifications very highly.

The legitimacy of much of the curriculum is supported by its usefulness, both in securing future employment and in everyday life. This contrasts with some of what children are learning at home and in after-school classes. Murshad, (2002) points out with regard to literacy, that the (English) literacy taught and advocated by teachers had immediate uses for children in their everyday lives. The legitimacy of this pedagogic action was not questioned. Meanwhile, some of the extracurricular lessons in Bangla and Arabic were not seen by children as useful or so legitimate and the pedagogic action was resisted to varying degrees (cf. Blackledge and Creese, 2008). While children communicated in Sylheti at home, Bangla seemed alien and useless either at home, in school or elsewhere. Arabic fulfilled a religious role for which the applications were spiritual rather than practical, a legitimacy that is perhaps harder for children to understand (Murshad, 2002:107). The children in my study, however, ranked Arabic as both important and useful and clearly accepted its legitimacy. Some of them saw Bangla as important, but very few actually made an effort when not compelled by parents to speak it. English seemed to have the most utility for social, school and future success, as well as powerful cultural appeal.

Bangladeshi parents in Islington have enthusiastically accepted some aspects of British state education, but are less keen on others. Pedagogic action in schools is accepted in strictly academic areas, but resisted in others, which are regarded as less legitimate and unnecessary.

---

<sup>77</sup> Thanks to Delwar Hussain for this observation

After-school activities and clubs, art, music and sports are not high on the list of priorities for Bangladeshi families. They are, however, quite central to the vision for pedagogic action of the school and its staff. Bangladeshi families replace these activities with private tuition for their children in Arabic, Bangla, reading the Qu'ran, or other academic tuition. The children, on the other hand, are enthusiastic about every aspect of the school and are disappointed not to be able to take part in more school activities. They accept the legitimacy of the school's pedagogic action and this makes them question some of their parents' ideas and assumptions.

Applying Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) ideas about reproduction to all the social fields I describe in this thesis recognises that it is not only in school that children learn and societies are reproduced. Through 'diffuse education' and more directed socialisation children learn in the home, on visits to Bangladesh (see chapter 4) and in religious education (see chapter 8). The relative legitimacy and 'pedagogic authority' of these different educations or socialisations depend on a range of factors. It depends on the relationship between pedagogic agencies' relations to power of various types, which I will examine more in the concluding chapter. It also depends on the perceived benefits that mastery of that education will bring, for example, in the perception that through success in mainstream education one can get a better job. Crucially they also depend on the subjective evaluation of importance and legitimacy that people, British Bangladeshi children in this case attribute to each social field.

It is this evaluation and the relative importance, legitimacy and corresponding vitality of social fields and their practices of reproduction and socialisation that this thesis describes. Through this evaluation it is possible to capture not only the reproduction of a society, but the way in which

**multiple** overlapping societies are reproduced unevenly based on individuals' reactions to them. In this dynamic unstable process, social change occurs alongside reproduction.

## **Conclusions**

British Bangladeshi parents of children at Poynder Primary School valued education extremely highly. However, there were some important differences in the ways they saw pedagogic techniques and what constitutes 'education', or valuable 'knowledge' and the ideas of the staff at the school. Due to these differences, many of the parents mistrusted some of the content and techniques of the British state education system. Its legitimacy was not wholly accepted and this is perhaps both to the disadvantage and in some ways advantage of these British Bangladeshi children. They may suffer in terms of results due to their resistance to the pedagogic action of the education system, but they may reproduce the class and social strata and subjectivities taught to them in school less readily than other groups.

This mistrust was exacerbated by misunderstandings and the disapproval demonstrated occasionally by staff towards working class parents. The solidly middle class tastes and values of the curriculum, administration and teachers at the school reproduced the class structure of British society. Children were taught a hierarchy of values attached to different types of media and cultural practices. 'Higher' forms of 'legitimate' culture are at the top and popular ones are near the bottom.

The British Bangladeshi children in the school have high aspirations and accept the pedagogic action of the school and teachers readily. Some of their parents find aspects of the British education system difficult to understand or contrary to their ideas about education. I agree with

Crozier and Davies (2006) that British Bangladeshi parents' resistance to elements of the education system is due to their ethnic and religious values (habitus), rather than their class status (and habitus). They are not as influenced by British ideas about class and class subjectivities (Crozier and Davies, 2006:692).

The elements of the 'pedagogic action' of the school that British Bangladeshi parents resist are entirely different to those that are resisted by the White working class lads' 'counter-school culture' described by Willis (Willis, 1977:11). Willis shows how through factors in the school, factory floor and family environment a 'counter-school culture' is created, articulated and acted upon. Details of the conversations, anecdotes and capers of 'the lads' and their run-ins with the teachers and the 'ear'oles' (conformists) in the school provide him with rich data for analysis of their lives. Willis's ethnography transports the reader into the world of the 'lads', into a parallel (and now dated) experience. The power relations among the young people in the school, the rebellions against teachers, the infamous fire extinguisher incident, the subversion of the timetable, the drinking, the smoking, the girls; the rollercoaster ride lasts for a hundred pages, until Willis moves on to analysis of his data and how it might fit into a wider context.

Willis's desire for 'cultural' understanding of 'the lads' stems from a his desire to understand the reproduction of class societies in which there is no explicit coercion and historical materialism will not answer his question sufficiently (Willis, 1977:1). He seeks to see "*how and why young people take the restricted and often meaningless available jobs in ways which seem sensible to them in their familiar world as it is actually lived*" (Willis, 1977:172). The analysis of the counter-school culture provides answers, showing the 'opportunity costed' assessment they make of the rewards of conformism and obedience in school, the desire for immediate gratification, the remoteness and

unlikeliness of high achievement and the prioritising of pragmatic skills over academic and abstract ones (Willis, 1977:126).

Although the British Bangladeshi children in Poynder Primary School participated in socialising and play with other children, they were generally not very determined exponents of the 'counter-school culture'. They recognised and respected the legitimacy of education, school and their teachers and they enjoyed the vast majority of what they did at school. The resistance of Bangladeshi parents towards elements of the school was not the same in origin or manifestation as that of Willis's lads. It did not involve the agency of children so much, it was not concerned with class and was not restricted by class-bound roles and employment routes. This is one reason why the correlation between deprivation and poor performance is not as strong for British Bangladeshi children as it is for White British children (Ofsted, 2004:9, DfES, 2006:18).

Bangladeshi pupils in the school did not participate as fully as some children in the extracurricular, social and sporting life of the school and were not at the centre of the social world of their peers. They enjoyed sports and socialising and would have liked to have been involved more. Sometimes they were restricted by protective parents barring them from participation in social events and some extra curricular activities. In other ways they were impaired by a lack of social skills, resulting from poor English in their early years, different understandings of the school and education and lower involvement in extracurricular activities. I believe that this vicious circle of low involvement in social and non-academic activities at the school and with peers hinders the development of certain types of social and cultural capital in British Bangladeshi children. British Bangladeshi parents were interested in building other types of social and cultural capital that were valued in other social

fields, such as the British Bangladeshi social field which I discussed in chapter 3 and the Islamic social field which I will discuss in chapter 8.

The British Bangladeshi children at Poynder Primary School enjoyed school immensely and tried hard to perform well at school, both academically and socially. They eagerly took on the mannerisms, habits and language taught to them at school. They enjoyed and understood the points systems and rewards for good behaviour, finding the system fair and meritocratic. Crozier and Davies (2006) drawing on Tönnies' (1957) ideas of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, compare the school's individualistic, market-based, competitive society (*gesellschaft*) to the collectivism and mutual trust and support of the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities they study (*gemeinschaft*). The *gesellschaft*-like school system based on individualistic competitiveness is an anathema to the discursive ways of the extended family and wider community (Crozier and Davies, 2006:692). The British Bangladeshi children seemed to understand and enjoy the *gesellschaft* in the school and find it hard to grasp the rules of the *gemeinschaft* of their extended families.

Parents felt sometimes that their children were changing, that they would grow up to be very different to them. They occasionally felt that their status as guardians and their ideological influence on their children was challenged. They strove to maintain their influence and to introduce the elements of what they saw as 'education' that were missing from the school's curriculum. Specifically, this meant moral, religious and 'cultural' issues. This is why the socialisation process I described in chapter 4 on visits to Bangladesh is so important. This is also behind the importance parents give to Islamic education that I will describe in the next chapter.

## 8 Islamic Identities

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

bismi-llāhi ar-raḥmāni ar-raḥīmi

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

In September 2007, as I was settling into a new class at the school, I noticed that the behaviour of the Bangladeshi children in the class was particularly and uncharacteristically bad. They were tetchy, impatient and their attention seemed to wander away from their work easily. Faisal, who was usually a good student with admirable attention to detail, was making a lot of mistakes in his work, when I pointed one out to him, he responded with a disinterested shrug. Fasting for Ramadan was affecting the children's concentration and patience. Even the conscientious Zakir made many more mistakes than he usually did in his maths exercise.

My research was on hold until 'after Ramadan' the much repeated phrase I heard from children and parents alike. When Eid ul-Fitr and the end of Ramadan did arrive, by message from Saudi Arabia, rather than determined by the more traditional method of moon spotting, which is still used in Bangladesh, the children celebrated, received presents and ate feasts with their families. We held a special Eid themed lesson in the Bengali after-school club and the mothers brought in lovely food for their own Eid celebration. None of the children I asked knew what Eid represented or celebrated, but they had participated in the festivities of Eid and the fasting of Ramadan enthusiastically. 'After Ramadan' they had said and indeed, after Ramadan my



relationships with the British Bangladeshi families I was getting to know became more numerous and deeper. Perhaps the families had been busy and tired during Ramadan, or perhaps I suspected, Ramadan had been a convenient period for them to observe me and decide how to engage with me.

Ramadan, Eid and other Islamic celebrations were important markers and dates in the lives of the children alongside the cycle of terms and holidays of the school year. Islam played an important part in their lives, in their practices, identities and fantasies. Islam was positioned by children in different ways at different times, sometimes as an essential part of identity, at others as a peripheral issue, sometimes Islam and Islamic practices were revered and proudly displayed and at others they were resented and the sources of family disputes and power struggles.

One of the principal Islamic practices I observed were Qur'an classes. The first time I went to a Qur'an class it was early March 2008. I rang Halima, who was one of the mothers who attended my computer class. She said I should come, so I biked over to Saiful's house where I met her. From there it was a short walk to what was known as 'Colin's hall' - Colin was the priest who occasionally came to the school. His church community project was housed in the hall. This was where the lessons were held every Monday and Tuesday after school from four to six. Colin had allowed the Qur'an classes to be held in the hall without charge – an act that was much appreciated by the organisers of the classes. Halima and several other mothers I knew had joined forces in response to the lack of mosques and Islamic education in Islington to create their own Qur'an classes. They had hired three young, female, Moroccan teachers to teach the children Arabic and to recite the Qur'an by heart.

The community centre in the middle of the De Vere Estate had a large central hall, with several side rooms, an office, a computer room and a kitchen with a hatch through to the hall. On the walls were posters with information about community projects, council services and a large banner proclaiming the legend: "Jesus is Alive" in graffiti style writing two feet tall along the full width of the hall. There was also a smaller banner saying: "Happy 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Doris".

Two groups of tables, chairs and children were at either end of the hall, the youngest ones near the main door and the older ones at the far end. Faisal, Rezwan, Sharif and Abu from Poynder Primary School were there along with a few boys from other local schools. They were sitting on one side of a horseshoe of tables. On the other side were several girls that I did not know, along with Ayesha, Laila and a Somali girl called Amina who were all at Poynder Primary School. Rukshana and Rayhana who had been at Poynder Primary School when I first arrived, in the previous academic year were also there. The girls and boys sat on opposite sides of the crescent of tables. All the girls wore their headscarves, even Ayesha and Laila who usually did not wear them at school.

I was shown to a seat by Sharif's mum, who along with Halima was one of the group of Bangladeshi mothers who organised the classes, and sat between Abu and Rezwan – the two jokers of the group. I was given a Qu'ran and shown where we were – the teacher did not seem to mind my presence. In contrast to the school however, while the teachers in the Qur'an classes were always welcoming to me, I did not speak to them much. There were three teachers, all of whom were young Moroccan women. They wore long patterned robes and headscarves, spoke broken English with strong accents and seemed to know the Qur'an off by heart. They stood at the front of each class and recited, often accompanied with hand movements to help the children

remember the words. At times it seemed like they were the conductors of an orchestra, as they waved, raised and dipped their hands and the children recited in time with the movements. I asked them about the classes and they told me about Qur'an memorisation and the importance of correct Arabic. Sometimes they would explain the meaning of the text to me or the important principles that they were trying to impart.

The children had to memorise and copy down *suras* (verses) from the Qur'an, reading the Arabic, writing it into their book and then reciting it. I asked several of them what the passages meant at various points, but they were unable or unwilling to tell me. The teacher went round the group getting each child in turn to recite a couple of lines by heart. Round and round the class she went, drilling the recitals. In between these tests the children chatted or dreamt and pretended to recite to themselves when she looked or banged her pencil on the table in frustration at their lack of attention. When one of them recited a passage correctly they were rewarded with a pleased '*ma sha`a allah*' (it is God's will) from the teacher. It was hard to hear yourself think in the hall with all the commotion coming from the youngest group who were enthusiastically shouting out Arabic letters at the top of their voices as their teacher pointed them out on the board. "OOO - AAA - UUU – OOO". They were locked in a gleeful competition for some of the jar of sweets that stood enticingly next to the whiteboard of their class.

I tried to read the passages in the Qur'an as we went through them. These editions of the Qur'an came from a publisher in Syria. They had beautiful covers decorated with Arabic calligraphy and inside the verses of the Qur'an in the original Arabic, an English translation and a transliteration of the Arabic. The English translations were in quite an archaic language and I found it hard to

understand what each passage was about – no wonder the children found it difficult to decipher the meaning.

Sharif's mum came over and told the teacher that it was time for *salat* (prayer). The children all got up for their break and went fetching carpets to line up in three or four lines to pray. The oldest girls and women went at the front as the boys were all rather young and irresponsible. The boys went to the back and stood there in a line, Abu, Rezwan, Sharif and Faisal were all nudging each other and giggling. Faisal caught my eye at one point as he looked around wildly trying not to burst out laughing. It was one of those situations when the terrible inappropriateness of laughing made it almost impossible not to. Up and down they bobbed in prayer, led by one of the women while a couple of the youngest children played in another corner.

A third class of children aged between the two classes I had seen in the hall had emerged from a room at the back of the hall for the prayers. Among them was Saiful who immediately came up to me to say hello. They were all a bit mystified as to what I was doing in their Arabic class. After prayers they had a break, a glass of water and a chocolate chip biscuit and then the class continued, as before: memorisation, recitation, drilling. Abu and Rezwan had next to no idea what was going on. Abu kept talking about how much TV he watched, how much he slept and chuckling. He was trying to impress the pretty girl to his right, who could not understand why he did not look at the book to try and memorise the passage they were studying when he obviously did not know it and the teacher was on her way round. He was oblivious and seemed to have given up trying. As he had at school, he attempted to introduce an element of hopelessness in those charged with trying to educate him. This was his form of resistance, which Rezwan was quickly learning from him. Teachers would learn that it was not worth spending the time it took to make him concentrate.

On one occasion Halima's oldest son who was 16 led the prayers as he covered for one of the teachers who was unwell. He attended a private Islamic school and was well versed in prayers and Qur'an recitation. His recitation technique was admired by all the mothers and the teachers. Halima proudly told me that he would be teaching the youngest class for the day.

Rukshana and Rayhana (one of Halima's daughters) were as diligent with their work as I remembered them from my brief encounters with their class at Poynder Primary School last year, before they had left to go to secondary school. I chatted to Halima after the class and she said that I could come every week if I liked. I attended these classes for a few months, observing each of the three groups. Occasionally I helped set up the tables before class or clear them away afterwards. The tables and chairs slid satisfyingly across the varnished, herringbone parquet floor of the hall. During the gradually warming spring afternoons I would sit watching silently and drowsily as the children recited the holy words in a rhythmic, lilting cadence.

Poynder Primary School, which I described in the last chapter, was the principal manifestation of 'British Society' in the lives of the British Bangladeshi children in my fieldwork. Their 'homes' in London and Sylhet were the spaces of socialisation into the British Bangladeshi social field, which I described in chapters 3 and 4. In this chapter I will explain how Islamic ideas, practices and influences were a major factor in the lived experiences and ideas about identity of these children. Some children visited mosques, mostly these were boys who went to mosque for special events with their fathers. The few mosques in Islington were small and reflected the diverse population of the borough, there was one on Caledonian Road, one on Gray's Inn Road and one in Finsbury Park. These were frequented by Turkish and African Muslims who often had quite different

lifestyles and ideas about Islamic practices from Bangladeshis. Several families I knew preferred to visit the East London Mosque in Whitechapel when they could as it reflected a type of Islam that they were comfortable with and was dominated by Bangladeshis. Others went to mosques in Hackney or Haringey, so it was not always easy for families to visit mosques regularly.

I considered how the behaviour of the children in the classes was different from their behaviour at school or at home. There did not seem to be much of a pattern of behaviour. Discipline was kept quite strict by the presence of parents in the hall and the teachers would request the parents of naughty children to attend classes. When they had the opportunity, the children in the oldest class particularly, started throwing notes to each other, gossiping and giggling. Their behaviour, the language they spoke most of the time (English) and their demeanour was not that different from how they behaved at school. They might have occasionally had a dose of home when one of their mothers came to see how they were getting on or tell them off, but it did not seem like a unique social space with its own particular habitus that corresponded to an 'Islamic sphere'. The space was not important, being only the vehicle for the learning of the venerated verses.

In this chapter I want to explore the role of Islam as an element of British Bangladeshi children's identities. I will discuss the local, national and international developments that have seen Islamic identities become central to the construction of British Bangladeshis and their ideas about themselves. How did the Qur'an classes I observed and the learning of Arabic, which I discussed in chapter 6, come to be seen as so important by the British Bangladeshi families I knew in Islington? Initially, when planning my research, I decided that too many accounts of British Bangladeshis focussed on faith and that I would not prompt people to talk about it. Nonetheless, Islam emerged from my fieldwork as an important part of British Bangladeshi children's lived experiences,

practices and ideas about identity. Here I want to examine why this is so and what implications it has.

I will argue that Islam has come to play a prominent role in the identities of British Bangladeshis for a variety of local and global reasons. This role does not have defined spaces or spheres, however, as Islamic principles inform the behaviour and dispositions of British Bangladeshi children and adults in Islington in all aspects of their lives. A particular Islamic habitus has developed, constructed as an improvement upon Bangladeshi ideas about Islam, influenced by South Asian and Saudi interpretations of Islam and the experience of living in a large multicultural city such as London. While the children themselves did not express many thoughts about the politics of relations between Muslims and 'the West' and Islamophobia, these had an impact upon their parents and through them, upon the children. These ambivalent relations are part of the reason why an Islamic habitus was constructed by parents as an alternative to Western modernity. This made them keen to socialise their children into an Islamic habitus. Elements of this Islamic habitus affect dress, the decoration of houses, eating habits as well as religious practices and the way in which British Bangladeshis see their own identities.

### **The emergence of Islam in identity politics**

In Britain there are more than 1.5 million Muslims (National Statistics, 2001), but they have a presence in British consciousness beyond their numbers. Muslims in Britain came to prominence during the 'Satanic Verses affair' in 1989 (Eade and Garbin, 2002:11, Glynn, 2002:976). British Muslims continue to be the subject of debates about religion, the nation, multiculturalism and identity. I will briefly summarise some of this literature below but have avoided an exhaustive

review as many of these issues did not explicitly appear in accounts of the daily lived experiences or ideas of identities of the children I have studied.

Europe's Muslims suffer from various forms of socio-economic, political and physical exclusion and many of them, like British Bangladeshis, live in relative deprivation (Vertovec and Peach, 1997:5). As I discussed in chapter 3, British Bangladeshis have very high rates of unemployment, low levels of educational attainment and a high profile in manual work (Modood, 1992:261). Muslims in the UK are excluded from local and parliamentary politics and education (Eade, 1997:149). Simultaneously, claim Vertovec and Peach (1997), among others, there is a new self-consciousness amongst European Muslims. More Islamic organisations and associations have been formed and this creates increasing engagement in politics and society (Vertovec and Peach, 1997:6). This is linked, both a cause and an effect of the decrease in the strength of the 'myth of return' and an increasing feeling of permanence. The growth and increased accessibility in transnationalism and transnational practices which I discussed in chapter 4 may also play a role in the increasing formation of organisation and associations, flows of ideas, interpretations and money. Perhaps this has led to a greater confidence and feelings of belonging in the UK. Vertovec and Peach identify changes to perceptions of Islam in Europe (Vertovec and Peach, 1997:9), which some say are part of a 'politics of difference' and anti-racism. Others claim it is part of a 'worldwide Islamic awakening' (Vertovec and Peach, 1997:10).

While minorities may 'retreat' into 'tradition' they may also see a 'translation' of their 'culture' and identities. Hall (1992a) cites Rushdie (1991) and Parekh (1989) in his discussion of these phenomena. 'Translation' of cultures may lead, according to Hall, to 'hybrid cultures', multiple identities and the emergence of new understandings or ideas about identities (Hall, 1992a:310). I



discussed some of the ways these ideas have been theorised in chapter 3. The British Bangladeshis in this study do not conform to these patterns in a simple way. They are neither retreating into 'their traditions' nor translating them; they are, as we shall see, using a supposedly 'untranslatable' filter to decide on the acceptability or otherwise of 'traditions' both old and new, 'British', 'Bangladeshi' or from elsewhere.

The reality is often complex and partial. In chapter 7 I showed how British Bangladeshi parents accept and encourage some aspects of the education system, but are suspicious about others. In chapter 5 I described the adaptation of Bangladeshi practices to the urban spaces and buildings of London. Practices relating to children have also been translated in some contexts but have also entailed a 'retreat into tradition' regarding certain ideas about childhood. With regard to religion, it is also negotiated and contingent, although it is often presented as non-negotiable. Different versions and interpretations of Islam are promoted and applied by individuals in different ways depending on the context.

Part of the context of being a Muslim in Britain is the phenomenon of 'Islamophobia'. Prejudice has come to be associated not only with skin colour but increasingly with religion or religious practices. Dalrymple's (2004) article written in response to rising hostility and ignorance of Islam and the Islamic world exposes this prejudice. Writing in Response to Kilroy Silk's (2004) astonishing attacks on Muslims and Arabs, Dalrymple writes:

*Yet what is more alarming than the public airing of such idiocy - ill-informed diatribes against Islam are, after all, far from uncommon in the British press - is the support that Kilroy has clearly found among the British public. Many other examples of his disturbing*

*disdain for ordinary Muslims have since emerged: in one column Kilroy wrote that "Muslims everywhere behaved with equal savagery . . . they throw acid in the face of women who refuse to wear the chador, mutilate the genitals of young girls and ritually abuse animals"; in another, he described the looting of Iraq as being the work of "a load of thieving Arabs". Nevertheless, since the suspension of his TV show by the BBC, the tabloids have rallied to his defence and the Express claims that 97 per cent of callers to the paper - about 22,000 people - have agreed that the BBC was too harsh with him. There has been a huge surge in anti-Arab racism as radio phone-ins, internet chatrooms and other media forums have been deluged with racist comments about "towel-heads" and "camel-jockeys". (Dalrymple, 2004)*

The 'Islamophobia' described by Dalrymple has been noted by many others such as Abbas, (2005) Castles and Miller (2003) and the Runnymede Trust (1997). Castles and Miller (2003) and Nielsen (1997) point out the 'self-fulfilling prophesy' of Islamophobia; that fear and exclusion will lead to increasing mistrust and hostility from the Muslim community. Nielsen describes how Islam is seen in an 'Orwellian' sense as the 'new enemy' in the post-Cold War, post 9-11 era (Castles and Miller, 2003:239, Nielsen, 1997:272). Events in the years since the publication of these articles and reports support the views they express. Dalrymple's (2004) summary of shocking racism, misunderstanding and propaganda in the press is mirrored in Vertovec and Peach's (1997) book *Islam in Europe*, in which they lament the widespread fear and hostility towards Islam (Vertovec and Peach, 1997:4).

Many British Muslims suffer or have suffered from exclusion, racism, problems surrounding drug addiction, violence and delinquency. The appeal of strict respect for religious prohibition is therefore logical for some of them (Vertovec and Peach, 1997:52). "*The main thing with our teenagers is a drug problem, not a religious problem,*" says Bashrhan Khan, interviewed in an article on the so called 'Tipton Taliban' who went from impoverished estates in the Midlands to fight in Afghanistan (Waldman, 2002). This message of people turning to 'fundamentalist' forms of Islam as a response to deprivation, racism and exclusion is often repeated by commentators.

Bangladeshis, who migrated to the UK as adults, were more attached to their national identity as Bangladeshis, than those born in the UK, some of whom see Islam as more important to them (Gardner and Shukur, 1994:163, Eade 1997). As I discussed in chapter 3, many British born Bangladeshis do not feel a strong bond with Bangladesh (cf. Hussain, E. 2007:2). As I discussed in the section about visits to Bangladesh many of them feel disorientated, uncomfortable, out of place and alienated in Bangladesh (cf. Gardner and Shukur, 1994:159). The draw of Islam is strongest amongst those who feel little association with either Britain or with Bangladesh (Gardner and Shukur, 1994:162).

Hussain's (E., 2007) autobiographical book *The Islamist* is a pertinent case study of exactly the types of transitions that have led not only to the radicalisation of some British Bangladeshis and Pakistanis but also from interpretations of Islam from South Asia to those influenced by conservative thinkers such as Maududi and Saudi Arabian ideas. Hussain's journey from a family of devout followers of a Sylheti *pir* (spiritual master) through the Jammāt e Islāmī-influenced East London Mosque and into the radical Hizb ut-Tahrir is one that, although exceptional, touches upon many of the issues discussed here. Hussain portrays himself as a misfit, who in the bewildering,

unfriendly world of East London found companionship and structure from Islamist groups. The political stance of these groups, strongly opposing Britain's wars in the Middle East and seeing Islam as the solution to social, political as well as spiritual problems appealed to him (Hussain, E. 2007:28).

The rejection that many British Muslims have felt due to the prejudice and racism that they have suffered in the UK has led to a deep ambivalence toward the UK. The ambivalence some British Bangladeshis feel towards the British government and society is coupled with the ambivalence many of them feel on visits to Bangladesh, as I described in chapter 4. These factors have led some towards religion as a source of identity and certainty, weakening relations with their 'homelands' and indeed the very idea of 'the nation' have also contributed to this (Sayyid, 2000:49). Events and subjectivities in the UK however are closely inter-related with global geo-political events.

## **Global events**

Global political events have played a crucial role in the formation and popularity of Islamist groups. A series of events and controversies from the 1980s until the present day has stimulated and maintained the strength and appeal of Islamist political involvement. Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Kashmir, *halal* food in schools and prisons, headscarves and the Rushdie affair, have been sources of rancour. The interconnectedness of these events and the impact they have on lives and events in London indicates the existence of a sense of a world wide Muslim community or *umma*, which I will discuss later (Begum and Eade, 2005:185, Hussain, 2007:205).

In contrast to Hall's (1992a) analysis of globalisation and capitalism, Huntington (1993, 1997) states that economic modernization and social change are separating people from local identities. He predicted that:

*The fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural* (Huntington, 1993).

Globalisation and capitalism, he maintains weaken the nation state as a source of identity (Huntington, 1997:175). Like Sayyid (2000) he predicts that emerging Islamic subjectivities are a threat to the nation state. Huntington claims that religion has filled this gap in many parts of the world, often in the form of movements that are labelled 'fundamentalist' (Huntingdon, 1993).

Huntington's 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis led to a war of words between right wing and liberal scholars. Said (2001) responded with 'The Clash of Ignorance' in which he outlined the long-standing and complex history of conflict, interdependence, mimicry and ambivalence between Islam and Christianity or 'the West'. He points out that Huntington (1993, 1997) and Lewis (1990) do not acknowledge the internal dynamics and plurality of every 'civilization'. Terms like 'the West' and 'Islam' are too simplistic. The timing of Said's article was no accident either - it was published a month after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 (9/11). Said claims that 9/11 has been wrongly interpreted by right wing analysts as proof of Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' thesis. Said balances criticism of 'Islamic fundamentalists' by pointing out similar movements within 'Jewish' and 'Christian' religious and political discourse. Said concludes that "*it is better to think in terms of powerful and powerless communities, the secular politics of reason and ignorance and universal principles of justice and*

*injustice.*" (Said, 2001). It is interesting to note that influential Islamist thinkers such as Maududi (1992) and Qutb (1993) subscribe to similar ideas about the total incompatibility of Western secularism and Islam as Huntington (1993, 1997) does. The similarities in their simplistic notions and inflammatory rhetoric are indicative of the political motivations of their intellectual work.

Recent history in the Middle East reinforces antagonism between some Muslims and Anglo-American regimes. Beaumont (2001) identifies Anglo-American attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq and support for Israel as specific grievances. He also finds, however, that internal conflicts within the Islamic world are influential and less obvious sources of rancour (Beaumont, 2001). The failure of 'the Islamic project' on issues such as governance and modernisation are also crucial factors. A sense of failure has fostered a historic sense of inferiority at Europe's dominance of the world since the nineteenth century. This is part of the continuous process of self-evaluation with respect to 'the other', identified by Hall (1992a), Cohen, (1994) and Said (1978). Feelings of inferiority are coupled with the demographic factors of urbanisation and unequal development.

Divisions within Islamic societies are at the root of many of the 'problematic' Islamist groups. Divisions between those who argue for reform, modernisation or 'an Islamic Enlightenment' and those arguing for more conservative interpretations of Islam or what has become known as 'Islamic fundamentalism' exist in many Islamic countries. Underdevelopment, lack of democracy and freedom of expression lead to the rise of conspiracy theories (Beaumont, 2001). Perhaps in this we can see the origin of some of Maududi (1992) and Qutb's (1993) more controversial contentions, blaming America or Jews for their feelings of powerlessness and alienation.

Hussain (D., 2007) maintains that this understanding of Muslim subjectivity is too simple. The commonly held belief that that Muslims perceive themselves to be under attack and as a result turn to Islamist organisations and Islamic extremism he argues, simplifies the complex situation in the way that Huntingdon (1993, 1997) has. These global processes and events have been enormously influential on Muslim subjectivities, but they are not the complete picture. Local interpretations of events, beliefs and practices and other orders come into play. Hussain invokes Robertson's (1995) idea of 'glocalisation' to explore how global ideas are mediated according to local contexts (Hussain, D., 2007:191). Before going on to discuss Islam in London, I will explain the idea of the 'Muslim *umma*' – the manifestation of a 'global Islam'.

### **The Muslim *umma***

Perhaps it would be stretching the concept of a social field to refer to a 'British Muslim social field' or a 'global Islamic social field', but I believe that this may be the best conceptualisation. The idea of the Muslim *umma* is perhaps a type of global transnational Islamic social field. The Muslim *umma* is a "*community<sup>78</sup> of believing women and men unified by faith and transcending national state boundaries*" (Sayyid, 2000:36). Hussain (D., 2007) and Mandaville (2009) liken the idea of the *umma* to Anderson's (1983) notion of 'imagined communities'. Socially constructed communities whose members will "*never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.*" (Anderson, 1983:15).

Mandaville (2009) includes the idea of the Muslim *umma* alongside other forms of Muslim transnationalism, some of which I discussed earlier. For him, the discourse of the *umma* has two elements; one is invoked by Islamist organisations to rally supporters. The other is a more

---

<sup>78</sup> *umma* means 'community' in Arabic

sociological sense of the word, used to discuss the strong sense of an imagined community of believers. Mandaville likens the discourse of the *umma* to a 'global Muslim public sphere', united by communications technology, global flows of people and international organisations (Mandaville, 2009:496).

Sayyid (2000) discusses the idea of the Muslim *umma* in some detail, engaging with Castells' (1997) analysis of Muslim subjectivities. Sayyid first points to several of the processes of globalisation. The debate is about the challenge that the Muslim *umma* poses to the idea of the nation. The increase in various types of flows, a characteristic of globalisation, has contributed to the emergence of the Muslim *umma*.

Sayyid gives three pieces of evidence for the formation of the Muslim *umma*. Firstly, there has, he says, been an assertion of an explicit Muslim subjectivity. This has reached Muslim communities all over the world. Secondly, Muslims are heavily represented in communities of immigrants throughout the developed world. This is due to migrations that are associated with post-colonial relationships and also due to the fact that a large proportion of the world's refugees in recent decades have been Muslim. Finally, like many migrants, these Muslims have tended to concentrate in urban areas. These urban areas such as London are crucial spaces and 'nodes' of global cultural flows and communications (Sayyid, 2000:35-36). Mandaville mentions flows of Muslim people around the world as a separate element of Muslim transnationalism from the idea of the *umma*. He maintains that while these people are Muslims and the experiences of migration undeniably affect their beliefs and practices, their movement has been largely for economic or political rather than religious reasons (Mandaville, 2009:494).



These factors have contributed to the convergence of diverse groups of Muslims around certain commonalities. Castells (1997) maintains that Muslims' attachment to their 'homeland' is not as strong as their attachment to the *umma*, thus undermining the idea of the nation (Castells, 1997:15). Sayyid frames this relationship in more complex terms. The idea of the *umma* undermines the nation by problematising the integration of different groups into a geographically bounded area. It also transcends the nation by indicating loyalties to an order much larger than the nation (Sayyid 2000:36).

Sayyid then struggles with the problem of how to conceptualise the Muslim *umma*. It is not a nation, a common market, a common way of life nor a linguistic community. The difficulty of identifying the *umma* suggests that the idea of Muslim identity is another of those 'useful fictions' (Sayyid, 2000:37). Like ideas of 'culture', it is socially constructed. Sayyid treads a careful path between deconstructing the idea of the *umma* and elevating it into a reified reality. This too is the problem that Hussain (2007) discusses and that which I must deal with here. The Muslim *umma* and Muslim identities do not create a discrete homogenous way of life and understanding of the world. They do create common subjectivities and influences which, while overlapping with other social fields or influences and locally mediated, are nonetheless influential.

Sayyid argues for the use of a modified version of the idea of diaspora. Diasporas do not, he says require their original features any more, they have begun to replace the idea of the nation. The *"dream of homogenous, hermetically contained spaces is being replaced by ... the idea of hybridized porous collectives that flow and overflow through any attempt to contain them"* (Sayyid, 2000:43). Sayyid's descriptions are compelling but he is using the idea of diaspora in ways which do not correspond to its original meaning. This template, drawing on the histories of Jewish and

African diasporas requires a homeland, displacement and settlement (Sayyid, 2000:37). His (re)conceptualisation of diaspora includes all Muslim migrants and all of those who do not migrate, who are the vast majority. He is perhaps too focused on a relatively small number of Muslims who are migrants or part of 'diasporas' in Europe and North America.

Sayyid's idea that homogenous, bounded nations are being replaced by hybridized fluid 'diasporas' is correct in my view; my argument is simply that 'diaspora' is the wrong word. This notion applies both to a world in which transnationalism and globalisation have increased global exchange and flows and in which analysts are increasingly recognising that nations and cultures were never so homogeneous, discrete and bounded before anyway.

The idea of transnational or global social fields which I have been using in this thesis seems to better describe the phenomenon of the Muslim *umma*. This social field is global rather than incorporating two locations. In this global social field there is a logic and rules, derived from the Qur'an and related texts. There are forms of capital, principally symbolic. There are struggles for power and legitimacy between Sunni and Shia, Sunni and Sufi, 'modernisers' and 'radicals', Saudis and Iranians, traditionalists and feminists. There are struggles to control the locations, histories, economies and practices of Islam. Most pertinently today there are many struggles in Muslim nations and communities over what kind of relations religion and Islam should have with the field of power and politics.

The Muslim *umma* derives strength and vitality from two processes. One is the end of the 'Age of Europe', the decentring of the West that Sayyid (2000) and Hall (1992a) point to. The other is the decentring of the peripheral nation-state, a process associated with globalisation. Increasing power

is held by international organisations and corporations, supra-national bodies such as the European Union (EU) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). In this space between two forms of decentring, the Muslim *umma* has gained strength, between the decreasing power and legitimacy of Western hegemony and the simultaneous growth in the power of transnational bodies over nation states (Sayyid, 2000:49).

Modood (1997) explains what the Muslim *umma* means for British Muslims:

*This did not mean a rigid 'fundamentalist' anti-Western, anti-modernist religiosity, but it did mean that the new ways of living, the gradually becoming a part of British society had to be culturally justified in terms compatible with a Muslim faith and the welfare of the Muslim people (Modood, 1997:158).*

This social field - the Muslim *umma* - has very few spaces that represent or correspond to it. It is a feature of Islam that one may pray or read the Qur'an anywhere. Aside from the Kaaba,<sup>79</sup> buildings or locations are not venerated in Islam. Perhaps mosques represent spaces of Islam, but the way Islam is practised, especially by women and children does not lend itself to seeing those as the only 'Islamic spaces'. In Islington there are not many mosques. The way Islam was seen by those in my study, as Modood's quote above indicates, was as a meta-narrative or constant point of reference with which to evaluate all other practices, objects or events. There was not much, as I will describe later, that was not scrutinised through the filter of what was 'correct' in an Islamic sense.

---

<sup>79</sup> The most sacred site in Islam, in Mecca, believed to be on the site of a building built by Abraham / Ibrahim

The role of Islam was presented to me by my research subjects as an uncomplicated distinction between *halal* and *haram*. However, what is the 'correct' interpretation of Islam or the Qur'an is highly contested. Nowhere are organisations like Jammāt e Islāmī, Hizb ut-Tahrir, or Hamas more feared and hated than among opposing groups of Muslims. I will discuss some of the debates over the role of Islam and Islamist groups in the lives of British Bangladeshis in London in the next section.

## **Islam in London**

Hussain's (D., 2007) article about the 'Islamicisation' of Bangladeshi communities in East London links international events and processes with national and local events and subjectivities in the UK. Alongside many of the events mentioned above, Hussain analyses local political developments in East London and the relationship between faith organisations and the state.

Increasingly, faith organisations have attracted government funding to carry out welfare and regeneration work and provide an important safety net in areas that the government no longer provides services. Organisations like the Young Muslim Organisation, affiliated to the East London Mosque have gained in legitimacy and importance (Hussain, D., 2007:196, Begum and Eade, 2005:186). This rise to prominence has not been uncontroversial however.

Religious leaders and organisations have occupied leading positions in the Bangladeshi community. This is linked to the gradual decline of secular socialist organisers as the centre of the Bangladeshi community's political scene. Religious organisations have been promoted by the

increasing emphasis on religion as a form of identity and through funding and recognition from government (Eade and Garbin, 2002:137). With money from Saudi Arabia, the new East London Mosque was built in Whitechapel in 1985 and now hosts many important Islamic organisations and events (Glynn, 2002:970).

Eade and Garbin (2002) and Hussain's (D., 2007) work compares Islamist organisations such as those based at the East London Mosque and the Islamist political party, Jamaat e Islami, with secular Bangladeshi organisations in London. The Swadhinata Trust, a secular Bangladeshi organisation, works to bring collaborators from the 1971 Liberation War living in the UK to justice. This appears to be of little importance to many young British Bangladeshis. They are more interested in the every day contemporary issues of drugs, gangs and unemployment. These are issues which religious organisations, such as those attached to the East London Mosque, have been or are perceived to have been effective at tackling (Hussain, D., 2007:202). Many young Bangladeshis born in the UK after 1971 consider Bangladeshi politics corrupt and irrelevant to their lives (Glynn 2002:987).

Jamaat e Islami MPs visit the East London Mosque, apparently using it as a base for political fundraising (Hussain, D., 2007:203). Their visits are accompanied by demonstrations by those who oppose their conservative religious and political stance. Older Bangladeshis, who remember the Liberation War, accuse some of these MPs of being war criminals. Counter-demonstrations have emerged in support of Jamaat by young, British-born Islamists. A quote from Eade and Garbin's (2002) research shows the tensions that these issues reveal in the community and between generations:

*...you see families protesting on one side of the street and their children on the other side following the young Muslim groups ... it was very bad to see that violence and the parents crying and shouting because their children were there as well (Eade and Garbin, 2002:139).*

There is a wide spectrum of responses and attitudes to the role Islam should play in the daily lives of people from Muslim countries. Hussain points out that about half of British Asians are Muslim and among those there are varying levels of commitment to an 'Islamic identity'. Some see their 'cultural heritage' as inseparable from Islam, whereas others emphasise a 'hyphenated British-Asian cultural identity' or see the two as separate or even incompatible (Hussain, D., 2007:206). Sen (2006) makes a similar point, showing how a 'Muslim', may be many other things besides a Muslim, a statement that may seem obvious, but seems to be difficult for many Muslims and non-Muslims alike to grasp (Sen, 2006:67). The diverse origins, experiences and attitudes of Muslims in London as in other parts of the world prevent them from becoming a homogenous group with one set of beliefs and practices.

The combination of the diverse 'roots and routes' of Muslims in London, the complex interactions these groups have with local politics and a wide variety of alternative allegiances that most people have means that there is no homogenous discrete 'Muslim identity'. British Bangladeshi views on the role Islam in daily life are heterogeneous. The 'war on terror' has united some of diverse groups in a common sense of anger and injustice. However, older British Bangladeshis expressed their anger about British foreign policy in different ways to younger British-born Bangladeshis. Those not born in Britain were worried about citizenship rights and did not want their 'loyalty' to Britain to be questioned. Opposition was quiet and mainly expressed in private (Begum and Eade, 2005:189).

This division runs along old fault lines in East London's Bangladeshi community. The Brick Lane Mosque, in what was once a synagogue and before that a Huguenot church, opposes the politicised Jamaat-inspired Islam at the East London Mosque. The older 'first generation' worshippers there maintain a more spiritual interpretation of Islam influenced by *pirs* and saints from Sylhet (Hussain, E. 2007:25).

Among young British-born Bangladeshis there has been a surge of interest in the meaning of Islam since 9/11 (Glynn 2002, Begum and Eade, 2005:189). Islamist organisations have effectively positioned themselves to deal with local issues at the same time as harnessing a newly politicised group of young people following 9/11. Their rhetoric and activities fits neatly with government ideas and policies about 'multiculturalism'. They have effectively worked within these global, national and local contexts to join other equality-seeking movements and position themselves as community leaders (Begum and Eade, 2005:189, Glynn, 2002:975, Hussain, D., 2007:209)

Hussain maintains that Islamist movements have sought to eliminate heterogeneity among London's Muslims. They wish to homogenise Muslims around a narrow, orthodox interpretation of Islam governing all aspects of believer's lives. Bengali Muslims are forced to determine which practices or beliefs are the 'correct' Islamic way and which are 'translated' interpretations of Islam. Practices that are perceived to be rural Sylheti interpretations of Islam, Sufi mysticism, 'incorrect' interpretations or South Asian adaptations are abandoned in favour of the more logical, scripture based, literate Islam practised in London (Hussain, D., 2007:207, Eade and Garbin, 2002:142). Saudi Arabian finance for mosques such as the East London Mosque has led to the promotion of Saudi Islamic ideas which are in competition with South Asian interpretations (Glynn, 2002:970).

Bangladeshi Muslims re-evaluate what 'correct' Islamic practices are when they see that other Muslims in London have different practices that they consider the 'correct' practice. Eade and Garbin (2002) cite the Boishaki Mela (the Bengali New Year festival) as an example of this. Islamists argue that it is a Hindu festival and is divisive for Muslims, emphasising national or ethnic identities over religious ones. Secular British Bangladeshis argue that most Muslims in Bangladesh celebrate Boishaki Mela and point out that the Bangla language; the cuisine and dress are also specific to the region (Eade and Garbin, 2002:142, Hussain, D., 2007:207).

Several times in my fieldwork I came across this phenomenon. Each time, practices that had been deemed to be 'bad' or undesirable were associated with 'Bengali culture' and the solution offered referred to Islamic principles. In a discussion about marriage practices with a group of Bangladeshi women, we discussed their attitudes towards their children's marriages. One recounted a discussion she had had with an Afghan man, who asked her why Bangladeshi people took their daughters back to Bangladesh to marry them off very young. This practice, like others disapproved of in the UK was ascribed to 'Bengali culture'.

Nadia: *Before you know, in our culture, in our country they don't used to ask the girl, 'are you going to marry this man?' they just straight away ... arranged the marriage.*

Halima: *That's the Bengali culture.*

Nadia: *But now they, now is different, Islam says that you have to ask the girl if she wants to, you can't force them.*

B: *Yeah, so Islamic ideas are different from Bengali ideas?*

Nadia: *Yes.*



Halima: *From Pakistan and Bangladesh it's different Islam. View is different from Pakistan and Bangladesh, let me make clear you, because a Afghanistani man complain me, he said 'why you Bangladeshi people take your daughters back home and sons back home and get married?' not only, but mostly from Pakistani and Bangladeshi.*

B: *Yes, take the daughters back to Bangladesh and quickly marry them.*

Halima: *No, that's not happening any more ... it's cut down now.*

Nadia: *Islam doesn't say that*<sup>80</sup>.

The sense of Sylhet being the 'sacred *desh*<sup>81</sup>', a source of Islamic spiritual power, associated with the *pirs* and saints of the region, most notably Shah Jalal (Gardner, 1993:6, 1995:231) has been replaced among many British Bangladeshis by more logical and scripture based forms of Islam such as that proposed by Jamaat e Islami. Considering the 'sacred *desh*' to have religious power is seen by many in London as the 'mumbo jumbo' of old Bangladeshis and village superstitions; it is not seen as being 'correct' in an Islamic sense. The more literate and influenced by Islamist activities young British Bangladeshis become, the more their parents seek to build a kind of symbolic capital which we could refer to as 'sacred capital' through Qu'ran classes, the more the idea of the 'sacred *desh*' having any of this 'sacred capital' is damaged (cf. Hussain, E., 2007:36, Gardner, 1995)

Gardner's (1993) account of the meanings of the *desh* to Sylhetis in the 1980s (which I described in chapter 4) would be considered by many British Bangladeshis to belong to an uneducated rural person, full of attitudes inconsistent with the religious and secular education British Bangladeshis

---

<sup>80</sup> Education and marriage conversation with mothers, Poynder Primary School, 27.11.2008

<sup>81</sup> '*desh*' means home, land or country, and is contrasted with '*bidesh*' which means abroad (Gardner (1993)

receive in the UK. Symbolic capital or 'sacred capital' is acquired now among British Bangladeshis through knowledge of the 'correct' Islamic rules and practices. In contrast to their grandparents' generation, many young British Bangladeshis have a thorough understanding of the Qu'ran. They have achieved this through literacy in both English and Arabic and long hours of study in Qu'ran classes like those I described earlier in this chapter which are vital for the acquisition of 'sacred capital'.

Ishrat, an 11 year old girl in Islington described her view of Bangladeshi Islamic practices to me, when I asked her about wearing the headscarf in Bangladesh. She linked poor observance of the 'correct' Islamic practices with assumptions about status in Bangladesh's hierarchical society.

*B: What about your cousins, do they wear it? [the headscarf]*

*Ishrat: No, because in Bangladesh, loads of people don't care about Islam and they just go out, whatever they wear, they go. Lots of gossiping, lots of back chatting.*

*B: Yeah, so do people care more about Islam here d'you think?*

*Ishrat: Yeah, because, in Bangladesh, they have all they want, like a mosque next to the house. But like they go 'oh I don't want to go, ooh I don't want to go to mosque, aaah' like that. And we, we don't have it and we have to pay for going to mosque. Yeah, like we have this inside thought that if I do this I'm going to be that, but they don't, they know that they think that because their dad's high, they think they're going to be high<sup>82</sup>.*

Among the British Bangladeshis families in Islington almost all the girls wore the headscarf from the age of about six. This practice is increasingly common in Bangladesh but is still not as

---

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Ishrat, 11, at Poynder Primary School, 12.02.2008

widespread as it is among Bangladeshis living in London where it has become the norm.

Rozario's (2006) work on the wearing of *burqa* in Bangladesh links the phenomenon to 'modernist' forms of Islam. The increase in *burqa* and headscarf wearing is a compromise between Islamist ideologies and the demands of contemporary urban life (Rozario, 2006:378). I tend to agree with Rozario's analysis, adding to it as I have in chapter 5 an element of the spatial arrangement of houses and cities in London (although similar issues apply in Dhaka).

Wearing the stretchy cotton headscarf rather than a *burqa* or scarf has become the norm for the majority of the British Bangladeshi girls. Some did not wear it, or took it off for sports and others like Ayesha and Laila only wore it when they went to the Qur'an classes. Older girls all wore their headscarves when they went out. There seemed to be little resistance to this practice and the girls accepted it. Parents said that they started encouraging their daughters to wear headscarves young, 'so they became used to it' and one girl confirmed to me that she felt strange and naked if she went out without it on. Wearing the headscarf was considered an important part of 'correct' Islamic practice for girls and women by British Bangladeshis. Somali girls also followed this practice, but the Turkish girls did not.

Forums, Qur'anic verses, articles and discussions on the internet are an important source of information and debate about 'correct' Islamic practices. This is important as knowledge of 'correct' Islamic rules and dispositions towards practices and dilemmas is crucial to acquiring 'sacred capital'. The pursuit of a *halal* lifestyle and the 'correct' form of religious practices in London often requires changes to practices common in Bangladesh. The ubiquity of wearing headscarves of

various types in London is an example of this. The saints, Sufis and *pirs* of Sylhet are rejected in favour of local, on-line or televised imams and scholars such as Dr. Zakir Naik<sup>83</sup>.

The effects of secular and religious education in London decrease the power of the 'sacred *desh*' due to increasing rejection of Bangladeshi and South Asian interpretations of Islam. British Bangladeshis continue to be linked to Bangladesh and their families there and continue to feel a personal connection to the land, but they no longer feel that the *desh* has an Islamic religious value.

## **Islam in Islington**

Glynn, (2002), Eade and Garbin (2002), Hussain (E., 2007) and Hussain (D., 2007)'s work on Islam and politics in Tower Hamlets paints a fraught and fractious picture. In Islington, where Bangladeshi Muslims were a minority, there was not so much scope for political engagement or conflict, religious or secular. Bangladeshis in Islington did not have the same sense of belonging to local political or religious factions. They looked to Tower Hamlets for specifically British Bangladeshi political factions and agendas. Their attitudes towards religion and politics were couched more in national and international terms. Religion was, as I have indicated, enormously important to them however. Children expressed this to me very early on in my research.

My field notes contain several accounts of conversations with children where they asked me about my own background and religious views. Many of them asked me if I was a Muslim, which provoked some revealing conversations. When I replied that I was not a Muslim I was asked why if

---

<sup>83</sup> Founder and owner of Peace TV, an Islamic Satellite Television Channel based in Mumbai ([www.peacetv.tv](http://www.peacetv.tv))

I was not a Muslim, I could speak Bangla. Religion, language and ethnicity were rolled into one identity of the untroubled essential type. Religion was something you were born with, as sure as you were Bangladeshi; you were a Muslim, no question. I pointed out to several children that Hindus in West Bengal spoke Bangla too, but they did not believe me. Being Bangladeshi, speaking Bangla and being a Muslim were all seen as inherently linked in this essential idea of identity. This 'Bangladeshi identity' was presented to and by these children as reified, homogenous and unproblematic.

This conceptualisation of the place of religion in identity was illustrated to me one day in Bangladesh as I chatted with Saiful. It was just before Eid in December 2007. We sat lazily in the shade of some palm trees beside the pond with Saiful's cousin and a Hindu boy, the son of a labourer who worked on the family farm. The conversation turned to religion as they explained to me that the boy and his family were Hindus. They asked me what religion I was and I replied that I was not religious. This met with total incomprehension. Saiful was non-plussed, after a roll call of all the religions he knew, intended to jog my memory about my forgotten faith, he gave up.

*"You must be religious" he insisted, "you must be a Christian, you are born with a religion, if you aren't any religion you aren't a human, you must be an alien."*<sup>84</sup>

I insisted, trying to explain my ideas, that religion was a way of thinking rather than something you are born with. This met with further incomprehension and derision, until finally I had to concede that I was a Christian so that we could all go and have lunch in peace.

---

<sup>84</sup> Conversation with Saiful in Sylhet, 20.12.2007

Islam was central to the way in which Bangladeshis in Islington saw themselves. As Saiful's comments indicate, religion is as much about identity as belief for many British Bangladeshi children. When I asked them to prioritise their different identities, many responded by saying that they were Muslims first and everything else afterwards. Earlier I cited part of a discussion with a group of Bangladeshi women about marriage. They had compared 'Bengali' practices unfavourably with 'Islamic' practices. Later in the discussion I asked them if they would allow their children to marry anyone they wanted.

*B: ... You said when they are older they can do what they like, what about when they are older and they want to get married ... will you stop them?*

*Halima: We will, we will, as a guardian, as a parent I will say no, if it's the same ... religion it will be ... nice, but if its understanding its ok but it doesn't work ... for the whole life, I will say no.*

*B: If ... they want to marry a Christian?*

*Halima: I would say no.*

*Husnahena: Definitely no<sup>85</sup>.*

For them the issue of 'choice' was less important than the issue of religion. While I was initially interested in asking them about marriages between British Bangladeshis and partners from Bangladesh, they identified religion as more important. They would not mind someone from Bangladesh, from London, from another ethnic background they said, as long as they were a good Muslim. Interestingly they said that they would not need to convince their children of these things

---

<sup>85</sup> Education and marriage conversation with mothers, Poynder Primary School, 27.11.2008

and that their children would make the right decisions as they had a clear understanding of the Islamic guidelines on marriage.

The women in the group felt that their children had learned from the mistakes of older people who had experimented with these 'mixed' marriages. They recounted the story of a cousin of one of them who had married a White English girl with disastrous consequences. Ruby explained that children were more 'mature' now and understood the complexities and difficulties of inter-cultural or inter-faith marriages:

*Ruby: He ... have to be, told before your child, when they are young what is the difference between same culture or other, our children now, they are much mature than before children ... before like ... ten years older than them, now ... they are married or ... separated they knows these thing, what is the difference, what gonna ... happen when they mix relationship ... like religion or something. Like a Christian get married with a Muslim ... they don't match<sup>86</sup>.*

Another woman said that she thought she would not have that much influence over the man her daughter married. She said that her daughter knew the Islamic rules on marriage, that it should be a contract (*nikkah*) between consenting parties. Due to her daughter's knowledge and insistence on these Islamic guidelines, the final decision would rest with her and she was confident that her daughter would choose an appropriate man.

---

<sup>86</sup> Education and marriage conversation with mothers, Poynder Primary School, 27.11.2008

If we think back to Jenks' (1996) discussion of Dionysian and Apollonian ideas about childhood which I reviewed in chapter 5. Jenks discussed the different systems of discipline associated with the two conceptualisations of childhood. What these women were expressing is a transition from Dionysian ideas about discipline, where children have to be strictly disciplined, guided and punished, to a more internalised panopticon of guilt and self regulation. Jenks (1996) associates this transition with ideas of modernity, in London; new forms of Islam are constructed as an alternative modernity by British Bangladeshis who are sceptical of 'Western modernity'. Children were at the forefront of this transition from Bengali interpretations of Islam to the stricter and more literate interpretation influenced by the Jamaat e Islami and Saudi Arabia. They were often the most literate in their families and the most able to find out which were the 'correct' practices. Parents wanted to create in their children, 'better', more devout Muslims.

In one of my computer classes I was discussing earthquakes and natural disasters. I showed the Bangladeshi mothers a BBC interactive guide about how earthquakes happen. After the whole class had watched the animated demonstration of tectonic plates, one lady admitted that she did not believe any of it. Soon, all of them enthusiastically denounced the BBC guide and said that they did not believe that earthquakes happened like that. In the conversation that followed, they said that volcanoes, cyclones, floods and other natural disasters were sent by Allah to punish sinners. Why I asked, did Allah continuously punish Bangladesh, especially in the light of the very destructive cyclone that had recently hit Bangladesh? The conversation ground to a halt at this point and one lady said that she would ask her daughters to find the answer in time for the next class. Her daughters (aged 12 and 14) would look it up and tell her, for they knew the Qur'an and



relevant literature better than her. Sure enough, the next week the daughters had explained to their mother to tell me that natural disasters were sent to test the faith of Muslims.

Just like in my art club at the Lansbury Youth Club when a young volunteer and children had revolted against my idea of drawing people, Islamic ideas were employed to resist the teaching and undermine the materials of activities that were unpopular or to test a teacher's authority. Children and young people knew religious edicts very well, having studied the Qur'an and related texts carefully in classes. They knew how to employ this knowledge to resist unwanted instructions from parents as well as teachers. Their parents turned to them for help and information on difficult questions or issues.

Islam was central to the way in which the children and their families lived their lives. The appropriateness of practices in every sphere of their lives was constantly evaluated using religious rules. After a trip to Bangladesh I presented one family with framed pictures of their children on the visit to Bangladesh as a gift. They thanked me for the photos and were all happy and amused to see them. Abdul, the father of the family said that he would hang the photos up, and 'he didn't care what people said'. They never did hang the photos up, however, due to his wife's insistence on the idea that angels never enter a house with pictures on the wall.

*I heard Allah's Apostle Gibreel [the Archangel Gabriel] saying; "Angels (of Mercy) do not enter a house wherein there is a dog or a picture of a living creature (a human being or an animal)." Hadith - Bukhari 4:448, Narrated by Abu Talha*

I found the above quotation from the Hadith Bukhari on the website [www.muttaqun.com](http://www.muttaqun.com)<sup>87</sup>. The website aims to educate Muslims about the 'correct' attitudes and practices they should take towards everyday issues. Muttaqun means '*pious and righteous people who fear Allah, abstaining from things forbidden by Allah and love Allah, doing those things which are encouraged by Allah*'. There are many similar websites that are used by British Bangladeshis in Islington to make sure they are following the 'correct' practices.

In the same family's house, I was once offered three large bottles of Coca Cola that the family had decided to discard after being unable to work out whether it was *halal* or not. We used their computer to search through internet forums. However, we could not find a conclusive answer to the question and the issue was forgotten. They kept the Coca Cola, much to the children's relief. Food and drink was a constant concern, school dinners were avoided if it was thought that they were not *halal*. The children employed these rules in their banter at school. When school dinners were mocked and denigrated by other pupils, Bangladeshi pupils would join in by saying how they were *haram* and disgusting.

Bangladeshi food and drink were considered *halal*, having been consumed by Muslims for many years. Other unfamiliar or foreign foods had to be evaluated for their *halal* or *haram* status. In this way religion and habitus combined, in the past Bengali food would have been re-evaluated by recently converted Muslims. Now those cooking and eating practices and dispositions are part of the Bangladeshi habitus. New additions to diets and kitchens are evaluated firstly for their *halal* status and then for their taste or utility. Several times I brought sweets, juice or biscuits to share

---

<sup>87</sup> [www.muttaqun.com](http://www.muttaqun.com), Accessed in April 2009, is based in Florida in the US.

with families I visited and these were always scrutinised very carefully, often by the most knowledgeable and literate child, to make sure that there was nothing *haram* in the ingredients.

## **The Qur'an**

The Qur'an classes which I attended and described earlier in this account played an important role for British Bangladeshi families in Islington. They helped the children have a thorough understanding of Islam and the Qur'an. Parents looked to their children's superior knowledge of the Qur'an and ability to quickly access information on relevant issues on-line for guidance. Whether the children grow up to become more 'British', maintained contact with Bangladesh or followed Bangladeshi practices appeared to be of less concern to parents than the fact that they should be and should marry Muslims.

Rafique, who was an excellent student at school and received glowing reports from his teachers every year, begged his father not to send him to Qur'an classes. He attended a different class than the one I attended and said that the teacher hit the students with a ruler if they got their recitations wrong. He preferred the pedagogic model of Poynder Primary School, where he was busy racking up merits and badges, awards for behaviour, punctuality and academic performance. He found the Qur'an memorisation hard, the material boring and the discipline frightening. It was, he was told by his father, a parent's duty to make their child memorise the Qur'an (cf. Ostberg, 2003:177).

The mothers who ran the Qur'an classes I attended felt similarly. They looked on proudly as their children recited the Qur'an or led prayers. They felt that they had missed out on a 'proper' Islamic education as children in Sylhet. One mother said that she had tried to improve the accuracy of her

recitation and understanding of the Qur'an with a teacher in London. She said she had given up in frustration, after finding that the hard learned verses she knew were, in fact, littered with errors and that it was difficult to learn the meanings of so many words. The mothers blamed this incorrect learning on their teachers they had been taught by as children in Bangladesh. Their recently acquired knowledge of Islamic practices in London convinced them that they had grown up in Sylhet engaging in a lot of 'incorrect' practices. Their children would not miss out on these important elements of their education. They wanted their children to learn how to recite and understand the Qur'an correctly and to follow Qur'anic principles in letter and in spirit.

I asked parents and children about reading the Qur'an, or memorising it. What was the point of reading it in Arabic when they could not understand it? Through these discussions I learned a lot about the meanings and practices surrounding the Qur'an. The verses of the Qur'an in the original Arabic are thought to be the word of Allah, so if translated their meaning would be subtly changed – which is unacceptable to Muslims. Memorisation and recital of the actual words of Allah has a power and meaning beyond the meaning held in the words and verses. This is why many parents persevered with the unpopular lessons. Many families use translations or interpretations such as the Talimul Huq (Teachings of Islam) or the websites I mentioned earlier written by scholars based on the original texts to understand the meanings. In this excerpt from a conversation with a group of children they express many of these issues:

*B: What's the point learning the Qur'an if you don't understand what it means?*

*Shirin: No, you don't have to understand what it means but you...*

*B: Why not?*

*Laila: It's important to learn Arabic.*

B: Yeah but if you can just say something without knowing what it means, what's the point? ... Like the Qur'an has all the important messages for Muslims in it doesn't it? All the rules?

Tasneem: No, it's not all the rules, all the Qur'an is about the life of Mohammed sallallaahu-alaihi-wasallam (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him) ... and the second part of the Qur'an is about at the end about gunna, what we should do to keep safe in our Muslim and all that how we should respect other Muslim people like old people.

B: But if you don't know what it means then how will you ever understand it?

Tasneem: No, it's in the Talimul Haq, there's this 'nother book that I've got and its in the Talimul Haq all the meanings and I know the meanings and you see all of them the words are the merciful of Allah the day of judgement.

...

B: Yeah but what I don't understand is if you, when you read the Qur'an if you read it and you don't understand how do you know what to do?

Laila: Because it says it, oh you're confusing.

B: No but you read it, like you told me a bit, but you don't understand what it means.

Shirin: You don't have to understand what it means.

B: But then how do you know what to do and what not to do? How do you know what the Qur'an says if you don't understand it?

Tasneem: There's this 'nother version of the book in English.

B: Ok so you then read the book in English to find out what it means? So then why don't you just read the book in English?

Shirin: Because it's different in English.

Tasneem: Because otherwise Allah will punish you.

Shirin: *He won't punish you, it's a different meaning.*

B: *It's a different meaning in English?*

Shirin: *Yeah.*

B: *Ok well why don't they have the same in English?*

Shirin: *Because Arabic is different from English.*<sup>88</sup>

The children made several observations in this exchange. Firstly they maintain that it is important to read the Qur'an, but Shirin says that it is not necessary to understand the meaning. Ostberg's (2003) analysis of Pakistani children's Qur'an classes in Norway includes a discussion of the oral tradition of the Qur'an. How, through the sound of the verses, Muslims believe they can experience God; the very recitation is an act of prayer and can be experienced as a kind of meditation (Ostberg, 2003:174).

This use of words, of language is reminiscent of Austin's (1962) ideas about performative elements of speech. Certain types of speech which do not describe or report or attempt to be true or false, are a part of doing something – a 'speech act' (Austin, 1962:5). Performative speech, such as the recital of verses from the Qur'an, has to be done correctly, by people who believe in its significance, following an acceptable convention, by an appropriate person and at an appropriate time (Austin, 1962:15). In this way the recital of verses of the Qur'an has significance beyond the meaning; the performative action of reciting them is significant in itself. This raises the significance of the manner in which the verses are recited; correctness and

---

<sup>88</sup> Discussion on Language (Older Group), Poynder Primary School, 07.05.2008

strict following of conventions and precise language become more important in performative speech. This is why the Qur'an classes are considered so important by parents.

The children explained that translating the Qur'an is not acceptable because it would change the original sacred words. The physical book, its contents and the very language it is written in are all considered sacred (cf. Ostberg, 2003:173). The children alerted me to the fact that they get a lot of their information about the stories and rules of Islam from interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith by Islamic scholars such as the Talimul Haq. It was also pointed out to me that 'Arabic is different to English', to translate the Qur'an, means to lose elements of the original words of Allah. The messages of the Qur'an are seen as untranslatable and inflexible, although they are mainly accessed through interpretations of them by scholars and imams in languages other than Arabic. This opens the way for the variety of interpretations of Islam which become intertwined with local, national and international politics.

## **Conclusions**

A complex array of global, national and local processes connected to globalisation, the post Cold War political order, challenges to the nation state, flows of migrants and government policies towards religious organisations has led to an increasing sense of a distinctly Muslim subjectivity among British Bangladeshis and non-Muslims. Interpretations of Islam that the grandparents of my research subjects followed are now rejected by Saudi and Jamaat e Islami influenced Islamic scholars and institutions.

Islamic institutions in the UK have been strengthened by political support from South Asian Islamist parties, Saudi money and funding from the British government for their social work. Some of these organisations, such as the Young Muslim Organisation, have become community leaders and champions for a diverse group of people who feel that in various ways they are discriminated against and oppressed. These manoeuvrings are not uncontested however, secular and alternative religious groups are competing for community support. In London, at the moment however, Jamaat e Islami influenced Islamist groups are in the ascendancy.

The configurations of difference have shifted, as Hall (1992b) and Alexander (2000, 2002) explain, 'Muslims are the new Black'. Just as once a diverse coalition of ethnic minorities converged under the political expression of a 'black' identity, now a wide variety of ethnic and political groups are brought together in the idea of the Muslim *umma*. The study and discussion of Muslims has become the latest hot topic in contemporary academia and media.

Islam is seen by British Bangladeshis in Islington as central to their lives. They believe that they are born Muslim, that it is part of their essence. It is at the core of the way they see themselves and it informs every part of their lives. 'Bengali cultural practices' are constructed as being separate and often incompatible with Islam. They are seen as elements of identity or of a way of life which is negotiable, which can and perhaps should be abandoned. Critiques of Bangladeshi or Sylheti 'backwardness' are accepted if they are in line with or based on Islamic principles. Of course the precise balance of these attitudes, the way they are expressed and relate to actual practices varies from family to family and between individuals. Some families I knew were more devout or saw a larger role for Islam in their lives than others.



The Qur'an and interpretation of Islam followed by most of these families, were presented as non-negotiable, infallible and the 'right' way. No critique of Islam was permitted or accepted by most British Bangladeshis in Islington. There was a touch of defensive, bristling stubbornness about these attitudes. This was a symptom of 'Islamophobia' which they perceived to be rife in contemporary Britain. They were not ignorant of or insensitive to the so-called 'war on terror', the stop and searches, raids, media smears, cartoons and prejudice. Public hysteria had been brewing since the 1980s and had boiled over since 2001 creating this poisoned atmosphere. In the UK this became especially pertinent since the July 2005 bombings of London's public transport.

News poured in to British Bangladeshi living rooms through their satellite channels and the different viewpoints of each channel were eagerly compared. All over the world Islamists gained strength and legitimacy in the light of fresh attacks upon them by the British and US Governments with tanks and bombs and tortures in foreign jails. Meanwhile ordinary British Bangladeshi felt less and less free and secure in London as one by one the rights and freedoms that we apparently celebrate and defend were dismantled. Habeas corpus, free speech, privacy and the right to protest have all been victims of the war on terror.

The injustice and hypocrisy are all apparent in London, the centre of power, empire and capitalism. With the 'credit crunch' the City of London has been exposed as the hollow core of the collapsing usurious system. The legitimacy the 'British way' is transparent and was treated with suspicion. It was taken by British Bangladeshis with a large Qur'anic pinch of salt. 'British cultural practices' are fine and in many instances logical in a British city, but were only adopted if they conformed to Qur'anic principles. The interpretation of Islam which the British Bangladeshis in my study follow is considered by them as an alternative modernity. This alternative progression from 'tradition' to

'modernity' is employed to resist elements of both 'Bangladeshi' and 'British' practice that are considered not to correspond with Islamic principles or undesirable by children or adults.

These British Bangladeshis felt that they had left behind those elements of the 'old ways of the village' or 'Bengali tradition' that are now considered wrong. Their cosmic order has been disrupted by migration and relentless change both in Sylhet and London. As I explained in chapter 5, many practices common in rural Sylhet are no longer possible or practical in London. As I explained in chapter 3, the innocent rural idyll of Sylhet that exists in the imaginations of many British Bangladeshis no longer exists. In the journey across time and space, many aspects of the objective material realities of London and Sylhet (the social field) and the subjective understanding of reality (*habitus*) have changed.

The British Bangladeshi *habitus* has not embraced a sense of 'Britishness' and 'British' practices however. Aspects of the British state, such as the history of imperialism and current aggressive foreign policy, render the British Government as corrupt and vacuous as Bangladeshi politics in the eyes of many British Bangladeshis. The discourse of the Muslim *umma* has contributed to these subjectivities, drawing strength from the weaknesses of the British and Bangladeshi states and 'cultures'. Alongside, intermingling and selectively replacing the flawed parts of these manifestly unjust and ineffective systems, a certain form of Islam has come to mean pride, progress, certainness and stability in the lives of many British Bangladeshis.

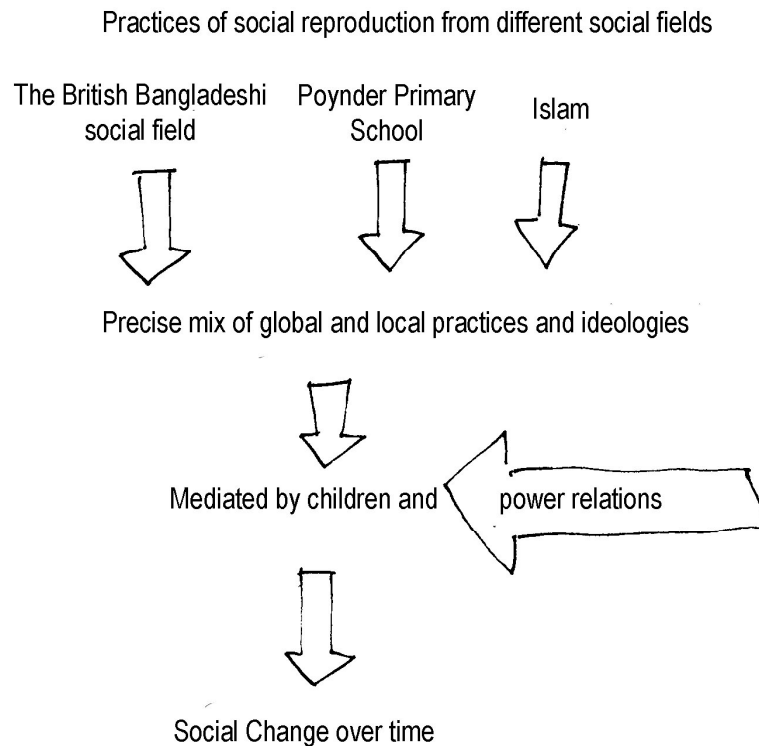
This chapter is the last in the series of analyses of different social fields in the lives of British Bangladeshi children. More than other social fields perhaps; the vitality of the Islamic social field has been influenced by relations with various fields of power. In the concluding chapter I will

discuss how various types of power relations influence the mediation of this mix of global and local practices and ideologies the reactions to different social fields and relations within them.

## 9 Conclusions

The diagram below illustrates how I have conceptualised the process of socialisation and some of the influences upon the lives of the British Bangladeshi children I have described in the empirical chapters. Chapters 3-8, ethnographies of the different social fields that the British Bangladeshi children in Islington engage with, are the top part of the diagram. Of course the diagram makes it seem that these social fields are discrete and cover the totality of the experiences of British Bangladeshi children in Islington, but this is not the case. Diagrams, like theories are useful but inevitably simplifications. I have tried to describe ways in which these social fields overlap and inter-relate, using the metaphor of language vitality and Robertson's (1995) notion of 'glocalisation'. The second level of the diagram indicates that the influences of these social fields have a precise local mix for each person and context. This is, as Bhabha (1994:227) said, 'how newness enters the world'.

Furthermore, these influences, ideas and practices are mediated by the children, compared, contested, experimented with, revered and resisted in ways that I have described in the previous chapters. The children's evaluation of and dispositions towards the variety of influences they are subject to are influenced by power relations both within and between the social fields I have described. The arrow coming in from the right, representing the influence of power relations on the children's mediation is the subject of this chapter.



British Bangladesh children in Islington inhabit several overlapping social fields. These can be associated with physical spaces, but they can also represent social spaces which are independent of physical moorings. Children move between these social fields and their corresponding systems of logic and are subject to the accompanying adult-led practices and institutions of socialisation. Children, however form their own opinions and responses to the people, practices, locations and ideologies of these social fields. These responses can make or break a social field in the long run. Some social fields, like languages, gain followers, size and importance, while others dissolve or dissipate until they no longer exist.

Through the chapters of this thesis I have described three of the social fields that British Bangladeshi children are involved in. The British Bangladeshi social field has formed through continuous interactions and transnational activity between the UK and Sylhet. Across the borders

and thousands of miles between London and Sylhet a community has formed which has a unique worldview and logic. In chapters 3 and 4 I discussed this social field, some of its history and contemporary practices as well as theoretical approaches to it. Children's responses to the British Bangladeshi social field are ambivalent. It represents home, family, people they love and trust and the familiar spaces of their homes. It is very close to their parents' hearts and the space of many important practices around family and food. However, some children find visits to Bangladesh and elements of interactions with their family difficult and disorientating.

For many children, school is the defining institution and arena of socialisation of their lives. It is a place where important social, cultural and academic lessons are learned. The school represents the principal place for social and peer interactions for British Bangladeshi children in Islington. They are at an age and subject to practices which mean that they are not allowed to spend much time outside of the home apart from in school, so it has an extra importance for their lives. The legitimacy of education is widely respected in society and among British Bangladeshis who see it as an important avenue for social mobility. However, the parents of many British Bangladeshi children in Poynder Primary School expressed doubts and some mistrust in the school and education system. Their understanding of education and pedagogy was different from the approach of teachers and educationalists. The British Bangladeshi children meanwhile embraced the teachers, children, practices and rituals of the school passionately. They found the individualistic '*gesellschaft*', meritocratic systems rewarding, the activities stimulating and the opportunities for social interaction attractive.

The third major influence on children's identities, self image and everyday practice that I analysed is Islam, which I have also called a social field. Islam has assumed a level of importance in

debates, both within the British Bangladeshi community and in British academic and policy debate that it never had before and which other religions do not have. It has come to be seen by British Bangladeshi children as integral to their identities, surpassing even the fact that they are of Bangladeshi origin. While some of the practices associated with Islam, such as Qur'an memorisation are resisted by children through the subversion of, or complaints about classes, the legitimacy of the messages and importance of Islam is never openly questioned by children. As a social field, Islam, or more precisely a version of Islam currently popular in London, would appear to have a strong vitality.

The way in which these social fields and their accompanying habituses are seen by British Bangladeshi children depends on many factors. It depends, as we have seen from the concept of language vitality, on their relative and absolute size, the status of the people who inhabit them or engage in their practices and their perceived status internationally. The way in which British Bangladeshi children perceive people or practices as attractive or not, to be revered or resisted, does depend on the opinions of others. In Islington more than in Tower Hamlets this depends on the opinions of people, friends, neighbours and peers who are not British Bangladeshi. For this reason, among others, the British Bangladeshi social field is not as strong in Islington as it is in Tower Hamlets, its logic and practices; its value is not so well understood nor held in such high regard.

The education system in the UK is regarded as being of high quality, especially compared with what was available in rural Sylhet at the time many British Bangladeshis migrated to the UK. British Bangladeshis appreciate the system of free, high standard, universal education, as this is an almost unimaginable luxury in Bangladesh. Education is regarded as a good way for British

Bangladeshi families to improve their status and material well-being through better employment. Throughout the last ten years of what was an unprecedented economic boom, the legitimacy of the education system was bolstered by high levels of employment and the feeling that with education it was possible to get a good job and get ahead. That may change in the current recession, but the effects linger on in attitudes towards education. The links between economic atmosphere and attitudes towards education are well expressed by the risk averse, pragmatic attitudes of British Bangladeshi parents and to an extent their children towards education. This contrasts dramatically with Willis's (1977) account of working class attitudes towards education in an industrial town in the Midlands. The 'lads' cynicism and rejection of the education system show the lack of legitimacy that the education system and its links with gainful employment had in that context compared to contemporary London. Contemporary London is different from the Midlands described by Willis in the 1970s, but perhaps the fact that many British Bangladeshis are immigrants and prioritise work; saving and social mobility in their new home also plays a role in this.

Islam presents a conundrum, for while its vitality is strong among British Bangladeshis and other Islamic communities in Britain, Muslims have been cast in the role of folk devils in the media in Britain. The 'war on terror', crude anti-terror initiatives, so called 'intelligence', legislation and policing as well as hostile elements of the media have created an atmosphere of suspicion and enmity between the artificially constructed entities of 'British society' and 'Muslims'. It would seem that the powers that be in Britain and in the world are hostile to Islam. However, to a degree this very hostility and struggle stimulates vitality. Politically engaged interpretations of Islam acquire political and symbolic power as a form of protest (Engelstad, 2009:225). Islam is seen by many, such as the British Bangladeshis in Islington, as a progressive alternative to the obviously corrupt western secular capitalist system, which they associate with colonialism, aggressive wars as well



as certain forms of moral corruption. The worldview dominated by the mainstream media and Hollywood is resisted by adults and undermined by an alternative version of events, influenced by a political interpretation of Islam. This interpretation takes its influences from struggles in Muslim countries, in South Asia as well as the Middle East, where conflicts pit politically secular forces (of Muslims) against those who see an influential role for religion at the heart of political power. This discourse feeds down to children slowly, as they are taught that many of the media they enjoy are in fact hostile to Muslims.

The point of this account of the social fields that I have analysed in this thesis and represented in the diagram above is to show that while I have described them as if they were floating in a neat ethnographic Petri dish; they are in fact embedded into power relations on local, national and international scales. In this conclusion I will discuss power relations within and between the social fields that I have described. I will review Bourdieu (1977) and Foucault's (1977) ideas about power and discuss their relevance to the ethnographic material I have presented. This will help to explain why the vitality of certain fields is increasing while that of others is decreasing. Finally, I will argue that a transnational social fields approach to the study of transnational children can be a lens with which to better understand symbolic power and identity formation in the era of globalisation.

## **Power**

*Every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to these power relations. (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990:4)*

Wolf (1990) argues that there are four modes of power. One is power in the sense of the attributes, potency or capability of a person. The next emphasises the power one person has to impose their will onto another in social relations, drawing attention to the relations between people, but not the context within which they occur. The third mode of power is that which controls the settings, or environment of interactions between people. Wolf identifies a fourth mode of power that not only operates within a setting or context but organises and orchestrates these settings. Wolf gives Marx's ideas about the power of capital to harness and allocate labour as an example of this fourth mode and also mentions Foucault's (1984) notion of power as the ability 'to structure the possible field of action of others' (Wolf, 1990:223).

Wolf's second mode of power, the power to impose one's will onto another person is perhaps the simplest and most widely understood idea of power. In a political sense the power to coerce people either directly or effectively is what Gramsci (1971) called to 'rule' (*dominio*) (Williams 1977:108). However, even within this mode of power we can see many variations. Coercion can be managed through the threat of physical force, as it is in some cases for British Bangladeshi children. Occasionally children would be punished for bad behaviour with a slap. Some also complained about such punishment in Qur'an classes, although this did not happen in the Qur'an classes that I observed. More often than coercion through physical force however, rule occurred through persuasion and coercion through punishments that involved the giving and withdrawing of privileges. These were used by parents, for example in access to the family computer or television. However, in the school, as I described in chapter 7, the institutionalised system of giving and withdrawing privileges was promoted to an art form. In this way children were persuaded to behave in a certain way, it was not strict coercion as there were children who refused to cooperate. The system worked well for most children however, a more subtle form of power, perhaps Wolf's (1990)

third or fourth mode of power, which gradually structured the subjective perceptions of the objective range of possible actions of the children. In contrast to direct coercion or rule, this complex interlocking of political, social and cultural forces produces what Gramsci (1971) would have called 'hegemony' (Williams, 1977:108). It is this mode of power, the power 'to structure the possible field of action of others', that I am most concerned with regarding the socialisation of British Bangladeshi children in Islington.

In chapter 5 I reviewed Jenks' (1996) discussion of the way in which childhoods are socially constructed. Jenks identified 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian' archetypes of childhood. He associates these two archetypes with different modes of discipline discussed in Foucault (1977). Whereas the Dionysian child of the *ancien regime* had to be strictly controlled and punished, the Apollonian child self-regulated through the internalisation of discipline and guilt (Jenks 1996:79). Foucault's conceptualisation of power sees it as moving from a system of control over subjects by those with power to a relational idea of power, as expressed above. 'Disciplinary' power does not simply involve a hierarchy, authority or control that happens simultaneously to other social relations but works through all social relations. Disciplinary power takes effect through constant small scale struggles that make patterns that transcend the individual and combine to form large scale mechanisms of domination, similar to Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony (Foucault, 1977:27). Disciplinary power manifests itself through the normalisation of behaviour designed to maximise the productive and reproductive capacities of the body (Cronin, 1996:58).

Rather than focus on the conscious subject of power, Foucault focuses on the way in which disciplinary power acts on the body to instil habitual responses. 'Sovereign power' prohibits, while disciplinary power, through this surveillance and regulation, produces the modern subject. Foucault

emphasises the role of science and the institutions of the prison, hospital and school in this process of observation and regulation. In this way, Foucault draws a direct link between power and knowledge (Foucault, 1977:27). Bourdieu's conceptualisation of power also focuses on the body and the inculcation of habitual dispositions. Through habitus, every aspect of behaviour is taught to children by parents, school and peers. The socialising training of habitus reflects the power relations of the social field by communicating to the child his or her position in relation to practices, objects and dispositions (Bourdieu 1977:72, Cronin, 1996:65, see chapter 3).

Power relations, in Bourdieu's conceptualisation, are influenced not only by material resources such as wealth and physical coercion, but also by symbolic power. Symbolic power is how material power relations are considered by a certain worldview or habitus to be legitimate (Cronin, 1996:65). Habitus is built from a shared belief system, which Bourdieu refers to as 'doxa'. From the 'doxa' the shared logic and system of meaning of a social field or society, symbolic power and capital is drawn (Bourdieu 1977:168-171). Through his theory of practice and the notion of habitus, Bourdieu manages, like Foucault (1977), to transcend conceptualisations of power limited to the individual subject and consciousness. Both conceptualisations manage to theorise the effects of what might be called a collective unconscious. By doing this they effectively theorise the difficult territory of what Wolf (1990) refers to as the fourth mode of power. Both focus on the habitual learning of a way of being and on the way in which this type of power limits the subjective perception of the objective possibilities.

The dominant forces in society have an interest in maintaining their system of logic, for that legitimates their dominant position. This is why ruling powers in societies find it necessary to take an interest in the socialisation of children to reproduce their world view and hierarchy. This, of

course, like Foucault's (1977) conceptualisation of power, relies upon the complicity of the dominated in these power relations (Cronin, 1996:66). It is also why Bourdieu's (1977) notion of symbolic power is so important.

Bourdieu's (1977) work on the Kabyle draws upon data from a relatively homogenous 'traditional' society. In 'modern' societies, however, Bourdieu says, social action becomes rationally differentiated into different fields of discourse and practice. Economic and cultural spheres have different fields of action and exchange. In non-literate societies, the system of meaning and symbolism is shared by all, but the doxa is imposed by those with power. In literate societies, this domination is opened up to specialist producers of symbolic goods who compete over symbolic power. This codification normalises and formalises practices, rationalising them and leads to new forms of symbolic power. Those, who possess the competence to codify practices, control the legitimate vision of the social world and the power to reinforce or challenge social relations (Cronin, 1996:68).

Through his analysis of cultural capital and *Distinction* (1984) Bourdieu shows how cultural capital is related to economic capital, as people seek to improve their status by exchanging wealth for cultural capital. This can be achieved through education and the 'right types' of cultural consumption. The social field therefore becomes polarised between a dominant class who are rich in economic and cultural capital and a class who are poor in both. Bourdieu maintains that the modern state gains power not only through control of legitimate physical violence but also through a monopoly over the power to produce and impose categories of thought to the social world.

Through the education system, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) describe in *Reproduction in Education and Society*, the state seeks to transform the dominant culture into a legitimate national

culture (Cronin, 1996:72). Power struggles happen both within social fields, for control over different types of capital, but also between social fields as different interpretations of the world, class positions and interest groups compete over resources, the power to rule or the power to control production of symbolic categories.

Cronin's (1996) evaluation of Bourdieu and Foucault's ideas about power concludes that Bourdieu's model provides better material for an analysis of power. Bourdieu's model better shows how the impersonal elements of power are manifested in the cognitive and behavioural patterns of people. His concept of symbolic power avoids some of the problems of Foucault's (1977) conceptualisation of power, providing a clearer idea of where power is and comes from than Foucault's conceptualisation of passive bodies as the subjects of disciplinary technologies. Symbolic power becomes the most important form of power: "symbolic" does not imply either a type of representation or power that is only symbolic, but refers a mode of domination that achieves legitimacy in that its arbitrariness is misrecognized, so that it goes without saying. This process happens through the development of habitus, through socialisation. Habitus, in contrast to Foucault's dehumanised disciplinary power is a dynamic interplay between structure and agency. For Bourdieu, a person's habitus is not the passive creation of an overpowering system of discipline, but neither is it the subject of sovereign power and fully conscious subject. Habitus is both a product and a producer of its surroundings, but the production of habitus and by extension, the surroundings is controlled by the dominant culture's control over symbolic power (Cronin, 1996:73).

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of power is weak, however, in terms of understanding how resistance to power happens. His analysis of resistance to power focuses on politics and academia but does

not provide much analysis of resistance to power by ordinary people. The only option open to the oppressed in Bourdieu's conceptualisation is to acquire the requisite capital to better their position or to challenge the dominant 'legitimate' symbolic order. However, as Bourdieu maintains that this symbolic order is arbitrary; challenges to the dominant order will only result in one arbitrary order replacing another (Cronin, 1996:78). I will discuss resistance to power later in this chapter.

One problem with both Foucault and Bourdieu's conceptualisations of power and their application to contemporary empirical work is the fixation with the organisational unit of the nation state.

Foucault's all pervasive regime of normalising discipline emanates from the state. Bourdieu's conceptualisations of class and cultural capital relate to a state authority with a monopoly on the production of symbolic capital. In the world today, these conceptualisations, while theoretically extremely useful, are not supported by empirical research. Globalisation and transnationalism mean that communities all over the world are linked and influenced by forces far beyond the borders or control of the government of the nation they are in. As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) point out, a transnational social fields approach entails a rethink of power (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1013). British Bangladeshi children experience many different types of power from different local, global as well as national social fields.

Studies of power that analyse transnational and global struggles for and sources of power tend, like Allen (2009), Cerny, (2009), Beck (2001, 2005) and Sassen (2006), to focus on nations and see corporations, international institutions, non-government organisations and social movements as the transnational forces which create new patterns of power. These studies do not enhance our understanding of how people respond to the multiple poles of symbolic power at play in the era of globalisation. Anthropologists, engaged in studying this kind of power and influenced by Foucault

(1977) see that power is implicated in all social relations. The risk of seeing power everywhere is that it can lead to power being explained away as nothing. The risk is that like 'culture', 'power' ceases to be a useful analytical tool once it is broadened to such an extent. This is why anthropologists often examine empirically easier to study issues such as practices, networks, resources, ideologies and beliefs. Jenkins (2009) sees power as 'efficacy in the pursuit of one's objectives' which seems to be a good working definition (Jenkins 2009:147). What we must also seek to understand are the sources of those objectives, the symbolic orders that have promoted them and the power behind them.

In the next sections of this chapter, I will discuss the power relations that emerged from my ethnography of British Bangladeshi children in Islington. I will also propose some ways in which they can augment Foucault (1977) and Bourdieu's (1977) influential analyses of symbolic power in the light of globalisation and transnationalism.

### **Power relations and British Bangladeshi Children in Islington**

Many migrants move from a state that is relatively weak to a state that is more powerful, both in terms of its capacity to rule within its borders and relatively compared to other states (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1013). This is certainly the case for Bangladeshi migrants to Britain who moved from a poor and relatively weak Bangladesh to a relatively wealthy and powerful Britain. The British Bangladeshi social field lies across these unequal power relationships. The strength of the British state manifests itself upon the people of the British Bangladeshi social field in various ways, including through the 'security capital' that I described in chapter 3. The British state's powerful



Foreign Office and social security system combine to offer British Bangladeshis a type of security which their kin in Bangladesh do not possess. This security allows them access to healthcare, education and sources of help when in trouble. As well as the education and healthcare benefits, these have a psychological effect and allow them to spend their excess economic capital rather than save it for emergencies.

Many migrants and participants in transnational social fields gain social power in terms of their increased access to social and economic capital in their 'homeland' compared to the power they had before migrating or that they do in the country they have migrated to (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1014). This is certainly the case for British Bangladeshis whose earnings in the UK make them extremely powerful economically in Bangladesh. They can, as Bourdieu (1986) says, exchange this wealth for social and cultural capital. Marrying into high status families, giving gifts to neighbours or kin in Bangladesh, paying for mosques to be built and holding lavish wedding or Eid parties are all ways in which British Bangladeshis may convert their economic capital into social and cultural capital.

Children have very limited command over this economic capital, although they may be the beneficiaries of it. On visits to Bangladesh, they experience a disempowering inability to employ what social and cultural capital they do have. Saiful and Rafique, whose experiences of visiting Bangladesh were very different; both experienced a frustrating inability to employ their social and cultural capital with children they met. These children did not appreciate their grasp of sports, slang, games and other 'valuable' knowledge from London that was not relevant in Sylhet. As the children they met in Bangladesh are not in the British Bangladeshi social field they do not

appreciate its logic and value the types of capital that British Bangladeshi children think are important due to their high value in London.

The important 'security capital' that British Bangladeshis possess relative to their kin and neighbours in Bangladesh is not free however: it comes at a cost. The valuable security provided by the British social welfare system makes British Bangladeshis dependent on the British state and subject to its rules. While parents may exercise power over their children in a number of ways, certain forms of physical force are not considered acceptable by the British Government's rules. Through the institutions of the school and the system of social services, the state exercises power over its citizens, British Bangladeshi and otherwise, about the acceptable boundaries of behaviour. Parents must conform to rules governing the care of their children in order to benefit from the free education, healthcare and to avoid the sanctions the state can bring against parents who do not act 'correctly'. Parents who take their children out of school during term time for extended visits to Bangladesh, for example, may be fined for every day that their child is out of school or may find when they return that their child has lost their place at school. A host of bureaucratic and legal systems represent the power of the state to rule its citizens and to exercise particular power over recipients of government benefits.

Through the school, as well as public information and in the mainstream media the government also attempts to exercise another form of power over its citizens, which is closer to the type of power in Foucault (1977), Bourdieu's (1977) and Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) analyses of power and Wolf's (1990) fourth mode of power. This relational form of power requires the 'dominated' to accept and participate in power relations willingly rather than through some form of coercion. It is the power to structure the possible field of action for others or inculcate a system of

dispositions such as the habitus (cf. Chomsky, 1989:75). This requires socialisation and the recognition of the legitimacy of authority. Parents are obliged by law to send their children to school until they are 16, but most do so willingly, exchanging the power the school has over their children for the power that the cultural capital of education will give their children in the future. The school then acts to teach a series of useful skills, measure success among pupils and reproduce the symbolic power of the state represented as legitimate national culture.

It is through resistance to this symbolic aspect of power that some within transnational communities resist the power of nation states. Whilst they are subject to laws and systems of taxes and subsidies, they may draw upon symbolic power and ideology from a variety of sources. The school represents one source of symbolic power for British Bangladeshis in Islington. It is particularly influential for the British Bangladeshi children as they find the logic of its systems, the content of the lessons and the social interactions they have there valuable and rewarding. This influence and the high regard which British Bangladeshi children have for their school and its symbolic power represent a challenge to other social fields that they are engaged in, which risk being relegated to positions of lesser importance in their estimation. This is particularly true as independent of the children's perceptions, the school and education system are intimately connected logistically and symbolically with the centre of political power in the UK.

However, as I described in chapters 3 and 4, British Bangladeshi children in Islington learn a system of logic that draws its influence both from Bangladesh and from the experience of being Bangladeshi in Britain. The British Bangladeshi transnational social field is influenced by state power as I have described above, but its symbolic power is independent and occasionally hostile to the Bangladeshi state, which is perceived to be corrupt and ineffective. It is perceived to be

representative of Bangladeshis who are not Sylhetis or respectful about Sylhetis. The symbolic power is also independent of the British state which is perceived to be corrupt in a different way, and is also perceived to be hostile towards Muslims across the world and within Britain. Instead the symbolic power of the British Bangladeshi social field draws upon economic success and 'security capital' in Britain, social and cultural capital drawn from relations in both the UK and Bangladesh and 'sacred capital' drawn from the correct observance of Islamic practices. The combination of these types of capital and the relations of people to power within other social fields, as well as different manifestations and scales of power in London and Sylhet makes the British Bangladeshi social field a unique system of logic that is not governed by the monopoly on symbolic power of any nation state.

Transnational social fields such as the British Bangladeshi one create symbolic power which is independent of nation states, they draw influences and meaning from a range of sources. This realignment of social spaces across borders, professions and even classes is not one that Bourdieu (1977) or Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) ideas about power include. Using their terminology and useful conceptualisation of power and the reproduction of symbolic power, but recognising that there are multiple poles of symbolic power that are not limited to the borders of nation states is essential for a clearer understanding of power relations and the experiences of growing up as part of an ethnic minority in Britain. Non-state forms of power, such as corporations, transnational social fields, diasporas, social movements, ideologies and religions have become important sources of symbolic power. Technological advances have strengthened their ability to communicate and this has broken the monopoly of nation states to control symbolic power. The effects of technology act in the same way that transnational social fields are made more coherent by improved travel and communication, as I described in chapter 4. Bollywood, Hollywood,

international music and large corporations are other transnational, non-state sources of symbolic power that have made appearances in this thesis, but received only brief attention. Islam however, is a major non-state source of symbolic power, which I discussed in chapter 8.

British Bangladeshi children in Islington learn a system of logic that draws its influences from the Qur'an and other Islamic writings, as well as certain contemporary interpretations of them. Many of the debates about interpretations of the 'correct' Islamic practices draw upon struggles for political power and symbolic power in countries in South Asia and the Middle East. Rather than simply the Bangladeshi state having an influence over symbolic power among Bangladeshis in London, the Jamaat-e-Islami's struggle for power in Bangladesh and their successful bid for control of symbolic power among Bangladeshis in London has meant that they control the interpretation of Islam that many British Bangladeshis subscribe to. Similarly, the Saudi Government's exposition of its self-legitimising logic through the sponsorship of mosques and Islamic education in London influences the interpretation of Islam among Muslims in London. Whichever interpretation Muslims in Britain, such as British Bangladeshis ascribe to, the fact that many see belonging to the Muslim *umma* as central to their sense of identity and interpretations of Islam as a guide for everyday practices shows that the monopoly of the British state over symbolic power is, as Sayidd (2000) suggests, weakened.

Just as the successful migrants in Gardner's account no longer needed to believe in the power of the *pirs* and their miracles, as they had found new sources of power and transformation (Gardner, 1995:270), British Bangladeshis today do not need to believe in the symbolic power of the British state as they have alternative sources of symbolic power. Core-periphery relations are not simple one way binaries. There are many cores and flows in different directions between them (Appadurai

1996). The economic and symbolic power of the West, the so-called 'core', creates reactions and oppositional forces. Interpretations of Islam which see a role for Islam at the heart of politics and reject capitalism and democracy are an example of this (Gardner, 1995:274). A certain interpretation of Islam is seen by British Bangladeshis in Islington as an alternative to 'progress' through embracing 'British' secular practices and ideologies. Western power is not the only form of power that stimulates counter reactions, all forms of power may be resisted and reacted against. The surge in interest in all things Islamic in the press and academic in the UK is a reaction against increasing symbolic power of certain forms of Islam. Foucault's (1977) linking of power and knowledge and analysis of the role of the 'human sciences' in creating disciplinary power shows that perhaps government funding for a thesis such as this one is a reaction to or consequence of this power.

The meanings of places such as *desh* and *bidesh* express ideas about various types of power (Gardner, 1995:272). While the spiritual power of the *desh* may be waning due to the decreasing symbolic power of the *desh* relative to other sources of symbolic power it remains important. As Gardner notes, the meanings of *desh* and *bidesh* are not static and the terms are used interchangeably by British Bangladeshi families. The global and the local become increasingly linked and both are transformed in the process (Gardner, 1995:281). Continuous reappraisal, questioning, contradiction and ambivalence are part of this process.

## **Ambivalence and Contradiction**

Over the time that I knew them, Shirin and Rafique who I discussed in the introduction, demonstrated some of these shifting, contradictory and ambivalent dispositions towards elements of their lives. Shirin occasionally rejected my presence, as she did in Bangladesh or sometimes at school. At other times she was welcoming, chatty and informative, at her home or in small group discussions and interviews. Both children displayed an ambivalent attitude towards Bangladesh; they had enjoyed their visit and meeting their family there, but had found elements of the visit hard and uncomfortable. The assumption by many within their family that Bangladesh was 'their home' was unsettling as they felt more at home in London than they had in Bangladesh.

While they had ambivalent relationships with many experiences, locations and people in their lives, as many people do, the children also changed their expressed positionality and ideas over time or depending on the context in which they found themselves. They experimented with different identities and positions, using their knowledge to assert positions and identities which drew from the different social fields which they engaged in. Within each social field they were subject to different rules and hierarchies of power based on the values of the types of capital that they possessed. They were also subject to the logic of each field, socialisation practices and attempts to paint each field's logic as the legitimate set of meanings. The symbolic power of each social field stakes a claim for legitimacy in the lives of these children, creating a type of competition between systems of meaning and symbolic power as well as within each social field.

The ambivalence and contradiction that characterised the practices and beliefs of some of the children I studied are symptoms of the overlapping local, national and transnational social fields

that they inhabit. They may assert a position within a social field, only to find out that they have misinterpreted their own importance or role. For example, children may find that while they are highly regarded among their families in Bangladesh on visits, they do not command the respect and reverence that their parents do as they do not have control of the economic capital. Children may also become temporarily involved in a particular social field, find their status rising and their acceptance of its legitimacy also increasing. If a child gets on particularly well with her/his teacher and peers in their class they might see school as more central to their lives and identities, but this feeling may decrease if they do not like their next teacher or the transition to secondary school is disempowering.

A myriad of factors influence this process, I have described some of them in my accounts of each social field that they children engage in. The nature of inhabiting or engaging with several overlapping social fields means that there are contradictions in behaviour and expressions of belief depending on the context. When some of these fields are transnational, the process becomes more complex because contexts and locations are further removed and local situations and interpretations of global phenomena may vary more widely. Scales and understandings of symbolic power shift and are interpreted in radically different ways. The exchange rates between types of capital change depending on the contexts as Kelly and Lusius (2006:835) pointed out in their research on migrants from the Philippines to Canada.

With regards to British Bangladeshis this means that the economic capital that British Bangladeshis have has a larger purchasing power in Bangladesh. Certain objects such as a branded mobile phone or clothing may also be of more value in Bangladesh than in the UK. Others such as football cards for swapping may be of high value to children in London, but of



little value in Bangladesh. Likewise, social contacts may assume a different importance depending on their context. A casual acquaintance or relationship with someone from your village in Bangladesh may be and has proved to be of vital importance for migrants arriving in the UK. These contacts may provide accommodation, further contacts and a job for the newly arrived. Good relations with powerful local figures of authority in Bangladesh can be enormously helpful in Bangladesh but of little help to once the same person is in the UK. Degrees and qualifications from Bangladesh are not highly respected and valued in the UK, whereas British qualifications tend to be highly prized in Bangladesh (cf. Kelly and Lusius, 2006:835, see chapter 3).

In this shifting territory, children find themselves learning sets of rules and a different habitus in each social field. In some social fields such as the British Bangladeshi social field there are two locations; this requires that children learn the rules and their different application in each location. In other social fields such as the Islamic social field there are a variety of points of view about the correct practices and ideologies that the social field should follow or espouse. This requires that children negotiate and learn attitudes and actions from people and that they interpret the relative value of texts for themselves.

These disjunctures within social fields and between social fields lead to children expressing contradictory or ambivalent feelings and actions. Sometimes these may be 'accidents' where children have misinterpreted elements of their socialisation or forgotten the 'correct' position to take in a certain context. For example children responded to me in a casual friendly way at school, which I encouraged in order to communicate to them that I was not a teacher or figure of authority. When they teased me and chatted to me in the same way at home they were

occasionally told off by their parents for being rude to a guest or adult. At other times these may be a type of resistance where children, using the logic of one social field and habitus that they believe is legitimate, reject that of another social field. Islamic rules were used in this way by children, for example to challenge the ideas that their parents had about marriage or to reject my proposal of drawing pictures of each other in an art class. Children also experimented with positions and attitudes to see how they get on and to measure the reactions of others to their stance.

These shifting positions and dispositions lead to constant evaluation and experimentation with different habituses. Children practice, experiment and learn from their interactions and engagements with people places and situations. Through this continuous process they grow into and begin to feel comfortable and 'at home' with a precise blend of different habituses which they employ in specific situations and with particular people. This process is mediated, as I have explained in this chapter by power relations, sources of symbolic power from a wide range of sources. In this mediation between structures of symbolic power and the personal reactions to them of individuals and small groups such as the British Bangladeshi children in Islington, social change occurs.

Resistance to symbolic as well as other forms of power by children has some of the same characteristics of the 'weapons of the weak' described by Scott (1986) thus:

*Just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy nilly, a coral reef, so do thousands upon thousands of individual acts of insubordination and evasion create a political or economic*

*barrier reef of their own. There is rarely any dramatic confrontation, any moment that is particularly newsworthy. (Scott, 1986:8)*

The low-level foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson and sabotage which Scott cites as the 'ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups', describe some of the tactics British Bangladeshi children and their peers and which I have described in chapters 7 and 8 (Scott, 1986:6). Through many small acts of resistance or indifference, social fields can lose vitality. As genuine enthusiasm for people, places and practices is replaced by dutifully performed enthusiasm, the life is sucked out of a social field, institution or relationship. Through this form of resistance to speaking Bangla/Sylheti or maintaining contacts with family in Bangladesh for example, the British Bangladeshi social field in Islington is weakening.

The flip side of this resistance and indifference is the reverence shown by children for certain social fields or people, places and practices within them. This reverence, performed and contingent though it may often have been, was the willing engagement of children with symbolic power. British Bangladeshi children accepted the legitimacy and rules of the school and the authority of their teachers. They got on well with their teachers and brought into the ideologies of the school, its rules, aims and logic.

## Power and Transnational Childhoods

Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of habitus and social field provide a conceptual framework which has run through this thesis. Combined with his ideas about *Distinction* (1984) and Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) ideas about social reproduction, they inform our understanding of transnational communities or social spaces (chapter 3). They inform our ideas about the relationship between physical places and socialisation (chapter 5). They can also help us to understand education, both in the formal sense that it is carried out in schools (chapter 7), but also in the sense that it happens everywhere through the 'diffuse' learning of the correct way of behaving. The socialisation of children happens in the home (chapter 4), in religious institutions (chapter 8) and in almost every social field.

Bourdieu (1977, 1984), Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and Foucault's (1977, 1984) ideas about power help us to see beyond power as a simple case of rule. In this respect they are useful for analysis of the way in which power works through all social relations and without coercion.

However, perhaps as products of mid-Twentieth Century France, both analyses are rather limited by a monolithic conceptualisation of the state and society.

*... postfordist globalization is a far cry from Foucauldian discipline: multi-layered as opposed to nationally bounded, dispersed and marketized as opposed to socially concentrated, increasingly repressive as opposed to self-regulating. (Fraser, 2003:166)*

A transnational social fields analysis can expand this conceptualisation of the workings of power to take in the effects of globalisation. Studying transnational children provides good empirical material

for this analysis. Despite the problems that emerge when one applies Foucault's conceptualisation of power to postcolonial or transnational contexts, Fraser (2003) warns against rejecting Foucault entirely, maintaining that his analysis is useful, despite its limitations. She proposes a reformulation of the question Foucault sought to answer with his notion of discipline: *How does power operate in the absence of the king?* Fraser's contemporary question is: *How does power operate after the decentring of the national frame, which continued to organise social regulation long after the demise of the monarch?* (Fraser, 2003:170) This case study of British Bangladeshi children in Islington can contribute to this.

Children are developing and learning, and as adults try to reproduce their own systems of logic as legitimate through the education or socialisation of children, they make good case studies of the workings of symbolic power. Studying this process in children reveals the workings of symbolic power more clearly than in adults as it is acceptable in a way that attempting to inculcate a system of meaning into an adult's mind is not. It can therefore be observed and studied openly. For all the restrictions upon and apparent difficulties of researching children, they are subject to symbolic power relations in a way that is much more accessible and observable than the ways that adults are.

I have been able to observe the way in which children seek and attain acceptance and power among their peers, through bodily control and maturity, through prowess on the sports pitch, through wit and banter and through knowledge and access to types of cultural capital. At school however, they are subject to the controls and rules of the school system. Within the school, they seek power both regarding their peers and through success in the school's symbolic order. Within other social fields such as the British Bangladeshi social field there are also struggles for power

and control of social, cultural and economic capital. Some of these struggles affect children only indirectly, but they position children within a scale of status and power in the social field.

While power is mediated and exchanged within social fields, different social fields also have relative amounts of power, or perhaps relationships with the field of power. However this is conceptualised, some social fields are larger and more influential than others and may be more influential at certain times. What I have analysed in the empirical chapters of this thesis is the way in which this power is mediated 'from below' by children who are subject to the symbolic power of different social fields and react to them in different ways. How children respond to the socialisation of the school, the British Bangladeshi social field or Islamic education is important to the power those social fields have in society or the world. The symbolic power of a social field is obviously influential in determining its vitality and attractiveness but individual experiences and interpretations, 'glocal' understandings of global processes are also vital.

A transnational social fields (re)conceptualisation of symbolic power sees it as emanating from many poles, or centres of power. Nation states remain important centres of symbolic power and in many people's opinion should have a legitimate monopoly over it. However, as Fraser (2003) indicates, this type of monopoly is over, globalisation means that symbolic power is multi-layered and multi-polar. Many of the poles of symbolic power are non-state institutions, ideologies or social fields. The privatisation and 'marketisation' of many functions of the state has accelerated this process, handing over control of sources of symbolic power to corporations who are often transnational and may have different agendas to governments. Communications technology has also enabled this process, allowing easy and regular contact between people and sources of symbolic power across national boundaries and large distances.

Recent repressive policies regarding civil liberties in the UK, which Muslims in the UK such as British Bangladeshis have felt more keenly than most, point to another of Fraser's (2003) contentions regarding Foucault's theory. The break up of the monopoly on symbolic power has led to increasing difficulty maintaining the self-regulating guilt of disciplinary power. People who regard transnational systems of symbolic power as more legitimate than the state are unlikely to self-regulate according to its logic. The school and education system in Britain socialises children into 'British society' but if children and their families regard British Bangladeshi or Islamic socialisation as more important, some of these lessons will not be readily accepted. The legitimacy of the social order, the system of logic and rules taught by the school will not be recognised or respected. When self-regulating discipline breaks down, a return to repressive sovereign power is the last recourse of the state. The British Government's use of torture, imprisonment without trial and the spectacle of extra-judicial executions on London's underground system and armed raids at dawn on the houses of suspect British Muslims in can be seen as proof of a crisis in the disciplinary power of the state.

Children's experiences and reactions to the principal social fields in their lives form the majority of this thesis. The empirical study of their understandings of local, national and global processes and influences is the unique contribution an ethnographic study can make. Their lives are connected to processes and powers that are far out of their control, such as the power relations which I have reviewed above. However, their reactions are integral to the power of social fields, particularly their reactions to different sources of symbolic power or forms of power that require complicity.

The concepts of 'Glocalisation', habitus, symbolic power, language vitality and transnational social fields can help us to understand how and why British Bangladeshi children in Islington willingly accept the system of symbolic power in the school and why their parents have mixed feelings about some elements of it. They can help us to understand why children have deeply ambivalent feelings about the British Bangladeshi transnational social field and some of the people, places and practices it entails. We can also understand why a certain form of Islam has become important to and is seen as legitimate by these British Bangladeshis and has come to be an integral part of their idea of who they are and their everyday practices. The analysis of the socialisation of children by practices in these different social fields, local, national, transnational and global can also inform our understanding of the way symbolic power works today.



# References

- Abbas, T., 2005, 'British South Asian Muslims: before and after September 11<sup>th</sup>', in Abbas, T., 2005, ed. *Muslim Britain, Communities under Pressure*, Zed Books, London
- Abu-Lughod, L., 1988, *Veiled Sentiments, Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, University of California Press, Berkeley
- Ackeroyd, A., 1984, 'Ethics in Relation to Informants, the Profession and Governments', in Ellen, R. F., ed. *Ethnographic Research. A guide to General Conduct*, Academic Press, San Diego
- Adams, C., 1987, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers, Life Stories of Pioneer Sylheti Settlers in Britain*, Eastside Books, London
- Ahmed, S., 1999, 'Home and Away, Narratives of Migration and Estrangement', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 2(3): 329-347
- Allen, J., 2009, 'Powerful Geographies: Spatial Shifts in the Architecture of Globalisation', in Clegg, S. and Haugaard, M., eds., 2009, *The Sage Handbook of Power*, Sage, London
- Alexander, C., 2000a, *The Asian Gang: Ethnicity, Identity, Masculinity*, Berg, Oxford
- Alexander, C., 2000b, '(Dis)Entangling the 'Asian Gang': Ethnicity, Identity, Masculinity' in Hesse, B., ed., 2000, *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms, Diasporas, Entanglement, Transruptions*, Zed Books, London
- Alexander, 2002, 'Beyond Black: re-thinking the colour/culture divide', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4, July 2002 pp 552-571.
- Alexander, C., 2006, 'Imagining the Politics of BrAsian Youth', in Ali, N., Kalra, V.S., and Sayyid, S., 2006, *A Postcolonial People, South Asians in Britain*, Hurst & Company, London
- Anderson, B., 1983, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London
- Anderson, B., 1994, Exodus, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Winter, 1994), pp. 314-327
- Anwar, M., 1979, *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain*, Heinemann Educational Publishers, Oxford
- Appadurai, A. 1990, 'Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy', *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 7:2/3, pgs. 295-310.

- Appadurai, A., 1996, *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis
- Ariès, P., 1962, *Centuries of Childhood*, Penguin, Harmondsworth
- Austin, J. L., 1962, *How to Do Things with Words*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts
- Aziz, K. and Maloney, C., 1985, *Life Stages, Gender and Fertility in Bangladesh*, Monograph No. 3, International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh, Dhaka.
- Back, L., 1994, 'The 'White Negro' revisited: race and masculinities in south London', in Cornwall and Lindisfarne, eds., 1994, *Dislocating Masculinity, Comparative Ethnographies*, Routledge, London
- Baggs, A. P., Bolton, D. K., Croot, P. E. C., 1985, 'Islington: Growth: South-east Islington', in Baker, T. F. T., and Elrington, C. R., 1985, Eds., *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 8: Islington and Stoke Newington parishes*, [www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=1281](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=1281). Accessed online: October 2008
- Bakhtin, M., 1981, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Edited and Translated by Emerson C. and Holquist, M., 1981, University of Texas Press, Austin
- Ballard, R., 1994, 'The Emergence of Desh Pardesh', in Ballard, R., and Banks, M., eds., 1994, *Desh Pardesh the South Asian Presence in Britain*, C. Hurst and Co., London
- Barker, P, 2004, The Taste of Banglatown, *The Guardian*, 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2004
- Barrett, M., 2005, 'National Identities in children and Young People', in Ding, S. and Littleton, K., 2005, *Children's Personal and Social Development*, Blackwell, Oxford
- Baumann, G., 1996, *Contesting Culture, Discourses of Identity in Multi-Ethnic London*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Beaumont, P., 2001, 'The Roots of Islamic anger', *The Observer*, October 14, 2001
- Beck, U., 2001, 'Redefining Power in the Global Age: Eight Theses', *Dissent Magazine*, Fall 2001
- Beck, U., 2005, *Power in the Global Age*, Polity Press, Cambridge
- Begum, H., and Eade, J., 2005, 'All Quiet on the Eastern Front? Bangladeshi Reactions in Tower Hamlets', in Abbas, T., ed., 2005, *Muslim Britain, Communities Under Pressure*, Zed Books, London
- Bernstein, B., 1975, *Class Codes and Control, Volume III, Towards a Theory of Education Transmission*, Routledge, London

- Bhabha, H. K., 1994, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London
- Blackledge, A., and Creese, A., 2008, 'Contesting 'Language' as 'Heritage': Negotiation of Identities in Late Modernity', *Applied Linguistics*, 29/4: 533–554
- Blanchet, T., 1996, *Lost Innocence, Stolen Childhoods*, University Press Limited, Dhaka
- Boden, M., 1994, *Piaget*, Fontana Press, London
- Bolognani, M., 2007, 'The Myth of Return: Dismissal, Survival or Revival? A Bradford Example of Transnationalism as a Political Instrument', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33:1,59 — 76
- Bourdieu P. and Passeron, J-C., 1990, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Sage Publications, London
- Bourdieu, P., 1977, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Bourdieu, P., 1984, *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge, London
- Bourdieu, P., 1986, 'The forms of capital', In Richardson, J., ed. 1986, *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Greenwood, New York.
- Brah, A., 1996, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Routledge, London
- Brooker, L., 2002, *Starting School – Young Children Learning Cultures*, Open University Press, Buckingham
- Bryeson, D., and Vuorella, U., 2002, *The Transnational Family: new European frontiers and global networks*, Berg Publishers, Oxford
- Burdsey, D., 2004, "One of the lads'? Dual Ethnicity and assimilated ethnicities in the careers of British Asian professional footballers', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 27 No. 5, September 2004, pgs. 757-779
- Cain, M., 1977, 'The Economic Activities of Children in a Village in Bangladesh', *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Sep., 1977), pgs. 201-227
- Carey, S. and Shukur, A., 1985. 'A Profile of the Bangladeshi Community in East London', *New Community*, Vol. XII, No. 3.
- Carrington, V., and Luke, A., 1997, 'Literacy and Bourdieu's Sociological Theory; a Reframing'. *Language and Education*, 11.2, pgs 96-112
- Castells, M., 1997, *Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Blackwell, Oxford
- Castles, S., and Miller, M., 2003, *The Age of Migration*, Macmillan, Basingstoke

- Cerny, P., 2009, 'Reconfiguring Power in a Globalizing World', in Clegg, S. and Haugaard, M., eds., 2009, *The Sage Handbook of Power*, Sage, London
- Chalmers, R., 1996, *Learning Sylheti*, Centre for Bangladeshi Studies, London
- Charsley, K., 2007, 'Risk, trust, gender and transnational cousin marriage among British Pakistanis', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30:6, 1117-1131
- Chomsky, N., 1989, *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*, South End Press, Cambridge
- Choudhury, Y., 1993, *The Routes and Tales of the Bangladeshi settlers*, Birmingham, Sylhet Social History Group.
- Clifford, J., 1997, *Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press
- Cohen, R., 1994, *Frontiers of Identity: The British and Others*, Longman, London
- Cronin, C., 1996, 'Bourdieu and Foucault on Power and Modernity', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol. 22 No. 6
- Crozier, G., and Davies, J., 2006, 'Family matters: a discussion of the Bangladeshi and Pakistani extended family and community in supporting the children's education', *The Sociological Review*, 54:4 (2006)
- Crozier, G., and Davies, J., 2008, 'The trouble is they don't mix': self-segregation or enforced exclusion?' *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 11:3, 285-301
- Dalrymple, W., 2004, Islamophobia, *New Statesman*, Jan 19, 2004. Vol. 6, Iss. 790; pg. 18
- DCFS, 2008, 'National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2 in England, 2008 (Provisional)'
- DCFS Website, <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000804/index.shtml> accessed, 05/01/09
- Dench, G., Gavron, K., and Young, M., 2005, *The New East End*, Profile Books London
- Denzin N., and Lincoln Y., eds., 1998, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, London
- Desai, P., 1999, *Spaces of Identity, Cultures of Conflict: The Development of New British Asian Masculinities*, Unpublished PhD thesis in Sociology, Goldsmiths College, University of London.
- DfES, 2006, 'Ethnicity and Education, The Evidence on Minority Ethnic Pupils aged 5-16', Research Topic Paper, 2006 Edition, DfES, London

- Durkheim, E., 1964, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Free Press, New York
- Eade, J., 1989, *The Politics of Community: Bangladeshis in East London*, Ashgate, London
- Eade, J., 1997, 'Identity, Nation, and Religion, Educated Young Bangladeshi Muslims in London's East End', in Eade, J., 1997, ed. *Living the Global City*, Routledge, London
- Eade, J., and Garbin, D., 2002, 'Changing narratives of violence, struggle and resistance: Bangladeshis and the competition for resources in the global city', *Oxford Development Studies*, 30, pp. 137-49.
- Eckstein, S., 2002, 'On Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Meaning of Immigrant Generations', in Levitt, P. and Waters, M. C., 2002, *The Changing face of Home the Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York
- The Economist, 2007, 'From Brick Lane to the Fast Lane', *Economist*, October 25th 2007
- Eder, D., and Fingerson, L., 2001, 'Interviewing Children and Adolescents', in Gubrium, J., and Holstein, J., eds., 2001, *Handbook of interview Research*, Sage, London
- Engelstad, F., 2009, 'Culture and Power', in Clegg, S. and Haugaard, M., eds., 2009, *The Sage Handbook of Power*, Sage, London
- Erikson, E., 1977, *Childhood and Society*, Penguin, Harmondsworth
- Fass, P., 2003, 'Children and Globalization', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 36, No. 4
- Figueroa E., and Patrick, P. L., forthcoming, 'The Meaning of Kiss-Teeth', in Spears, A., and DeJongh, J., eds., *Black language in the U.S. and Caribbean: Education, history, structure, and use*. Accessed online in January 2009  
<http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~patrickp/papers/KSTpapwww.pdf>
- Flick, U., von Kardorff, E., Steinke, I., and Jenner, B., 2004, eds., *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, Sage, London
- Foucault, M., 1977, *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison*, Penguin London
- Foucault, M., 1984, *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, Ed. Pantheon, New York
- Fouron, G. E., and Glick Schiller, N., 2002, 'The Generation of Identity: Redefining the Second Generation Within a Transnational Social Field', in Levitt, P. and Waters, M. C., 2002, *The Changing face of Home the Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York
- Fox, R., 1997, *Conjectures & Confrontations: Science, Evolution, Social Concern*, Transaction Publishers, London

- Fraser, N., 2003, 'From Discipline to Flexibilization? Rereading Foucault in the Shadow of Globalization', *Constellations*, Volume 10, Issue 2
- Friedman, J., 1997, 'Global Crises, the Struggle for Cultural Identity and Intellectual Porkbarrelling: Cosmopolitans versus Locals, Ethnic and nationals in an Era of De-hegemonisation', in Werbner and Modood, eds. 1997, *Cultural Hybridity*, Zed Books, London
- Friedmann, J., 2002, 'Place-Making as Project? Habitus and Migration in Transnational Cities', in Hillier, J., and Rooksby, E., 2002, *Habitus a Sense of Place*, Ashgate, Farnham
- Gardner, K., and Shukur, A., 1994, 'I'm Bengali, I'm Asian and I'm Living Here: The Changing Identities of British Bengalis', in Ballard, R., ed., 1994, *Desh Pardesh*, Hurst, London
- Gardner, K., 1993, 'Desh Bidesh: Sylheti Images of Home and Away', *Man*, March 1993
- Gardner, K., 1995, *Global Migrants Local Lives, Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Gardner, K., 2002a, 'Death of a migrant: transnational death rituals and gender among British Sylhetis', *Global Networks* 2, 3 (2002) 191–204.
- Gardner, K., 2002b, *Age, Narrative and Migration: the life course and life histories of Bengali elders in London*, Berg Publishers, Oxford
- Gardner, K., 2006, 'The transnational work of kinship and caring: Bengali–British Marriages in Historical Perspective', *Global Networks* 6, 4 (2006) 373–387
- Gardner, K., 2008, 'Keeping Connected: security, place, and social capital in a 'Londoni' village in Sylhet', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14, 447-495
- Gardner, K., and Mand, K., 2008, *Transglobal Childhoods: Diasporic Childrens in East London, Diasporas Migration and Identities Working paper No.009*, Arts and Humanities Research Council, accessed online Jan, 2009: <http://www.diasporas.ac.uk/assets/Gardner%20working%20paper.pdf>
- Geertz, C., 1973, 'Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture', in: *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. New-York/N.Y./USA etc. 1973: Basic Books, pp. 3-30. Accessed online at [http://hypergeertz.jku.at/GeertzTexts/Thick\\_Description.htm](http://hypergeertz.jku.at/GeertzTexts/Thick_Description.htm) in April 2009
- Geertz, C., 1974, 'From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 28 no. 1 (1974), pp. 26-45. Accessed online at [http://www.iwp.uni-linz.ac.at/lxe/sektkf/GG/GeertzTexts/Natives\\_Point.htm](http://www.iwp.uni-linz.ac.at/lxe/sektkf/GG/GeertzTexts/Natives_Point.htm) in April 2009
- Giddens, A., 1990, *The Consequences of Modernity*. Polity Press, Cambridge
- Giles, H., Coupland, N., and Coupland, J., 1991, 'Accommodation Theory: Communication, context and consequence', in Giles, H., Coupland, N., and Coupland, J., 1991, eds., *Contexts of*

*Accommodation, Developments in Applied Sociolinguistics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Gilroy, P., 1987, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, Routledge, London

Gilroy, P., 1993, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, London

Gilroy, P., 2000, 'The Dialectics of Diaspora Identification', In Les Back and John Solomos, eds., 2000, *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, Routledge Student Readers, Routledge, London

Gledhill, J., 2000, *Power and its Disguises, Anthropological Perspectives on Politics, Second Edition*, Pluto Press, London

Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, 1992, 'Transnationalism: A new Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration', in Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, 1992, *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration*, The New York Academy of Sciences, New York

Glynn, S., 2002, 'Bengali Muslims: the new East End radicals?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 25:6, 969 – 988

Government Office for London, 2007, Indices of Deprivation 2007, Briefing Note: [www.go-london.gov.uk/boroughinfo/profiles/ID/Index%20of%20Deprivation%202007%20Briefing%20Note.doc](http://www.go-london.gov.uk/boroughinfo/profiles/ID/Index%20of%20Deprivation%202007%20Briefing%20Note.doc)

Guarnizo, L. E., 1997, 'The Emergence of a Transnational Social Formation and the Mirage of Return Migration among Dominican Transmigrants', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 4(2):281-322.

Gramsci, A., Hoare, Q., Nowell-Simth, G., 1971, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Lawrence and Wishart, London

Grusec, J. and Hastings, J., 2003, 'Introduction', in Grusec J., and Hastings, P., eds. 2003, *Handbook of Socialisation Theory and Research*, The Guildford Press, London

Hall, S., 1992a, 'The Question of Cultural Identity' in Hall, Held and McGrew, eds., 1992, *Modernity and its futures*, Polity press, Cambridge

Hall, S., 1992b, 'New Ethnicities', in Donald, J., and Rattansi, A., 1992, *Race Culture and Difference*, Sage, London

Hall, S., 2000, 'The Multi-Cultural Moment' in Hesse, B., ed., 2000, *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms*, Zed Books, London

Harvey, D., 1989, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the origins of cultural change*, Wiley Blackwell, Oxford

Hebdige, D., 1987, *Cut 'N' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*, Routledge, London

Hirschfeld, L. A., 2002, 'Why Don't Anthropologists Like Children?', *American Anthropologist*, 104 (2), pgs: 611-627.

Holloway, S. L., and Valentine, G., *Children's Geographies, playing, living, learning*, Routledge, London

Holmes, M., 2003, 'Water Lot of History we Have on Tap', *Camden New Journal*, 11.12.2003

Huntington, S., 1993, 'The Clash of Civilisations?', *Foreign Affairs*, Summer, 1993

Huntington, S., 1997, *The Clash of Civilisation and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, London

Hussain, D., 2007, Globalisation, God and Galloway, The Islamicisation of Bangladeshi communities in London, *Journal of Creative Communications*, 2007; 2:1&2, 189-217

Hussain, E., 2007, *The Islamist*, Penguin, London

Islington Education Authority, 2008, '2008 Outcomes', presentation made to Bangladeshi Education Forum, Cambridge Education @ Islington, December 2008

Islington Education Authority website: <http://www.islingtonschools.net/Performance/> accessed January 2009

James, A., Jenks, C., and Prout, A., 1998, *Theorising Childhood*, Polity Press, Cambridge

James, A., 1993, *Childhood Identities, Self and Social Relationships in the Experience of the Child*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh

James, A., 2001, 'Ethnography in the Study of Children and Childhood', in Atkinson et Al., eds., 2001, *Handbook of Ethnography*, Sage, London

James, A., and Prout, A., eds., 1997, *Constructing and reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Falmer, London

Jenkins, R., 2002, *Pierre Bourdieu*, Routledge, London

Jenkins, R., 2009, 'The Ways and Means to Power: Efficacy and Resources', in Clegg, S. and Haugaard, M., eds., 2009, *The Sage Handbook of Power*, Sage, London

Jenks, C., 1996, *Childhood*, Routledge, London

Jones-Correa, M., 2002, 'The Study of Transnationalism among the Children of Immigrants: Where we are and Where we Should be Headed', in Levitt, P. and Waters, M. C., 2002, *The Changing face of Home the Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York



- Kabeer, N., 2000, *The Power to Choose, Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Decisions in London and Dhaka*, Verso, London
- Kalra, V., Kaur, R., and Hutnyk, J., 2005, *Diaspora and Hybridity*, Sage, London
- Katz, C., 2004, *Growing Up Global: Economic Restructuring and Children's Everyday Lives*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis
- Kelly, P., and Lusius, T., 2006, 'Migration and the Transnational Habitus, Evidence from the Philippines and Canada', *Environment and Planning A*, 2006, Vol. 38, pgs. 831-847
- Kepel, G., 1997, 'Islamic Groups in Europe: Between Community Affirmation and Social Crisis' in Vertovec and Peach, eds. 1997, *Islam in Europe*, Macmillan, London
- Kilroy Silk, R., 2004, 'We Owe the Arabs Nothing', *The Express on Sunday*, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2004
- King, J., 1997, 'Tablighi Jammah and the Deobandi Mosques in Britain', in Vertovec and Peach eds., 1997, *Islam in Europe*, Macmillan London
- Kotalova J., 1993, *Belonging to Others, Cultural Construction of Womanhood among Muslims in a village in Bangladesh*, Uppsala Studies in Social Anthropology, Uppsala
- Lancy, D. F., 2008, *The Anthropology of Childhood*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Lancy, D. F. & Strathern, A. J., 1981, Making-twos: Pairing as an alternative to the taxonomic mode of representation, *American Anthropologist*, 81, 773-795
- Lawson, S., and Sachdev, I., 2004, 'Identity Language Use and Attitudes, Some Sylheti-Bangladeshi Data from London, UK', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 2004, 23: 49-69
- Levitt P. and Glick Schiller, N., 2004, 'Conceptualising Simultaneity, A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society', *International Migration Review*, 38, 3 pgs 1002-1039
- Levitt, P., 2002, 'The Ties that Change: Relations to the Ancestral Home over the Life Cycle', in Levitt, P. and Waters, M. C., 2002, *The Changing face of Home the Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York
- Levitt, P., and Waters, M. C., 2002, 'Introduction', in Levitt, P. and Waters, M. C., 2002, *The Changing face of Home the Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York
- Levitt, P., and Jaworsky, B. N., 2007, 'Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2007, 33 pgs 129-156.
- Lewis, 1990, B., 'The Roots of Muslim Rage', *The Atlantic Magazine*, Sept, 1990

Local Futures, 2007, 'The State of the Borough, An Economic, Social and Environmental Profile of Islington'

London Borough of Islington, 2003, 'Islington, Census 2001, Key Statistics'

Mandaville, P., 2009, 'Muslim Transnational Identity and State Responses in Europe and the UK after 9/11: Political Community, Ideology and Authority', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35:3,491 – 506

Marcus, G., 1995, Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi Sited Ethnography, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 1995, 24:95-117

Marcus, G., and Fischer, M., 1986, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Mason, J., 2004, 'Managing Kinship over Long Distances: The Significance of "the visit"', *Social Policy and Society*, 2004, vol. 3, No. 4, Cambridge University Press

Maududi, S., 1992, 'Self-Destructiveness of Western Civilisation' in *Contemporary Debates in Islam*, in Moaddel, M., and Talattof, K, eds., 2000, Macmillan, London

Mead, M., 1962, *Growing up in New Guinea: a comparative study of primitive education*, W. Morrow & company, New York

Modood, T., 1992, 'British Asian Muslims and the Rushdie Affair', in Donald and Rattansi, eds. 1992, *Race Culture and Difference*, Sage, London

Modood, T., 1997, 'Difference, Cultural Racism and Anti-racism', in Werbner, P., and Modood, T., eds. *Debating Cultural Identity*, Zed Books, London

Morley, D., 2001, 'Belongings, Place, Space and identity in a Mediated World', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 4(4) 425-448

Morley, D., 2000, *Home Territories, Media, Mobility and Identity*, Routledge, London

Murshad, A-H., 2002, 'Tools for Talking: the purposeful and inventive use of languages by bilingual children in primary classrooms', *Reading*, Vol. 36:3 pgs 106-112

Nash, R., 2003, 'Social explanation and socialization: on Bourdieu and the structure, disposition, practice scheme', *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, Iss. 1, pgs. 43-62

National Statistics, 2004, 'Education, Exam Results Differ by Social Status', National Statistics Website, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1003> accessed 05/01/09

National Statistics, 2001, 'Religion in the UK', <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=293>, accessed in April 2009

- Neilsen, J., 1997, 'Muslims in Europe into the Next Millennium', in Vertovec and Peach, eds., 1997, *Islam in Europe*, Macmillan, London
- Ng, S. H., and He, A., 2004, 'Code-Switching in Trigenerational Family Conversations among Chinese Immigrants in New Zealand', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, Vol. 23 (1), 28 - 48, 2004
- Ofsted, 2004, '*Achievement of Bangladeshi Heritage Pupils*', OFSTED May 2004
- Olwig, K. F., 2003, 'Children's Places of belonging in immigrant families of Caribbean background' in Olwig, K. F., and Gullov, E., 2003, *Children's Places, Cross Cultural Perspectives*, Routledge, London
- Olwig, K. F., and Gullov, E., 2003, 'Towards an anthropology of children and place', in Olwig, K. F., and Gullov, E., 2003, *Children's Places, Cross Cultural Perspectives*, Routledge, London
- ONS, 2005a, 'Ethnicity, People and Migration – Archived in Dec 2005', Office of National Statistics Website, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=764&Pos=4&ColRank=1&Rank=176> accessed in February 2009
- ONS, 2005b, 'Ethnicity, Families, 4 in 5 Bangladeshi families have children', Office of National Statistics Website, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=1167&Pos=1&ColRank=1&Rank=326>, accessed in February 2009
- Ostberg, S., 2003, *Pakistani Children in Norway: Islamic Nurture in a Secular Context*, Monograph Series, Community Religions Project, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds
- Pagett, L., 2006, 'Mum and Dad prefer me to speak Bengali at home: code switching and parallel speech in a primary school setting', *Literacy*, Vol. 40, No. 3, November 2006
- Parekh, B., 1989, 'Between Holy Text and Moral Void', *New Statesman*, 23 March, 1989, pgs 30-1
- Pellegrini, A. D. and Blatchford, P., 2002, 'Time for a Break', *The Psychologist*, Vol. 15, No 2, February 2002, pgs 60-62
- Perlman, J., 2002, 'Second Generation Transnationalism', in Levitt, P. and Waters, M. C., 2002, *The Changing face of Home the Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York
- Piaget J. and Weil, A., 1951, 'The Development in Children of the Idea of the Homeland and of Relations with Other Countries', in Campbell, S, ed, 1976, *Piaget Sampler*, John Wiley and Sons Inc., London
- Piaget, J., 1963, 'Stages and their Properties in the Development of Thinking', *Social Research*, 1963, 30:283-299

- Piggott, G., 2004, '2001 Census Profiles: Bangladeshis in London DMAG Briefing 2006/16', Greater London Authority, Data Management and Analysis Group
- Punch, S., 2002, 'Research with Children: The Same or Different from Research with Adults?' *Childhood*, 9 (3): 321-341
- Qutb, S., 1993, *Milestones*, Dar al-Ilm, Cairo
- Rasinger, S., 2005, 'Language shift in Banglatown? Evaluating Ethnolinguistic Vitality in East London', Working Paper 18/05, Department of Linguistics and English Language, University of Sussex
- Reay, D., 2004, 'It's All Becoming a Habitus': Beyond the Habitual Use of Habitus in Educational Research', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 25, No. 4, Special Issue: Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Education: The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory (Sep., 2004), pp. 431-444
- Robertson, R., 1995, 'Glocalisation: Time – Space and Homogeneity – Heterogeneity', in Featherstone, M., Lash, S., and Robertson, R., eds., 1995, *Global Modernities*, Sage, London
- Rogoff, B., Moore, L., Najafi, B., Dexter, A., Correa-Chavez, M., Solis, J., 2003, 'Children's Development of Cultural Repertoires through Participation in Everyday Routines and Practices', in Grusec J., and Hastings, P., eds. 2003, *Handbook of Socialisation Theory and Research*, The Guildford Press, London
- Rosaldo, R., 1993, *Culture and Truth, the Remaking of Social Analysis*, Beacon Press, Boston
- Rozario, S., 2006, 'The new burqa in Bangladesh: Empowerment or violation of women's rights?', *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 29, Number 4, July-August 2006, pp. 368-380
- Runnymede Trust, 1997, *Islamophobia a challenge for all of us*, Runnymede Trust, London
- Rushdie, S., 1988, *The Satanic Verses*, Viking, London
- Rushdie, S., 1991, *Imaginary Homelands: essays and criticism 1981-1991*, Penguin, London
- Said, E., 1978, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Routledge, London
- Said, E., 2001, 'The Clash of Ignorance', *The Nation*, 22, Oct., 2001
- Salih, R., 'Reformulating tradition and modernity: Moroccan migrant women and the transnational division of ritual space', *Global Networks* 2, 3 (2002) 219–231.
- Salway, S., 2008, 'Young Bangladeshi men in the UK labour market: inclusion, exclusion and identity' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31(6):1126-1152.

- Sassen, S., 2006, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Princeton University Press, Princeton
- Sayyid, S., 2000, 'Beyond Westphalia: Nations and Diasporas, the Case of the Muslim *Umma*', in Hesse, B., ed., 2000, *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms*, Zed Books, London
- Scheper Hughes, N., 1995, 'The Primacy of the Ethical', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 36, No. 3, June 1995
- Scott, J., 1986, 'Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance', in Scott, J. and Kerkvliet, B., eds., 1986, *Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance in South East Asia*, Frank Cass and Co., London
- Sen, A., 2006, *Identity and Violence*, Penguin, London
- Siddiqui, T., 2004, 'Institutionalising Diaspora Linkage, the Emigrant Bangladeshis in UK and USA,' Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit and International Organisation for Migration, Dhaka
- Silva, E., 2005, 'Gender, Home and Family in Cultural Capital Theory', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 2005 Volume 56 Issue 1
- Solomos, J., and Back, L., 1996, *Racism and Society*, Macmillan, London
- Song, M., 2003, *Choosing Ethnic Identity*, Polity Press, Cambridge
- Spradley, J. P., 1980. *Participant Observation*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, Orlando, Florida
- Starn, O., 1994, 'Rethinking the Politics of Anthropology', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 35, No. 1, February 1994
- Tagore, R., translated by Radice, W., 1987, ed., *Rabindranath Tagore, Selected Poems*, Penguin, London
- Thompson, H. R., 2007, 'Bangladesh' in Simpson, A., ed. 2007, *Language and National Identity in Asia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Thomson, M. and Crul, M., 'The Second Generation in Europe and the United States: How is the Transatlantic Debate Relevant for Further Research on the European Second Generation?', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 7, September 2007, pgs 1025-1041
- Tönnies, F., 1957 (1887), *Community and Society: Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, translated and edited by Charles P. Loomis, The Michigan State University Press
- Toren, C., 1993, 'Making History: The Significance of Childhood Cognition for a Comparative Anthropology of the Mind', *Man*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 461-478

UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, 2003, 'Language Vitality and Endangerment', Document submitted to the International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme Safeguarding of Endangered Languages, Paris, 10–12 March 2003

Vertovec, S., and Peach, C., 1997, 'Islam in Europe and the Politics of Religion and Community', in Vertovec, S., and Peach, C., eds., 1997, *Islam In Europe*, Macmillan London

Vertovec, S., 1999 'Conceiving and researching transnationalism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (2): 447-62

Vertovec, S., 2004c, 'Cheap Calls, the Social Glue of Migrant Transnationalism', *Global Networks*, 4, 2, (2004) pgs 219-224

Vertovec, S., 2004a, 'Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation', *International Migration Review*, 38, 3, pgs. 970-1001

Vertovec, S., 2004b, 'Trends and Impacts of Migrant Transnationalism', Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Working Paper No. 3, University of Oxford

Wacquant, L., 1989, 'Towards a reflexive Sociology: A workshop with Pierre Bourdieu', *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 7: pg 39.

Waldman, A., 2002, 'How in a Little British Town Jihad Found Young Converts', *New York Times*, April 24, 2002

Watson, J. L., ed. 1977, *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford

Werbner, P., 1997, 'Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity', in Werbner and Modood, eds. 1997, *Cultural Hybridity*, Zed Books, London

Werbner and Modood, eds. 1997, *Cultural Hybridity*, Zed Books, London

Wilce, J., 1998, *Eloquence in Trouble, The Poetics and Politics of Complaint in Rural Bangladesh*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Williams, R., 1977, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

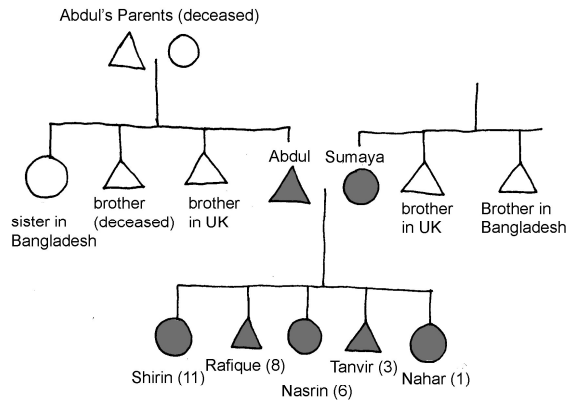
Willis, P., 1977, *Learning to Labour, How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, Ashgate, Aldershot

Wolf, E., 1990, 'Facing Power – Old Insights, New Questions', in Vincent, J., ed. 2002, *The Anthropology of Politics*, Blackwell, Oxford

Wood, D., and Beck, R. J., 1994, *Home rules: culture, environment and the American family*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore

Yusuf Ali, A., 2004, *The Meaning of The Holy Qur'an*, Islamic Dawah Centre International, Birmingham

# Appendix 1: Family Trees



Both parents from Sylhet.

Abdul came to the UK in 1982 aged 11.

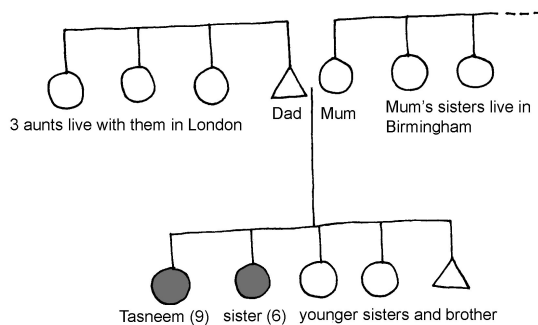
Sumaya came in 1996 for marriage.

Abdul works as a driving instructor.

Sumaya attended the mothers English class.

Shirin and Rafique attended the Bengali after school club.

Family of seven live in a two bedroom flat.

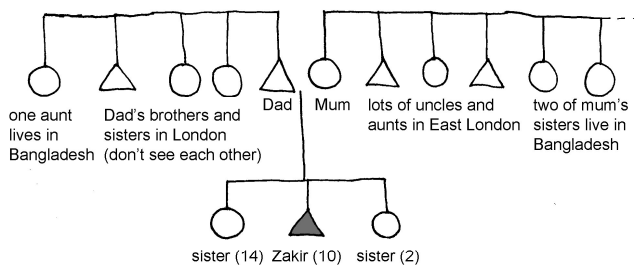


Both parents Sylheti, father spends a lot of time in Bangladesh.

Father owns a restaurant in Elephant and Castle.

The family used to live in Elephant and Castle but have moved to Islington.

Family of ten live in a three bedroom flat.



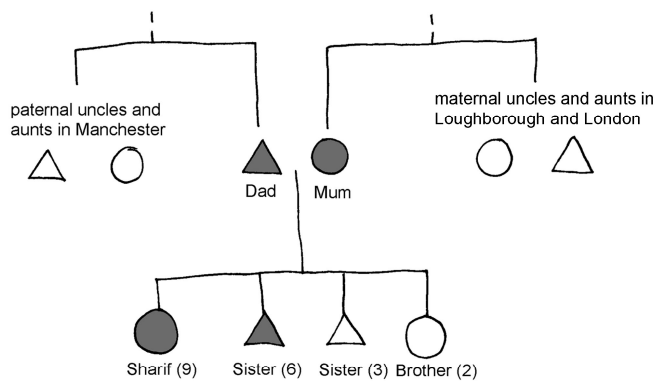
Both parents from Sylhet.

Both parents unemployed, although both used to work.

Mum came to the UK aged 11.

Father lived in US and then came to UK later.





Parents both Sylheti.

Mother grew up in London, father arrived about 12 years ago.

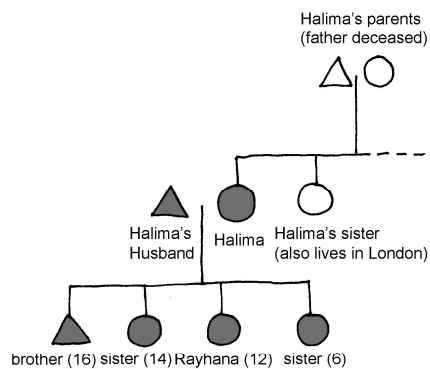
Both parents unemployed. Father used to work in a restaurant.

Parents are active in organising Qur'an classes

Mother has poor health

Father speaks almost no English

Family lived in overcrowded flat (2 bed) and moved during the research to a larger house.



Both parents Sylheti.

Halima arrived in 1986 aged 16.

Halima's father had lived in the UK since the 1960s.

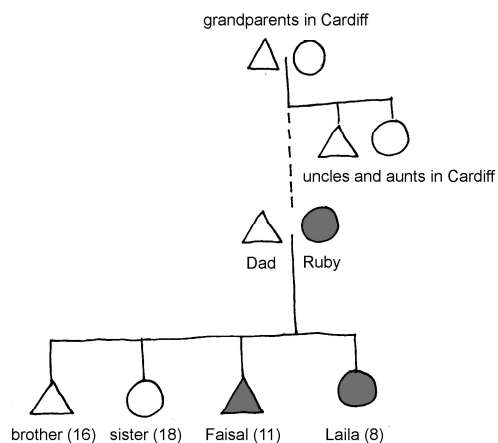
Halima's husband arrived in London in 1991.

Halima's husband works in a restaurant.

Halima attended the mother's computer club and English classes.

Rayhana and both her sisters attended Qur'an classes.

Halima is active in organising the Qur'an classes.



Parents both Sylheti, related to Halima and Tarique.

Father works for a taxi company as a manager.

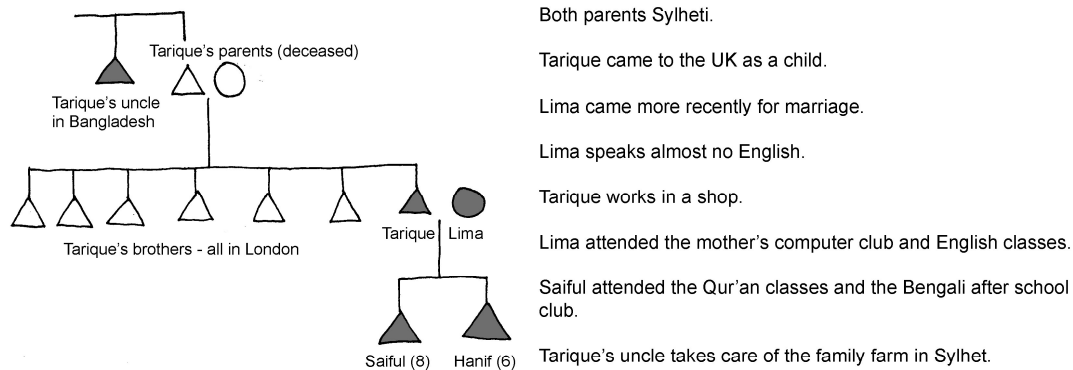
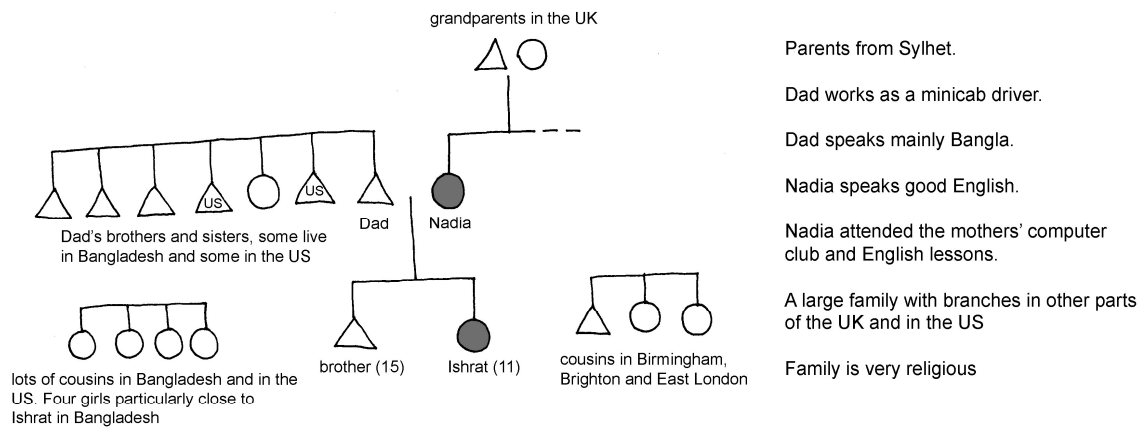
Grandparents and other family members live in Cardiff.

Other family members live in Leicester and Birmingham.

Oldest sister is at university.

Faisal and Laila attended the Qur'an classes and Bengali after school club.

Ruby attended the mother's computer club and English classes.



## Appendix 2: Mr/Ms Successful

