

# **British Report on Category V: Ethnic Minorities**

## **Living in two cultures**

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### **Introduction**

This report first gives an overview on 'ethnic minorities' in Britain followed by an extended account of the in-depth-analysed case of Djamillah, child of Pakistani immigrants. Two more cases of the second generation of Asian immigrants, Anita and Raashida, are then presented. The discussion of these 'second generation cases' focusses mainly on gender and generational aspects. They are then contrasted with the cases of two refugees who have different biographical horizons. A short discussion of how these cases are related to the cases of the other categories so far is interwoven.

### **1. Ethnic Minorities in Britain<sup>1</sup>**

The contemporary history of immigration into England and Britain started in the early nineteenth century when people from the 'Celtic fringes' moved to the prosperous cities in England. By the middle of the nineteenth century half a million Irish people lived in England and Wales. During the early industrial period further ethnic groups settled, especially in the industrial centres. These included Jews from Eastern Europe, Chinese, and the first immigrants from the West Indian islands. Some 80,000 refugees arrived from Europe to escape Nazi persecution and a further 70,000 refugees came during the war itself.

After the Second World War, significant immigration from the Commonwealth countries began. Immigrants were welcomed by the government to fill the shortage of labour in post-war Britain, but experienced terrible discrimination in everyday life (in housing, the labour market and education, as well as physical and verbal attacks). Under the Labour government anti-discrimination laws were introduced in 1966. From 1968 immigration was restricted through immigration laws, and further laws followed in 1981 and 1988 which drastically reduced the rights of Commonwealth citizens to settle in Britain. In the context of common legislation in the European Union ('fortress Europe') the possibilities for refugees to enter the country were essentially restricted.

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<sup>1</sup> In current British discussion ethnic minorities are treated as synonymous with non-white migrants including their British born descendants. 'Ethnic minority' is the current politically correct term to describe people from a different 'race' (as based on phenotypical differences, e.g. colour) or 'ethnicity' (collectivity constructed as sharing practises and history). In any case it refers to presumed experiences due to a minority status but neglects the fact that ethnicity and race apply to everybody,

In 1995 people from ethnic minority groups represented just under six per cent of the population in Great Britain (Social Trends 1996:40). Of the 56 million inhabitants there were 52 million 'white' people and about 3.2 million people who belonged to 'ethnic minorities'. Among these there were 869,000 'Black' people which means in a bureaucratically statistical sense that they were non-mixed, Caribbean, African or other Black (Social Trends 1996:40). 844,000 people were described as Indian, 725,000 people as Pakistani and Bangladeshi. There were also 773,000 people categorised as 'Others', e.g. Chinese and people of other ethnic minority groups, as well as those of mixed origin. The age structure distinguishes the ethnic minority population from the 'white' population as the former has a younger age structure. 80 per cent of the ethnic minority population was under 25 but only one fifth of those over 25 years old were born in Britain (Social Trends 1996:40). The parents' generation form a group of immigrants in their self-perception as well as in the perception of the white-British majority. In contrast, the young people form a non-white British population and are British citizens in their self-perception and in their rights. This often clashes with a view which still classes them as 'immigrants'.

## **2. The Cases**

We interviewed five people from ethnic minorities in Britain. The British-Caribbean population is already well represented in our study, as are people from the 'indigenous' minorities, i.e. Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Therefore we decided to focus on other ethnicities in Britain such as the Asian and African communities. Three of the interviewees are second generation Asian immigrants whose parents arrived in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s. Two of the interviewees are refugees from African countries.

### **2.1. Djamillah**

We met Djamillah through a colleague who knows her from her work for a North London Victim Support Service. Djamillah agreed to an interview which was conducted at her workplace. Djamillah shares an office with two other colleagues but we were able to retire to a small room. Djamillah left the door to the room (which led to the corridor) open during the whole interview.

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and also the ambivalent character of a minority status, which is not only a possible source of discrimination but also of pride and superiority (cf. Phoenix 1997).

### 2.1.1. Results of the Biographical Data Analysis

**In 1971 Djamillah was born into a Muslim family who came to Britain (Bedfordshire) from Northern Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> Her parents had married in 1962 when her father was 29 and her mother was 19 years old. The father was a major in the Pakistan army. After his retirement in 1967 he migrated to Britain, where his brother already lived. Both worked in a bakery. The mother followed in 1969, one year after the birth of their first child, a boy. The mother was not educated. Djamillah's family and her uncle's family shared a house. In 1972, 1973 and 1975 three more boys were born.**

As far as the analysis of the biographical data is concerned, we have to take the migration into account: what could the data mean in the English context, what could it mean in the Pakistani context and where are possible sources of conflict?

Pakistani migration into Britain occurred within the tradition of labour migration in the Indian subcontinent since the 19th century. Men from Northern Pakistan were mainly employed by British steamship companies or joined the British army. After the creation of Pakistan in 1947 this tradition continued and many Northern Pakistani men became part of the Pakistan army (Anwar 1985). Generally migration and the absence of male family members for a certain period was regarded as an opportunity to raise their social status (Shaw 1988).

Alison Shaw (1988) found in her ethnographic study of a Pakistani community in Britain that they did not interpret their migration as a break or a decision for a new life, but that they saw their life in Britain in the context of their and their kin's lives in Pakistan. However, Eisenstadt (1953) found that immigrants do not simply recreate their communities but build up a 'new' community in the sense that they adapt to the host society. Even if this is not the immigrants' intention they do respond to the culture of the host society. As 'biradari'<sup>3</sup> is not a static, but a flexible institution, e.g. including friends in the network, we can assume that the Pakistani community in Britain developed a *collective* strategy of coping with the British culture. Both,

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<sup>2</sup> Among the immigrants into Britain after World War II Pakistanis are the third biggest group (after Caribbean and Indians). The main immigration period was during the 1950s and the early 1960s when they had free entry into Britain as Commonwealth citizens. After the Commonwealth Immigrants Act came into force in 1962, economically active people could get a 'work voucher' if there was a job prearranged. This allowed them to come into the country. Whereas among the Caribbean immigrants were many women, immigrants from Pakistan and India were mainly men. Dependants of immigrants were allowed to come without vouchers: between 1962 and 1968 77,966 voucher holders were admitted, compared with 257,220 dependants. Anwar (1985:4) sees the Commonwealth Immigrants Act as a reason why originally temporary migration from Pakistan of male workers turned into relatively permanent immigration of families.

<sup>3</sup> Pakistani communities are based on an intensive and elaborate network of kinship relationships ('biradari') which strongly influences the individuals' activities and expectations of life. It is perpetuated through the institution of arranged marriage, which is normally arranged between first grade cousins.

Anwar (1985) and Shaw (1988) report that living clearly separated from white, British people was an everyday-strategy used by quite a number of migrants.<sup>4</sup>

Even if Djamillah's father's decision to come to England was mainly motivated by the idea of supporting his 'biradari', he might have been irritated by the hostility shown by indigenous British people. Not only were the unions against the immigration of workers from abroad but also in everyday life Pakistani immigrants experienced terrible discrimination. The term 'Paki' became a swearword. Djamillah's father had gained transnational recognition and competencies as a major, and he might have had a positive view of Britain as he was trained in an army which was British influenced. In addition he might have had a rather middle class attitude regarding his status, as he was of a generation of 'new men for a new army in a new country' (he was fourteen years old when Pakistan was created).

The migration of Djamillah's parents followed the common pattern of 'chain migration': a brother, who provided access to work and accommodation, was already in the UK. After a short settlement period the wife followed the husband, and they shared a house as an extended family. They were not lonely, and as their migration was rather late, they found an existing infrastructure (mosque, Muslim clubs and institutions, shops, restaurants) which allowed them to build up their Pakistan-English life.

Djamillah's family came into a pre-existing immigrants' community. This means that a set of rules and patterns already existed about the appropriate response to white-English life style. If the family had any ambitions towards a less regulated or more westernised life style<sup>5</sup> it could have been difficult for them to realise these, as it would mean leaving the Pakistani community in Britain. This would have been a serious decision as the family would have become double outcasts: discriminated against British society as 'Pakis', and without the network of their community, perhaps even without religious integration.

From the Pakistani point of view the father's migration from Pakistan to England was clearly a rise in status and rather 'normal' for an ex-army member. In contrast, from a British point of view, the migration of a rather middle-class man from Pakistan, who had held a high position in the army, into a rather hostile country to become a manual worker was a clear sign of social downward mobility. Whereas Pakistani people might have worried about the future of

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<sup>4</sup> This could be interpreted as a strategy to avoid temptation. It is also possible that this strategy is a response to earlier experiences under British colonial government, a hypothesis which needs further research into British-Pakistan history. Breckner (1997) shows the influence of historical relationships between the country of origin and the host country on the migration process.

<sup>5</sup> An assumption which is quite common among white people, and which they communicate implicitly or explicitly with people from Pakistan (cf. Anwar 1985, Shaw 1988).

his family in England, and especially whether the children would be traditionally educated and learn about their culture, British people might have expected him to be professionally and economically ambitious, for his own and for his children's future. The situation also involves the 'degradation' of a move from a major in the army to a bakery worker, a transformation from a boss to a person who is bossed. Within Pakistani culture this might produce a need for compensation, e.g. the hope for a better future for the children.

A rise in status might have been necessary for Djamillah's family as her parents had been married for six years before the birth of the first child. The father's absence from home in Army life could have been one reason for the postponed start of a nuclear family. Another possible hypothesis is that a family secret 'allowed' the mother a sexual relationship with another man, e.g. her brother-in-law, in order to get children, as the children were all born during their father's absence or during a period when the family shared house with their kin. Eventually the birth of five children, four of them boys, raised the status of the family within their community. On the other hand the pattern of births could be attributed to the good influence of their life in Britain if the couple was unhappily living with the husband's family in Pakistan. The birth of the children is at the same time an issue which is evaluated in a completely different way by the host society, where large families are suspiciously regarded.

From Djamillah's perspective, she grew up as the only girl, which could have raised her status to that of somebody special. On the other hand she could have been neglected as a little child, as her brothers followed quickly. This could have been compensated for by a closer relationship to her father or to another member of the extended family. As the only girl, expectations that she fulfilled all the roles of a girl in a traditional Muslim family were high. As 'somebody special' she could have easily developed in this role, as it was special for her. As the only girl she might also have experienced more 'pressure' from the 'outside' world to become a westernised woman. The lack of a female role model who combines both worlds, the experience of a caring mother, and the lack of sisters could have made it difficult for Djamillah to become her 'own person'.

Until the age of 12 Muslim girls grow up in close relationships with their brothers. As the only girl Djamillah might have developed a double role for herself: she was the good daughter for the parents, whereas she behaved as a boy when playing with her brothers. This hypothesis is strongly supported by the fact that Djamillah spoke English with her brothers and Punjabi with her parents, probably from school age onwards. This could have encouraged a modification of the Muslim gender division in her later life.

**From 1981 Djamillah went to a middle school, and from 1983 she attended an all-girls grammar school. In addition she went with her brothers to a daily Koran school until the age of 12. In about 1982 Djamillah's father retired early due to occupational asthma (flour allergy).**

These data prove that the family lived within the wider Pakistan community, as there was a Koran school nearby. The family's choice to send Djamillah to an all-girls grammar school was a perfect compromise between the Muslim norm (all-girls) and the British and middle class value of social upward mobility (grammar school). All aspirations concerning social upward mobility were now transferred to the children after the father's retirement at the age of 49.

The end of the close relationships to her brothers at the age of 12 and the change of school could have been quite a distressing experience for Djamillah. She might have been confronted with more or new forms of discrimination at the new school, and there was no support from having her brothers around. A possible solution for Djamillah could have been to continue or to expand her multi-faceted life: the good daughter for the parents, a modern western girl at school, an intellectual partner for her father/her brothers (= access to the male world).

The relationship between Djamillah and her father could have intensified after his early retirement. He might have had time for her, he could have helped her with her homework, and he was the only adult man who was available for the adolescent girl (the nuclear family also moved into their own house around this time). If Djamillah was 'somebody special' within the family this might have been continued/intensified. On the other hand Djamillah's father could have been quite distressed after his early retirement for a second time. He could have become a 'problem' within the (female dominated)<sup>6</sup> house, bad tempered, depressed etc. In this case Djamillah could have found refuge at school by becoming a studious girl. Her older brother left home in 1986, going to Manchester to study medicine. This could have encouraged Djamillah to work even harder, in order to also leave her parents' home.

**In 1988 Djamillah had a white boyfriend for a while.**

This data confirms either the assumption that Djamillah led a 'double life': at school a modern girl, at home a good Muslim daughter; or it shows that her parents adapted their children's education to British culture.

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<sup>6</sup> Women traditionally have the say within the home.

**In 1989 Djamillah passed her A-levels exams. She went to London and studied Law. She lived in a mixed hall of residence.**

This data confirms the hypotheses concerning the middle class aspirations of the family. Studying law is also within the professional tradition of the family in public service (army, medicine, and law). It could also confirm the family's increasing orientation towards a British lifestyle.

**Between 1990 and 1992 Djamillah's younger brothers came to London to study. Djamillah and her brothers shared a house. During this time Djamillah started a relationship with a boy from the same part of Pakistan, who came from an uneducated family. After finishing her studies and her professional training Djamillah worked for a solicitor. She also got engaged to her boyfriend. In 1992 he bought a house in their joint name and they married soon after.**

This data confirms that the family and Djamillah tried a 'third way'. They adapted to a modern British life-style without giving up their tradition: after living in a mixed hall of residence which must have been upsetting for the Pakistani community, Djamillah lived with her brothers, which is in accordance with the tradition. The children lived a modern life, becoming well educated, within a traditional framework (brothers watching over the sister). Djamillah did not have an arranged marriage, but her choice could have been an acceptable solution. They married according to tradition after the man - who had a lower social status - provided some economic stability. This data also shows the family's orientation towards middle class values: the lower status was not a problem as long as a certain life-style was guaranteed, e.g. by living in their own house.

Djamillah broke with tradition by not moving into the house of her husband's family. As the couple lived in London it is probable that they had other peers who tried a similar compromising way of life. They would have built up a community of new-generation Pakistanis which would have allowed them a 'modern' life within another form of a 'we'-group.

**In 1993 Djamillah found out that her husband had been married in Northern Pakistan. He had three children with his first wife. Djamillah moved into her parents' house. Four months later she went back to her husband.**

Djamillah's intention of a modern life within a the 'home' tradition failed. Finding out about her husband's traditional way of marrying two women must have been a shock for Djamillah. It faced her family with the 'told you so' attitude of the traditional community that modernisation necessarily leads to failure. This again brought pressure upon Djamillah. Her return to her husband could have been a consequence of this pressure. Also this pressure

would not allow divorce. This option would have meant a final break between Djamillah's family and the Pakistani community. It is probable that Djamillah retired into 'internal emigration' which meant focussing on her professional career, perhaps further educational steps.

If Djamillah's husband interprets his first marriage as over, he will resolve the situation and divorce his first wife. If this is not possible because of tradition, the couple could negotiate a solution. Either way Djamillah's husband will stop the (sexual) relationship with his first wife.

More events confirm the strategy of Djamillah's family of cautious adaptation to modern British life: during the 1990s Djamillah's father became the godfather to her white Christian friend's children; and in 1994 Djamillah's older brother married an English woman who converted to Islam. One of the younger brothers married a woman from Northern Pakistan. This confirms that the family did not give up a 'Muslim way of life'. They maintained the tradition but they integrated the white-English culture into their life.

**In 1995 Djamillah started to work at a North London victim support centre. She also applied for a job in Northern Pakistan. When she was offered the job she turned it down.**

Djamillah tried to 'escape' her husband by changing to a demanding job. Going to Northern Pakistan could have been a solution for her dilemma within the conventions of her culture: away from her husband but in a country with high social control over her life. The latter could be the reason for turning down the job offer - a life in North London promised more personal freedom.

**In 1996 Djamillah started to study for an MA in criminology. At the same time two of the husband's children came to London to live with Djamillah, her husband and one of Djamillah's younger brothers. In spring 1997 she visited Northern Pakistan.**

Djamillah resumed her double life: the modern woman at work and at university, and the traditional woman who regularly visited Northern Pakistan, accepts the husband's other wife, and lives with their children. The latter also allowed her to pretend to have a 'normal' family life with children without having her *own* children.

Djamillah's lived life shows the fine line between integration of different life-styles or having a double life. Obviously being supported by a family who integrated English values into their life-style, Djamillah tried her own method of integration and compromise. This failed when she was confronted with her husband's ultra-orthodox decision to have two wives. Resuming



her old 'strategy' of a double life is now less promising than it was during her adolescence: at that time it was a means *to an end* (to become educated, to live independently, to have a modern marriage, etc.), whereas it is now a solution without a future, partly resignation and partly resistance to the values of the milieu of her upbringing which she does not want any more (arranged marriage, wife's obedience to her husband, divorce as disgrace to the whole family, individual actions valued as the family's action). Leaving her husband is still impossible for Djamillah as it would mean that her family will lose their social status and they might even be expelled from the Pakistani community. Further education, perhaps followed by an academic career, seems to be a hopeful option for Djamillah as it could be connected with work in other cities and countries, and could mean more independence from her husband and her family. Gaining higher social status could enable her to lead a more independent life.

### **2.1.2. Results of the Thematical Field Analysis**

*Djamillah tells her story as one of individualisation, of a development which led from a culture of being a 'we' and of following a predestined path, to a culture of 'I' and of having a choice. She reconstructs her biography as a development story ('it has been a big haul'), not as a story of predestination or fate, nor as a conversion story. Djamillah presents herself as integrating her past, present and future. The issues which are included in this presentation are education, racism (especially in form of discrimination she experienced at school) and gender. According to her self-presentation as an individualised (= having a choice) woman, the emotionally distressing factors of having lost the emotional security of the 'we' group of the Pakistani community, or the disappointment about her husband's deception, remain unmentioned or are only mentioned briefly.*

Djamillah starts her self-presentation after the initial narrative by double-checking the procedure of the interview and the interviewer's intention ('do you want me to start from wherever?', 'shall I just start?'). This makes clear that having a choice is an important issue of Djamillah's development. She gains reassurance that she is not confronted with a concept which she has either to follow or against which she has to fight.

Djamillah starts her reconstruction with a short report, beginning with her birth in Britain, followed by her family background, the children's education and eventually her brothers' professional education. She continues with her own higher education: 'I studied-', then she interrupts herself. The themes mentioned so far are related to her nuclear family which she constructs as constitutive element of her 'we'. She leaves out the extended family which is

so important for Pakistani culture: Djamillah presents herself as part of western European culture.

It is also important that all family members are presented in the context of a process: her parents' migration to England, her brothers and her going through the British education system, her brothers becoming professionals. The order of themes is also connected to the theme 'racism', as the experience of discrimination started with the parents' migration, and the children experienced discrimination mainly during their period of education. And not least Djamillah introduces the gender issue by stating the difference between her brothers' and her own further education. The latter might be further explained when she resumes the report about her studies.

Djamillah interrupts her initial narrative at the moment when she starts to speak about her university studies. This could mark the moment when she was for the first time (successfully) acting as an 'I'. She includes a more distant retrospective report (a mix of report and argumentation) on her grammar school education which she evaluates as 'it was important for me to get through', an evaluation which is made from a point of view of having begun higher education. This part of her initial narrative also includes an argumentation about the low Asian population rate in the area where she grew up. It was at school when she first realised that she was regarded as member of a minority group, that she was different from the majority. Her evaluation is from the perspective of a child who could not understand what happened: 'it seemed so odd'.

Djamillah continues with an argumentation which evaluates her behaviour at that time from her present perspective: she tried to behave like white people. She got into trouble at home as her behaviour challenged her parents, who are 'strict Muslims'. At the same time she places herself in another we-group by referring to a generational division within the family: 'That's us being really rebellious and trying to keep up with the rest of the people of our age.'

Djamillah continues with a thematic and temporal shift, resuming her initial report of going to university. By a mix of report and argumentation she clarifies her father's refusal of these plans and her unique position within the family as the first academically educated girl within the extended family. This first reference to the extended family marks the moment when she eventually left this 'we'. This step is further elaborated by two narratives about her fight for university education, followed by a second narrative about her staying at a mixed hall of residence. Djamillah constructs the beginning of her university education as turning point for a new life: 'now I can laugh but at that time it was so serious'.

Djamillah continues her biographical reconstruction with an elaborate report about her studies, her fight against an arranged marriage after her studies, and the marriage to her boyfriend which did not work out well, but 'that's the mistakes we make in life'. Djamillah refers here to a collective 'we' of 'modern' people. She goes on with her self-presentation as a modern woman with a report about her professional career which she finishes with her current work at the Victim Support Centre. She evaluates her biography: 'it's been a big haul'. Why does Djamillah say 'big haul' instead of the more usual English expression 'long haul'? She refers to the time factor of her development and to the endurance necessary for the haul. She might also express the development of many important issues in her life. This is confirmed as Djamillah continues outlining the problematic issues in her life. She discusses the gender issue and the experience of racism by two long argumentations. She had 'many fights' because of the contradictory norms of British and Pakistani culture, which she generalises as the typical experience of Asian girls who are torn between the 'rest of people' and family. The other issue is introduced by stressing that she had a 'good time' at university, but that she has been a victim of prejudice throughout her life, especially at school, but also even today in North London, where people spit at her and call her a 'Paki'. She evaluates these experiences as 'I have been through that all my life'.

Obviously thinking of how she found her way through these circumstances she recollects memories of her childhood which she presents in the form of a 'condensed situation'. She used to fight with boys, 'that's made me so tough'. Usually they beat her up, but 'I didn't care, I was so angry'. This story is introduced to mark the beginning of her becoming an 'I', a period in her life when for the first time she did something as an 'I', not within the sibling or generational 'we'. At the end of the passage she reveals who supported her fighting as a girl, and also during her later development. It was her father who told her 'don't be weak, you have to fight'. She evaluates her father's attitude towards her: 'he has opposed me in a lot of things ... but he has been like a pillar of support for me throughout- whenever it has been the hard times, my Dad is the only one that's been there'.

Having included these problematic and supportive parts of her life in her account, Djamillah again resumes the report of her life and finishes by telling about her current professional activities (MA, book about victims). At the end she refers to probably the most problematic part of her 'own' life, the unsuccessful marriage which she tries to balance with wide interests and by keeping herself busy. She finishes the reconstruction of the 'big haul': 'that's about it really (1) short'.

Djamillah’s evaluations referring to her experiences during her adolescence give a hint that the ‘big haul’ is her current perspective, whereas during her time at school the coming to terms with disparate realities, expectations and experiences relating to her Pakistani origin and gender identity was predominant. The case reconstruction should uncover further aspects of the ‘fight’. Djamillah probably developed the perception of her life as a ‘big haul’ after her marriage and consequent discovery of her husband’s deceit. Resuming education and changing her professional career into a more demanding field was her repair strategy developed in order to maintain biographical continuity. Education is the issue in her life which allows her to bring the different spheres and experiences of her life together and which has enabled her to develop.

**2.1.3. Case Structure**

	Djamillah	Family	Education	Husband
1971	extended family	life		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• father</li> <li>• mother</li> <li>• brothers</li> <li>• Northern Pakistan</li> </ul>			<b>‘we’</b>
	nuclear family	life		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• father</li> <li>• mother</li> <li>• brothers</li> </ul>		racial harassment society	<b>‘fight’</b>
1980s		tradition	modernity	
↓	<b>‘I’</b>			
	double life and compromising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• illiterate</li> <li>• women at home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘white’</li> <li>• Jeans</li> </ul>	

- boyfriend (platonic)

middle-class aspirations

**'fight'**

suppressive *and*  
supportive

bad *and* good  
experiences

1989

joy

control

freedom

compromise  
but choice

double life, no  
compromising

- independence
- sexuality

1992

backdrop

foreground

marriage

choice

compromise

finished

**a modern person with a nuclear family life**

1993

compromise

supportive

resumed

failure

double life

compromise

independence

**'fight'**

no fight

double life

compromise

**'development'**

Djamillah represents a case of second generation immigrants within a multicultural society. She solves the task of integrating the culture of the country of origin and the culture of the country of arrival through *transformation*. Transformation means the ability to overcome different and contradictory cultural experiences in a process which involves the creation of new meanings of social reality (institutions, relationships, cultural codes).<sup>7</sup>

Transformation happened in different phases and spheres of Djamillah's life:

- Djamillah's family of origin changed from a resource for feeling safe into a threat to her personal development, and later into a resource for support
- Djamillah's self-experience changed from being a 'Pakistani' into being a 'Pakistani woman'
- The experience of being 'the other' and of racial harassment is connected with Djamillah's transformation from tradition to modernity, e.g. experiencing herself as no longer part of an extended family but of a nuclear family, or becoming educated and a professional
- Djamillah's family of origin's strategy changed from strong separation from white-British culture towards integration of both cultures, the culture of the country of origin and the culture of the country of arrival
- Djamillah's attempt to transform an extended family life (her childhood experience) into a nuclear family life (as an adult)
- The meaning of education changed from a source of humiliation to a connecting link between the two cultures, and eventually to a resource for reflexivity, stability and affirmation of her modern personal identity
- The structure of Djamillah's experience changed, first from humiliation to fight, and then to a 'big haul'

1. Djamillah's family had chosen a strategy of separation from the British-Christian milieu.

They tried to live according to the norms and values of the Muslim Culture of their country of origin and the Pakistani community in Britain. Due to this strategy Djamillah

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<sup>7</sup> Every immigrant (and also their children) does transform social reality, and every host country undergoes the process of transformation in interactive relationships with the immigrants. However, there are immigrants who are more structured by transformation than others (who might be more structured by cultural conflicts or the decision to adapt to the new culture).

experienced a strong separation between the private and the public sphere during her upbringing. An extended family life provided a stable context for the child. Djamillah reconstructs this phase as a satisfying period of her life.

Accordingly her memories of this period are presented as 'condensed situations' with a happy undertone ('and I remember when my grandparents used to come over we used to get so happy, and my uncles and aunts they used to come over and that used to be so wonderful, and I remember me and my brothers playing out in the gardens my brother picking up worms and, you know just sort of having it wiggle on his hand and I kept running away getting all scared, saying no, I don't want this, you know this is when we were really little').

2. In contrast Djamillah describes her first contact with the public sphere at school as her first experience of racial harassment. Speaking about this period Djamillah changes to a young schoolgirl's perspective. She talks in long narratives about the hostile world invading her life, as the following excerpt exemplifies: 'I was at school once and I was sitting down doing some maths, and there was a set of cubes that we were doing addition and take away, this was only when I was about six but it's, it's in my head so much that I can even remember it today, ..., it was a table of white girls, ..., and the teacher said, there's six cubes here, take away five, and nobody would touch those cubes, because I'd touched them, and there was this theory that, oh no, they're dirty, you mustn't touch them now cos she's got brown skin, you know and it was so awful and I felt so horrid.'

Speaking about this period Djamillah reconstructs her family of origin as a nuclear family and no longer as an extended family, although the families were still sharing a house. Djamillah reconstructs her experience of racial harassment as a *transformation from tradition to modernity*. Tradition is in Djamillah's case characterised by an extended family life and a milieu where all people are the same ('mechanical solidarity', Durkheim). In contrast, the young schoolgirl experienced modernity as humiliating and dangerous. Her family of origin's strategy of dealing with another culture by separation remained a valid concept for Djamillah.

This interpretation is also evident in Djamillah's description of Northern Pakistan: 'It's just so nice so different than England anyway (1) and people accept you and they love you over there no matter w- you know, they're all the same, they're like you, you know.'

3. Only the children's adolescence made the family concept of separation problematic. Adolescence brings growing importance of the peer group, the questioning of the parents' interpretation of social reality, and the development of independent access to social reality. Living in an area in Britain without a numerous Asian population, and as a high school student, Djamillah's only available peer group was white-British adolescents. She found access to her peer group through adaptation ('I tried to-, you know do the things that all the white people would do, and I tried to talk like them, and I tried to act like them.', 'I had a boyfriend when I was about seventeen, and he was white, and that was only because, I didn't, I didn't fancy him, I was only doing that to mix in with my friends'). Djamillah tried even to hide her skin colour ('I never used to wear shorts or short skirts, I used to wear like tracksuit bottoms and full length thingies so that I showed the least amount of my body as possible').

If there are two widely distinctive cultural concepts in competition as in Djamillah's case there is always the option of conversion, to jump from one world into another. However, between the two worlds there was one connecting link, the family's middle class aspirations which included education for their children: 'all the time he [the father; S.R.] was on our back to study study study all the time.' As a diligent student Djamillah pleased her family *and* she participated in the world of her peers. This compromise, which also allowed daydreams about her future life (double life), was satisfying enough for Djamillah. There was no further need for steps into conversion.

Education allowed Djamillah to do both, to leave the restrictive milieu of her family *and* to please them at the same time: 'I knew I was gonna go to school, I was gonna, get to university, and I thought I'm gonna- that's when I'm gonna do what I want because, I-, they won't be there, to tell me what to do and what not to do.'<sup>8</sup>

The argument about Djamillah's further education at university involved a conflict about her future life as a *woman*: 'In my actually whole, family, I am the only girl that's been educated, or the first one that actually went out and studied.' It marks both the family's change into a more integrating life-style and Djamillah's perspective on her life history as a fight: 'that was another big major fight I had to have with the whole family.' The family's change became manifest in allowing Djamillah to go to university, the brother's marriage to an English woman, and in her father taking the role as godfather for a Christian child. Djamillah describes certain spheres of her life as dominated by fights. As a young

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<sup>8</sup> In recalling this phase of her life the conflict becomes visible through her speech. This is not surprising as conflict concerning personal autonomy has been predominant in her life.



adolescent Djamillah started fighting against racial harassment she experienced from other children. Later 'fighting' became one of the main characteristics in her relationship with her parents. The arguments between her and her family have been focussed on her behaviour as a Muslim Pakistani woman: 'I go out, and I have got jeans on, and if anybody from the family sees me in Western clothes, oh my God, you know she will become a tart, ... , and day in and day out, you have to put up with this.' Djamillah's experience changed from being a *Pakistani* into being a *Pakistani woman*, the latter still a key identity in her life.

4. After leaving her family of origin Djamillah's impulse for integrating both worlds changed. As an adolescent it was the desire to take part in the culture of her peers. Still staying in touch with her family of origin - through following her family's middle-class aspirations and through following her strategy of compromise and double life - Djamillah insisted on denying one of the central traditions of the Muslim Pakistani culture, the arranged marriage. But she was still looking for a compromise: 'I deliberately went out with my husband because he was a Muslim and from our home area cos I thought this would be my parents' perfect choice.' Djamillah opted for one of the central and contradictory values of a late modern society, the right to have, *and* the obligation of having, a choice which includes the risk of failure: 'They tried to get this proposal fixed up [an arranged marriage] but I was having none of it [none of the men who were proposed to her], I said no way, I'll marry who I want, even though it might be the wrong decision.'
5. The failure of her project for a nuclear family life did not bring a change in Djamillah's orientation towards modernity. Having opted for the right to choice Djamillah copes with the failure of her marriage by legitimising it as a right to make mistakes: 'I'm entitled to make mistakes I suppose, we all are.' As a consequence she has resumed the educational track. During her childhood and early adolescence the meaning of education was ambivalent for Djamillah. On the one hand it was a source of humiliation, on the other hand it was a connecting link between the two cultures. During late adolescence it transformed into a resource for reflexivity and stability. Going through a crisis in her private life triggered her resumption of further educational training: 'I've been doing that since last year and I've loved it.'

Education as a resource for upward social mobility was important for her parents but not for Djamillah, who refused a highflying professional career: 'It came to a stage once I was sitting in court and I was going, is this what I want to do? Do I really wanna do this? And I said no, I'm not, ... I started applying for jobs, this is the first job I applied for, it said a

racial harassment officer, ..., and I've enjoyed it so much here for the last two or three years that I've been here, ..., it's just exactly what I want to do, everybody keeps asking me, why did you leave a legal firm, to come here, and you know nobody understands that this work is more important to me, it proves a point to me that I- fighting against something which I couldn't do as a child.' Going through education and becoming a professional allowed Djamillah to act effectively and powerfully within the British system.

Education as a structuring element in biographies brings a time perspective. There is always a beginning and an end of (formal) education, and it involves a process of development, through learning, professional and personal development (in contrast to work or a house-wife's work which can be more structured through everyday routines without temporal horizon). Therefore it is not surprising that Djamillah's view on her biography changes from 'fight' into a 'big haul' after she has resumed education.

## **2.2. Anita<sup>9</sup>**

Anita comes from a Hindu Indian family. Her father's family left Punjab in India in the 1960s. The grandfather was working as an electrician with the British army. He arrived in England first and Anita's grandmother followed later with four of her five sons. Anita's father stayed in India as he was signed up with the army. Later he left the army and followed his family to England. He worked as a trader, the family running a market stall.

Anita's mother came to England from Bombay. She trained as a midwife after she left home at the age of 17. In her mid-20s she came to London before settling in Liverpool. She was lodging with the family of Anita's father. It is not clear whether they fell in love with each other or whether the grandmother encouraged them to fall in love. Anyway, the couple married in 1971. This marriage was regarded in the family as a love marriage and not as an arranged marriage.

In 1972 Anita was born. She was the first baby girl in the family for many years. The nuclear family was not well off at this time as they had lost money through the father's gambling. Eventually they moved to Leeds where the father worked as a bus driver. When Anita was still little, about three or four years old, they moved back to Liverpool. The grandparents ran a shop and they all shared the flat above it. Anita's father worked as a bus driver in

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<sup>9</sup> This is, like in the other cases, an anonymised name. Her original name is also a name which is usual in both Indian and white-British culture.

Liverpool. In 1978 Anita's younger brother was born. The parents and Anita moved into their own house. The grandparents stayed in the flat above the shop but a few years later a series of burglaries and racial harassment started (the shop was on the road to Liverpool football ground). As a consequence the grandparents gave up the shop. They did not buy or rent another flat but moved around and stayed with their sons' families.

After primary school Anita attended a private all-girls school run by the Catholic Church. After sixth form Anita attended a mixed college, where she met her first boyfriend, an Asian Muslim. The parents found out about her boyfriend, and after she failed the first year her parents sent her to India for a few weeks. However, Anita and her boyfriend stayed together and changed college. Anita eventually finished her A-levels in 1989, and went to UEL to study Psychology. At about the same time the relationship with her boyfriend broke up. At the end of the first year Anita's grandmother died. Anita went home and stayed for a few weeks. As a consequence she repeated her first year. She finished her exams in 1993 but did not finish her dissertation. Anita has been employed in community and charity work since the second year of her university studies (projects working with old people and with women in Newham). She also started to build up a second career as a singer. She sees her ideal job as working in an arts centre within the community.

### **2.2.1. Anita's self-presentation in the interview**

Anita had learnt about the SOSTRIS project through one of our previous interviewees and had phoned us up as a possible candidate. The interview took place at university, Anita arriving together with her brother. He wanted to visit the library but was not allowed to enter using Anita's ID card. Therefore he was waiting in the student refectory for her. Nevertheless the interview with Anita took more than two hours.

Anita is a petite young woman with short hair (she had her hair cut after her grandmother's death) which is unusual for young Asian women (though it is a frequently discussed issue in Asian families). She was very interested in the interview and spoke easily about her life, mainly using reports and narrations. Her motivation for the interview might have been to tell somebody at UEL about her pretty awful experiences at UEL. She did not feel supported with her difficulties during her studies, especially when her grandmother died. She seemed to appreciate the fact that I asked her for a more detailed narration about this period of her life.

Anita started her biographical self-reconstruction with her birth in Liverpool. She continued with an introduction to her parents' Indian origins and how they met each other (in the narrative questioning part of the interview she evaluated her parents' marriage as the 'famous example of a love marriage in her family'). She mentioned the economically bad situation of her family after her birth, and she spoke about moving to Leeds and back to Liverpool, her father's work as a bus driver and how the family eventually left the extended family when Anita was six years old.

Anita continued her initial narrative with her educational career. She spoke about the discrimination she experienced, especially at the private secondary school, e.g. she was not allowed to continue learning Latin (though she was the second best in Latin in her class at the time) but was forced to take extra English lessons instead. Anita spoke about her change to the mixed college, how she failed the first year and that she had met her boyfriend there. She concluded with her life from then on as 'dichotomic' - 'sociable' at school and a 'child at home'.

Anita described going to university as the 'start of a new life'. She reported her decision not to carry on with the relationship with her boyfriend, a bit later she spoke about their 'break-up'. She legitimated her decision to study psychology as a refusal to become a high status professional (law or medicine). She evaluated the choice of psychology as a compromise between her own and her parents' aspirations.

Anita went on speaking about her grandmother's death at the end of her first year at university which she evaluated as a 'tough time'. She repeated her first year, and she did not feel supported by tutors. She had some counselling but she 'still coped on her own'. Anita finished the initial narrative after about 30 minutes with a report about her professional career which started with her involvement in community projects, e.g. an Asian women's group against violence.

In the second part of the interview Anita again stressed the importance to her life of going to university; it was her 'pathway to escape'. She also gave a detailed narration about her grandmother's death; she described her grandmother as an important point of reference within the extended family. But Anita felt also liberated after her grandmother's death which became manifest as she had her hair cut. She nearly left out the racial harassment her grandparents experienced in their shop and only after my narrative questions did she speak more in detail about the consequences of the continued burglaries. In the context of her

singing career Anita also introduced her current partner who plays in the band in which she is a singer. He is also of Hindu Indian origin, at the time of the interview working in India.

### 2.3 Raashida

Raashida is a 28 year old psychologist. Her family came from India to Britain in the 1960s. They are Hindus. Her father was an English teacher in India and also a writer. He came to Britain and studied engineering, and in 1968 he went back to India and married. In the same year he returned to Britain and found work as an engineer, his wife following in 1969. Raashida's mother is educated, originally wanting to study maths. Instead she married at the age of 17, and one year later Raashida was born. Since 1970 they have run an off-license. First the family lived in a flat above the shop and in 1977 moved into a house opposite the shop. In the early 1990s Raashida's father started writing again, and he has also joined a theatre group.

The parents, Raashida and her younger brother lived as a nuclear family. The children's upbringing was rather liberal and the parents were not strict about them going out. Raashida remembers bullying and racial harassment when she was a child, e.g. other children spitting at her. At the shop drunk customers once hit her mother and they sometimes did not want to pay. The police in Leicester used to help her parents when such events happened. The family life was structured by the rhythm and the needs of the shop. Usually her parents took time off in turns for holidays, but there were also two family holidays, once in Wales and once on the Isle of Wight.

Towards the end of her school education Raashida started a relationship with a Muslim man of her age who was a worker. After having finished her A-levels Raashida moved to London to study psychology and her boyfriend also moved to London. She lived first in the university's hall of residence before sharing a house with two friends. Her boyfriend also lived there though he kept his own flat. Raashida did not tell her parents 'officially' although they might have known of their relationship as her boyfriend also visited her when she stayed in Leicester with her parents.

At the age of 16 Raashida became involved in Labour Party politics in Leicester. After she moved to London she changed her political orientation ('less naïve') and became involved in black feminism and gender politics activities. Later she worked as a volunteer for a refuge for Asian women who escaped domestic violence. This was an innovative and also

provocative project as domestic violence in Asian families was taboo a few years ago. Raashida also participated in a variety of Asian artist projects.

After her degree Raashida applied for an MA in health psychology. She was accepted but she declined the offer. Instead she decided to go back to Leicester. There she applied unsuccessfully for jobs. She then came back to London where she started to work for a film company. Raashida worked on short-term contracts in a highly competitive field, a decision which was not appreciated by her parents who would have preferred her to do an MA. At the same time Raashida resumed her voluntary work for women's and mental health projects in East London. After about two years Raashida found the financially unstable situation with the film company too exhausting and she started to apply for jobs as a psychologist. In 1995 she started work at a day centre for the elderly in Newham. Old people from all ethnicities visit this day centre but the majority come from an Asian background.

Raashida and her boyfriend stayed together from the days when they finished school. They wanted to marry but her boyfriend asked Raashida to convert to Islam which she refused to do. They separated when Raashida returned to London. Her parents keep asking her to agree to an arranged marriage which Raashida refuses to do. In contrast to Djamillah's case Raashida does not interpret the situation as her parents' attempt to impose their traditional will on her but she sees her parents' desire to see their daughter settled down. She thinks that her parents would also like to become grandparents. She feels an obligation on her but is focussing at the moment on her job. Since splitting up with her long-term boyfriend she has started another relationship with an Asian man who is Hindu. Although this relationship is at a difficult stage at the moment Raashida is optimistic that it will continue.

### **2.3.1. Raashida's self-presentation in the interview**

Raashida is an energetic looking young woman with long hair. There were two meetings with Raashida, the interview lasting about four hours altogether. The interviews took place at Raashida's work place after she had finished work. At the first meeting Raashida gave a report on her biography of about half an hour. She then answered the narrative questions in detail, both with long passages of narratives and argumentations. In accordance with the structure of her initial narrative the first interview focussed on her later life since she came to London to study. During the second interview we spoke mainly about her childhood and youth.

Raashida started from the time when she moved from Leicester to London where she studied psychology. She continued with a report about the time when she looked for jobs in Leicester and in London. After this introduction she asked rhetorically 'what else could be interesting?'. She spoke then about her upbringing in Leicester, her 'small' nuclear family and her school education. She continued with an argumentation about Leicester's multi-cultural character. A longer passage of mixed report and argumentation followed. She first introduced her father, then her parents as shop-owners, and she described her childhood as 'brought up in a shop'. This made her 'being used to people'. She also had many friends who lived nearby. She goes back to Leicester for a visit every month. She argued that her hometown has changed a lot, there is now a large student community. She does 'not recognise the place anymore', on the other hand she does 'not consider herself as a Londoner'. However, at home she is regarded as a Londoner. Raashida finished this part of her initial narrative with the idea that she will perhaps settle down abroad. In the last part of her initial narrative Raashida described her work in the day centre which she evaluated as 'good work'. She sees her work as a 'befriending service' as many old people are alone and do not have a family any more. She evaluated her psychology studies as 'the right thing' for her and she regrets that she did not pay more attention to her studies. She is 'craving to go back to college' and is thinking about doing an MA.

For Raashida's self-presentation in the interview it is typical that she often presented two versions of a story. She said that 'she found her way easily' when she came to London as her parents' education style was not strict, and that it was easy for her to make friends, but then she also spoke about difficulties she had when she started her university studies and that she felt lonely. On the one hand she told that she was 'brought up in the shop', and especially how she and her brother helped during the evenings in the shop. When asked for more detailed stories she described her parents' division of labour. Her father looked after the shop during the evening when her mother stayed at home with the children. These two versions depend on the theme: Raashida told a different version depending on whether she was speaking about her father ('brought up in the shop') or about her mother (at home with the children). Another example is her evaluation that she did not see herself as a Londoner but that she then she told in detail about her involvement in Asian (sub-) cultural activities in Newham, and that she identified herself with 'being part of a new culture in London'.

Raashida's self-presentation in two versions could be a consequence of feeling torn between two cultures. However, Raashida did give less an impression of being torn than of being able to adapt to different situations and realities. This could be a result of contradictory experiences, e.g. with her parents who were on the one hand rather liberal, and on the other

hand still attached to strict traditions. It could be a (successful) coping strategy for these contradictory experiences. Raashida expressed the positive aspect of being part of two cultures in the interview: 'we can have the best of both worlds'. She saw it as a generational aspect, that people of her age enjoy it now, but that at first it was a problem for them.

#### **2.4. Discussion of the second generation immigrants**

The social field which embraces the three cases of second generation immigrants is a life in two cultures. As children of immigrants they all have to manage a life *in* two cultures as is also confirmed by recent research (and not a life *between* two cultures as older research stated) (*references*). According to the central cultural question, the risk faced by our interviewees in this category is less a risk of poverty and deprivation in the 'classic' sense but more the risk of (literally) 'social' exclusion.

Djamillah represents this case most clearly as she is not at risk of poverty but at risk of 'social' exclusion if expelled from her family and the cultural context of her family of origin. Her main resource is her good education, due to the upward social mobility orientation of her family of origin. Her strategy of transformation is at the same time a risk factor and a resource as it threatens her belonging to the Pakistani community, but it allows her more independence.

This at the same time brings the risk of being excluded from motherhood. As long as Djamillah's marriage remains childless there is still the hope that she will be able to leave her husband one day. Once she is the mother of his children the bond will be eternal; being a single mother is not one of her options. Single motherhood would definitely exclude her from the Pakistani culture in Britain. This exemplifies the contrast to Janette whose family is of Caribbean origin who we interviewed as a single mother (Rupp/Chamberlayne 1997). Though Janette is also characterised by transformation Janette and Djamillah act on different levels. Djamillah acts on a cultural level; she brings the values of white-British life into the Pakistani-British culture and vice versa. Janette's activities aim at relationships and especially at the relationship between her partner and her, and between her children and their father. Single motherhood was an option for Janette as it is acceptable in the culture of Caribbean immigrants and in her family. There is also a transformation process in Janette's case, as she became a single parent for different reasons to her grandmother and her mother. The older generations escaped from violent relationships with men and did not allow



further contact between the children and their fathers. Janette has been trying to transform the quality of the relationship and also the relationship between her children and their father.

The main difference between Janette and Djamillah lies in their different cultural traditions. Janette comes from the liberal culture of Caribbean immigrants into Britain. Djamillah is part of the strongly normative Muslim-Pakistani culture in Britain. Both cases show how children of immigrants are living in and transforming their culture of origin and white-British culture. However, the field of their actions is different. Djamillah focusses on the more normative field of British and Pakistani culture, she contributes to the transformation of values and norms in the public sphere. Janette acts within the field of social relationships, also transforming values and norms, but within the private sphere. Djamillah's possibilities for action in the private sphere are restricted as long as the normative bias of her culture of origin does not change.

Compared to Djamillah Anita is professionally less successful and does not fulfil her parents' middle class aspirations. But she also appears to be under less pressure. Some of the issues of Djamillah's struggle were in Anita's case already sorted out by her parents' generation. Her parents did not have an arranged marriage but a love marriage, her mother had left her home and gained a professional career. They had also already developed a kind of a Indian-British identity which became manifest for instance through the name they gave their first child, and building up a nuclear family life with two children.

All three cases share the experience of racial harassment during their childhood, particularly in school education. They interpret their involvement in community projects as a consequence of these experiences. However, there are differences between them. Djamillah now fights the fight she could not fight as a child. She brings the minorities' and immigrants' experiences to the white-British public. Raashida's involvement in contrast brings 'Western' standards into the Asian community; she challenges traditionalism by bringing domestic violence or the solitude of old people into the Asian and white-British public sphere. Djamillah's cultural background is more separated from white-British culture than Anita's and Raashida's background. Without speculating about the religious reasons (Islam vs. Hinduism) we can see that Anita's and Raashida's families were, as shop-owners, more in touch with white British culture than Djamillah's family. Even though their experiences as shop-owners were rather bad and characterised by racial harassment they allowed the children an orientation towards the morally more positive aspects of white British culture and enabled them to bring these into the culture of their families of origin.

This brings the *generational* aspect into the discussion as all three of them feel part of a social network<sup>10</sup> (Raashida and Anita more than Djamillah). They see themselves as actively participating in the creation of something new, a transformation as we discussed it in Djamillah's case. Ironically, Djamillah, who is actively creating and transforming, sees herself less as part of a social movement than Raashida and Anita who might end up with more conventional lives (this is hypothetical as they are not yet married).

Among the three cases Anita represents the case that has problems finding an appropriate generation unit (Mannheim). She distinguishes herself from other second generation Asian immigrants as she had an untypical role as a girl, being the first girl in the extended family. Anita was special just by being a girl. Her grandmother might have been fond of her which would explain the close bond between them, and also Anita's crisis after her grandmother's death (she lost the person to whom she was very special). In addition Anita comes from a family with a love marriage in the previous generation. Therefore Anita's biography is less structured by 'fight' than Djamillah's. In a positive sense Anita had the freedom to fail at university, to build up a more risky professional career and to follow her artistic aspirations. She has to come to terms with her failure even though she is not unhappy with her professional situation. She also has to take care not to be excluded from the unit of the second generation of Asian immigrants, who might be more characterised by fight and the obligation to have a successful professional career, than by a certain amount of freedom and the choice for the *right* professional career. Her experiences of racial harassment, on the other hand, make it difficult for her to join the generational unit of young academics who are more structured by the question of the quality of their professional career, a question which is more prevalent among the white British. At the same time Djamillah, Anita and Raashida show us the link between the second generation immigrants and the white members of their generation: they are all confronted with the deregulation of the labour market which brings the need for a biographical orientation independent from the labour market for all of them.

*Djamillah and Steven (interviewed for the first category – unemployed graduates)*

*Djamillah and Steven share the desire for a qualitatively satisfying professional career.*

*Djamillah was on the way to a high-flying career as a lawyer. She changed her ambitions as*

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<sup>10</sup> Social network in the sense of an underlying structure of a social movement (Melucci 1989). The latter includes also mass mobilisation which is not (yet) visible among the second-generation immigrants in Britain.

*a result of the failure of her marriage. A more demanding<sup>11</sup> job matched her needs for several reasons:*

- the new job brought more freedom and independence from her husband*
- it allowed her to balance her unsatisfying situation in her private life with a more satisfying task at work*
- the failure of her marriage intensified/clarified the need for change in the culture of her family of origin. She now works in an agency which influences both cultures, British-Pakistani and White-British culture.*

*Steven made the decision for a qualitative satisfying career during his studies as he refused to adapt to the commercial orientation of his department.*

*Djamillah came from a rather middle-class family who had experienced social downward mobility. The regaining of higher social status was transferred to the children. Although Djamillah had to fight for education her parents were nevertheless supportive, and the higher status of her family in the past worked as 'cultural capital'. Steven's parents were also supportive and made the right decisions during Steven's childhood regarding his education. The lack of social and cultural capital in addition to the bad image of young black men (compared to young Asian women who are regarded as studious) made it more difficult or even impossible for him to develop the 'skill' to enter the labour market. In Steven's case the strategy of prioritising the quality of a professional career is a result of frustration with the educational system and the labour market. In contrast Djamillah chose a qualitatively more satisfying career as a strategy to balance the failure of her marriage.*

All three cases share the experience that the question of an arranged marriage is the crunch question ('Gretchenfrage') of their cultures' and families' tolerance. They all went through periods of enormous pressure and they all have had to fight for their right to choice and making mistakes, as Djamillah put it. It is surprising that all three of them started their (sexual or platonic) relationships with partners from another culture and/or religion. The ability to fight is in all three cases grounded in the consciousness of being part of a 'rebellious' younger generation.

Our sample of Asian immigrants is characterised by social downward mobility in the first generation, the postponement of social upward mobility in the next generation, and the emphasis the parents laid on family and community relations. This brought a specific range of tensions for the adolescent second generation: education, future profession, family life

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<sup>11</sup> 'demanding' not on the level of time and energy but on the level of 'personal involvement and investment'.

and the norms of the community were all dependent on parental support and control. Whereas for white-British adolescents social institutions can work as an accepted alternative/corrective to the family of origin, the Asian-British adolescents experienced them as an alternative which threatened their membership of their community. Djamillah's, Anita's and Raashida's sense of being part of a social network or even movement is grounded in this shared history.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly it matches the experiences of other members of their generation, e.g. Steven, who draw similar conclusions about their lives though for other reasons (cf. the Djamillah-Steven comparison above). But it allows all of them to feel part of a wider network/movement which leaves the restrictions of the milieu of their upbringing *and* of the deregulated labour market behind.

## 2.5 The Refugee Cases

The refugees are in a structurally different position to the second-generation immigrants. Whereas the legal status of the latter group is safe and also their economic and social status is often no longer at the bottom of the ladder, refugees suffer from insecurity in nearly all parts of their lives. Their legal status is often unclear or temporarily limited; some of them live in a state of absolute illegality with the danger of being expelled from the country as soon as the police find them. Although many refugees are educated and come from a rather middle class background in their countries of origin they are often at the bottom of the ladder regarding their social status in this country. This includes the fact that their professional training is often not acknowledged. Other strands of insecurity are their families; they often do not know whether their family members who remained are still alive. Not least there is the political situation in the countries they left, hopes and fears connected with the situation at home, and the knowledge of being restricted in their influence at home. All this threatens their physical and mental health, and in addition many refugees bring health conditions with them when they enter the country.

From a biographical perspective all this means that refugees are in a vicious circle. At the least they have experienced an interruption in their biographical strategies and often their lives have been threatened, and they need to build up new perspectives and new strategies which ideally are connected with their lives in their country of origin. But this is almost

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<sup>12</sup> Neal from Cat.1, born in 1969, comes from a white-British family. He also gave up a promising professional career. However, he regards himself as part of a (predominantly white) social movement based on New Age and environmental issues. Angela from Cat.3, born in 1968, who is white-South African, did not grow up in Britain nor did Morag from Cat.1, born in 1968. They are both not part of a social network, Morag missed it more than Angela did. Colin (born in 1972), from Cat.1, of Afro-Caribbean origin however participates in this network.

impossible because of their insecure status. We could therefore expect that feelings of insecurity and confusion are likely to be found in the interviews with refugees.

### **2.5.1 Ahmet**

Ahmet was born in 1954 in north-eastern Somalia (Ericabo). His parents were from different tribes. The mother was still a teenager whereas Ahmet's father was already an old man who died when Ahmet was six months old. The father was of high status as he worked as a mediator between the cultural and official law.

In 1970 Ahmet moved to Mogadishu where his brother and other family members lived. He finished his high school education there, followed by National Service which involved four months teacher training followed by eight months work as a teacher in a small village. Back in Mogadishu Ahmet studied medicine from 1973 to 1979 at the recently founded Medical School. The training included work as a junior doctor in a little village. In 1980 Ahmet went to Italy for postgraduate training as an Orthopaedist. In 1982 he married a woman from Somalia and they had one daughter together. In 1987 the family went back to Somalia where Ahmet found work in a hospital in Mogadishu.

Ahmet's further biographical data are easy to extract from his self-presentation as he mainly followed in his reconstruction of his life-story the chronological order of events from the beginning of the civil war on. (There is one hypothesis to derive from this way of reconstructing the order - the order of events is so important because he lost the order in his life, or as Ahmet said, he is 'mentally confused'.)

#### **2.5.1.1 Ahmet's self-presentation in the interview**

The interview with Ahmet took place in the mental health department of a West London hospital where Ahmet works in a project on the mental health of refugees. When I met him I thought that he was working there as a medical doctor and he obviously manages to present himself as a doctor (the secretary addresses him as Dr. X, you have to make an appointment with him, you have to ring at the door and ask for Dr X, and also his body language corresponds with the body language you expect of a medical doctor). As we will see later Ahmet's self-presentation is based on the necessity of maintaining his professional and personal identity. It is grounded in Ahmet's socialisation into the medical profession.

**The structure of the interview: Ahmet's reconstruction of his life history from the perspective of a refugee:** we had clarified Ahmet's questions about the project and the interview during the small talk while setting up the tape recorder. After the initial question Ahmet started easily to tell his life story, mainly as a report. In the narrative questioning part of the interview Ahmet reconstructed his life history mainly through reports and argumentations but also through narrations prompted by the questions. Though he is not a 'story teller' he managed to give me a rather impressive picture of his upbringing in Somalia (in the course of the interview he told me that there is no tradition of story telling in Somalia; people give short answers when asked about something in the past). Argumentations mainly focussed on parts of his life which are painful: his failed marriage, missing his daughter, his problems in Britain. In contrast other difficult experiences (like racial harassment in Italy) are presented as narratives. It is very possible that these experiences are now, told from a refugee's perspective, 'finished' for him.

At the beginning of his initial narrative Ahmet introduced himself as a Somali by nationality. He continued with a report starting with his birth in 1954, and he then gave a short explanation about his date of birth which is a construction to respond to European standards, as date of birth is of no importance in the country where he grew up. Ahmet interrupted the report several times to include similar short argumentations like this. These argumentations had a double function, on the one hand to provide background information for the interviewer, on the other hand to clarify the differences between Somalia and Europe, to explain the 'other'.

Ahmet resumed his report with the moment when he moved into the capital of Somalia, Mogadishu. He focussed on his educational and professional career until the beginning of the civil war in 1991. (From then on Ahmet included more and more dates in his reconstruction.) Next he introduced the start of his family, and immediately afterwards he spoke about the separation from his family because of the civil war ('I have to take the family out'). His wife and his daughter went into a refugee camp in Kenya. Ahmet returned to Somalia. For four more months he worked in Mogadishu. Together with a group of Italian doctors he then moved to Berbra where they set up a group working for physically handicapped victims of the war. In March 1992 the civil war 'overran' Berbra. Ahmet went to Mogadishu again working as an orthopaedic surgeon. But the 'distraction' became too much; he 'couldn't stand it anymore'.

Ahmet then mentioned that he is a Muslim but that he had made connections with the Catholic Church during the civil war. These connections allowed him to organise further professional training at the Royal College in Dublin which he finished in December 1993. From Dublin Ahmet came to London and asked for political asylum. He legitimised this decision by saying that his family was already here. In October 1995 he was allowed to stay for at least one year. He mentioned then that he had separated from his family in the meantime, and that his child lived nearby.

Ahmet wanted to continue his work in the 'medical profession'. He therefore attended a one-year-course in medical English terminology which he finished in 1995. His medical training is not recognised by the British Medical Association and it was a 'dashed hope' when he was told in early 1996 that he needs a further six months unpaid placement in a British hospital. Ahmet then evaluated his situation as 'physical safety, but as mentally confusion and torture'. Ahmet started working with the Somalian community and, as he knew the differences between the Somalian and the British health system by then, he did 'mediation work'. In May 1996 he started to work as a mental health support worker in a mental health project on refugees (this project is based in the hospital where the interview took place). This work was contributing to his 'psychological well-being', but the project finished in December 1997.

The first narrative question (about his upbringing in the North Eastern part of Somalia) produced a 'second version' of his life history. This time Ahmet focussed more on social life, and he introduced the tribal divisions in Somalia. Ahmet described life in the little town where he grew up, 'all the tribes lived in this town', he was well integrated and never felt 'as a fatherless child'. He first saw his father's grave at the age of 15 (this was the age when he started to ask for his father's story, and it is also the age when you are considered an adult - these two pieces of information Ahmet told me later). He legitimised his move to Mogadishu not only in terms of his education but also because family members were already there. Also, as in his hometown, in Mogadishu he 'did not feel the tribal division'.

Ahmet constructed a contrast between Mogadishu (a 'cosmopolitan city') and his hometown, as the gender division was much stronger in his hometown. He exemplified this argumentation by the story of how he fell in love with a girl in Mogadishu and the girl came to visit him, an event unthinkable in his hometown. Ahmet stated that he did not go back to his hometown at that time, even though his mother lived there.

After this long explanation about the differences between the countryside and Mogadishu Ahmet returned to his educational career. He stated that he had many friends from different tribes at High School. He then spoke about the National Service (which brought him in touch with even more people from different tribes and which brought him to another tribal area of Somalia - Ahmet gave me this information later in the interview). Ahmet spoke in this second reconstruction about his life history, then about some difficulties with his university studies when he had to learn Italian (the lectures came from Italy). He then evaluated his degree as possibly identifying him with the 'middle class' from then on. He finished this second reconstruction with a report about work, his life in Italy (marriage, daughter) and a long final evaluation: he knew 'why he was in Italy', he wanted to go back, he had some 'particular experiences in Italy' but they 'didn't go through his skin'.

The argumentative parts in the interview have mainly two themes:

- he misses his country, he wants to do something in/for his country, he wants to go back to Somalia, the situation now is completely different from his life in Italy as then he always knew that he would go back
- how important it is for him to work as a medical doctor

From the biographical data as well as from Ahmet's told life story the importance of being a medical doctor is salient. Ahmet's family background did not prepare him for a medical career. As a young man he felt he was a member of a community/generation unit (Mannheim), the up and coming young (and new) middle class of Somalia. He legitimised his decision to study medicine: 'It was because people of my age group were saying a school of medicine is good ... you have never thought of enrolling or deciding your future in a certain way, it was decided by your age group.' After his graduation he started to work as a medical doctor: 'from a student you became really someone in your country which they respected'. This transition was not easy for Ahmet who as a junior doctor was the only medical doctor in a hospital in the countryside. This hospital was responsible for 15,000 residents and in addition for 60,000 nomads who also lived in this area: 'when you finish your graduation you do have certain experience under supervision in the field of treating human beings but, when you are by yourself- the responsibility is put on your shoulders,... , you are frightened out of your wits, ..., very few things you have done under supervision, it was very frightening, ..., push myself to the limit, because there is no one whom you think you could ask something and say explain to me how that's done, because you- there's no point, they may start looking at you and say doctor, there is that patient, what can we do and you say (2) you just can't say I don't know.' Ahmet saw his colleagues in the same position and he did not want to be the one who gave up. But he felt the need for further training: 'it was a great thing in saying



you need it'. It was not available in Somalia at that time so he applied for a programme which allowed him post graduate training in orthopaedic surgery in Italy. In the short-term Ahmet escaped the awkward situation at work and the socialisation process into *being* a medical doctor, but in the long-term he continued his socialisation into the medical profession through five years of professional training. He also succeeded in finding a role in the medical field as an orthopaedic specialist which took the pressure of 'everyday' diagnosis away from him. Through the further professional training Ahmet also gained time to learn the role of a male *middle-class* Somali adult. This process was reinforced by Ahmet's marriage to a Somali woman. Ahmet saw this process finished when he returned to Somalia where the civil war had now begun. Ahmet's professional identity is connected with his consciousness as a member of the new Somali middle class. He expected a change in the government but not a civil war which involved the vast majority of the Somali population, and which destroyed his, so far successful, biographical strategy.

At the end of the interview Ahmet spoke about an attempt to create a new family when he started a relationship with a Somali woman who also lives as a refugee in Britain. They have a child but the relationship ended. This second attempt to build a family has made Ahmet's dilemma worse. If he opts for staying in touch with his children he will stay in Britain but will not be able to work as medical doctor. If he opts for his professional career, e.g. by moving to Italy, he will lose contact with his children. Therefore it is not surprising that Ahmet's hope of a quick end to the civil war in Somalia runs through the interview. Only his return to Somalia with his children would allow him both to live close to his children and to work as a medical doctor. On the other hand, having a safe future in Britain would allow Ahmet to build up a new role in order to gain the social status he wants.

### **2.5.2 Ali**

Ali is a 40 year old refugee from Ethiopia. He is an agricultural engineer and was working for international organisations before he came to London. At the time of the interview he was working for a local organisation that works with refugees. Soon after the interview he changed to a bigger charity for refugees. We came in contact with him through a colleague at the University who works with him. Both myself and the research administrator phoned him and explained the project and the procedure of biographical interviewing. We made an appointment to go to his workplace.

Ali shared an office with others and I therefore asked him for a more private place to conduct the interview. We then went into another room which was nearly empty apart from a few

filing cabinets and a table and chairs. However, as I found out during the interview, this room had the disadvantage of colleagues coming through occasionally on their way to another office which was accessed through this storeroom.

As usual, I explained the project and the interview procedure to Ali before I started the interview. To my surprise Ali responded with astonishment and told me that he had not known that it was an interview about his life story. He had thought the interview was about his work. After a short discussion we agreed that we would start the interview and that he would then decide what he was going to tell me.

After the initial question ('I'd like you to tell me your life story ...') Ali started a very short report. He mentioned that he came to Britain as a refugee from Ethiopia in 1991. In Ethiopia he was working in a UN project for Somali refugees. He then shifted to his present situation. He has been living in Britain for six years and he will soon change his job. He described his current work which involves working with refugees from 40 countries. His organisation provides them with basic support. He was also involved in co-operating with other institutions, locally and in Greater London.

I thanked him for this account and asked him to tell me more about the time when he came from Ethiopia to Britain. Ali answered with a long argumentation. It was a cultural shock for him though he spoke English fluently, and he stressed the great importance of support from the community. 'To get a decision', which means the decision about whether he will get political asylum or not, 'takes a few months'. Ali referred also in a very general way to the experiences of a refugee: to live as part of a minority, the experience of racism, and the problems of finding a job. I realised that he was not willing to speak about the experiences which led to his decision to leave Ethiopia. Perhaps I should have made this manifest; instead I decided to follow his priority of speaking about his situation in Britain. The only period of his life about which he spoke as a personal experience was the time before he was acknowledged as a refugee. He described the waiting process which lasted for two years (not 'a few months'), sitting in a room, without a job, and waiting for the letter. Ali wrote poetry to cope with this situation. But as soon as I asked him about the situation when his case was heard he refused to answer. He legitimised the court's decision that his case 'was a rather strong case', therefore he has always been quite optimistic that his claim will be acknowledged. This time I asked him whether he would speak about this and he refused. I remember that I was quite struck by this legitimisation as Ali must know that there are many strong cases which are not acknowledged, especially as he is working with refugees. I felt that his legitimisation was probably his coping strategy for feelings of guilt; he might feel guilty

because of those he left in Ethiopia (his family is not in Britain) and because of those who are also 'strong cases' but nevertheless not acknowledged.

### **2.5.3 Discussion of the Refugee Cases**

Ahmet sees his future as dependent on the possibility of returning to Somalia as soon as possible. Ahmet was willing to leave his native country for a limited period with the prospect of a return. When he had realised that the civil war in Somalia would continue for a long time, he pursued the strategy of building a second life in Britain, based on his transferable skills as a medical doctor. With the failure of this strategy Ahmet fell back on the hope of a quick return to Somalia. Ahmet is now at the point of realising that his professional identity is in danger if he cannot work as a medical doctor, and that he has to build up another career if he cannot return quickly to Somalia.

Ali did not speak about his life before he came to Britain. This could be a result of traumatic experiences before, especially as he stressed twice in the interview that he was a 'strong case'. In contrast to Ahmet Ali could continue his professional career in Britain once he was accepted as a refugee. This could also contribute to his endeavour to remain silent about his past as he tries hard to look forward. However, this is a very tentative conclusion as it is difficult to interpret such a short and thematically restricted interview in a biographical way.

### **2.6. Discussion of the 'ethnic minority' cases**

The cases of Ahmet and Ali are fundamentally different from the cases of the second-generation Asian immigrants. They are different regarding their

- generation
- gender
- life phase (past and future horizon, work, start of a family)
- legal status
- motivation for living in Britain
- the dominant themes in their narratives (fight, transformation and development on the side of the second generation immigrants, mourning for the home and life they have lost on the side of the refugees)

It is therefore especially difficult to draw conclusions about Ahmet and Ali, not only because they are not analysed in-depth but also because Djamillah is a different but not a well-matching contrasting case.

The most salient difference relates to the future horizons. Whereas Djamillah is, in spite of her rather depressing private situation, still full of hope for her future, Ali and Ahmet are more focussed on their past. Both had already built up a life in their country before they left involuntarily. This could contribute to another difference between the second-generation and the refugee cases: Djamillah, Anita and Raashida feel more in control over their situation and their actions than do Ali and Ahmet. Ahmet's case in particular illustrates the crisis triggered by the loss of control over his life. Therefore we can conclude that it needs the feeling of being in control of your life to build up a future perspective, and vice versa. The unstable situation of refugees concerning their professional, emotional and economic state prevents them from building up a 'second life'.

Djamillah, Anita and Raashida on the other hand went through periods of 'fight' to take control of their lives. This fight was triggered by the experience of an alternative world to the culture of their families. They present themselves as even more in control of their lives than the 'objective' situation suggests, especially in Anita's situation with her unfinished degree. Djamillah maintained this self-presentation even after the failure of her marriage, which could also have been a turning point. We can build up the hypothesis that Anita's, Raashida's and Djamillah's original problem - 'torn' between two cultures' - has turned into a strength which allows them to face and to manage even difficult phases in their private and professional lives.

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