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Immigrant women's identity and integration: Liverpool "The world in one city"

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This article is based on the original research¹ that studied immigrant women who have been living in Liverpool since 2001. It deals with issues concerning the identity of immigrant women. One of the aims was to identify if there was a difference between the subjective perception and the findings derived from an objective evaluation of their integration based on the collected data. The study, conducted in Liverpool in 2009, explores the choices immigrant women have made in respect of their preferred identity, i.e. by nationality, religion, or ethnicity. The inductive explorative research is post-positivist in approach and a questionnaire was used to collect primary data. The results have demonstrated how the various challenges immigrants face when moving to another country influence their choice of identity. Their preference of identification by nationality, religion and ethnic group helped to define the level of integration of these women within the wider society. The study has found that the way the respondents wanted to be identified depended on a number of factors; degree of integration, knowledge of the local language and participation in the local community. The quantitative method and the multiple correspondence analyses have enabled the mapping profile of the sample and have demonstrated the existence of spatial urban self-segregation.

The study shows that these women live in their diaspora space rather than within the wider community.

Keywords: Identity, Women Immigrant, Self-Segregation

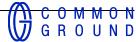
Introduction

Identity, when associated with immigration, is a new term that entered the social science terminology in the 1950s (Gleason 1983). The term identity comes from the Latin root idem, meaning 'the same', and has been associated with the mind-body problem in philosophy since the time of John Locke in the 16th century. Hegel (1972) describes identity as a process of mutual recognition where recognition is an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects whereby each sees the other as its equal but also different from it. This relation may evolve in subjectivity: an individual becomes a subject by recognizing and being recognized by another subject. This Hegelian recognition is essential in developing a sense of self of any human being and if denied, results in a distortion of one's relation to one's self and an injury to one's identity.

In 2003 Liverpool was awarded the title of European *Capital of Culture* for 2008, the Liverpool Council adopted the slogan 'The world in one city' implying that people who arrived from all over the world to the city were forming a cohesive society. It was therefore seen as an ideal opportunity to research the feelings of belonging and to discover if the declaration of the Liverpool Council corresponded to reality.

The first aspect for the researcher was to address the perception of integration of immigrant women living in the city during the period 2001 and 2009. The period was chosen for several

¹ Di Cristo Bertali, 2011. Liverpool, "The world in one city"; Subjective and objective perceptions evaluation of the integration of women immigrants in Liverpool, 2001 to 2009.



reasons: to encompass the city event, to work on latest secondary data from Census 2001 and to allow an acceptable length of time of residence considering that the requirement to obtain British naturalization is to have lived in the country for 5 years (Home Office, 2010). The research by Di Cristo Bertali (2011) focused on analysing immigrant women because of the paucity in the literature referring to their degree of integration. They are mainly studied for their role as wives who have followed the men in their migration (Chistolini 1986; Watts 1983; Simon et al. 2000), for their religiosity, their working rights, their autonomy, health and self-esteem (Pedraza 1991; Buijs 1993; Riaño 2003; Gabaccia and Ruiz 2006; Im and Yang 2006). Thus women's feelings and attitudes related to their integration in the host society have been ignored by scholars at large.

The second aspect analysed by the main research was to discover if women's perception of integration, corresponded to the reality derived from an objective evaluation of certain personal aspects of the life of the immigrants (Massey 1981; Jasso et al. 2000).

The integration process of women is rather different than that of men (Tastsoglou et al. 2000) due to the different role women perform in the family as the latter revolves around them; they can be identified as its engine. Women are expected to have the responsibilities for nurturing the ethnic identity and imparting religious values (see below).

It has been said that Asian women in Halifax, "besides traditional family responsibilities, are also responsible for the retention of ethnic identity within it" (Tastsoglou et al. 2000, 20).

The empowerment of women has been discussed by Mehra (1997) and Yuval-Davis (1993), but no literature was found about women's role in the process of integration of their family in the host society.

In order to establish their level of integration the women were asked how they preferred to be identified. Their identity is a reflection of their ontological perception of the environment, and it was seen to be important in the identification of the self-interpretation of their relation with the community and in return the community understands of them at that time. Their positive or negative integration is consequential to their perception of their role in society that is influenced by the attitude of the society toward them. Blumer (1937) in his discussion on symbolic interactionism indicates that people are influenced by the meanings of things that are derived at by social interaction and that are modified through interpretation. Therefore it should be natural for an individual to act and behave in line with those with whom they are interacting. Society is based on interaction. The choice of one identity over another was seen as an indication whether respondents were more or less inclined to integrate in the host society. It is theorized that the degree of acceptance of immigrants' achievements by members of the dominant cultural group will influence the new-comers' decision to live in the society at large rather than within their ethnic environment, and consequently, the level of their integration (Nesdale and Mak, 2000).

Theoretical background and selected literature

Foote (1951) proposed identification as the origin of a theory of motivation in social interaction; he said that identification was the "appropriation of and commitment to a particular identity or series of identities" (Foote 1951, 17) by an individual. Foote's article linked identification with role theory. This was rather different from the idea of identity as proposed by Erikson in 1972. Erikson explains the word 'identity' in terms of selfhood as defined by and based on the uniqueness and individuality which makes a person distinct from others.

The study of identity became widespread among anthropologists especially with the emergence of social movements in the 1970s. Other related concerns lie with ethnicity and with the effects they have on individual migrant and on his/ her contribution to the social context in which he/she lives. The common view of identity is that actors mobilize and negotiate their identities at their own discretion (McCrone et al., 2008). The need to have a close connection between the notion of identity and the awareness of belonging to a distinctive group separate from the others can lead to the creation of different 'cultural markers' (Jenkins 1996).

Identity in different contexts

Identity as a general term is seen somewhat differently by different disciplines, and there are many varying descriptions of it. For example, Jenkins (1996, 120) believes that "Identity is produced and reproduced in the course of social interaction."

"Social identity is a game of playing the vis-à-vis". It is also our understanding of who we are and who others are and jointly, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which include us). Therefore, no more essential than meaning; it too is the product of agreement and disagreement; it too is negotiable" (Jenkins, 1996, 5).

Other researchers in the field suggest other descriptions. Bechhofer et al. (1999) propose that social identity is something of an axiom in the sociological environment; it is manufactured and shaped by the people themselves. Norton, (1997) develops the notion further by proposing that social identity is also understood as the relationship between the individual and the wider society and this happens through institutions such as families, workplaces, schools, and social services.

Attempts to define personal identity have been made for centuries. The definitions given by Locke (1959) have gained prominence and are still cited today: the first, formulated that one's personal identity extends only so far as his own consciousness, therefore linking it to the memory of past experiences, and the second referred to self, as quoted in Perry (1975, 12) that stated: "a thinking and intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different time and places".

Personal identity was not included in the questionnaire as it was not considered in line with the purposes of the original study that wanted to identify the objective integration of the participants. The same applied to cultural identity seen as an affinity to language, customs, country, people, music, or other cultural aspects, age and level of education.

Cultural identity is the understanding of ethnicity that embraces awareness and knowledge of the cultural characteristics of one's ethnic group (Ibrahim et al. 1997). This indicates that cultural identity is anchored in a socio-cultural context. The creation of a cultural identity depends on the influence of several factors, such as: specific group of origin, religion, type of neighbourhood, social class, educational level, gender and common language (Ibrahim et al., 1997; Norton, 1997).

Religious identity is another facet that has been widely debated. Hasting (1997) discusses the relationship of religion with nationalism because he feels that it is an aspect that has been neglected by modern theorists such as Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm (1990) and Anderson (2006). Hasting believes that "religion is an integral element of many cultures, most ethnicities and some states" (Hastings, 1997, 4). He also believes that religion has been the dominant feature in the formation of a number of states and the expression of their nationalism. He further states that ethnicities can dissolve into nations, but nations cannot easily merge with other nations.

In a modern urban and industrialized society there is the tendency to intertwine religion and ethnicity. Some anthropological studies of the religious aspects of cultural and social systems, have asserted that ethnicity is a synonym for nationality and that religious and ethnic sentiments of immigrant minorities are expected to give way to the processes of modernization and assimilation (Smith1978). It is accepted that religious beliefs and practices act as counterweights for immigrants when they struggle to adapt to their new home (Herberg 1955; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). In the new social context immigrants may confront the need to find a new identity. The certainty of religious teachings, which may have been taken for granted before, becomes the anchor providing the certainty to which to relate at a time of so many changes.

For these reasons Herberg and others assume that religious beliefs and attachments grow strongly when people become immigrants. Religion has also been identified as a bridge connecting their previous environment with the new; it is seen as helping "people who have left one world to adjust to the other" (Handlin 1951, 5; Rhodes, 2010). The researcher is in full agreement with the above mentioned concept. Handling, furthermore, states that everything around immigrants is different and they seek to recreate their familiar environment through their religious beliefs. Religion is usually considered in spiritual terms, but religious organisations can

also offer psychological and social benefits such as economic opportunities, and educational resources for the immigrants in need (Hirschman 2004; Peek 2005). Religious elites too, continue the work of advocacy for laws that respect the human rights of immigrants (Chen 2002).

National identity refers to the political-cultural identification with a territory. In some cases 'nation' is considered as the equivalent of 'state' and McCrone and Bechhofer, (2008) have taken a wider view of these differences. They indicate that national identity has its own dynamic and momentum, for example in England and Scotland, 'citizenship' and 'national identity' are perceived as distinct. Following their approach, this study analyses the perception of integration of English women, separately from Scottish, Irish and Welsh women, because the researcher agrees that these particular 'nationals 'could tend to identify themselves with their nation rather than with the state, that in this case is Great Britain

National identity is the one that defines an individual as 'one of us' and consequently one who participates in the wider social life in society, including political and cultural aspects. The inclusion or exclusion is in general an issue about access to or denial of advantages and rights that in turn are a matter of politics and social policy. The state considers 'one of us' the people who have its citizenship.

National identity, it has been said by some, does not carry a great deal of importance for the majority of people. "...a national identity is a bit like having an old insurance policy. You know you've got one somewhere but often you're not sure where it is. And if you're honest, you would have to admit you're pretty vague about what the small print means" (McIlvanney 1999).

Others consider it as one of the most important types of group identity (Vlachová 2009). It defines who people are from the cultural and political point of view and it is constructed in contrast to those perceived as the 'other', the ones representing the cultural and political entities to which the immigrants do not belong.

National identity, as many other concepts, is described in contradictory ways: the word 'national' can at times indicate the belonging to a specific nation-state, while at other times it is associated with the nation not as a state, but as a geographical space (Bechhofer et al. 1999). When there is pressure towards assimilation and the immigrants are willing to adapt to the culture of the host country, national identity is positively predictable (Phinney et al. 2001). Immigrants may like to be identified by their own nationality at birth but it is also possible that they may wish to be identified according to others factors. The identity of an immigrant is the result of a complex procedure that is generated by the transition from one culture to another. This transition frequently causes a sense of crisis and requires readjustments that effect personal and communal identity (Kahane 1986). Therefore immigrants' identity depends not only on nationality but also on personal approaches to the changing environment. The identification of aspects that may facilitate the integration/acculturation are important and worthy of analysis if the individual wants to become a member of that society.

Ethnic identity is another characterization of the term. A group can be called 'Ethnic group' when its members believe they are of common descent, meaning that there are no differences between 'us' and 'them'. "... We shall call 'ethnic group' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in the common descent ... this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation" (Weber 1978, 389). Weber is arguing that the formation of ethnicity is a subjective process which is very much the result of contact and /or antagonism with "members of a different group" (Weber 1978, 385). For example, Rumbaut (1994) states that during adolescence many of young people feel rather confused, so it is important they have social experiences in the family, in the ethnic community and in the larger setting; although some of them may need more to develop a clear identity. (Phinney et al. 2001). It must be said that for some even this may not be enough in the process of reaching their ethnic identity (Phinney et al. 2001). Therefore young people who find it difficult to develop their own ethnicity should be encouraged to be critical about their experiences; they must fully understand their own ethnicity as well as that of the host country to be able to choose. The colour of their skin or the place of birth may not be sufficient to ethnically identify a subject. In order to find own place in a new community the subject needs to be sure about their identity.

In this study "British identity" was used, because in the sample there were women who were born in the nations forming the United Kingdom and it was useful to establish whether they

identified themselves as members of the nation-state or if they wanted to be seen as members of the nations where they were born. The other reason was to see if the 'Not English' wanted to be identified as British; if they wanted, it meant they wished to obtain the naturalization that can also be seen as an indication of full integration.

Methodology

For this part of the research a post-positivist approach was adopted and the quantitative method was used as a pragmatic way to quantify the women's responses (Trochim 2001). Post-positivism has been defined as the search for 'warranted assertability' as opposed to 'truth' traditionally represented by universal law or absolutes (Allen and Letourneau, 1999). The validity of data has been guaranteed by cross tabulation and correlation tests along with comparison with results obtained within the entire research. The quantitative approach helped to quantify the women's responses, while a qualitative approach was utilised to understand the reasons for the outcome.

Women were reached through various organisations² and asked to fill in a questionnaire. This article presents one aspect of the original extensive study³. The material was extracted from the fourth section of the questionnaire. The 223 participating women came from a variety of backgrounds. Purposive sampling, defined as a non-probability sampling procedure was used for the composition of the sample (Saunders et al, 2007). The participants were divided into three groups: 'English' (100), 'UK' (Irish, Scottish and Welsh) (23) and 'Not English' women from all over the world' (100); their answers were analysed and their level of integration was revealed.

The question that yielded the material for this article asked the participants whether they wished to be identified by nationality, religion, and ethnicity and as British⁴.

The answers were cross-tabulated with the variables on subjective and objective integration ⁵ to establish if the choice of an identity had any bearing on the respondents' levels of integration. The relative nominal categorical data are also displayed as Multiple Correspondence Analysis in accordance with the preferred specific type of identity declared.

Findings

The Spearman rank correlation test was applied to the ordinal data relating to Nationality, Religion, Ethnicity, English Identity, and the results are shown in Table 1. It can be seen that there are two correlations at the sigma level 0.01 and below: one is negative, indicating that the women that wanted to be identified accordingly to their nationality strongly objected to be identified as British. The other correlation, this time positive, exists between religion and ethnicity. The more they like to be identified by Ethnicity, the more they liked also to be identified by Religion

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² Companies with a great number of women employed (private, NHS, radios, council). University Libraries; churches: Presbyterian, Scottish Anglican and Roman Catholic. Scandinavian church; The Somali and African women centre was also contacted; centre for the Chinese Community and the Irish Centre and nurses at the hospital.

³ Subjective vs. Objective integration of foreign women in Liverpool (Di Cristo Bertali 2012)

⁴ See footnote 5

⁵ The objective level of integration was obtained through the use of a purposely constructed table of evaluation that enabled the determination of three levels of integration: Fully integrated, Partially integrated and Not integrated.

Table 1. Correlation of the various identity choices

Correlations		Nationality ⁶	Religion	Ethnicity	British ⁷
Nationality	Correlation	1.000			
	Sigma				
Religion	Correlation	.109	1.00		
	Sigma	.105			
Ethnicity	Correlation	.084	.470**	1.000	
	Sigma	.214	.000		
British	Correlation	301**8	.056	104	1.000
	Sigma	.000	.402	.120	

The city of Liverpool is formed by 5 main areas: "Liverpool City"; "Alt Valley"; "Liverpool East"; "Liverpool South Central" and "Liverpool South". The presence of the 'UK' and the 'Not English' is largely in areas Liverpool South Central and Liverpool South, thus the results and considerations will refer primarily to them (Chart 1).

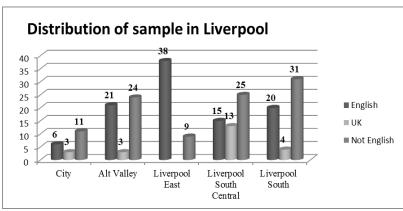


Chart 1: distribution of all the respondents in Liverpool (count)

Source: Di Cristo Bertali 2011

Multiple correspondences

Multiple Correspondence Analysis has been used to find and graphically display the relationship between the various types of identity, the women groups and the areas where they lived.

Nationality identity

Chart 2 shows the correspondence analysis of the preference for national identity.

- Quadrant A shows that UK women living in 'City' and 'Liverpool South Central' disliked to be identified by their nationality
- Quadrant B shows that 'English' women preferred or did not have a strong opinion on being identified according to their nationality.
- Quadrant C shows no correspondence among the variables
- Quadrant D shows that 'Not English' women strongly preferred to be identified by their nationality and they lived in Liverpool South.

 $^{^6}$ Nationality here denotes belonging to the nations that make up the UK, i.e. England, Scotland etc.

⁷ The label 'British' stands for the desire to belong to the nation-state or to obtain the naturalization (see Di Cristo Bertali 2012)

^{8 **} Correlation is significant at the sigma 0.01 level (2-tailed)

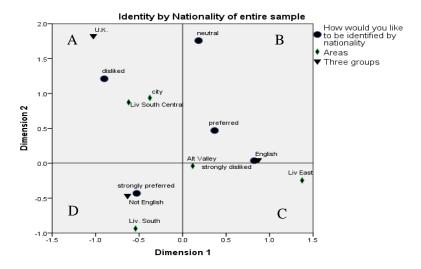


Chart 2: Results preference of nationality identity

British identity

Chart 3 shows the correspondence analysis for the preference of British identity

- Quadrant A shows mixed feeling by 'Not English' women living in 'Alt Valley', 'Liverpool South' and 'City' who dislike or are not interested in being identified as British.
- Quadrant B shows that the 'English' who strongly prefer to be identifies as British live primarily in 'Liverpool East'.
- Quadrant C shows no correspondence among the variables
- Quadrant D shows that the 'UK' women living in' Liverpool South Central' preferred to be identified as British.

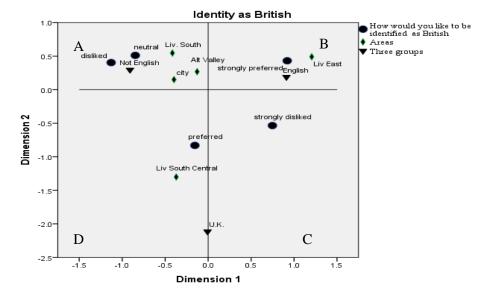


Chart 3: Results for preference of British identity

Religious identity

Chart 4 shows the correspondence analysis for the preference of religious identity

- Quadrant A shows that UK women living in 'City' strongly preferred this form of identification while the ones living in 'Liverpool South Central' disliked to be identified by their religion.
- Quadrants B shows no correspondence among the variables
- Quadrant C shows that 'English' women strongly disliked to be identified according to their religion.
- Quadrant D shows that 'Not English' women have indicated mixed feelings: the ones living in 'Alt Valley' felt neutral, the ones living in 'Liverpool South' preferred and even strongly preferred to be identified by their religion.

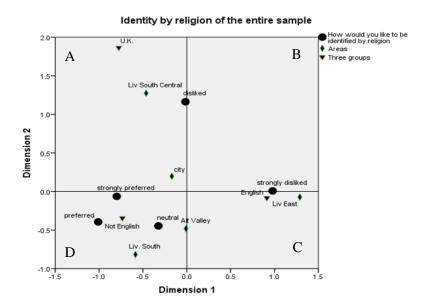


Chart 4: Results for preferences of Religious identity

Ethnic identity

Chart 5 shows the correspondence analysis for the preference of ethnic identity

- Quadrant A shows that 'Not English' women living in 'Alt Valley' and 'Liverpool South' strongly preferred and preferred to be identified by their ethnicity.
- Quadrant B shows no correspondence among the variables.
- Quadrant C shows that 'English' women strongly disliked to be identified in this way and they live in 'Liverpool East'.
- Quadrant D shows that 'UK' women living in 'City' and 'Liverpool South Central' feel neutral to the identification by ethnicity.

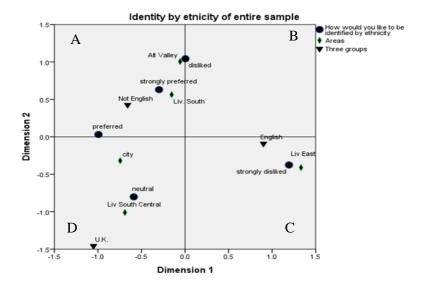


Chart 5: Results for level of preference of ethnicity identity

Discussions

All the information discussed below comes from the questionnaire. Chart 1 shows that 'UK' and 'Not English' women lived mainly in: Alt Valley, Liverpool South Central and Liverpool South. A further examination of the correspondence analysis presented in Charts 2 to 5 for the area of Alt Valley, where the number of the two groups combined are slightly greater than the number of the 'English', has not shown aspects that clearly indicate signs of segregation. Giving the information shown in Chart 1 to 5 the 'Not English' women who live in Liverpool South Central, although quite numerous do not appear to have strong opinions about any specific identity therefore there is no strong evidence of self- segregation.

Contrary to the 'Not English' women who live in Liverpool South Central, the ones living in Liverpool South have expressed strong preference to be identified according to their religion and ethnicity. Smith (1978:175) thinks that immigration itself is a theologizing experience as immigrants react to the trauma of arriving in a new country by turning to religion to try to correct adjustment issues by re-forming familiar social expressions in the new host society (Kurien 1998; Rayaprol 1997). Therefore religion can assume greater importance for the immigrants than was the case in their homelands, where religion may not have had such an importance. The choice of a type of identification over the other is encouraged by people of the same nationality living in the same area, so the personal identity becomes community identity or as defined by Ibrahim et al. (1997) and Norton (1997) cultural identity. Table 1 has shown that there is a strong correlation between religious identity and ethnic identity and it is noted that the phenomenon is emerging in studies of immigrants. The correspondence analysis charts in this study has also confirmed the relevance of religion and ethnicity; this is also accepted by scholars of immigration (see for example Ebaugh et al. 2000; Gibson 1988; Haddad et al. 1987; Williams 1988). In some communities, religious identity is considered more important than their ethnicity, while others consider ethnicity as the more salient and see religion as the institution for the preservation of traditions and ethnic boundaries (Yang et al. 2001 367). If the religious or ethnic identities become of paramount importance in the hierarchy of multiple identities, it is highly unlikely that the individuals involved will fully integrate in the host society.

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⁹ See Appendix 1

On the contrary, Feher (1998) and Yang (1999) view religious identity as a facilitator for integration as it can ease the tensions caused by incongruent immigrant ethnic and native identities because their ethnicity will no longer be a problem and the diverse communities will be brought together through shared worship. One of the problems native society and immigrants face more frequently is that the immigrant's religion is not the one shared by the majority of the host society. Sometimes this is the opposite of what they were experiencing at home, so their affiliation with the group who shares their belief becomes very strong because by so doing they maintain group identity and solidarity.

The women living in Liverpool South strongly identify themselves by their religion or their ethnicity; from the answers to the questionnaire it is evident that they do not speak English and interrelate only with women of their nationality or of the same religion. The rationale behind this study is that immigrant women should be integrated because they are the ones who are expected to retain the ethnic or religion identity within the family (Tastsoglou et al. 2000). Therefore it is possible to speculate that if they are to guide the children towards an interconnected relation with the host society and to influence the relation that their children will assume towards the host society they ought to be fully integrated. Therefore, they need to be encouraged to interrelate with the native mothers, because it is mainly by so doing that they will be introduced into the new culture and the native approach to daily life. They will then have the opportunity to choose the preferred way to conduct their life and the life of their family. It may be further inferred that if they are not introduced to a new circle of acquaintances by mixing with the "native" women they may carry on seeing the values of the host society as a threat to their own role. If immigrant women are expected to protect their children from any form of intrusion from the host society into their culture and values (ibid.), this, in turn, will create a myriad of contradictory sentiments in the children. These sentiments will not be necessarily all negative, but it is possible that conflicts will occur and consequently mothers may have provided the host society with adults that not only are not integrated, but who may be unhappy and resentful towards the surrounding society¹⁰.

It would seem that the findings in this exploratory study confirm Buruma's (2007) conclusions by showing that presently immigrant women living predominantly in Liverpool South have transferred the spirit of the community they experienced in their home country into the new environment; they resist the host society, through their religion and ethnicity, while taking from it what they think useful. This is what is considered as self-segregation, in other words it is a choice made by these women and it is not imposed by the administrators of the city.

Conclusions and implications

This study has demonstrated that the respondents, through their declared preferences, have indicated that their desired identity can be attributed to their origin, their culture and their religion. It has been noted that the area where they live can contribute to their chosen identity. The reasons for choosing one area in preference to another can be of different natures: joining friends, national communities and places of worship. The location of churches, synagogues, temples and mosques can be important when choosing where to live.

Religious identity is sometimes used as a way to ease the integration. This happens when the native group and the immigrants share the same religious belief even if it is not the predominant one. On the contrary, if the immigrant women live in a specific area, where the religious identity is only shared by their specific group, then they remain detached from the local community and, consequently create a 'diaspora space' (Belchem 2006, 14). In Liverpool this is common (Di Cristo Bertali 2011). However, as this study has been focusing specifically on identity, the phenomenon has only been identified in Liverpool South.

Earlier understanding of identity as fixed and immutable is no longer valid, today's identity is considered as an evolving process due to individual experience and social changes (Peek 2005). Therefore if immigrant mothers who live in self-segregated conditions are encouraged to learn the English language and are enabled to interrelate with members of the host society their

¹⁰ E.g. young Muslims going abroad to fight in support of organisations unfriendly to the Western countries

preferred identity may be modified. If immigrant women are expected to attribute their identity to their experiences it is important that they feel able to mix with the local people, and consequently they will be able to contribute to the development of a cohesive society.

The study has shown that people who live in Liverpool have arrived from all over the world. Therefore the statement 'Liverpool: the world in one city' is true. However, the implication that its citizens form a genuine cohesive society is still only a vision.

The outcome of this study has been submitted to the Liverpool Council for considerations as the researcher thinks that there is scope for conducting a wider investigation among all the immigrant women resident in the City.

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APPENDIX 1

The questionnaire used for the original research was divided in four sections as represented below.

Section1	Respondents' profile and family information			
Section 2	Integration			
Section 3	Education			
Section 4	Identity/Religious relevance			