MYPLACE (Memory, Youth, Political Legacy And Civic Engagement)

Grant agreement no: FP7-266831

WP2: Interpreting the past (The construction and transmission of historical memory)

Deliverable 2.3: Intergenerational transmission of political heritage and historical memory (United Kingdom)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Editors</th>
<th>Anton Popov (AP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Version</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>28.07.2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Package</td>
<td>WP2: Interpreting the past (The construction and transmission of historical memory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliverable</td>
<td>Deliverable 2.3: Country based reports on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

1. Introduction
   1.1. Historical and regional contexts
   1.2. Theoretical framework
      1.2.1. Socialisation in mnemonic communities
      1.2.2. Generations and intergenerational transmission of political heritage
   1.3. Note on Methodology
      1.3.1. Selection of family case studies
      1.3.2. Analysis and approach to respondents’ narratives

2. Research Findings
   2.1. Family mnemonic culture(s)
      2.1.1. Transmission of family memories: selective and intersubjective process
      2.1.2. Family memory, (meta)narratives, myths and identities
         a. The Williams: football, ‘respect’ and resilience
         b. The Whites: the mixed race family
         c. The Donovans: professional car manufacturing workers
         d. The Sadiqs: British Muslim family
      2.1.3. Local / national historical discourses and family memories
   2.2. Traditions and national identity / identities
      2.2.1. Food, family gatherings and religious celebrations: the sense of decline of English traditions
      2.2.2. Multiculturalism and the (lost) sense of community?
   2.3. ‘Good old days’ and ‘bad times’: the past and present concerns
      2.3.1. ‘The Golden Age’: the swinging 1960s?
      2.3.2. The Thatcher era: de-industrialisation and recession then and now
      2.3.3. Young people’s work ethics and the welfare state
      2.3.4. Racism
   2.4. Intergenerational transmission of political heritage and civic / political engagement
      2.4.1. Negative attitudes towards politics, politicians and (dis)interested youth
      2.4.2. Socialisation in the culture of political / civic activism
         a. Maria White: a community activist
b. Ian and Kylie Williams: EDL supporters  
c. Saida Sadiq: an Islamic charity activist

3. Conclusions

References

Appendix 1: A template of the UK interview schedule

Appendix 2: Respondents’ socio-demographic information
1. Introduction
1.1. Historical and regional contexts

This report is to be read as a continuation of the research findings from the initial phase of MYPLACE WP2 (‘Interpreting the Past’) presented in the Deliverable 2.1 report (see Popov 2013). Research activities during the first stage of the project were carried out in Coventry (and to a lesser extent, Nuneaton) in collaboration with the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum (hereafter, the Herbert). The Herbert is a ‘site of memory’ where the national and local historical discourses are institutionalised and emplaced as temporal and permanent museum exhibitions, that represent the history of Coventry as a coherent narrative within the British context.

In institutionalised historical discourses Coventry is presented as an ancient city, the contemporary identity of which has been shaped by the main events of British history, such as the industrial revolution of the early nineteenth century and development car manufacturing industries in the city since the early twentieth century. The dramatic and challenging period in British history that was the Second World War (hereafter referred to as WWII) is marked in local history by the Coventry Blitz; from 1940-42 the city was severely bombed during the Luftwaffe air raids that caused hundreds of civilian casualties. The reconstruction of Coventry in the 1950s and 1960s gave the city its symbol of a phoenix rising from the ashes. The reconstruction led to a golden era in the city’s history – the 1960s was a period of full employment and the heyday of Coventry’s car manufacturing industry. Coventry underwent substantial economic and socio-demographic changes as a result of de-industrialisation and restructuring of local economies during the 1970s and 1980s – the period that is associated in the public mind with Margaret Thatcher (leader of the Conservative Party, in opposition, from 1975 and Prime Minister from 1979-1990). During this period following economic recession social tensions rose, resulting in the deterioration of inter-racial relations and the rise in visibility of far-right groups and movements such as the National Front; street violence (in which the police were actively engaged) then emerged in the course of race riots and the miners’ strike in the early 1980s. Throughout the strike the village of Keresley, one of the Coventry’s suburbs, became a stronghold of miners in the West Midlands.
Arguably urban decline that began with the 1970s recession and subsequent de-industrialisation has become endemic in Coventry, manifesting today in high levels of social deprivation. According to the 2010 English Indices of Deprivation, the proportion of the city’s population living in the most socially deprived ‘neighbourhoods’ (Lower Super Output Areas, or LSOAs) places Coventry 52nd out of 362 Local Authority Districts where 1 is the most socially deprived (Coventry City Council, 2011: 4).

Young people’s experiences of historical memories about the troubled periods in Coventry’s and Britain’s past has been analysed in the Deliverable 2.1 report (Popov 2013). The present report draws on research conducted within family settings involving both young people and their older relatives (parents and / or grandparents). The aim of this research is to gain insights into more informal modes of mnemonic socialisation. In particular we are interested in the role that family play in reinterpretation of more institutionalised historical discourses and how these interpretations impact on young people’s political attitudes and activities.

1.2. Theoretical framework

1.2.1. Socialisation in mnemonic communities

Socialisation into mnemonic communities involves transmission of past into present. The transmission requires some form of social engagement that inevitably produces a social individual with a particular social identity. Drawing on Halbwachs’ (1992) concept of ‘collective memory’, Boyarin argues that since both identity and memory are the product and manifestation of power relations at work within society they ‘are virtually the same’ (Boyarin 1994: 23). Memories are intersubjective and symbolic because they are selected to constitute group membership and individual identity; continuously reshaped, reinvented and reinforced as ‘members contest and create the boundaries and links among themselves’ (ibid: 26). Alongside the intersubjective space that produces and sustains memories, the selection process, as demonstrated in this report, is equally important. This is because what is remembered is continuously formed and reformed, but also because it is constituted by what was, or was made to be, forgotten.
This report concerns the role of the experiences of the older generation in the successful transmission of memory about socially and historically important events to the younger generation who did not experience them at first-hand. In practice, young people are socialised into a given mnemonic community through the internalisation of second-hand memories. Keightley and Pickering call this process ‘mnemonic imagination’ (2012: 87). As Cappelleto shows, moreover, the individual experiences of group political heritage facilitated through narratives, visual materials and/or embodied activities have great potential for production of sensorial/somatic effects and emotional responses (2003: 242). Due to their intimate, emotionally charged and physical nature, family, local and professional communities (sometimes represented by local museums, festivals and commemorative events), and friendship groups make up environments for mnemonic socialisation, and by extension, embodiment of political heritage (Keightley and Pickering 2012: 87).

It is important to note however, that history and memory are not mutually exclusive; sometimes the boundary between these two aspects of historical discourse is difficult to determine. Moreover, the dynamics of interactions between history and memory are not unidirectional. As Eyal points out memory studies have reduced the distance between oral tradition and written history: ‘On the one hand, history opened itself up to the subaltern and popular…; on the other hand, memory too opened itself up to history, and historians and intellectuals began to construe their work as an “art of memory”’ (Eyal 2004: 8). Therefore despite the assumed opposition of social memory and historiography, memory is a part of contemporary historical discourse (Klein 2000). Using family case studies in the UK, the report demonstrates the dynamic relationships between national historical narrative and family memories. Furthermore, our findings shed light on the role that intergenerational mnemonic socialisation within the family plays in shaping young people’s identities, their political views as well as the modes of engagement with socially important issues in the present.

1.2.2. Generations and intergenerational transmission of political heritage

For Mannheim, generation is ultimately the product of history that represents ‘the phenomenon of similar location of a number of individuals in a social structure’ (1952: 290). Moreover, evaluating Dilthey’s qualitative approach to generations, Mannheim emphasises that generations can be seen as ‘a temporal unit of history of
intellectual evolution’ that can be used for ‘measuring time from within’” (282). As Alexei Yurchak reminds us generations are not natural but rather emerging through common experience and related discours (2005: 30).

One of the central concerns of this research is the very process of inter-generational political socialization and transmission of political heritage. The generational approach however, needs to be considered with some caution to avoid the naturalisation of such abstract concepts as ‘national history’ and ‘transnational identity’ since the concept of generation suggests both continuity and change (Kansteiner, 2012: 111). Thus in Lebow’s opinion the concept of generation implies the collapse of temporal divide – children acquire experiences of their parents to such extent that Hirsch talks about traumatic ‘postmemory’ among second generation Holocaust survivors, for example (Lebow, 2003: 48). MYPLACE findings so far however, suggest that although role of intergenerational transmission of political heritage is very important in shaping young people’s views and actions, they internalise family memory only if it has direct relevance to their own experience. The political relevance to the present social environment also impacts on the level of youth’s critical attitude towards political views and values passed to them by the older generation (Popov and Deak, 2013).

Similarly the scholars of the intergenerational transmission of political heritage observe that political socialisation of younger generations into the values and views of their parents is most effective if parents have strong political persuasions (e.g. the history of partisanship in the family) and socially important issues are often discussed in the family (Jennings et al, 2009: 795). Arguably young people (late adolescents and young adults) form their cultural orientations through internalising orientations of their parents. According to Vollebergh et al (2001: 1196) the process of internalisation is unidirectional: adolescents become less susceptible to the cultural leanings of their parents, whereas ‘the influence of children on the attitudes of their parents is almost negligible’. At the same time, Jennings et al point out that a politicized family background also attunes children to the external political influences that in periods of upheaval ‘when the political environment contains forces antithetical to parental inclinations… may work against within-family congruence’
(Jennings et al, 2009: 796). Thus, we can agree with Demartini’s refinement of Mannheim’s problem of generations as one which accommodates both political socialisation and social change rather than seeing social change as a breakdown in intergenerational transmission of political heritage (1985: 13-14).

Taking into consideration the central role of intergenerational transmission of cultural and political attitudes and identities that impact on young people’s own political positions and activities, we have to pay attention to the mechanism of political socialisation. Emotions, affect and sensorial practices are often mentioned among factors required for successful mnemonic socialisation, in the course of which the political heritage is transmitted (Narvaez, 2006: 57). Rico and Jennings (2012: 739) demonstrate how emotionally charged Catalan territorial identity being transmitted across generations became a vehicle for political socialisation, because it is much more accessible and less abstract than such overt political categories as left-right orientations. Jennings et al (2009) have arrived at a similar conclusion in their longitudinal study of intergenerational political socialisation in the USA in the 1960s and the 1990s. They emphasised that ‘the more concrete, affect-laden, and central the object in question, the more successful was the transmission’ (782). While some of the theoretical positions on the role of mnemonic socialisation and intergenerational transmission of political heritage outlined above are supported by our findings; others (e.g. the direction and mechanism of mnemonic and political socialisation) are challenged and clarified through careful analyses of semi-structured interviews conducted with four British families.

1.3. Note on methodology

1.3.1. Selection of family case studies
In the following case studies three out of four families (the Whites, Donovans and Sadiqs) were interviewed as a result of establishing contacts with young people during the first phase of the WP2 research activities at the Herbert. These exercises that involved participant observation of the Herbert’s outreach work with young people, some of whom took part in the focus group discussions (see Popov 2013). The fourth family case study (the Williams) was conducted with a family that was contacted in the course of ethnographic research among English Defence League (EDL) activists.
within WP7. The Williams are the only family that is located outside Coventry in a place that is referred to as ‘an English town’ to protect their anonymity. In all cases names have been changed in addition to some geographical locations and institutions.\footnote{Intergenerational interviews were conducted by a team of researchers: Hilary Pilkington interviewed the Williams family; Emma Parfitt interviewed Barbara and David Donovan and the White family; and Anton Popov conducted interviews with Martin Donovan and Saida Sadiq.}

The families were selected on the basis of their members’ social and political (dis)engagement and (non-)activism. Members of three out of four family case studies presented in this report can be defined as activists. In all cases the activists are young people: Maria White is a youth worker and community activist working on the local radio station; Siada Sadiq is actively involved in Islamic charity organisations; and Kylie Williams is an EDL supporter who regularly participates in the movement’s marches and demonstrations. Only one member of the parental generation, Ian Williams, has an explicitly active political position as an EDL activist (he was the main contact person in the case of the Williams family, all other families were approached through young people). Contact with the Donovan family was established through the grandson Martin; although he expressed interest in the research politically and socially inactive. Only in the Williams case study were three generations of family members interviewed: daughter Kylie, father Ian, and grandmother Sue. Two generations were interviewed in the cases of the White family (daughter Maria and mother Cheryl) and the Donovan family (grandson Martin and grandparents Barbara and David). In the case of the Sadiqs the interviews with older generation family members have not been conducted at the time of this report – this case consists of only one interview with daughter Saida. All generations within same family case studies were interviewed separately. Nine interviews were conducted with 10 individuals. All interviews were semi-structured in-depth interviews that followed the same thematic schedule (see Appendix 1).

In terms of their socio-economic profiles, all families while having working-class backgrounds represent examples of upward and downward social mobility: Maria White is the first person in her family who received a university degree. Saida Sadiq’s parents immigrated to Britain in their childhood, her father is co-owner of an Asian restaurant, and she is planning to do a university course. Kylie Williams is a mother
of two children and pregnant with her third child at age 23; she is unemployed with very limited work experience. Her father Ian has been unemployed for the last 15 years. Her grandmother Sue was in continuous employment until her retirement. Martin Donovan had been homeless for several months before moving in with his grandparents (Barbara and David); he has completed a college course in child care and is working as a trainee in a nursery, being the first man in the Donovan family who is not a car mechanic or engineer. In terms of ethnicity, members of two families identify themselves as ‘White English’ (the Williams and the Donovans), the Sadiqs are the ‘British Asian’ (Bangladeshi) family and the Whites are an ethnically mixed family: ‘White English’ (Cheryl) and ‘Mixed White and Asian’ (Maria). Socio-demographic profiles of respondents are summarised in Appendix 2

1.3.2. Analysis and approach to respondents’ narratives

The main data produced in the course of the intergenerational interviews are the personal narratives with a substantial element of life history or autobiographical content. The analyses of these materials combined both thematic and narrative approaches. In the course of the data coding the main themes common in the majority of interviews were identified and provide the foundation for the structure of the Research Findings section of the report.

The narrative approach has been applied for analyses of family mnemonic traditions, cultures and individual identities. As Somers (1994) suggests ‘narrativety’ has several dimensions, including ontological (how the person defines themselves), public (held by larger units than individuals, e.g. national historical discourses) and metanarratives. Metanarrative is effectively a cultural tradition in which both ontological and public narratives are embedded. Metanarrative is not as much about what is told but rather how it is told. Thus, in ‘doing’ narrative, respondents are constructing their identity, not simply reporting events.

This entails the main epistemological question for individual life history of family history narrative: how to match the micro-scope of individual biographies to the macro-perspective of cultural processes and the social world. To resolve this dilemma Bertaux suggests that, in collecting life histories, social researchers discover the
patterns of social practices which provide a guide to understanding the ‘underlying sociostructural relations’ (Bertaux 1981: 36). Autobiography, in Kohli’s opinion, refers to the relationship between an individual life and the historical world inasmuch as it is a ‘structured self-image’ ‘…[through] which the individual represents those aspects of his past which are relevant to the present situation’ (1981: 65). Such a statement comes close to the notion of identity. Similarly, Bourdieu sees the constancy of individual identity as the illusion of (auto)biography, which is the individual practice of representing one’s life trajectory in relation to the norms and values of society. In other words, biographical narratives are a manifestation of *habitus* (Bourdieu 2000).

2. Research findings

This section sums up the findings from the research with family case studies. The findings are structured thematically. The section starts with the discussion of families’ mnemonic culture(s) which is followed with respondents’ reflections on English / British traditions and national identity(ies). Then we consider how in respondents’ narratives the past is linked with their present concerns about the state of the economy and social issues. The empirical part of the report finishes with analysis of the role that family mnemonic socialisation plays in the transmission of political heritage in general, and how it shapes young people’s political / civic activism in particular.

2.1. Family mnemonic culture(s)

By family mnemonic cultures we understood dynamic relationships between family memories and more institutionalised historical discourses that shape how the past is remembered and how these memories are passed across generations of family members. In this section we look at what, how (in discursive, narrative terms as well as in terms of concrete practices) and by whom memories are remembered within families; and the roles of different generations in their production, transmission and interpretation. In particular we will pay attention to the family metanarratives or myths about the past and their link with the local and national historical narratives.
2.1.1. Transmission of family memories: selective and intersubjective process

Young people in all of the families interviewed shared the experience of memories being passed to them by the older generation family members in the course of informal conversations (often during family gatherings). According to young people such conversations are almost always initiated by the older generation (i.e. parents, grandparents), and the rarely searched proactively information about the family past. Thus Kylie Williams stated that talks about family history are always started by either her nan or mum, with her being a passive listener: ‘I don’t ask. All I’ll hear’. In the case of Saida Sadiq her grandparents do not play any significant role in transmission of family memories due to the language barrier. Saida is not so confident in using Bengali as to have full conversations with them. The main source of information is her father who has an interest in history in general and family history in particular. Similarly to Martin’s and Kylie’s families, the narratives through which family memories are passed are initiated by the older generation (i.e. Saida’s father), while Saida is a recipient and never an initiator of such conversations:

It’s not that I ask, he just says it. He just randomly starts talking about it, going on and sometimes I listen and sometimes I just don’t. I don’t think we have, up until now you’ve asked me I’ve not thought about all this – it’s never come across my mind (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Such passivity seems to go against the argument that young people actively engaged with the past. However, although the transmission is often not initiated by young people it does not mean that they disengaged with family memories. The interviews with older generation members demonstrate that perhaps in a very similar way the parents of young people were socialised in the family memories by their parents and only later in their life turned into the main source of family mnemonic narratives. For example, most of the stories about her family’s past were transmitted to Cheryl White by her father, who lived to the age of 95. She admitted regretting that she had not asked him more questions, and commented that perhaps her older children had better knowledge of family history because they had spent a lot of time with their

---

2 The respondents are referred to by their pseudonyms, age at the time of interview and the town / city they lived in during the research.
grandfather when they were young. These stories, as well as more recent family memories are talked about during the gatherings that take place at birthdays and seasonal festivals like Christmas and Easter; traditionally the oldest females (currently Cheryl and her sister) host meals on such occasions. As in other family cases, Cheryl considers herself to be the initiator of conveying family memories to her children, who in her opinion are passive (and not always interested) listeners:

INT: And have you told Maria this, these kind of stories?
Cheryl: Oh I do, but, yeah, Maria listens sometimes, I think I go [inaudible] I don’t think she likes to listen too much (Cheryl White, 66, Coventry).

However, as Maria’s interview and interviews of other young people demonstrate, a younger generation is actively engaged with family memories, using them as a resource in constructing their identities and for interpretation of their present conditions (see below). At the same time, younger generations are rather selective in their interpretation and appropriation of family memories – taking on board only those which are most relevant to their experience and present situation. This confirms the understanding of collective memory as an intersubjective and selective process (Pine et al 2004).

The mnemonic socialisation in families is selective, not least because, as our data demonstrate, young people participate in the transmission of memories and knowledge more with older relatives that they maintain closer relationships with, than with others (this is often the case in families where children are brought up by a single parent, following separation or divorce). Kylie Williams for example, is very close to her father’s mother Sue and talks to her daily, whereas she maintains contact with her maternal ‘Nan’ via Facebook, although all of them live locally. Thus young people are effectively socialised in mnemonic culture that is centred on either the maternal or paternal side of their family.

Maria White, for instance, is socialised in the mnemonic community of her maternal family because her Asian father left when she was eight, and she saw her paternal grandparents only once when aged three. She has never seen her half-sisters on her
father’s side and has only sporadic telephone contact with her paternal cousins. In contrast, she knows several generations of her (Irish)-Scottish relatives on her mother’s side.

Martin Donovan is cut off from his maternal grandparents due to their problematic relationship with his mother. Despite his active attempts to establish links with them his knowledge of this side of the family is very limited. Conversely, he is very close to his paternal grandparents (with whom he was living at the time of interview), even though his father emigrated to New Zealand and their only contact is through Skype. The grandparents consciously try to include him in the family by telling him family history and stories about his father at his age:

**INT:** Is Martin interested in family history, and does he ask you questions?
**David:** Not very often, no.
**Barbara:** No, because I was trying to explain to the… Martin’s never been part of a family.
**David:** No.
**Barbara:** And we’re trying to make him –
**David:** (interrupting Barbara) I feel very sad.
**Barbara:** – part of our family.
**INT:** So in what circumstances do you? Is there any particular time and place where you might tell him little bits of family history, or try…?
**David:** We try to tell him a bit of his own history.
**Barbara:** Sometimes we have a sit down now and again and we have a discussion… (David Donovan, 77, and Barbara Donovan, 72, Coventry)

Saida Sadiq, despite having both parents in her family and close relationships with grandparents from both sides, has more knowledge of and connections with stories from the paternal side of her family, partly because of her close relationship with her father.

Thus, family memories can have an imbalance in their transmission from paternal or maternal sides of a family, depending on the particular family situation and the role...
played by each parent (or grandparent) in the upbringing of any children. So a young person is socialised in a particular mnemonic culture of family that makes it a mnemonic community with its myths and metanarratives.

2.1.2. Family memory, (meta)narratives, myths and identities

Some observers argue that collective memory is closely linked with construction of national identity (Boyarin 1996: 24). These links are discussed in the next subsection of the report. Here, however, the focus is on the role which family memory plays in the creation of individual and family identities. The sense of being part of a family in which all members share memories, physical resemblances and personal characteristics is articulated in the interviews, through the family metanarratives (discursive representation of self and others that present in the personal narratives of family members) and myths (past stories and tropes through which elements of the family history with a strong bearing on its present identity are narrated). In Ricoeur’s semiotics, ‘narrative identity’ is the third active element of the identification process alongside ‘selfhood’ and ‘sameness’, which form respectively the synchronic and diachronic axes of identity. Thus individual identity appears as the plot of a more or less coherent life story (Wodak et al. 1999: 11-15). Such a ‘reconstructive element’ in the autobiography creates the meaning of an individual life by referencing past events according to the context of the present situation (Kohli 1981: 67). In this subsection, the family-specific metanarratives, myths and identities that are built upon them are discussed separately for each of the case studies.

a. The Williams: football, ‘respect’ and resilience

For the Williams family football constitutes a central family myth and practice that is passed down the generations. According to the family history, Sue Williams’ grandfather was a prominent footballer in the beginning of the twentieth century playing for a local football club; he later played for the newly formed Manchester United FC, allegedly scoring the first goal in the club’s history. Thus football constitutes the main subject of the family’s memory work and identity. Sue had done some family history research on her grandfather using a computer programme and the Internet. However, according to Ian, football as a family tradition was not passed down to him from his parents (this is partly explained by the fact that he grew up
without contact with his father), but rather was re-discovered through his Mum’s (Sue) memory work, his own interest in football, and the importance of fandom and firm membership (support for the local team his grandfather had played for) for his local identity and reputation:

It was (names town) mob when I got involved. It was (names town) mob when I was involved then they switched as the years went by they switched over to the clubhouse seating in the seats and that so the kids couldn’t afford it, then I started playing football and I’d gone, I’d met my ex-wife at that point and she’d admitted to me with the reputation I’d got of being amongst some of the football violence and the other violence and all that, her and her mates used to try and cross the road when they’d see me walking down the street and I was like ‘well actually when you get to know me I aye like that’ (Ian Williams, 49, English town).

Importantly, football is closely framed within the family’s sense of locality: support for the local football team with which they have family connections. As a family metanarrative, it connects the past – the glorious great-grandfather – the present (support for the local team and Manchester United) and also surfaces in the younger generation’s projections of the future when Kylie talks about her future plans to train as a sports physiotherapist (inspired by watching football matches with her dad, Ian).

Interestingly, Kylie talks about her father’s activism in the EDL as a typical trajectory for an aging football fan, who is too old for clashes with rival firms and replaces it with having a good time with his mates on EDL demonstrations and marches, while still being involved in some violence:

INT: How much of a connection do you think there is between the people who are on those EDL demos and football crowds, you know, the casuals and stuff?
Kylie: Yeah I mean it is just a load of old football lads, well the older ones anyway. That’s all dying out in football though ain’t it now? So it’s just another way to …
INT: To do the same kind of thing?
Kylie: Yeah, get drunk and have a fight. Even if it’s fighting amongst yourselves. That’s one thing to do. They are only arguing between themselves it’s unbelievable (Kylie Williams, 23, English town).

The trope of ‘respect’ featured heavily in Ian Williams’ narrative. When he explains his own and others’ behaviour, he conveys a strong moral imperative to his actions and world views, reflecting what Watt (2006: 779) notes about the communal solidarity and fragmentation in working-class council estates being often discursively shaped along the division between respectable and rough.

When Ian talks, for example, about his conflict with the new husband of his ex-partner he calls that man’s behaviour ‘disrespectful towards him, his mum, his relatives, but also towards the bloke himself’ – who through this shows himself a coward. Here morality, values of family and ‘respect’ are brought together. Ian’s own illegal economic activities at the local market might be justified, but dishonesty towards and disrespectful treatment of those who are from his close circle is unacceptable.

Talking about his years of football violence, Ian underscores the importance of moral principles of not attacking ‘ours’, while legitimizing attacking ‘strangers’. Ian justified his own participation in violent attacks on rival firms as ‘defending my mates’. Here again there is a strong moral imperative of sacrifice for ‘our people’ – he puts mates before himself. This is another example of the local estate’s mentality that has a sense of respect at its core: to respect (our) people and be respected by them.

The hierarchy of values here is clearly inward looking – first come family and close friends, then the neighbourhood, and then the estate.

The estate and local area are very important to Ian’s identity. The EDL makes sense to him as being part of this locality-focused identity. He talks about his reputation in the neighbourhood as an open EDL activist, which makes him visible among other Whites, Blacks, Sikhs and Muslims:
I drink in the [names pub]. [Names male] used to, before he got banned from there he use to drink in the [names pub]. Now you’ve heard and you’ve seen I don’t hide what I am. I’m EDL local me. I’ve got badges on now, you know what I mean? Usually if I go shopping I’m wearing my hoodie. When I work the market [I] wear my hoodie. The Sikhs down there know who I am, they’ll talk to me, laugh and joke with me. The Muslims in (names town) know who I am. One talks to me, the rest just ignore me and I ignore them. All the black guys round these areas know exactly who I am (Ian Williams, 49, English town).

He justifies his attraction to EDL in terms of familiarity: being locally visible and a way of socialising with ‘the lads’ – having a good time at demonstrations and marches. Moreover, the moral imperative of honesty and trust in ‘us’ underpins Ian’s anti-Muslim attitudes, he distrusts them because of the principle of Taqiyya that he interprets as allowing ‘Muslims to lie to non-Muslims’.

The roots of such an inward looking perspective perhaps lie in the inherited lack of geographical mobility, which is exacerbated by a lack of social mobility (in either direction) for at least the last three generations of the Williams family. Sue has moved very little outside the area where she was born and has lived all her life. Interestingly, although Ian is in a very similar position, he has been further afield in the course of attending football matches and EDL demonstrations. It is symptomatic in this respect that his memories of visiting a seaside resort in childhood were mentioned both as an English tradition and in relation to his EDL activism:

INT: Okay the other thing I wanted to ask about was traditions in terms of like the country, you know, like British traditions, English traditions, what are the most important for you?
Ian: Sunday dinner.
INT: Sunday dinner.
INT: Yeah day trips to the seaside, that’s a big thing round here isn’t it? Where did you used to go, you said (names place)? Do you all go to (names place)?
Ian: Yeah (names place) and (names place). (Names place) started an EDL division up before and I turned round and said ‘you need anything we’ll come down and support you’ and they was like ‘why?’ and I turned round and says ‘enough of us go holidaying down there and have been down there as kids so if you start having a problem we will come and support ya no matter what’. And it’s like, being able to walk in the country, them sort of things that they used to do in the past, I love doing that now (Ian Williams, 49, English town).

The same moral imperative of supporting ‘our people’ against ‘strangers’ is articulated in this excerpt. Such lack of mobility might partly explain Ian’s fear of strangers and his negative attitudes towards migrants – the embodiment of human mobility.

In Ian’s interview football, as a part of the family’s metanarrative, is interwoven with his employment history, which also reflects socio-economic and political changes in Britain since the 1970s. The security company he was employed with became bankrupt in the early 1990s. He moved onto disability benefits due to (as he explained) too much football playing in his younger years and hard physical work as a labourer in construction (but he blames football more than the labouring). Then as a result of the current coalition government’s welfare reforms he was moved onto Job Seeker’s Allowance. Now he is registered as unemployed and living on ‘the dole’.

While football is a main hobby and important part of family history, the health problems that both Sue and Ian (and some other members of the family’s older generation) have been suffering is reflected in the family’s metanarrative of being survivors and resilient in the face of family deaths and other hardships of life. Sue expressed this feature of the Williams in the phrase ‘we’re all fighters’:

Sue: We’re all fighters.
Ian: As I said, he was 30, she didn’t leave till 78, you was 17 spent a year in hospital with TB, still going. I was born as I says after 43 years, they calls her sister up ready to tell her that I was dead…

Sue: No, says I don’t think he’ll last the night.

Ian: I shouldn’t lasted the night. I’m still going now.

Sue: Says we wanted someone to tell her cause they’d have to put me to sleep cause you know you see when I held him the blood all started coming out of his mouth. He’d had a bit of a haemorrhage and he had another one in the incubator when they didn’t think he’d live. Now look at him! (Sue Williams, 80, and Ian Williams, 49, English town).

Furthermore, although they did not draw direct parallels, there is a notable resemblance between how Sue and Ian explain their health conditions – hard work and too much sport. This shows a pattern in transmission of knowledge about personal problems that keeps the individual responsible and downplays the structural reasons for this. Neither Ian nor Sue reflect on the fact that the state had withdrawn or did not have a system in place for safeguarding the living and working conditions of the most vulnerable groups.

Another striking similarity is in how Sue and Ian explain their employment trajectories through changes of workplaces marked by conflicts with management over the fairness of treatment of either themselves or their co-workers. Probably for Ian, his mum’s story serves as a template for the justification of his own actions in the workplace and towards authorities in employment. There is a strong moral connotation in this way of presenting the family pattern of employment relations – zero tolerance to unfair treatment (or what is perceived as unfair) from the management and others – something that Ian claims his daughter Kylie inherited from him. The one significant variation is that Sue managed to remain in full employment and secured her pension on retirement. Ian, on the other hand, is ‘on the dole’ with the prospect of eviction from his council house while Kylie has not started working and is expecting her third child at age 23. This difference demonstrates the contrast in socio-economic conditions between the past (when Sue was working) and the present.
b. The Whites: the mixed race family

The issue of family identity is not straightforward in the case of Cheryl White. She identifies herself as White English (although in fact there is Irish-Scottish ancestry on both sides of her family, see below); Maria identifies herself as being ‘Mixed White and Asian’ (her father is Indian), but Cheryl classes her older children as ‘West Indian’ because of their Jamaican father. The ethnic mix of the family is further enriched by Cheryl’s older children providing a strong link to the West Indian community of Coventry, which Cheryl and Maria feel part of. This illustrates how cultural (in this instance Afro-Caribbean) heritage can be transmitted from a younger generation to the older one. In addition to Maria’s socialisation into their Caribbean heritage, her half-siblings have also influenced her in other respects; a primary example being sport. Cheryl’s relatives were not particularly sporty, but Maria shares a love of football with her brother: she enjoys playing it while her brother plays semi-professionally at a local club, and her sisters run for local athletics clubs.

The history of inter-ethnic / inter-racial relationships in the family constitutes one of the central family narratives. This is important for Maria who is herself a child of mixed race heritage, and is very important for Cheryl since both of her partners were from ethnic minorities (West Indian and Indian). As part of the family metanarrative the story of (Irish) ‘Spanish gypsy blood’ in the family is used as an explanation for the ethnic / racial mixing that runs in family. The importance of the story of the ‘Spanish gypsy’ great-greatgrandmother is demonstrated by the vivid image of her as a barefoot woman with a smoking pipe in her mouth passed down through family memories:

[My father] told me that, that, let me get it right now, his mother’s mother’s oh God, his mother, that was his grandmother and then his great-grandmother, that’s Maria’s great-great-great-grandmother, she used to come down the street, that’s an Irish gypsy woman, smoking a pipe, and singing her head off, and never wore shoes and my father told me he used to go to school with no shoes, that’s how poor they were, he said many, many [times], in the snow he said, everything, that’s how poor they were used to go he never had shoes to go to school in and I didn’t believe that, I thought no, I can’t believe I cannot believe
that, you didn’t go, until I was eleven, ten, eleven, I went down and stayed six month down there, with my grandmother, that’s Maria’s great-grandmother, and then I seen the poverty and I seen how they lived and I, and then, then I could really see my father walking to school with no shoes, now you wouldn’t think (Cheryl White, 66, Coventry).

Maria: I know somewhere along the line, way before my grandparents, that one of my great-great-grandmothers was an, was a Spanish gypsy but I don’t know where or how far, my mum could tell you a lot more about that… Like she knows a lot, lot more than what I do, so. And even what I know about my grandmother and father is not a whole lot, it’s all just stories…

INT: Okay, did she maybe mention the Spanish gypsy blood to you?
Maria: Once or twice, yeah

INT: Okay, what kind of thing did she say?
Maria: Just that the lady used to walk down the street with no shoes on and with her pipe.

INT: Yeah, exactly she told me the same thing, it’s amazing.

Maria: I think she was telling me in relation to how crazy our family is and maybe that the genetics have come from a long line, this is not going to work, is it, go on, no, that’s alright (Maria White, 24, Coventry).

Cappelletto (2003) argues that collective memories are transmitted intersubjectively as part of an imaginary process that involves visualisation of mnemonic accounts, thus increasing the emotional connection between the listener and the story. The same image of her Spanish gypsy great-grandmother drawn by Cheryl in her interview is described by Maria in her own. This image suggests someone unusual, described by Maria as bequeathing characteristics to the family that are ‘transmitted genetically’: ‘how crazy our family is’. This narrative can be interpreted as an evaluation of the ethnic mixing in the past and more recently as an abnormality that runs in family, despite opposing racial prejudice to which her family was subjected to in the past, Maria has at least partly accepted and internalised it in her identity as a member of the family.
The ethnic mixture passed down in family ‘in the blood’ is emphasised by Cheryl when she showed the photograph of her young father having a rather dark skin – she makes a remark that during the summer he easily could be confused with an Indian. She also stresses the fact that they were impoverished by telling the story of her father not owning shoes as a child, much like her great-grandmother; she uses the single pair of her shoes to say how difficult her economic situation is now, see later in the report. In Maria’s narrative the same story about a barefoot gypsy woman lends an exotic (if not abnormal) air to the family history in ethnic terms, rather than memories of past hardship. Notably, Maria does not mention the Irish origins of her maternal family (she talks about ‘a Spanish gypsy’), although she is aware of their strong Roman Catholic heritage. Furthermore, the Irish ancestry is ignored by Cheryl when she identifies herself as White English. This demonstrates that despite being aware of their ethnic minority roots the family is very much integrated and assimilated in English society, which is perhaps true of the majority of Irish descendants living in Coventry (see also the case of the Donovan family below).

The White family experienced traumatic incidents of racial prejudice and violence in the 1960s and 1980s. In 1964 Cheryl was verbally abused and almost run over by a car for carrying a black child. In the early 1980s her son was stopped, searched then beaten by a police officer for wearing a Crombie coat. When Cheryl complained at this brutality and tried to find out the name of the officer she was almost arrested herself. This was a very traumatic experience for her son, ‘who has never forgotten it’. This inspired anti-police attitudes in the family that were passed to Maria; however, she never fully embraced them. As she said during the focus group interview she even wanted to enlist in the police after school but encountered furious opposition from her mother:

I remember one occasion, I went to a careers fair just at school and I went to a careers fair in Birmingham and the police were there doing their career stand and I took this bag home full of careers advice and application form and was quite giddy to terrify my mother and tell her, she took it out, and said I was never ever going into the police force, so from… I remember I was quite shocked at the time because I didn’t understand what… I just liked to collect the
bags and pens really. I know even going into the police force, just wanted to
collect free pens. But I was surprised at her reaction. And my family have
experienced a lot of bad scenarios with the police and I’ve heard a lot of bad
things… (UKFG3R15, 25 October 2012).³

These traumatic stories are retold in vivid terms in the family, constituting an
important part of its mnemonic culture. Moreover, for Cheryl White the experience of
racial victimisation in the past is at odds with her being critical of the current situation
with immigration. Despite being subjected to racism in the past she expresses rather
racist attitudes towards ethnic and cultural immigrants. Arguably the change of
terminology to vocabulary such as ‘culture’, ‘religion’, and ‘migration’ helps to
dissociate the past forms of racial discrimination from the present ones.

c. The Donovan’s: professional car manufacturing workers

The Donovan’s are a line of Coventry car manufacturing workers. Being involved in
the British motor car industry for several generations is the main narrative in family
history as told by Martin’s grandfather, David Donovan, who is himself a retired car
engineer. The Donovan’s have been living in Coventry since the early twentieth
century and David’s grandfather was the first who settled there, moving from his
previous trade of coach building to working in motor cars:

Yeah, well when the parents died, erm, my grandfather was separated from his
brother; his brother went to live in London – they were both born in Burnley, or
Blackburn, up in Lancashire. Erm, my f- my grandfather moved to his uncle’s
in Shropshire and he learned the trade of, er, coach building – literally the old
stagecoaches – and then he went on to motor cars. Er, and he spent the last,
probably, 30 years of his life working at Jaguar as a carpenter (David Donovan,
77, Coventry).

³ References to focus group interviews have been developed for Deliverable 2.1 (see Popov 2013: 16)
and they include the country code (UK), the focus group number (FG3), the respondent’s number
(R15) and the date of interview (25 October 2012).
David’s father continued working at the Jaguar factory most of his life, with an interruption during WWII when he joined the war effort making Lancaster bombers at the factory located in the city suburbs.

David himself made an illustrious career in car manufacturing, rising from an apprentice to a mechanic, working in several factories and dealerships in Coventry. He then went on to become a car engineer at an experimental car racing factory, travelling with the racing team around the world:

I’ve had a busy life, personally, I have – I’ve been very fortunate. So I served my time as a mechanic, erm, I worked for the Vauxhall dealer in Coventry – then I moved to the Ford dealer, which is on the on the A45 here. Then I went to Triumph motorcycles, that was just on the road to Meridan, quite close. Erm, I worked in experimental there and racing so I saw a bit of the world with that. It was great (David Donovan, 77, Coventry).

Both of David’s sons started their working lives as apprentices in companies within the car manufacturing sector. Martin’s father eventually became a mechanic working on heavy goods vehicles, a career he has continued after emigrating to New Zealand in 2003.

Thus working with cars as mechanics and engineers is seen by David as the family business – something that he had hoped would be carried on by his grandson Martin; however, Martin is the first male member of the Donovan family to enter a completely different career altogether. He is a trainee member of staff at a nursery and hopes to make his career in childcare, a choice greeted with some derision on David’s part:

David: My father was an engineer, he used to make things and I took it on, y’know. But naturally, erm, I didn’t have to think what I wanted to do when I left school. To be honest, I thought I’d like to be a farmer and that’s what I wanted to do. Until I was about 14 and I used to get hay fever and I thought ‘well that ain’t a good idea then, is it?!’ [Laughs].
INT: [Laughs] and Martin said you’d taught him some skills as well, like, with the mechanics.

David: Yeah, I try and show him when he’s around – but half the time I’m fixing his bike and he’s… gone off somewhere else. Or he-he’s at work [laughs sarcastically] (David Donovan, 77, Coventry).

Martin, had been living with his paternal grandparents for several months at the time of interview; although he did not know anybody from the generation above his grandparents, he was familiar with the stories passed down from his grandfather and great-grandfather about craftsmanship and working in car manufacturing. In both cases the stories were related to the tools which belonged them and had been handed down the generations or objects (a Crib board that he mistakenly called a ‘penholder’) made by them. These objects act as tangible connections to his family’s metanarrative of professional car mechanics and engineers:

Martin: Oh, we chat about [family history] now and again but, it’s mainly about my dad ‘cause my dad’s not here and I always chat to my granddad and grandma about him.

INT: So your grand, your, your grandparents talk to you about your dad.

Martin: They talk about my dad to me like, saying what he used to do and things like that.

INT: Oh, really? So what are sort of stories about your dad?

Martin: I know that’s he’s had many accidents on bikes before, he’s broken near enough every bone in his body.

INT: Why? Was he doing sort of racing?

Martin: He used to have a motor bike but before that he used to have like push bikes and he always used to go mad on them, every day he’d end up hurting himself somehow, that’s about it really.

INT: So this is probably what put him into mechanics.

Martin: I think so yeah, he always had to fix his bike so he went into fixing things, but I think my granddad’s dad used to work in mechanics as well, ‘cause he had, I know there’s a lot of things in my garage that got passed down from
him to my granddad. So he must have done something with cars or transport or something (Martin Donovan, 19, Coventry).

Together David and Martin visited the Coventry Transport Museum, this being the most important site of memory - dedicated to the glorious past of the city as the cradle of the British motor car industry. This visit demonstrated to Martin how tightly linked his family’s history with national and local industrial heritage; his grandfather gave him a tour around the museum, telling him stories about cars and his personal involvement with the companies and people that built them. In this context of mnemonic socialisation, Martin praises and perhaps exaggerates a limited knowledge of car mechanics and bicycle maintenance learned from David. He also admitted that he wanted to work with cars and even approached a couple of companies looking for an apprenticeship. However, and to the great disappointment of his grandfather, these plans were never realised. At the same time, Martin’s work in the childcare sector is following in different family footsteps.

Martin’s mother and step-father have been working as childminders for many years. But the maternal side of Martin’s family story marginalised by the dominant ‘motor car mechanics’ mnemonic culture of his paternal family, despite the fact that his father left the family home when Martin was three years old. His maternal family history is little-known to him and narrated in terms of the exotic, if not alien. He emphasises the foreign, Irish, origins of his mother – despite the fact his paternal family name is distinctly Irish, both Martin and David declare English identity. Martin also thinks that his maternal grandparents are ‘posh’ as opposed to the working-class background of his paternal family.

Martin admits that his choice of career is inspired by his mother’s childminder work that he grew up witnessing. However, he divulged during his interview some details of his troubled relationship with his step-father; recalling incidents of bullying and threatening behaviour. He was expelled from the house several times between the ages of 15 – 17, when he finally left. After spending a number of months at a hostel for the homeless he then went to live with his grandparents, David and Barbara:
Like one time I got kicked out for carrying the hoover upstairs the wrong way, that’s how bad it is. And I come home then I’d like say sorry and stuff, even though I shouldn’t really have been saying sorry. And all my clothes were in black bags out in the rain, like, just in the front garden… There was nothing really I could do, like ‘cause I can’t really just say it ‘cause as soon as the police show up he’s gonna be there acting all goody two shoes, ‘oh, I work with children, I’m really good with children, yeah, I’m great with them’, ‘cause he’s, he’s a really clever guy so anything that there is he will get out of it. No I did report him one time ‘cause at one time he had a machete up to my neck, just because we were arguing, so, and then I phoned, I told someone about it, I think I told the people in [the hostel in Coventry], reported it to someone higher and then OFSTED went and, round to check, to see ‘cause obviously working with children and stuff like that, and he got rid of the machete (Martin Donovan, 19, Coventry).

His explanation for his step-father’s behaviour is that he himself had a ‘hard life’ as a child and then ‘shared his experience’ with Martin. These traumatic experiences have had a formative effect on Martin and increased his motivation to work with children: ‘that’s why I want to be good to children, so they can have a better life than I had when I was a bit younger’.

The story of his relationships with mother and step-father as well as the history of his parents’ separation are topics that both Martin and his grandparents do not want discussed within the family; though they did go into them during interviews. Moreover, Martin’s conflict with his step-father brought back his grandmother Barbara’s own traumatic memories of being physically abused as a child:

INT: And were there maybe things in your family history as well that weren’t talked about – that you know nothing about because nobody spoke about it; the history?
Barbara: Well, no, because I don’t think… people like you can understand that… you just didn’t discuss family, and… this – I mean – you quite often –I watch a programme sometimes where people die and they’ve left no will and
they’ve got family, but they’ve never had anything to do with them, because
(pauses) – I – now – I feel family’s very important, erm, and this is why
Martin’s here, because i-if it wasn’t, I suppose I could, y’ know, be… erm… but
I… I do, because… maybe it was the upbringing I had as a child, erm…
INT: And it’s something you wish you’d had -
Barbara: Yes.
INT: – More of.
Barbara: Yes. I wish I… I wish I’d had a mother… I really loved. I absolutely
adored my father. My father knew nothing about the life my mother… erm…
She hit me over the head with a broom one day and split my head open. She’d
asked me to pick the rub… – go and empty the rubbish bin. And you know
when there’s bit… – I was picking… - ‘come on and hurry up!’ and ripped my
head open. And she told my dad I’d done it on a gate running out to save my
younger brother ‘cause he would’ve run in the road. She covered up all her... y’
know. So my dad knew nothing (Barbara Donovan, 72, Coventry).

This excerpt demonstrates that repressing traumatic ordeals does not mean forgetting
them. On the contrary, the grandson’s experience of domestic violence provides
another perspective to Barbara’s own experience, and her memory of trauma acquires
new meaning of being a survivor rather than a victim. In her narrative Barbara implies
that her own ordeals make her more sympathetic to Martin and protective towards
him, compensating for the lack of love she experienced as a child.

Another form in which memories can be shared is that of music, an interest shared by
four generations of Donovan men. Through his love of popular music and ability to
play guitars and rap, Martin can relate to his father, who played in a heavy metal band
when he was young; also to his grandfather, who played rock ‘n’ roll in social clubs in
the 1960s, and even to his great-grandfather who was a banjo player. The tradition of
family musicians provides a contextual framework, helping Martin place his valued
hobby into his paternal family mnemonic culture. In fact, there is very little
transmission of family tradition here: Martin learned how to play guitar from his
friend and his rapping is inspired by his experience of domestic violence and
homelessness.


d. The Sadiqs: British Muslim family

The central point of Saida’s narrative about herself and her family revolves around being British Muslims. She reflects on her acquisition of Muslim identity in terms of ‘exploring our roots’ to ‘relate back to our country’. In the course of the interview however, it became apparent that she is very critical towards Bengali (or more general Indian culture) when it deviates from Islamic traditions; she gives examples of clothing and wedding customs which do not conform to Islamic tradition. In apparent contradiction to this, Saida criticised Bangladeshi traditions as being ‘oppressive towards women’ – a distinctly western opinion. Similarly she uses western liberal idioms when she talks about learning about Islam as an empowering and liberating experience:

So that’s why I turned to my religion in a sense, and that’s where I found that a lot of the things that I assumed about my religion when I didn’t practice it – because I was a Muslim but I didn’t know much about it, didn’t have that education in it. So I learnt about it and I found that it wasn’t degrading, it wasn’t the same as how culture is and you know how people in the western world think it’s degrading for women and they think that we’re oppressed and stuff like that. And it’s actually really liberating, there’s actually we have a lot of rights and when you look into it and when you learn about it, you kind of – it empowers you a little bit, so now… So I think what I find, personally – people would obviously, people do disagree with me – but I find that Bangladesh the culture is oppressive (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Saida perceives religion to be more important than culture. Thus, Bangladeshi culture is seen by her as being ‘contaminated’ by Hindu culture. The true cultural heritage for Saida is the religious (Islamic) one. When confronted with a more complex vision of culture as a dynamic process with numerous sub-layers of cultural influences being its integral parts, she appears detached from the cultural aspirations of young Muslims in Bangladesh; though young Bangladeshis never question their religious identity, they often aspire to look more western – a manifestation of their rebellion against rigid traditionalism. Saida herself conforms to Islamic clothing conventions to rebel against
rigid and intolerant views in British society, which is truly the cultural, social and political environment she has been fully socialised in:

Everyone’s biased, everyone has a bias. But it’s true there are a lot of sub-layers so in Bangladesh now they wear a lot of western clothing, the girls, the young girls. For the older women they still wear their saris but the younger girls – the ones that are kind of rebellious, they’re known as rebellious – they wear a lot of jeans and tops and things like that and they wouldn’t – they’re Muslim, but they wouldn’t dress like one – if you understand what I mean. So there are a lot of – see, here, people in Bangladesh they would assume me being here that I would wear western clothing, they’d never assume that I’ll dress like – in their head they just wouldn’t picture it so it’s just really funny when they like ‘no, we do’ – for them they’re like how can you live in England and be like that? It’s funny like everyone has their own assumptions (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Nevertheless, Saida distances herself from the British lifestyle embraced by one of her sisters. The sister’s ‘Britishness’ is discussed in terms of visual markers such as western dress and socialising habits – drinking, partying and smoking:

Saida: My other sister doesn’t [live like a Muslim] – she drinks, she smokes, she does what she wants. And that’s her choice.
INT: Does she – what do you think – does she consider herself to be Muslim?
Saida: She does, because we actually did the – not the full pilgrimage, you’ve heard of Hajj, right? But we did - there’s a similar one, like a smaller one, called Umra, and we did that in February and she came with us, which is obviously you have to be a Muslim to do that – so she does class herself as one, but back when we’re – when we’re in this country - as soon as we came back she’s back to doing what she was doing. I think my parents were hoping for a bit of a wakeup call, [laughs] but it didn’t happen! So she does call herself one but she doesn’t – you wouldn’t tell by looking at her, she doesn’t really look, she doesn’t look like me, she’s a bit more western as well, she’s a bit fairer and light brown hair – she does look different as well, so – I think when people see her they wouldn’t treat her how they would treat me.
INT: Because she sort of uh mingles a little bit more?
Saida: Yeah (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Thus, for Saida to fit into her perception of British identity, she had to behave as a young British woman might. This perhaps would not have been required if she did not visibly belong to an ethnic minority with her darker skin; her westernised sister has a lighter skin tone, which is less of a contrast to white skin. She views her non-British (Bangladeshi) heritage as being ‘filtered’ down through two generations of family members living in Britain (her grandparents and her parents). Saida’s search for a more informed Muslim identity may be a result of this very complex process of othering. While she has a rather weak attachment to Bangladesh and the culture of her parents (and even less of her grandparents), on the other hand, she is also reminded constantly of her divergence from the majority of British society. Interestingly, Saida considers the current atmosphere of racism and xenophobia to be more attacks on cultural differences rather than racial ones (she understands ‘racial’ to refer to skin colour).

In interview she emphasises her family’s experience of being discriminated against, and witnessing racial violence (during the Birmingham riots of 2005) and prejudice towards Muslims. Saida’s British identity has been consolidated through her own experience of xenophobia and learning about the family history – particularly that her grandfather fought in the British army during WWII:

My dad was telling me yesterday about my grandad, actually served in the war in India, for the – he was on the British side. And, because we were talking, I met someone yesterday who said something quite controversial to me, about being in this country is not your country ‘la, la, la’, things like that, I’m used to it, but it was quite – it was quite [an] intense conversation and I was just telling my dad about it and was laughing about it, like ‘another one’ happened, and, um, he was telling me that ‘actually your grandfather fought for the British, so who – who’s to say you’re not, your grandfather fought for the British – so – how British do you wanna be?’ … So I found that quite interesting – I didn’t know that until yesterday! (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry)
There are several important elements at play here. Firstly, the process of intergenerational transmission of family memories was ignited by her present experience of prejudice and xenophobic attitudes towards ethnic minorities and Muslims in particular in the UK. Saida told her father of one recent comment where her ‘Britishness’ was challenged, and he replied by telling the story of his father fighting in India on the British side during WWII, concluding ‘how British do you wanna be?’

Secondly, the involvement of family members in WWII fits perfectly into the British national historical narrative where the war is considered to be a period when the entire nation made sacrifices to survive. Thus Saida had knowledge of this discourse and the connection between her family memories and national history became very relevant for her personal social positioning and identity as a British Muslim of Bangladeshi heritage and an Islamic activist.

Thirdly, and importantly, the present concerns of a daughter actualised the family memories of her father which were not previously part of the mnemonic narrative in the family. The process of transmission here can be seen as not just unidirectional – from older generation to the younger one – but also as a complex process of production of memories which involves articulation and negotiation of their meanings within the current socio-political context. This corresponds with the intersubjective nature of social memory (Boyarin 1997). Thus, Saida’s grandfather’s story became a meaningful and powerful memory as a result of this conversation between Saida and her father, in which present day meanings of this story were produced by both the daughter as well as the father that makes them co-producers of these memories.

Although family memories of being subjected to racism are constantly mentioned by Saida in the interview, her own experience of racism and prejudice is relatively recent and coincided with her decision to manifest her Islamic identity through wearing Muslim dress – in stark visual contrast to more westernised dress styles:
I have another friend – a Pakistani friend, who she wears what I wear and she lives in Nuneaton – and she gets a lot of – whenever I go to her house, or her area even, to go to shop – shopping centre or whatever, we get a lot of … so I think it depends on the areas as well, if you’re with many people of your colour or things, although you just get used to them and the racism is different… It’s a big difference to Coventry town centre or Hillfields or Foleshill and areas like that, it’s a massive difference. So yeah, people, you might get the odd look but most people are fine, most people are – when I come into the town centre most people are fine with me. So when something – when someone does say something or look at me funny it stands out. Whereas if you go to Nuneaton, it’s so – it’s everywhere, people – everyone looks at you funny, everyone moves away from you, everyone does it so it’s like, for me it’s strange, I’m not sure to it - she’s used to it, she’s – she’ll warn me, she’s like ‘by the way, just ignore people’ but why should you have to ignore people, why should you have to step aside for them to be allowed to do what they want, that was my point when I was there, I was like I’ll give them dirty looks back, I was like ‘what?’, ‘what’s your problem?’, maybe that’s not the right way to go about it, but if they’re not going to listen when you’re nice, then what are you meant to do? (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry)

Saida is clear about her proactive position as an activist who cares about the situation of Muslims in the UK but also elsewhere in the world (Syria, Palestine, etc.). Her decision to wear Islamic dress in addition to its religious meaning has clear activist connotations as a challenge to racist attitudes in society. When she is the subject of ‘dirty looks’ she is prepared to return them rather than ignore the behaviour as her friend suggested; she is prepared to fight back.

At the same time, Saida is surprised at receiving such xenophobic treatment, since she has internalised the values of cultural diversity as a result of going through the British education system. Saida’s experiences of multicultural education can be contrasted with memories of her aunt who experienced racism and ethnic segregation when she was in school in the early 1990s:
Well, my aunty, she’s thirty-two now, when she was in secondary school she felt like there was a lot of racism… there - you had to be with people from your country, your colour otherwise – it was like a way to stay protected, having people who were friends, like you. And she was – if you spoke to other people that was okay but at the end of the day – she goes, people knew their place, so it was quite a tense [environment] (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Saida’s school experience suggests a degree of success of the New Labour policy of promoting multiculturalism throughout the education system. The fact that school is very successful in introducing young people to multiculturalism is also confirmed by the findings of WP5 and focus group discussions with young people conducted in the Herbert.

2.1.3. Local / national historical discourses and family memories

Our findings suggest that one of the important characteristics of family mnemonic culture is its link with the national and local historical narratives. One such historical landmark in Britain’s national identity is WWII. In the case of the White family, Maria’s grandfather and his brother were fought in the war and a photograph of her grandfather in uniform gives a tangible reminder of this. She talks about her mother as someone who was born soon after WWII, which corresponds with Cheryl’s earliest childhood memories of playing in the rubble of bombed houses – the reminder of the Coventry Blitz as a central and most tragic episode in local history. The air raid shelter built by her father during the war acts as a standing memorial in their garden – something that is also featured in Maria’s interview. The fact that the death of Cheryl’s uncle, whom she had never met, during the war is still remembered as one of the most tragic losses in the family suggests that the family’s involvement in WWII has been passed down at least three generations.

In the case of Saida, although not confirmed by interviews with older members of the Sadiq family, the story of her paternal grandfather’s fighting in the British army during WWII implies a link with WWII that is arguably a formative event for British nation as a mnemonic community. However, unlike the White family, WWII did not play an important role in her perception of the past until she learned about her
grandfather’s involvement in the war. This brings an emotional reaction and connection to the event in the past which Saida expresses as a shock:

Like I would say that I do – you know when the memorial and things like that happen, I do feel that sense of you know it was a horrible time and a lot of people died – I do feel that. But, the events and – I can’t I can’t possibly relate – there’s nothing that’s happened like that in my lifetime for me to understand what happened. And I don’t always I don’t know which countries exactly were part of it and – so I don’t know how I fit into it – like I don’t place myself into that situation. So hearing that my granddad was part of it, yesterday kind of shocked me, I was like especially I was just thinking – what made him want to be a part of it – was it because the – you know, in the colonisation there and everything – in India and you know, did my grandad feel like he had to do it, did he want to do it – I don’t understand (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Family history can thus be seen to provide an intimate perspective on historical events, unlike the national school curriculum, which is seen as uninteresting. Saida believes her disinterest in WWII history is partly generational: she could not see the relevance of it to her present experience (the story of her grandfather with all connotations of racism and sense of ‘Britishness’ discussed above provides this relevance); and partly due to the racialised representation of WWII history as predominantly White British. She thinks that there is an element of deliberate misrepresentation of WWII in order to preserve it for the White British identity (see the whole argument about selectivity of collective memory as an important mechanism in production of national identity in Boyarin 1997). The recently discovered memory of her grandfather as a British soldier in WWII is important because it helps Saida to explain her own identity as both British and ethnic / religious (Muslim) minority.

The valued family involvement in the history of British football has a structuring effect for the mnemonic narratives in the Williams family. Here the emphasis is put on their great-greatgrandfather playing for a famous English football club in its early years. This connection to the foundation of English football – one of the central aspects of contemporary English identity - is cherished by all three interviewed
members of the family. Moreover, Ian and Kylie have a lifelong involvement with football (particularly clubs their ancestor was associated with): Ian as a player, fan and firm member; Kylie as a supporter, and in her ambition to work as a sports physiotherapist.

For Coventry families, the industrial heritage of the city as a cradle of British car manufacture is often linked with their family history in the interviews. For example, Cheryl White remarked a number of times in interview that her West Indian husband and later herself had worked at the different car manufacturing plants in Coventry. Ironically, Maria also talked about her mother’s employment in the car industry and assumed that her grandfather had also worked in this sector, but she had mistaken the GEC (General Exchange Centre, the telephone service where he worked) for the name of a car manufacturing factory. Obviously, for Maria the telephone exchange centre and car manufacturing plants are both features of the past that she has no first hand memories of.

In the Donovan family, the generations of men involved in car manufacturing and car mechanics is at the centre of the family metanarrative. For David Donovan his career as a car engineer is a source of male pride. His biographical narrative is structured by his experience of work at the most famous car manufacturing companies in Britain and he emphasises that he was able to see the world by being a part of the British racing team. His passion for British cars continues as a pastime and he belongs to a historical car enthusiasts’ club. The current decline in the car manufacturing industry in Coventry is affecting his grandson Martin, with a lack of job opportunities for him to continue the family tradition. David regards this is as an indicator of what is wrong with the nation – the decline of the manufacturing sector in the current economy and the corresponding idleness of the younger generation. Martin takes solace from learning how to use the material reminders of his family history embodied by the tools passed down from his great-grandfather to his grandfather and now to himself.

Finally, the popular culture, personal, and family connections to 2 Tone band The Specials, is another important reference point in family memories that connect Coventry participants with the local historical narrative. In his interview, Martin
mentioned the jam session he once had with one of the ex-Specials who happened to be a friend of his friend’s father. The family connection to the famous Coventry band is important because it grounds the shared intergenerational interest in music in the Coventry working class culture, from which The Specials emerged in the subculture of amateur rock bands playing at pubs and social clubs in the late 1970s. Maria too has a connection to The Specials, who rehearsed in the aforementioned garden air raid shelter while Cheryl babysat a band member’s child. The integration of the Whites into Coventry’s West Indian community provides a historical context for the family link to a band which embodied 2 Tone’s vision of inter-racial collaboration and cultural mixing in the British music scene in the 1970s-80s.

Thus family memories are closely linked with local and national historical narratives that in many cases provide family narratives with structure, highlighting the key historical events as important landmarks in a family’s history. It is important to note the role that physical and sensory objects play in the production of such memories; for instance old photographs, tools from Martin’s great-grandfather, records by The Specials, and of course the air raid shelter. These items in particular stand out for family members and are both emotionally charged and historically significant, in addition to providing connections on a greater scale to national narratives.

2.2. Traditions and national identity / identities

The connection between family memory and national historical narrative discussed above correlates with the way our respondents talk about their sense of national identity (be that British or English) through values and traditions. These traditions, in one sense, are inherited from previous generations and therefore have strong connections to the past and provide a sense of historical continuity. At the same time, traditions are subject to change over time and our participants tend to talk about them in terms of erosion and decay. Importantly respondents of all generations were inclined to see family as the main site where practices identifiable as traditions take place. This may be influenced by interview questions about the traditions that are practiced in respondents’ families (see Appendix 1). Correspondingly, this might reflect the role that family plays in socialisation into national identity, which is
enhanced by the dynamic relationship between family mnemonic culture and national historical narratives (as discussed above).

2.2.1. Food, family gatherings and religious celebrations: the sense of decline of ‘English traditions’

The transmission of family memories is closely associated with family gatherings that are also seen as part of British traditions since they take place around important Christian festivals. Importantly, memories, family and British traditions are brought together in narratives about family customs such as having Sunday lunch at grandmother’s house. This highlights the important role of food and meals as well as family matriarchs for construction and internalisation of national / ethnic identity (similar tropes were present in all case studies):

INT: Yeah so do you have things in the family then that you try and keep like special, like as a tradition?
Kylie: Well now like Boxing Day we go to my Mom’s and we have like a second Christmas Day ‘cause I don’t see my Mom on Christmas Day. She lives over the back of Walsall. We now see her Boxing Day and we have Christmas dinner and all the presents and that on Boxing Day (Kylie Williams, 23, English town).

I try to encourage even Martin, y’ know, erm, to come when it’s Christmas or when it’s our birthdays. We, we usually meet - see our son that lives here and he’s got two children, so they’re like Martin’s cousins (Barbara Donovan, 72, Coventry).

In Kylie’s, Martin’s and Maria’s families such gatherings take place at Christmas, Easter and family birthdays – most of these celebrations have a religious origin. As a result, although the majority of young people (and in fact their older relatives) with the exception of Saida and her family, are not religious, traditions for them are associated with Christian celebrations, while also being associated with elderly relatives and the older generation in general. This perhaps adds to their sense of losing (British / English) traditions, since they are not religious and lives of elderly
relatives with whom they associated traditions are in decline. This is illustrated by Maria, who stated that her family had followed Roman Catholic tradition in the past; however, that part of their Irish cultural heritage is never mentioned by her and there is no strong sense of religious identity in the family now. Maria expresses the opinion that English traditions are in decline. Interestingly she juxtaposes British / English traditions with increasingly multicultural modern British society, seeing herself as an embodiment of this multiculturalism: ‘I’m a mix of Indian, I’m a mix of Caribbean, I’m a mix of English.’ Her English (used almost interchangeably with British) heritage is exemplified with her love of stereotypical English food (fry-ups and Sunday roasts), religious celebrations (Easter, Christmas), and leisure habits (Christmas shopping, summer holiday). This is very similar to narratives in Kylie’s and Martin’s case studies:

INT2: Do you have any like traditions in your family, any things that you do? Martin: Not really, no, not, we’ll always sit in here and have Sunday dinner together and that’s about it like. INT: Sunday dinner every Sunday or you… Martin: Yeah, every Sunday we’ll have a roast dinner like, proper turkey and… INT: Do you have at home or you going to the pub [sic]? Martin: No, no, we always have it here… INT: So who is [sic.] keepers of this tradition in your family? Is it your grandma? Martin: It’s just my grandparents like. INT: Your grandma? Martin: Yeah, it’s just something we’ve done ever since I’ve moved in. Sunday’s the day of chilling out and relaxing before work, isn’t it? (Martin Donovan, 19, Coventry)

Similarly to other respondents, Saida identifies cooking and food as a main source of traditions passed across generations in her family. She talks about Indian and Bangladeshi cooking that she learned from her mother, who in turn had learned them from her mother. At the same time, she acknowledges that this tradition is open to changes – her cooking of curry is different from her mother’s and her grandmother’s
methods. She uses cooking as another example of cultural hybridity that she identifies with – she uses a lot of South Asian spices for cooking Italian food that she loves. Nevertheless, traditional Indian and Bangladeshi food has is a strong ethnic identity marker for Saida. Also, food and cooking are things that she has contextualised with the values of traditional (if not patriarchal) family: cooks in the family are women; while the father runs the household:

INT: Can you think about any sort of traditions, religion probably is one, but maybe some other traditions, I don’t know how this interests which are passed within the family [sic.]?
Saida: Cooking, I’d like to say, cooking definitely… It is traditional Indian and Bangladeshi cooking. So there’s a lot of you know, Indian snacks and curry and things like that that I know how to cook, because my mum taught me. But I’ll only know her version of it – but it’s funny because my grandma cooks differently to my mum – I cook differently to my mum as well. Like everyone puts their own twist on it so I put – I like cooking like Italian food for instance – I love it and I put my twist on things, like I put a lot of spice in my Italian food and make it taste a bit more Indian – it’s really funny because I don’t – I don’t like bland food I have to have a lot of chilli in it, so – it’s all a mixture of things. So my grandma, my mum cooks really traditional Bengali food like really traditional and like fish is a big thing in Bangladesh, a lot of fish.

INT: And your dad – is he cooking as well, because, or is he just running restaurant [sic.]?
Saida: Uh – he he can cook, he does when the chef’s ill and stuff my, dad does step in. He can cook professionally but he doesn’t – if you – he doesn’t do it, he’s just head of - he just runs the head of house, yeah (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Food is a strong metaphor for tradition, and by extension for national, ethnic and religious identity. For example, Kylie Williams is appalled by the spread of Muslim culture in Britain that she sees demonstrated by the increased presence of halal food in shops. She supports EDL and BNP because they stand for ‘Britain for British’ that she again expresses in terms of gastronomic traditions: ‘Just having your Sunday
dinner or not trying to bring the like, if wanted your own rules and that you stay where you are’ (Kylie Williams, 23, English town).

There are several aspects that make food a suitable media for expressing xenophobic attitudes. First of all, at a very basic level, the kind of food that people eat identifies them as human – there are both appropriate and inappropriate foods for humans that are often explained in terms of (national) tradition. For example, many English (British) people would find it inappropriate to eat horse meat – this was strongly expressed during the ‘horse meat scandal’ in spring 2013, and featured in the semi-structured interviews recorded with young people in Coventry and Nuneaton for MYPLACE WP5.

So by marking some food as inappropriate (for whatever reasons) the people who consume it can be tainted by association. Kylie’s children are exposed to some of her xenophobic views through talking about food. She has already explained to her son the difference between halal meat and ‘normal’ meat:

[My son] knows about Halal meat. He knows how Halal meat is killed and how our meat is killed ‘cause he has asked me what the Halal is and what normal meat is and that. But they’ve always known where the meat’s come from anyway from when he’s a baby, and he’s seen a cow, I’ve told him what they do with the cow when they’ve seen the slaughter lorries come past, I’ve been open. I’ve thought well they are going to learn it anyway, I’d rather tell ’em so they don’t just freak out when they am older and you know it might come as a bit of a shock when they am older and they find out. You know but them too young to know anything else really. They know there’s bad men out there but I ain’t told them it’s obviously just from Muslims ‘cause it ain’t (Kylie Williams, 23, English town).

Emphasis is placed on how the animals are killed. Although she admits that she is in general open about the slaughter of animals, it is interesting that the topic of violence (towards animals) occurred in the course of interview when Muslim traditions were
discussed. Thus, the use of food as a religious marker might be instrumental in the process of de-humanisation of the ethnic or cultural ‘other’.

Additionally, the tradition of a family Sunday dinner (as well as Christmas dinner or New Year’s Day dinner) has strong Christian connotations that in this context makes it incompatible with Muslim cultural traditions.

The reference to Sunday dinner has direct family associations – referring to the close circle of people who are ‘us’ with the central role of ‘Mom’ or another female figure who is cooking food for the family and thus uniting it. For instance, Kylie’s grandmother, Sue, who has a clear sense of being a centre point for her family, gathers family members around her (if not in her house) for Sunday lunches, Christmas dinners, New Year’s Day meals etc. Since such family meals are an important element of English tradition, in her family Sue is seen as an epitome of the current state of English traditions. Her fragility as an elderly person adds to Ian’s and Kylie’s sense of a decline in tradition. Sue herself reflects on the decline in family gatherings: ‘they don’t get together as much as they used to’.

The portrayal of matriarchal figures – mothers and grandmothers - and the older generation in general as the embodiment of ‘English traditions’ is very important for young people’s sense of continuity, changes in the transmission of values and even political views. For example, Archie, a 19 year old participant of the Getting Involved workshop held in the Herbert, commented that the BNP appealed to older generations because they were the ones who still remembered what traditions were (the Herbert fieldwork diary, 8 February 2012). Ian’s story about meeting an elderly lady on the street who shook his hand in approval of his EDL activism supports this view:

I did expect it one day, this little old lady stopped me in the street down (names town). I walked past her and I just turned round and [she] said ‘excuse me love’ and [I] went to walk back and [she] said ‘yeah you, excuse me’ and I stopped, her [sic.] went ‘are you English Defence League?’ I went ‘yes love’ and I stood there and waited for the tirade. I thought ‘here we go, I’m gonna be had a go at
here’. I stood there and thought ‘oh no’ and she turned round and said ‘can I
shake your hand?’ and I was like ‘erm yeah’ held my hand out and she shook it
and went ‘I’m grateful that somebody is standing up for this country for once.
Well done lads and her [sic.] just turned round and walked off and I was just
standing there going, I must have stood there for a minute watching her walk off
up [names town] high street cause I was just shocked (Ian Williams, 49, English
town).

The tradition of the mother being a family’s centre point has been passed to the eldest
granddaughter, Kylie, who is also very close to Ian (Sue’s only child). It is symbolic
that now Kylie is going to host traditional family gatherings such as Christmas dinner
– an indication that she is taking over from Sue.

2.2.2. Multiculturalism and the (lost) sense of community?

If British and English traditions are often associated with the past and evaluated by
the respondents as being in decline they are also often juxtaposed in interviews with
the increasingly ethnically diverse and multicultural British society today. In
narratives of the older generation of respondents this comparison of the supposedly
culturally homogeneous past and the multicultural present is sometimes accompanied
with nostalgic narratives about the lost sense of community.

Cheryl White talks about the past (the 1950s and 1960s) as a time when everyone
knew each other. Interestingly, she refers to the neighbours of this ‘golden age’ as
‘one family’, when children called adult neighbours ‘aunties’, representing the strong
community spirit. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from her interview,
where she recalls the Queen’s Coronation in 1953:

Oh people had a big massive party ‘cause it was the coronation and I remember,
you see neighbours in them days, neighbours in them days, you, we called
everybody auntie, Auntie Kitty, Auntie Rose, Aunt, everybody in the street was,
we were just one big family and everybody knew everybody and you know, so
children, you, you was, you never said hello Mrs, Mrs whatever her name is,
you called them Auntie Rose, Auntie Kitty, Auntie Jan, you know, all the
people that was around, Auntie Molly, you know, Auntie Molly and that’s how it was when we was growing up, but today I find neighbours are very, very, you see I, I live here, and I’ve got four houses there and I could not tell you, I know who they are, but I couldn’t tell you, you know, anything about them, anything, you know, you don’t communicate, they go [inaudible] and hello and that, but in my day, everybody, we’re not saying like we went in and out of houses, we didn’t do that, we didn’t go in and out and in and out but you know, parents got together and everybody kept together and everybody was a family, and when I watched the coronation and I seen the street parties, it brought it all back to me, ah, I can remember them days and they were lovely days. Oh, in the fifties, right the fifties, right through to the sixties, oh, they were lovely, lovely days (Cheryl White, 66, Coventry).

These nostalgic attitudes have been passed to Maria; who refers to the “close community” from her mother’s stories, and emphasises the positive meaning of a big extended family:

INT: What for your family are the good times and the difficult times and [sic.] that have been shared?
Maria: It’s a mix, I think yeah, I think it’s a real mix, I think, every family has their ups and downs, I think the, my mum’s children, other children, when they grew up, they were, you know, they were happy times for her, growing up in, in Wood End and places, like she had a close community and a lot of family around her, especially my grandparents still being alive, I think times have got harder for the family as we’ve all grown up and family members have passed away, they’ve moved away, you know, circumstances have changed, I think it’s got a lot difficult for her as we’ve all grown up.
INT: Yeah, that’s pretty much what your mum said about the community and having everybody around you.
Maria: Oh she always talks about Wood End and all of that, yeah, she loves it (Maria White, 24, Coventry).
Such references to the family unit in relation to the local community demonstrate the positive values attributed to family by many of the research participants; Cheryl, for example, describes her childhood with her parents as ‘a good time’. This might be interpreted as a belief in the traditional value of family as an ideal, even though there is only one example of a ‘complete family’ in the traditional sense (the Sadiqs) – the rest are characterised by separation, divorce, or children raised by single parents with help from older relatives.

It is significant that a nostalgic hankering for the halcyon days of community spirit exists against a modern backdrop of neighbours being virtual strangers, some of whom are recent immigrants, in stark contrast to the traditional model of families living in the same house for several generations. Cheryl’s anti-migrant attitudes are particularly directed against Eastern Europeans (e.g. Bulgarians and Romanians) and linked with her negative opinion of the European Union (EU) as a source of immigrants. At the same time, she distinguishes between different groups of migrants in relation to their ethnicity and historical ties with Britain. The recent immigrants from Eastern Europe are ‘bad’ because they use the EU as an opportunity to come to Britain without being ‘invited’; the ‘good’ immigrants for her are those who were ‘invited’. Perhaps not surprisingly the groups of migrants associated with Cheryl’s family history are among those she regards as ‘good’: the West Indians and the Irish. She particularly opposes racist attitudes towards second generation West Indians living in Britain because they were born here and are fully British in her opinion:

Well, in the, in the early fifties, when, more or less, West Indians came here then. And they were asked to come here by Macmillan. He was Prime Minister then and he brought them all over to help build the country up and work, same as the Irish, they were asked to come over and they did all the roads. The Irish are still doing the roads. Then the West Indians they came, and they, to work and take low [paid] jobs and everything. And then what makes me laugh now, the majority of the old West Indian[s] that came here in the early fifties and late fifties, they’ve all gone back home now, but their, it’s what their offspring is left here, their children and their grandchildren and whatever, they’re left here, but they are British, they were born here. But the people out here today say go back
to your own country. They ain’t got their own country, this is their country, do you know? People should read their history books sometimes, you know. All these racist people are people that’s got no knowledge of how West Indian people came into this country, and Asian people. Asians and Indians fought in the war, they fought, [inaudible] [for] the country. They were, they were the, what do you call them, with Queen Victoria, the, the empire, what do you call it, and they come in here. But you see what’s happening now is… Well, there’s, I mean now we’ve gone into the EU, haven’t we, and we’ve got, in October we’ve got the Romanians and Bulgarians, is it? Romanians and Bulgarians are coming in, now they’re entitled to come in because it’s the EU, we’re in the EU, so in October we’re having a big influx of them coming in, you know, you know, it’s live and let live that’s how I look at it, but the country is over, it’s gone over, over, it’s gone over, there’s too many and they’re having children and they’re having children and it’s going over and over and for the people that’s here, they’re not finding jobs, they can’t, because there’s too many, too many now (Cheryl White, 66, Coventry).

South Asians, or more specifically Indians and their descendants, are also identified as ones who deserved to be here because they fought during WWII as subjects of the British Empire. This argument is very close to one that is used by Saida when she gives an example of her veteran grandfather as a justification for her being ‘British’. The national historical narratives surrounding WWII as a central event shaping British national identity are linked with individual family histories (e.g. in the case of Maria’s Indian father). Moreover, the anti-migrant discourse that is racist in its essence is normalised and racism is denied through employment of expressions that metaphorically oppose ‘them’ (immigrants) to ‘us’ (the ‘family’ and the ‘home’ where ‘others’ are legitimate only if invited). Cheryl particularly stresses that she could not be accused of being racist because her ‘children are mixed race’ (see discussion of race and racism below).

Similarly to Cheryl, Ian Williams’ nostalgic memories of community feature the Britain of his childhood – ‘when it was safe for them to play outdoors in the country’.
He stresses that at that time the estate had a white population who were English-speaking, contrary to today’s ethnic diversity in the area:

Ian: The whole estate, the whole estate that I grew up on was white apart from a couple of black families. Totally English-speaking. I left there in my 20s. I can walk to my Mom’s house now from my house when the kids are being took [sic.] to school and it’s very rarely I’ll hear an English voice. I can walk from my Mum’s to (names town), I took [inaudible] that way and we heard one person speaking English in the whole, it’s what two and a half, three mile[s] to our Mom’s, straight through a town.

INT: What languages are they speaking?

Ian: Either Urdu or them languages or Polish and you are walking along going [might mime something here] and I’ve actually nearly turned round to some people at some point cause they’ve actually spoke a word of English and I’ve turned, ‘Oh my God somebody’s speaking English.’ (Ian Williams, 49, English town).

Kylie Williams, rather unusually for young people in our research, is an EDL supporter and shares her father’s xenophobic views, reproducing a similar nostalgic narrative. Despite living a very local life (e.g. being born in the area, having all her relatives including her partner’s relatives living locally), Kylie wishes to emigrate to Australia because she identifies the country with values that she cherishes and that are, in her opinion, missing or lost in contemporary Britain, such as being less open to other cultures, and a strong work ethic (see more on this topic below).

Martin’s grandparents, David and Barbara Donovan, also talk about New Zealand, the country where their son emigrated and where they wish Martin would go to be closer to his father, as a Britain of old good days. They also express a feeling of discomfort at not knowing their neighbours, and see the presence of immigrants as frightening:

David: I must admit – I could live in New Zealand, I don’t know if you’ve ever been abroad like that…? It’s just like England, but there’s… there’s nowhere near as many people -
Barbara: Oh, it’s beautiful. If you ever get a chance to pick a country, you go - you go to New Zealand.

David: It’s absolutely wonderful. And there aren’t many fore-foreigners – obviously the Maoris, which are th… the natives –

Barbara: But they tend to live in their own bit, y’ know.

David: But it’s so nice, erm…

Barbara: It’s, it’s like England was years ago.

David: In New Zealand, it’s pretty much like England. Similar size…

Barbara: New Zealand’s like here. You can go from one village like Tile Hill, Canley – you can go through different place[s]…

David: But the people are so friendly as well.

INT: Yeah, ‘cause you mentioned earlier it doesn’t feel like that in the towns and cities these days.

David: Yeah, that’s the trouble. I think this is one thing against multi-cultural… ism [laughs]. Erm, because the people from other countries don’t, sort of, get on the same, do they. Well, don’t seem to. (David Donovan, 77, and Barbara Donovan, 72, Coventry).

Moreover, the culturally homogenous Britain of the past is remembered as ‘nice and safe’, whereas the present ethnic / cultural diversity is associated with danger and crime:

David: I mean some cities are worse than others. Leicester, in fact – there’s more, erm, non-English there than there are English now.

Barbara: Well I think – see, with us – we probably thought – this country was a lovely country because most of us were British.

David: You all thought the same, you all dressed the same.

Barbara: And it, and it – it was – and we thought that was nice. And then we’ve got all these other people, and… it’s, it’s like you don’t feel safe anymore.

That’s how I feel.

INT: Oh really?
Barbara: Yes. I don’t – I wouldn’t want to… Years ago I would go and walk anywhere – dark… now, I wouldn’t even dream of going… walking anywhere…

David: You hear many stories of people being robbed in town (David Donovan, 77, and Barbara Donovan, 72, Coventry).

As in the case of Cheryl White their xenophobic attitudes are rather selective and directed (perhaps due to media discourse at the time of interview) against Eastern European migrants, who are viewed with a high degree of suspicion. Similarly to Cheryl the Donovans are inclined to have a more positive view of foreigners who have some family connections with them (e.g. Barbara’s sister is married to a Polish man therefore Poles are better known and accepted).

The xenophobia of older generations underpins the nostalgia for a lost sense of community in the English city / town, and is in striking contrast to the positive evaluation of contemporary multicultural Britain by younger generations of respondents, particularly those who have an ethnic minority background.

Saida, for example, talks about her positive feelings towards Coventry in terms of community (the city as one community) emphasising that multicultural profile of the city and the comfort that it brings to her everyday life (e.g. accessible shops selling South Asian food and spices):

See where I live, um, I live about a 15 minutes – 15 minute walk away from the city centre so I live near – I live near city college, so that’s kind of in the centre of everything and on one side of me I have – you know Stoney Stanton road– I don’t know if you know it – but it’s like a lot of Asian shops, a lot of – you know, you can get all your spices and all your Halal meat and things like that, so that side is good for me in that sense, and then there’s Foleshill and a lot of things to do, a lot of places to go and then on the other side is the town centre and the hospital, college, the secondary schools. So it’s I feel like Coventry’s a bit well rounded in that sense that where I am in particular there’s a lot of things around me that’s easily accessible whereas I like how it’s all – Coventry - is all
one community in a sense, so it’s all, you get places like Leicester and Birmingham, and London, very like one side won’t have a clue about the other side. Whereas Coventry’s very much just Coventry (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Maria also characterises Coventry as a multicultural city. Given her family’s past experience of racism, it is not surprising that she emphasises previous local opposition to the National Front and current lack of support for the EDL at interview:

INT: And what changes have you noticed about kind of, like diversity, the multicultural ‘cause this area’s really multicultural, isn’t it? Have you noticed it changing?
Maria: Oh, massively, I’ve not lived in this area at all but I’ve worked in it for the past four, five years and especially Foleshill as well, it is rapidly changed this area that we’re in now, used to be massively Caribbean black people, previous to that it was very Irish, big Irish area. Yeah and now, it is Somalian, Turkish, Kurdish, Romanian based, massively, I think there’s over 150 languages spoken in [named the area in Coventry] alone, and that was from a statistic that came from primary schools so…
INT: Does it cause a lot of tensions in the community?
Maria: Not for me, not for what I see and I work in the community and all, no, I think in Foleshill it did previously, especially with them Sikhs and Muslims, but no, I’ve never, ever, Coventry’s never been a place that we’ve had issues like that at all, the, not the National Front, the English Defence League were in Coventry two weeks ago doing a march and they didn’t get any reception whatsoever (Maria White, 24, Coventry).

These comments are in striking contrast with attitudes expressed by Martin’s grandparents and the Williams family whereupon they associate the ethnic diversity and multicultural character of present day Coventry with the loss of community feeling. This at least partly confirms Watt’s observation that in deindustrialised inner city the white working class and older generation in particular tend to express more negative attitudes towards the state of community, whereas the positive evaluation of
community is often made by ethnic minorities (Watt 2006). Therefore Cheryl, Maria’s mother, who is connected to the city’s Afro-Caribbean population through her children and ex-husband, continues to apply the term ‘community’ when she talks about West Indians in Coventry today – despite her anti-migrant attitude.

Nevertheless, this positive assessment of Coventry multicultural community by young people (including those from ethnic minorities) is only part of the story. Maria contrasts this cultural diversity with real social and economic deprivation of people living in her area of the city. Thus a rather confusing picture of the city is drawn that is both very progressive in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity and tolerance, and rather depressive in terms of its socio-economic prospects for young people in particular (see more on this in the next section).

Moreover, the feeling of a close community network that is often associated with ethnic minorities living in inner cities has provided a comfort zone for first generation migrants. While this sense of family and familiarity continue to be seen positively by their children and grandchildren, close immigrant communities can be increasingly suffocating for the younger generation who are more fully integrated in British society. Saida’s narratives provide a good example of this. For her family metanarrative involvement with the Asian community of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent is very important. Saida’s grandparents never learned to speak English because the circle of their socialisation and interactions in England was limited to other Asian immigrants; her grandfather worked in a garage “run by brown people for brown people”. Her parents learned to speak other Indian languages (Urdu, Punjabi, Hindu) because they were interacting with other people within the Asian immigrants’ circle; her mother cooks and sews for her neighbours who are predominantly Asian. In this context, Saida feels rather detached from that ghetto-like sense of community: she doesn’t speak Bengali very well and she somewhat disapproving of her parents having only Asian friends. And most of all, Saida is very critical of her ‘Bangladeshi culture’ and prospects of marriage into family rather than living independently:

But a lot of time it’s like – if you’re living with a family of in-laws, especially like south Asian people who you know, the in-laws are quite traditional and the
older generation, they could – they probably might not like their daughter-in-
law to work. ‘Cause with us it’s like you’re not marrying a person, you’re 
marrying their family – [laughs] you hear that a lot, that’s a really like true, 
especially in our culture, you can’t just get married only think of the partner, 
you also have to think about the family… I think – with – with – what’s funny 
is that nowadays people try and look for someone who’s already got their own 
house – so they don’t have to live with in-laws! It’s true, it’s sounds horrible, 
but it’s true – people, they don’t wanna live with people – they don’t wanna 
have to deal with someone else’s parents and someone else’s siblings and clean 
[up] after their family and they want independence and they want their own 
house. A lot of the time it’s kind of a it’s like ‘oh, if you don’t have your own 
house, I’m not marrying you’. It’s that shallow – my sister specifically, she was 
hoping for someone who did have a house. But she’s not saying it’s a must. 
But a lot of people do because it makes a big difference. Because I mean the 
difference between your independence and your – you know having to stay 
home all day could mean that, so it’s kind of in a sense just like looking out for 
yourself (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Saida sees a potential conflict between her values of building a professional career 
and the traditional form of family relations. There is sense of friction in the 
traditional value of family as unquestionable and absolute good. Talking about 
marriage strategies among Asian women, Saida stresses the value of independence for 
contemporary British Muslim women. Indeed, Saida is very much assimilated into 
British society. Her political activism and conscious attempts to uphold her 
distinctive identity as a Muslim should be seen as a result of this integration.

2.3. ‘Good old days and bad times’: the past and present concerns
The thematic scope of respondents’ nostalgic narratives is not limited to the feelings 
of communal solidarity in the past or the decline of English traditions, some periods 
in recent British history have been evaluated by them as ‘good times’ whereas others 
are remembered as ‘difficult times’. Importantly, such retrospection and the nostalgia 
that can accompany it should be considered in the light of interviewees’ feelings on 
their present conditions, since the here and now is the vantage point from where both
personal biographies and national history are viewed. Indeed nostalgia tells us more about the present than the past (Mah, 2010: 402). Thus in this section, the present concerns of respondents are examined partly through analysis of how and what they remember about the past. The section starts with an outline of the 1960s as a ‘golden age’, followed by the Thatcher era which is conventionally seen as a ‘difficult time’ for the country and the working class in particular. The Thatcher period is also remembered as a time of recession that is linked in respondents’ narratives with the present recession and economic difficulties. Finally, the section returns again to the issues of migration, anti-Islamic and racist attitudes in contemporary Britain that are named by many respondents as being among their most pressing concerns.

2.3.1. ‘The Golden Age’: the swinging 1960s?

David and Barbara Donovan called the ‘swinging ‘60s’ a golden age not only because it was the era of their youth but also because of the economic conditions: jobs were plentiful, the cost of living was far less, and leisure and social activities were simple and affordable – in stark contrast to the challenges facing their grandson Martin today:

David: Oh the music and… in the fifties it was great.
Barbara: Ohhh. We had a motorbike –
David: The threat of war had gone and it was just so free.
Barbara: Yeah. We had a motorbike and we went everywhere –
David: Still didn’t have much money [laughs].
Barbara: We didn’t need money.
David: Yeah, we had, we had motorbikes and we toured all over England on it [sic.]. It was fantastic.
Barbara: Yeah. I remember they opened a, a coffee place in… Coventry – in the town centre – and we used to go down and listen to the music and have a coffee.
David: It’s all gone now… And we often used to go and have coffees in there, it was great.
Barbara: Didn’t go very often.
David: When I was [an] apprentice in the sixties – well late fifties, I should say… (David Donovan, 77, and Barbara Donovan, 72, Coventry).

Martin is familiar with these memories and talks about the time of his grandparents’ youth as an era young people had a more fulfilling and active lifestyle:

Martin: They say they used to love it like, because apparently it was completely different when they were like my age, they always had stuff to and things like that but that’s the thing at the minute right, there’s never really anything for people my age to do, like everywhere that’s decent to go like, we used to go to the Alan Higgs centre in Willenhall, it’s just too far away, unless you’ve got a bike or something or a car then you can’t get up there... They just said that they always used to have things to do like. I think what it is really is like the way generations change, like they always used to have friends that would be active and want to go out and do things, by the time they’re all 17 they all had cars and things like that but like most of mine, I don’t really know many people with cars and I’m 19.

INT: What do you mean by generation change? Is [it] something which -
Martin: Basically I think they’re getting lazier. I’ve got a lot of mates that don’t have a job and really don’t really want to go and find a job, well they do, they say they try but… they just sit around all day, trying to find things to do, going out and sitting around basically.

INT: So what then made you [want] to look for job doing this sort of [thing], the course and the college?
Martin: Because I don’t want to be sitting round with no money, I can’t, I like being able to go and do things like, I can’t buy new things for my bike, I can’t go on holidays, I can’t go and see people, things like that, and I’ll be saving up for driving lessons, that’s definite, that’s what I’m going to do, start of next month and get that started and see where I go from there (Martin Donovan, 19, Coventry).

Importantly, such comments highlight the moral value of being employed and able to support himself (work ethics will be discussed later in the section). Cheryl White
also stresses in her interview that she was employed all her working life. She uses the availability of jobs as an indicator of whether times are ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Thus, the 1950s and 1960s are identified as a ‘good time’ because she was always in work:

Cheryl: When I was [sic.] left school, at 15, I could walk out of one job if I didn’t like it, I was watching it on the television last night actually, I could walk out of one job and go into another and I’d get it straight away, and if I didn’t like that after a couple of weeks I could leave that and go to the next one and that’s what you did, oh, it was, they were the days, and I mean your wages was only four pound ten shillings.

INT: What did you spend that on? What, how, how far did it go?
Cheryl: Well you gave, I gave me mother two pound for board, so I’m left with two, two pounds ten shillings and out of that you could buy anything. You could buy your shoes, buy clothes, do your hair, and it lasted, and that was only four pound, ten shillings, I know then the days have changed now, the economy’s changed and all the cost of living’s changed (Cheryl White, 66, Coventry).

The memories of this period vary, however, depending on the socio-economic and cultural background of families. Therefore, the memories of immigrant families are different from the memories of white working class communities, reflecting the generational shifts in cultural and economic integration into British society. According to Saida, the Sadiqs remember the late 1960s - early 1970s as an unsettled time, when her grandparents and parents arrived in the new unknown country, without any connections or social network. During that period her grandparents felt unwelcome and experienced racial discrimination. The ‘good time’ for the Sadiqs came in the late 1990s – when the family settled down and Saida’s parents achieved some economic and social stability. They saved some money to buy a house, her mother stopped working in a sewing factory and spent more time with the children, and her father became a co-owner of a restaurant, thereby achieving a degree of status in the local community:
I think the first time – when they first came here I think that was considered a bad time. Because they didn’t have much money, the kids were young – my parents were young, they were – they weren’t – a lot of people were coming over from different countries and no one was – no one was [sic.] here was really accepting it – they weren’t used to it – they did - my grandparents and their family didn’t know the language, they didn’t know English – there was a lot of, like such a contrast to everything they’re used to – the weather and everything. So I’d say that was definitely a bad time for them. Obviously I couldn’t I couldn’t ever know how it felt for them, but [even] so I’ve heard that it was a bad time. I think they kind of forced themselves into starting up you know their own – you know getting a job and making their place here in a sense… The good times were probably the 90s, er, yeah, definitely the 90s I think. Late 90s. ‘Cause I think back then – by then a lot of people were used to people here – my grandparents, parents had learnt the ways a little bit. My grandparents learnt the ways of England but not the language, they never really caught on with that – they were quite old when they came here anyway. My parents knew the language. My dad had, you know, started, settled down and saved up a bit of money, he wasn’t struggling that much anymore, he felt a bit – it was a bit more happier [sic.] which came across in the family, um, my mum she didn’t work in the factory or anything anymore, so she was more kind of you know stay at home – more with spending more time with us. We were kids so we had [a] really good childhood back then, didn’t have nobody saying anything to us – there weren’t many you know, no one associated us with terrorism and things like that then. There wasn’t that back then. I think it was only from around you know 9/11 that things got a bit bad again. I wouldn’t say that bad because not like say my sister – the one that doesn’t wear – she doesn’t get anything – nothing ever has – no one’s ever said anything to her. So my dad, no one really says anything to him, because he’s a man and you just, you see, you don’t really see religion on him, they just see his colour. But I think – yeah that’s the – now would be – it’s good times because everything is you know settled down, we know the ways of the country, we’re not struggling or anything, but it’s bad in the sense that - consistently bad in the sense that you just don’t – you’re not
always treated like you belong here as much as you think you do (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

At the same time, Saida brings her own perspective as a Muslim activist that the 1990s were good because nobody was associating Muslims with terrorists at that time. The turning point was 9/11, after that ‘things got a bit bad again’.

On closer examination, the ‘golden age’ of the 1960s was not purely a happy time for Cheryl White, because her inter-racial marriage was deemed unacceptable by many, and she was even attacked on the street for carrying a black child:

I was carrying my daughter across the road and I was walking on a zebra crossing and they, this car come[s], I don’t know where it came from, and how it never killed me I’ll never know, and I was carrying, she was ten month old, and he said get off this road with that effing nigger… And I was carrying me daughter, yeah, yeah, and that was in 1964. Then she used to say to me, Lilia, ‘why does people look at us all the time?’ I said ‘cause we’re beautiful. She’s are we. I says yes. But they’re not looking at us because they’re looking at me with mixed race children because late fifties, early sixties, that was a taboo, that was a no-no, you know, you know, you never seen it (Cheryl White, 66, Coventry).

The social conventions of that time also traumatised Ian Williams, who suffered the stigma of being born outside of marriage, a view that was commonly held until relatively recently. This might explain some of his animosity towards his father and difficulties he has had in establishing lasting family relationships himself.

Pining for the higher employment levels of the past is a reaction to the current economic hardship, resulting in an overall positive evaluation of the 1960s as a ‘golden age’. There is a degree of ‘rose-tinted spectacles’ at play, demonstrated by the respondents’ downplaying of the conservative social views, xenophobia, and racism prevalent in that era.
2.3.2. The Thatcher era: deindustrialisation and recession then and now

The economic restructuring during the Thatcher era was marked with job losses and evaluated by many of respondents from both older and younger generations as a ‘bad time’. As in the case of the Herbert’s exposition dedicated to this period, the miners’ strike of 1984-85 is remembered as a symbol of Thatcher’s assault against the working class (see Popov 2013: 42):

[Thatcher] was a normal working, working girl, she was, her parents were working, corner shop, I forget where she comes from now, but as soon as she got into the government and she got into power and she got into, as Prime Minister, as she mixed with the rich and famous and, her attitude changed and then it was, she forgot about, I mean look what she did to the miners, poor miners, the poor, poor miners, that’s all they knew, that’s all they had… And she closed all them mines down, and left them people destitute and left them homeless, people committed suicide, marriages broke up, everything… You see them poor people, you know, if you go there now, Oldham and all them places they’re all boarded up, they’re all, their houses are boarded up these last few, it’s like a, it’s like a ghost town (Cheryl White, 66, Coventry).

Cheryl White draws a direct parallel between the Thatcher era and the current period of austerity, David Cameron is likened to ‘Thatcher: ‘turning his back on ordinary people’. She sees the coalition government as a direct descendant of Thatcher’s conservative government, both of which in her opinion represent the rich and not the ‘ordinary’ people of Britain. This view is extended to the entire class of politicians who are not ‘in touch with the real world’. The cuts in social benefits (particularly pensions) and rising cost of living affect Cheryl directly and she regards this as a gross unfairness when she has ‘worked all her life’. She talks about the current situation as a period of new poverty, with people struggling to manage financially. The use of the single pair of shoes as an example of her poverty is not accidental, but rooted in her family’s metanarrative of extreme poverty when her father used to go to the school barefooted (see above):
Now, I know as the economy has gone on, I know things, prices are rising and rising and rising, you know. And everything’s privatised and everything’s this and everything, you know I’ve got two pair of shoes, I cannot even afford to go and buy a new pair of shoes. Sometimes I’d like to go buy a pair of shoes and I can’t and people, and then he’s [David Cameron] on holiday, I feel like screaming at the telly, Maria will come down and say why are you shouting at the [television]?… (Cheryl White, 66, Coventry)

At the same time, the memory of the Thatcher era and its deindustrialisation continues as a narrative today, connecting the past with the present day and manifesting in urban decay – the suburbs of Coventry where miners used to live are marked by boarded up houses. Interestingly, Cheryl (perhaps subconsciously) uses the metaphor ‘a ghost town’ that is a direct reference to The Special’s hit song *Ghost Town* (believed by some to have been written about Coventry).

Maria retranslates her mother’s memories of the Thatcher era as a difficult period that in her narrative is extended to the present: before her mother had a good job, but ‘around the Thatcher era it’s when things kind of went downhill’. This period is also associated with vicious racist attacks on her family.

Perhaps due to the political affiliation of the White family with the Labour Party – both Cheryl and Maria openly stated their support to the Labour played – they express such strong criticism of the Conservative’s policies in the past and the present Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. It is symptomatic that Cheryl associates the ‘good era’ with a time when the Labour Party was in power and James Callaghan was Prime Minister. However, arguably this was a time when economic and social problems in the country were widespread: a national cap on pay rises put in place by Callaghan sparked industrial disputes and public sector trade union strikes that resulted in the 1978 ‘Winter of Discontent’.

David Donovan’s career as a highly skilled professional car manufacturing worker made him feel privileged and protected him from the most detrimental impacts of deindustrialisation in the 1980s-1990s. He was able to keep his job when many
fellow workers lost theirs. This perhaps explains his and his wife’s lack of solidarity with miners who were living just next door in their village of Keresley, which became one of the strongholds of the Miners’ Strike in 1984-85. David and Barbara shared an animosity towards Trade Unions and supported Margaret Thatcher:

David: …That was seventies.
Barbara: Scargill brought all the miners out and –
David: For a year.
Barbara: Y’ know. That, that was –
David: He took the government - Maggie Thatcher - on and he lost, to be honest, and all those people lost money, because of an idiot like that.
Barbara: They blame Margaret Thatcher.
David: Alright, some of them would’ve been out of work anyway and that’s what it was all about; they were cutting jobs in mining and… All through the sixties and seventies – and eighties, I suppose – the Unions were a problem, because you’d got lots of people leading the Unions that were, to be honest, had a different sort of mindset. Erm…
Barbara: And you had to be in the Union.
David: They were always taking on – they were always taking on the management… I think some of them got too carried away, y’ know, they would drop tools at the slightest bloomin’ problem, which is a bit stupid. I come across it at Triumph, at Meridan, erm, I thought it was an experimental [factory] that didn’t involve me but the, the slightest silly thing they’d down tools and walk out… (David Donovan, 77, and Barbara Donovan, 72, Coventry).

This narrative leaves no traces of David’s support of the Labour Party as ‘a working class people’s party’ in the past. His current political sympathies – he voted Conservative in the 2010 general election – might play a part in his selective memory and re-evaluation of politics in the Thatcher era.

The changes in British economy and society that started during the Thatcher era directly impact on the Williams family. Ian’s life trajectory might be seen as typical for working class men of his generation in ‘the English town’. It is historically
conditioned by economic restructuring during the 1970s and 1980s that led to deindustrialisation and a decline in manufacturing, thus reducing the availability of skilled manual work, which was the main occupation for local men. Ian’s grandfather two generations before him had been a professional crane driver in the local steelworks plant. These jobs had gone by the time Ian reached employment age. His longest period of continuous employment (five years) was in a security company that also was closed down. Notably, all Kylie’s positive examples of finding employment through repeated retraining come from female relatives (namely her mother and aunt), and are framed through contrasting them to the inability or unwillingness of her father to find a job. All job opportunities centre on the service or retail sectors (e.g. hairdressing, Sainsbury’s, McDonalds’) where there are predominantly female workers employed. Kylie, however, suggests that some (implying her dad) see such jobs as being ‘beneath them’. Nevertheless, this historical context of such socio-economic transformations is left without reflection and Ian talks about his family not being affected by the economic restructuring of the Thatcher era:

INT: So all times have been reasonable prosperous. What about the 70s, what about the Thatcher era, what do they talk about in reaction to that?
Ian: Nothing, see it never really affected ’em cause my Mom worked at the rent rebate office and she used to work for British Gas, then she went to the rent rebate office. That come [sic.] in handy, and she worked there until she retired. So her’s always been [working], cause her was a council worker basically, her was staff, paid and everything and them [sic.] always looked after, the pensions they paid into were very good. But we’ve always been, not wealthy, but we’ve never gone without. I’m spoilt, I’ll tell you that now. With our Mom I was a spoilt brat. If I wanted summat I always got it (Ian Williams, 49, English town).

Perhaps, such lack of historical memory about the Thatcher time might be explained by the Williams’ attitudes of resilience to the difficulties they face. For example, in her interview Kylie, despite frequently mentioning her money worries, the rising cost of living, and care for her two children, insists that her family is not affected by the current recession:
INT: So you don’t really think that this recession has made things a lot harder for people?
Kylie: No, well [my partner] is always renovating houses and that so…
INT: Is he the same age as you or is he older or …?
Kylie: He’s only a year older. So you know I can’t see…
INT: You can’t see any big change.
Kylie: No ‘cause everybody still seems to be spending money so I don’t know how they can say they’ve got none.
INT: That’s interesting ‘cause everyone says like the younger generation now is kind of like quite angry about it being harder and less opportunities and got no pensions and …
Kylie: No well we get on alright. You know, anything you really want that’s like expensive you just save for, everything else just gets worked in doesn’t it? It gets worked in somehow.
INT: But you have to be quite disciplined about what you, it’s not like, I’m just thinking, you know, after that period after the war, 50s, 60s, it was like dunno, seemed that is was quite easy for people and people had a lot of disposable income to spend. Not get that sense?
Kylie: I don’t know. I mean we do what we want when we want you knows.
INT: So you don’t feel you are really constrained?
Kylie: No (Kylie Williams, 23, English town).

The economic recession of the Thatcher era and the present economic crisis are also downplayed in Saida’s narrative. Although her mother and her grandparents lost jobs in the sewing factory in the 1980s, the support of relatives and the immigrant network helped them to overcome difficulties of unemployment:

They never really mention the name (of Thatcher) ever – but they did talk about how everything went to different countries – it was when I was making a documentary,\(^4\) you know, ‘when British \([\text{sic.}]\) sold itself – sold its soul’ to foreign countries, um, Japan and China and things like that. So they did

---

\(^4\) Saida refers to a mock documentary ‘Who killed the car industry?’ that was produced by young people as part of MYPLACE dissemination workshop ran in collaboration with the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in October-November 2013.
mention the result of those things so yeah, um the fact that – exactly how my grandmother, my mother they worked in those factories and they got moved and that left them out of a job. So a lot of people say to my mum, my grandma now, ‘you don’t work, why don’t you work?’ they don’t claim – you know Jobseeker’s [Allowance] or anything. They just live off what – you know what my uncles earn, from my grandma what my dad earns – they don’t claim Jobseeker’s [Allowance] ‘cause they’re not seeking a job, they’re fine. But I think it’s, it’s funny because the jobs that they could do – the jobs that they - anything they could do, got moved, so in a sense it’s like the only opportunities they did have and things they were interested in – sewing and things like that. Now the only things you can do – you know, is fix, you know, to be a tailor or something like that, you can’t, there’s no places, like factories that you can just work in and go home – it has to be you have to make the job for yourself in a sense (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Moreover, the economic difficulties in the UK at that time and more recently should be compared with extreme poverty in Bangladesh that Saida’s grandparents experienced before immigration and that she, albeit indirectly, is aware of.

2.3.3. Young people’s work ethics and the welfare state

Interviews with the older generation of family members demonstrate that being in full employment was very important for the identity of working class families in the past. The work ethic is an important value that is discussed in families and passed down to younger generations. In interviews this topic is often linked to discussions of the present problems with employment and a break in the manual work patterns of the working class. In a way, the value of being employed and able to earn one’s own living is one associated with an older generation. However, as in the case of Kylie, young people are not always able to live up to this moral expectation. For Kylie, despite being close to her father and being obviously influenced by him, Ian is an example of what is wrong with Britain: ‘nobody’s just bothered anymore’; idleness; and a lack of work ethics. Being on welfare benefits is something that she sees in a negative light (despite being on benefits herself). She tries to distance herself from
such a status and lifestyle, although she might feel herself being increasingly pulled in
the same downward spiral:

Kylie: It’s just going down the pan. Well nobody’s just bothered anymore it’s just, you know, aye bothered about anything. They say there’s no job opportunities but nobody looks. No, you just have to make your own life not rely on everybody else to do it for ya. Or blames the world for their problems. Or blames the world for everything.

INT: You think that’s what your Dad does?

Kylie: Yeah there’s a Muslim woman who works for housing, that is why he is being kicked out of his house, because of one woman. [With irony in her voice]

INT: Actually we had exactly the same conversation and I did challenge him.

Kylie: And his benefits, they’ve got it in for him but if a Muslim goes in the job centre or a black or a foreigner they’ll just sign on and they don’t have to do anything. [With irony in her voice]

INT: So you don’t buy that?

Kylie: No. (Names Kylie’s partner)’s Mom works at the job centre and she says if they see that you are willing to try they’ll do anything they want for you. But if they see you ain’t bothered they’ll come down on ya like a ton of bricks.

INT: So you think your Dad doesn’t want to work at the moment?

Kylie: No I think he’d quite happily sit on his backside and that’s it.

INT: So that’s something you don’t share with him?

Kylie: No I don’t understand it. Both my brother and me sister work and me Mom. Yeah well everybody works apart from me Dad. That’s about it.

INT: Have you got a theory about why that is?

Kylie: I just don’t know, I think he is too set in his ways of doing nothing, or being a nuisance to everybody else, or a nuisance on Facebook and blaming the world for his everything else (Kylie Williams, 23, English town).

Interestingly on a similar topic in his interview Martin explained his situation and his decision to develop a career in childcare – in this way he was deviating from a tradition of car mechanics and engineers that ran in his family for at least four generations, due to lack of job opportunities in that field in his locality:
Martin: Well I did try to go for engineering. That’s what I tried to do when I left school, I went to the MGTS place on [street name], the Midland Group Service I think it is and I tried to get an apprenticeship there but they told me when I went that I’m guaranteed the course, even if I haven’t got an employer at the time, and then didn’t have an employer when it got to it and they said sorry, we can’t do it, so basically they messed me around a bit but…

INT: So you have to find employer first and then you have the course?

Martin: That’s it, yeah.

INT: And obviously it’s not easy to find work.

Martin: Neither of the companies even got back to me and I did a day’s work with one of them, said I’d get paid for it and I didn’t, so…

INT: You think it’d work the other way round that they’d give you a placement.

Martin: Yeah, that’s what I thought ‘cause that’s what happened with this one, they found me the place at the [name of his current workplace]… My college, CWT, yeah, they found, I think, five places that wanted a male role model in the nursery and my first interview was at the [name of his current workplace] and then I got, got a lift back from after my interview, got changed, walked out my door, got a phone call, you got the job! (Martin Donovan, 19, Coventry)

Martin’s grandad has an ambiguous view of his grandson’s career choice: on the one hand, he thinks that it is good that he is at least doing something, unlike some of his friends ‘on the dole’; on the other hand, he implies that it is not really an appropriate job for a man.

In Saida’s narrative, the loyalty to family that can always shelter its members in the case of economic difficulties is juxtaposed with the individual work ethics of being in employment and supporting herself independently. Saida’s ideas are changing and although she still prizes and praises the traditional family model for her culture, she also sees value in work as a way of self-fulfilment, and even a way to achieve independence from traditional family norms that are imposed on women in South Asian communities. Thus in the interview she talks angrily about the termination of
EMA (Education Maintenance Assistance) as part of the government’s austerity measures, which will reduce the independence of her generation:

When I was unemployed for three months, I couldn’t find a job, I needed money, so I applied for Jobseeker’s [Allowance]. They wouldn’t let me because they said I hadn’t been out of education for long enough. I said that’s not the point, the point is I don’t have anything right now… I was like, what do you mean, does my education provide for me? What’s the point, that doesn’t correlate at all! It’s like, what [do] you mean I’ve not been out of education for long enough – ‘because you’ve only been out of education for a few months, you need to have been unemployed for a bit longer’. It was like, it doesn’t make sense, that does not make sense to me. They said, ‘come back in September’… It’s just – they’re just trying to cut in everything – so if you think about college EMA – they give money to people who go to college – I think it was £30 a week as an incentive to go – they don’t give that anymore. It wasn’t just an incentive, it was to provide money for people while they’re studying – you need that for money - books, food, general things. They stopped giving that to people… So when it was my turn to go to sixth form college and I didn’t get that money, it was, it was cut off from my age group, so as soon as I started, that’s when they stopped giving the money. So I had to still rely on my parents ‘cause I couldn’t get a job on full-time education. Where do I get money from? So my parents had to provide for me still. And it felt a bit weird that. It’s such a – you get used to cutting – like being independent from the age of 16, and then suddenly you realise you can’t, you have to rely on your parents (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Although some of our respondents are receiving social benefits because they are unemployed (Ian and Kylie) and to support their underage children (Kylie), the general attitudes towards people on benefits are negative. Moreover, the high rate of unemployment among young people tends to be explained as a lack of work ethics by the older generation, rather than structural problems in the British economy. Thus for Sue Williams being an unemployed young mother is an easy choice for today’s young women:
INT: So in comparison now would you say you get a better deal as a lone parent?
Sue: Now you do I think, not what we used to have before. We used to have to, you know, we did it on our own. We never had all this help. I think that’s why there is so many youngsters now having children. They don’t want to work, that’s it.
INT: Think it’s an easy option?
Sue: I don’t blame, you know, how can I say it? I don’t really blame them having the money but if only they’d put themselves out to help themselves as well.
INT: And we talked a bit about kind of how then you were able to go from one job to the next, so I mean like you were giving up jobs, you know, ‘cause you weren’t happy with the boss or whatever. I’m wondering whether anyone would do that nowadays, ‘cause if you’ve got a job you don’t let it go do you?
Sue: You wouldn’t, you’d be frightened to wouldn’t you?
INT: Well also you don’t get any benefit[s] do you if you leave the job voluntarily, that’s it.
Sue: No, none of that. But then again we didn’t get the help we get now. I mean my dad put in for a rebate when I was working ‘cause of course I was a non-dependant and he got 20p towards his rent. So I went to my boss and I says ‘look there ain’t any use him having this’, he says ‘Sue have it’ because later on it will probably get more. Only 20p (Sue Williams, 80, English town).

Young people themselves express rather negative comments towards their peers and friends ‘sitting around on the dole’ as being lazy and a source of trouble for society:

Kylie: Well you know you ready to go back into training and that can’t you?
You know, it’s just you have to make that opportunity for yourself. You know, aye gonna do it for ya. You just have to get out there and do it. If you don’t do it nobody’s going to do it for ya. That’s what it is. I think everybody’s just too lazy, all these young people.
INT: She says at 23 [laughs].
Kylie: No they think you’ve got to do it for ’em and you have to go out and do it yourself. That’s all it is. That’s why my Mom retrained when I was still at school (Kylie Williams, 23, English town).

INT: Did you try to get into the sort of, into their head, the head of your friends, which was [sic.] sitting [a]round so -
Martin: I’ve always told them, I’ve told them all, they need to come and sort their life out, but they just think that I’m being nasty to them, I told one of [my] groups of friends, I said, I went into them, I was like look youse all need to sort your life out, youse all need to go and find a job, and from that they all fell out with me.
INT: So you’re not [inaudible], you’re not hanging out with them anymore?
Martin: Not really, no, like, too old for hanging around now, they all, they all sit in parks and things like that.
INT: So what are they doing if they’re not in education, are they registered with the obseeker’s [Allowance] or something?
Martin: On benefits, yeah.
INT: So what do you think about this benefits culture?
Martin: I think it’s fair enough ‘cause everyone needs money but if they’re not going and looking for jobs I don’t think it’s right, ‘cause the Job Centre don’t do their job properly, in order to get Jobseeker’s Allowance you have to prove that you’ve been looking for jobs but half of my mates just write down [inaudible] piece of paper, hand it in and they say yeah, so they’re not trying at all, they need to like sort it out really (Martin Donovan, 19, Coventry).

Maria White, being in general very sympathetic towards vulnerable groups of the population who are dependent on social benefits, sees the welfare system inherited from the New Labour government as problematic. Although she does not support the current government’s reform of the welfare system she says that it does need to be sorted out (the attitude expressed by many young people in this research project). Similarly to Kylie and Martin she talks negatively about a ‘culture of laziness’ (although not attributing it specifically to young people) as a result of abuse of the
welfare system. At the same time, Maria praises the work ethics that do not allow her to rely on social benefits.

The lack of job opportunities creates a sense of frustration and pessimism regarding the future prospects in Coventry. This explains why some young people express the hypothetical idea to move away (or even emigrate to Australia, for example, as in the case of Kylie). For instance, despite feeling positively and comfortable about the idea of living in Coventry, Saida doesn’t really see a future in the city in terms of professional development:

INT: Can you see a future here in Coventry?
Saida: I’m trying to, but I don’t think there’s many jobs here. Like, I like media and art and that - cultural kind of things but there’s not many jobs – …think what happens in Coventry is there’s so many smaller jobs, so many – ‘cause the town centre, there’s so many jobs that you could go work in the shop[s], in retail, but there’s not many careers. So if you’re here for a job – you’re okay – you might – you’ll might [sic.] get a job, but a career – I’m not so sure – you’d probably have to venture out and the thing is if you’re – if you’re fresh out of education – see I know a girl with an illustration degree, she just finished, she just graduated and she’s just sat at home, she can’t even get a basic job in Tesco and she has an illustration degree. Like she paid, what nine grand for… So I think when it comes to careers in Coventry, if you’re not from a family who’s open – who’s like completely you know, tells you, ‘yeah you can go and look’ and you know ‘do what you wanna do, be what you wanna be’, then it’s a bit of a struggle, there’s not many opportunities here (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

She stressed that job prospects for young people in Coventry are poor unless one accepts work in the retail sector, which may be somewhat banal. The prospect of marriage in this context presents an alternative for Muslim women who abide by traditional family values. Rather paradoxically, Saida sees marriage as an opportunity to gain more stability and independence in her life, which she considers a prerequisite for professional development.
2.3.4. Racism

Among concerns that our respondents expressed during the interviews the most often mentioned are immigration, ‘Islamic terrorism’ and the increase in ethnic and racial tensions in British society. Although narratives with these concerns can be found in interviews of young people as well as their parents and grandparents, there are some generational differences in attitudes towards migrants, Muslims and people with racist views. As has been demonstrated in the sub-section on multiculturalism and community (2.2.2), many older generation informants are concerned with immigration and talk about different groups of immigrants in rather negative terms. In interviews with young people similar anti-migrant comments are given only by Kylie, an EDL supporter. The theme of migration is completely absent in Martin’s interview, although he said that people with migrant background were absent in his circle of friends. Both Maria and Saida are positive about the cultural diversity that is associated with immigration and appalled with racist attitudes they associate with older generation.

Moreover, Maria stated that she has frequent arguments with her mother on the subject of immigration. Her mother expressed very strong anti-migrant views even though she had immigrant partners and her children can be classed as second generation immigrants. In Cheryl’s words the fact that she has been involved with immigrants as a family is used as evidence of her objectivity in her views that immigration needs to be restricted. Interestingly, Maria calls her mother in jest ‘Enoch Powell’, labelling her opinions as ‘racist’ and ‘outdated’:

Maria: I’ve had arguments with my mum, I really have, I even looked at the incident with the soldier,5 I had very strong arguments with my mum about that because she had a viewpoint that that religion [Islam] was the cause for [sic.] the problem, and you know my, my viewpoint is totally against that, but I think again that comes from the generation that they grew up in, you know, from her living in a country where immigration was very low, to now, being in a country

---

5 Maria is referring to the murder of a British Army soldier, Fusilier Drummer, Lee Rigby, in May 2013 in London, by Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale who justified their attack as retaliation for Muslims killed by British soldiers presumably during conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.
where it’s very, very high, I think that’s difficult for them, so we do have a lot of conversations around things like that, yeah.

INT: Yeah, she did express a view that they [the government] should have stopped a lot of immigration.

Maria: I know, I call her Enoch Powell, that’s my nickname for my mum, yeah (Maria White, 24, Coventry).

The anti-immigration and racist discourses from the past are being rekindled in the present, displayed in the older generation’s concerns with immigration today, notably however, these are directed mainly against Muslims. In Cheryl’s anti-migrant attitudes Muslims are condemned as terrorists, which she justifies by citing the horrific murder of Lee Rigby, that makes Powell’s prediction of rivers of blood particularly truthful for her.⁶

Enoch Powell said close the gates now, because this country’s going to run rivers of blood, it’s what he said, the country’s going to run rivers of blood, and exactly what he said has happened, the Brixton riots, the Birmingham riots, all the riots, all the, all this racism, all this. And now these two and what they’ve done to this poor boy, walking along the road, minding his own business, going into his barracks and they went and run him over and chopped him and chopped him and chopped his head off, absolutely disgraceful, for the sake of Islam.

Now it Islam [inaudible] no, don’t get me wrong, you cannot blame the lovely innocent people that run them mosques, they’re those quiet, peaceful and quiet, lovely Muslim people that live peacefully, you can’t blame them because lunatics like them… I love all these little Asian people, and look, I’ve got a lot of friends of Asians, West Indian, Asians, and Polish people, you know. I’m not, I always say live and let live but it is getting, when it starts with this Islam, and preaching racism and preaching terrorism and preaching politics and, and terror, to go and kill, like the 7/7 [bomb attacks], killing all them innocent people on them buses and tubes, now they’re going to work, they’re minding

⁶ Enoch Powell, a Conservative MP (1950-1973) delivered The Birmingham Speech (that is commonly referred as the Rivers of Blood Speech) on immigration in April 1968. The actual ‘blood quote’ that Cheryl refers to is “As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood.” Full text of the speech can be found here: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643826/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html
their own business, if you said hello to them they said hello back to you…

(Cheryl White, 66, Coventry).

Sue, Kylie’s grandmother makes similar references about Enoch Powell’s speech in her anti-migrant comments. Both Sue and Cheryl are Labour supporters, although they still refer to right-wing political discourse from their youth.

In her explanation of her mother’s anti-migrant (if not racist) views, Maria refers to xenophobia as a characteristic feature of the older generation of British people who grew up in a less multicultural Britain. In the same vein, Saida describes the stereotypical racist as a white middle-aged or elderly man:

INT: Who do you think are these people who express these kinds of racist anti-Muslim views? How would you describe them?
Saida: Just ignorant, I don’t think they know what they are talking about a lot of the time. A bit of a young generalisation, but I think it’s usually middle-aged white men. Middle-aged white men or older white men. Women, they give me dirty looks, and they all want to look at me funny. They have these things in their mind that they want to say, but they wouldn’t ever act on it. A lot of them don’t act on it, but I think men, the older men, they’re like in their forties, fifties, a lot of them…

INT: Why do you think it’s the older generation?
Saida: Because I don’t think they grew up with a lot of – they didn’t integrate while they were growing up. I think whereas [for] people younger than that there was a lot of migration into this country and there was a lot of people to learn about their culture and religion. And everything you could learn about you could experience for yourself, because you had friends who came from different countries you heard it from the people themselves, whereas older people, they might not have had the chance to meet actual people from different countries – cultures. Everything they hear, or see, or know about these people are [sic.] from maybe school, a limited knowledge they learnt in religious studies or you know, what they heard in school basically or geography class maybe, and, they, they just don’t know people. They don’t see you as you
know, the same, because they haven’t actually met you to know that. They
don’t understand. A lot of [the] time same people are scared of what they don’t
know, so they won’t want to be a part of it – they want to stay away (Saida
Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Such association of racism with older generations is problematic, however.
Substantial non-white immigrant communities have been present in the UK since the
1950s. The generation of Saida’s parents were already the second generation of Asian
immigrants in Coventry, so the conditions for multicultural living in many British
cities have been in place for several decades. The 2-Tone music genre emerged from
the experience of cultural hybridity of white and black music traditions and
communities in the 1970s. Therefore diversity was present when the current middle-
aged generation were young people. In fact, as interviews with Ian Williams (age 49)
and Cheryl White (age 66) demonstrate, they have very close friendships and intimate
relationships with people from non-white communities yet still they expressed racist
opinions.

Furthermore, the discourse emphasising cultural diversity (that is often associated
with multicultural policies in Britain) does not necessarily lead to the undermining of
racialized world views; on the contrary it might entrench ethnic or ‘cultural’
stereotypes more deeply. For example Ian and Kylie Williams show some expertise
in ethnic and cultural differences. Both of them emphasise that they know the
differences between Sikhs and Muslims, for example. Kylie teaches these differences
to her son for whom all ethnic minorities are ‘brown people’. However, it seems that
through this differentiation some ethnic stereotyping is transmitted. Sikhs, for
example, are identified by wearing turbans, which makes them visually different
from Muslims:

I just try and let [names son] know the difference between a Muslim and a Sikh.
You can tell by the turban. That’s how you can tell ‘cause obviously he was
just, we had this conversation about brown people you know cause when you
see them on the telly and that it’s like your blacks, your Muslims and
everything, they just see ’em as brown people. So then I just tried to you know
[explain that] there’s Jamaicans, Muslims, Sikhs, that’s about as far as we got. Then it was there ain’t even just Jamaicans, you’ve got Kenyans and Africans and we tried to go into that but that was even more confusing. You know I do try to keep it just simple then they know like a Muslim, a Sikh and blacks, well Jamaicans, I had to, we did try to [inaudible] off on Jamaicans but then he [Kylie’s partner] is trying to explain to them that you don’t have to be that colour to be that. That’s harder to explain to ’em cause they don’t understand that bit (Kylie Williams, 23, English town).

Religious differences are seen by Saida as part of cultural differences and the most vivid example of prejudice towards Muslims as a culturally different group in British society is the perception of Muslim women as oppressed because they are wearing Islamic dress:

They think being British is wearing western clothing, it’s having – it’s a lot of the time, it’s not even religious, it’s more cultural – they don’t like [Islamic] culture a lot of the time, and they think that – for instance they think that Muslim women are oppressed. That’s a big thing they always say to me ‘oh, do you have to wear that, do you - are you forced to wear that, or do you - do you get stoned if you don’t wear that?’ It’s really funny, cos, no, I’m not forced (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Such distinction between culture / religion and race is used by EDL activists (Ian and Kylie) in their denial of being racists:

INT: Do you think you’re a racist?
Kylie: Nah.
INT: What do you think racism is then?
Kylie: Well it’s just being like against the whole race aye it? Like religion that ain’t a race so you ain’t even a racist. But then it ain’t against the whole religion it’s against parts of the religion.
INT: Which parts of it are the ones that bother you?
Kylie: About all this, the killing of, I can’t even think, the Infidels and the non-believers and the Sharia law. There’s Sharia courts over here. It’s all stupid, really stupid.

INT: In what way?

Kylie: You know I just think obviously it’s a whole different law as to what the country’s is and you know it’s conflicting and obviously there’s the law of the land and you know that’s the law and you have to obey, not Sharia law cause that ain’t the law of this land. Does my head in. (Kylie Williams, 23, English town).

So I always says I’m a racist because the word racist has been took out of context. It’s used to cover anything now and it shouldn’t be. If you’ve got something against colour you are prejudiced. I’m being called a racist now because I’m against Islam. Islam is not a fucking race. So therefore if they call me bigoted yes I’d be bigoted because I am against Islam. (Ian Williams, 49, English town).

This corresponds with the more general trend in contemporary society to replace the term ‘race’ with that of the less contentious ‘culture’, which expresses the same politics of difference and subordination but provides some distance from the shameful history of racism and racial segregation. Thus, according to Appiah, western notions of multiculturalism do not undermine the essentialising nature of ‘race’ discourse while substituting it with ‘culture’ (2005: 136). Such (ab)use of ‘culture’ as ‘a universal cure from ethnic intolerance may turn out to enhance rather than undermine an ethnecist and racialised vision of the social world’ (Pilkington and Popov 2008: 13).

Cheryl White insists that she is not a racist, she was opposed to activities and discourses of the National Front in the past and EDL today, explaining them, however, as a result of fear of Islamic terrorism. Despite being anti-EU she also despises UKIP as a racist party. Importantly she sees a problem not only in the amount of immigrants but also in the political correctness that prohibits voicing concerns over immigration due to fear of being accused of racism:
Cheryl: I call it the National Front, you call it…?
INT: Oh, English Defence League, that’s what.
Cheryl: Yes, that is why these people are like that and there’s a lot of -
INT: You mean you think they’ve become more popular since 9/11?
Cheryl: Oh yes, oh yes, a lot of people are voting for them and that… because
of the amount of immigrants [that] are in the country, and the kind of things that
are happening, like we’ve got to take a stand back. It’s like you’re not allowed
to say anything or you’re not allowed to speak to them, and if you say the wrong
word you’re classed as a racist, and if you, if you voice your opinion you’re
classed as a racist but you’re not a racist. How can I be a racist, my children are
mixed race? I’m not a racist but if you voice your opinion you’re a racist, and
so you have to keep quiet… (Cheryl White, 66, Coventry).

Indeed ‘having a voice’ was also mentioned by Ian and Kylie Williams when they
explained what attracted them to the EDL.

Thus the generational differences are not enough or not satisfactory for explaining the
current prevalence of racism. This is appreciated by some of the participants when
they talk about particular areas or neighbourhoods as being more racist then others.
For example, Ian sees his council estate as one such racist stronghold. The examples
of racist areas in Coventry would be Tile Hill and Holbrooks, according to Maria and
Saida. Even the entirety of Nuneaton might be called a racist town. What is
significant, however, is that most respondents did not make a connection between the
socio-economic difficulties (i.e. economic and social depravation, high rate of
unemployment, etc.) and an increase in social tensions including incidents of racism
experienced in those areas.

Finally, in the two families which suffered racist behaviour in the past – the Whites
and the Sadiqs – their experiences are remembered and narrated differently depending
on the present concerns facing them. This implies that the meaning of racism is not
universal but rather depends upon changeable contexts.
For Maria White the present is the most difficult time; her main concerns are economic (she uses the phrase ‘economic climate’ as a euphemism for recession and unemployment) and social (the high level of aggression and violence). She draws parallels with her family’s experiences of racial violence in the past (in the 1980s):

**INT:** So which period of the past do you think about as difficult for the country and why?
**Maria:** For the country? Gosh, I think now, not even about the history, I think now, I mean especially growing up in this era, I think it’s very, very difficult for everyone involved.
**INT:** Okay, are there certain things you’re thinking about that are going on now that are [difficult]?
**Maria:** Yeah, the economic climate, I mean it’s so hard to get a job nowadays, I’m quite lucky that I managed to find work while I was at University. Social climate, just people’s attitudes as well, I don’t think, I think years ago you could gauge a person’s personality and their temper and I don’t think you can do that now, people could be killed just by looking at people the wrong way at bus stops and stuff, and I’ve never, ever heard [of that happening in the past].
**INT:** Right, are you getting this from the news or people here?
**Maria:** Yeah, and stories, you know, I’ve got family all around England you know, and you do hear, you swap a lot of stories around, you know, things that you’ve heard and neighbours that live next door to your family and things like that…
**INT:** Yeah, do you, is, your mum mentioned like racism towards her and her family or one of you guys. Is that, is this something you’re aware of?
**Maria:** I’ve not experienced a whole lot growing up, I know my brothers, my brother and sisters have, with my mum, my mum spent quite a bit of her time living in Peckham and places like that in the early seventies so she experienced quite a lot of racism and was physically attacked, verbally attacked, so she’s experienced quite a lot of that growing up, especially being married to a black man in the seventies, you know (Maria White, 24, Coventry).
She emphasises that she herself doesn’t experience racism (although in focus group interview she mentioned some accidents that can be interpreted as a racist attitudes towards her shown by White British residents in Canley and Tile Hill areas of Coventry), but the experiences of racism in the past are often talked about in her family. Interestingly these transmissions of memories of racism are very different from how racist attacks of the past are remembered in Saida’s family, or how Saida would like them to be remembered:

Yeah um, it doesn’t really come up in conversation. But um nothing really’s out of the question. If it comes up then they’ll talk about it, but – one of the things I would say is that – no one really talks about the – when like my grandma, grandad first came here, all the – all the comments they got off people and you know a lot of the time my grandma couldn’t go out to the shop on her own, she felt unsafe. No one really talks about that, they think… They just adapt to the fact that it’s different now. They don’t, they don’t like dwelling on it, in a sense. And they, they think we won’t relate because… Sometimes I can’t tell if they’re – they downs [sic.] – like if they downplay it – if they brush it off, or if they, if they just forgot, if it’s just so different now that they don’t remember it as much. But I think they, they expected it – they kind of expected that to happen, people who’d moved here before them told them what to expect, they, they knew people wouldn’t like them when they first came here so they kind of just took it – they just took it to their head they just thought, ‘okay’, in a way they felt that they were - they deserved it in a sense that ‘yeah okay maybe we did come here and take you know, live here you know without people wanting us here’ (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

For Maria the racism is very much something that her family experienced in the past and overcoming that experience made them stronger. For Saida, racism is something that was accepted by her grandparents in the past and it is still the main problem she fights today; her grandparents are perceived by her as being vulnerable to encounters with racists today. Moreover, due to her perception of the 1990s (when her parents were young adults) as a positive time in terms of tolerance towards the Muslim
minority in the UK, Saida sees a parity between experiences of racism by her generation and that of her grandparents’ - but not those of her parents’ generation:

I think they kind of missed – they dodged a bullet in that sense, whereas my grandparents when they first came, they were the first adults to feel it so they had to protect their children from it, so they – I think they were more at risk – and now with everything that’s happening, we – being young people, we can’t just be around certain social circles, we have to venture out for our education, for our jobs, for anything. Generally it’s not about – you’re not comfortable yet, you have to seek things out don’t you – so you meet a lot of people who don’t accept you. So in that sense [it’s] a lot of the older people and the youngest people who get it – the middle ones kind of missed it a little bit (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

These differences in remembering racism come from the very different backgrounds of Saida’s and Maria’s families, despite both having ethnic minority and immigrant family histories. In Maria’s case, the English / British heritage has never been questioned by her family; it provides her mother and siblings a platform from which to defend their rights, believing that any racism towards them is unjustified. Saida belongs to the Muslim ethnic minority, which is the main focus of racist attacks in the country today. She is only now coming to terms with her ‘Britishness’ (hence the story of her grandfather as a Bangladeshi Muslim soldier in the British army during WWII is so important to her) that comes with greater integration into British society: ‘we have to venture out for our education, for our jobs, for anything’.

2.4. Intergenerational transmission of political heritage and civic / political engagement
In the final section we present our findings on the transmission of political heritage across generations and socialisation in political and civic activism.

2.4.1. Negative attitudes towards politics / politicians and (dis)interested youth
Our research suggests that young people are experiencing cognitive mobilisation in political values of their parents / grandparents through discussions of political issues
in the family (Spannring et al. 2008). As this excerpt from the interview with Martin shows however, they do not always see the subject of such conversations as interesting or relevant to them:

INT: You mention Tony Blair as [prime minister], and his sort of period then the country became [a] mix, mess, [a] big mess basically. What make[s] you think about this? What do you think happened at that time?
Martin: I don’t know, I’m not really sure how it all went downhill, that’s, I’ve been told, that’s what my mum told me, she said it was Tony Blair that wrecked the country so that’s what…
INT: Oh really, it’s from your mum?
Martin: Yeah, that’s what I’ve always thought. I guess it’s a bit of everything, isn’t it, that’s making everything go downhill.
INT: So do you have the, well obviously this kind of political conversation isn’t it when your mum says you, do you have [such conversations with you mum often]?
Martin: Yeah, my mum’s always going on about politics.
INT: Do you have this [kind of] political conversation often with your parents?
Martin: Not often but it’s all she really talked about, that’s all mum, they used to talk about. They’d be sitting both doing a [piece of] cross-stitch [embroidery] and talking about politics so you can guess why I didn’t really get on with them (Martin Donovan, 19, Coventry).

Martin is not interested in politics and in the interview he struggled to name main parties and politicians beyond the Prime Minister. He does not vote and does not know which party / parties his parents and grandparents support. This does not mean, however, that he has not got views on political issues that concern him and other young people who are in similar situations of transition from education to employment:

Martin: [Politics] is important but it’s not something I’m interested in, no matter what I have to say, it’s never going to change the way the world’s run, is it? So
I could sit there and have many views on politics but them views are never going to be [considered].

INT: Well basically if you vote, and if you support [a] party which you think would represent what you, your views of politics, then you can influence, they can come to the [sic] power, this looney party.

Martin: To be honest, the only way I’d be interested in it is if I was one of the leaders and I was doing it all, politics is really probably the thing I know the least about out of everything in the world.

INT: Because you, well, you have strong opinion[s] for example, what you said about the young people and you not [being] happy what is going on with young people and [how] you think that it should be changed at the government level.

Martin: Yeah, basically, I’ve got, my main view, the way that I think it should be done is children in schools should be fixed up with, every child, like they should all have apprenticeships straight from when they leave school because it’s the easy way to get, like, [an] education as well as earning money. And I think like all children should have like an apprenticeship set up before they finish school so, but in order to do that there’d need to be loads more apprenticeships out there (Martin Donovan, 19, Coventry).

Martin’s ideas about policies that would ease young people’s transition from education to employment are influenced to a great extent by his grandfather’s stories about his career trajectory, and the employment history of his father:

INT: Was it easy for [your dad] to find [a] job at that time?

Martin: I think it was, because I can, I’ve never been told he had a hard time finding a job, so, I think it was a bit easier then, ’cause like my grandad was still working then. So, he was be able, yeah, he was being able [sic] to get like links for him to get a job, [he] knew a lot of people, so I know he used to work at, you know [the track company] up in [area in Coventry], used to be [the former name of the track company] and things like that, that’s what I know, them, that’s where my dad used to work here, so I know about that (Martin Donovan, 19, Coventry).
See, when I were an apprentice, there were lots of companies – car manufacturers, machine tools. You could get a job there and earn good money straight away when you were young, but I was on a very low wage when I was learning my apprenticeship, so… but it paid off in the end, ‘cause I was able to earn more once I got [my mechanic qualification]. (David Donovan, 77, Coventry).

Despite Martin’s general disinterest in politics, he does express strong views on areas related to youth (un)employment and education, that are to some extent influenced by the memories about ‘the golden age’ of his grandparents. His negative attitude towards politics and politicians in general should be situated in the context of his difficult relationships with his mother and step-father: although political subjects were often discussed by them, due to the family conflict such discussions had a discouraging effect on Martin’s interests; in addition, he could remember his parents being very critical towards politicians and politics as a whole.

Such negative attitudes towards politicians and politics are not limited to young people like Martin who declare their disinterest in the subject. Many of our respondents who are politically and socially active downplay their interest in politics, not least because the ‘political’ is often associated with politicians and political parties who are seen by both older and younger generations as participants in an establishment whose lives, in the words of Cheryl White, are detached from the everyday lives of ‘ordinary people’.

Cheryl’s daughter, Maria White, is politically very active at the community level: she is a presenter at the community radio station where she also provides training opportunities to local youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds. Her community activism developed from her experience of local politicians’ ignorance of the problems faced by their constituents. Maria aims to provide an opportunity for local people to have a voice in decisions that concern them. One example is her opposition to the local council’s decision to build a halfway house for former prison inmates in her neighbourhood, which is already one of the deprived areas of Coventry; in her
opinion the city council and politicians should ask the local community first before taking a decision that will have a long-lasting impact:

Maria: I think people need to make a difference and need to make themselves heard and when there’s petitions and stuff like that, friendly petitions, that needs to happen a lot more, like I said I don’t think the parties represent the people’s views at all, they represent their own.
INT: So have you signed petitions?
Maria: In the local area, yeah, for things.
INT: Okay, what kind of things have you - ?
Maria: They wanted to build like a, I think it was a halfway prison building [halfway house] where people can come out of prison and live in the community… And I live two door downs from a halfway house and not that I’m against it, I think that they should have them. I think in this community in particular there’s so much crime and deprivation that that just would not help, in fact it would worsen the community. I think by putting those people in that community is just kind of taking them out of one bin and putting them into another, you know. Like I said, we have people injecting themselves with crack cocaine out in the flower beds, you know, sleeping in flower beds, having daily fights, you know. I see that every single day and I think by getting more people in the community like that is not gonna benefit [it] at all. They don’t, they don’t support their local people enough, they don’t talk to the local people, they implement change and they put things in, in place in here when they feel it suits them.
INT: This is the government?
Maria: The government, the local council, everyone and I think they really need to consult with the local, the local community more, have more forums, have more discussions, they just don’t seem like they’ve got the time to do that, and it seems like it’s a bit unfair. (Maria White, 24, Coventry).

As this excerpt demonstrates, Maria is disillusioned in politicians and does not see her activism as political because, despite her work in community, she holds the view (shared by Martin) that people don’t benefit from politics:
INT: And what about, do you think there’s anything that you might have such strong views about that you might want to take it further or it might prompt you to be more active?
Maria: I don’t think in a political sense, no.
INT: Okay, why not?
Maria: I don’t think it would ever get done, I just think they’d always find a way or a loophole to say, you know, this has been done, this has been looked at, I just don’t think it’s, I don’t think people benefit from it at all. (Maria White, 24, Coventry).

Saida Sadiq, regardless of her clearly stated views on the treatment of Muslims in the UK and her involvement with Islamic charity organisations, declares her lack of knowledge of party politics, putting her in the same bracket as Martin and Maria. She distances herself from politics, seeing it as part of the adult world of her father, who has low expectations of politicians, despite being electorally active:

INT: Do you know whom [your father] voted [for]?
Saida: No, I think it’s the Conservatives.
INT: Conservatives? Why?
Saida: I don’t know, he has his reasons, it’s just he’s never told me them. I’m not, I’m not interested in politics at all, so I don’t know much about it.
INT: It’s funny that you say this, because you’re very politically minded.
Saida: As in politics as in – I don’t know the difference a lot - between the Labour Party and the Conservatives. I don’t know about the coalition and everything like, I don’t really, I’ve never been a part of that – like a lot of the things that happen happen[ed] when I was still in education, and that takes up a lot of your time, so... the outside world, you don’t really [pay as much attention to it].
INT: But – uh, do you think, have you started, have you thought a little bit about, what, whom would you vote, or would you vote at all in the next elections?
Saida: I’ve never considered it, I’ve never actually thought, I just thought my vote – I probably should vote because it would probably make a difference to me, but – I – I don’t know the differences to be fair.
INT: So – just – it’s never the topic of discussion.
Saida: No.
INT: And somehow you know that your dad probably voted [for the] conservatives, how do you know this?
Saida: I think so because he gets um he gets letters in the post and he does – he says some things about it and you know, talks about it a little bit, with me, I’m just - my dad’s been talking about something so I don’t even listen all the time [laughs]. So I would be able to answer this if I listened to him! I have a feeling, yeah, I’ve heard it in passing comments that he does – he did vote for the Conservatives.
INT: Does he still [feel] happy with them, with the current government, in the government?
Saida: I don’t think anyone’s happy with the government! [Both laugh]. Let’s be honest! Um, no, I don’t think he is happy, I don’t. I think he knows that whoever is in power – they’re not gonna do, they’re not gonna do a perfect job of it, so it’s like you take what you get at the end of the day, accept it and try and deal with whatever you’re given (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Partly due to this detachment politicians as well as other powerful public institutions like the media are not trusted. Recent media scandals such as ‘telephone hacking’ by News International’s journalists, the exposure and conviction of celebrities and well-known public figures for historical cases of child sexual abuse, and Edward Snowdon’s whistleblowing on surveillance conducted on the American public by the National Security Agency - all of these scandals do, in some young people’s opinion, provide an environment for the spread of different conspiracy theories that resulted from distrust of politicians and the media:
Saida: I think a lot of the scandals coming out now – say like Murdoch for instance, what happened with him – see that kind of hit home to us, cos of the phone hacking and things like that – that was kind of like ‘wow’, you know, no one’s safe really. And we know it happens, we know our phones are tracked and can be traced back to any time.

INT: And now this with this Snowdon, the recent scandal um about the spying – the American government spying?

Saida: Yeah the government um can listen in on people’s phone calls and tap into anything they like with your webcam, they can tap into anything really – and – you always hear these things like kind of conspiracy theories like you know ‘yeah the government are illuminati’.

INT: Hence and now [sic.] they’re proved [right]! [Both laugh]

Saida: Yeah you hear all this stuff but you never really just – you just laugh it off ‘cause you just think ‘yeah, it probably is true, but who’s gonna prove it, who’s gonna take the time to prove something so ridiculous’ – so – now that it’s been proven that they do that I think it’s just – I think young people are more inclined to – we believe a lot more because we – we’re the kind of - we consume a lot of you know entertainment and we have these like mad things in our head about how the government is out to get us and you know, Obama is the root of all evil. [laughs] ‘the illuminati is everywhere’ it’s quite funny. We’ve been the ones that have grown up with that kind of, obviously the illuminati has been a topic – [the name of friend] is obsessed with the illuminati… He thinks that basically there’s a – oh I forgot the name now, but there’s a group of – there’s a group or something, in America. Who run everything, everyone else. They, they, they control everyone, they control the leaders, they control the big celebrities and it’s all evil and they’re all Zionists and you know, they, they believe in the devil things, the free masons and things like that – I don’t really know much about it, I think it’s a bit weird, but there’s lot research and people

---

7 Keith Rupert Murdoch is American-Australian businessman and media magnate; he is an owner of the international media company, the News Corporation. In July 2011, Murdoch faced allegations in telephone hacking that his companies, including the News of the World, owned by News Corporation, were involved in in the UK and US This led to police and government investigations into corruption by the British government and FBI in the US.

have put their lives into proving it – and there’s a lot of things, like you know, that sign they all make, with the eye and yeah, yeah, yeah, things like that. Things like that. It’s all a part of that whole phone hacking thing, you know, the government spying on us, because that’s all – like we’ve grown up to these conspiracy theories – and then we see it in the news – to us it’s like, ‘yeah, we knew that all along’ (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Later in the interview, Saida draws the generational boundaries of attitudes towards technology held by young people and mature adults; for example, young people may perceive computer technology as a risk but they also know how to overcome and / or reduce some dangers they might encounter while using the Internet. Suspicions towards technology are often linked with negative attitudes towards government and official institutions, which might hinder the UK government’s plan to attract young people to formal political participation by introducing electronic voting (see also, Price 2014).

Maria gives an example of conspiracy theories that she as a radio presenter heard from her guests that are a direct result of the media playing on the public’s fear of terrorism in the UK. In her opinion this leads people to question the truth behind the media coverage of such events, and confirms her lack of trust in the media. This distrust is at odds with her career in local radio:

I don’t believe much of the stuff I read in the papers at all, I don’t trust the media, I work in the media so I don’t trust the media, I think they do play on people’s fears a lot, I really do. A lot of the stuff that’s put out there nine times out of ten it’s not true, or it’s been fabricated. (Maria White, 24, Coventry).

Thus, our findings demonstrate that although disengagement of young people with political and social issues is seen as one of the challenges for present and future British society, the differences between young people who declare their disinterest in politics and those who are actively involved in civic and political activities are not so marked. A politically disinterested youth might have rather strong views on the contemporary political issues whereas young activists often declare their lack of
interest in, and knowledge of, politics. Both, however, see politicians as being detached and irrelevant to their real life concerns, and are therefore not to be trusted and are potentially dangerous. Therefore, the use of the concepts such as ‘political disengagement’ is not adequate as a description of young people’s political attitudes and actions. The examples cited above demonstrate that young people feel passionate and might be proactive about issues that directly concern them and their communities, but these views and actions not always framed as political. Finally, young people’s attitude towards politics and politicians are at least partly shaped by cognitive mobilizations that occur during family discussions on political subjects (that sometimes go alongside the transmission of family memories). The focus of the next section is on the role that family plays in forming young people’s political and civic positions, whether these be at the passive or activist ends of the spectrum.

2.4.2. Socialisation in the culture of political / civic activism

The research findings demonstrate that families provide an environment for cognitive mobilisation. Socialisation in culture of political activism, however, is a rather more complex process than direct intergenerational transmission of political values and views. As has been noted by some observers political partisanship of parents is not always shared by their politically active children, whereas more proactive and articulated positions on political issues are often passed from politically active parents to their children (Jennings et al 2009). Among our four family case studies, only the Whites demonstrate intergenerational transmission of political partisanship with both Cheryl and Maria being Labour supporters. However, during the last local election Maria voted for the Conservatives – something she regretted at the time of the interview – partly because she had become disillusioned with the previous New Labour government. This indicates that there is no straightforward transmission of political views and partisanship (as a manifestation of these views) within the family. Furthermore, both of them admitted having regular political disagreements on the issue of immigration (see above), this being one of the most disputed questions in current British politics.
a. Maria White: a community activist

In the case of Maria White, she does not consider her community activism to be part of any family tradition of being politically active. It is her work at the community radio station that really enriches her knowledge of the local community and shapes her views. As a radio presenter, she works with representatives of different ethnic, religious, social and age groups from her area. She also expresses tolerance towards other people’s opinions even if they contradict her own views – she is a great advocate of freedom of speech:

I deal with 50 people on a weekly basis, that all have radio slots - that all have different religions, different ethnicities, in terms of, I love working with people and I love working with people that are different abilities, ages, sexes, religions, you know, that none of that has an interest in me [sic.] but their ability to perform on the radio, so no, not really. My belief is I work with a [sic.], Muslims and stuff like that and I’ve got a lot of Muslim friends, you know, I’ve [been] very open to the way that they’ve got their religion, again it’s people[‘s] choice and that’s their [right], they can live their life how they choose. (Maria White, 24, Coventry).

Thus her professional experience has had a great impact on her political values and principles. In contrast, family plays a comparatively insignificant role in her development as a community activist – she ended up as a radio presenter almost accidently as part of her placement during her university course. Maria is the first person in her family to go to university, and this experience was life changing for her, ultimately leading to her becoming an activist.

Nevertheless, on closer examination, Maria’s awareness of community problems and her disposition towards community work and collaboration with local radio are, perhaps, rooted in her family. Maria’s family is a good example of a local family with a working class immigrant background made up of people from the Irish-Scottish, South Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities which settled in the area after WWII. She has a much older brother and sisters whom she describes as being very different from her: they are ‘streetwise’, loud, and go to bottle parties and blues
dances that presumably makes them well-known characters in the area. Maria also joined the radio station, which has built upon the Afro-Caribbean cultural heritage in the area by hosting reggae musicians and DJs from the black Caribbean community. Maria spoke at interview of her love of reggae as something shared by everyone in her family – she has been socialised very much into the Caribbean culture of her older siblings. Perhaps not surprisingly all the other participants of the focus group (UKFG3) where we met Maria were local young people with Afro-Caribbean family backgrounds, who were taking part in the radio training run by Maria at her community station.

b. Ian and Kylie Williams: EDL supporters

The strong Labour partisanship used to be a family tradition for the Williams in the past. Sue says that she has always been a loyal supporter of the Labour Party and when Ian was younger he also was in the Labour Party. However, his path to the party was through his interest in football – he used to run the Labour Club’s football team. Being exposed to behind the scene talks of the party members he became disillusioned with Labour and party politics in general:

Ian: Well when you get ‘im standing there in the bar, the local counsellor, aye gonna say his name ‘cause he’s dead and I wouldn’t disrespect the dead by naming him, but when he stands there looks at us and turns round and says ‘the people am [sic.] that thick on these estates that Labour could dress up, put up a pig for election, they’d still vote for it.’ And then they set the poll tax back in them days and turned round and say and actually argue about it in the bar saying ‘why are they setting it that high we don’t need to’. The[n] one turned round and says ‘well the government will cap us’ he went ‘yeah but they’ll only cap us down to the money we need but it don’t matter cause we can make cutbacks then’ and they was ‘well we won’t need to make cutbacks’, ‘yeah but we’ll still make ’em then blame the government’. And you’m said there thinking ‘hang on you’m actually admitting…’ you’re standing there, just bought a pint, you’m standing there next to me at the bar discussing this in front of all these people, they can hear it, and you’m actually admitting that you’re ripping me off and
you think I am gonna vote for ya? I just finished my drink that night, put it down, walked out, gone.

INT: So who do you vote for now?
Ian: Depends what I feel like at the time. I’ve voted Conservative before.
INT: What period did you vote Conservative?
Ian: It was only the once. I’d got a choice out of [a] Conservative counsellor from round here…
INT: Was that locals?
Ian: Erm, supposed to be a local one. Conservative counsellor round here, there was a Labour one from Wales or a BNP one from [names town] I think, and I’m standing there thinking ‘no, local policies have got to be dealt with by local people’ so I voted Conservative. I’ve voted English Democrats before, I’ve voted UKIP before (Ian Williams, 49, English town)

Ian’s electoral preferences are based on his sense of ‘localism’. He voted Conservative at the local elections because he wanted local politicians to deal with local issues – only the Conservative candidate was from the local area, the rest were from outside.

In her interview, despite her support for Labour, Sue Williams voices the same disappointment in party politics as her son, an EDL activist: “they are all out for themselves”. She also expresses her anti-immigration views using the same argument as her son: there were very few immigrants in the good old days but now too many of them. Interestingly, despite Ian’s opinion that his mother does not support his activism in the EDL, she said that she agreed with everything that the EDL stands for:

INT: So if all the politicians are now as bad as each other, are there any other kind of movements or like maybe not the mainstream, not the main three parties, but other parties that you think might do a better job?
Sue: No I don’t think anybody can now. Think it has gone too far.
INT: What do you mean it has gone too far?
Sue: I mean you take his ELS it’s good…
Ian: EDL.
INT: EDL yeah.
Sue: EDL, whatever it is, it’s good and I agree with everything they say but what can they do? All they can do is shout and that. I can’t see what they can do.

INT: What about the parties, there are some parties that [have] some similar policies [but] not all. For example you mentioned immigration, so like the BNP is about stopping immigration, would you ever vote for them?
Sue: No.
INT: Why not?
Sue: I don’t know. I’ve never liked them. But what Enoch Powell said is coming true. I remember him saying it. Will be rivers of blood soon.
INT: Why do you think that?
Sue: I don’t know ‘cause nobody, it’s only, [hesitates] how can they get together, them getting together?
INT: You mean how can different communities get together?
Sue: Mmm, it seems as though it’s always something that’s stopping them.

Such adoption of anti-establishment and xenophobic views by an elderly person who was a lifelong supporter of a left-wing party might be an example of political views being transmitted from children to parents, rather than the other way around, as often suggested in literature (see, for instance, Vollebergh et al. 2001). However, the fact that Sue refers to the past anti-immigration discourses like Enoch Powell’s Rivers of Blood Speech – something that is rather marginal in Ian’s own narratives – demonstrates how memories of the past anti-immigration discourses are utilised for the new political context.

Kylie Williams, who very much embraces her father’s anti-Islamic views and had been introduced by him to the EDL, does not share her grandmother’s negative attitudes towards BNP – they are one of the parties that voices ideas that are close to her own. Kylie’s attraction to radical political parties and movements is driven to a great degree by her frustration with the political establishment’s and mainstream parties’ inaction on the issues that she is concerned with – immigration and Islam in Britain:
INT: I was just thinking of other things ‘cause like protesting is one thing, but if you don’t think that’s changing [anything], how else [do] you might kind of [sic.] have an impact.

Kylie: You know, there’s just no point in writing letters, nobody will read them. Or they’ll probably have a standardised letter sent back to you. Waste of time.

INT: Do you think the BNP will be any different if they got [sic.] in? I mean are there other parties that might be more responsive, do you know what I mean?

Kylie: I mean the BNP or UKIP seem to be making a bit of a noise at the minute and I know a lot of people don’t agree with BNP.

INT: Is there anything you find that you are not comfortable with about what they say?

Kylie: Not really, you know they just want to make Britain British and that’s what it should be (Kylie Williams, 23, English town).

At the same time, the Williams family demonstrates a rather interesting similarity in all three generations’ positive attitudes towards voting. Thus Kylie opposes her active position on voting to that of her mother’s – who she thinks doesn’t vote at all – using the same phrase as her grandmother, Sue, “if you don’t vote you can’t moan”:

Sue: I don’t know. It’s all according to what they are saying you know, what I believed they’d do. By half the time I think every, now at the moment I think they are all alike. Nobody will do anything. They are all out for themselves.

INT: And has that changed since…?

Sue: I think so.

INT: So you think actually more people would do what they said they would in previous [years], yeah?

Sue: Erm I don’t know. As I say with politics it’s out the window.

INT: Yeah but if you still vote at every election you still care.

Sue: Yeah I still go ‘cause if you don’t vote you can’t moan can ya?

INT: That’s exactly what Kylie said word for word.

Sue: Is it? Hers probably heard it from me.
Ian: I’ve always said exactly the same thing as well.
Sue: ‘Cause people say, ‘oh I ain’t bothered to vote’ well if you don’t vote you can’t moan (Sue Williams, 80, and Ian Williams, 49, English town).

Perhaps this is an indicator that despite their claims of being detached from politics, politics has been always regarded as an important, albeit unfamiliar part of their lives. This understanding might lead to the more active stances of middle and younger generations of family members (Ian and Kylie). Sue herself opposes her attitudes to the apathy of those who say, ‘Oh I ain’t bothered to vote’.

Kylie’s participation in the EDL, following in the steps of her father, seems natural to Ian who states in the interview that out of his children Kylie is the one who has a personality type and behaviour that resembles his own. Sue and Ian praise Kylie’s honesty and truthfulness – the family virtues that nevertheless might cause problems to her as they did in Sue’s and Ian’s stories about their employment misfortunes (see above). Ian calls his daughter the ‘thug in our family’, a rather controversial complement that he uses sometimes in relation to his own personality. Thus, Kylie’s participation in the EDL is approved of by her father (and to an extent by her grandmother, not least because Kylie is supervising Ian and restraining him from irresponsible behaviour) as a continuation of family values. This meaning of EDL activism is further strengthened by the fact that Kylie met her current partner in the EDL.

c. Saida Sadiq: an Islamic charity activist

Similarly to Maria, Saida Sadiq doesn’t see her parents as role models for her activism as a British Muslim woman. Even though she has been growing up in a Muslim family of Bangladeshi immigrants, she sees her Muslim identity not as something she inherited from her parents and grandparents but as something that she chose herself. Moreover, she is questioning how her parents way of living and ‘traditions’ (listening to music and going out, wearing saris, etc.) fit with Islamic norms. Saida’s narratives convey a strong sense of liberal values which are expressed with the term ‘choice’. The epitome of adhering to values of liberalism (perhaps, ironically) is her choice to wear Islamic dress:
So, well up until the age of around 16 – well, my parents actually – I’ll start from the beginning – my parents actually never forced religion on us, so they practiced, but not intensely, you know. My mum she always wore the headscarf but she still would wear saris and you know, all of this, and go out, and listen - my family listen to music and watch films and things like that – and they’re quite frowned upon, in the Muslim community, but we did it anyway. And wearing covered up clothing, they never forced that on us either. So up until around the age of 16 I didn’t - I wore what I wanted - I didn’t wear a headscarf, I - was totally up to me. And then, when I was in sixth form, and I was learning more about religion, and learning more about what it was, I felt like I was following something I don’t understand – I never really got a good understanding from my parents, ‘cause I don’t think they’d had one either, so I did start going to classes, and going on youtube and getting books and things like that, and if – I chose to wear this. But a lot of people assume that because I’m born Muslim, I automatically am forced to wear it, they don’t understand that you still have the free will to decide whether you’d wear it or not (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

Socialisation into Islam has been for her an educational experience – her sister and she were attending mosque classes in order to get a deeper understanding of their identity and truly became Muslims. Islamic dress is simply a manifestation of an identity that has been chosen and worked through. She contrasted her experience with her Muslim identity and the one of her second sister who ‘chose’ to be ‘westernised’ (drinking, going out, and wearing western clothes) while considering herself a Muslim. Here again the difference is drawn between the merely performative practices – it is not enough to do a pilgrimage ‘Umra’ – one should have a deeper conviction of faith that can be achieved through self-education as a Muslim.

Despite such conscious attempt to present her trajectory as an activist as a self-education project, her family perhaps still played significant role in Saida’s political socialisation. Although Saida doesn’t see her parents as being politically active, she gives a number of examples in the interview when they were involved in different
charity activities raising money for victims of child abuse (her mother), for orphan children in Bangladesh (her father), and supporting a local council in Bangladesh (her father and her grandparents). They are also willing to help her and her sister in their charity activities.

INT: Do you have a – what is your parents opinion on these activities?
Saida: They’re not really involved, they don’t, they don’t – they come along.
INT: Do they bother at all?
Saida: They don’t – they don’t – if you ask them for help – so my dad, we asked him to put the leaflets up for us – in like – wherever he went in [a name of the town] and places like around Coventry where he goes, generally. So he does help on the side, but – and my mum, like the food that we sell there, she just cooks it, so we don’t need to pay someone externally to cook the food, and so she’ll cook all of it and we’ll sell that there so in that sense they do help – but I don’t know if they know a lot about what [sic.] we’re doing it – they just help ‘cause we’ve asked them to. They’re not actively like involved they just help when we ask them, they just chip in (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

For Saida activism includes being involved in protests. Thus she maintains that her parents agree with her views but don’t agree with her voicing her views so strongly. Her father in particular has strong opinions but does not enact them in a way that in her opinion might make a difference, which also suggests a risk of being involved in troubles of being subjected to verbal and even physical attacks. She stated that she ‘doesn’t mind getting into trouble because people need to hear things’:

My parents…. they think I’m a bit too controversial! [Laughs]. They think I’m a bit like – my views are really strong and I – I shouldn’t let them get me into trouble. But I don’t mind getting into trouble because people need to hear things. They can’t stop me! They don’t – they’re not the kind of parents that will force me not to go, they won’t say ‘no, you can’t go’, or ‘I forbid you’ but they’ll say ‘I don’t think it’s a good idea, I wouldn’t like it if you went’, but I will say ‘look, you not liking it, it’s not gonna [stop me going], like the cause is there, I believe in the cause and it needs to be known, the more people who go,
the more it’s publicised, the more people [know about it]’. You know, numbers count, don’t they, in protests, so it’s like I would like to go and prove a point, it’s like, I know you don’t – I know, but the thing is, they, it’s not that they disagree with my views, it’s just that they disagree with me you know viewing them – I mean, voicing them so strongly (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

She doesn’t really see any transmission of activism from older generations of family; although she assumes that her grandparents might be involved in the support of the pro-independence movement back in Bangladesh. In a way she opposes her (protest-oriented) activism to the more passive charity work of her parents believing that money doesn’t solve everything:

I think with my dad it’s a sort of, he feels like, he has these views and he just throws money at them – he doesn’t, he wouldn’t stand up and do something like put time and energy into it, he will just think that money is the route like to solve everything. I don’t think some things, you can’t solve – that Trayvon case for example, what’s money going to do? (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

In interview, Saida refers to her parents as an example of political passivity and disillusionment. According to her, her mother does not vote and is always silent when political subjects are discussed in the family. Her father has strong political views but remains inactive because he does not believe that his participation (by this she means political actions beyond charity work, e.g. attendance at protests, demonstrations, etc.) would make any difference. However, it appears that her parents are getting involved to a significant extent in the political activities of their daughters, taking them out of their comfort zone of a close circle of friends and acquaintances, and even putting them in violent situations, as the following excerpt suggests:

---

9 Saida refers to Trayvon Benjamin Martin, an African American teenager who was fatally shot by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer in Florida, USA, on 26 February 2012. Saida attended an anti-racist demonstration that was organized in Birmingham, UK, as a protest against Zimmerman’s release without charges.

---
Someone came to the event for the Syria [campaign] and they didn’t like what we were doing, they disagreed with us.\textsuperscript{10} They came simply to argue. And it wasn’t even in like a debate, like in a nice respectful way, it was kind of like ‘what are you doing?’ It was just two boys, like young men, like 21-22. I dunno what their views were because they were just screaming and shouting. But – they obviously disa-disagreed and they were just saying how ‘oh they’re refugees, la la la’… They were English. I don’t know if they were just doing it for attention, or if they honestly had a view that they wanted to get across. ‘Cause some people just scream and shout because they just – they scream and shout because they don’t want people to hear what they’re actually saying, they just want some attention. Well, we just kicked them out, because we had a lot of volunteers who were – we outnumbered them and so we were like ‘get out, right now otherwise’, you know and we had like - my dad and my uncles there and they were like ‘seriously, get out,’ punch! You know it was kind of like threatening – you had to threaten them to get them out, you couldn’t - like there was no nice way to deal with people who don’t wanna be nice. So it was just funny, but I think after, my dad had kind of realised that the things like – some things are a bit controversial and it can get a little bit dangerous… (Saida Sadiq, 18, Coventry).

In a way this example demonstrates that the transmission of experience of political activism that is shared by family members of different generations is not necessarily and not always initiated by the older family members. The impetus might come from children and parents become involved perhaps accidently and out of their love towards their children, and through experiencing involvement in political actions they might learn more about the views and values of their children.

3. Conclusions

The research findings presented in the report demonstrate that family plays an important role in mnemonic socialisation of young people. Critically mnemonic socialisation often goes hand in hand with transmission of political heritage. In the

\textsuperscript{10} Saida refers to the charity event her sister and she organised in winter 2014 to raise money to aid Syrian refugees.
report we attempted to analyse the mechanism of political and mnemonic socialisation. First of all, the case studies of four British families demonstrate that each family is characterised with a particular mnemonic culture that is manifested through metanarratives, tropes and myths through which the identities of family members and their histories are articulated. Although family memories are unique and (inter)subjective they are also shaped by local and national historical narratives that provide family narratives with a structure that links important landmarks in family’s history with events in national history. Thus family memories are not isolated from discourses within which the national and regional identities are constructions, the tropes and myths from the family past and the national history are often mixed and interwoven in the family mnemonic narratives. On the one hand, institutionalised historical discourses provide family memories with a sense of significance and belonging to the nation; correspondingly, stories passed down in the family give more emotional and intimate meanings to the events from national or regional history.

To some degree this interstation of familiar and national mnemonic cultures (that always have at least an element of political being part of what Boyarin (1994) calls ‘politics of memory’) is exemplified by our respondents’ narratives about the state of English / British traditions. Our respondents tend to see family as a main site for practicing traditions. They also recognise that family as well as national traditions are subjects of change. Traditions are often associated with practices which historically originate from religious celebrations and are associated with strong communal solidarities that are enacted through regular (if not ritualistic) gathering and sharing of food. Such understanding of traditions, although very common for respondents from all generational cohorts, is connected in interviews with the past and attributed to the older generation. Thus in respondents’ interviews the fragility of elderly members of family as well as general secularisation of public discourses and private everyday practices of British people, together with changes in family structure, add to the sense of decline and erosion in both family and national (often framed in terms of Christian) traditions.
In respondents’ narratives food is frequently mentioned as an important element of any family celebration. It symbolises the solidarity of family members through sharing, intergenerational transmission of cooking skills, and respect for and emotional attachment to elderly members of the family who provide space and/or food for family gatherings. Favourite dishes also act as sensorial markers for remembering family traditions and family history, not least because during family meals is the time when most of the stories about the past are told and events from family history recalled. Thus family meals and food in general appear as metaphors for tradition and by extension for national, ethnic and religious identities of our respondents.

Since even family traditions are sometimes thought of in national terms – hence our respondents talks about ‘English traditions’ that is sometimes used interchangeably for ‘British traditions’ – it is not accidental that respondents’ evaluation of traditions as being in decline is juxtaposed to ethnic diversity and multiculturalism of contemporary British society. Moreover, in nostalgic narratives of the older generation of respondents, the multicultural present is opposed to the presumably ethnically homogenous past that is also associated with the lost sense of close community (often expressed through metaphors of family).

Xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants featured in the older generation of respondents’ nostalgia for the lost sense of community in English towns; these attitudes are in striking contrast to the positive evaluation of contemporary multicultural Britain by the younger generation of respondents (with the exception of a young EDL supporter). Furthermore, when young people express their concern with racism in contemporary Britain they tend to attribute racist prejudice and behaviour to people of the older generation, partly reproducing their parents and grandparents argument that in the past the country was less culturally diverse hence the older people had no environment in which to embrace the values of multicultural living. However, the family histories of our respondents show that such argumentation is problematic, because since the 1950s there were significant numbers of immigrants and ethnic minorities in British cities that impacted on cultural developments (e.g. often mentioned by respondents is the 2-Tone music of the 1970s). Moreover, several
of our elderly respondents who expressed views that might be called xenophobic or racist had previously had experience of very close relationships with individuals from ethnic minorities, sometimes establishing families with them.

Such retrospective assessment of the past, misremembering (and sometimes forgetting the details that do not fit in with the current widespread perception of the past) and nostalgia that sometimes accompanies it should be seen as respondents’ reflections on their present conditions. ‘Here’ and ‘now’ are the vantage points from which the trajectories of both personal biographies and development of entire society are reconstructed. Thus the subjects of nostalgia are important to consider as issues that concern respondents in the present. Nostalgic narratives often feature ‘noticeable absences’ both in the lives of our respondents and in society in general. For example, family is valued by all our respondents but only one young person out of four has experienced growing up in a family with both parents present. Other families have a history of parental separation, single parenthood and domestic violence dating back two or three generations. Young people and their older family members also repeatedly talk about full employment and work ethics that are associated with being employed rather than receiving state support. They associate these with the past referring to the memories of their parents and grandparents of the ‘golden era’ of the 1950s-1960s. It is precisely the current economic recession, austerity policy and high level of unemployment among young people that trigger such nostalgic memories. What is sometimes forgotten or downplayed in these narratives, however, is that current economic conditions in Britain at least partly are a result of deindustrialisation and economic restructuring that started in the 1970s and 1980s.

One of the important conclusions of our research is that young people are active co-producers of family memories. They do not passively receive family history, but engage in the process of selective interpretation of those stories that have relevance to their own experience (or are linked to the present concerns of society) and their sense of identity.

If generational differences are not satisfactory for explaining racist attitudes in Britain the same is true in relation to the perceived lack of a work ethic among young people,
who are sometimes seen as a ‘lazy generation’ not only by the older respondents but by younger ones as well. The current attacks on the welfare system and austerity measures that reduce the number of people entitled to social benefits perhaps have some impact on our respondents’ generally negative attitudes towards recipients of benefits. What is significant, however, is that many of our respondents do not really make a connection between the socio-economic difficulties (i.e. economic and social deprivation, high rate of unemployment, etc.) and increase in social tensions including racism experienced in those areas. While the older generation of respondents see themselves and younger people caught in the spiral of poverty and lack of opportunities that had been taken for granted in the past, immigrants and Muslims are blamed for high competition on job market, decline in communal solidarities and the rise of racism. At the same time, the state and political class are viewed by many of our respondents with suspicion and detachment since they do not deal directly with those concerns. This might lead to feelings of frustration with mainstream political parties in some young people and their attraction to radical anti-establishment movements (as exemplified by the case study of EDL supporters in this research). Participation in such movements is seen by some as the only way to make their voice heard, sometimes involving politically incorrect language and even violent actions. Conversely widespread disillusionment with mainstream political parties and politicians has produced a fertile environment for the increasing popularity of different conspiracy theories, thereby conveying a lack of trust in the state, important public institutions, and the mass media. Furthermore, young people might believe the use of modern technologies – namely the introduction of online voting – to be simply another manipulative strategy by a government that has grown complacent.

Indeed, many of our respondents who are politically and socially active downplay their interest in politics, not least because the ‘political’ is often associated with politicians and political parties who are seen by both older and younger generations of participants as corrupt and ‘out for themselves’. Thus, although disengagement of young people with political and social issues is seen as one of the challenges for the present and future British society, our findings demonstrate that there are not essential differences between those young people who do not show an interest in politics and those who are politically or civically active. Both might hold strong views on
contemporary political issues that concern their age group or local communities. At the same time, lack of trust in mainstream political parties and the political establishment is declared by those who enact their political views as well as those who less active. Therefore, we suggest leaving the discourse of ‘political disengagement’ as it is inadequate in its description of young people’s attitudes, practices and motivations for being involved in political activities. The examples cited in this report suggest that young people demonstrate much stronger emotional attachment and tendency to act on the issues that are directly relevant to their experiences and their communities. This needs to be considered in any policy recommendations that aim to address the perceived lack of political engagement of young people.

Finally, our research demonstrates that political views or even activism are not necessarily transmitted unidirectionally from older generations to younger ones as some observers maintain (see, for instance, Vollebergh et al 2001). While young people co-produce the meanings of the past in the course of family mnemonic socialisation, older generations of respondents might re-interpret the political ideas and discourses they socialised in during their youth to accommodate the views of their children or grandchildren. In some situations, the political activities of young people might even lead to their parents becoming more involved with political issues that concern their children. In such contexts parents learn about the political values of their children. Thus political socialisation in the family has to be seen as a multi-dimensional process that implies that young people can also act as initiators of intergenerational transmission of political heritage.

References


Popov, A. (2013) *MYPLACE Deliverable 2.1: Country based reports on historical discourse production as manifested in sites of memory (United Kingdom)*, available online at [http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/documents/Partner%201%20and%202%20-%20UK_Deliverable_2_1_submission.pdf](http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/documents/Partner%201%20and%202%20-%20UK_Deliverable_2_1_submission.pdf), (accessed on 23/6/2013).


Appendix 1: A template of the UK interview schedule

1. **Biography** (introduction to family history):
   - Work, education, family, age, etc
   - Locality of the family: where they come from, what were occupations of parents / grandparents etc.

2. **Family mnemonic culture:**
   1) How far back do you remember your older relatives? (Grandparents / great-grandparents?) What do you remember about them? What stories do you remember them telling? Do you think you have a good knowledge of your family’s past?
   2) When / how / to whom do you talk about your family history or personal / family memories of the past?

3. ‘**Difficult past**’ and ‘good old days’:
   1) Which period of the past do you think about as ‘difficult’ for the country? Why?
   2) In the family do you talk about the past times as ‘good’ or ‘difficult’? [Do all members talk in the same way? What are the differences?]
   3) What did your family / parents / grandparents do during those difficult times?
   4) Do older generations’ memories about the ‘good’ / ‘difficult’ past resonate with you? And vice versa – for older generations, does how the younger generation perceives difficulty make sense to you?

4. **Family memories of particular periods of recent history:**
   a) What happened to your family during WWII (extending to the pre-war and post-war periods)?
   b) What were things like for your family during the post-war period (late 1950s-1960s - time of full employment)?
   c) And in the 1970s and the Thatcher era? How does your family talk about Thatcher and the changes in society that happened then? What did you think about how the Thatcher era was discussed after her death?
   d) And how have the last two decades been for your family? What changes have you noticed and how does your family feel about them? [E.g. how diverse / multicultural / non-English / non-British the country has become; changing jobs environment, unemployment and benefits; changes to community; differences between younger generation and older ones in relation to the life views and life practices.]

5. ‘**British / English / Christian traditions**’:
   This theme might naturally emerge from the previous block and could have strong nostalgic sentiments.
   1) What do British / English traditions mean? Which are most important for you?
   2) Do (did) you keep those traditions in their family? How and who made sure they were / are kept?
   3) In what way are traditions changing? Have some traditions been lost? Is it a good or bad thing?
   4) What things do different generations of the family share (sporting, musical, social, political, religious interests or hobbies for example)?

6. **Transmission of political heritage within the family:**
1) Who among your family is politically active? [Member of a party, union, active in 
local community issues, protest movements etc.]
2) Has this encouraged you to be active? Has it discouraged you?
3) Has it shaped your own views?
4) What do you know about the political views of your children / grandchildren / 
parents / grandparents (e.g. which parties do they support? How actively?) Do you 
agree with these views and affinities?
5) Do you discuss politics at home at all? With whom, when and in what terms?
6) What is your opinion of the present government and opposition?
7) Would you say any (mainstream or fringe) political parties / politicians / ideas 
represent your views on how the country should be run and what a better society 
would look like?

7. The ‘depressing present’:
What things about what is happening currently in British society and politics concern 
you?
Prompt for:
- recession;
- immigration;
- changes in welfare state (social benefits issues, frozen salaries in public sector); and 
- recent scandals discussed in the media (the whole issue of BBC sex and paedophile 
scandal might lead to the discussion of memories from the 1970s-1980s)

8. What is forgotten / not talked about in the family:
1) Are there things talked about the family past that are sensitive (not told to 
everyone)? What and why are some stories not told to children and / or 
grandchildren?
2) Do you think the younger generations of the family are (dis)interested in the 
(family) past?
3) Do different generations remember different times / events in the past differently?
Why?
### Appendix 2: Respondents’ socio-demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Residential status</th>
<th>Family status</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl White</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White English</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Completed general academic secondary education to age 15</td>
<td>Lives independently with own child</td>
<td>Divorced / separated from spouse or partner</td>
<td>Coventry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria White</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White and Asian</td>
<td>In part-time employment</td>
<td>Completed university</td>
<td>Lives at home with a parent</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Coventry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue Williams</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White English</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Completed general academic secondary education to age 14</td>
<td>Lives independently alone</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>‘English town’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Williams</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White English</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Completed general academic secondary education to age 16</td>
<td>Lives independently alone</td>
<td>Divorced / separated from spouse or partner</td>
<td>‘English town’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylie Williams</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White English</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Completed general academic secondary education to age 18</td>
<td>Lives independently with own partner and children</td>
<td>Living with partner</td>
<td>‘English town’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Donovan</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White English</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Completed vocational academic secondary education</td>
<td>Lives independently with own partner and grandchild</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Coventry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Donovan</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White English</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Completed vocational academic secondary education</td>
<td>Lives independently with own partner and grandchild</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Coventry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Donovan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White English</td>
<td>In full-time employment</td>
<td>Completed vocational secondary education</td>
<td>Lives at home with other relatives e.g. grandparents</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Coventry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saida Sadiq</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asian British - Bangladeshi</td>
<td>In full-time employment</td>
<td>Completed general academic secondary education to age 18</td>
<td>Lives at home with parent(s)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Coventry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>