CONTESTED TERRAINS: NEGOTIATING ETHNIC BOUNDARIES IN THE CITY OF LEICESTER SINCE 1950

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Leicester

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University of Leicester, 2004
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tables, Figures and Maps</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. INTRODUCTION 1
   - Terminology
   - Methodology
   - Interviews
   - Ethics
   - Outline

2. THE BACKGROUND TO ASIAN SETTLEMENT 20
   - The national context: Asians in Britain
   - The local context: Leicester

3. CONSTRUCTIONS OF WHITENESS 40
   - Mapping world views
   - Narratives of exclusion
   - Narratives of inclusion
   - Redefining the 'other'

4. TRANSITIONS 81

5. THE HOUSEHOLD 100
   - Finding a new home
   - The ideal Asian household
   - Reconstructing household relations
   - Women: the life course and constraints
   - Negotiating constraints
   - Recreating culture: continuity and change

6. THE NEIGHBOURHOOD 145
   - Boundaries of exclusion
   - Beyond the neighbourhood
   - Boundaries of inclusion
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is dedicated to Alice Louise Weddell.

Firstly I would like to thank the many people whom I have interviewed who showed considerable hospitality and gave me access to their lives. Thanks to the advice of members of the sociology department, including, Professor Jack Barbalet, Nick Jewson, Syd Jeffers and Dr. Chris Pole. Thanks to Professor Gurpal Singh and Peter Benson and to staff and colleagues in the urban history centre and the school of historical studies. Thank-you to the stimulating comments provided at the post colonial seminar and the women’s history network. I am especially grateful to my supervisor Professor Richard Rodger for his time and effort and for his crucial insights, criticisms and suggestions, they are much appreciated. I am also grateful for the financial support provided by the University for the funding of the Ph.D.

A special thanks to Cynthia Brown for her valuable advice and support and other staff at the East Midlands Oral History Archive. I would also like to thank the staff at the National Sound Archive, British Library and Highfields Library for their help.

I am indebted to Mohammed Bashir for his guidance, stimulating discussion and help in gaining access to the respondents and Kip Phillips for his time and help in arranging the interviews. I must also thank Dr. Kathy Burrell and Louise Garnier for their friendship.

Finally I would like to thank my family, particularly my mum, for all the encouragement and support and my deepest heartfelt thanks to Richard Courtney for his constant support, his intellectual engagement in my work and for living through this Ph.D. with me.
TABLES, FIGURES AND MAPS

Table 1. Ethnic group composition of the population of Leicester and Great Britain, 1991 26
Map 1. Leicester City Wards, 2002 29
Figure 1. Religious Differences in Leicester, 1983 31
GLOSSARY

BL: The British Library
CHC: Community History Collection
EMOHA: East Midlands Oral History Archive
EEC: Ethnic Elders Collection
HL: Highfields Library
HRA: Highfields Remembered Archive
LOHAC: Leicester Oral History Archive Collection
NSA: National Sound Archive
ROLLR: The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland
This thesis takes Leicester as a local case study to investigate the impact of Asian migration from the Indian subcontinent and East Africa on the white inhabitants and the migrants themselves. Oral history formed the basis of the research, and this allowed a unique insight into the subjective experiences and perspectives that shaped the respondents’ daily lives. The thesis elucidates how and why people used racial narratives to exclude Asians, the influence of inter-ethnic contact, and the situations whereby white respondents’ included Asians. This revealed the complex and contradictory nature of white attitudes which was not reducible to racism. The main part of the thesis concerns the difficulties encountered by the Asian newcomers, with a particular focus on the coping strategies they developed to pursue viable lives. These issues are examined in various contexts: the home, the neighbourhood, education and the workplace. These were not neutral spaces but represented key sites where power relations were highly contested.

Findings highlight how the Asian respondents encountered diverse forms of racial exclusion and it is argued that perceptions and experiences depended on the dynamic intersection of a complex factors. Gender was fundamental to the respondents’ experiences. Asian women faced both post-colonizing forces and patriarchal systems within the Asian communities. For many women, racism was not the defining problem; instead, isolation was their main concern. The thesis analyses the underlying causes of such concerns and reveals how women actively negotiated constraints. This research, and the conclusions presented, is important since migration studies have been criticised for presenting a homogenised male perspective, ignoring the interplay between structures of domination and agency, and presenting women as disempowered, suffering endemic disadvantage. The research provides significant revisions based on intensive, in-depth interviews of migrants’ experiences and those of the indigenous population between 1950 and 2000.
INTRODUCTION

Migration is a fundamental feature of the world today; indeed the twenty first century has been hailed as the 'age of migration.'1 Yet migration is not unique to contemporary society, it is not a new, incidental phenomenon; instead the arrival of newcomers is part of a long established process and an enduring feature of global history.2 From the late fifteenth century the Americas have been shaped by millions of Europeans, Africans and Asians, whilst immigration to Britain can be traced back almost 2000 years. The post-Second World War era heralded a new phase in the history of immigration. Migration increased significantly in volume and included mass movements of European refugees to Western Europe, the large-scale migration of qualified personnel from Europe to North America and Australia, and the migration from former colonies to Britain, France and the Netherlands.

Asian communities have figured most prominently in these migration processes and by the last quarter of the twentieth century, nine million from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were residing outside their country of origin.3 Britain was their single most important destination.4 The impact of this migration on British cities was remarkable; the urban milieu was dramatically transformed. Yet the effect on the 'immigrants' themselves was also profound. On arrival, whites effectively relegated Asian communities to the margins of society, defining where they could go, what they could do and how far they were accepted. In the case of Asian women, boundaries were imposed by both post-colonizing forces and the patriarchal systems within the Asian communities: they were racialised and gendered.


4 C. Peach, 'Three phases of South Asian experience', in Ibid., 48.
INTRODUCTION

This intricate set of relations prompts significant questions: did whites always erect boundaries to exclude Asians? On what basis were these boundaries formed and were these borders rigid or permeable, static or malleable? How did individuals within Asian communities live within these constructed boundaries? How were their lives confined? How did they create viable lives? Were they the passive recipients of marginality? Did they develop strategies to resist, challenge and subvert constraints? In addition, how did the boundaries of ‘race’, gender and class overlap and intersect? Did migration open up new opportunities for women to resist patriarchy? Which was the most important dimension shaping individuals’ lives? Moreover, what were the historical processes behind these complex relations?

A large body of literature has uncovered evidence of racial prejudice in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain. Sociologists and historians alike have proved that all newcomers have encountered levels of hostility. Indeed, the study of discrimination has been identified as the greatest success within ethnic and racial research. This thesis is, therefore, concerned with the perspectives of the newcomers and their daily experiences, a facet that has tended to be neglected by history. Furthermore, rather than focusing solely on the ‘oppressed’ the aim is to elucidate the relations between different groups, to reveal the complex nature of power relations in which the boundaries were negotiated, and the division between the margin and centre was contested.

Previous research on racial and ethnic relations has for the most part been confined to the fields of sociology and anthropology, rather than history. There are, of course, some notable exceptions although these have tended to focus on the pre-war period and rarely incorporated relevant sociological advancements.

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7 This was noted in B. Bowling, ‘The emergence of violent racism as a public issue in Britain, 1945-81’, in P. Panayi, (ed.), Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (London 1996), 208.

Undoubtedly a major sociological contribution was Rex’s pioneering research in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly his conception of an underclass to explain the position of migrant workers. Here he argued that Asian communities responded to their position of disadvantage by focusing on social mobility and accumulating capital. Yet his work was criticised in the 1980s by scholars who adopted a neo-Marxist perspective. Most prominently, Miles denied that immigration created divisions within the working class and shifted the research to the analysis of racism and the process of racialization. This endeavour to reconceptualise racism was further advanced by a group of influential scholars, including Gilroy, Hall, Lawrence and Solomos, based at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham. They highlighted the historical nature of racism, the evolution of ‘new racism’ and began to probe the influence of gender.

Ethnographic studies have also contributed to the sphere of ethnic and racial studies, by analysing the experiences of different communities. Ballard and Ballard studied the lifestyles of Sikhs in Leeds in 1970s and outlined phases of development, which they contended were applicable to other Asian communities. They were critical of studies which placed too much emphasis on racism and ignored the cultural preferences of minority ethnic groups in explaining their behaviour. Put simply, Marxists prioritised structural inequalities, whilst the ethnicity approach favoured culture. Inspired by post-structuralism and post-modernism, the 1990s has witnessed a reclaiming of ‘culture.’ Interest has shifted to the construction of racial identities and the role of the media in fashioning racial representations and discourses. Hall introduced the concept of ‘new ethnicities’ and ‘cultural politics’,
whereby differences within minority ethnic groups generated plural identities. This, it is argued, questioned not only 'black' but also notions of Britishness.\(^\text{14}\)

A related body of work is concerned with diaspora and transnationalism as a challenge to traditional concepts of accommodation and assimilation.\(^\text{15}\) This refers to minority ethnic groups who feel excluded by the 'host society', possess a collective identity and consciousness, and maintain links with their homeland. Whilst these studies have highlighted important aspects of the 'immigrant' experience, the actual experiences diasporic people have with others in their new locality has often been neglected. Moreover, a focus on diasporas and new ethnicities depoliticises important power dimensions, which produce inequalities and exclusions within social relations.\(^\text{16}\)

This thesis is firmly situated within this literature. It builds on several recent developments within academia and seeks to overcome certain limitations. The influence of post-modernism has prompted a move away from grand narratives and simple models of dominance and subordinance, as they have failed to reflect the real life experiences of individuals and the complexities inherent in power relations. Here, black feminist scholars have provided a valuable alternative, offering a multidimensional framework and a means to understand the triple oppression of gender, race and class. In a critique of white feminists, which presented women as a collective 'we', black women have highlighted how individuals are located within power hierarchies and interlocking inequalities where class, gender and 'race' are not autonomous spheres but enmesh to create a matrix of domination.\(^\text{17}\) Thus individuals experience 'race', gender and class differently depending on their social location within the cross cutting hierarchies. Men and women experience both constraint and

\(^{14}\) S. Hall, 'New ethnicities' in Ibid., 252-9.


opportunity depending on their class and 'race'. So for instance, Asian men experience a loss of power due to racism, yet their experience of racism will vary according to their class. In addition to these established social variables, this thesis also recognises the importance of age as a differential within power hierarchies. The life course approach adapted in interviews unveils the various roles adapted at different stages of one's life, such as, from daughter, to mother, to mother-in-law. Certainly, these roles have important implications for access to power.

Bourdieu's exploration of human subjectivity and agency within an objective framework is a further conceptual underpinning of the thesis. Migration studies have been criticized for ignoring the interplay between structures of domination and agency, presenting women as essentially disempowered and suffering endemic disadvantage.\(^{18}\) Agency refers to human action and Bourdieu has provided a more complex and subtle model of agency than other structural theorists, such as Foucault.\(^{19}\) He also goes beyond simplistic paradigms of dominance and resistance and permits a consideration of the complexities of negotiation processes.\(^{20}\)

Another key concept, 'habitus', was formulated to overcome what Bourdieu perceived to be a false dichotomy between the individual/society or objectivity/subjectivity. It is a particularly useful notion for conceptualising the predispositions, aspirations and common sense worldview of particular groups, gained through experience. It encapsulates how the active residue of a person's past that is grounded in their group's collective history, functions within their present.\(^{21}\) Although for Bourdieu habitus served to reproduce social structures, the concept integrates the role of competence and improvisation, emphasised by Bourdieu's analogy of people as players in a game, actively pursuing their own goals. Therefore habitus does not strictly determine actions as a fixed structure; rather it provides a set of guiding principles, which individuals deploy in changing contexts.

Another crucial concept employed throughout the thesis is Bourdieu's notion of capital. Bourdieu distinguished between different types of capital, which

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INTRODUCTION

influenced power relations within particular fields. Cultural capital encompassed legitimate knowledge and familiarity with the dominant culture. This was determined by the investment of the family or group members and was enhanced by education. Social capital included useful contacts, networks and group membership and the obligations tied to friendships and kinships. Finally, symbolic capital defined status such as a noble title or a prestigious occupation, in short, acquisitions other than money which confer status and honour and provide opportunities. Both capital and habitus serve to shape actions and define social positions and they operate within the network of objective relations: the ‘field.’ The concept of field denotes the context of action and helps to conceptualise the differentiated nature of society. This has influenced the framework of the thesis, which examines particular sites of struggle, that is, the home, the neighbourhood, education and employment.

Feminist scholars have complemented and developed Bourdieu’s theory of agency. Ethnocentric concepts which equate agency with autonomy and western views of independence, have recently been questioned and rejected in favour of a more relational and multi-dimensional theory of agency. Here agency is viewed as creative, generative and variable, involving imagining, planning and strategizing. It therefore encompasses the resourcefulness and cognitive capacity of the individual to adapt to constraints and develop different strategies.

A further influence on the conceptual framework of this thesis is the recent burgeoning in whiteness studies. There is an increasing awareness that focusing solely on minority ethnic groups serves to problematize them, whilst white ethnicity is presumed as the ‘norm’, silent and unacknowledged it remains untouched at the centre. Other academics have stressed the need for local, specific and historically grounded analysis. Solomos and Back have consistently urged for a need to develop a conceptual model that incorporates the contextual manifestations of racist discourse, and have highlighted how particular localities produce particular kinds of

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INTRODUCTION

racialised identities. Hence, this thesis takes Leicester as a local case study and highlights the lived realities of ideologies within particular fields. The focus on Leicester is most pertinent, considering it has been hailed as a European model of multi-cultural success, although this success is recognised as relative.

Finally post-modern theory within ethnic and racial studies has tended to embrace the cultural domain. Confined to the studies of the media and literary world, it neglects the social and the reader is often left unsure as to its impact on wider society. Hence, based on the narratives of individuals, this study seeks to avoid this weakness, as it is firmly rooted in concrete realities and the actual lived experience. Hitherto, it has been claimed that the thesis seeks to synthesize various different perspectives and offers an interdisciplinary approach. Having reviewed the relevant literature and sketched out the conceptual framework, it is necessary briefly to discuss the terminology, before addressing important methodological issues.

**Terminology**

The terminology which refers to minority ethnic groups is problematic, inconsistent and requires clarification. Essentially, it is a contentious issue because the ability to categorise and define people is tied to power relations. Throughout the thesis, ‘Asian’ is used as shorthand, to describe collectively those who can trace their ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, namely, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir. This does not encompass all Asian countries and therefore excludes the Chinese and Vietnamese. The label ‘Asian’ ignores the cultural diversity within communities and may be opposed by those who object to being defined by their ‘country of origin’ when they have been living for several generations in Britain.

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INTRODUCTION

Other academics have argued that caste, religion, regional, or even kinship classifications are more important forms of identity. Nevertheless, 'Asian' was preferred to 'black'. The latter refers to Asian or African origin groups, who define their identity based on the shared experience of racism. However as Modood has argued, this term misrepresents the experiences of all Asians in Britain. Besides 'Asian' was qualified as acceptable by the respondents and this is supported by other research, which asked those from South Asian origin living in Leicester, to define themselves. The main response was 'Asian', in contrast to Newcastle where the term was considerably less salient. 'Black' is used in this thesis to refer to people of African and African Caribbean origin and 'white' denotes those who are of white skin colour and British origin. Yet the term 'white' is also ambiguous and suggests an undifferentiated group, although it has not been subject to the same scrutiny as other categories. This reflects the hegemonic position of whiteness, which acts as a privileged viewing point, to view 'others' whilst itself evades inspection and qualification.

Methodology

Oral history formed the basis of the research that enabled an exploration of core conceptual themes. I drew extensively on existing oral history archives, including the interviews held at the National Sound Archive, British Library and collections of transcripts from previous studies. I also conducted my own in-depth life story interviews. Oral history aims to access the concrete lived experiences, to capture the essence of human creativity and subjectivity, including motivations, perceptions and feelings. In short, the 'human element which cannot quite be reduced to a scientific

27 See for example, R. Ballard, 'Migration and kinship: the differential effect of marriage rules on the processes of Punjabi migration to Britain', in C. Clarke, C. Peach and S. Vertovec, (eds), South Asians Overseas (Cambridge 1990), 219.


29 P. J. Aspinall, 'Collective terminology to describe the minority ethnic population: The persistence of confusion and ambiguity in usage', Sociology, 36, 4 (2002), 810. This is supported by L. Chessum, From Migrants to Ethnic Minority Making Black Community in Britain (Aldershot 2000), 19.

30 For discussion and ways to overcome problems of definitions, see V. S. Kalra, From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks. Experiences of Migration, Labour and Social Change (Aldershot 2000), 32-42.

31 D. Mason, Race and Ethnicity in Modern Britain (Oxford 2000), 17.
norm. Life stories however, are not based on the pursuit of generalisations for statistical analysis or accurate objective knowledge. The interviews therefore do not represent the views of all white or Asian people living in Leicester. Instead, life stories value the uniqueness of the subject and attempt to gain sincere responses to open ended questions. The biographical detail served to contextualise discussions of experiences and events and enhanced an understanding of the respondent’s perspectives.

The method of life story interviews has many strengths and has been described as the ‘purest form’ of interviewing. Narratives are anchored in social history and provide a unique insight into how the social and political penetrate people’s lives. It therefore offers a window to view the link between the macro and micro worlds. Oral history exposes the diversity of experiences and challenges dominant representations and conventional wisdom. It enables an analysis of unexplored aspects of urban life, such as the web of social networks within the intergenerational family and the dynamics within and between different social groups. Moreover, oral history has proved to be vital to the histories of ‘hidden’ groups, in particular, immigrants whose experiences are simply not available through conventional documentary sources.

Despite the value of oral history, it has attracted considerable criticism and continues to be seen by some as inferior to written documents. This is based on the contention that oral sources are irrefutably inaccurate, inconsistent and therefore unreliable. For instance, it has been contended that people’s opinions alter in response to changes in their economic and social position, whilst others have targeted

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33 The importance of biographical detail has been noted in T. Lummis, ‘Structure and validity in oral evidence’ in R. Perks, and A. Thomson, (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London 2000), 298.


37 There are an abundance of studies, for an overview see A. Thomson, ‘Moving stories: Oral history and migration studies’, *Oral History* 27, 1 (1999), 24-37. See also, R. Benmayor and A. Skotnes, (eds), *Migration and Identity* (Oxford 1994).
the bias of the interviewer as a source of inaccuracy. Post-modernists meanwhile, contend the interview has minimal value beyond the specific exchange. These criticisms were effectively challenged by those who questioned the 'holiness' of the written record. As Tonkin argued, all histories were fundamentally subjective in that they embody a structured argument, thus 'history must have a face.'

Furthermore, oral historians highlighted the strength of subjectivity as an asset rather than a weakness and have sought to explore the construction of collective and individual memory. This acknowledged the revisionist nature of memory. That is, recollections are based on a framework of criteria, in which people select and omit certain facets of their stories. Oral history is thus an edited version and the result is a simplification of reality, whereby what is forgotten may be just as important as what is remembered. In addition, personal narratives do not often follow a chronological ordering of events, but may move back and forth in time. Indeed, the concept of a coherent and chronologically ordered interview is itself a western construct. Thus individuals from different cultures may use different genres to frame their story. Likewise, personal relationships may be debased or elevated. This may stem from the narrator's attempts to deal with moral values when they interpret their own past, as ultimately their story stands as a self-justification. Thus memories provide security, authority, legitimacy and identity in the present and the recalling of past events is inextricably linked to their present day concerns. Nevertheless, this does

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41 See L. Passerini, 'Work'.


43 This a major theme in Chamberlain and Thompson, Narrative and Genre.

44 Samuel and Thompson, The Myths, 1-14.

not undermine the significance of memories, but offers insights into subjective meanings, as opposed to the historical ‘facts.’

Likewise, bias within an interview does not necessary impair the validity of the source. Throughout the interview I was alert to possible distortions and acutely aware that interviews were not simply neutral tools for securing information. The interviewer did not assume an omniscient part within the interview process, but remained crucial to its construction. As Portelli has argued, the researcher sets the agenda, by asking specific questions and the interviewees may appease the historian by simply telling them what they think is expected. Consequently, rather than imposing a rigid interview structure respondents were encouraged to freely discuss issues they felt had been important in their lives and to explain meanings in their own terms. When specific questions were asked, they were based on actual events, rather than abstract or theoretical questions, which tend to yield clichéd responses.

**Interviews**

The oral history archives and my own interviews concerned mainly adult migrants, but also included those who attended secondary or sixth form schooling in Britain. It therefore consisted of first generation immigrants and what has been classified as, the ‘half-way generation.’ Over forty interviews were derived from existing oral history archives and I identified such issues as the motivations for the interviews, how interviewees were contacted and details of the interviewer. This helped to ascertain the context of the interviews, though as Bornat has acknowledged it is not possible to ‘know all of it.’

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49 T. Modood, *Changing Ethnic Identities*, 13. This also reflects the relatively young Asian population in Leicester. See chapter two for more details.

INTRODUCTION

My own interviews were conducted with sixteen white people aged between sixty and ninety. Twelve of these had lived or were still living in Highfields and were interviewed on an individual basis, whilst four people were interviewed from Northfields, within a focus group. Fourteen Asian people aged between about forty and seventy-five were interviewed who had migrated to Britain in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Respondents were from diverse backgrounds, including different countries of origin, socio-economic background, religion and location in Leicester. Minority Asian religions such as Christianity were not included and considering the small sample size, it would not be possible to represent the differences in a statistically meaningful way.

Respondents were contacted through various 'gatekeepers' within Highfields. Although this may present problems regarding gatekeeper bias and the representativeness of the group interviewed, it did prevent possible suspicion from the respondents, an obstacle which I previously encountered when I attempted to contact potential participants. The gatekeepers therefore fulfilled a crucial role in establishing a degree of mutual trust between the respondents and myself. Participants were free to choose the location of the interview and consequently the bulk of the interviews were conducted in the participant’s private home. This enabled me to glean additional clues about the participant and the local community and may have helped to disrupt the power hierarchies between the respondent and myself as a researcher.\footnote{S. A. Elwood and D. G. Martin, ‘“Placing” Interviews: location and scales of power in qualitative research’, Professional Geographer, 52, 4 (2000), 649-57.} Interviews lasted between half an hour and four hours and some individuals were interviewed more than once. Interviews with Asians followed a basic chronology including,

- Family background, childhood and education.
- Expectations of Britain and the journey.
- First impressions: the area, neighbours and contact with bureaucracy.
- Resettlement: work, family and community life.
- Sense of identity and ‘home.’

White respondents were asked to talk about their life course, their childhood, work, family and so on and within this context, how they had experienced changes living in Leicester. More specific questions included how people felt about immigration, the
reaction of the local community and their relations with people from Asian backgrounds. All the discussions were recorded onto a minidisk and transcribed.\footnote{The transcriptions quoted throughout the thesis have omitted hesitations and false starts and substantive deletions are indicated by ellipses.}

\textit{Ethics}

The ethical issues which arose from the interview process warrant attention. For practical reasons the interviews were conducted in English with Asian individuals.\footnote{Interpreters were considered, but not used, due to financial constraints and possible problems associated with the influence of the interpreter on the interview process, such as the interpreter filtering the dialogue. For studies which have used translators see N. North, ‘Narratives of Cambodian refugees: issues in the collection of refugee stories’, \textit{Oral History}, 23, 2 (1995), 32-9 and M. Andrews, ‘A monoglot abroad: working through problems of translation’, \textit{Oral History}, 23, 2 (1995), 47-50.} The issue of language and power is highly contentious and shrouded in debate.\footnote{For a summary of debates see B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, (eds), \textit{The Post-Colonial Studies Reader} (London 2001), 283-318.} The English language has been identified as a tool of domination and it could be argued that the interviews, albeit unwittingly, implemented a dominant English perspective. Conducting interviews in the respondents’ second language may have prevented individuals from expressing themselves freely and confidently and failed to capture nuances of expression and poetic linguistic form. This strayed therefore from the principles of oral history as a form of empowerment.\footnote{This was argued by P. Broomfield, ‘Asian women’s life stories’, paper presented at Talking Community Histories, The Annual Conference of the Oral History Society, London Guildhall University, 22-23 June 2001. See also S. Kyriacou, ‘ “May your children speak well of you mother tongue”: oral history and the ethnic communities’, \textit{Oral History}, 21, 1 (1999), 75-80. For a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing respondents in their first language see S. K. Burton, ‘Issues in cross-cultural interviewing: Japanese women in England’, \textit{Oral History}, 31, 1 (2003), 38-46.} However, there was only one interview where a respondent possessed a limited English vocabulary and despite this, their sentiments and feelings were clear. Moreover, this problem of articulation was not confined to Asian participants but was encountered with white respondents. It has been noted that individuals from a working class background have a realisation that their style of language is devalued and therefore lack the authority to speak in certain situations. Their lack of self-confidence inhibits clarity of expression.\footnote{S. J. Charlesworth, \textit{A Phenomenology of Working Class Experience} (Cambridge 2000), 131-49.}
Nevertheless my own working class background may have helped to breach these difficulties and I was able to adopt an informal approach in the interviews.

Some white respondents, mainly women, were reluctant to speak and claimed they had nothing worthwhile to offer. It was therefore necessary to establish from the outset why their life experiences were significant. In particular, some responded to the topic of immigration with unease and sought to avoid the subject for fear that they would be labelled racist. This was clearly apparent in an early interview with one white woman. I asked her if she had any previous knowledge of Asians before they migrated to Leicester.

Oh no, not until this lot came in, you’ve got to be careful what you say these days haven’t you?

*How did the people in Leicester feel about Asian immigration?*

Well when they started to come in a lot there were quite a few arguments going off. Not arguments, just people saying what they thought, you might say.

*What did people think at that time?*

I really couldn’t say, we used to talk among ourselves but as I say you have to keep your thoughts to yourself sometimes. I hope nobody’s going to sue me for this.57

This defensive reaction was overcome in future interviews by employing a more subtle approach rather than using direct questions to elicit information.58 Furthermore, this illustrates that even though as a white researcher I was an ‘insider’, this was not enough to gain complete trust. Perhaps my university education and the generational difference were seen as a divide.

Other ethical issues were also raised. Essentially, prompting whites to articulate their feelings towards Asians may have been construed as colluding with racist views, empowering racists and reproducing white supremacy.59 It could be

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57 Doris 14 March 2002.


argued that, as an anti-racist researcher, I should have challenged their beliefs. Nevertheless, though I may have found some views objectionable, the actual aim of the research was to ascertain white people’s perspectives and gain insights into the motivations that underpin racist attitudes. Furthermore, the interview questions were not designed to incite reactionary remarks; instead, respondents often expressed racist views without provocation. A further dilemma arose when some respondents became emotional during the interview. The process of recalling certain past experiences, such as the expulsion from East Africa, racist incidents and problems within the family, often triggered painful memories and demanded sensitivity and humanity.

However, the main ethical question concerned the power of the researcher in relation to the ‘researched.’ It is recognised that the social location and identity of the researcher, including their ‘race’, shapes the research process. Consequently, it has been contended that white researchers should avoid researching minority ethnic communities. This argument emanated from criticisms of sociological ‘race relations’ research in the 1980s which, it was argued, served to reproduce racism and stereotypes of minority ethnic groups. The structural inequality between middle class academics and the communities they sought to study came under close scrutiny and whites were attacked for ‘prying into the black community’ and acting as spies for the government. Alongside this was the belief that because whites do not experience racism they could not empathise or understand experiences of discrimination and disadvantage. Attempts to overcome power hierarchies have lead to the methodological practice of ‘matching’ to ensure for example, that only women


interview women. This is founded on the premise that the researcher and participants share a common social location and can establish rapport and trust on this basis.

However, these arguments tend to homogenise social groups and present all whites as racist and all minority ethnic groups as sharing the same experiences and more importantly, the same levels of awareness of racism. Moreover, the notion of ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ is highly complex, as in reality, people inhabit multi-faceted identities. ‘Difference’ is based not only on ‘race’ and gender but also age, religion, sexuality, class and so on. Researchers whose experiences of ‘matching’ were problematic have testified this. To illustrate, Mirza, an Asian woman, interviewed other Asian women, but was perceived by them as strange and as an outsider. In addition, insiders may be expected to conform to cultural norms, which may restrict their research questions.

Throughout my own interviews, I was able to establish common ground and affinity with respondents based on a variety of criteria, such as their education, or experiences of living in Leicester and my university status seemed to accord me with a degree of respect, especially from the Asian men. Women, in particular were extremely open and honest and some women openly stated that they would talk candidly to me ‘as another woman.’ In these cases, gender as a social category effectively superseded ‘race’ as a basis for identification. As an ‘outsider’, Asian women were able to disclose information which was critical of their own communities and I was able to ask ‘naive’ questions and seek clarification. The experience proved that my racial identity was not an insurmountable barrier and that ‘insider’ ‘outsider’ boundaries were not fixed or immutable but could be negotiated.

Nevertheless, I was fully aware throughout the stages of the research of the potential difficulties involved as a white researcher. I could not dismiss the possibility that Asian participants would be unwilling to discuss certain issues for fear of causing misunderstanding or negative judgement. In particular, respondents may have avoided the issue of racism for fear of offending the white interviewer. Again, framing indirect questions helped to avoid this problem and many

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65 For discussion see Leydesdorff, ‘Genres of migration.’
INTRODUCTION

respondents spoke freely and at great length about their experiences of racism and hostility.66 A further possible danger was of racialising Asian respondents, by focusing solely on the issues of ‘race.’ I therefore prioritised their experiences and views and consistently sought to challenge assumptions. This included Western feminist notions of liberation and stereotypes of monolithic ‘third world women’ who are inherently ‘traditional.’ Nevertheless, perhaps it is difficult to ascertain how all the various aspects of my identity impacted on the research.68 In short, the position of the researcher as an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ entails both disadvantages and advantages and generates different types of knowledge, which cannot be viewed as more superior than the other.69 There is therefore no one authentic knowledge which the thesis seeks to represent.70

Outline

From this overview and methodological perspective, Chapter two provides the background information on demographic and geographical patterns of Asian settlement at the national and local level. It will also discuss the causes of migration, the role of immigration legislation and the extent of local hostility to Asian immigration. Chapter three will draw on the interviews with the white respondents

66 This was also the experience of P. J. Rhodes, quoted in F. W. Twine, ‘Racial ideologies and racial methodologies’ in Twine and Warren, Racing Research, 12-3. Twine suggests the topic of racism may provoke unease regardless of ‘race’, 16.


68 J. Penrose and P. Jackson, (eds), Constructions of Race, Place and Nation (London 1993), 208.

69 This is also argued by A. Phoenix, ‘Practising feminist research: the intersections of gender and “race” in the research process’, in M. Maynard and J. Purvis, (eds), Researching Women’s Lives From a Feminist Perspective (London 1996), 66.

INTRODUCTION

and examine their views of Asians living in Leicester. It will elucidate the importance of the colonial legacy and Enoch Powell in shaping world views and it will highlight why the respondents used racial discourses to interpret the changes they experienced at the neighbourhood level. However, as other academics have noted all whites were not essentially racist and there is a need to study situations in which discrimination is absent. Consequently, Chapter three will explore the white respondents’ narratives of inclusion, including relations with Asians as neighbours and the benefits of this interaction. This will highlight how the respondents consistently attempted to reconstruct a white identity, though this process was essentially dynamic and in flux.

Chapters four to seven will focus on the narratives of the Asian respondents. Chapter four will analyse the personal motivations for migration and the decision making process. In particular, the significance of perceptions and expectations of Britain will be stressed. The rupture of migration will also be examined and this will reveal the importance of habitus and the lived body as vital facets of the migratory experience. Chapter five will focus on the respondents’ experiences of finding a new home in Leicester and the impact of migration on power relations within the household. A core theme of this chapter is the various social constraints recalled by the female respondents and the coping strategies they developed, which were mediated by their specific stage within the life cycle.

Chapter six develops the themes of exclusion and inclusion as discussed in chapter three. Focusing on the sphere of the neighbourhood this chapter seeks to avoid the homogeneity and obscuration which has characterised previous studies of social exclusion by dissecting who was excluded and included and by whom or what? This chapter will also highlight the positive and negative ramifications of specific forms of social capital and reveal how respondents encountered racialised spaces within particular geographical sites. Chapter seven casts light on how the respondents experienced racist discourses within education and the workplace. This


72 According to Ratcliffe these questions are rarely tackled. P. Ratcliffe, 'Housing inequality and "race": some critical reflections on the concept of "social exclusion" ', Ethnic and Racial Studies, 22, 1 (1999), 1-22.
includes a discussion of the key themes of hard work and the loss of status which dominated the male narratives and the positive dimensions of employment stressed by the female respondents. Finally, Chapter eight will draw together the main themes of the thesis and posit some key conclusions.
THE BACKGROUND TO ASIAN SETTLEMENT

The national context: Asians in Britain

This chapter will set the context for the research by providing a brief background of Asians in Britain and Leicester. The main issues include the reasons for immigration, the impact of legislation, patterns of settlement and key aspects of Asian differentiation in Leicester, as well as the local response to Asian immigration. The nineteenth century witnessed the initial influx of Asians composed mainly of sailors, (lascars) who worked for the East India Company and also servants and nannies, (ayahs). Others included Indian students, exiled princes and politicians; thus the newcomers did not form a homogeneous mass, but originated from a diversity of backgrounds.¹ In the first half of the twentieth century migration continued as Asians employed on British merchant lines settled in seaport cities such as Newcastle, Liverpool and London. During the 1920s and 1930s Sikhs from the Punjab set up door-to-door selling in areas such as the Midlands and during the two World Wars Indian soldiers played a prominent role.²

Nevertheless, this Asian population was relatively small and transient and it was not until after the Second World War that the main period of immigration commenced. The reasons for this are well documented and include a demand for more labour in Britain in an era of post-war reconstruction.³ This need for labour was part of a western European phenomenon that saw Germany, France, the


² For further details of Asians in Britain before 1945 see P. Fryer, Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain (London 1984), R. Ramdin, Reimaging Britain: Five Hundred Years of Black and Asian History (London 1999).

³ This is argued in S. Castles and G. Kosack, Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe (London 1973). The demand for labour was in the region of 1.3 million at the end of 1946. J. Bourke, Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity (London 1984), 193.
Netherlands and other countries, attracting large scale immigration. In Britain, as indigenous white workers progressed from menial jobs to the white collar sector, the numbers of Irish and Eastern European migrants could no longer fill the gap in labour shortages. Britain therefore turned to its former colonial territories, including the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent, for a cheap workforce, whose residents were citizens of the United Kingdom. Thus, the colonial legacy had effectively secured the colonies role as 'economic peripheries of metropolitan colonial power.'

This corresponded with several ‘push’ factors from the immigrants’ country associated with problems of underdevelopment, poverty and pressure on the land. In particular, the partition of the Indian subcontinent following independence in 1947 led to the division of the Punjab, Bengal and Kashmir and created considerable economic and social distress, including the displacement of over 10,000,000 people. A further 100,000 were dislocated as a result of the Mangla dam project in the 1960s. The precise interplay of the factors has been contested and the ‘push’ ‘pull’ paradigm has attracted criticism from those who have perceived it as too deterministic and instead favour migrant network theory. This emphasises the process of chain migration, whereby once immigration has been triggered it establishes a momentum of its own as friends and relatives encourage others to migrate. Less debatable are the reasons for East African Asian migration, generated as it was between 1968 and 1972 as a result of political circumstances, namely the Africanisation programmes in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi, as governments sought to eradicate the economic dominance of Asians that had

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developed under British rule. Most notable was the expulsion of some 30,000 Asians from Uganda by General Idi Amin in 1972.

British legislation had an immense impact on Asian immigration to Britain. The British Nationality Act 1948 conferred on all British citizens, including those based in the colonies, the right to freely enter, work and settle with their families. Yet this guarantee was challenged by a series of Immigration Acts which sought to exclude minority ethnic immigration, irrespective of the economic costs. It is important to note that immigration legislation was not new; it had an important precedent in the early twentieth century with the Aliens Act of 1905, directed at the destitute Jew. In the 1960s however, the ‘undesirable Jew’ was replaced by the ‘Commonwealth black’. The Commonwealth Immigration Act 1962 introduced a voucher system designed to curb ‘coloured’ migration, though paradoxically this increased immigration as many attempted to evade tighter controls and ‘beat the ban’.

The Commonwealth Immigration Act 1968 passed in response to the influx of East African Asians, restricted migration further by denying entry to those whose parents and grand-parents were born outside Britain. Similarly this prompted a surge in migration from parts of East Africa particularly, Nairobi, Kampala and Dar es Salaam, although many Kenyan Asians who arrived after 1st March 1968 were sent back to their last port of embarkation. The Immigration Act 1971 served to consolidate preceding legislation by preventing those without family from migrating to Britain. Virginity tests were introduced for prospective Asian brides and government powers of deportation were extended. Consequently, primary

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11 Freeman argues that Britain suffered economically compared to other parts of Europe as a result of limiting immigration. G. P. Freeman, *Immigrant Labour and Racial Conflict in Industrial Societies* (Princeton 1979).


immigration from the New Commonwealth effectively ceased and additional controls secured Britain’s status as ‘one of the most impenetrable forces on earth.’

The initial impetus for these acts has been consistently debated, with some arguing that public pressure impelled immigration controls and others asserting that government hostility to commonwealth migration was evident prior to legislation and that politicians actually instigated British racism. Nevertheless the effects were unequivocal and had profound implications for Asian immigration and settlement. The type of immigration was transformed from temporary male workers, who had intended to return ‘home’ once sufficient funds had been accumulated, to families who began to settle in Britain on a permanent basis. Moreover, government policies attracted considerable academic criticism and immigration controls came to be seen as part of the ‘racialisation’ of immigration and the institutionalisation of racism.

That is, policies were governed by a principle of racial exclusivity which sought to regulate the immigration of dark skinned migrants whilst allowing whites from the Old Commonwealth and South Africa to enter freely. The practical effects were the creation of human shuttlecocks, as families were transferred from airport to airport. Reports also surfaced that many Asians had encountered harassment by the immigration service and suffered a violation of their basic rights. Overall, blacks and Asians were deemed undesirable outsiders, their presence was widely regarded as a problem and despite their legal nationality their Britishness was contested. The symbolic boundaries of the nation had been redefined and were irrevocably fixed.

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19 The British Nationality Act 1981 actually abolished citizenship rights for various categories of colonials and ex colonials.
Whilst British legislation served to classify all Asians as 'coloured immigrants', it is important to appreciate the internal differentiation and diversity of experiences within different Asian groups. The timing of arrival into Britain varied between ethnic groups. The main influx of migrants from India and Pakistan was between 1965 and 1974 with 134,000 Indians and 68,000 Pakistanis entering the UK.\textsuperscript{20} The arrival of East African Asians was particularly rapid, rising from 6,000 in 1965 to 31,600 in 1967 with a further 27,000 entering Britain in 1972.\textsuperscript{21} Conversely, the peak of arrivals from Bangladesh was from 1980 to 1984, when a total of 23,000 arrived into Britain.\textsuperscript{22} Patterns of settlement also differed and were influenced by the changing availability of employment and existing social and kin networks. East African Asians settled mainly in Leicester and northwest London, whilst Indians were most numerous in the northwest Midlands, London and west Yorkshire. Pakistanis clustered in the northern mill towns such as Bradford and Bangladeshis tended to settle in Inner London Boroughs.\textsuperscript{23}

These groups brought with them diverse skills, social capital, expectations and histories, as well as different levels of economic capital, which had a vital impact on their experiences and prompted them to follow different trajectories and achieve contrasting fortunes. In particular, East African Asians as 'twice migrants', exhibited specific characteristics that distinguished them from Asians who had migrated directly from the Indian subcontinent.\textsuperscript{24} East African Asians were mainly of urban, middle class and Gujarati speaking background. In Africa they formed the privileged minority within the colonial system having established themselves as a socially exclusive intermediate stratum between the African and British elite. As middlemen, they developed valuable transferable skills, including business acumen, language capabilities, expertise in urban and bureaucratic institutions and familiarity with


\textsuperscript{21} Marett, \textit{Immigrants}, 6.

\textsuperscript{22} Peach, \textit{Ethnicity}, 10.


\textsuperscript{24} For the term 'twice migrants' see P. Bhachu, \textit{Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain} (London 1985), 3. The term has recently been criticised on the basis that many East African Asians were born in Africa and therefore did not migrate twice. See J. Mattausch, 'After "ethnicity": migration, identity and political economy', \textit{Immigrants and Minorities}, 20, 3 (2001), 68.
English lifestyle through the British imperialist presence. Moreover, the circumstances of their migration, involving forced migration as complete family units, resulted in the propensity for them to make long term commitments, to invest in property and settle indefinitely in Britain. In contrast, the majority of Asians migrated with economic and family ties in the homeland and subscribed to the 'myth of return'. Consequently, they were orientated towards their country of origin rather than the prospect of life in Britain. The fusion of these factors facilitated the considerable economic and social success which is associated with East African Asians and enabled them to emerge from one of the poorest minority ethnic groups to one of the richest.

Nevertheless, it is worth stressing that despite these shared characteristics there are important differences within the East African Asian category. For example, although the majority were Gujaratis, there were also Goans and Punjabis. Moreover, evidence suggests, the most meaningful and definitive criteria for community organisation and affiliation was not ethnic labels such as Indian or Pakistani, but caste for Hindus and sect for Muslims. The Patidar and Lohana castes dominated in Uganda and marriage ties have enabled the reproduction of these networks in Britain. In short, the Asian presence in Britain is highly complex and defies simple generalisations.

The local context: Leicester

The history of Leicester is marked by successive waves of immigration, including the Jewish and Irish in the early nineteenth century, a small number of Italians from the

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27 A Special Correspondent, 'Asian minorities in East Africa and Britain' New Community, 1, 5 (1972), 417, M. Michaelson, ‘The relevance of caste among East African Gujaratis in Britain', New Community, 7, 3 (1979), 389-415, Mattausch, 'After'. This is also substantiated by informal discussions at Highfields Youth and Community Centre.

28 For further discussion see R. Ballard, ‘Migration and kinship: the differential effect of marriage rules on the processes of Punjabi migration to Britain’, in C. Clarke, C. Peach and S. Vertovec (eds), South Asians Overseas (Cambridge 1990), 219-49.
late 1890s and around 900 Belgian refugees as a result of the First World War. In the aftermath of the Second World War Leicester received migrants from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, particularly refugees from Poland, and small groups from Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and the Ukraine. A second wave of migration from Ireland began in the 1930s and the 1940s, and the 1950s witnessed the arrival of the city's African Caribbean population. The largest groups originated from Antigua and then Jamaica, but also included Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago. Leicester as a host city was therefore accustomed to diverse minority ethnic groups, although public opinion towards migrant populations varied. The Irish for example, encountered discrimination and attacks, whilst the Jewish appeared to have settled without much difficulty. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Leicester's population is one of the most ethnically diverse in the European Union and this has prompted conclusions that perceptions of ethnic difference were less pronounced as there was no simple dichotomy between a white and non-white population.

Leicester's prosperous reputation dates back to the early twentieth century and was based on high levels of female employment which produced a high average household income. This prosperity has been an enduring attraction for immigrants. Leicester's range of industries, particularly hosiery and footwear manufacture, provided plentiful employment for men and women, at all skill levels and this encouraged both migration from the Indian subcontinent and internal migration from

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33 Nash *et al.*, *Leicester*, chapter two.
other towns such as Coventry, Birmingham, London, Yorkshire and Blackburn.\textsuperscript{34} Apparently, employment opportunities were a vital consideration for East African Asians who had not managed to transfer their savings to Britain, whilst those with savings chose Manchester and London.\textsuperscript{35} Other incentives for Asian migration were the abundance of cheap housing, the lack of strikes and the central location of Leicester, which facilitated communication between Asian families and businesses throughout Britain. This was combined with the apparent absence of open hostility towards immigrants and Leicester’s reputation as a safe city, a view promulgated by the local press.\textsuperscript{36}

Chain migration played a fundamental role as many Asians informed others of the promising prospects in Leicester. This process influenced both early migration and subsequent flows from East Africa. The first permanent Asian settler in Leicester, a Punjabi Muslim, arrived in the 1920s and was joined by two Punjabis in the 1940s. These newcomers established business as market traders and returned to the Punjab in the late 1940s, informing friends and relatives of their newfound success. Consequently, the presence of these pioneers has been directly linked to the arrival of a further forty-five Punjabis by the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{37} Similarly, for the East African Asians, the decision to settle in Leicester was often based on the preference to live near friends and relatives and many had contacts already resident in the city.\textsuperscript{38} Furthermore, East African Asians were attracted to the established social, cultural and religious facilities which served the existing Asian population, such as food and clothing shops, mosques, temples and other religious and cultural associations.\textsuperscript{39}


\textsuperscript{38} Marett, \textit{Immigrants}, 9. This is also testified by interviews. HL, HRA, A. S. Johl, T. Hansrani, and D. Alam.

\textsuperscript{39} Hill, ‘The housing’, 62.
The growth of the Asian population in Leicester was considerable and radically transformed Leicester’s ethnic profile. In 1951 there were approximately 636 Asians living in Leicester. This rose to 3,566 in 1961, 9,805 in 1971 and 38,162 in 1981. The rapid increase from 1971 to 1981 was largely attributed to the influx of the East African Asians as approximately 20,000 East African Asians arrived in Leicester between 1968 and 1978. By 1991, 39,164 Asians had migrated to the city and a total of 63,994 were defined as ethnically Asian. As Table 1 demonstrates, the ethnic composition of Leicester was distinct from the national profile. The proportion of white people in Leicester was conspicuously lower than the national picture, with 71.5 per cent white in Leicester and 94.5 per cent white in Britain. This compared with a minority ethnic population of 5.5 per cent in Britain and 28.5 per cent for Leicester; thus Leicester boasted the highest percentage of minority ethnic population, outside the London boroughs.

By 1991, Leicester ranked fifth as the local authority with the highest number of minority ethnics and second to Birmingham for the highest number of all Asian groups. However, Leicester ranked first for its population of Indian descent, with Indians representing 22.3 per cent of the total population and 78.3 per cent of the total minority ethnic population. By 2001, the population of Leicester was estimated to be 279,921, of whom 36 per cent were from an ethnic minority background, 30 per cent were classified as ‘Asian’, whilst the Indian population numbered 72,033 and comprised 25.7 per cent of Leicester’s population. It has

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40 This is taken from the decennial census cited in A. Andrews, ‘A history of South Asian migration into Leicester: an essay on Hindu/Muslim segregation’ in Jewson, Migration, 70. The figures are according to place of birth from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and East Africa. They need to be treated with caution as they include whites born in India. In 1971, apparently one third of those born in India and living in Britain were white. See Peach, Ethnicity, 2.


42 ‘Ethnically Asian’ included second and third generations who were born in Britain. Leicester City Council, Leicester Key Facts, 8.

43 Tower Hamlets in East London had the highest percentage for the Asian population with 24.7 per cent. Ibid.

44 Birmingham had the highest number of ethnic minorities (206,767) and Asians (129,899). Ibid.

45 Brent located in northwest London followed second with an Indian population of 17.2 per cent. Ibid.

Table 1: Ethnic group composition of the population of Leicester and Great Britain, 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Leicester</th>
<th>Great Britain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>270,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>193,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Minorities</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>76,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>60,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Other</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3,044</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


been predicted that Leicester will be the first British city, outside the London boroughs to have the first non-white majority population by 2011.47

The numbers of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Leicester was considerably lower compared to the proportion of Indians, although the Pakistani and Bangladeshi contingent in Leicester was similar to the national composition. By 2001 the Pakistani population numbered 4,282, 1.52 per cent of the population of Leicester, whilst 0.7 per cent of the population were Bangladeshis (193 Persons).48 Nevertheless, Leicester local authority recently admitted that their records on the number of Pakistanis in Leicester were essentially incomplete and that an increase in the Pakistani population had largely gone unnoticed.49 In addition, the census data

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47 O. Wright, ‘Leicester to be first city with ethnic majority’, *The Times*, 8 December 2000.


49 Leicester City Council, *Research into the Needs of the Pakistani Community in Leicester* (Leicester 2002), 9. They estimated that the Pakistani population currently numbered about 6,000.
presented in Table 1 obscures the actual size of the East African Asian population. East African Asians were incorporated into the category of ‘Other-Asian’, though this underestimated the number of East African Asians, as many would have selected ‘Indian’ instead. More reliable data is provided by the Survey of Leicester, which shows that in 1983, 22,477 people were born in East Africa, compared with 22,414 from India, 2,530 from the Caribbean, and 3,023 from the rest of Europe. The East African Asians therefore constituted a main sub-group within the Asian category and it is this dimension which distinguished Leicester from other British cities. It is also worth noting that compared to the white population the Asian population in Leicester was comparatively younger. In 1991, the average age of white residents was 38.9 years compared to 28.2 years for Asian residents and overall Asians tended to fall in the 0-40 age range. This age structure reflects the immigration of young Asian families who are now approaching middle age.

In the 1960s and 1970s Asian newcomers settled in Highfields, a typical ‘zone of transition’ which had previously housed immigrants from Ireland and Eastern Europe and was an established conduit for immigrants. The area encompassed the Wycliffe, Spinney Hill and Charnwood wards of the city (map 1) and was generally deemed undesirable by the white population, following post-war neglect. It contained large Victorian houses and terraced cottages that were inexpensive, albeit deteriorating and the area was located close to the city centre, the foundries, traditional hosiery mills and new factories. Cheap accommodation was also available in the Belgrave area, to the north to the city, due to threats of redevelopment, including the planned demolition of over 1,000 properties to build a motorway. It has been assumed that this area was pioneered by East African Asians, who sought to buy property to house a large extended family, yet research

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52 Leicester City Council, Leicester Key Facts, 2-3. This is also reflected nationally. The average ages were Europeans: 37; Indians: 31 and Bangladeshis: 18. K. Sunder ‘The truth about multi-cultural Britain’, The Observer, 25th November 2001.


Map 1: Leicester City Wards, 2002
has confirmed that over sixty Sikhs and Hindus were already resident in Belgrave by the early 1960s.55

Overall, minority ethnic populations remained highly concentrated in the inner wards of the city, with seven out of the city’s twenty eight wards containing a minority ethnic population of 50 per cent or more in 1991.56 Nevertheless, there were important changes within Asian groups. The Indian population, originally congregated in Wycliffe and Spinney Hill Ward in the centre of the city, had moved by 1971 to Belgrave and St Margarets and by 1981 lived mainly to the north of the city in Rushey Mead, Abbey and Belgrave. Evidence of suburbanisation to the more affluent wards of West Knighton and Evington was also noticeable, though the extent of this process was limited and in 1991 the Indian population in West Knighton was 461, only 5.4 per cent of the total ward population.57 However, the 2001 census confirmed the pattern of suburbanisation. For instance, the Indian population in Evington had increased from 18.1 per cent of the total ward in 1991 to 30.97 per cent in 2001.58 East African Asians followed a similar centrifugal pattern although initially they were more widely dispersed throughout the wards and later they shifted rather than dissipated, to the northern wards of the city, particularly Rushey Mead, whereby in 1991 they numbered 2,294 and represented 20 per cent of the ward population.59

Conversely, whilst Pakistanis had exhibited signs of dispersal between 1971 and 1981, by 1991 they had returned to the centre with Spinney Hill as the principal ward. This also contained the largest number of minority ethnic groups in Leicester, with 82.5 per cent from a minority ethnic background.60 Likewise, the Bangladeshis, a relatively new immigrant group have tended to remain in the central wards of

55 Based on the electoral register in 1962 there were 26 Sikhs and 34 Hindus cited in Davis, ‘A sweet’, 37.
60 Leicestershire County Council, Ethnic Minority, 9.
Spinney Hills and Wycliffe. Overall then, despite some changes, the Asian and white population of Leicester was sharply divided. This was also manifest by the working class estates on the outskirts of the city which were characterised by a prevalent white population. In 1991 Eyres Monsell contained a black minority ethnic population of only 1.9 per cent and the corresponding figure for North Brauntsone was 2.8 per cent. Thus Leicester was typically viewed as an Asian city, with an outer ‘white highlands.’ Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to imply that the Asian communities have simply supplanted the white population in Leicester, as this ignores the continued white presence in both Highfields and Belgrave.

A salient facet of the spatial distribution within Asian groups was the emergence of religious segregation as demonstrated in Chart 1. This shows that Hindus have tended to concentrate in the northern wards of Abbey, Belgrave, Latimer and Rushey Mead, whilst Muslims prevailed in the Highfields wards of Spinney Hills and Wycliffe. Sikhs were less segregated, although they were present in all wards with a significant Asian population, bar Latimer. The highest concentration of Sikhs was found in Charnwood and Crown Hills where they constituted over 15 per cent of the ward population. The number of Muslims in Spinney Hills rose from 3,706 in 1983 to 11,886 in 2001; thus Highfields has evolved into a predominantly Muslim area which was largely self contained and autonomous. This was reflected not only in the proliferation of mosques, but in the commercial structure of the area, in driving schools and estate agents and the location of community organisations and Islamic schools.

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61 This was an outcome of Leicester City Council policy on housing lists.

62 ‘Black minority ethnic’ includes blacks, Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. Data from e-mail correspondence with Leicester City Council, 11th March 2003.

63 P. Winstone 7 June 2002. Winstone claimed the term ‘white highlands’ was typically used by Asians in Leicester to refer to the outer estates. It reveals the spatial symbolism of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Similar patterns have emerged in other cities, such as Birmingham which exhibited a black and Asian inner city and a peripheral city area ‘as white as Torquay’. J. Rex, The Ghetto and the Underclass: Essays on Race and Social Policy (Aldershot 1988), 31. For other examples see J. Eade, The Politics of Community: the Bangladeshi Community in East London (Aldershot 1989), 28-9.

64 See also the conclusion in S. Kalogirou, ‘Spatial distribution of ethnic and age groups, residential mobility and trends in population movement in the Leicester district’, (unpublished University of Leicester MSc thesis, 2000), 53.

65 Leicester City Council, Leicester Key Facts Census 2001.

The reasons why religious groups have clustered in certain areas can be attributed to elements of both forced and voluntary segregation. The development of Belgrave involved a process of East African Hindus attempting to distance themselves from other Asians by only selling property to members of their own sub-group, thus excluding Pakistani Muslims. Other evidence suggests that religious spaces were carved into the city, because areas served as vital spaces where religious groups could express and cultivate their culture. This was particularly applicable to Muslims whose social and spatial ties were highly localised and dependent on the mosque.

In contrast to the national profile in which the number of Muslims exceeded Hindus, Hinduism was the dominant Asian religion in Leicester. In 1983 Hindus represented 62.1 per cent of the religions, compared to 18.4 per cent Muslims and

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67 Phillips, 'The social', 111.

68 Hill found that Muslim men tended to attend the mosque daily whilst only 23 per cent of Hindus visited the temple weekly. Hindus also have places of worship within the home. See Hill, 'The housing', 346-8.
THE BACKGROUND TO ASIAN SETTLEMENT

16.7 per cent Sikhs.\(^6\) By 2001, Leicester's Hindu population of 41,248 people was the second largest in England and Wales.\(^7\) In addition, the majority of Hindus and Muslims have their origins in Gujarat.\(^7\) Gujarati speaking Hindus were therefore the main language and religious group with an estimated size of 36,100 in 1983 and some 46,000 in 1996.\(^7\) This was the major group in Belgrave and Rushey Mead and represented more than half of the total in population in some areas. In 1983, Gujarati Muslims numbered about 5,200 in and around Highfields and approximately 9,600 Punjabi Sikhs resided in the surrounding areas of Highfields.\(^7\) Mirroring the national level, the majority of Bangladeshis were Bengali Muslim, whilst Pakistanis were either Punjabi or Urdu Muslim.\(^7\) There were also smaller communities within these categories who followed different religious practices, including both Sunni and Shi-ite Muslims and the Mistrys and Patels were the main castes in Leicester. In 1978, 31 out of 56 Gujarati Asian organisations in Leicester were jati (sub-caste) specific and it has been claimed that caste associations were the most significant Asian bodies in Leicester.\(^7\)

Having traced the main facets of Asian differentiation in Leicester it is necessary to consider the local reaction to the arrival of Asians. In September 1972 the city was infamously branded the most ‘unwelcoming’ in the country due to the

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\(^6\) Leicester City Council, *Survey*, 33. The 1991 census did not ask a question on religion due to the misconception that religion was a private concern and had little relevance within the public domain. See S. Brown, ‘Religion and economic activity in the South Asian population, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23, 6 (2000), 1037. It should be noted that there were also Christians within the Leicester Asian population with origins in Gujarat, Punjab, Bengal and Goa.

\(^7\) After Brent (45,228). The Sikh population in Leicester was the eighth largest in the country (11,796) and the Muslim population, the tenth largest (30,885). See *National Statistics*, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/>. This is in contrast to areas with Muslim populations, such as Bradford and Manchester where the Muslims were mostly Pakistani.


city council advertisement placed in the *Ugandan Argus*, warning potential settlers to stay away.76 Leicester quickly surfaced as a focal point for National Front activity, which exploited the council's failure to deflect the exodus and the city emerged as a centre for organised racist activity. Leicester's National Front evolved from a coalition of anti-immigration groups and the leaders consisted of middle class lawyers, led by a solicitor Anthony Read Herbert, who commanded respect from the political parties and local police. The Front came close to election victories, most notably in 1976, when they took 29 per cent of the vote in Abbey ward and 18 per cent of the poll throughout the city.77 The headquarters of the National Front were based in Highfields and the city was one of the central National Front strongholds outside London.78

Yet this racism was met with a considerable anti-racist backlash and it was this combination of both racist and anti-racist tradition that was a defining characteristic of Leicester.79 Anti-racist organisation took the form of student protest, the Anti-Nazi League and a broad coalition of groups, named the Inter-Racial Solidarity Campaign, who received financial support from Jewish industrialists.80 The 1970s witnessed a series of confrontations between the National Front, blacks and Asians and anti-racist activists, including the Imperial Typewriter strike in 1974 and a National Front demonstration in 1979.81 The latter was successfully thwarted by anti-racists and signalled the end of the National Front in Leicester.82 Other notable disturbances were the riots which erupted in Highfields in July 1981.

76 Marett, *Immigrants*, 222.


80 *The Sunday Telegraph*, 3 September 1972, See EMOHA, CHC, CH/095/0104, P. Winstone.

81 The Imperial Typewriter strike is seen as a pivotal event in Asian resistance against racism. See R. Moore, *Racism and Black Resistance in Britain* (London 1975), chapter five. However, an investigation found no unlawful discrimination within the factory. See Bulletin of Race Relations Board, *Race Relations*, 20, Autumn 1974, 8-9.

82 This is well documented in Chessum, *From Migrants*, 220-2. Marett alleged the demise of the National Front was due to the efforts of the Inter Racial Solidarity campaign and the increase in Asian councillors within the Labour party. Marett, *Immigrants*, 59.
However, as in other parts of Britain, this did not involve a clash between racists and their opponents but emanated from a myriad of social problems, including social injustice, relative deprivation and mistrust of the police.\textsuperscript{83}

Other studies have focused on the racist content of the Leicester local press. From 1945 to 1962 the \textit{Leicester Mercury} gave tacit support to Cyril Osborne, an Enoch Powell sympathiser who campaigned relentlessly against immigration and overall, articles were framed by a consciousness of the empire in which South Africa was presented as an acceptable model.\textsuperscript{84} During the 1970s the \textit{Leicester Mercury} gave considerable coverage to the activities of the National Front, which were presented outside the agenda of racial relations and instead were related to issues of democracy and freedom. News in the \textit{Mercury} consistently focused on incidents of racial conflict and tension and unequivocally depicted minority ethnic groups as a problem.\textsuperscript{85}

The attitude of the public has prompted mixed interpretations. Some have claimed that there was an initial absence of hostility due to the lack of direct competition and that Ugandan Asians were accepted with ease 'at least on the surface.'\textsuperscript{86} The lack of racial hostility was also indicated by the absence of racial attacks, compared to other cites such as Coventry, Birmingham and London.\textsuperscript{87} However, others have stressed that attacks in Leicester were mostly unreported due to fear of the police and that racial prejudice was actually ubiquitous.\textsuperscript{88} As one white anti-racist campaigner recalled, 'what disturbed me most was the gut level hatred of

\textsuperscript{83} G. Gaskell and P. Smith, 'Are young blacks really alienated?' \textit{Race and Riots '81: New Society Social Studies} (London 1982), 8, J. Benyon and J. Solomos, (eds), \textit{The Roots of Urban Unrest} (Oxford 1987), J. Benyon, \textit{Crime, Disadvantage, Politics and Disorder: Social Disintegration and Conflict in Contemporary Britain} (Leicester 1993). See also PC Phillips 19 March 2002, who recalled the disturbances. He claimed the riots were 'copy cat' rioting as a result of the riots in Brixton and Toxteth and only a few Asians were involved. There were further riots in Highfields on 10 October 1985 following a football match between Leicester and Derby.


\textsuperscript{87} Troyna and Ward, 'Racial antipathy', 455. This is also supported by a review of the Commission for Racial Equality newsletter, \textit{New Equals}, 1977-1987, in which Leicester is rarely mentioned.

black people that I experienced on the buses, in pubs, in neighbourhood centres, everywhere I went.\textsuperscript{89}

Several social surveys have also provided an indication of the local reaction. Research conducted in 1975, involving 238 white people, demonstrated that 65 per cent of those who lived in an area of ethnic concentration felt that there were ‘too many coloured people’ and 86 per cent agreed the area had ‘gone down hill.’\textsuperscript{90} Similarly in 1978, a survey of 250 whites revealed that ‘too many immigrants’ was perceived to be the main problem afflicting the city and 47 per cent believed that ‘race relations’ constituted an important local problem. In contrast, the corresponding figure for Manchester was a mere 5 per cent, where ‘race relations’, was seen as a minor concern. Moreover, a significant 90 per cent of the Leicester sample expressed negative attitudes to immigrants.\textsuperscript{91}

This chapter has attempted to provide the context for the thesis by sketching the main dimensions of Asian presence in Britain and Leicester. The causes for migration were manifold and this theme will be explored from the perspective of the newcomers in chapter four. Legislation had a profound impact on immigration and settlement and was essentially part of the process of protecting what was imagined to be a homogeneous white nation by defining and excluding ‘others.’ At the local level, Leicester was characterised by a high minority ethnic and Indian population. Within this category there were many layers of differentiation, though the main subgroup were the East African Asians and in particular, the Gujarati Hindus. These differences were reflected spatially and despite the recent trend since the 1990s, towards suburbanisation for Indians and East African Asians, the inner city wards still contain the highest concentration of minority ethnic groups. Yet, it would be erroneous to infer that this segregation was ‘chosen.’ It was intrinsically tied to the actual experiences and perceptions of different areas within the city, held by Asians and this will be discussed in chapter six. Finally, whilst surveys provide an indication of the opposition towards Asians at particular times, this is also only a fragment of the picture. Hence, chapter three will elucidate the underlying conditions

\textsuperscript{89} EMOHA, CHC, CH/095/0104, P. Winstone.

\textsuperscript{90} Community Relations Council, \textit{Housing Choice and Ethnic Segregation: An Attitude Survey} (London 1979), 41-2.

\textsuperscript{91} Troyna, \textit{Public Awareness}, 52-55, 82, 57. See also Ranger, ‘Belgrave’ 22, 29, who has shown that in 1979 about 35 per cent of whites agreed with the National Front and support was higher in Latimer than Belgrave. However research was limited to forty questionnaires.
that foster white racism and chapters six and seven will examine how Asians themselves experienced and responded to this hostility.
This chapter will focus on older white people’s narratives of Asians living in Leicester. These interviewees witnessed the transformation of Leicester into one of Britain’s main Asian cities. How did they interpret these changes? What issues were posed by Asian migration? Did they have contact with Asians and if so, what was the nature of this contact and how did this shape their views? The aim is not to simply label specific examples as racist, for a focus solely on racism implies a rigid and deterministic mode of thinking which obscures the complexities and contradictions that may accompany racist perceptions.¹ Neither does it seek to provide a single underlying explanation for racism. There is recognition that there is not one, monolithic racism, but a diversity of racisms, which are historically specific and variable.²

Thus the focus here is to elucidate how and why people use racial narratives. This will examine the perceived threat to whiteness posed by Asian immigration, the discourse of white decline, and the disruption to the neighbourhood order. The mechanisms which white people employ to include Asians and refrain from reproducing racism will also be discussed. This will highlight the importance of neighbourly relations and the specific benefits of contact, albeit it will be argued that ultimately a residual white identity remained unabated. However, it is first necessary to discuss the defining facts of the respondents’ world views and clarify some key concepts.

¹ This was recognised by D. T. Wellman, ‘Portraits of white racism’ in E. Cashmore, and J. Jennings, (eds), Racism Essential Readings (London 2002), 163-72. Furthermore as Billig notes people do not possess a simple cognitive framework but hold complex and contradictory views, M. Billig, ‘Rhetorical psychology, ideological thinking, and imagined nationhood’ in H. Johnston, and B. Klandermans, (eds), Social Movements and Culture (Minneapolis 1995), 64-84.

Mapping world views

The respondents shared a collective location which framed their knowledge and attitudes and shaped their world views, that is, their frames of reference used to comprehend, interpret and interact with reality. They had all been born in Leicester, were from a working class background and, were of the same cohort. A defining facet of the historical context which they shared was the legacy of colonialism. The influence of the empire on British identity has received considerable academic attention. Studies have shown that from that late nineteenth century, life in Britain was infused with popular representations relating to the empire and the British which helped to forge ideas regarding what it meant to be British and how colonial people were different. It is argued that these ideas were disseminated through advertising, education and popular literature and constructed binary notions of inferior and superior, uncivilised and civilised, which essentially pervaded western consciousness. British feelings of paternalism and superiority over imagined child like savages, who must be civilised, was both reinforced and acquired new meanings during decolonisation, when the boundaries between the colonised and the coloniser where dissolved. Whilst there is debate regarding the precise impact of racist ideology on the working classes, interviewees did recall being taught about the empire and in particular they remembered Empire Day. As Phyllis recalled,

On Empire Day you were dressed to represent the different countries and sing you know songs like that represented them.

Somebody represented Canada and Australia and India and everywhere and we were taught the sun never sets on the empire.

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3 The term 'cohort' refers to a defined population who have lived through the same historical period and experienced specific events such as the Second World War. See J. Pilcher, Age and Generation in Modern Britain (Oxford 1995). Bourdieu has emphasised how people's dispositions are shaped by living in particular cultures. See P. Bourdieu, 'Social space and symbolic power', Sociological Theory, 7, 1 (1988), 19 and N. Crossley, 'The phenomenological habitus and its construction', Theory and Society, 30, 81 (2001), 81-120.

it’s always shining somewhere, the sun never sets, but you see
we’ve not got the empire now."5

This illustrates how education effectively promulgated notions of imperial
greatness and worldwide superiority. Indeed, evidence that these feelings were
internalised is revealed by Phyllis’s explicit and assertive response when she was
asked how Asian immigration had prompted her to consider her own ethnic identity:
‘I felt superior because I was Leicester born and bred and they weren’t (laughs). I felt
all right. You know I was sorry for them that they’d had to come to find a better
place you know.’6 Thus whilst she felt sympathy for Asians, colonial discourse was
clearly evident in the conception of her ‘self’.

Another experience which fashioned the interviewee’s world view was the
speeches of Enoch Powell throughout the 1960s, culminating in his apocalyptic
‘rivers of blood speech’ in 1968. Powell had a profound and lasting impact on how
people thought about ‘race’ and this is already well documented.7 Essentially he was
instrumental in constructing a new form of hegemonic racism, or cultural racism,
which was seen as central to the success of Thatcher and the New Right. Powell’s
metaphors of urban decline and anarchy caused by the invasion of black strangers
were resonant throughout the interviews. Immigrants were ‘the enemy within’ they
were not totally excluded but ‘unassimilated and unassimilable’. The legacy of
Powell is irrefutable as he was consistently mentioned by the interviewees without
any prompt. As Marge claimed,

We didn’t live there when it was as bad as it was now really but
you can’t imagine really one extreme to the other you know and
as I said Enoch Powell said, he said he was real he was against it
from the start and he said “if you let one in you’ll have them all

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5 Phyllis 29 April 2002.
6 Phyllis 20 May 2002.
other day I met a constituent of mine”: a theory of anecdotal racism’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22, 1
(1999), 23-47, P. Gilroy, ‘There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack’: The Cultural Politics of Race and
Nation (London 1987).
CONSTRUCTIONS OF WHITENESS

here and they’ll rule you in the end, they’ll take over” and they
are, aren’t they?8

This replays Powell’s warnings of the ‘black man holding the whip hand over the
white man’, an inversion of the slave metaphor which served to absolve colonial
guilt, whilst generating white fear.9 Yet the perception of Powell as ‘real’ is most
insightful. Indeed he was typically hailed as the valiant truth teller. According to
Stan, ‘he was looked upon as a bit of a rabble rouser at the time but his words have
come true really because we can’t cope with all these people coming into the country,
we’re only a small country.’10

In essence, this vision of Powell’s can be seen as a direct result of the Labour
government’s suppression of racism which, rather than directly challenging the
rationale of racists, enabled Powell to emerge as the saviour of ‘the people’s
repressed truths.’11 Although Powell is cited for making racism respectable, his
speeches were pivotal in the sense that they provided a new framework for
articulating racial difference. Overall this demonstrates that racism was neither ‘out
there’, nor can it be reduced to individual behaviour as some have surmised.12
Instead it was historically rooted and central to an individual’s ways of seeing and
understanding the world, enabling them to classify and define themselves in relation
to others. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to imply that individuals were
passively imbued with racist rhetoric; instead, racist narratives provided categories of
everyday thought and practice, a lens through which to see the world, express their
own real world concerns, and make sense of contradictions. In this sense it was part
of their class habitus which does not strictly determine actions as a fixed structure,
but provided a set of guiding principles and stock of knowledge which individuals
deployed in changing contexts.13

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9 Gilroy, ‘There Ain’t’.
10 Stan 21 March 2002. See also Doris 14 March 2002.
11 Smith, New Right Discourse, 146.
12 Cashmore asserted racism is a product of natural conservatism. See E. Cashmore, The Logic of
Racism (London 1987).
13 This approach has structured the work of other researchers most notably Back, who has examined
how competing racial discourses were employed to give meaning to the landscape in different London
CONSTRUCTIONS OF WHITENESS

Before discussing these discourses it is first necessary to conceptualise racism, for despite the plethora of racisms, some common features can be delineated. Racism encapsulates the attempts of a dominant group to exclude, subordinate or exploit subordinate groups. This is achieved and justified by representing a difference to categorise the racial group which signifies an ‘otherness’. The boundaries for locating difference are based upon biological and cultural traits. The latter was used by Powell, and is particularly pervasive. Based on the premise that different cultures and lifestyles are incongruous, segregation is justified to avoid cultural conflict. Yet it does not simply identify difference. Cultural racism constructs a hierarchy, in which national values supersede non-national values. The racialised group is consigned to the margins of society and the superior national community is reinforced. The connection between ‘race’ andnation are clearly apparent. As Miles explains, ‘racism is the lining of the cloak of nationalism, which surrounds and denies the boundaries of England as an imagined community.’14 Thus whilst ‘race’ is a tool to define minority groups, ‘nation’ differentiates and encompasses ‘us’.15

Hage adds an important and enlightening psychoanalytical dimension to this schema in his notion of ‘white nation fantasy’ which encapsulates the imagined ideal national order in which whites occupy a privileged position. This is essentially a fantasy in the sense that it is something some people yearn for and yet it is ultimately unrealistic. Moreover, as a fantasy it gives purpose to life and enables the nationalist to exist as a meaningful person. As Hage explains; ‘People don’t have fantasies. They inhabit fantasy spaces of which they are a part.’16 The desire to belong to this space is deeply rooted in feelings of disempowerment. They feel the state is not working for them and that they ought to be more empowered. Thus it acts as a fantasy of empowerment. This therefore offers a valuable insight into why racist discourses may be particularly attractive to certain people. ‘Whiteness’ also warrants

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16 G. Hage, White Nation (Kent 1998), 70.
definition and clarification. Whiteness is a culturally constructed position of social privilege and power, which presents itself as natural and 'normal.' It is a place to look at ourselves and view others and in the process, mark and racialise others. Thus when individuals employ racial discourses, they are implicated in a process of naturalizing and reifying whiteness. Here I prefer conceptions which highlight that white identity is not a defining characteristic which motivates and links all white people, but is part of a process which is always being made and constructed.  

**Narratives of exclusion**

One dominant discourse which was implemented to interpret the changes within Leicester was that Asian immigration prompted a crisis of whiteness. Asians were perceived by whites as a threat to their economic and social status. Thus whiteness ceased to confer superiority. Academics have provided ample evidence to demonstrate that the working classes were not always considered white and in the nineteenth century the urban poor were categorised as racially distinct from the middle and upper classes. They were a feared ‘other’ of darkest England. Consequently, whiteness was a not a naturally given, mass identity but had to be acquired. It was in the post Second World War era that a new consciousness and sense of security and solidarity for the working classes was defused. The strong demands for labour served to fortify their bargaining power and this was coupled with a prevalent belief that post-war reforms would rectify injustice and poverty and ensure a better way of life. The advent of the welfare state was articulated within a nationalist discourse with a focus on meeting the needs of ‘our people’. This was accompanied by a government publicity campaign which emphasised that social services were not ‘free’ but had to be earned through hard work. Furthermore, from 1911 to 1948 health services were supported by private contributory insurance

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18 See for instance, A. Bonnett, White Identities: Historical and International Perspectives (Harlow 2000).

schemes which were swallowed up in 1948. Within this context, immigration came
to be seen as a threat to working class ‘gains’.\textsuperscript{20} Hence, throughout the interviews
Asians were seen by whites as collectively usurping resources, for which they had
not worked for and were not rightfully theirs.

One woman from Northfields whispered, ‘they’ve come into the country and
the government have gifted them and they’ve given what is ours and we’re worse off
than them.’\textsuperscript{21} Others claimed that Asians had taken jobs from ‘our own men’ within
the transport industry, or had come to Britain to use the health service. As Trevor
exclaimed, ‘they’re getting health care for nought, they wouldn’t get any in their own
country.’\textsuperscript{22} Consequently Asians were seen to be the source of problems within the
National Health Service.\textsuperscript{23} However, undoubtedly, the main site of contention was
over social security. Typical comments included:

They were coming into the country and getting benefits and
having paid nothing into it, that seems to still be the main,
concern, of most, people, that they’re getting hand outs and
they’ve put nothing into the pot.\textsuperscript{24}

We’ve paid all our lives for it and even your grandad, fought
during the wars for it and look what they’ve got, nothing.\textsuperscript{25}

It causes a lot of friction when you see what they’re doing and
getting money like that and you’ve worked all your life and what
do you get? It’s just not fair. But they’re brazen with it.’\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{20} For more details on how the working classes have been fixed and defined see R. Colls and P. Dodd,
\textit{Englishness and Political Culture} (Manchester 1986). The influence of the welfare state is also noted
in Samuel, \textit{Patriots}, xi. For an overview of changes in working class status see A. Marwick, \textit{British
Society Since 1945} (London 1996). For other examples of how whiteness has excluded certain white
European groups and incorporated them later see D. Roediger, \textit{The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the

\textsuperscript{21} Alice 9 July 2002.

\textsuperscript{22} Trevor 21 March 2002.


\textsuperscript{24} Stan 21 March 2002.

\textsuperscript{25} Trevor 21 March 2002.

\textsuperscript{26} Marge 30 January 2002. See also Gladys B 2 May 2002.
No credible evidence was presented for these claims, but anecdotes were presented as essential truths. Indeed, approximately two and a half million left India to fight for Britain in the Second World War, whilst during the 1960s more than 18,000 doctors from India were imperative to the expansion of the health service.27 These doctors came fully trained and have saved Britain approximately over £300 million.28 Clearly, whites' ownership of the nation was at stake and the racial advantage which whites had come to expect as 'normal' was challenged. The identification of Asians as 'brazen' is most insightful as it conveys a concern that the national hierarchies and the imagined ideal order were disrupted. Asians had agency and free will, they were demanding, and had transgressed, therefore, their place on the margins. This discourse orchestrated around the welfare state corresponded with numerous studies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s.29 Nevertheless, though previous research has consistently highlighted housing as the key source of tension and loci for anti immigration hostility, this issue was strikingly absent from the Leicester experience. Indeed, perceived conflict for public housing was recently recognised as fuelling considerable resentment in Burnley. Arguably, the propensity for Asians to live in private accommodation and the private housing renewal programmes in Leicester have appeased possible racial antagonisms and contributed to Leicester's relative success as a multicultural city.30

The contention that Asians had not earned their place within the nation was reinforced by the white people's construction of themselves as worthy, because their lives had been dominated by struggle. Typical remarks were: 'Still you had to struggle 'cause none of us were working you see, my mum just had to bring us all up,'27 'There were no parades for us.' The Guardian, 6 November 2002, 'How Asian doctors saved the NHS', BBC News, 26 November 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3239540.stm> In addition, research has shown that Asian doctors encountered overt racism in the form of limited opportunities. See N. Coker, (ed.), Racism and Medicine: An Agenda for Change (London 2001).


30 Burnley was afflicted by race riots. For a discussion of housing see 'Divisions over woeful spoils, The Guardian, 12 December 2001, 'What the poor whites are telling liberal Britain', The Sunday Times, 26 May 2002.
CONSTRUCTIONS OF WHITENESS

you know we always had food on the table you know, and we were always clean and everything, but it was a struggle a real struggle you know it was. Their moral worth was further emphasised by anecdotes of having to save money and make sacrifices. As Stan explained,

I was brought up, that you couldn’t have anything until you had the money for it you see and my father wouldn’t allow me to buy anything on the never never. If you wanted a bat and ball, then you took the money out of the money box, it wasn’t the done thing to have things before you could afford them now we have things and pay later. So when it came to having a house, I never altered I put money away and waited until I’d got money to do that you see and worked hard and saved and did without. That was the point, we did without and my wife accepted that she didn’t clamour to have the new things until we could go to the shop and buy it and put the money on the counter and that was our way of life.

The context here was the legacy of depression in the 1930s which created a saving ethic and a climate of uncertainty. Yet crucially, these narratives were used to construct an identity for themselves. Their life was penetrated by their material constraints, they emphasised the daily grind, conditions of hardship and the shared experience of struggling and self help. They had to be disciplined and stoic and their personal integrity was born out of their material conditions which had provided them with self reliance, endurance and a strong work ethic.

In sharp contrast, Asians were defined as unworthy because they did not play the rules; they were crafty, cheating and cunning. William asserted: ‘That is I think, that’s the crux of the matter they seemed so conniving so and sos you know as Marge said all the DHSS things, they know a damn sight more than what we know and they seem to get the full benefits and not only that they’re the best fiddlers I’ve yet to meet.’ These accusations were based on newspapers articles, and ‘lessons’ learnt

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32 Stan 21 March 2002. See also Christine 21 March 2002.
33 William 5 March 2002.
from the war: ‘oh they’re the most light fingered people you could yet to meet, you wouldn’t leave anything laying about ’cause it would be gone in a flash, you see, they live by their wits a lot of them do.’\(^{34}\) Another founded her observations on the rapid rise of East Africa Asians from refugee status to middle class success, signalled by their home ownership and suburban residence: ‘They’re supposed to have come in without any money and then they got money all of a sudden they were able to buy these big houses in Evington, but you read in the paper a lot of these up Evington were twisting the government out of money.’\(^{35}\) This stereotype of Asians as astute, shrewd and unscrupulous was actually a typical ethnic representation, used to define the corrupt ‘nature’ of slaves and the supposedly criminal Chinese.\(^{36}\)

The realisation that whiteness no longer represented a privileged position and the injustice felt at this, also underpinned accusations that Asians received ‘preferential treatment’ from the local council. As Marge stated,

> I think the council were to blame for a lot of trouble because if there was a job going and you went for it and an Asian went for it you wouldn’t get it, they couldn’t turn them away they weren’t allowed to turn them away.

*Why?*

It was racist.\(^{37}\)

Another even took offence to Diwali celebrations on the grounds that ‘we’re not *allowed* to have the road shut off... they do they get treated *better* by the council.’\(^{38}\)

To them ‘coloured councillors’ were unequivocally to blame. Thus whites professed themselves as the losers in anti-racist politics.\(^{39}\) These claims, which

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\(^{34}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{35}\) Marge 30 January 2002.


\(^{38}\) Christine 21 March 2002.

equated equal opportunities policies with ‘reverse discrimination’, conveyed the sentiment that white people have endured endemic disadvantage and discrimination. Yet affirmative action policies were clearly employed to remedy racial inequalities and by doing so, whites felt that they had lost their racial advantage. Therefore claims of unfairness and injustice were underscored by fundamental issues of power and advantage.

This sense of white defeat was a salient and recurrent theme throughout the interviews. It was evoked by the language used to describe the settlement of Asians. William described living in Belgrave in the 1970s: ‘When we went there, everybody was white, everybody was white and it seemed that overnight, it seemed to change. As I say eventually all the white people moved out and we were left there on our own.’ The conception that the neighbourhood drastically altered portrayed a feeling that they had no control over the situation; they were passive and helpless and left as the isolated white family. Another described the process of white flight. ‘But as I say, somebody, gets itchy feet and they move and they’re like vultures oh we’ll have that one that’s how it went on you see.’

Here the use of the term ‘vultures’ projected an inhumane, threatening and savage like image, of scavenging and picking over flesh, which denoted that whites felt under siege. Once again it implied that Asians were not acting according to their rightful place, but were impulsive and problematic. The perception that Asians had reversed the power hierarchy was an enduring and recurrent theme, evident in assertions that Asians ‘took over’ and came ‘to take everything from us.’ One woman stated this explicitly. ‘I mean they’re in power aren’t they? They’re everywhere.’ Evidence for this was based on observations that Asians owned shops and were therefore economically successful: ‘They’ve got every business

anti-racism was responsible for youth grievances in London. For America see M. Lamont, The Dignity of Working Men (Cambridge 2000).

40 William 5 March 2002.
41 Stan 13 May 2002.
42 Christine 21 March 2002.
going there’s not one business they ain’t got, they’ve got post offices, they used to be all white, they’ve got paper shops which were all white.\textsuperscript{44}

This obscures the actuality that Asians turned to corner shops particularly in the 1970s because racism excluded them from other forms of employment.\textsuperscript{45} Furthermore, developments including competition from supermarkets and the legalisation in 1994 relaxing Sunday trading undermined the profitability of the corner shop so that workers incurred long hours for low pay.\textsuperscript{46} The claim that shops used to be ‘all white’, manifests how Asians signified white decline. This was also implied by those who claimed that the area had ‘gone down hill,’ suggesting an awareness that whilst others were socially mobile they had been left behind.\textsuperscript{47} In Christine’s words: ‘To me I’ve lived here since 1970, although we only lived down the road, we used to go up Charnie even as a kid, I think since the coloureds have come in it’s gone down hill, it’s scruffy, it never used to be like it is now.’\textsuperscript{48}

The view that Asian gains had resulted in whites’ loss also informed claims that Asians exhibited greater affluence and emblems of success. In Bourdieu’s terms their status was validated by their accumulation of symbolic capital. As one respondent stated: ‘You look at all of them now, they all drive about in decent cars BMWs, you know because a car to them is a symbol, it’s a big symbol is a car and to get a house well that’s another big symbol in their life it puts them in at a different level from the riff raff if you like.’\textsuperscript{49} Another claimed: ‘They’ve got more than what ever any white person has. If there’s two or three in a house they’ve all got a car each. They’ve all got two or three cars, we haven’t got well I haven’t got one, you know what I mean?’\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{44} Trevor 21 March 2002.
\textsuperscript{45} For instance, in 1978 20 per cent of Asian shopkeepers were graduates. ‘Family run Asian shops disappear’, \textit{The Guardian}, 5 January 2002.
\textsuperscript{46} ‘I would be better off on the dole’, \textit{The Times}, 5 January 2002.
\textsuperscript{47} Also noted by A. Brah, ‘The scent of memory: strangers our own and others’, \textit{Feminist Review}, 61, 1 (1999), 4-26.
\textsuperscript{48} Christine 21 March 2002.
\textsuperscript{49} William 5 March 2002.
\textsuperscript{50} Christine 21 March 2002.
Mosques also symbolised the power and wealth Asians had attained and whilst they recognised that these buildings were ‘fantastic’ and ‘beautiful’ they simultaneously conveyed a sense of white failure.\textsuperscript{51} As Marge stated, ‘they took over the churches you see but whose fault is that? It’s ours ’cause they stopped going to church.’\textsuperscript{52} In reality redundant churches were used only partly due to a decline in white religious observance. More significantly, was the dissipation of the white population from the city centre, to the outskirts, in pursuit of the suburban dream.\textsuperscript{53} Clearly, the local landscape had acquired new meanings and no longer sanctioned the authority of the dominant white culture. The mosque proclaimed the permanent presence of Muslims and was a visible and stark reminder of their identity and solidarity, and of their demands on public space. It signified a space for collective expression and belonging which white people felt they had lost.\textsuperscript{54}

Perhaps this sense of loss was shaped by economic and social changes in the twentieth century which transformed social life. Put simply, higher incomes, coupled with cheaper transport and suburbanisation have led to the erosion of traditional occupational neighbourhoods and larger and more comfortable homes combined with more time for social activities has arguably, reduced social interaction. This decline in social cohesion was further influenced by various factors such as, geographical mobility, slum clearance, housing schemes and the onset of Conservatism, which has prompted some academics to conclude that working class collective identity and solidarity has declined, particularly since the 1970s.\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{52} Marge 5 March 2002.

\textsuperscript{53} R. Gale, ‘Pride of place and places’, South Asian religious groups and the city planning authority in Leicester’, Paper in Planning Research, Cardiff University, 172 (Cardiff 1999), 9.

\textsuperscript{54} For research on the conflict over urban space in relation to mosques see J. Eade, ‘The political articulation of community and the Islamisation of space in London’, in R. Barot, (ed.), Religion and Ethnicity: Minorities and Social Change in the Metropolis (Kampen 1993), 28-42. This shows that the debates were centred on the need to preserve English national identity, rather than religion.

However, the respondents displayed the familiar device of romanticising this past community life. They referred to the ‘good old days’ when ‘everybody was on the same level,’ ‘everybody mixed’ and they occupied autonomous spaces. For example, William recalled his wife’s fondness for Highfields: ‘She really loved it round there. She knew everybody and Charnwood Street, well it was a mecca.’ St Barnabas church was also a central meeting place and was used for dancing on Saturday night. According to William: ‘As far as we were concerned that was our dance place, keep out, you know.’ This reveals how space was contested and viewed in territorial terms, a consciousness evident in other studies of working class racism.

This competition over space was exemplified by the experiences of one woman who persistently claimed ‘I mean you go in town, you have to move out of their way for them they will not move.’ She continued to relay a detailed example whereby she was forced to step off the path into the road, for an Asian man. Arguably, this seemingly inconsequential encounter was experienced as traumatic because it triggered latent fears regarding her imagined powerlessness. She subsumed the role of the vulnerable and defenceless white woman and racialised the Asian man as inherently violent and dangerous; he became the typical aggressive black male. This is later testified by her remarks: ‘It was safer to walk the streets till these all came in definitely.’ Furthermore this was not a unique experience but

56 R. Samuel and P. Thompson, The Myths We Live By (London 1990), 8. This has been noted in other community studies and according to Cornwell the romantisation of a past community life was a coping strategy to deal with the problems in the present. See J. Cornwell, cited in Crow and Allen, Ibid, 20.


58 William 5 March 2002.

59 Ibid.


has been acknowledged as a ubiquitous feature of modern society, which has been termed ‘image repertoire’. That is people draw on crude stereotypes when they encounter strangers to minimise further stimulation and feelings of anxiety and therefore reduce the complexity of the urban experience. In general, this discourse of the loss of white power was voiced by those who had minimal contact with Asians. Indeed it was most conspicuous in the interviews with those living in Northfields, a predominantly white estate, north east of the city. Here they protested that they were the voiceless victims. Comments included, ‘I’m not saying anything you can’t even speak now you can’t even speak, it’s not a free country, it’s not what it was.’ ‘What I’ve got against is if we say anything we’re in the wrong, if they say it doesn’t matter and that’s what I don’t like.’ In this case, it can be surmised that these feelings emanated from their lack of access to a civil society. This parallels Charlesworth’s research of working class communities in Rotherham, where the demise of trade unions contributed to the erosion of any civic culture. Trust is seen as a vital facet of civil society, yet during the interviews they warned me to trust no one and look after yourself only. They also exhibited a sense of disenfranchisement with mainstream politics, for them ‘it ain’t England any more.’ Hence it can be argued that although they were not affected personally by Asian immigration in the absence of what constituted a civil society, the white nation fantasy offered a sense of identity and belonging. Moreover, Northfields has been identified as an area blighted by pockets of deprivation and high levels of crime.

64 R. Sennett draws on the work of a range of academics including R. Barthes, K. Lynch and E. Goffman to support this theory. See R. Sennett, *Flesh and Stone* (New York 1994), 356-66.

65 Northfields was located in the ward of West Humberstone which in 1991 contained a white population of 79.8 per cent. Leicester City Council, *Leicester Key Facts Ethnic Minorities 1991 Census* (1995), 9.

66 Alice 9 July 2002.

67 Joan 9 July 2002.


70 Joan 9 July 2002.

71 P. Winstone discussed the resentment of the white estates as stigmatised communities in interview 7 June 2002. West Humberstone is in the ten per cent of the most deprived wards nationally. Leicester
With this in mind, Scheff’s statement that ‘people choose imagined communities over real ones when they are desperately humiliated’ appears to be most pertinent.\textsuperscript{72}

Hitherto, it has been argued that whites voiced the negation of their power because Asians were seen to threaten the superiority which whites were socialised to expect. They therefore mobilised and reconstructed their white identity when it was decentred and its privileges threatened. Essentially they did not want to relinquish the benefits of whiteness and were defending what was considered ‘normal’ to them. For those who lived in Highfields, racist discourses were also adapted to interpret changes within their immediate locality. Previous studies have revealed the crucial role of the neighbourhood in shaping residents’ identities. Neighbourhoods were seen to contribute to the definition of who a person is and locate their belonging in society.\textsuperscript{73} Moreover, it is recognised that neighbourhoods may be particularly valuable for the older person’s sense of self as they often have a long association and investment in a particular area. Furthermore, in the absence of paid employment and consequently, relationships within the public sphere, the neighbourhood may be highly valued. Yet the neighbourhood also functioned as an ‘agent enforcing conformity to accepted standards of behaviour.’\textsuperscript{74} Thus interviewees stressed the values of pride and respect which governed their communities and the importance of traditions.\textsuperscript{75} For example, on the day of a funeral people would lay out the dead, ‘it was a neighbourly thing and the whole community of that street was there.’ ‘The men would raise their hats’ and this was ‘the correct thing to do.’\textsuperscript{76} In Bourdieu’s


\textsuperscript{75} Marge 30 January 2002 and Alice 9 July 2002.

\textsuperscript{76} Marge 5 March 2002 and William 5 March 2002.
terms these ‘rules’ constituted their ethos, that is, their specific embedded morality which operated at a practical level. These actions are taken for granted and people only become conscious of them once they cease to be part of the social world.

Thus Asians were seen to displace their ethos and disrupt the order of the neighbourhood. Trivial complaints included the alleged unpredictable way Asians parked their cars, which was ‘anywhere they want’ and even stalls outside the shops were seen as an irritant as they disregarded the conventions and regulations. 77 Doris complained, ‘they’ve got all the things outside, that weren’t allowed when the other people had them they weren’t.’ 78 This disruption impinged on people’s private spaces such as their garden. Phyllis claimed her neighbours were opportunistic,

I went on me holiday once and when I’d come back they’d chopped all me flowers off in the garden and I were looking for me prop to put my washing out… and then I looked over the wall and there it was stuck in the garden with something growing up it you know my prop (laughs) so ever so cheeky like you know. They did knock me back wall down and they were made to put that up, they were sort of making us all into one place; they thought they could just take over. 79

According to these accounts Asians subverted the boundary markers and challenged the spatial ordering of the neighbourhood. 80 Others complained that Asian clothing such as turbans and saris would often colonise the washing line and shared back yard, whilst one man described the invasion of smells and noise from cooking. 81 For

77 Trevor 21 March 2002.
78 Doris 14 March 2002.
79 Phyllis 29 April 2002.
example, the ‘terrible’ smell had forced him to leave the house and this was coupled with the ‘bang bang bang ....doing the chapattis’ all at ‘ten o’clock at night.’

At first glance these incidents appear to be conflicts over space. Academics have noted how with the racialisation of public space, the home became a defended and guarded white space where a sense of order was maintained. Yet incidents were also inextricably linked to developments in the post-war era. Greater affluence amongst the working classes prompted a new home centeredness. With more comfortable homes and attractions such as the radio and later the television, the home represented a site of leisure and consumption and encouraged a retreat into privacy. This was facilitated by neighbours who were aware of the disparaging effects of gossip and began to distance themselves from their fellow neighbours. According to some academics this focus on the home in the 1950s was part of a process of reworking and redefining national identity. In the climate of decolonisation Englishness once signified by white male adventure was transformed into the ‘quiet street and the privet hedge.’ Within this context, Asians did not adhere to their norms and values, specifically quietness and privacy, but instead blurred the boundaries between the public and private domain.

Another facet of the neighbourhood order was a gendered dimension. Skeggs has uncovered the centrality of respectability as an organising principle and focus for class identity and social superiority. This originated from nineteenth century conceptions that the potentially dangerous working class could be suppressed by casting mothers into the role of civilisers for their family. Thus working class women were educated in bourgeois domesticity, a role which gave them moral significance and status, encapsulated in the term ‘cleanliness is next to godliness.’ Consequently, women judged other women by standards of cleanliness and uncleanness was synonymous with immorality and low social standing.

82 Stan 21 March 2002.
84 W. Webster, Imagining Home Gender 'Race' and National Identity, 1945-64 (London 1998).
85 Ibid., 65.
86 See B. Skeggs, Formations of Class and Gender (London 1997) and also J. Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity (London 1994), 161.
White women interviewees were keen to be associated with the domestic ideal. Phyllis stressed, 'I was always scrubbed and clean I can never remember being dirty or having dirty hands or anything like that I can never remember being dirty.'\(^{87}\) Similarly, Marge claimed, 'cause years ago people were clean, they scrubbed their step, their front door step, every week you cleaned your window seal and all that.'\(^{88}\) Consequently, they appraised their Asian neighbours by these standards. Marge observed 'they didn’t know really how to put curtains up properly do they? The nets and that everywhere looked really sullen you know.'\(^{89}\) Another disclosed, 'I used to think I wish some of them would ask me how to put a net curtain up you know. I mean Indians never seemed to know how to put the curtains up straight you know (laughs) no they never asked you nothing like that.'\(^{90}\) Phyllis claimed her Bangladeshi neighbours 'seemed a scruffy lot' because 'when they came next door to me they I mean chucked all their rubbish in the yard, in the back yard... stinking rubbish, then they’d have a bonfire...they didn’t look clean and they weren’t clean.'\(^{91}\)

Others took offence to their toilet habits including the Indian toilet which was ‘unhygienic’ and other intolerable habits including spitting and chewing gum which were ‘dirty.’\(^{92}\) For one woman the sight of a Muslim woman blowing her nose outside her house, had impelled her to call her a ‘dirty pig.’\(^{93}\) Some presented ‘Asian’ as analogous with ‘dirt’ in contrast to ‘white’ and ‘clean.’ Marge claimed, ‘there were no coloured people then it was all white and everywhere was so clean.’\(^{94}\) This revealed a connotation of Asians with litter suggesting an underlying desire to expel them from the neighbourhood. This discourse was echoed in the local

\(^{87}\) Phyllis 29 April 2002.


\(^{89}\) Marge 30 January 2002.

\(^{90}\) Doris 14 March 2002.

\(^{91}\) Phyllis 20 May 2002.

\(^{92}\) Spitting was a social taboo due to fears of tuberculosis. See ‘Here’s one in the eye’, The Guardian, 6 November 2003.

\(^{93}\) Christine 21 March 2002.

\(^{94}\) Marge 30 January 2002.
CONSTRUCTIONS OF WHITENESS

newspaper in the 1960s where their cultural habits were a prime source of discontent. ‘It’s not their colour I object to it’s their habits.’ These included spitting, the smell of their cooking and even leaving the toilet door open, thus defining them in terms of bodily characteristics, which became the object of disgust: dirty, uncouth and contaminated.

The association with dirt and disease has played an eminent role in the construction of stereotypes; it not only marks an ‘other’ as imperfect and uncivilised, but also signals the threat of contagion and the infiltration of personal, local and national space. In Krisieva’s words, it is based on the ‘simple logic of excluding filth.’ The potency of dirt and disease as a symbol permitting demarcation cannot be overstated. Academics have charted its various nineteenth and twentieth century guises stressing the bourgeois fear of working class diseases and the scientific discourses which correlated disease with ‘race.’ Nevertheless, the interviews reveal that this familiar discourse was gendered. Moreover, women did not draw on this rhetoric arbitrarily; instead it was grounded in their historical reality and related to their socially constructed version of white femininity. Asians were seen to defy the values in which they had invested and which whites perceived as universal. This enabled them to criticise Asians for their ‘failings’, the process of which actually enhanced their self worth and status and reinforced their position of respectability.

At the crux of the white interviewee’s anxieties was that Asians represented a threat primarily to the privileges conferred by whiteness, and to their norms and values which constituted their self identity and white culture. This echoes facets of Elias’s and Scotson’s work on boundary construction in a study of a suburb in Leicester. Elias noted: ‘The very existence of interdependent outsiders who share neither the fund of common memories nor, as it appears, the same norms of respectability as the established group, acts as an irritant; it is perceived by the

members of the latter as an attack against their own we-image and we-ideal.'

Consequently, the established responded by rejecting the newcomers and casting them into the role of the outsiders. The powerful felt attacked; they were motivated to attack in return. As Elias explained, ‘it was a weapon of defence as well as attack.’ This was achieved through networks of gossip which functioned to praise the established’s superior status and further integrate their group, whilst the outsiders were stigmatised as immoral, and in essence ‘uncivilised.’ Thus the ‘group charisma’ of the established was inextricably linked to the ‘group disgrace’ of the ‘outsiders’. Moreover, they concluded that this strategy operated at an entirely unconscious level. This reading of Elias clearly contains important parallels to the experiences of the white respondents.

To summarise, the contours of whiteness have been mapped. The interviews reveal that whilst whites did not uniformly harbour racist feelings they were all engaged in a process of defining and excluding Asians and constructing a white identity. This is proved by the racial discourses they employed which were interwoven and shaped by their experiences of class and gender. Whites saw themselves as disciplined and domesticated, whilst Asians were marked as corrupt and unworthy. These discourses bore little resemblance to the tangible reality of Asians but connected to the subjective lived experiences of white individuals. In short, these discourses stemmed from the anxiety they felt regarding their position in society. Equal opportunities policies and Asians access to state resources ultimately challenged white privilege, whilst the behaviour of Asians did not comply with ‘normal’ white culture and was, therefore, classified as deviant. Nevertheless, whites did not always act in a manner that was consistent with their designated racial identity. They often included Asians and acted in ways which blurred the boundaries.

**Narratives of inclusion**

This section traces the impact of whites’ relations with Asians. It will test the assumption that encounters with those from different ethnic minority backgrounds may result in the rejection of stereotypes and the realisation that seemingly disparate

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CONSTRUCTIONS OF WHITENESS

101 Communities do not pose a tangible threat. The interviews reveal that despite initial fears that Asian immigration would prompt imminent chaos, in reality encounters were far from problematic. The form, quality and extent of relations with Asians were multifarious and diverse. Some developed networks with Asians within the realm of work, whilst others discussed more informal relations as friends. This involved visiting each others houses and attending special celebrations such as birthdays.102 Some forged intergenerational relationships. As Phyllis described,

There used to be a little [Asian] girl come in our shop, she didn’t come for nothing but she knew, you knew I were friendly and she used to come in and she liked reading and she was a good little reader and she were only about so big you know and she’d go to the library twice a week and get a children’s book and she’d come in and read a bit to me like you know, ask me if it were right like you know and she were a nice little girl.... So anyhow she came in at Christmas with this little brass crucifix so she said I brought you a present she said for Christmas she says because we’ve been told, I should have thought she’d been told at school or something, this was our god, she said and I couldn’t part with that, it’s standing on top of the wardrobe now, it’s a little brass crucifix...I couldn’t part with it like, this little girl said she’d been told that this is your god.103

The affective bond between the white woman and the Asian girl clearly transcended racial boundaries and the respect shown by the girl through the gift, was highly


103 Phyllis 6 May 2002. For a similar account see Cynthia 28 May 2002.
valued and cherished. It could be surmised that this was due to the Asian girl’s life course position within childhood. Western notions of childhood conjures up a constellation of social attributes such as innocent, vulnerable and dependent, which rendered her less threatening than her Asian elders.

Undoubtedly the most recurrent basis of interaction was as neighbours. Many praised their neighbours highly. Comments included, ‘our neighbour is a Muslim and she is one of the best neighbours God ever made’ whilst one man stressed of his neighbour Mr Patel ‘you couldn’t wish to have a better friend.’ Sometimes, neighbourhood friendships were built on mutual need, as Phyllis stated of her neighbours from East Africa ‘they’d got nobody and I’d got nobody really you see.’ It was within this role as neighbours, that Asians provided crucial practical support. One man was particularly impressed when his neighbours were forthcoming and offered assistance during a blackout. ‘We had a power cut and I was out at the time, but they came round to see if I wanted any candles now unprompted, I was out but they went to my neighbour next door to me and asked them, and very good it shows, friendliness.’

They therefore provided help in times of need and this was also demonstrated following a death within the family.

The people next door to her are Asians they’re marvellous couldn’t do enough for her when her husband died, you know really nice. She said they’re very nice they’re very helpful when her husband died and that.

*What did they do?*

Well they sent flowers and that they asked if there was anything she wanted doing you know they always shouted over even now to see if she’s all right and knock at the door.

Another recalled, ‘when my wife passed away I’ve still got the cards, and there was about a dozen houses round there that all contributed to flowers and I didn’t know

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105 Phyllis 6 May 2002.

106 William 5 March 2002.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF WHITENESS

half these people, but they did that, which I thought was very nice, very nice and touching it was really.\textsuperscript{108}

The importance of traditions such as the funeral within a street has previously been discussed, thus despite anxieties, Asians did not attempt to displace the values held by the whites but reinforced them and in the process, effectively revitalised and enriched the old neighbourhood community.\textsuperscript{109} This is supported by studies conducted in the 1950s and 1960s which reveal that the traditional role allocated to neighbours was to fulfil an intermediary role by offering help in ‘emergencies’ and to be friendly.\textsuperscript{110} The friendliness of Asians was also noted.

There’s a greater tendency for them wanting to make contact with you. Very often, when I go just down here to the post office, a single one an Asian or something, either he’ll nod, or we’ll exchange good morning with one another which they didn’t do two or three years ago, they would sort of not look at you, now they want to look at you to recognise that they belong in the neighbourhood and that’s the difference I’m noticing at the present moment and if I go into any of their shops I don’t go into a lot, but they’re very very helpful, well they’re very, very kind to you if you go into any of their shops.\textsuperscript{111}

Although this increased assertiveness, responsiveness and civility was described as a relatively recent phenomenon, it illustrated how Asians were, in effect, recreating and regenerating the community atmosphere and fulfilling the criteria of the model neighbour. Indeed local shops functioned as an important site of sociability, particularly for women and from the 1960s were fading from other towns.\textsuperscript{112}

Moreover, these everyday occurrences had significant ramifications for how whites viewed Asians. This is exemplified by Stan’s reflections:

\textsuperscript{108} William 5 March 2002.

\textsuperscript{109} For the funeral see 55.

\textsuperscript{110} Phillipson \textit{et al}, ‘Older people’s experiences’, 725.

\textsuperscript{111} Stan 13 May 2002.

But there’s good and bad in them the same as us. I mean we’re not whiter than white and there’s some very nice. I suffer with my heart and sometimes when I go out I get an attack and I’ve stood several times on a road trying to get my breath waiting while the pain goes and I’ve had five or six white people pass me and just go by but the next coloured person that came would always say; “Are you all right? Can I do anything?” Now that’s very noticeable and not once has that happened, several times, the white person, my own colour wouldn’t bother about me, but the coloured man or woman would, very noticeable. I didn’t expect it but I accepted that was done with great thought and great caring for me.113

The aid offered to him in an emergency, dispelled any myths of the threatening, aggressive ‘other’ and prompted him to be reflexive.114 That is, their actions effectively challenged his expectations and preconceptions and forced him to reflect, to question and reinterpret his racial discourses where were enmeshed in his worldview. Moreover, as an older man and also suffering ill health, he occupied a marginal space within society.115 Older people have been classified as ‘immigrants in time’ and ‘strangers in their land’.116 That is, their culture and values are deemed out of date and strange by modern society. Arguably, Stan was not in a position to effectively subjugate and racialise Asians, as he was also positioned on the margins.

Similarly, contact with Asians spurred others to be reflexive and reject dominant stereotypes. Evidence revealed that Asians were not inherently sly or cunning, but proved to be honest, trustworthy and reliable. Doris noted this when she worked in a local shop.

They never owe you anything if they were a bit short of change and you’d say “don’t worry”, if it were a few coppers “you can

113 Stan 13 May 2002.

114 See A. Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity (Oxford 1991) who developed the concept of reflexivity to capture human agency.

115 Pilcher, Age, 98-117.

116 Ibid.
drop it in when your passing’ you know if you were short of change at the weekend. I’ve known them a man say perhaps a Indian or a foreign man to come and ‘I’d say you’d needn’t bother’ and I could bet nearly always, they never owed you anything they’d send the wife or send somebody straight down when they got home. Never tried to do you out of money, although they’re acute business people you see but they wouldn’t try to twist you out of anything.117

The language of Asians was identified within racial discourses as a mark of an inferior characteristic and was typically seen as archaic.118 Yet Cynthia refused to label their language as a sign of their primitiveness, for her it signified an aptitude, which white people lacked.

The first ones I remember were in Prebend Street, because there was one lady there I used to speak as I came home and she got a girl, it struck me as strange really a little girl she’d be about eight, nine, she’d go along the street and meet me and start chatting away to me and her mother was outside, she’d run and start talking to her mother in their language and I thought you know, I know we’re not now so much now, but we were very backward really, we were only taught one language where as... they spoke English and also spoke their mother tongue, that was strange. I don’t think there was the resentment.119

A further example of this admiration for Asians included a respect for their family values. According to Pauline: ‘They think a lot of their family I mean the young ones go out to work and their parents bring their children up that’s their way and they never leave the elderly.’120 This was supported by Stan,

117 Doris 14 March 2002.
119 Cynthia 28 May 2002.
120 Pauline 28 May 2002.
I think they look after their old, far better than what we do. I'm not saying that I'm not, I mean I'm very fortunate but there's a section of older people where the family have either ignored them or sort of let them get on with their life well it's nothing to do with us type of thing. I think the Asian population and people from those different countries they take care of their old, I think you can see that in many instances, they take care of their old better than what we do. I think we're better at it now through the health service ...there are still a lot of people would like to get rid of the old and get them in a home, because really they're a bit in the way, they upset your life and that's the attitude of the white people.121

Once again, considering the marginalised position of older people in British society, the tradition of close knit families, and in particular caring and respecting elders was an enviable custom.

Nor did Asians incite chaos and violate the principles of white culture, but appeared to adhere to traditional British values of courtesy and privacy. As Cynthia and Pauline discussed,

I think they're quieter all together.
And they're so polite they teach them good manners and politeness and everything.
I think the Asians were accepted more than the Africans to be honest.....well I don't think it sounds funny but I don't think the English sort of accepted the Africans with their long hair. And they were louder. Because they do speak very loudly don't they?122

This implies that Asians were accepted on the strict basis that they monitored their behaviour, and aspired to and assimilated British norms. However, new racism worked on the basis of including some aspects of black or Asian culture, to

121 Stan 13 May 2002.
legitimate the exclusion of other traits which were deemed unassimilable. This
differentiation of ‘otherness’ was at the core of New Right discourse. In the
interviews, the appearance and behaviour of the African Caribbeans was perceived as
too alien and bizarre, hence they were collectively excluded and defined as the
‘other’. This was substantiated by others who associated African Caribbeans with
drugs and crime. This exposes the hierarchy of national cultures which underpins
cultural racism, in which some cultures are defined as more threatening than others.
For one woman, the immigration of Asians was unremarkable and clearly did not
prompt fear; instead, for her, the Chinese posed an ominous danger. According to
Phyllis,

There was about one China man, Chinese man, a laundry man,
Sam Lee I think his name was and he married a girl, Belgrave
way and I used to cross the street because I was frit of him. I
fritted China men. (laughs) I mean as a kid I was bought up that
you feared China men because they had these opium dens and
they murdered people (laughs).

Clearly, the parameters of racial stereotyping were not dislodged or overturned but
were ever present and all pervasive. Moreover, academics have contended that
despite the offer of acceptance in exchange for assimilation, this was never possible
and was a ‘phantom acceptance’. Despite this, overall, contact did help to erode
negative judgements of Asians by prompting individuals to amend their beliefs in the
context of specific experiences and therefore contributed to the construction of a
more positive collective identity.

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123 Smith, *New Right Discourse*.

Caribbean’s criminality in opposition to Asian’s supposed passivity see P. Gilroy, ‘Police and thieves’,
in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, (eds), *The Empire Strikes Back*, 143-82. This diverges
from Good’s study in which the African Caribbeans were accepted to a greater extent than the Asians,
because they shared common Christian values. Good, ‘White’.

125 Phyllis 29 April 2002.

126 This is Goffman’s terminology see E. Goffman, *Stigma Notes on the Management of Spoiled

127 See S. R. Pitchford, 'image-making movements: Welsh nationalism and stereotype transformation',
*Sociological Perspectives*, 44 (2001), 45-65, for more discussion of transforming stereotypes.
Contact with Asians had further benefits. It enabled whites to learn about Asian communities. They were able to differentiate between the different religions. Christine noted: 'There’s the Muslims, the Hindus and then there’s the Sikhs’, whilst one woman had been informed how the surname of Hindus signified their caste and therefore occupation.  

There were some Patels, used to bring the laundry to me and everybody seemed to be named Patel you know, but with an initial first and I said to them one day when they came in for some laundry I said, "oh there’s a lot of you at your house so you know all Patels” so he said “oh yes” he says “we’re all brothers.” Well me thinking he meant blood brothers you see and I said, “oh dear how many sisters have you got like?” So he said "no not living with us but,” he said “we’re all brothers there’s twenty two of us” he said, you know I thought, bit queer that is having twenty two sons, she must have got some daughters somewhere and then we got the conversation sorted out. No they were all named Patel and that was what they were and the Patels were mostly workers you see they were workers. The Khans ’cause there were few of them, they kept shops like butchers shops...

It takes you a bit to learn it, to understand it, if you don’t ask any questions you don’t know. It seems as if the Khans were mostly shopkeepers, the Patels were workers, factory workers and I don’t know what the Chars were, perhaps they were a bit better class, but that’s how it was you see, you know it’s like in England there’s upper class, lower class and medium class ain’t it?  

They therefore attempted to grasp the internal differences and diversity often encapsulated within the single, mythical ‘Asian’ community. This understanding was most important considering stereotypes and prejudices were grounded in the

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128 Christine 21 March 2002.

129 Phyllis 20 May 2002.
conception of a homogeneous 'out group.' A sharp contrast is provided by those who did not live in a predominantly Asian area and essentially conflated different categories. Alice contended: ‘Listen Asians come into the country; Indians came into the country, now we’ve got these Muslims.’

Whites were also able to absorb important knowledge about the background of different Asian communities. Some acknowledged the different class and status backgrounds and therefore did not make the typical assumption that all ethnic minority groups shared a working class position. William clarified: ‘A lot depends on their type of background they had in their own country. These people I’m telling you about that live facing me, they had quite a big high standard of living, they had a maid, someone to do the cleaning, somebody to do the garden, they were up the tree a little.’ William’s friend explained that Asians from East Africa were predominantly from a commercial class and therefore possessed valuable entrepreneurial experience, which they transferred to Leicester.

He said that Asians are work people, they’re shop keepers you see. And I think that’s what they were, they come over to this country they perhaps had a market stall or something or a small place somewhere and I think that’s where they sort of built on…. He said ‘we’re a nation of shop keepers. We’re not a nation of soldiers and warriors.’ I remember him saying that. ‘We’re shop keepers’ and that sort of thing, which makes it right, therefore that’s why I think they’re that way in shops.

These anecdotes illustrated that the rapid upward mobility of some East African Asians was not grounded in their cunning strategies but determined by their previous experience and resources.

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131 Alice 9 July 2002.

132 For the tendency to associate ethnic minority groups with working class status see T. Reynolds, ‘Black women and social-class identity’ in R. Munt, (eds), *Cultural Studies and the Working Class* (London 2000), 82-97.

133 William 5 March 2002.

134 Ibid.
Others learned about the conditions preceding their immigration and, in particular, the expulsion from Kenya and the preparations this entailed.

They'd explained to me he was the eldest son and he'd come over to England with his young wife and baby and that his family were still in Nairobi or somewhere. He used to tell me about how they'd got a shop on one of these nature parks where there's animals and that they'd got lorries ... Then as it went on and they got more friendly, I'd always been a good listener like I like to know about how people go on in different countries and he said "you know that there was a lot of trouble there?" I mean we didn't particularly know there was any trouble there and they'd sent the oldest out and they were getting the money all out you see. Then you know the time they said they'd thrown them all out with nothing two or four days to get out, there was four more men big brothers come and two daughters and their husbands and the mother and dad and within a fortnight every one of them had bought a house in Leicester, paid cash for it. Every one and they said they'd come in with nothing, they did come in with nothing but it was all here before. That's when they first came in when what's his name Amin somebody chucked them out like, you know.\textsuperscript{135}

Some were enlightened to the networks of support and mutual dependence, which operated to meet imperative material needs. William explained, oh yes it was common knowledge in the first instance, that they were big families, lot of brothers, and they'd all pool the money and they'd buy a property and all live in that property and all chip in you see and when that place was nearly paid they'd buy another one, then for the next one you see.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{135} Gladys 13 March 2002.

\textsuperscript{136} William 5 March 2002.
Likewise, Muslims pooled resources together to finance mosques: ‘well of course you see these people unlike Christians and what not, they’ll give their last farthing to the cause you see.’\textsuperscript{137}

They also gained insights into various facets of Asian cultures. This included details of Ramadan, Hindu and Muslim funerals and marriages\textsuperscript{138} Phyllis remembered Indian cooking techniques. For example chapattis she explained were put ‘on the steps to dry and then they have chapattis for every meal, but then, we don’t understand you see, they don’t eat bread, see not when they first come.’\textsuperscript{139} She also expressed admiration for her neighbour’s clothing. ‘When she went out she looked beautiful in this jewellery and lovely saris and that, I mean she looked beautiful.’\textsuperscript{140} Her neighbour even dressed her in a sari.

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\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{139} Phyllis 29 April 2002.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
good idea really 'cause fashions come fashions go you (laughs)
got them all forever ain't you?\textsuperscript{141}

Elsewhere the appearance and strange dress of Asians was stigmatised and often caused outrage.\textsuperscript{142} Yet for Phyllis, the ‘exotic’ and novel Asian clothing was normalised and naturalised; it had a practical purpose. This example could be viewed as providing tacit support for Bhabha’s ‘hybridity.’ This concept is based on the premise that ethnic identities are not fixed but change and that sharing a social space enables the fusing of disparate cultural elements. This occurs within a ‘liminal’ or in-between space, where structures of authority are undermined and rendered ambivalent. Thus, the constructed boundaries of the nation are contested.\textsuperscript{143} Whilst this concept is attractive, proposing a positive and progressive outcome from the exchange of cultures, it has attracted considerable criticism.\textsuperscript{144} Critiques have claimed that hybridity must involve the transposition of ethnic cultural symbols.\textsuperscript{145} Considering this, inter-racial mixing in Highfields was not transformative, as it did not produce significant and permanent changes to white identity. In addition, ambivalence has been proved vital to racial discourses. Asian women for example, have signified both desire and alleged backwardness and even when stereotypes appear to bestow approval they serve a restrictive function.\textsuperscript{146} To illustrate, Powell declared a grudging respect for Asians and India which ultimately served to reinforce their ‘otherness’ and obscure the underlying inequality of power.\textsuperscript{147} The historical roots of these contradictory attitudes have been identified by Said who has shown how, from the late nineteenth century, Europeans were able to admire and

\textsuperscript{141} Phyllis 6 May 2002.

\textsuperscript{142} Leicester Mercury, 16 February 1968 and letter Leicester Mercury, 14 April 1968.

\textsuperscript{143} See H. Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture} (London 1994). This concept has typically been applied to youth cultures. See L. Back, \textit{New Ethnicities}.


\textsuperscript{145} F. Anthias, ‘New hybridities, old concepts, the limits of "culture" ', \textit{Ethnic and Racial Studies} 24, 4 (2001), 619-41.

\textsuperscript{146} A. Rattansi, ‘"Western" racisms’, 68-9.

\textsuperscript{147} Smith, \textit{New Right Discourse}, 55.
CONSTRUCTIONS OF WHITENESS

simultaneously demean the ‘Orient’, which principally acted as the antithesis to the West.\textsuperscript{148}

Despite these arguments, the very existence of meaningful relations between Asians and whites demonstrates that whites were able to suppress their hostility and antagonisms, to differentiate people from the constructed stereotype, and to treat people as individuals.\textsuperscript{149} As Trevor reflected: ‘How did I feel about it, well I didn’t feel any hostility towards them at all not at all because I used to speak to them you see, so I didn’t feel hostile towards them at all.’\textsuperscript{150} Some recognised that it was their responsibility to overcome their negative perceptions. As Gladys stated: ‘You got to give and take ain’t you? There’s no good being funny with people when I can get nasty, but otherwise what’s the point?’\textsuperscript{151} William confirmed, ‘if I’m walking up there and I see them I always pass the time of day with them I won’t just ignore them, I’ll speak, I’m a man, I’ll speak to anyone and my philosophy is if you don’t speak to them, they won’t speak to you, you see that’s how you make friends, I think so anyway.’\textsuperscript{152} Moreover Phyllis’s involvement in the ‘culture’ of Asians reveals how she actively embraced the cosmopolitan dimension within her locale. For her it was an opportunity to engage, to yield fascinating information and consequently was a source of enjoyment and empowerment. She summarised; ‘I found it very interesting and I learnt a terrible lot about other people.’\textsuperscript{153}

Collectively, these glimpses into the everyday experiences of the white people who lived in Highfields, defy Sennett’s contention that diversity within cities prompts people to distance themselves from difference, to avoid contact, manifesting in indifference. That is, ‘individuals create something like ghettos in their own bodily experience when confronted with difference.’\textsuperscript{154} Whilst this may have constituted an


\textsuperscript{149} This draws from Gilman who stresses the need to recognise the crucial difference between those who stereotype pathologically and those who can discard them once anxiety is overcome. S. L. Gilman, \textit{Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness} (Ithaca 1985), 17-8.

\textsuperscript{150} Trevor 21 March 2002.

\textsuperscript{151} Gladys B 2 May 2002.

\textsuperscript{152} William 5 March 2002.

\textsuperscript{153} Phyllis 6 May 2002.

\textsuperscript{154} Sennett, \textit{Flesh and Stone}, 366.
initial response, the evidence from the interviews suggests that over time, both whites and Asians did not withdraw into closed and isolated communities but showed willingness to overcome ‘difference’ to engage and interact.

This is further supported by the distinctly non-racist statements that abound throughout the interviews. Although the interviewees failed to recognise structural inequalities, they often employed a rhetoric of equality. For example, ‘in the eyes of the Bible, we’re all equal and I think that’s how you’ve got to look at it.’\textsuperscript{155} Phyllis claimed:

As I say I’ve got nothing against anybody, if they want to work and want to earn a living and I say let them all come (laughs) I mean you can’t deprive people, we’re all people. I mean I used to say in the first place if you’ve been run over in the street and you’ve got to have a blood transfusion would you suddenly sit up and say ‘well what colour are they?’ I mean they’re all they same inside aren’t they? I mean we’ve all got the same blood and everything you can’t help your colour.\textsuperscript{156}

Whites also demonstrated empathy and understanding and exhibited a belief in common humanity and the universality of human nature. Comments included:

When they’ve got their own people in, they you know just come over and stay with them don’t they, same as you would if you’ve got some of your own family, you’d say ‘oh well if you’ve got no where else to go, would you like to come over here?’\textsuperscript{157}

It’s like for instance if I’d stayed in Germany after the war it would have taken me quite some time to adapt to the German way of life or any other foreign way of life you see.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{155} William 5 March 2002.

\textsuperscript{156} Phyllis 20 May 2002.

\textsuperscript{157} Gladys 13 March 2002.

\textsuperscript{158} Trevor 21 March 2002. See also Phyllis 6 May 2002.
Moreover, they admitted that they had gradually learned to accept Asians and adopted a more positive outlook: 'What’s right? You thought, oh god we’ve come to all this. I suppose over the years, now we’ve become accustomed to it now.'\textsuperscript{159} Another insisted: ‘As I say there are good and bad everywhere and I say again they’re here, they’re going to stay here, so you’ve got to make the best of it.’\textsuperscript{160} Similarly Stan claimed,

\begin{quote}
I don’t think we should shun them we should accept what they have to offer, simply because if they’re going to live here lets learn to live together, that’s the way I feel anyway.
\end{quote}

\textit{Is that a view that you’ve always had?}

No it’s not a view that I’ve always had I think I was probably like a lot of other people many years ago sort of why do they want to come here, we’re a small country and why do they want to come here? But I’ve changed. Your attitudes change, your thinking changes doesn’t it. You see the problems of other countries and you see the deprivation that they’ve got and you think to yourself well how would I like to live? How would I like the children to live like that? If we could give them a better life, well you know you start to think differently don’t you, that’s how I’ve changed really. I’m tolerant of them now, a few years ago I wouldn’t have been.

\textit{Why have your views changed is it through living here?}

I think it is yeah, because I’m living amongst it. I mean you’ve only got to go down Belgrave Road again, the golden mile and again it’s all Asian people so you know, you’ve got to accept that we’re a multi-cultural city now and basically we seem to be getting on all right don’t we? We seem to be mixing better and I’m very pleased that the queen has now accepted that we’re multi-cultural country.\textsuperscript{161}

\textsuperscript{159} William 5 March 2002.

\textsuperscript{160} Trevor 21 March 2002.

\textsuperscript{161} Stan 13 May 2002.
Overall, interviewees refused to dwell on past antagonisms, typically asserting that they could not remember the riots in 1981 or the hostile reactions of local politicians in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, they expressed a pride in their local identity and accentuated the hospitable nature of Leicester people. This is captured by Doris's response when she was asked if there were aspects of Highfields which she disliked.

No not really. There were prostitutes up there. There was every nationality and I think it's with there being so many different people that they can't afford to fall out, its not like say two lots ganging against one another, I mean every nationality I mean don’t think you can name anywhere that's not up there or been up there I mean there's every nationality and the prostitutes they weren't a problem...

Well I mean you hear of all this trouble in different towns don’t you, but we don’t get a lot of trouble do we? There’s not anybody fighting one another here or shooting one another I mean we’ve always accepted people and Leicester has, and you know that’s how life should be.162

Collectively, these examples showed that living amongst an Asian population did have discernible positive implications, particularly as these non racist statements were absent from those who had minimal contact with different ethnic groups. Evidently, whites did not always evoke a white identity, they did not consistently engage in racial subordination, or resort to racialising Asians. Instead their specific experiences had prompted them to adopt a more humanistic perspective. Moreover, on a day to day basis, whites effectively included Asians as they provided exemplary neighbours. Their respective neighbourhood roles provided a basis for commonality and was a group based identity which effectively superseded racial boundaries. Furthermore, contact encouraged the cultivation of a more positive Asian group image, exposed whites to the diversity of Asian cultures and alerted them to important information. The cumulative effect was that it fostered greater understanding. Nevertheless, racial discourses which were embedded in their world

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162 Phyllis 20 May 2002.
views were not totally displaced. This is apparent by their relentless efforts to redefine the boundaries and recast the ‘other’.

**Redefining the ‘other’**

Invariably, the respondents struggled to rearticulate their identity and constantly attempted to fix the boundaries, between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This was achieved by marking a differentiation from Asians and highlighting essential elements of group membership, which was based on a range of criteria.\(^{163}\) Despite their contact with Asians, some claimed that they kept a physical distance and proclaimed ‘as long as they leave me alone, I’ll leave them alone.’\(^ {164}\) Others stressed that Asians were not classed or treated as their friends. ‘As I say I speak to them but I wouldn’t want to go out with them as friends.’\(^ {165}\) Another commented, ‘I wouldn’t say I wanted them to live in my house I wouldn’t mind getting them a cup of tea or anything if they wanted it, but I wouldn’t want to live with them. I’d never turn them away. I find them somewhere else to go with their own people but that’s the way it is.’\(^ {166}\)

For Gladys, the language difference was seen as an insurmountable barrier.

> There’s a lot of white people that just can’t, well for myself you know, you just can’t sort of get together with them, know what I mean? I suppose they feel the same way about us really don’t they ’cause they all keep themselves to themselves, don’t they? Well then again it is language problems ’cause if I’m talking to coloured people as I call them, they can’t understand what I’m saying same as if their speaking, I can’t understand what their saying, can I?\(^ {167}\)

Alternatively, religion was cited as the principal cause for disagreements:

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\(^{164}\) Marge 30 January 2002 and Doris 14 March 2002.

\(^{165}\) William 5 March 2002.

\(^{166}\) Phyllis 20 May 2002.

\(^{167}\) Gladys 13 March 2002.
I think we would be, we are amenable. But I don’t think they would … It’s religion. We’ve got that in Ireland haven’t we, Protestants and Catholics they haven’t agreed for forty years have they? And they never will agree. So how can you expect us to agree with Muslims and Sikhs and Asians and what have you, I don’t think we will ever fully agree.168

One woman even drew on the history of racial divisions and slavery. ‘I mean there used to be slaves and all that, the coloureds used to be slaves years and hundreds so years ago, and they’ve never ever did live together and I don’t know, I don’t think they’ll ever ever accept each other and live together. I don’t think they ever will.’169

More typically some argued that they were fundamentally different because they were English. Phyllis claimed,

I’ve got nothing against them I mean anybody to me they was all people I didn’t hate them, but I’d have sooner they’d been all English, I didn’t want to mix with them and that. Why not?

Well because as I say I consider myself English through and through like if I, you know, if I wanted a man if I couldn’t get an Englishman I wouldn’t bother with another one, its just that like, its not that I think any less like, just that I wouldn’t, you know, we never went to school with them or anything there were none when we went to school.170

Similarly, William argued,

I think it’s just, the long and short of it, Joanna, they’re not us and we sort of think they’re encroaching onto our way of life. This is England, we’re British, well English I should say not British ’cause they’re British now aren’t they? But we’re

168 Stan 21 March 2002.
169 Christine 21 March 2002.
170 Phyllis 20 May 2002.
English there's a big difference and I know from an old soldiers point of view, I fought for this country and I don’t like anyone else taking a piece of it. It’s often been said that I wonder what would happen if there were another war? I wonder what would happen to all these? ... I bet we’d have some conscientious objectors I bet. But there’s good and bad in all. It’s just the fact of it is they’re Asians, we’re white and it’s not our way of life, but you put up with, you’ve got to put up with it, they’re here to stay that’s the long and short of it.171

These examples clearly echo Powell’s rhetoric of ethnic absolution, whereby the culture of Asians was irrevocably fixed and immutable and contact was presumed to result in inevitable conflict. Moreover, this unveils the resonant process of othering which they were actively involved in. They needed to maintain a sense of difference between the ‘self’ and ‘other’ and thus difference was identified to construct an imaginary boundary. Ethnic identity was essentially relational and only made sense in the context of the ‘other’. Moreover, by engaging in these struggles to define and distance themselves from Asians the white interviewees had attempted to reclaim their white identity, by reasserting their privileges and excluding Asians. The presumption that white equalled British was contested by Asians and therefore the insider and outsider boundary was reorganised around the axis of Englishness. By equating Englishness with whiteness and therefore ‘race’ and nationality, they were asserting that Asians could never belong because they did not share the ethnic heritage and the imagined common ancestral roots. The boundary constructed a hierarchical difference and created a place for Asians on the margins of the nation. In short they had attempted to reconstruct a white identity and re-centre whiteness. Nevertheless, the line between themselves and the ‘other’ was actually dynamic. It was ambiguous and in flux, their white identity remained in essence, unresolved.172

The perspectives of the white interviewees were complex, contradictory and nuanced, and were not reducible to the category of ‘racism’. There were often tensions between their experiences and their rhetoric and as they attempted to negotiate and mediate their world views they employed both narratives of exclusion

171 William 5 March 2002.

172 This parallels the interpretation of Englishness in Colls and Dodd, Englishness, 1.
and inclusion. It has been argued that they mobilised their white identity as an initial response to Asian immigration. This was a strategy of defence, to preserve their relative status and protect their neighbourhood identity. This mirrors several facets of Elias's and Scotson's work, which showed that 'established' and 'outsider' relations may be established even when ethnic differences were absent. In this case though, the newcomers were from a different ethnic group and this created a perception that Asians were fundamentally different and essentially inassimilable. In reality, the white respondents established reciprocal links with Asians primarily as neighbours and often reconciled previous preconceptions. Yet they ultimately expressed a desire to perpetuate separateness from Asians, thus their white identity was always latent. Finally, this chapter has provided a mere segment of a whole picture, and it would be erroneous to suggest an Anglo 'white' versus 'the rest' dichotomy. For Highfields encompassed a multitude of ethnic groups, including the Irish, Spanish and Polish. Further research could therefore explore the interaction and dynamics between different groups, in particular to probe whether they also positioned and located themselves as 'white.'

173 The established and outsider groups in Elias's and Scotson's study were whites. Elias and Scotson, The Established. See also K. D. M. Snell, 'The culture of local xenophobia', Social History, 28, 1 (2003), 1-30.
TRANSITIONS

This chapter will analyse the meaning that the process of migration had for the migrants themselves. What were their motivations? How was the decision made and how was the transition experienced? Several explanations for migration were outlined in chapter two and whilst it is accepted that structural conditions channelled and enabled migration, a focus solely on these social forces ignores the personal and familial strategies and decisions, the gendered dimensions, and the mental maps along which people moved. This chapter will therefore examine men’s narratives of colonialism, views and expectations of Britain, the decision making process and the arrival into Britain. This will highlight the importance of habitus and the lived body as key concepts to understanding the subjective reality of the migratory experience. Furthermore an analysis of the motivations and perception of the migration is imperative to understanding their subsequent experiences of living in Britain.

As other studies have highlighted, narratives of migration were gendered.1 Asian men consistently stressed the colonial links with Britain and the ramifications of colonialism, a theme which was absent from the women’s stories. Central then to the men’s stories was the presumption that to fully understand the presence of Asians in Britain, it is necessary to trace two hundred years of colonial history.2 Consequently, male respondents typically asserted that they were born under British rule and members of their family had worked for the British, most commonly as soldiers. Khan was born in 1928 and his story began:

I was born in those days what was of course, the British Raj, India. I was born in a city called Kamalpur, Pakistan. Actually,

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2 Skultans notes that an understanding of an ethnic groups’ past is also a prerequisite for meaningful communication. See V. Skultans, The Testimony of Lives Narratives and Memory in Post-Soviet Latvia (London 1998), 1.
my background is from Kashmir, I’m still living in Kashmir, my parents were there and of course my father was in British army, so he was in Kamalpur. ... My grandparents, my whole background family are army people actually.3

Khan’s family served under the British forces, and this shaped his ‘whole family background.’ It represented an enduring connection between the family and Britain, it was an undeniable facet of their past, a legacy which Khan inherited.

Likewise those who originated from East Africa also documented their family’s history. Men from East Africa traced their migration back to the endeavours of their predecessors when some 32,000 indentured Indian labourers were transported by British colonisers to work on the Kenya Uganda railway from 1896 to 1901.4 Karim described this history.

My grandfather and my father when they came there, many many other Indian people came from India, British government wanted them over there. The aim was the railway line from Mombassa to Nairobi, Nairobi to Kisumu, Kisumu to Uganda, Kampala. All this main railway line was built by Indian liberals from India. It has got a very good history there as well. Good history. ...

My father says he can remember, there are some trees over there with leaves as big as this, so all the leaves there they used to make a string of it and that’s their clothes and from there they have to teach the Africans what to do, how to do it, but all the expertise came from India and they built the railway line. ... They used to sleep in the bog in the railway line. There’s history there. Man eaters of Tsavo park, lions. That bog is still there in Nairobi, a platform because a few officers and labourers were picked up by the lions.5

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3  Khan 4 July 2002. For other examples of connections with the British army see BL, NSA, C900/09145 S. Singh, C900/00009 B. Kaur and C900/00014 H. Patel.


5  Karim 7 May 2002.
These stories clearly convey how personal histories cannot be disentangled from colonial history. Yet Karim was also engaged in a process of reclaiming and preserving his family’s history, in which Indian people were not merely extras in a white man’s film, but assumed the leading role. Although the fate of Karim’s ancestors was entwined with the injustices and exploitations of the colonial ‘progress’ it was simultaneously a story about the struggles and sacrifice of the pioneers and their capacity to adapt and survive despite perilous conditions. The lack of basic amenities, clothing and housing, highlights their vulnerability and lack of protection, yet they were ultimately resilient against the odds. The Indian bodies were transported simply for their physical labour, yet Karim stressed their skills, achievements and vital contribution to actually building the empire. Hence, it was their hard work which enabled the expansion of the British Empire and underpinned Britain’s imperial grandeur. It is a story which proclaimed ‘the height the great men gained was built on the backs of these other disregarded people.’ Karim’s father passed down these stories, thus revealing how oral tradition transmits ‘wisdom’, values and ways of viewing the world, which constituted a particular habitus. The intergenerational stories illustrated the scope of imagined possibilities and also generated a sense that ‘Britain owed them something.’ They also helped to create a self identity, which as Giddens has shown was not rooted in specific qualities intrinsic in individuals, but constructed in terms of biographical continuity. This identity was also collective; it distinguished the shared history of the East African Asians and defined who they are and where they had come from.


7 Bhattacharyya, Tales, 33.

8 P. Thompson, ‘Women, men and transgenerational family influences in social mobility’, in P. Thompson and D. Bertaux, Pathways to Social Class (Oxford 1997), 43. Thompson notes that this is a two way process, thus the children may reject the ‘message’.

9 BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel.


The links with Britain were further underlined by the men’s emphasis on their British nationality. According to Vadhia the ‘turning point’ in his father’s life was when he acquired British citizenship in 1942. He explained:

He was an adventurer just like Christopher Columbus who went to see the Americas he went to Africa made his little bit of fortune and we were thrown out of the country... on his luck I managed to get a British passport and I'm enjoying life, my achievement, my good living in England now in UK, because of that finger stamp in the British citizenship that my parents got in 1942 and I give my full credit to him.12

Vadhia’s story clearly echoes Karim’s, as the father is cast into the heroic role and admired for his sacrifices and risks. Yet whilst the revisionist nature of memory may have transformed relatives into ‘ideal types’ the British passport was the tangible result of his father’s actions and signalled a link with his past.13 It was consistently mentioned by the Asian men and can be viewed as a form of symbolic capital, substantiating not only their entitlement to travel and settle in Britain but also to citizenship, including economic, political and social rights and their access to equality and respect.14 It signified a legal document of identification, a guarantee of their right to be included into the boundaries of the nation and accepted as a British citizen. Consequently, those who were forced to leave Uganda in 1972 typically felt insulted when they were referred to as refugees. Moghal asserted, ‘I felt offended if anyone called me a refugee. I held a valid British passport, I could not see why I, as a British subject should be classified as a refugee.’15 Similarly Mashru proclaimed he should not be referred to as a refugee because ‘we had the British right, we had been given British passport so it was British government obligation to have us in this country.’16

12 BL, NSA, C900/00003 C. M. Vadhia.
14 For other examples see EMOHA, CHC, CH/096/0154 M. Patel, Khan 4 July 2002.
15 ROLLR, BBC Radio Four, Mr Moghal speaking on ‘Haven of refugees, Ugandan Asians’, 2 November 1982, 8.30pm.
16 EMOHA, LOHAC, 919 LO/274/225 M. Mashru.
Overall then, the male respondents effectively conveyed their awareness of the structural and historical causes of their migration. Yet if we attend to the politics of hearing, as academics have urged, then arguably these narratives were sparked in response to their contested experiences of citizenship, in which their Britishness was not only undermined by immigration controls but by their daily experiences as a citizen.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, narratives were enacted as a ‘strategy of equalisation’ designed to rebuke the effects of racism, by demonstrating their equality and reaffirming their prerogative to live in Britain.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, considering that narratives were framed by the expectations of the interviewer, it is clear that they also served a didactic function and embodied an attempt to educate the white interviewer who may be ignorant of their own British history.\textsuperscript{19} Whilst this was implicit in most of the narratives, Patel stated this explicitly and asserted that immigration was the unequivocal outcome of Britain’s colonial rise and decline:

This racism, these people don’t know the background or the history where as I said earlier why we are here. Now they just think that we went into an empty house, we have seen this empty house and we try to occupy that this is the bad impression, because we have all come here and we are all Asian because it’s a best, attractive and beautiful country, that’s why we’re here. I say that it’s not that why we came here. If I had to live in Africa and I had to make the choice without this British passport or anything probably myself and many more would have decided to stay there because then it’s a choice of your home but because there was no choice at all because you become a number, you become a number on the political game. ...

by offering the British subject what will be the effect or what will be the result. So in the fifties when they wanted to have British counting they wanted to have bigger numbers so the Commonwealth can shine better they wanted to have bigger numbers so we British are so many around the world. They

\textsuperscript{17} See K. Gardner, \textit{Age Narrative and Migration} (Oxford 2002), 34.

\textsuperscript{18} M. Lamont, \textit{The Dignity of Working Men} (Cambridge 2000), 85.

\textsuperscript{19} Y. A Brown, \textit{Who Do We Think We Are?} (London 2001), 45-53.
TRANSITIONS

wanted to use we British, .. but consequences have come other way around.\textsuperscript{20}

The links with Britain were not simply part of a historical family connection, or an inherited legacy, they were also experienced directly through formal education. Both male and female respondents, particularly those educated in East Africa were keen to state they were taught the English curriculum, their teachers were recruited from England, America and Australia and their exam papers were transported from Britain. Karim stressed that '\textit{everything} was taught about England' and Bhambra described her experiences of education in the 1960s:

I was quite influenced by the Western society, the school I went to, the schools I studied in, the teachers were mostly from America and England so I had lot of western influence and the children who attended that school came from a very upper class Indian society who were very very very very Americanised and Westernised.\textsuperscript{21}

Similarly, Vadhia recalled, 'all the teachers in my study time in Uganda were Europeans. I can still remember the names like Mr Brown, Mrs White and all the syllabuses were all English syllabus.'\textsuperscript{722} The influence of English literature was also apparent by numerous references to Shakespeare, Byron, Wordsworth and Austen.\textsuperscript{23}

Arguably the colonial influence fostered identification with Britain and imposed a hierarchy of cultural importance, in which western culture was the 'norm'.\textsuperscript{24} Thus Britain was viewed with special regard as the 'motherland', a

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{EMOHA, CHC, CH/096/0154 M. Patel.}
\footnote{Karim 7 May 2002, BL, NSA, C900/09149, M. Bhambra.}
\footnote{BL., NSA, C900/00003, C. M. Vadhia. See also BL., NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel, who did not encounter a black teacher until he was aged fifteen.}
\footnote{BL., NSA, C900/00066 T. V. Morjaria, BL., NSA, C900/00007 U. Valand. For those who stress that their exam papers came from Oxford and Cambridge see for example, Karim 7 May 2002, Chitra 22 May 2002. This was not confined to respondents from East Africa, see Khan 4 July 2002.}
\end{footnotes}
consciousness that paralleled the African Caribbean communities in Britain. Moreover education served to fashion their perceptions and therefore expectations of Britain. Academics have uncovered how colonial administrators implemented a strategy in which western knowledge was presented to colonial subjects as objective, universal and rational. Thus, specific texts were selected for study, which bolstered British moral values and promulgated British claims to superiority of civilisation, whilst Indian culture was defined as irrational, superstitious, idiosyncratic and even wild and barbaric.

As a result, many possessed idealised visions of Britain. According to Patel, 'that education system did have a role to play in people's perception because what it gave, came across, was that this wonderful British Empire, how strong it was and how everyone had to obey to its standards.' Britain was typically envisaged as a superior, mighty nation, the pinnacle of modernity. As Kapasi explained:

> And see in our minds, this was when I was a student in Uganda we were taught that Britain was a great Empire and the way we were taught was look the British have ruled all quarter of the world you know and they are the elite, they are the best, they know everything and you are going to a race which is far superior than yourself and your mind begins to think you are such a small man in a developing poor country trying to adjust to these people who are so advanced.

Saujani recalled a similar experience. 'In school we'd always done British writers, in literature we'd also done British adventurers and historians so you had a vague idea of a race of people who were very adventurous, people who had conquered many countries of the world.'

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26 This was seen as vital to colonial power. G. Viswanathan, 'The beginnings of English literary study in British India', in Ashcroft *et al.*, *The Post-Colonial*, 431-7.

27 BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel.

28 BL, NSA, C900/09135B J. Kapasi.

29 BL, NSA, C900/00011 R. Saujani.
The view that Britain was more civilised also prevailed, evident in comments such as, ‘there were standards set and everybody abided by them’, ‘everything to do about the law and the etiquette comes from this country’ and ‘they have very good manners and very good principles, they principally do everything by law.’ Thus Britain was seen as more moral, ordered, rational and refined and most prominently it was seen as a place where success and status could be gained. Patel described his experiences in the late 1960s and early 1970s:

In terms of people what they were trying to ingrain in me yeah, was that it was a beautiful state, powerful state ... if you got educated in Britain that meant the whole world would respect you. Something was being portrayed there that if you were brought up in Britain, educated in Britain, you conquered the world, because that's how I can put it in terms of my view and experiences though the education system. There were families who were sending their children back to study in Britain and they’d come back and there was always this view he has gained degree from such and such university and should be commanding a certain element of respect.

This conception of Britain was therefore reinforced and actively reproduced by return migrants. This is further testified by Karim:

Expectation was there, people say “okay my son is going to UK for further study”, I say “what for the study?” “Maybe doctor, maybe degree in law”, so this kind of expectation was there but at that time my fiends who became lawyers some of them became doctors they came back to Kenya and a few of them went to America as well.  

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30 BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel, C900/00066 T. V. Morjaria, C900/12596 B. Vora. See also C900/09101 S. Bagum.

31 BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel.

Whilst those from East Africa emphasised the opportunities for occupational status and entry into the professions, those who migrated from the Indian subcontinent tended to view Britain in terms of material gains and as a means to enhance the quality of their life. For Khan, England simply represented 'betterment' whilst other definitions were couched in utopian terms such as 'paradise' and where 'the money is growing on trees.' Conversely, one Muslim academic who moved to Britain in 1980 held a common admiration for British democracy. He claimed: 'There’s quite a lot that what I had read about Britain in terms of its democracy, in terms of its democratic institutions, in terms of university education, establishments, welfare state, so you always get attracted to know actually what is it. How does it work? How is it organised? So that was my interest.'

Clearly migrants bought with them a cluster of hopes and expectations regarding Britain. These set of 'cultural imaginaries' fuelled an admiration and aspiration and constituted their prime motivation for migration. However it would be erroneous to suggest that these British educated Asians passively accepted and internalised these unrealistic group images of British superiority and Indian inferiority. Whilst the colonial presence perpetuated an association with the west, this did not displace their identification with Indian culture which according to Roland was their 'core' identity.

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33 BL, NSA, C900/00009 B. Kaur, EMOHA, LOHAC, 740, LO/108/059 C. Singh. This is very typical and revealed in other oral history studies of Asian migration including Bradford's Heritage Recording Unit, Here to Stay, Bradford's South Asian Communities (Bradford 1994) and BBC Education Windrush Asian Community <http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/2cvoximmigrate.shtml>. See also EMOHA, EEC, 000629, EE01/01, K. Singh, who claimed Britain was 'rich man's country, people looked up to you.' Tatla claimed Punjabi migrants had a dream like view of England. D. S. Tatla, 'A passage to England: oral tradition and popular culture among early Punjabi settlers in Britain', Oral History, 30, 2 (2002), 61.

34 Gheewala 25 June 2002. K. Armstrong, 'The curse of the infidel', The Guardian, 20 June 2002. Armstrong claims that at the beginning of the twentieth century, 'every single Muslim intellectual was in love with the west.'

35 Thomson, 'Moving', 28.

36 People's habitus' are formed of contradictory layers. A. Roland, In Search of Self in India and Japan: Toward a Cross-Cultural Psychology (Princeton 1988), 21. Roland claims there were potential responses to this conflict; to identify with the west, reject the west, or synthesize west and Indian cultures. 22. Postcolonial studies debate the ramifications of colonialism and the capacity of colonised subjects to resist. For the range of debates see P. Gordon, Psychoanalysis and racism: the politics of defeat, Race and Class, 42 (2001), 17-34, H. Bhabha, 'Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse', in The Location of Culture (London 1994), 85-92. G. C. Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in Ashcroft et al, The Post-Colonial, 24-8. Fanon argued colonialism created a narcissistic identification with the coloniser, Bhabha, claimed that colonial societies were engaged in a
Nevertheless, Britain felt familiar to them and for this reason, the movement to Britain can be viewed as internal rather than international migration.\textsuperscript{37} Perhaps this explains why men tended to present migration as a flippant decision. This is exemplified by Tripathi’s recollections of 1964.

I was getting promotion and my boss decided to station me at Bombay. So I wrote a letter to my friend in Preston to say I’m changing town and I’ll let you know the address soon. He wrote to me and said instead of changing town why don’t you come here you may be better off here? So I wrote him, send me a ticket and I’ll come down; knowing it would cost a lot of money, I didn’t expect him to send the ticket. Within fifteen days he sent me a ticket with a fixed flight number. So (laughs) I jumped on the plane and came here.\textsuperscript{38}

In addition it can be surmised that the casual and spontaneous nature of the decision was also founded on a familiarity with migration. Tripathi had lived in Pakistan, India and East Africa and this experience of migration was conspicuous in the life stories of other men. Sandhu for instance, claimed that the necessary arrangements to move to Britain in 1962 were ‘not very difficult’ because he had already travelled to sixteen other countries and Kumar explained: ‘My Father always worked abroad (laughs) been to New Zealand, Australia been to England a couple of times in the early sixties and he stayed here in ‘66.’\textsuperscript{39} This illuminates how some men lived within a culture of migration and were accustomed to the migratory experience.

Added to this, the actual decision to migrate was described by men, not as autonomous, but largely influenced by friends and family and was therefore

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\textsuperscript{38} EMOHA, LOHAC, 978 LO/333/284 U. Tripathi.
\textsuperscript{39} EMOHA, LOHAC, 962. LO/317/268 C Sandhu, Kumar 16 February 2002. See also Devi whose father had travelled to Singapore, Devi 24 June 2002 and many families travelled between East Africa and India. See for instance BL, NSA, C900/00049 M. Singh.
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formulated at the meso level of social relations.\textsuperscript{40} Singh migrated in 1961 and claimed,

One of my relatives was here and he lived here for about eight years and then he wanted to go back to his country to India, from here he went to Germany and he wrote us a letter. If you want to come to this country while I'm here it's better and then I can do something for you.\textsuperscript{41}

Men were therefore guided by a network of friends and relatives who precipitated the move and carved a ‘migratory path.’\textsuperscript{42} Social networks also directed migration flows to Leicester as many men went to London first and remembered the imperative role of their friends who advised and reassured them to settle in Leicester.\textsuperscript{43} For others, the incentive to migrate originated from within the family. Khan’s interview clearly conveyed the immense influence of his mother on his life course. He claimed, ‘my mother decided I must be a business man so that was her decision for me to be a business man.’\textsuperscript{44} His mother bestowed him with advice and instilled an ambition in Khan to seek improvements; his prime motive to migrate. Whilst other members of the family worked for the British army Khan was chosen to advance his career, thus his migration can be construed as a ‘family mobility project.’\textsuperscript{45} Furthermore, Khan exemplifies, how the Indian self is based on the eminence of the ‘we self’ in contrast to the western ‘I self’. That is, those of Indian origin do not conceptualise themselves as autonomous or independent but collectively as ‘indivisible bonded

\textsuperscript{40} C. Harzig, ‘Women migrants as global and local agents: new research strategies on gender and migration’, in P. Sharpe, (ed.), Women, Gender and Labour Migration (London 2001), 22-5.

\textsuperscript{41} EMOHA, LOHAC, 740, LO/108/059 C. Singh. For another example see BL, NSA, C900/00001 A. H. Choudhury, who claimed ‘My father was here before me that’s why I came.’

\textsuperscript{42} This is highlighted in other studies of migration. See I. Bertaux-Wiame quoted in Thomson, ‘Moving’, 28.

\textsuperscript{43} EMOHA, LOHAC, 962, LO/317/268 Sandhu, BL, NSA, C900/00049, M. Singh.

\textsuperscript{44} Khan 4 July 2002.

\textsuperscript{45} B. Elliot, ‘Migration, mobility and social process: Scottish migrants in Canada’, in Thompson and Bertaux, Pathways, 219. See also Sharad whose father told him must go to Britain, BL, NSA, C900/09064 B. Sharad.
units. Interdependency is cultivated during childhood and as a result, they are motivated by social pressures and gaining the approval of others, within the family context. Thus, it was not uncommon for the parents to determine their child’s education and occupation.

Interdependencies highlight the importance of assessing the often hidden locus of the family and also acknowledging the role of women within the decision making process. There are numerous examples which reveal that women were able to influence and participate in decisions. Patel recalled the ultimatum imposed by his wife in a letter which demanded him to rejoin the family or else they would move, whilst Shenta described the letters exchanged between herself and her husband, whereby she resolved whether he should stay in Britain rather than return to Nairobi. However, overall women were confined by their role within the family and they migrated primarily to marry or rejoin the husbands. Mistry recalled leaving Zanzibar in 1967: ‘I cried, the whole night on the plane, I was leaving all those beautiful things out there and I am coming to a new country which I never knew but only for one person. I had to leave, all which I had there and I came here only for my husband, for my love.’

Similarly, Yasmin claimed that she came to Leicester in 1976 because her husband ‘wanted a Kenyan girl’, whilst Balbir explained that the reason her family joined her father was to help with the necessary housework: ‘My dad was on his own I think he found it very hard, you know getting up in the morning at three o’clock and cooking his food, obviously he used to do all the curry and everything, cooking at night time.’

It should be noted however, that these examples do not necessarily reinforce the stereotype of women as passive followers and dependents. For Sue marriage was simply a way of securing her ambition to come to England and for other women who married in Britain, it was their husbands who travelled from India to join them.

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49 Mistry 8 March 2002.

50 BL, NSA, C900/00009 B. Kaur.

51 Sue 10 July 2002. See for example, Devi 24 June 2002 and Balbir 8 May 2002.
This therefore revises simple generalisations that men made the independent decision to migrate and females succumbed to their husband’s demands and followed.  

Obviously the decision to migrate was inherently different for those who were forced to flee from East Africa. Yet whilst those from Kenya and Tanzania simply stated that they left due to the ‘political situation’ or the ‘troubles’, those from Uganda, relayed in vivid details the traumatic circumstances of their departure and the harrowing experience of their flight in 1972.  

Testimonies convey the sense of panic and shock that they were stateless, the inhumanity of the bureaucratic systems considering the exigencies of the situation, and the acute sense of loss and dislocation. Memories of violence were embedded in the landscape and underline the threat of death. As Kotecha recalled: ‘They kill, they pick the people out and just put it on the road and they drive the lorry on it [them] and they throw the people on the river and the river was red.’ Others remembered the army snatching jewellery from the women, ‘their ears bleeding’, whilst Mashru was threatened with a gun and hence ‘without having a second thought we boarded the plane on 14th October.’  

These recollections of 1972 provide powerful images of the crisis experienced, and provide a sharp contrast to the casual explanations for migration presented by the male migrants from India. The decision to leave Uganda had life transforming consequences but took a mere fleeting moment to make. The ramifications of the expulsion have been discussed elsewhere, yet the narratives confirm that it was an indelible memory and a defining part of their lives.

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53 See for example Karim 7 May 2002 from Kenya and Mistry 8 March 2002 from Zanzibar.

54 BL, NSA, C900/09135 Y and J. Kapasi BL, NSA, C900/00003 C. M. Vadhia.

55 BL, NSA, C900/09083 K. Bhanumati.

56 BL, NSA, C900/00003 C. M. Vadhia, EMOHA, LOHAC, 919 LO/274/225 M. Mashru.

57 V. Marett, *Immigrants Settling in the City* (Leicester 1989), chapter 8, 155-166. This parallels the experience of other refugee groups. For example see, M. Winslow, ‘Polish migration to Britain, exile and mental health’, *Oral History*, 27, 1 (1999), 57-64. Studies show that refugees were more likely to suffer mental illness. See A. Ager, M. Malcolm, S. Sadollah and F. O’May, ‘Community contact and
On arrival in Britain, the vast chasm between expectations and reality was exposed and Asians went through feelings of shock and bewilderment; emotions experienced by immigrants who preceded them, particularly those from the Caribbean. In particular, romantic constructions of Englishness were quickly dispelled. As Valand recalled, ‘I opened the door, the front door and what do I see? Rows and rows of all these houses (laughs) and that was the first shock, I thought goodness me this is different isn’t it? That’s when I remembered Charles Dickens, this is not a Jane Austen story is it, this is Charles Dickens.’ Others were astounded by the white working classes who did menial jobs. Patel arrived in 1976 and explained:

It was February 18th in the morning when we landed, quite cold, the snow was still on the ground and what I found difficult to understand was looking at it back in Africa you could never see a white man sweeping the road and this was a shock to me that there was white people clearing snow. I thought to myself this is totally different. I was totally shocked to see white people actually sweeping the streets, that was my first thought and I just couldn't believe it.

Added to this was the frustration of not being able to understand the language, a difficulty which Irish migrants also encountered on arrival to Britain. Chitra claimed:

Although I’d grown up with English, I’d been taught English and I spoke fluent English maybe my accent was little different, but I spoke fluent English and I could read write and everything


59 BL, NSA, C900/00007 U. Valand.

60 BL, NSA C900/00014 H. Patel.

excellent when I first came to this country and when I used to listen to the white people talking I used to think are they talking English or are they talking in another language? I found it really hard to comprehend what was being said it was just the different accents, you know have I learnt English or have I learnt something else?62

Clearly, their perceptual expectations, shaped by their habitus, were severely undermined by migration. These experiences can be conceptualised as a threat to their ontological security, that is, 'confidence or trust that the natural and social world are as they appear', which is maintained by predictable and consistent routines.63 Migration disrupted their trust in their social environment, thus the experience was clearly unsettling. This is further testified by their inability to comprehend the landscape. Mandy for instance recounted the moment when the family alighted the plane in 1965, ‘we had never seen snow, although it was May it was very cold, it was snowing and I remember my brother saying to my mum, “look they’ve laid out the white sheets for us” (laughing) not realising it was snow.’64 Sources of confusion and ambiguity also included escalators, wall paper and mannequins in shop windows, the latter confused Devi, as she explained: ‘I thought they were real ladies and I said to him [her father] I said “oh my god, don’t they get tired standing there?” You wouldn’t think these things but when you are young and you haven’t seen anything like it.’65 For others, their sense of temporality was ruptured and they questioned ‘when will night come?’66 Collectively these recollections clearly articulate how the transition challenged the migrants’ sense of reality and triggered feelings of disorientation and uncertainty.

A further significant dimension of their experience of the migrants’ experience can also be illuminated through a consideration of the lived body. As theorists such as Merleau-Ponty have contended, the social world is not experienced

62 Chitra 22 May 2002. See also BL, NSA, C900/00011 R. Sajani.
64 Mandy 28 May 2002.
65 Devi 24 June 2002.
as a spectacle but lived through the engagement of the body. Consequently, migration was experienced at the level of lived embodiment; it entailed feeling, perceiving and sensing. Arrival in Britain involved the body inhabiting a new space and confronting new sensations. As Balbir reflected,

The weather it was cold it was raining it was cooler than India it wasn't even supposed to be cold it was like when we came over it was July….The smell was so nice when we walked into the house it was like so fresh it was different from India, no petrol smell nothing, you know in India when you go into cities you actually smell a lot of petrol and like a paraffin smell.

Similarly, Yasmin remembered ‘the smell of that air 'cause it was spring time when I came. It was cold and the smell was fresh though. It was just so different. Totally new world to me you know really different.’

The cold and dark weather was a consistent theme throughout the interviews, but migration also awakened other senses. Chitra’s arrival in 1974 was relived through a stream of sensory experiences and physical sensations including tasting cheese for the first time on the plane and on entering the house she remembered, ‘this weird sensation of climbing the stairs because in Kenya we have single storey houses so it was something wonderful to be in a three storey house where as over here it’s the opposite. I remember climbing up these little stairs and sort of thinking and just falling asleep.’ This further highlights Bourdieu's conception that habitus is inscribed on the body. That is, the sensation of climbing the stairs or encountering a

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68 The importance of the body to understanding the experience of migration has also been noted in S. Ahmed, ‘Home and away narratives of migration and estrangement’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2, 3 (1999), 342.

69 BL, NSA, C900/00009 B. Kaur.

70 BL, NSA, C900/09135A Y. Kapasi.

71 EMOHA, LOHAC, 978, LO/333/284 U. Tripathi, 919 LO/274/225 M. Mashru, BL, NSA, C900/00005, S. Singh, Patel 3 July 2002. References to the weather have also been noted in Gardner, *Age*, 36.

72 Chitra 22 May 2002.
new smell was given particular meaning and significance due to their past experiences and specific cultural location. Overall, these examples convey that although prior to migration Britain felt familiar, on arrival it was actually experienced as strange, different and alien. This was manifest at various levels; through observations of the landscape, encounters with unfamiliar accents and it was also felt at the physical level.

Likewise, the senses also guided memories of East Africa and India and many reminiscences focused on the weather. Patel stated, ‘this Nairobi is the best climate in whole of East Africa, not very hot, not very cold and it’s a beautiful city.’ This theme was developed by Karim.

Well at the time of living in East Africa the life was much, much better than UK, in terms of first of all weather, very nice weather you get very good sunshine and hot weather as well rainy season and during the rainy season and the hot weather there’s a cool period you know, so it was good weather over there and because people liked it there the life was better. And the availability of food was plenty. All kinds of food there meat, fish, no problem, vegetables, milk, butter, everything.

Memories of food figure prominently in the life stories, for instance, Singh claimed: ‘When I think of India and those times it brings back great memories, you know as soon as my mum would go down to milk cattle I would go down with a glass and put sugar in it and she would give me the first milk.’ This daily ritual reveals an intensely intimate relationship with food, which was absent from Britain.

The multiple meanings embedded in narratives of food have recently been discussed by Mukta. According to Mukta, food had religious connotations and was central to the philosophy of Krishna, yet the experience of hunger was also common

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73 Patel 3 July 2002.
74 Karim 13 June 2002.
75 BL, NSA, C900/00005, S. Singh.
76 See also Patel’s reference to the wild berries BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel and Kaur’s memories of mangoes, BL, NSA, C900/00009 B. Kaur.
TRANSITIONS

within families and stories of hunger were deeply ingrained within family memories and transmitted through generations. Moreover, foodstuff such as bread and butter, were brought to East Africa for the colonial British. They were too expensive for the East African Asians and were therefore desired as a special luxurious treat. This sheds considerable light on Jaffer's cherished memories:

It's funny, I mean every Sunday I still think of what I used to do every Sunday back at home, this is after twenty seven years of existence in England....
in a hotel I used to have English cheddar and enjoy a ginger ale or any other drink with it, we just wanted to have that cheese you see 'cause cheese was something which was uncommon in that part of Uganda and it was fantastic having a piece of cheese (laughs).79

In addition, reminiscent of Singh's memory of milk, the eating of cheese was a ritual for Kapasi; it occurred 'every Sunday.' These recollections, therefore, encapsulated the yearning for routine, and habit in everyday life; crucial elements of ontological security which had been impaired by migration. This is particularly pertinent considering Kapasi's memory of food was triggered in response to a question regarding Uganda as his 'home' and his preceding comment, 'if you really think about it we are stateless or still remain homeless, because we have been uprooted from a country.'80 Finally, literature on the emotional culture of the Indian self has revealed that food was a principal metaphor for conceptualising emotional experiences, a factor which further elucidates the salience and significance of these memories.81

This chapter has attempted to grasp the essence of the migrants' internal world and to understand the underlying processes and experiences of transition. Principally, narratives were unequivocally gendered. Male respondents tended to

78 Ibid., 85, 99.
79 BL, NSA, C900/09135B J. Kapasi. See also Karim's reference to Salmon, Karim 13 June 2002.
80 Ibid. Giddens discusses the importance of food as a 'regime' in Giddens, Modernity, 61-2.
anchor their story in terms of a grand and coherent, linear narrative, which were structured by the key themes of colonialism and citizenship. These stories also signified an attempt to restore and reconstitute a collective history and identity and were framed by their subsequent experiences of living in Britain and the social location of the interviewer. The interviews further reveal that the culture of the empire was not simply an objective structure but penetrated people’s mental maps and formed their stock of local knowledge and perceptual schemas of Britain. In short, Britain was viewed as more superior, civilised and as a source of status and success; a fundamental motivation for migration.

For several men, the move to Britain was facilitated by previous migratory experience and the plan to move emanated from networks of interdependency, particularly within the web of familial ties. Within this process, women did yield a degree of subtle power, although their main reason for migration was family reunification. The effect of the transition was profound. As the disparity between their expectations and reality transpired, their sense of ontological security was undermined and the process of inhabiting a new space was fundamentally an embodied experience. Furthermore, physical sensations, specifically, temperature and taste served to unlock memories of India and East Africa and helped to overcome the rupture and dislocation of migration.
THE HOUSEHOLD

This chapter will explore the migrants' experience of the household both as a physical place of dwelling and a set of relations within the domestic sphere. The experience of acquiring a new home will be confined to the private sector and will trace the difficulties encountered by different immigrant cohort groups. The impact of migration on household relations will then be considered. This will review the high cultural expectations of the male elders and the consequent social constraints experienced by women at various stages of their lives. The strategies women developed to navigate restraints will then be discussed and this will include the influence of women's participation in the labour market on their status within the household. Overall the chapter will highlight how power relations were not fixed but were consistently negotiated and shifted throughout the life course.

Finding a new home

The process of finding a new home and the type of accommodation experienced was largely differentiated by immigrant cohort; that is, immigrants who entered Leicester at approximately the same time shared the same conditions and contexts of arrival, including prevailing housing market conditions. Men who migrated mainly from the Punjab in the 1950s and 1960s lacked the infrastructure of

1 The focus is on a single household. For the problems associated with the definition of ‘household’ see K. Bhopal, Gender, ‘Race’ and Patriarchy A Study of South Asian Women (Aldershot 1997), 27-30.

2 The respondents did not have experience of council housing and some claimed that public housing was not desirable. See Kumar 16 February 2002. Access to council housing was also constrained. A year of residency in Leicester was necessary to be eligible for a council house and reports in the 1980s stated that council housing did not meet the needs of Asian families. For example, the city lacked large council properties to house extended families. See ROLLR, House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, Race Relations and Immigration Sub Committee Session 1980-1981. Racial Disadvantage Minutes of Evidence, 13 March 1981, Leicester, 970, ROLLR, ‘New Life in Leicester’, New Life (Asian Weekly), 14, 26 July 1985, 16. According to Marett fear of racial attacks prevented Ugandan Asians from seeking council accommodation V. Marett, Immigrants Settling in the City (Leicester 1989), 144, 152-4. Hill however suggests that the demand for council housing was greater than has been reported. R. Hill, ‘The housing characteristics and aspirations of Leicester’s inner city Asian community’, (unpublished University of Leicester Ph.D. thesis, 1987), 498.
an existing Asian community and stressed the obstacles involved in acquiring accommodation. These problems were articulated in terms of a lack of houses and difficulties obtaining a mortgage. Leicester has traditionally had insufficient private rented furnished accommodation and prior to 1976 building societies were unwilling to grant mortgages to properties in Highfields.\(^3\) However, whilst African Caribbeans have exposed their exclusion from rented accommodation and mortgage markets in Leicester because they were ‘coloured’, the Asian respondents rarely pinpointed racism as at the root of their difficulties.\(^4\) For instance, Singh simply stated: ‘When I came in 1961 only I think fifty Asian people were here in this town, you know Leicester and it was very very difficult and even the mortgage was a big problem, you know.’\(^5\)

Only one respondent suggested that racial discrimination in housing existed. Kapur arrived in Leicester in 1965 and claimed, it was ‘very difficult’ to find accommodation and that ‘you couldn’t get accommodation with white people.’\(^6\) He explained, ‘it might not be blatant, they would just say “sorry haven’t got the accommodation it has gone.”’\(^7\) Kapur believed racism within housing persisted despite the Race Relations Act of 1968 which outlawed discrimination in housing and employment.\(^8\) He claimed, ‘those who do not want to give accommodation become more sophisticated in their dealings, there is no way you can force a landlord to give you accommodation.’\(^9\) This suggests that perhaps the respondents did not discuss discrimination within housing because they did not encounter covert racism.

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\(^3\) Marett, Immigrants, 136, L. Chessum, From Migrants to Ethnic Minority Making Black Community in Britain (Aldershot 2000), 111. The area was seen as high risk.

\(^4\) Chessum, From Migrants, 100-1. See also Community Relations Council, Housing Choice and Ethnic Segregation: An Attitude Survey (London 1979) 43-4, which revealed that Asians in Leicester felt they had minimal experience of discrimination. Only, 94 per cent claimed they had not been refused accommodation because of ‘colour.’

\(^5\) EMOHA, LOHAC, 740 LO/108/059 C. Singh.

\(^6\) EMOHA, LOHAC, 970, LO/325/276 S. Kapur.

\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) For further discussion on race relations legislation see H. Goulbourne, Race Relations in Britain Since 1945 (London 1998), chapter five.

\(^9\) Ibid.
Kapur however, was involved in the Indian Workers Association and it can be construed that he possessed a heightened awareness of racism.

The proliferations of all male lodging houses provided a pragmatic solution to these problems and were a ubiquitous feature of other British cities. As one man who arrived in 1956 recalled:

There was a shortage of houses for our people. There were thirty-five people living in one house. Houses were usually dirty and there was nobody to clean, sometimes it was embarrassing, everybody was busy working nights, days, shifts. We were too busy to make the coal fire during the weekdays, we used to have the coal fire at the weekends. We stayed in the pub till late to keep warm. This is all true, I am not exaggerating.

Similarly another claimed that forty-four people lived in one house with a 'board on the bathroom as the bedroom'.

These quotes clearly convey the cramped living existence, yet the lodging houses also subverted the hegemonic white culture presented in chapter three, whereby households were governed by the domestic ideal and neighbours were judged by standards of cleanliness. The Asian men did not invest the household with values of domesticity; it merely served a practical purpose, enabling them to minimise living expenses and maximise savings. In addition, the need to divide living space between multiple lodgers challenged dominant modes of spatial ordering within the house. Consequently, the lodging houses marked a culturally distinctive space and embodied certain qualities of Foucault's heterotopias. This is

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11 HL, HRA, B. Singh.


further supported by evidence that the houses were governed by specific principles. As Singh explained,

the tradition when people come over from India they used to stay with their friends and the food was free. No rent was charged unless you get a job and you pay them, you buy your own food and whatever you like and first pay you used to get you used to give them a part with the first pay and that was the tradition that we had here and ....even those who want to send some money to their parents at home they could borrow, they used to lend the money, you could give it back afterwards when you want.14

The emphasis on 'tradition' conveys how new arrivals were admitted to the same rites of passage on entering the house and how this heritage and value system of mutual dependence and obligation operated autonomously from the wider society. In Foucault's words, 'heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable.'15 Thus networks within the lodging houses, functioned on a basis of gender and ethnicity and can, therefore, be construed as a mechanism of boundary maintenance, defining who belonged to the group. Yet they also acted as a vital resource, providing security and easing the transition of settlement. Whilst Bourdieu has claimed that the creation of social networks was driven by economic conditions and the opportunity for profit, it was the positive aspect of human relations highlighted by Coleman, which featured most prominently in the men's narratives.16 Networks within the houses offered a valuable source of companionship as Singh confirmed, 'we needed each others support because we did not have our families with us, so we'd spend our weekends together.'17 This provides a sharp contrast to the contemporary accounts provided by Rex and Moore which stressed the conflict, fear and distrust within lodging

14 HL, HRA, B. Singh.
15 Foucault, 'Of other' 26.
16 J. Coleman, 'Social capital in the creation of human capital', American Journal of Sociology, 94 (supplement), (1988), 95-121.
17 HL, HRA, A. S. Singh. See also E. Bhayat. This narrative style was also noted in P. Werbner, 'Rich man poor man – or a community of suffering: heroic motifs in Manchester Pakistani life histories', Oral History Journal, 8 (1980), 43-8.
houses. Instead, memories centred on examples of trust, reciprocity and comradeship, that tended to eclipse the physical hardships. As Shokki claimed, 'when I first arrived in England, there were thirty people living in one house. We had to queue to make chapattis and queue to go to the toilets but those days were the best.'

The arrival of women and those from East Africa in the late 1960s marked another immigrant cohort. Lodging houses were no longer suitable and accommodation was sought to house the family. For many, housing was remembered as unproblematic; friends and relatives helped to arrange accommodation and for those endowed with sufficient funds, most notably those from Kenya, property was purchased with relative ease. For those hindered by economic constraints, owner occupancy was obtainable by sub-letting rooms to other Asian migrants. However, respondents generally endured a process of renting prior to owner occupancy and for women this tended to be remembered as a difficult, albeit transient, phase. One woman recalled the predicament of sharing a house with numerous men. Unlike the men's accounts, she did not praise the values of co-operation. Instead the house was experienced as a contested space and in particular she disliked sharing the kitchen. The strength of her opposition was demonstrated by her actions whereby she fasted for one month as a form of protest.

The lack of privacy and autonomy was a salient theme in accounts of renting. Balbir's family were evicted from their first house and she recalled their fragile status and vulnerability to exploitation. This was exacerbated by their household type, as female headed households tended to occupy a disadvantaged status within the housing system.

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18 Rex and Moore, Race, 138.

19 HL, HRA, A. S. Singh.


21 EMOHA, EEC, 00644, EE/16/17, A. Bibi.

THE HOUSEHOLD

We rented a room out there and we used to have one room and ...four of us, my mother and myself and my two brothers. Four of us in that room we had a shared kitchen we used to have a lock on the door. Our mother tells us now that when we used to go out some of our belongings used to go because obviously the land lady had other sets of keys to our room....we moved to three bedsits before we actually bought a house of our own. 23

The insecurity associated with renting and the anxieties this prompted were clear. Yet, the respondents were not compliant of their precarious situation as tenants; instead they worked collectively to exert control over their lives and ameliorate their position. Hence, the need to purchase a home assumed a principal objective and family members took whatever jobs were available to raise the necessary funds. Balbir’s brother, for example, worked tirelessly to save £500 for their house, and similarly Johan who had planned to pursue a university education to become a doctor recalled, ‘we had to save the money to buy the house and rent and everything. At that time, I don’t know but we didn’t have any of this social thing, benefits and that.’ 24 She, therefore, sacrificed her ambitions and worked for long hours in a box factory: ‘I had to save £500 for the house, three of us worked eight till eight and then we saved £500 and we bought the house.’ 25 Other respondents also emphasised their lack of knowledge regarding government assistance and the importance of their self reliance and hard work in obtaining their own house. 26 This also corresponds with findings from elsewhere, which have stated that women were compelled to work to help purchase a house and the employment of Asian women in Leicester has been noted as a decisive factor in enabling Indians to obtain secure residence in affluent areas. 27 Furthermore, for women, owner occupancy was

23 See also EMOHA, EEC, 00634, EE/06/06 N Kaur whereby six people lived in one room.

24 Johan 8 March 2002.

25 Ibid.


typically equated with the need to acquire a sense of security and stability for their new life in Britain. This was most conspicuous in Johan’s interview whereby she consistently stressed ‘once we bought our own house we were more settled.’

Those who left Uganda in 1972 can be categorised as forming another immigrant cohort. They confronted a distinctive set of problems and their initial experience of accommodation was within the resettlement camps. Many expressed immense gratitude at the supplies provided, as Kapasi recalled, ‘we received a very warm welcome, we felt as if we had come to our other home, you know, we were given warm clothing, proper food and all for us.’ However, memories of the camps were also dominated by the control and surveillance exerted over individuals. According to Mashru, they were treated like ‘prisoners’ and told ‘what to do and what not to do’, whilst Ganatra remembered particular instances when he was offended by the officials and his sense of humiliation and outrage when the Ugandan Asians were addressed as ‘wogs’ and were refused a second helping of beans. He recalled his response: ‘I explain don’t do it. These people are rich people, they have money people and now they are standing here with the plates begging for food.’

These experiences were elaborated by Vadhi:

They used to get in the tray beans and toast and things and that was not our normal dietary food but was supposed to be good because we were told that if you eat this and if you eat this it is good for you, the carbohydrates and the iron. You were not forced into, we were not compelled as well, but we were like, how shall I put it, we had to force ourselves to eat with fork and knife which we never did in Uganda so it became a custom to eat with fork and knife, how to cut this, how to cut that, we used to go to classes like how to arrange glasses, how to arrange your

28 Johan 8 March 2002. Other research has noted that purchasing a house was also viewed as a route to accumulating wealth. K. Hahlo, Communities Networks and Ethnic Politics (Aldershot 1998), 53.

29 BL, NSA, C900/09135B J. Kapasi. See also C900/00003 C. M Vadhi, C900/09083 B. Kotecha, EMOHA, LOHAC, 864, LO/228/179 C. Sharma.


31 Ibid. The sense of shame the Ugandan Asians felt in ‘begging’ for food has been stressed in other personal accounts. See J. Kramer, Unsettling Europe (New York 1980), 136.
trays, how to arrange your dishes and everything when you go on a table which became like we had to abide by the British rule. You go out you cannot spit on the road, you cannot stand next to a tree I'm sorry to say this and have a pee which was illegal you could be fined for that so this thing came in like paper tissues which we never used in Uganda, dustbin do not drop any rubbish here and there you have to make sure everything is spik and span, clean ......
At one time, the food was different, the eating style was different, but we had to go and mould ourselves in to the living of it. We had to abide and we started learning those things you see.  

These examples resonate with Elias's 'civilising process' in that the camps represented an opportunity to impose the English culture, instil the 'uncivilised others' with British respectable standards, and produce 'civilised' bodies. Hence, bodily functions were to be concealed from public spaces. The process in the camps was also akin to Foucault's concept of carceral discipline, whereby institutions including non-prison bodies, implement procedures of discipline and self control on to bodies. Vadhaia's account exposes the pressure he felt to conform to rules and regulations and emulate the intricacies of polite behaviour and etiquette. His actions were effectively constrained and the scope of agency curtailed.

These memories provide an antithesis to the sense of autonomous culture depicted in the male lodging houses. Nevertheless, Foucault's theories have been criticised for ignoring the subversion of power relations and the interviews reveal that the Ugandan Asians were able to carve a distinctive space for themselves away

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32 BL, NSA, C900/00003 C. M. Vadhia. See also M. Mamdani, From Citizen to Refugee, 87-103.

33 For other examples of this 'civilising process' see S. Mennell, Norbert Elias; An Introduction (Dublin 1998), 125-7. For further discussion see C. Shilling, The Body and Social Theory (London 1993), 150-75.


35 For other interpretations of camp life see Marett, Immigrants, 74-80.
from English cultural domination. This was evident by the celebration of various religious festivals and the sense of unity and solidarity which was cultivated. As Vadhia explained:

After maybe four, five, six weeks we became a close knit family, we used to know all the Asian families who came in from different areas of Uganda, we were all there and then we came to know each other by surnames by first names and we found out you know some came from Soroti a place in Uganda, some came from Arua, from Mbale from Ginger from Kamapala. So we became a close knit family and we still keep in touch these days as well.

Whilst Ugandan Asians were granted the option of help with housing the Ugandan Resettlement Board followed a policy of dispersal designed to steer the Ugandan Asians away from areas of existing Asian settlement. Consequently many were offered housing in areas such as Essex, York and Glasgow before relocating to Leicester. However, on arrival to Leicester they encountered a combination of adverse conditions including a severe housing shortage of some 1,800 dwellings in 1971, an unexpected upsurge in house prices from 1971 to 1973, high rents, competition for accommodation by students and in contrast to other Asians from Africa, a lack of capital. The permanent loss of their life savings as compensation failed to transpire, evoked feelings of injustice and immense disappointment. This was epitomized by Vadhia's comments.

Up until today this is 1998 I haven't heard a thing they have promised and promised and promised that they would send the

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37 BL, NSA, C900/00003 C. M. Vadhia. This aspect of camp life was highlighted in Y. Alibhai-Brown, 'My time in a resettlement centre', *The Independent*, 29 October 2001.


property back that they would send the money back, I had eighty, ninety thousand shillings in my account in Uganda in 1972. If I had that money when I came over from Uganda I would have bought a house and everything I was counting on it, nothing has ever come up.40

The cumulative effect was that housing constituted a critical problem and this has been discussed in depth elsewhere.41 Mashru relayed the desperate position he was situated in: ‘I lived for six months of my life in one bedroom, that was my wife, my sister and myself and I could not get a house complete for us to rent.’42 He claimed that he did not receive support from the existing Asian communities and added, ‘that is where the difficulties comes when one is of too many that everybody class everybody into one society.’43 This indicates that Mashru felt he had experienced some form of exclusion within the sphere of housing based on racial stereotyping. It can therefore be inferred that previous cohort groups did not cite racism as a key facet in generating housing disadvantage because it was within their capacity to overcome difficulties. Mashru however, could not rely on networks of support and therefore possessed a heightened awareness of the constraining factors.44

When accommodation was eventually obtained, respondents typically stressed the deprived living conditions and meagre facilities which impinged on their quality of life. This afflicted not only the Ugandan Asians but was also

40 C900/00003 C. M Vadhia. See M. Bristow, B. N. Adams and C. Pereira, ‘Ugandan Asians in Britain, Canada and India: some characteristics and resources’, New Community, 4, 2 (1975), 155-66, which reported that 80 per cent were unable to transfer their resources from Uganda.


42 EMOHA, LOHAC, 919 LO/274/225 M. Mashru. These difficulties were also reported in Community Relations Commission, Refuge or Home? A Policy Attainment on the Resettlement of Refugees (London 1976), 11-12.

43 Ibid.

44 According to Werbner direct racism had a limited impact on Pakistanis in Manchester within housing because the private housing market is ‘relatively open in Britain’ and they tend not to depend on statutory bodies. P. Werbner, The Migration Process Capital, Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis (Oxford 1990), 41.
experienced by those from East Africa and India. Shenta recalled her feelings of
distress that ‘there was no bath there, no electricity, no carpet, it was very cold’ and
this had an adverse affect on the family’s health. Many also remarked on the small
size of first home in Leicester which was typically remembered as ‘very very tight
and really small’, in contrast to the spacious houses they had occupied in India and
East Africa accompanied by open courtyards and verandas. However, a response
to these poor housing conditions can be posited from the interviews, which reveal
that families moved house several times, perhaps reflecting the desire to search for
improved accommodation and attain better living conditions.

The character of the immigrant cohort clearly shaped initial experiences of
accommodation and in particular, the experiences of the Ugandan Asians were
distinct from preceding Asian groups. Certainly the extent to which constraints were
felt was tied to the amount of resources available and this included drawing on ethnic
and familial networks to pool resources and share houses, whilst women’s
participation in paid work helped to boost the household income. Some gender
differences have also been detected. For the male respondents memories of renting
focused on the positive sense of social cohesion in the lodging houses and the
convention of mutual support in adverse circumstances, whilst the women’s
narratives conjured more negative images of insecurity and the lack of privacy they
endured. Similarly, as other studies have noted, for the male respondents purchasing
a house was primarily viewed as an important business investment and a means to
circumvent high rents for poor quality accommodation. Conversely, for the women,
owner occupancy was unequivocally related to the need for a secure and autonomous
space for domestic life following the rupture of migration. Despite these divergent

46 BL, NSA, B C900/00009 B. Kaur, EMOHA, EEC, 00645, EE/17/18 R. Sultana, 00642, EE/14/15,
S. P. Chowdary, 00629, EE/01/01, K. Singh.
47 Many moved three or four times. See for example, EMOHA, LOHAC, 740 LO/108/059 C. Singh.
48 The strategy of pooling resources and subletting accommodation was used by other ethnic groups.
For instance see M. Chamberlain, ‘The family as model and metaphor in Caribbean migration to
49 See for instance, Marett, Immigrants, 152-3.
50 This mirrors Chamberlain’s findings in M. Chamberlain, ‘Gender and the narratives of migration’,
experiences, a predominant theme which spanned cohort groups and gender
differences was the inferior and cramped conditions within the properties. Thus the
house itself was rarely recalled as a place of warmth and comfort.\textsuperscript{51}

\textbf{The ideal Asian household}

Before discussing the experiences within the domestic sphere it is essential to sketch
briefly the most salient dimensions of the household within the respondents’ country
of origin. This is not to suggest that the behaviour of Asians in Britain should be
evaluated solely by the norms and values which pervaded in their country of origin,
though this background information helps to elucidate the relative changes
experienced following migration and their responses. It also avoids the pitfalls of
judging patterns of behaviour as deviant in relation to western norms.

According to Khanum ‘reciprocal responsibility’ was at the crux of the Asian
household.\textsuperscript{52} This encapsulates the principal aim of the household to ensure the
welfare of all family members and so individuals were guided by family duties and
expectations of reciprocity. In conjunction with this, the principle of hierarchy was
paramount. Family members were situated within strict hierarchical relationships
which were expressed through rituals and codes of behaviour and demanded covert
displays of subordinance and deference to superiors. Within this system, wives were
expected to be submissive to men, to alleviate family tensions and ensure the
harmonious working of the family. In particular, a women’s relationship with her
father-in-law required utmost respect and adherence to rules of complete
avoidance.\textsuperscript{53} According to some academics these nuances of behaviour were not

\textsuperscript{51} This chapter has focused on the respondents’ early experiences of housing, however other studies
have shown that over time class superseded ethnicity as the dominant structure determining residential
patterns in Leicester. See Byrne, ‘Class’, 703-20, Leicestershire County Council, \textit{Ethnic Minority
Groups Living in Leicestershire Census 1991} (Leicester 1997), 37-8. This contrasts with the national
picture whereby Asians continue to occupy inferior housing in the most deteriorating areas of the city.
category. For further discussion see C. Peach, ‘South Asian and Caribbean ethnic minority housing

\textsuperscript{52} S. M. Khanum, ‘The household patterns of a “Bangladeshi village” in England’, \textit{Journal of Ethnic
and Migration Studies}, 27, 3 (2001), 493.

\textsuperscript{53} U. Sharma, ‘Women and their affines: the veil as a symbol of separation’, \textit{Man New Series}, 13
(1978), 225.
based on an external framework for action, but were internalised and effectively shaped individuals’ psyche.\textsuperscript{54} As a result, Asians were not socialised to conceptualise themselves as autonomous individuals but viewed themselves in relation to the family and they were also acutely aware that their public behaviour was inextricably linked to the family’s ‘good name’ and reputation.

Conformity to these ideal norms of behaviour was also enforced through discourses of shame (sharam) and honour (izzat), which were vital mechanisms of social organisation. Yet the responsibility for family honour was not shared equally but confined to women and their conduct could either jeopardise or enhance family status. As a result, women’s behaviour was effectively constrained. For instance, marriage was crucial to the maintenance of family honour and as a result in some societies, the women’s right to divorce was never acknowledged.\textsuperscript{55} Honour also operated to segregate women, through the system of purdah which was practised in varying degrees throughout north Indian villages. This system was fashioned by ideologies of sexual modesty and women’s incompetence and perpetuated the belief that women were passive and vulnerable dependents. It served to control women’s communication and direct their social influence, away from the ‘male’ public sphere to the safe confines of the domestic arena.\textsuperscript{56}

It is pertinent to note that the implementation of practices varied across class, caste and communities and academics from the Indian subcontinent have exposed the discrepancy between the intention of ideological forces and their actual effect. Whilst men actively endorsed ‘traditional’ values designed to subordinate women, research has uncovered the subtle and discrete powers Asian women possessed and their abilities to manipulate situations to fortify their own position.\textsuperscript{57} Therefore women

\textsuperscript{54} A. Roland, \textit{In Search of Self in India and Japan: Towards a Cross-Cultural Psychology} (Princeton 1988), 205.


faced strict and rigid sexual inequalities within their country of origin yet they also yielded a ‘power of the weak’ and had developed a tradition of resistance.  

**Reconstructing household relations**

How was the domestic life experienced on arrival in Leicester? Did migration upset the relative positions of power within the household? At first glance, it appears that the authority of the male elder was maintained. When discussing their present day position the male respondents invariably envisaged themselves as the head of the family and were keen to stress their prestigious role within the home. Ganatra emphasised his ability to implement decisions and traditions and boasted that he had arranged thirteen marriages and ‘not a single person has got a problem, everybody is happy.’

Vora claimed that although his family earned separate wages, ‘still I’m being maintained by my sons wholly, ... I am proud’, whilst Singh stated ‘with my family at home, I’m fully respected.’ The family was, therefore, a source of male pride and honour and offered social approval and status.

Alongside this, male respondents consistently advocated the principles and functions of the family and emphasised elements which reinforced their dominance. Throughout Ganatra’s interview the Indian core values of the extended family, arranged marriage and hierarchy within the family were expounded; hence for Ganatra the ideal situation was to ‘be ruled by your family’ as this avoids the problems which afflict the west, namely divorce. Moreover, Ganatra presented his life story as a justification and proof that his beliefs were impeccable. This was echoed in other interviews which referred to the ‘right’ way of ‘jointly working for the family’, whilst others praised the tradition of caring for the elderly. According to Singh, ‘there is nothing better in the world to serve your elderly parents and look after them and, love them honestly. There is nothing better than that. That’s one of

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59 EMOHA, LOHAC, 836, LO/200/151 G. Ganatra.

60 BL, NSA, C900/12596 B. Vora, C900/00049 M. Singh.

61 EMOHA, LOHAC, 836, LO/200/151 G. Ganatra.

62 BL, NSA, C900/12596 B. Vora.
the most important items of the Asian system that the children got to love the parents and assist them. Singh discussed this subject with particular fervour and conviction and warned 'But if you ignore your parents you are committing an offence, a very serious moral offence.' This clearly conveys the sense that rules were presented as inflexible and if individuals dared to violate key values, they would be held culpable.

The length of time devoted to these issues and the predominance of this rhetoric is most telling and suggests that male respondents felt a need to reassert their principles because their ethos was threatened by migration. Durkheim has observed how the pressure to conform to norms and values was greatest amongst smaller groups and that as social encounters increased, individualism increased and morality became more abstract. Drawing on this insight, it seems that the morality expressed by the male respondents which bolstered their authority, was undermined by migration. Suajani recalled the loss of power experienced by her father.

It was a real shock to him having to live in this country where he couldn't go out much, where he didn't have any friends, where he couldn't communicate because he didn't speak English. When children spoke English and were able to communicate to outsiders when he wasn't, his authority sort of lessened and I think he was finding it very very difficult.

Here, the father's lack of knowledge of the English language tipped the balance of power relations within the house and rendered him dependent on other family members.

This loss of power was also certified by the male respondents. Morjaria grappled with his anxieties,

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63 BL, NSA, C900/00049 M. Singh.

64 Ibid.


66 BL, NSA, C900/00011 R. Saujani.

67 This is noted in F. Husain and M. O'Brien, 'Muslim communities in Europe: reconstruction and transformation', Current Sociology, 8 (2000), 9.
At times I’m really worried about our younger generation because they try to copy what the western people are doing. In the olden times when you are in East Africa the head of the family will work and the mother and the others the eldest will have the children and educate them, what is discipline what is the religion about which we have no time to do it.  

Morjaria’s concerns were based on the premise that the dichotomy between the male public and female private sphere which assigned men to the role of providers and women as carers was ruptured following migration. In particular, it broke with the precedent that women were the intergenerational transmitters of ‘home’ culture and as a result, left children exposed and vulnerable to the perceived moral vacuum in the west. Morjaria claimed the wider community sympathised with his position and served to substantiate his complaints: ‘I’ve been talking to the community, to the people who feel I’ve done so much for my children but they’re not doing anything for me.’ Accordingly, his children did not fulfil their kinship obligations which he had invested in. His views were further corroborated by his use of vocabulary which presented his opinions as part of an accumulated wisdom, entrenched within the group’s history and culture. He proclaimed, ‘There was a saying back in East Africa that when we came, we left East Africa, we lost our money and here after coming to this country, we will lose our generation, we will lose country over them, we will lose the family feeling which we had back in East Africa and India.’ The use of the term ‘family feeling’ denotes that some inherent essence of the family had been eradicated.

This notion of loss was conspicuous and was a recurrent feature of other narratives. Patel stated,

The tradition that we find difficult to maintain here is because of the education firstly for our children, when they’re educated in

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68 BL, NSA, C900/00066 T. V. Morjaria.
70 BL, NSA, C900/00066 T. V. Morjaria.
71 Ibid.
this country, they got a job in this country, so everyone has to work and when they go for work, the environment of the working places is different so the first thing, becomes clothing, what to wear and there the tradition starts dying away. They used to have saris for example, strictly, my wife still puts on saris 365 days she never tried anything else, but for my daughter and my daughter-in-laws, they’re working in the offices, they put on skirts or frocks and that’s how we accept that is going to change, traditionally we know it’s not very comfortable, we’re not used to that dressing but we have to accept that and we feel like we are loosing that you see.  

This reveals how men defined the parameters of ‘appropriate behaviour’, whilst the duty clearly lay with the women to be the paragons of virtue. More specifically, Patel’s comments relate to women’s ascribed role as symbolizing their nation or community. As Yuval-Davis has contended the importance of this role was amplified in multi-cultural societies such as Britain, as women were expected to preserve minority identities. Thus women’s ‘traditional’ clothes were a visible marker of the group’s identity and difference. However this was threatened by women’s entrance into paid employment as the public sphere represented a different cultural model to that of the home. Patel was unable to control these changes or impose his will; he could not monitor women at work and thus female employment had effectively curbed his leverage over other household members. A further repercussion was that the practicalities of work prevented family members from attending religious festivals which in Patel’s words meant that, ‘they are not as tight as one family so they are all separated.’ Patel concluded the ‘family system is still there but it is invisible it is divided and we are weak or we are losing on that matter, that is another difficult part.’

72 EMOHA, CHC, 00524, CH/037/0154 M. Patel.
74 According to Wilson saris were also important status symbols and signifiers of the family’s prosperity and showed women were ‘possession of husbands.’ A. Wilson, *Finding a Voice, Asian Women in Britain* (London 1988), 45.
75 EMOHA, CHC, 00524, CH/037/0154 M. Patel.
Others blamed women’s economic independence as the main problem. According to Ganatra, ‘When we were in Uganda, Kenya, East Africa or India, all men was an umbrella, all millions of rupees is there in one name,’ in contrast to ‘here everybody has got their income, everybody has got a bank account’, consequently, ‘parents are not to interfere or help the child. They want to help but they can’t. I have lot of problems here.’ These findings correlate with a recent study of Asian elders in Leicester which reported that male respondents attributed increased individualism to women’s employment which generated difficulties within the family and according to their observations, the respect conventionally shown to elders had diminished. Overall the interviews reveal that men demanded strict adherence to the ideal Asian household and the prescribed roles this entailed. Yet they also depict a widening gap between morality and reality and reveal that the reconstruction of household relations had incurred a reconfiguration of power relations between men and women. This caused the men considerable concern and frustration as their honour ultimately rested on their ability to control women within the family.

**Women: the life course and constraints**

To explore this issue further it is necessary to consider the perspective of the women and uncover their experiences within the domestic domain. This shows that discourses relating to the ideal Asian household continued to exert a powerful influence over women’s lives and were fundamentally experienced as a form of constraint. However, this was ultimately mediated by their stage within the life course. Those who came to Britain as children were unequivocally subject to the authority of their parents. In particular, the female respondents were acutely aware of the clash between the public and private domain and the battle to protect religious and community identity. This was exemplified by Balbir’s comments of her experiences in the 1960s.

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76 EMoha, LOHAC, 836, LO/200/151 G. Ganatra.

77 In contrast to the interviews cited here the male respondents insisted that this was not an issue which affected them personally. N. Jewson, S. Jeffers and V. Kalra, *Family Care, Respite Services and Asian Communities in Leicester* (Leicester 2003), 95.

78 Research has suggested that parental strictness was greatest amongst parents from Asian origin. See J. Pilcher, *Age and Generation in Modern Britain* (Oxford 1995), 46.
when we were at school we had to wear skirts and mum didn't like the fact that we had to wear skirts, it was long skirts up to our knees and then we used to wear long socks with it so it was only just the knee that was showing from the back and the front of the knee and it still mattered to my mum, my mum was thinking it wasn't a good idea but she didn't have a choice.\textsuperscript{79}

Although she claimed to have felt 'good' wearing the uniform to school, the clothes felt incongruous with the culture which characterised the home. In her words,

When we were sitting on the bus we kept on pulling the skirt down. Dad was sitting right opposite to me and I felt ashamed I felt really really stupid you know I didn't feel good at all. I felt really really shamed and every time we used to come to school we used to get changed last thing get into skirt and leave and then as soon as we used to walk into the house we used to change straight away, we wouldn't even go into the bathroom with my uniform on. I would not do anything in the house with my uniform on cause that's how shamed and that's how bad I felt in the uniform.\textsuperscript{80}

The western clothes were effectively stigmatised within the home. The uniform strayed from conventions of sexual modesty and as a result sparked feelings of shame and embarrassment.\textsuperscript{81} In addition, Balbir's account reveals how her body was experienced as a site of contradictions, which Balbir herself exerted little authority over.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{79} BL, NSA, C900/00009 B. Kaur.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{82} Balbir was a Sikh. However this theme has been developed with reference to Muslim women. See L. A. Odeh, 'Post-colonial feminism and the veil: thinking the difference, \textit{Feminist Review}, 43 (1993), 26-37, S. Khan, 'The veil as a site of struggle, the Hejab in Quebec', \textit{Canadian Woman's Studies} (1995), 146-152.
Although Mandy remembered the same predicament her account of the early 1970s conveys that shame did not enforce conformity, rather in Goffman’s terms, Mandy actively managed her impression of herself which she tailored to different audiences.\(^{83}\) She claimed: ‘For me it was really strange because at home it was strictly Asian and when you were in town you were one of the kids you know so like the miniskirts, I remember one day I forgot to get my skirt down because when you go out, you rolled your skirt up (laughs).’ She claimed, ‘we had two extremes’ and concluded ‘we had to pretend a lot where as the next generation doesn’t have to pretend just to fit in.’\(^{84}\) The use of the word ‘pretend’ adds to the sense that Mandy’s actions were not rigidly dictated by social constraints, but that she was engaged in presenting a performance.

Discourses of shame and honour impinged on women in other ways. A common recollection was that they were prevented from attending further education.\(^{85}\) This is not to suggest that education per se was not valued by Asians as research has shown that Asian parents tended to place a high value on education.\(^{86}\) It is important however, to consider Brah’s remark that there were considerable disparities among Asians in relation to their views on education, just as there were among other ethnic groups.\(^{87}\) Balbir claimed, ‘She [her mother] didn’t want me to go on to further education. It would have meant that I would have mixed with boys.’\(^{88}\) This was underpinned by her mother’s apprehension that Balbir’s potential relations with ‘boys’ may have risked the family’s honour. She explained, ‘if I had gone off with anybody it would have been insulting to her, that her own daughter had found a man. My mother felt that she had to marry me off with her own hands, she chose


\(^{84}\) Mandy 28 May 2002.


\(^{86}\) Bhachu has argued that this was particularly the case for Punjabi Sikhs. P. Bhachu, *Parental Educational Strategies: The Case of Punjabi Sikhs in Britain* (Warwick 1985). See also Bhopal, *Gender*, 14-6.

\(^{87}\) A. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora* (London 1996), 80.

\(^{88}\) Balbir 8 May 2002.
rather than I chose. Chitra was, with retrospection, more understanding of the restrictions enforced by her aunt and uncle and reflected that they were a manifestation of their concerns and a form of protection. In her words, their actions signified ‘support’ and were indicative of a trait within Asian families ‘that you look after your own.’ She arrived in Leicester in 1974 and recalled,

I really, really seriously wanted to study and I was so against coming to this country, they weren’t to know that and there are these horror stories aren’t there? People going to university and falling in love and this that and the other I mean their fears were founded, you know, having children now myself, now I can understand especially when it’s not your own child anyway you know you feel even so much more responsible, so they didn’t want that responsibility of me studying.

The reference to ‘horror stories’ was reiterated in Mandy’s account of the early 1970s and reveals how gossip functioned to preserve the moral order by amplifying fears and tightening constraints.

I had my O levels and really wanted to go on to university, that’s what I wanted to do but I think I could have won my dad over, but my mum, bless her because she was a house wife and she heard all these horror stories she persuaded my dad saying you know, “universities aren’t for Asians, not prim and proper Asian girls they get married and have children” and that my mum, soon became to regret it later you know.

Education was, therefore, seen as an impediment to conventions and her prescribed role as a wife and mother. This was compounded by perceptions of racism.

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89 Ibid.

90 Chitra 22 May 2002.

91 For further discussion on the mechanism of gossip see F. Dalal, _Taking the Group Seriously Towards a Post-Foulkesian Group Analytic Theory_ (London 1998), 118-9.

92 Chitra 22 May 2002.
They felt even education wouldn't help us to get a job, because we were Asians, my dad, all he thought was as a bloke he'll only get a foundry job and if you're a woman you're lucky if you get a job in sweat shop as a machinist. It didn't matter what you had done, it's who you were. But when they realised that we were able to get office jobs we were getting on with things and you know my mum soon said, "gosh I wish I wasn't being so forceful I wish I had listened a bit more to your dad" and then she said "it's you lot you should have fought for it even more" (laughing).93

In this case, education was seen as ineffectual against the pervasive force of racism and this conception was transmitted from parents to children. It reveals how structures of racism and patriarchy intersected and it lends support to Phoenix's contention that it was within the realm of the family that minority ethnic children learned their position of social exclusion.94

Allied with this, the pressure to marry was widely reported and this has recently been exposed in other studies.95 In all cases the husband came direct from India and according to Bhambra, this 'was the trend in the seventies, all my friends were having arranged marriages, everyone was having their husbands come from India.'96 The interviews reveal the different types of emotional and psychological pressure exerted on the women. Balbir for instance claimed that when her father

93 Mandy 28 May 2002.
96 This heightened local prestige and facilitated the entry of grateful sons and daughter-in-laws into Britain. R. Ballard, ‘The South Asian presence in Britain and its transnational connections’, in G. Singh, B. Parekh and S. Vertovec (eds), Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora (London 2003), 16.
discovered she was meeting male friends in Victoria Park in 1972, the family went to India and planned her marriage without her knowledge. ‘After a couple of months dad decided to marry me off, that was the punishment for having male friends.’

This was accompanied with the threat of violence from her father.

If we were in India we would have been chopped up he would have killed us straight away there and then he said that. He said ‘you’re in England that’s why you’re safe you know I wouldn’t do anything to you but if you were in India I would chop you up in little pieces and you know chuck you in the river and nobody would ever found you’” I think I’m almost lucky to be alive, because that’s how strict my dad was.

This triggered feelings of fear and immense helplessness. She claimed, ‘I was just crying and I wanted to commit suicide you know I was just crying I wanted to run away from home I just didn’t know what to do to myself.’

However Balbir deferred to her father and conceded that her father’s honour was more important than her personal needs. This shift in her mindset was the outcome of evaluating the precise costs of her actions. As she explained,

I was looking at my dad’s you know, his turban thinking look how people respect him in the village. He’s a big man, he’s a well known person, he helps society and everybody and all these people and look how much he does for people and people think he’s god almost. People worship him and could I do that to him? Could I commit suicide and then let people talk about my dad?

She concluded ‘I done it for my dad, I done it for my mum, I done it for the whole village.’

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97 C900/00009 B. Kaur.

98 Ibid. See also J. Vasagar, ‘Freedom to choose may have cost bride her life’, The Guardian, 18 January 2003.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.
Others retold the scenario of travelling to the airport to meet their future husband and confirming to immigration officers that they would marry him. Whilst the threat of physical violence was absent, the women nevertheless felt compelled to agree. As Balbir explained:

Had I said “no” then he would have been flown back on the following plane and my mother said “if that happens, it will be bad for his family and for ours, as well to think that a child has the right to mess up so many people’s lives? “ So I was under pressure like my mother was holding out both hands to me she was like this [Her hands were clasped above her head to convey praying] “please look after my honour this time please don’t say no, you know, tell them that you want to marry him.”’ So I was under immense pressure, knowing it was so wrong I was under immense pressure.102

Thus, not complying with marriage was not perceived as a plausible option, considering Balbir was deemed wholly responsible for the fortunes of other people’s lives. This was a heavy burden considering the legacy of dishonour affected not only the immediate families but was handed over to future generations.103 The term ‘child’, exposes how Balbir was expected to show obedience and highlights her inferior location within the web of hierarchical positions of dominance and submission. Thus, Balbir was accorded scant autonomy over the situation. A similar case was experienced by Devi and although she attempted to resist the marriage and run away from home, her attempts proved futile as her father and brother consistently surveyed her movements. For Devi, her father’s authority was experienced as impervious and non-negotiable.104

Respondents also recalled their lack of authority over the marriage ceremony. Bhambra described the rushed nature of the ceremony and stated, ‘It was very very

102 Balbir 8 May 2002.


104 Devi 24 June 2002.
degrading I went through that, I wonder how many other girls went through that?'
She continued:

Nobody was happy I mean because it happened so fast I didn’t even have time to have a proper wedding dress it was just sort of an outfit conjured up in the middle of the night it wasn't anything like bridal dressing up or anything no make up nothing it was just a simple very very simple ceremony like I’d probably wear a pair of jeans and get married like that. I had to wear something red yes, but nothing as elaborate as you know you find these bridal dresses. It was very heart breaking to come to think about it. When I think back of that particular day, it’s very very heart breaking, it’s very sad but I had to go through that and its put me off marriage completely.\textsuperscript{105}

The event was therefore experienced as perfunctory and associated with feelings of despair and regret. Moreover, once the marriage was cemented, the pressure to stay with the husband was reinforced. Sue recalled the warning from her father that under no circumstances was she allowed to breach the contract.

"You never get separated or divorced, because none of my children do that. I’ll never forgive you for that. If things get worse, we don’t know what the family’s like and if you can’t take it commit suicide but you don’t come into this house because I never want my reputation, somebody to point the finger at me that your daughter came back,‘’ and it was a taboo it was a big time taboo, that you know if girls come back, it’s always the girls fault full stop. So that was clear I was not accepted back, I had no choice but to put up with that.\textsuperscript{106}

In short, women’s remembrances of their childhood and adolescence stress the manifold constraints placed upon them within the household. The pressure to conform to cultural standards of behaviour and maintain family honour resulted in

\textsuperscript{105} BL, NSA, C900/09149 M. Bhambra.

\textsuperscript{106} Sue 10 July 2002. See also Bhopal, ‘South Asian’, 120.
rules pertaining to clothing, an exclusion from further education and a pressure to marry.\textsuperscript{107} The interviews reveal that constraints continued within marriage.

The life cycle stage of marriage had a profound impact on the women's lives. This was evident by the length of time women discussed the issue in contrast to the men who conveyed that the experience of marriage was peripheral to their lives.\textsuperscript{108} The male respondents typically envisioned wives as necessary for the smooth running of the household and marriage was generally seen as functional and practical.\textsuperscript{109} This was encapsulated in Khan's seemingly flippant remark that he married because 'being man can't stay without wife.'\textsuperscript{110} However, for women, marriage heralded significant changes to their lives. A prevalent theme was the experience of isolation.\textsuperscript{111} This emanated from various sources, particularly through isolation by the spouse. Thus some women described a situation whereby their husband was like a stranger to them. As Balbir disclosed,

\begin{quote}
I felt that he was cold. I realised that when I'd seen his photograph, he had these cold kind of eyes and I said to my mother "I don't like the look of that" and when I met him, when I'd seen him he wasn't very sociable either because some people can break the ice and warm up to you. He was very very quiet very quiet and the only time he spoke to me during sixteen years of marriage was when he wanted his dinner to be ready he'd be
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{107} These problems have been identified by the Southall Black Sisters. See J. Patel, \textit{Overcoming Discrimination} (London 1999), 72-3.

\textsuperscript{108} This has been noted in other studies, see H. Afshar, 'Muslim women in West Yorkshire: growing up with real and imaginary values admits conflicting views of self and society', in H. Afhsar and M. Maynard, (eds), \textit{The Dynamics of 'Race' and Gender, Some Feminist Interventions} (London 1994), 129.

\textsuperscript{109} BL, NSA, C900/00005 S. Singh, C900/00003 C. M Vadhia.

\textsuperscript{110} Khan. 4 July 2002.

like "dinner now". There wasn't any communication between us.\textsuperscript{112}

The sense of emotional loneliness this generated was stressed, when she added, 'I had nobody, I couldn't talk to my own mother because I wasn't on the same level as her.'\textsuperscript{113}

A striking example of the isolation experienced was also evident in Sue's narrative. Like Balbir she felt disconnected from her husband, whom she married in 1976. She claimed, 'I never went on honeymoon, I never went out with my husband alone, there was always somebody there with us. It was hell, it was just sheer hell.'\textsuperscript{114}

This isolation was amplified by various tactics deployed by the husband’s extended family, including thwarting contact with her natal family, restricting her finances and as a result, minimising her contact with the wider society. The effects of this were illustrated by one incident she recalled in 1978; a particularly painful memory.

I still never got to see the outside world, what it was like women going to work, bringing so much money, I never had enough money I couldn’t even buy, I couldn’t even spend one pound, I didn’t know how to cross the road I didn’t know from Belgrave area, how to get to Royal Infirmary, when I was pregnant with my daughter. My husband was working shifts in a factory I still remember very, very clearly I can actually relive it, I can actually feel, even today that I’m going through that. But I still remember I had to go for ante natal classes at Leicester Royal Infirmary and I didn’t know how to get there so I walked up to Melton Road, then main Belgrave Road and I asked somebody and he says ‘yeah, you get the bus and you get there,’” so somehow I managed, somehow I got there and I still remember, I don’t know how I ended up on the round-a-bout, Belgrave round-a-bout and I didn’t know how to cross the road that you have to walk up to the crossing and then cross it to get onto Belgrave Road if you are coming from the city and what I was trying to do heavily

\textsuperscript{112} Balbir 8 May 2002.
\textsuperscript{113} Sue 10 July 2002.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
pregnant I was trying to run across and the car would come and I’d run back and I thought oh my god how do I get to Melton Road or Belgrave Road? How do I cross the road? And I still didn’t know I was really, I felt so helpless. I thought wait a minute they were supposed to be so rich living in a detached property, colour television, a car, so much money I’d heard and they were, really, really, wealthy, I thought wait a minute here I am don’t even know how to cross the road, heavily pregnant, how do I? If I get late my mother-in-law will get very cross you know ‘where have you been all this time?’ And I still feel, I think I was probably crying at the time but I did feel really, really helpless, I don’t know how I managed to get home.115

Her inability to perform a presumably simple, taken for granted task aptly depicts how her isolation and dependency rendered her vulnerable and disempowered and throughout the interview she consistently referred to her lack of knowledge and awareness of the outside world. According to Sue this isolation was intentionally calculated to maintain her subservient position within the household. In her words, ‘they never wanted any outside influence, they never wanted me to get that clever, that then I will say, “excuse me I don’t want this” they never wanted that so the first condition was that I will stay at home and be a housewife full stop.’116

Related to this, marriage cast women into very narrowly defined roles. In particular, women who lived within a joint family were subject to overwhelming pressures and were expected not only to fulfil the role of a wife and mother but to also meet the demands of the dutiful daughter-in-law. Chitra described the immense strains and feelings of exasperation this caused her, when she married in 1974.

I think I found that I was thrust into a role that I wasn’t at all prepared for, if you think about a seventeen year old, they’re so naïve and so little knowledge and there’s so much. I was the older daughter-in-law so that has its responsibilities and I think I

115 Sue 10 July 2002.

116 Ibid.
found it really difficult it just, those few years, and also becoming a mother quite soon within the year if marriage I think, I had my daughter and I think everything combining being a daughter-in-law and a wife and mother and all that, it was really really hard, I think I lost a lot of weight, I missed my parents, the situation I was facing, I was expected to be a grown up and I was still quite young and expected to be ideal daughter-in-law and this that and the other and finding it really, really difficult to cope with that.\textsuperscript{117}

Chitra’s incorporation into the extended family, therefore involved a drastic transition as she was expected to embody ideal roles and embrace new obligations. According to Chitra, the ideal daughter-in-law encompassed slotting into the husband’s family lifestyle and simply doing ‘what the family wanted her to do.’\textsuperscript{118} This involved following a strict regime of working Monday to Friday, completing the household chores and shopping on Saturday, and visiting members of the community on Sunday. Responding to the needs of others consumed all her energy and time and her own needs were bypassed. Consequently she was left with no time to spend with her husband. She recalled, 'I really resented that’ yet conceded ‘in those days you didn’t question you know you were, you just did. I mean, I wouldn’t stand for it now you know you develop as you move and I wouldn’t do half the things now that I did then, but that was how it was then.’\textsuperscript{119} As the daughter-in-law Chitra was the weakest member of the household but Chitra’s remarks indicate how she gradually learned to negotiate and contest the power relations embedded within the household.

A further factor which moulded these women’s experiences was their former class status. Many women from East Africa stressed their former comfortable and high standard of living before, with servants to work for them. Chitra recalled the duties undertaken by their domestic worker, which the family had become accustomed to.

\textsuperscript{117} Chitra 22 May 2002.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
He would also come in the house and he would clean the house and he would do the sweeping and the wiping the floor, wash the dishes and he would wash the clothes so he did the work, the things, so we didn’t have to do any of that and I’m really ashamed to say that we just accepted it as part and parcel of life and didn’t think anything more of it.\textsuperscript{120}

Chitra was ill equipped therefore for the daily hardships of housework which were thrust upon her. Likewise Sue also felt unprepared and found it difficult to adjust.

I would get up really late and I wouldn’t clean the bathroom after I had a wash or bath because it \textit{just doesn’t occur to} me because I had servants to do that you know, it doesn’t occur to me. So when I helped in the kitchen, cooking I wouldn’t tidy the kitchen or the sink I would leave everything \textit{messy} but it’s not my fault because I was not trained to do that at all.\textsuperscript{121}

Consequently Sue was punished by the family who resorted to physical force to induce her passivity.

I was thrown out so many times, out of the house because I’d argued or because I hadn’t put enough salt in the curry or something like that you know, so its like they’d throw me out then come and fetch me when they felt like it and you know I begged them for forgivingness and I cried and I said “okay I’ll never do it I’ll make good curries from now on I’ll make good chapattis.”\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{121} Sue 10 July 2002.

As a result, the female respondents were consistently critical of the extended family and equated it with ‘a burden’, ‘no privacy’, or ‘no freedom.’

However women tended to yield more authority within a nuclear family. The traditional practice of patrilocality involved the transfer of the wife to the husband’s household. Research has shown that Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (Muslims) preferred to live within an extended family, whilst East African Asians and Indians (Hindus and Sikhs) have claimed that a married couple should establish their own household after marriage, albeit, they should live in close proximity. Within the nuclear household women exercised greater influence as household managers. Mandy for instance made key financial decisions; an important determinant of power relations within the household. As she explained,

my role before I got married it was a case of I with my sister we paid the bills we made sure all the paper work was done and when I got married you know I’m quite independent I’m quite head strong I can deal with things so when we actually first got married and you know roles had been established, right from early on my husband said well “I’m not good at paper, I’m not going to, you deal with it I’ll deal with everyday, with the family disputes, you deal with the monetary things and what needs to be done.”. And strange as it may be that his family is in India, his dad and his brother, even though from quite early on, any decisions that were made regarding finances in India they all sort of came to me and we’ve been quite successful, we’ve been able to turn a lot of things round in India as well as here and you know we’ve done quite well we’ve really done well kids will benefit from the heritage I think (laughs) I like dabbling in stocks and

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shares I like investing, and you know we’ve managed to progress.127

Similarly Balbir exerted greater control over household finances and after a year of marriage, in 1978, persuaded her husband to stop sending remittances to his family in India and instead, allocate his income towards purchasing a house in Leicester. Balbir claimed her husband deferred to her decisions relating to domestic matters and stated ‘anything that happened it was instigated by me.’128 She added ‘when I did leave him after sixteen years I felt as though I’d abandoned him like a baby because he was no more capable than a baby of doing anything.’129 His dependency on Balbir was shared by other members of the family, as she took the lead role in solving family problems and provided imperative moral guidance. According to Balbir ‘I have taken control of all my family’ and this subversion of traditional gender roles was substantiated by others who claimed Balbir was ‘meant to have been the oldest boy of the family.’130 Thus, women did not simply assume a co-operative and responsive stance within the domestic arena, but particularly within a nuclear family, were able to assert decisions and master their own actions. However, these women were also Sikhs and previous research has shown that the independence of Sikh women within the household was linked to the ideology of the Sikh religion, which stressed the equal status of men and women.131

To review the themes relating to the household, the interviews reveal the extent to which discourses relating to the family and the ideal household permeated women’s lives and resulted in numerous restraints. As women entered marriage they encountered problems of isolation and confining gender roles and were often denied access to basic human needs such as respect and sociability.132 Their restriction to the private sphere mirrors Walby’s conception of private patriarchy, whereby the male

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127 Mandy 28 May 2002.

128 Balbir 8 May 2002.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid. See also. Devi 24 June 2002.


head of household controlled women individually and gained from their unpaid labour within household production.\textsuperscript{133} According to Walby this form of patriarchy prevailed in nineteenth century Britain and has since been eclipsed by public patriarchy: women’s exploitation at work. Although Walby acknowledged that the dominant type of patriarchy varied across different minority ethnic communities her conception requires further modification in relation to the experience of Asian women, as it overlooks the influence of the household type on women’s authority and in particular it ignores the role of the mother-in-law.\textsuperscript{134} The mother-in-law essentially presided over the domestic domain, and thus it was not simply a male patriarch who sought to control women and benefit from their subordinate position.

**Negotiating constraints**

Whilst other studies have also noted the constraints placed on women, many present a snap shot picture and fail to appreciate the importance of the life cycle dimension.\textsuperscript{135} The interviews reveal that certain problems were not a permanent aspect of the women’s lives but were often transient. Thus, women were engaged in a continual process of navigating constraints and overcoming problems as they arose. This was achieved through various strategies. An enduring theme throughout the interviews is that women tended to be very pragmatic in the coping strategies they developed. They were acutely aware of their constraints and often accepted reality at a given time, without loosing sight of their long term aims. Chitra for instance accepted that she could not continue with her education when she married and had children, but she was patient and quietly determined and pursued a law degree later on in life. She remarked, ‘I’ve got five children so you can see that I had to wait quite a while before I started studying but it’s something I always wanted to do.’\textsuperscript{136}


\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 181.


\textsuperscript{136} Chitra 22 May 2002.
For other women their role as child bearers was not experienced as a hindrance to pursuing their own goals but represented an informal power, which enabled them to manoeuvre circumstances. This was exemplified by Sue’s comments.

I thought no matter what happens, this is it, this is my life and I’ll have to accept that. So few months later I heard my father-in-law he said “oh we should all go to India and settle in India because this is a really bad country, bad influence, the divorces” and all this and I heard and I thought, oh my god that’s not what I wanted, I wanted to come here, I didn’t want to go back to India, so the best thing would be if I fell pregnant then that’s it, at least I will have a children in this country, so I fell pregnant straight away.137

The role of motherhood established the woman’s place within the household and enhanced her status, yet Sue used the option of pregnancy to secure her life in Britain.138 This shows the importance of imagining and planning as a vital facet of women’s agency and how the meaning of activities and strategies were often discreet.139 Furthermore it demonstrates that women did not want to usurp men but advance their own strategies to improve their own well being and orchestrate their own lives.

Although co-operation was often desirable, for some women divorce provided the resolution to an unsatisfactory marriage.140 This was often a decision taken by women following many years of marriage however in the 1970s Bhambra

137 Ibid.

138 S. Warrier, ‘Marriage, maternity, and female economic activity: Gujarati mothers in Britain’, in Westwood and Bhachu, Enterprising Women, 135. Women’s ‘power’ as child bearers was noted in Rahat ‘The role’, 79.


140 Divorce was less acceptable for Pakistani and Bangladeshis than East African Asians and Indians. See Beishon, Modood and Virdee, Ethnic, 66. According to Patel divorce was not an option for women who migrated to Britain to marry as they typically faced deportation. P. Patel, ‘Third wave feminism and black women’s activism’, in Mirza, Black, 261-3.
refused to accept the conditions of her forced marriage and resolved to leave without hesitation. Her steadfast determination was manifested when she locked her husband out of her bedroom and audaciously confronted his family the next day.

His family expected me to stay I said ‘‘look I'm going back to Leicester because I've to go back to work the following day,’” yeah but they said ‘‘you're married now you've got to stay here’’ I said ‘‘no I'm going back to work and I'm not coming back’’ and they took it very lightly they laughed, they said ‘‘but you've got to stay’’ I said ‘‘no I'm not staying here I'm going back to Leicester and I'm not coming back.’’ ‘‘Oh you're joking’’ I said ‘‘no I'm not joking look at the expression on my face,’’ I was very very outspoken in those days and I stuck to my guns.141

For other women, divorce was also presented as a pivotal juncture when they attempted to assert control over their lives, yet divorce precipitated immense problems and women were invariably ostracized and stigmatised by their family and suffered extreme isolation.142 Bhambra recalled ‘I was looked down upon by every Tom, Dick and Harry in the family; my cousins, my sister in laws, everybody turned against me saying that ‘‘she is too liberated she is no good keep her at arms length.’’’143 Likewise Balbir’s family were ‘‘disgusted’’ by her divorce in the 1990s, whilst Devi stated her in-laws used to ‘‘hate’’ her when she divorced in 1984 and refuted her claims of domestic violence.144 In her words, although divorce is ‘‘very common nowadays but that time, bad, they thought it's bad. They never blame men. Indian community as such, they never blame men, they always blame women, always, always. That's why I stopped going to everybody’s house and I tried to commit suicide and everything because I was all alone.’’145

141 BL, NSA, C900/09149 M. Bhambra.
142 This is also discussed in R. Ballard, ‘South Asian families’, in R. N. Rapoport, M. P. Fogarty and R. Rapoport, (eds), Families in Britain (London 1982), 179-204.
143 BL, NSA, C900/09149 M. Bhambra.
145 Ibid.
A prominent response to these adversities was to muster personal strength. Balbir distinguished herself from women who ‘look up to their men ‘cause I’m the mere woman’, and instead claimed, ‘I’ve always been strong in myself. I mean even now I think to myself I’d rather be on my own than be with someone whose unsuitable cause I don’t need a man, I’m quite independent.’ Thus many women defined themselves as strong and emphasised their belief in independence and self responsibility. They did not internalise the shame propagated by others but created their own positive self-image based on the antithesis of the deferential Asian woman. This was most important considering feminists have contended that women were socialised to perceive themselves from the perspective of men and as a result may develop a sense of inferiority and a passive temperament.

Other women obtained strength from various sources. Some drew on spirituality and education as a source of self empowerment and inspiration. Devi for instance turned to Hindu art which she sold for charity. She concluded ‘that’s where I got my strength from, that’s why I’ve survived, otherwise I would have died a long time ago.’ Moreover, this strategy was not limited to divorced women, but was also evident in the narratives of those who stayed with their husbands and endured other problems. Balbir for instance claimed she pulled through her ‘hard times’ because she was ‘very very strong’ and her mother proved to be a crucial role model. She explained,

mum was very very strong person she did pull through a lot of weight, everybody’s weight looking after the children and you know looking after the farm and the people who were looking after us and everything, she did so much I don’t think any woman would cope nowadays you know especially without a husband I think that’s what it is, that’s what’s made me very very strong

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146 Balbir 8 May 2002.


149 See for example Sue 10 July 2002, BL, NSA, C900/00007 U. Valand.
woman very strong person because I take after my mum you know. I saw mum going through hard time I saw mum working very very hard, I saw mum fighting with people fighting for her rights and everything and I think that's why because I'm her blood naturally I'm like that you know.150

Mandy’s mother was also a role model for her. She cited her mother as ‘the most dominating one in our household’ and claimed, ‘she had the last say whether we were going to university she had the last say in anything, she controlled the finances and that’s how I was bought up I think that’s how I picked it up’.151 Interestingly, Mandy stressed that her mother’s authority was ‘kept within the household’ and as a result did not undermine the father’s authority publicly.152

Similarly, Valand also defined herself throughout the interview as independent and although she was intensely aware of the pressures associated with being a wife and daughter-in-law, she did allow these roles to subsume her sense of self. She described how she was tied to the mother-in-law in the early 1970s but added, ‘I must remember here that although I was married, I was still a teenager, although I was a daughter-in-law, I was myself, I wanted to venture, I wanted to explore the places and that’s what I was doing, learning about the place and people.’ 153 This demonstrates that within the household women were defined in relation to others, as a wife and daughter-in-law yet Valand consciously retained her individual sense of identity. Thus, although women were circumscribed by prescribed gender roles, they did not assume the totality of their lives.

Women’s entrance into the labour market also offered some women an alternative source of recognition and self worth, yet it also enabled them to negotiate power relations within the household.154 Research has shown that East African Asian and Indian women were more likely to participate in work outside the home

150 BL, NSA, C900/00009 B. Kaur.
151 Mandy 28 May 2002.
152 Ibid.
153 BL, NSA, C900/00007 U. Valand.
154 The experience of paid work and the implications on their sense of identity will be discussed in chapter seven.
than Bangladeshi and Pakistanis, though according to some academics this was related to their length of stay in Britain, rather than any 'cultural constraints.'\(^{155}\) Most women commenced paid work once their children had passed the stage of infancy. However, this was often earlier for those who resided within an extended family as the mother-in-law provided essential child care support. This highlights some of the benefits associated with the extended family, as Kotecha explained ‘here if you are staying with the laws, mother-in-law and father-in-law, then it’s not difficult because when you go to work, they will look after the kid but if you are alone then it is very difficult.’\(^{156}\) A common theme was that the income women earned improved their well being. Devi claimed that her income enabled her to purchase consumer goods including a television and made it possible for the family to eat out at weekends. She stated, ‘we got that little bit of extra cash and we were happy, we used to go out for a meal Friday and I never used to cook Friday and Saturday.’\(^{157}\) It raised her standard of living therefore and freed her from certain household chores. This provides an alternative view to research which has claimed that the children and husband were the prime beneficiaries of Asian women’s work and that the women themselves were denied any material benefits.\(^{158}\)

For other women, their wages effectively reduced their dependence on their husbands and enabled them to override male authority. As Kotecha remarked, ‘in Africa for the lady they don’t go to work so what husband you got to stay under husband.’\(^{159}\) Sue worked for three mornings in playgroup in 1980 and saved the money to take driving lessons. She recalled, I started to learn to drive and my parents

\(^{155}\) Bhopal, _Gender_, 10, 145, Beishon, Modood and Virdee, _Ethnic_, 69-70. Brah claims that the Asian women who entered the labour market in the 1960s and 1970s were mainly Sikhs and Hindus, whilst Muslim women tended to arrive in the 1980s. Brah, _Cartographies_, 128-51.

\(^{156}\) BL, NSA, C900/09083 B. Kotecha. See also Chitra 22 May 2002 and Mistry 8 March 2002. Though the presumption that an extended family equaled more support has been challenged. See S. Katbamna, G. Parker, W. Ahmad and R. Barker, _Experiences and Needs of Carers from the South Asian Communities_ (Leicester 1998), 225-6.

\(^{157}\) Devi 24 June 2002.

\(^{158}\) Warrier ‘Marriage’, 141. Others have noted that women did not control their earnings, but handed them over to the men. Afshar, ‘Gender’, 222, S. Westwood, ‘Workers and wives: continuities and discontinuities in the lives of Gujarati women’, in Westwood and Bhachu, _Enterprising_. 102. However more recent research has shown that women’s experience of domestic finances was related to level of education, position within the labour market and family type, with women handing over their wages in lower income households. Bhopal, ‘Domestic’.

\(^{159}\) BL, NSA, C900/09083 B. Kotecha.
in-law said “no you can’t” and I said “no I’m going to.” That’s the first time I put my foot down. I said “no I want to, I’m not asking you for money. I’m earning myself.” As women gained confidence through work they were therefore able to influence the men’s decisions. Furthermore, once Sue was able to drive, this in turn boosted her autonomy and self sufficiency and this was also experienced by Mandy. In her words, ‘I passed my driving test and got myself a car and that really gave me a lot of independence. I was able to go out in the evenings with the kids it wasn’t a case of I had to stay at home because we hadn’t got a car and I sort of organised my life.’

A further effect was that the division of labour within the household was altered and men were accorded greater responsibility for household tasks. Female respondents commented that when they went out to work their husbands were left to care for the child and this change was confirmed by the men. Karim noted, ‘husband and wife, they have to share the work in the house and there are all sorts of opportunities for wife or woman. Okay, my husband’s doing this, I’m going to do these things. In the evening he is going to look after my child so I can work part time in the evening.’ However this is not to suggest that conjugal roles within the household were automatically transformed as women still retained primary responsibility for the housework and childcare. This ‘double burden’ has prompted some academics to posit that paid work was not as liberating as Western feminists

160 Sue 10 July 2002.

161 Other studies have noted that women’s employment increased their equality within the home for a summary see S. Pedraza, ‘Women and migration: the social consequences of gender’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17 (1991), 321-2.

162 Mandy 28 May 2002.

163 This has been noted in other studies of immigrant women. See P. R. Pessar, ‘The linkage between the household and the workplace in the experience of Dominican immigrant women in the United States’, *International Migration Review*, 18 (1984), 1118-211.


165 Karim 13 June 2002.

have supposed and that it actually devalued the women’s role within the household.\textsuperscript{167}

Mandy claimed that although she devised a rota to overcome these difficulties and ensure household chores were evenly distributed, the majority of women she knew retained responsibility for the running of the household. Most notably she cited the example of one woman she knew who had experienced considerable occupational success and had progressed from a machinist to owning her own business. According to Mandy, ‘she must earn you know three times as much as he does but at the end of the day she still has to go home and do the housework.’ Hence, ‘there are still women like that, who despite all their achievements are still classed as the wife.’\textsuperscript{168}

Similarly, Saujani discussed her dilemma,

> When I got married obviously the responsibility fell on me to juggle work and home. I find that still quite difficult not in the sense of just keeping the house but also in the sense of you are the sole main educator of your children, the culture that you pass, the language that you pass on, the way of life you pass on to them and it becomes a big struggle when you are working full time and you still have to come home and make sure you know all these things and it become a constant struggle in a way. And because I've never been brought up to think I'm going out to work that was something I never thought of in terms of how do other women do it for example in this culture so its become a constant learning experience in the sense you make mistakes and you learn from it so there is no one way and I'm still finding the best way to do that.\textsuperscript{169}

Whilst her husband had adapted to sharing the housework, Saujani still shouldered the responsibility as the cultural transmitter. This generated feelings of ambivalence


\textsuperscript{168} Mandy 28 May 2002.

\textsuperscript{169} BL, NSA, C900/00011 R. Saujani.
and guilt which were most apparent when she commented, 'I just feel because I've been brought up to think it was my role, I just feel being split in two at times. Am I doing this right? Am I doing that right? And you feel you are sort of torn between the two.' Nevertheless, Saujani's claim that it was part of 'learning experience' implies she did not passively accept the 'double burden', but consistently worked to overcome problems.

**Recreating culture: continuities and change**

Despite the struggles and hard work, many women took pride in the example they set for their children and their role within the household fostered feelings of authority, self worth and self achievement. This was most evident in Sue's narrative.

One can balance. I still go to the temple, I still attend weddings, I still do my duty, I still have guests, I still feed, I do everything and I know how to dress. If I go to the temple, I don't turn up in a pair of jeans, I do dress appropriately and I have balance. Now, I mean I shouldn't be saying this because it sounds like I'm not being modest but in our family people take my example. Look at Sue you know, one minute I'm nine to five Sue Gokani when I'm out working in an English western dress, in a suit or tight pair of jeans or whatever then that's me then that's it you know, but once I get home, I become a housewife. I make sure the house is reasonable clean, I've done my cooking, I've done my duties. It's my duty. Sue insisted that she had not experienced a 'burden', but a 'compromise.' She added,

If I try to be too westernised then how can I train my girl to have that balance? I want my daughter-in-law to be like a proper daughter-in-law ... but I can't expect that if I'm not prepared to balance in the first place and set an example for them so I don't

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171 Sue 10 July 2002.
think it’s a problem, but there is a compromise anywhere you go you know.\textsuperscript{172}

Her role was, therefore, a valuable source of identity, stability and self esteem. Moreover, her emphasis on wanting her daughter-in-law, to be a ‘proper’ daughter-in-law reveals how she actively participated in reproducing gender relations within the home.

Nevertheless, the women did not simply pass on a static, immutable culture; instead they revised their cultures and accepted some values, whilst consciously rejecting others.\textsuperscript{173} For instance, many were keen to transmit religious practices and knowledge to their children, yet they stressed that they would not require their children to have arranged marriages.\textsuperscript{174} Bhambra stated, ‘Let them choose their own, how they want to be, should they choose to get married to them or should they want to live with them it’s their choice. Let them make their own life.’\textsuperscript{175} Others stated that their values were reformulated due to their own experiences. As Kotecha explained,

now I can say that when I was young, my parents, they don't let me go out with friends, or with the boys and if my father, if he see I'm talking with the boys they will start shouting and fighting. But now I like my daughter to go, she goes out I don't mind, but I want to know where's she's going and with whom.\textsuperscript{176}

Many stressed the importance of learning the language of the dominant culture. Kaur stated, ‘parents should speak the English language with their kids because it is

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{173} P. Bhachu, ‘Culture, ethnicity and class among Punjabi Sikh women in 1990's Britain’, \textit{New Community} 17, 3 (1991), 401-12.

\textsuperscript{174} For religion see for example, Mandy 28 May 2002, BL, NSA, C900/09149 M. Bhambra. For changing attitudes towards marriage see also T. Modood, R. B. Verthoud, J. Lakey, J. Nazroo, P. Smith, S. Virdee and S. Beishon, \textit{Ethnic Minorities in Britain, Diversity and Disadvantage} (London 1997), 314-9. According to Bhopal Muslims were more likely to have arranged marriages, followed by Sikhs and then Hindus, though religion did not influence attitudes towards marriage. Bhopal, \textit{Gender}, 58-78.

\textsuperscript{175} BL, NSA, C900/09149 M. Bhambra. See also Mandy 28 May 2002, Balbir 8 May 2002.

\textsuperscript{176} BL, NSA, C900/09083 B. Kotecha.
very very and I mean very very important.\textsuperscript{177} Whilst, when Mandy was asked whether she felt it was important for her children to learn Punjabi, she responded, 'I don’t think it’s as important as my parents thought it was but then again we couldn’t communicate with our parents in any other way and no, as far as I’m concerned their education is paramount than them learning a second language.'\textsuperscript{178} Unlike her parents who felt an education was futile against the inexorable force of racism, Mandy was aware that education offered opportunities to achieve a higher social status and this was possible without forsaking an ethnic identification. She added:

The importance for them is to get proper careers, proper education, focus on that because this is the country they’re going to be living in so it’s important that they adapt the cultures and so forth and that’s paramount. Not losing their own identity because I don’t think they have I think my children have managed to adapt to both.\textsuperscript{179}

Women also adopted more egalitarian values. Kaur claimed that she contested the gender inequalities she had learned as a child and claimed, ‘some of the values I don’t agree with, simply that men and women should not mix, that men, boys should be fed more than little girls cause they’re boys and they’re going to grow up to be men.’\textsuperscript{180} She therefore imbued her children with notions of equality. In her words,

I’ve brought my children up to think that they’re \textit{equal} to each other and I must admit my youngest daughter I said to her the other day ‘you’ve got to learn to roll out some chapattis that’s Indian’, she says ‘oh I will when he does’ and that’s my son, which is fair comment which is good. It’s nice to see that, it’s

\textsuperscript{177} BL, NSA, C900/00009 B. Kaur.

\textsuperscript{178} Mandy 28 May 2002.

\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{180} Balbir 8 May 2002.
equality isn’t it? You know people should be respected for what they are not what gender they’re born into.\textsuperscript{181}

Therefore, from their own experiences these women were acutely aware of the importance of the household as a key site where values, dispositions and practices were transmitted. As cultural reproducers, the female respondents sought to negotiate deeply entrenched cultural traditions and innovate and fuse different values. Thus, alongside their daily struggles to assert control over their own lives, these women were also committed to a long term strategy, designed to transform gender relations for future generations.\textsuperscript{182}

The immigrant cohort was integral to the respondents’ experiences of accommodation, whilst the degree to which constraints were felt hinged on their access to resources, such as social and economic capital. However, with regards to relations within the household, there was no simple correlation between immigrant cohort and actual experiences. Suffice to say, this was largely due to the many axes of differentiation within the Asian population, such as language, religion, wealth, caste, education and so forth which were not simply transmitted from the respondents country of origin.\textsuperscript{183} Within the home, men attempted to reassert their authority and demanded strict conformity to the principles of the ideal Asian household. This imposed numerous restraints on women, including rules relating to clothing, exclusion from further education and a pressure to marry. Within marriage women experienced isolation and confining gender roles, although this varied according to household type and was further complicated by the women’s previous class status. Nevertheless, the female respondents were able to resist restraints and this included pursuing pragmatic strategies, divorce and cultivating personal strength, whilst women’s entrance into the labour market granted them leverage to negotiate household relations. However, the nature of constraints was inextricably linked to the life course. As the daughter-in-law women were the weakest members of the household, yet when women assumed the role of cultural reproducers they seized the opportunity to reformulate cultural values and instigate change. Finally, whilst black feminists have reclaimed the household as a site of resistance against

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{182} See also Bradby ‘Negotiating’, 163-4.

\textsuperscript{183} This is also argued by Brah, \textit{Cartographies} and Takhar, ‘South Asian’. 
white domination, this chapter has shown that it is also important to recognise the continuing struggles against gender inequalities within the household.\textsuperscript{184}

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

This chapter will examine the neighbourhood as a spatial setting within which people reside and interact socially. An analysis of the neighbourhood enables an examination of the lived experience of the urban environment and a focus on the meso level of social interaction.1 Research on social capital has revealed how people’s relationships to their neighbourhood and their stock of social networks have important ramifications for their sense of well being.2 In particular, social capital has been noted as an important resource for immigrants; countering the alienation caused by migration and aiding consequent adaptation.3 This chapter seeks to explore the respondents’ relationship to their neighbourhood. What forms of social inclusion and exclusion did they encounter? Whom or what excluded them? How did men and women actively generate and negotiate their own forms of social capital? On what basis were these relations formed? What were the positive and negative effects of these networks? The chapter aims to highlight the complexity of experiences, reveal the agency of the respondents and elucidate the significance of place in the formation of people’s subjective realities.4


4 P. Jackson and J. Penrose, (eds), Constructions of Race, Place and Nation (London 1993), 12-3.


**Boundaries of exclusion**

As Bourdieu has stressed, social capital is not a natural or social given but a process which must be invested in continually.\(^5\) Social networks needed to be created, thus on arrival in Leicester respondents invariably recalled the absence of a social life. Men who arrived before the 1970s typically recalled the limited range of places for social interaction. For instance Choudhury arrived in Leicester in 1938 and claimed he would simply ‘stay in the house or go out to work or go out have a walk around’ in his spare time.\(^6\) He added, ‘Those days there were no mosques in Leicester, you couldn't go, but library or sometimes go in the shops and have a look round.’\(^7\) This conveys a sense that he was not engaged in social activities but circulated between work and home or wandered the streets. Others visited the park. According to Singh, who arrived in 1967 ‘we all used to go to Spinney Hill Park and we went to town. We used to walk to town. So that's the only two places we went to for the first twelve months or so.’\(^8\) Another option was the pub. For instance Shokki claimed, in the 1950s ‘a visit to the pub and beer was the main source of entertainment’ and Patel stated,

we came in March but at that time 1965 it was snowing it was very cold for us and my brothers were here and they used to mix with the white people and they used to go to the pub in the evening as white people are going you know, but as I came from Kenya, I had no experience of this and I had no like for the drink you know so this was very, very tough for me, because I didn’t like to go to pub at that time, even today I’m not going.\(^9\)

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\(^6\) BL, NSA, C900/00001 A. H. Choudhury.

\(^7\) *Ibid.*

\(^8\) BL, NSA, C900/09138b G. S. Singh.

\(^9\) HL, HRA, A. S. Shokki, Patel 3 July 2002. For other references to the pub see also HL, HRA, B. S. Anwal, A. Singh and B. S. Claire.
The pub was a signifier of the dominant white culture and was clearly experienced by Patel as problematic. Yet whilst these quotes illustrate the lack of suitable spaces for sociability, they also confirm that the male respondents were involved in some social activities, had forged social ties and were active in social space.

This contrasts sharply with the female respondents who recalled their initial isolation from the neighbourhood. As Valand explained Asian women felt excluded from white leisure spaces such as the ‘masculine’ pub and ‘feminine’ bingo.

There was nothing much really nothing much no parties, I don't remember Asian girls going to parties, Asian men would go to a pub but of course ladies don't go to a pub, do they? That's not possible (laughs) and Asian families don't go to play bingo, we didn't for some reason we just don't, it's not within our culture to go and play such games.

In addition, various factors coalesced to isolate women from the neighbourhood. This included the ramifications of paid work. Mistry explained how her employment severely restricted her free time. ‘I didn’t have a social life for so many years because it was all work, work, work. Saturday and Sunday we used to work, seven days a week and end of the day we feel so tired we didn’t have that much of a social life for so many years.’ This was combined with the ‘cold and dark’ British weather.

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10 For a discussion of the how the landscape represented the dominant culture see D. Cosgrove, ‘Geography is everywhere: culture and symbolism in human landscapes’, in R. Walford and D. Gregory, (eds), *New Horizons in Human Geography* (London 1989), 118-35.


13 Mistry 8 March 2002.
and the English ethos of home centredness which pervaded in the 1960s. As Valand recalled,

I wasn't shocked about the layout of the house I wasn't shocked about the yard, what I was shocked about was the winter nights, the winter evenings, when people just stayed in the house, they couldn't go out because they would be tired after work or they would stay at home watching television. There wasn't that kind of social life as I was used to. That was very difficult and in the beginning I did miss those open spaces, I did miss that social life, thinking oh dear, we have to stay in four walls all the time, *everything* has to be done within the *four* walls. (Pause) I did shed some tears, but then gradually you do get used to the new lifestyle. 

This new lifestyle was underpinned by norms and expectations of privacy. As Valand explained,

The family life used to be very private; we didn't know what the neighbours were up to. We knew or I knew rather that they were very private people. That they had their own life and like in India you can't just go and enter in anybody's house you have to knock on the door or you have to say, "is it all right for us to come in? Would you like to come and have a cup of tea with us?" Things like that, you had to use certain, very different tones as well, that way it was very different.

Here Valand's mention of the appropriate 'tones', reveals her sensitivity and nuanced attention to the unwritten 'rules' which underlay everyday behaviour and facilitated smooth social interaction.

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14 There were many references to the cold and dark weather. See for example Johan 8 March 2002. The retreat into the home is discussed in chapter three. For more details see E. Roberts, 'Neighbours: North West England 1940-70', *Oral History Journal*, 21 (1993), 38-45.

15 BL, NSA, C900/00007 U. Valand.


17 For further discussion of theses 'rules' see Garfinkel's concepts in D. Layder, *Understanding Social Theory* (London 1994), 81-2.
A further factor that fashioned the women’s experiences was their previous social life.\textsuperscript{18} Female respondents typically lamented the ‘vibrant community in India and Uganda’ where ‘all doors are open’ and daily life was less structured by work and time.\textsuperscript{19} This was most evident in Chitra’s interview whereby she envisaged the spontaneous and unconstrained life in Uganda.

You just used to walk up and down the road, you know everybody used to dress smartly and then walk up and down the road, or there was a restaurant and because it was on Lake Victoria and there was a point in the restaurant where you could see the hippos come out something like that. I remember going for a night visit because they only come out at night so I remember being taken in my nighties and all of us being hurried into the car, half asleep and being taken to see the hippos and things like that, it was really relaxed and easy going life style.\textsuperscript{20}

Chitra’s quote aptly illustrates how her previous social life was not confined to institutions such as the pub but was structured by the natural landscape, with Lake Victoria serving as the key focal point.\textsuperscript{21}

Fear of causing misunderstanding also prevented some women from venturing beyond the house. Ranjan claimed her mother felt ‘very, very insecure’ and prevented her from visiting the corner shop for one month after arriving in Britain, whilst Patel claimed his wife was unable to meet people ‘freely’ and was ‘very afraid.’\textsuperscript{22} Similarly Vora recalled, ‘first of all very difficult for speaking English because I’m very worried that somebody laughing, or somebody say ‘she’s

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\textsuperscript{20} Chitra 22 May 2002.

\textsuperscript{21} The pier on Lake Victoria was Brah’s ‘favourite spot’ for congregation, A. Brah, \textit{Cartographies of Diaspora} (London 1996), 34.

\textsuperscript{22} BL, NSA, C900/00011 R. Saujani, Patel 3 July 2002.
not very good, not speak very good’’ and I'm afraid.’’23 Clearly language difficulties hindered communication and heightened a sense of alienation.24 This was most evident in Shenta's interview who stated, ‘when we came here we just cried, why come here? We don’t know nothing here, it’s cold, we can’t speak, we don’t know anything, we can’t find food properly, no shop here, so hard.’25 The problem of isolation was further amplified for those who arrived in the 1960s when there were fewer Asian people. Devi who arrived in 1960 consistently claimed she had ‘no friends’ in Highfields, whilst Mistry stated,

> at first you find it very hard because down in India the sun was up all day and people meet outside and everything when we came here we got nobody to talk to, you’re on your own, it’s very hard for you to find your friends as you don’t know that many people, in ‘67 we didn’t have that many Asian people.26

Added to this, according to Abraham, women’s wider support networks performed a vital role in India and East Africa and often acted as a social control to an abusive husband, or served as a buffer to stress and abuse.27 In short, women’s survival against structures of patriarchy was unequivocally tied to their web of female alliances. Migration however, disrupted these networks and consequently magnified the problems the women experienced within the household, as discussed in chapter five.28 This helps to elucidate why whilst the male respondents felt constrained by the lack of meeting places in Leicester, isolation from the neighbourhood constituted a considerable and pressing problem for the female respondents and irrevocably impinged on their quality of life and sense of well being.

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23 BL, NSA, C900/12596 B. Vora.


25 Shenta 8 March 2002.

26 Mistry 8 March 2002.


28 This is also noted by Phillipson, Ahmed and Latimer, *Women*, 30.
This was exacerbated by social exclusion from white neighbours. One form of exclusion was racial harassment. Singh recalled the relentless racial attacks his family endured from their English neighbours when he arrived in Leicester in 1969.

We were being continuously bullied by them but I think that was a bad experience because all white children weren't like that but unfortunately we got the worst bunch. We lived on a street where they seemed to be very racist and the children would really tease us and call us the usual names like pakis, wogs, get out of this country. Like I said I couldn't even play in my back yard, there was times when my sister would get bullied when she was coming back from school so my mother would literally have to take her and bring her back. So that first house we were at was a very bad experience because we were bullied a lot by white children and called all sorts of names and it wasn't a very good start because it obviously puts you off and you think we were better off in India at least we didn't have this problem and we weren't looked upon as aliens or people that didn't fit.  

These incidents clearly sparked feeling of displacement, alienation and insecurity and this was conspicuous by Singh's reference to 'aliens', a term which also featured in other accounts. The consequent powerlessness his family felt impelled them to flee the area. As Singh explained,

We couldn't do much about it. We didn't know what to do, we didn't know that you could call the police or stuff like that plus they were children and the police didn't do much in those days, so we had to take it all really, whatever they did to us we had to take it and so we were glad to move from there.  

This illustrates how racial harassment served to eradicate the 'outsiders’ from the neighbourhood. Yet another striking aspect of Singh’s account was that the

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29 BL, NSA, C900/00005 S. Singh.

30 See BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel.

31 BL, NSA, C900/00005 S. Singh.
experience of racial harassment was not equated with the racism of all white people. Instead, Singh surmised that his family were unfortunate in encountering the ‘worst bunch.’ Similarly Karim deduced that although there were one or two families in the street who did not like ‘immigrants’ and who threw stones or bottles, these represented a small minority.32 Racial incidents, therefore, tended to be viewed as isolated and self contained. This counters Cohen’s contention that the experiences of racial harassment make white hostility seem ubiquitous within society.33

Alongside this, respondents also encountered more indirect forms of social exclusion from the neighbours. Kapasi claimed that whilst he was aware that Britain was endemically racist, he was not prepared for the more subtle guises of racism. He came from Uganda in 1972 and recalled,

> We have faced racism yes certainly because when we came to Leicester for example our neighbours didn’t speak to us for at least three years and that really puzzled us because you see we came from a background where, you know, you meet a friend on the road you spend ten minutes talking to him and here is a neighbour who is not willing to even say hello to us, so you see we had to adjust to those things.34

Other respondents also felt insulted when white neighbours rejected gestures of friendship or failed to reciprocate invitations of hospitality and this parallels research in America, which revealed that West Indian immigrants did not expect racism to infuse day-to-day interactions.35

Furthermore, due to this less explicit form of racism, the respondents were often ambiguous as to whether events were actually a manifestation of racial prejudice. This uncertainty was exemplified by Balbir, who recalled the harassments

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32 Karim 13 June 2002.


34 C900/09135B J. Kapasi.

from their neighbour. Although the racism could not be termed as subtle, it did not involve explicit racial insults.

We had a lot of harassment from the person next door he was English, he was like trying to drive us out of our homes I think. I remember him standing on the top end of the garden sharpening his knife, he was saying "this is for you Mrs Kaur" you know, so that sort of thing I think that was racism from next door, they were English, they had six children of their own, they didn't like us....

We had a little garden and he used to put his dog over deliberately to come and mess in our garden and come and mess the vegetables up. It was only a small garden but yeah he would throw the dog over and mother couldn't really do anything about it because she was a woman on her own with three kids.36

According to Essed a crucial step towards acknowledging racism is the realisation that unacceptable behaviour is directed towards individuals because of their ethnicity.37 Drawing on this, Balbir's reference to the neighbours as 'English' suggests that she evaluated the hassles as racist and she actually stated 'I think that was racism.' However the following comment is contradictory and indicates her uncertainty.

It was just him, 'cause he used to row with his wife as well, there'd be pots and pans flying between the pair of them and I never thought it was a racial act. I just thought that's the way he is, a bit of a lunatic and when he's not fighting with his wife, he's having a go at us.38

36 Balbir 8 May 2002.
38 Mandy 28 May 2002.
Thus Balbir conceded that as her family were not the only targets of his aggressive behaviour, it could not be assumed that he was racist. According to some academics, this could be construed as a coping mechanism, as an acceptance of racism can harm an individual’s sense of control and self worth. However, Balbir’s quote suggests that her judgement did not simply stem from a denial of racism, but that she failed to interpret his behaviour as part of a wider social and historical context. Instead she drew on an individualistic framework and consequently viewed him as pathological.

It is important to note here, that the sample of respondents did not form a homogeneous mass but represented a heterogeneous group who possessed varying conceptions and different levels of awareness of racism. A myriad of factors influenced perceptions of racism within the neighbourhood, including the ability to speak English and understand racist comments and personal definitions of racism. A further influential factor was the extent of contact with whites and this was most pertinent considering the female respondents were initially isolated from the neighbourhood. Nevertheless despite this disparity, overall the interviews reveal that those who arrived in the 1960s recalled a radical shift in white attitudes during the following decade.

Hence, they tended to stress that white people appeared friendly, amicable and polite before the 1970s. Devi insisted,

Oh they were nice to us they were really good to us there was no like what do you call it, racism I didn’t find any racism in those days, every people you meet ‘good morning’ and man used to wear hats and he used to lift the hats up for respect. Oh my god, those were the days, honest to god, nothing like that now, they

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41 See R. Aziz, ‘Feminism and the challenge of racism, deviance or difference?’ in H. S. Mirza, (ed.), *Black British Feminism* (London 1997), 74.
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

don’t wear a hat any more and nobody says good morning even you know. They were gentlemen, but the gentle is gone.42

For Devi, the display of civility in public spaces conferred personal respect and signalled an inclusion into the neighbourhood.43 Others claimed that white people treated them as ‘novelties’. According to Choudhury,

They treated me like a novelty because there wasn't many Asians. There were hardly any Asians about and they were quite nice to me and they used to ask me to their house, invite me in their house for cup of tea or drink, some used to say “you can come when you like to visit us”, they were quite friendly you know because they had not seen many Asians before.44

Similarly Kumar articulated, ‘at one time I suppose I think Indian people were like novelties (laughs) if you can see what I mean, it was good to associate with an Indian person, I got that feeling.’45 These respondents were aware that although whites viewed them with curiosity, as an ‘exotic other’, this did not result in a social distance from them instead, whites were keen to establish interaction.

Accordingly, this evidence of tolerance and tacit acceptance was drastically displaced by local hostility in the 1970s. Kumar charted the changes, ‘I think that’s when we started getting these racist views, late 70s was quite high it was gradually rising I think late 75 76 77 78 it peaked and then it slanted off again towards the 80s.’46 Often throughout the interviews, exact dates were forgotten, yet Kumar’s recollection of the specific years underlines how the increase in white hostility was vividly remembered. Indeed, these changes also had a profound impact on Kumar evident by his comment that he never thought he was a ‘different colour’, before the

42 Devi 24 June 2002.

43 The decline of this ethos in working class communities is a major theme of S. J. Charlesworth, A Phenomenology of Working Class Experience (Cambridge 2000).

44 BL, NSA, C900/00001 A. H. Choudhury.


46 Ibid.
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

'bitterness in 1972.'47 Furthermore, according to Kumar in the 1970s racist attacks were 'so common you just ignored it' and racial comments were 'just part of the life'.48 Similarly Balbir surmised, 'I didn’t recognise racism in the 1960s because it was only a few Indians here, perhaps we didn’t have it, perhaps you know its only heightened with so many immigrants coming into the country and more so wanting so many of their rights.'49 This was also supported by Councillor Parmar's observations, which claimed there was 'very little racial abuse or racial attacks in 1960s Leicester. The hatred began after the 1972 expulsion of Uganda Asians.'50 This upsurge in violent racism was evident throughout Britain, particularly in the East End of London with the onset of 'Paki-bashing.'51 The memories of these respondents were not simply coloured by a nostalgia for the 'good old days', rather they observed how racism became more visible in the city particularly with the rise of National Front, as detailed in chapter two.

Women in particular initially felt excluded from the neighbourhood and this was compounded by explicit and subtle forms of exclusion from white neighbours. Whilst Asians encountered hostility from white neighbours irrespective of structural dimensions, such as gender and class, actual perceptions of racism varied. A further form of exclusion emanated from within the Asian communities. Although this may have had less impact on an individual's well being compared to the preceding modes of exclusion, this issue warrants attention as it reveals how boundaries were drawn not only between whites and Asians but shows how Asians were also positioned in relation to one another. Respondents from East Africa typically stressed the unity between diverse groups within their country of origin. Bhambra described the communal social life in Kenya,

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.


we observed other faiths and cultures and religious festivals like Diwali, Eid and all that which was very good in the sense we would celebrate everything together. That's the one thing I really miss, Diwali we would all get together and celebrate, Eid and Gustom and the Vasaki coming we could all celebrate that together whereas in England we are so isolated.52

Similarly Valand claimed the 'the life in East Africa was very, very different to the life in this country', there were no ‘religious or racial conflicts’ and ‘everyone was like as if they belonged to one family’.53 It would be easy to dismiss these claims as part of a nostalgic yearning; however this social mixing across multiple identities has been noted elsewhere.54

By contrast, on arrival in Leicester, these respondents noted the perceptible divisions between themselves and those who had migrated directly from the Indian subcontinent. Karim claimed the hostility was akin to rivalry between football clubs or local towns, whilst Patel’s comments indicate the root of the fissure.55 According to Patel:

In the start I'm talking about 1970 there were two parts, the Asian people from India the other one was the Asian people from Africa even they used to talk to each other but they didn't used to meet each other you know. Those people who came from India they were quiet, they came very early in this country you know, that's why they thought these people have come and spoilt all our you know interest. But now, now it's okay, they all meet together.56

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52 BL, NSA, C900/09149 M. Bhambra.


54 Brah, Cartographies, 31-2.

55 Karim 13 June 2002.

56 Patel 3 July 2002.
Here Patel suggests that the East African Asians were blamed by the existing Asian population for provoking local hostility and upsetting local relations.\textsuperscript{57}

Others suggested that the East African Asians and Asians were divided along class lines and possessed different priorities and expectations. Patel claimed,

I saw in those early days that there was a three way system within the Asian community in terms of its divides. So you had the people who wanted to make money, as far as they were concerned come hell or high water whatever they trampled over they were going to establish themselves. And then you had the difference with what people experienced back in the Asian subcontinent, coming over and they basically wanted to make money and send it back and then you had the experiences of the African Asians coming in.\textsuperscript{58}

In particular, Patel felt distanced from those whose prime priority was the attainment of economic and social success.

My agenda was totally different. I wanted to live within reason, comfortable, without injustices and see that everybody was happy and therefore I had this difficulty in understanding what it meant for them and what it meant for me. Certainly for me was that there was no way I was going to engage myself in that massive business building empire and becoming a millionaire that wasn't my agenda it never featured on my agenda.\textsuperscript{59}

Patel stressed, 'for them money meant a lot yeah and therefore in terms of challenging or resisting or you know trying to make change was the last priority they had.'\textsuperscript{60} Clearly, divergent values and attitudes undermined a sense of solidarity or mutual identification.

\textsuperscript{57} This was also noted in V. Marett, 'The resettlement of Ugandan Asians in Leicester 1972-1980,' (unpublished University of Leicester Ph.D thesis, 1983), 551.

\textsuperscript{58} BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Yet coupled with this, Patel also encountered caste divisions within the Ugandan Asians and specifically felt snubbed from the Lohanas. This was demonstrated by one particular social encounter with a man on a bus. As Patel explained:

He was talking about his life and experiences in Britain which came during the Ugandan expulsion thing and all that and the first question he asked me was "are you a Lohana?" And I said "what's that got to do with it?" So in terms of discussion there was that barrier because immediately I said "I wasn't", you could see that there was barrier and he didn’t want to engage into that discussion.61

Patel felt slighted that the man excluded him from further social exchange on the basis of his caste association. It can be surmised that the manifestations of these internal differences during the early 1970s was simply part of the formation of collective identities whereby individuals sought to differentiate themselves from ‘outsiders.’ The continuing importance of caste loyalties in Britain has been stressed by academics; Lohanas in particular have been identified as extremely conscious of their status and caste affiliation.62 Yet it was also strongly tied to the predominance of the Asian population in Leicester which enabled individuals to be more discerning in their choice of friends.63

Clearly this experience was influenced by timing of arrival. Mandy moved from Wolverhampton to Leicester in 1980 and claimed Leicester was ‘very very, different. I found living in Wolverhampton it was more sort of open house, here it was closed house.’ She elaborated,

61 Ibid.


God knows why I didn’t suffer from depression. I had a very young baby a six week year old baby and I felt the Asian community here didn’t like outsiders. Even my own husband’s family who were here, if you weren’t in the pecking order you didn’t fit in and he used to work nights and I remember thinking god, why have we moved to Leicester? Because I just didn’t find that the people were friendly, they just didn’t accept you.64

This highlights an often overlooked aspect of social capital, that the development of social networks and solidarity often entailed the social exclusion of others.65

**Beyond the neighbourhood**

It is important to note that whilst racism did not represent an everyday occurrence or an all pervasive problem within the neighbourhood, it was seen as constituting a considerable threat in other parts of the city and the respondents frequently pinpointed specific racialised areas.66 Several respondents revealed their experiences of racism when they visited the council estates.67 Gheewala claimed he endured racist comments when he attended an interview at Braunstone, whilst Singh recalled the anxieties and intense discomfort he felt when he played football at Braunstone and New Parks in the 1970s. He claimed, ‘you’d never go on your own. You were always wary to get away as quickly as possible afterwards and you didn’t feel comfortable. People would stare at you. People would swear at you.’68 Other experiences were located in the villages outside the city. Kapasi recalled an incident

64 Mandy 28 May 2002.


67 This is also discussed in M. Fitzgerald, ‘Racial harassment in Leicester’, *Black Housing*, 4, 3 (1989), 7-12.

in Birstall in the 1970s and the memory was triggered in response to the question ‘Do you remember anything that really hurt you?’

I was waiting at the bus stop and before me there was this old lady and then it started to rain you know and we were soaked in rain, it rained so heavily and the bus would never come and we just kept on waiting and waiting thirty five, forty minutes and this old lady told me ‘look I think you better ask for a lift, better try for a lift from any passer by car.’ And so we just indicated with our thumb and nobody would stop, nobody would give us a lift and no bus was coming and then this old lady turns to me and says ‘look we both have no chance, the reason why I won’t get a lift is because I’m too old and the reason (laughs) you won’t get a lift, you know very well.’ And I still remember I was very young then when I really realised people do, are racist (laughing) and I admitted no-one would give me a lift because of my colour.69

Although the incident did not involve physical harassment, the moment was remembered as particularly poignant and pivotal for Kapasi as he was alerted to how his racial identity was conspicuous within a particular geographical setting.

Kapasi was also acutely conscious of his racial identity within the city in the 1970s. He explained, ‘when I used to be in the city centre I was surrounded by all the white people because at that time the Asian population was not that high and really I used to get scared because of people saying ‘‘you are different colour to mine’’ you are conscious about it and it used to scare me.’70 This quote clearly reveals Kapasi’s sense of fear and echoes hook’s descriptions of whiteness in the black imagination as fundamentally a representation of terror.71 Similarly, Singh recollected the aggression prevalent in the city centre in the 1970s, conspicuous by National Front graffiti and amplified on Saturday when there was a football match. He claimed, ‘every Saturday afternoon we were locked away. We weren’t allowed to go out’, due

69 C900/09135B J. Kapasi.
70 Ibid.
to 'stories of other Asians who ventured out Saturday afternoon around Albert Street, Narborough Road, Upton Road area who were beaten. It was generally accepted that you stayed away or stayed away from that area so we stayed indoors.'\(^{72}\)

Clearly the apprehension of racial harassment inhibited the use of public urban spaces and prompted the respondents to develop an inventory of racialised spaces or geographies of fear.\(^{73}\) Another common place to avoid was the pub. Fear of the pub was not associated with a particular historical period or even a specific pub. Instead the pub was presented as universal to time and location. For instance, Kumar stated, ‘if I go to a pub you can’t relax. You don’t know how they perceive you,’ whilst Khan explained that though he had no experience of going to clubs or pubs he feared these spaces because ‘perhaps somebody will beat me or perhaps somebody will abuse me.’\(^{74}\) Collectively, these comments defy the stereotype of the ‘fearless male’ often reproduced in studies of crime and uncover how mental maps of the city did not simply emanate from direct past experiences but were also based on accumulated local knowledge which informed the meaning of the landscape.\(^{75}\) As Bannister and Fyfe have commented, ‘fear is embedded in the physical and social characteristics of place and the familiarity of that space to the individual.’\(^{76}\) In addition, perhaps the spaces frequently identified by the respondents, such as the pub and the football ground, were viewed as potentially dangerous because they also signified a tradition of white masculinity which was associated with drinking and sometimes violence.

These ‘masculine’ spaces did not feature in the women’s accounts though they did recall racist incidents in the city. Chitra described how whilst she was shopping with her child at least ten years ago, a white woman blamed her for stealing her purse. She claimed,

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\(^{72}\) BL, NSA, C900/09145 S. Singh.

\(^{73}\) This was also noted in D. Phillips, F. Butt and C. Davis, ‘The racialisation of space in Bradford’, The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Review, 12, 2 (2002), 9-10.


\(^{75}\) P. Pain, ‘Gender, race, age and fear in the city’, Urban Studies, 38, 5-6 (2001), 899-913.

\(^{76}\) J. Bannister and N. Fyfe, 'Introduction: fear and the city', Urban Studies, 38, 5-6 (2001), 809.
she accused me of having stolen her purse and she said ‘I’m going to call the police on you’ and I forget she must have been swearing, ‘you people you shouldn’t be in this country and things like that,’ I can’t remember the ins and outs of it now, but I remember being really shaken with it, probably because it was my first direct experience of racism. I’ve heard about it from other people you know bad experiences, but I’ve been very fortunate. I said ‘yes go ahead call the police because basically I have nothing to hide’ and I really came down to this nitty gritty I was saying to her ‘you know, if you don’t like us why do go ahead and try and get a sun tan to look like us?’ and that sort of thing and it became really personal.77

Chitra reflected, ‘that’s the only experience I can recall but it at the time I was really shaken by it. I was wanting to really sort of hit them because, how dare you you know, I’m probably more honest than you are sort of thing, just because you look at a person’s skin and you think everybody’s dishonest.’78 Chitra was unequivocally angered by the incident and this has been acknowledged as a common response to prejudice.79 Yet anger also conferred, vengefulness, a vital ingredient for social action. In Barbalet’s words vengefulness is ‘the active apprehension of both injury and a desire for retribution, it is a sentiment or emotion directed to setting things right.’80 Hence Chitra did not accept the prejudice but contested the women’s attitudes. This contradicts the image of women as fearful and passive.81 Yet Chitra’s ability to respond was also linked to her class status. That is, as an educated woman, she was able to articulate herself confidently and this was recognised by Chitra herself: ‘I wonder how much that is to do with if you are seen as educated and able to hold your own then people won’t take advantage of you.’82

77 Chitra 22 May 2002.
78 Ibid.
80 Barbalet, Emotion, 134.
81 Pain, ‘Gender’.
82 Chitra 22 May 2002.
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Balbir’s narrative provided a similar example. The setting was also in town, whilst she was shopping with her daughter and the incident occurred only a couple of years ago. According to Balbir a group of four females deliberately bumped into her and this was followed by racist comments. She recalled,

that made my blood boil ’cause I stand up for myself so I thought to myself you might talk to some other Indian like that because they’re all very timid, I’m not. So I stood there and said “’why don’t you come over here and say that’” and although there was four of them I think it probably stunted them in their thoughts and then they sort of didn’t say anything and walked off, because they must have been used to doing that to the mere Indian that’s not going to say anything, that’s going to say keep away from trouble, oh they’re trouble. But I’ve always been like fight back quick and that’s the way I’ve bought my kids up, you don’t go out looking for trouble but if it comes your way, don’t back off, you know stand your ground.83

Like Chitra, Balbir boldly challenged her perpetrators, yet Balbir’s premise that the women directed verbal abuse at her because she was expected to act like a ‘mere Indian’, is particularly insightful. That is, it reveals how she was aware of the gender sensitive nature of racism and this was also evident in other accounts.84 Mandy for instance stated that whilst she had no direct experience of hostility within the city of Leicester she was shocked that ‘still now people are unsure about Asian women.’85 She claimed, ‘I used to joke when I was a peasant, I put my traditional dress on and I kiss his feet and everything else and (laughing) I was joking I wasn’t being serious you know oh God and they realise that the modern Asian women are no different to anybody else.’86 Mandy was therefore conscious of stereotypes of Asian women as

83 Balbir 8 May 2002.
84 This was also noted in Back’s study. Back, Urban, 165.
85 Mandy 28 May 2002.
86 Ibid.
docile, backward and the subjects of subordination. She used parody to mock the racist constructions and provoke individuals to question their assumptions.\textsuperscript{87}

Collectively, these quotes help to uncover the subjective experiences of racism and specifically reveal how experiences and perceptions of racism can be mapped within the city. In particular, for the male respondents, fear of white hostility had a tangible effect on their use of public spaces and reinforced social exclusion from certain areas. It is important to note that these spaces were not construed as dynamic and changing over time, but were envisaged as fixed and static. Although the racist experiences recalled by the female respondents were painful memories, the incidents had not impeded subsequent visits to the city centre. This contrasts with a recent study of Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets which revealed that experiences and perceptions of white hostility in London actually impelled the female respondents to stay within the confines of the household.\textsuperscript{88} Finally, the discussion of racism in other parts of Leicester serves to underline the importance of the neighbourhood as a paramount source of respite and safety and arguably influenced the proclivity of Asians to reside within the inner wards of the city.\textsuperscript{89}

To re-evaluate, social exclusion at the neighbourhood level was not a monolithic or ubiquitous entity, rather respondents experienced different types of exclusions at different times. A predominant theme which structured the women’s narratives was their exclusion from the neighbourhood social life following their arrival in Leicester and this was due to multiple factors. It was compounded by what was perceived to be isolated and intermittent manifestations of white hostility; a subject that was present in both the men and women’s accounts, though those who arrived during the 1960s invariably stressed the rapid rise in racism in the ensuing decade. Conversely, those who arrived in the mid 1970s and 1980s tended to highlight exclusions within the Asian populations; an issue which was absent from the accounts of the earlier arrivals. Nevertheless, forms of exclusion were not insurmountable, rather the respondents were able to generate their own networks and negotiate boundaries.

\textsuperscript{87} A. Rattansi, \textquoteleft Western\textquoteright racisms, ethnicities and identities in a "postmodern" frame\textquoteright, in A. Rattansi, and S. Westwood, (eds), \textit{Racism, Modernity and Identity} (Cambridge 1994), 68-9.

\textsuperscript{88} Phillipson, Ahmed and Latimer, \textit{Women}, 38-42.

\textsuperscript{89} This is discussed in chapter two.
**Boundaries of inclusion**

The role of social capital has stirred considerable debate, which basically stems from competing definitions. It would therefore be useful at this juncture to provide a brief conceptual overview. For Bourdieu the creation of social networks is driven by economic conditions and the opportunity for profit and social capital fundamentally acts as a resource to action. Conversely, for Coleman, social capital is not determined by economic factors but created by the free will of individuals, who trust each other and reciprocate favours. In this sense, social capital does not necessarily reap economic rewards but enables the attainment of human capital. Similarly, Putnam claims 'social capital refers to the connections among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.'

However, whilst Coleman studied the degree of social capital within the orbit of the family and the community, for Putnam, social capital had political and economic implications for regions and nations and was considered on a much broader social scale. Furthermore, it can be argued that Putnam presented an erroneous and reductionist view of social capital, by equating it with social trust and in addition, implying that certain values were innate within individuals. This chapter therefore draws on Coleman's and Bourdieu's formulation of social capital as a set of processes and practices which form the basis of the accumulation of economic capital, or to secure certain values, namely trust. This section will elucidate the different types of social capital which the Asian respondents generated and maintained and the different resources which emanated from these ties.

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92 For more detailed critiques of Putnam see J. Putzel, 'Accounting for the dark side of social capital: reading Robert Putnam on democracy', *Journal of International Development*, 7 (1997), 917-37, J. Harriss and P. Renzio, '“Missing link” or analytically missing?: the concept of social capital', *Journal of International Development*, 7 (1997), 920-36.

93 For further discussion of different definitions see in particular, Portes, 'Social.'

94 Academics have stressed the importance of marking these differentiations. See for example, Harriss and Renzio, '“Missing”, 932-4, Forrest and Kearns, 'Social cohesion', 2139-40.
One form of social capital evident from the interviews was the development of social ties which provided practical help and imperative guidance. The basis for these networks was a neighbourhood identity which cut across ethnic boundaries.\textsuperscript{95} Those who arrived in Leicester in the 1960s or before often recalled the assistance of white individuals. Bhoot stressed the help of one white woman who came to her aid when she was lost.\textsuperscript{96} She added, 'you won't believe the way they treated us then, they don’t treat us like that now. They respected us a lot. Any difficulty you’d have they’d try to understand, they’d help.'\textsuperscript{97} Similarly, Valand described living in Belgrave when she first arrived in Leicester, where she estimated only ten per cent of the population was Asian. She insisted, 'people were just quite tolerant of each other, if somebody wanted help they would just go and help them and if an Asian lady say for example, wanted some kind of help on the road or picking shopping bags anybody would say ‘can I help you?’'\textsuperscript{98} This suggests that white people were forthcoming with help and initiated contact with Asians.

Other forms of help included the transmission of valuable local knowledge. Karim described relations in Highfields in 1970 and insisted that despite the presence of a few white families who expressed hostility towards him, the majority of white neighbours were ‘there to help.’ He elaborated,

helping in a way of if somebody finds some difficulty in taking their children to school near a school, how to apply which school to go to, job or experience if someone says ‘I don’t have any experience, where I should go?’’ and again, money wise nobody will give you cash money, but they will say ‘okay you go to such and such benefit section’’ and they will help you out.

Again if people say you find difficulty there are churches around the area, there are some kind of sales going on, jumble sale or brick-a-brac so people used to go there and buy clothes and used

\textsuperscript{95} Putnam termed this ‘bridging networks’ that is inclusive groups which facilitate the dissemination of information. Putnam, \textit{Bowling}, 22-3.

\textsuperscript{96} HL, HRA, H. Bhoot. See also EMOHA, EEC, H. Shaikh 00643 EE/15/16.

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{98} BL, NSA, C900/00007 U. Valand. The help of strangers was also a common theme in Gardner’s interviews. Gardner, \textit{Age}, 105.
household items, so that kind of information they used to get from the neighbourhood.\textsuperscript{99}

White neighbours, therefore, passed on imperative knowledge necessary for the completion of daily tasks and also offered useful tips for minimising expenditure. This urban knowledge encompassed a spatial dimension, such as the location of specific facilities and also a temporal dimension for instance, the times and places of bargains.\textsuperscript{100} Asian respondents who were assisted by whites were then able to provide support to newcomers. This was explained by Khan.

I was actually the first person to receive them, first from Kenya that was 60 something. First of all they were coming from Kenya then Uganda then Malawi and so on. When Kenya people come my business was flourishing and I was a young active man I received them and take them to the job centre and social security. The people from Uganda I do the same thing. Some people they come with lot of money they start businesses of course here I advise them, some people do very very well.\textsuperscript{101}

Khan was able to pass on important commercial knowledge including business advice and this role of social capital has featured prominently in other studies of migrant groups.\textsuperscript{102} In addition, Khan’s narrative stressed his active and central role within this process and his claim that ‘some people do very very well’, served to accentuate the importance of his help and highlighted his success. As other studies have noted Khan’s role was typically fulfilled by well established entrepreneurs and was a source of considerable prestige, respect and rivalry.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{99} Karim 13 June 2002. See also EMOHA, CHC, 000524, CH/037/0154 M. Patel.

\textsuperscript{100} L. Faire, ‘Spatial and temporal knowledge of daily urban life in Britain, 1900-39, paper presented at The Urban History Group Annual Conference, University of Glasgow, 29-30 March 2001.

\textsuperscript{101} Khan. 4 July 2002.


A further form of information which newcomers lacked was knowledge about urban space.\textsuperscript{104} Women relied therefore on friends to help familiarise them with the city and gain confidence. Bhoot explained, ‘we’d go shopping together. Some of us had a lot of difficulty and didn’t know how to come and go into town at first. In a group we’d go and come together.’\textsuperscript{105} Chitra recalled the importance of receiving this form of aid:

When I came to this country my parents were still in Kenya, I came to an uncle here and she [her friend] took me around. She showed me how to get on the bus, because we didn’t have buses in Kenya, we didn’t have traffic lights and things like that, so it was a completely different environment here. When I came to my first interview I got the job straight off and she showed me how to get from my job to her work place, work in the city centre and then we used to go home together, we lived quite close by, she was really, really supportive.\textsuperscript{106}

Chitra’s friend helped her to negotiate the unfamiliar surroundings of the city and Chitra’s gratitude illustrates how help in times of need was greatly appreciated and bolstered personal friendships. Other academics have noted how veterans typically express lifelong thanks towards those who helped them at particular times and perhaps this explains why recollections of help featured so prominently in the respondents’ narratives.\textsuperscript{107}

In addition, this help was reciprocated as East Africa Asians provided valuable services for those from the Indian subcontinent. In particular, they were able to offer their skills relating to their knowledge of the English language and

\textsuperscript{104} C. G. Pooley, ‘Getting to know the city: the construction of spatial knowledge in 1930s London’, paper presented at The Urban History Group Annual Conference, University of Glasgow, 29-30 March 2001.

\textsuperscript{105} HL, HRA, H. Bhoot.

\textsuperscript{106} Chitra 22 May 2002.

experience with bureaucratic systems as this enabled them to fulfil important administrative tasks. Karim recalled the form filling service he provided.

So I used to fill the sick note in and they sign and take it away, fill the benefit form, other forms. From East Africa particularly from India and Pakistan they come here and settle down maybe four or five years they qualify for right of British subject in this country, so I used to fill their passport forms, British nationality forms and send them to the Home Office. So that knowledge, India and Pakistan didn’t have yeah where as we had bit.108

A system of self help and networks of interdependency evolved to overcome day to day problems.

Another form of social capital was relations between female respondents and white female neighbours. Recollections of close relationships formed with white neighbours were particularly striking and were a salient theme throughout the interviews. These relations were often formed with elderly white women and represented the intergenerational relationships discussed in chapter three. The female respondents typically praised these neighbours and relayed anecdotes of mutual aid and trust. Mistry described her neighbours in 1967 and her sentiments were representative.

We bought a house and I had all my neighbours English and at that time they were very very kind they treated me like my own daughters they were elderly though, they treated me like their own daughter and we were happy. There was also some times when we wanted to go out and they looked after my kids also, so it was very nice. I miss them, they are dead now, but I can never forget them.109

108 Karim 13 June 2002. The importance of this role was also noted in A. Shaw, A Pakistani Community in Britain (Oxford 1988), 37.

The practice of white neighbours providing child care support was also noted in a study of Gujaratis in London, yet the interview reveals that the relationship was of tremendous personal value for Mistry.\(^{110}\) The reference to the neighbour’s treatment of her as a ‘daughter’ and her lifelong appreciation towards them, uncovers how the relationship was not simply based on requisite or obligation but was an important source of socio emotional support. That is, the neighbour conferred affection, respect and social acceptance and fulfilled a fundamental psychological need.\(^{111}\) This was most important considering the social isolation Mistry experienced and the increasing hostility from the white population. This is confirmed by her following comment. ‘No trouble like today, fighting, you blackie, this and that, no, it wasn’t like that.’\(^{112}\) This therefore suggests that her gratefulness for the relationship grew over time and was valued highly in retrospect.

Saujani’s relationship with her neighbour was also clearly cherished.

I think one of the good things I have very fond memories of, we used to have a white neighbour she was an elderly lady and she was very very helpful, she was on her own and she used to grow vegetables in her garden and what she used to do to because I used to be at the house so much she used to ask me if I wanted to help her or go shopping with her and I think that was really really nice because that was my first encounter of knowing a white person.\(^{113}\)

Considering Saujani’s mother was anxious about her going outside the house Saujani was clearly grateful for the neighbour’s gesture of friendship. The relationship was also cultivated by acts of reciprocity. For instance, the neighbour would offer help with their laundry and Saujani would give her gifts in the form of the English dishes she had prepared at school. The neighbour would also accompany them to the cinema in the evenings, thus Saujani’s family provided a form of companionship and

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\(^{111}\) Gaines and Stanley ‘Coping with prejudice’, 114.

\(^{112}\) Mistry 8 March 2002.

\(^{113}\) BL, NSA, C900/00011 R. Saujani.
friendship. This evidence of mutual exchange characterised other neighbourly relations; Chitra's neighbours bought her Christmas presents and Kaur's neighbours baked her cakes and pies.\footnote{Chitra 22 May 2002, BL, NSA, C900/00009 B. Kaur.} These acts were, therefore, tangible signifiers of recognition and goodwill. In addition, the length of time Saujani spent describing the 'bond' with her neighbour emphasises that this relationship was most valued, particularly in the context of racial exclusion. As Saujani explained

*but it was so nice to have that experience you know whenever we'd thought of a racist remark being made outside or you felt angry about something we always had somebody to compare to say all English people are not like that and I think that was what kept us sane for a long long time and I think it's nice to have that.*\footnote{BL, NSA, C900/00011 R. Saujani.}

This suggests that although the female respondents may have only developed a few friendships with white neighbours, they preferred to remember these relationships because they signalled a positive experience and perhaps helped to justify staying in Britain. Therefore, alongside social networks of practical help, the female respondents actively invested in more long terms relationships with their neighbours.\footnote{This is also a theme in P. Werbner, 'Taking and giving: working women and female bonds in a Pakistani immigrant neighbourhood' in S. Westwood and P. Bhachu, (eds), *Enterprising Women, Ethnicity, Economy and Gender Relations* (London 1988), 132-52.}

The importance of associations which proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s was also stressed by the respondents and will be briefly considered here. In particular, respondents emphasised how community organisations cultivated cohesion. For instance, Singh's local hockey club was established in 1970. Sport was particularly important for Sikh migrants in Britain and clubs were initially established partly as a response to racism within white clubs.\footnote{See the research of J. Bains and S. Johan cited in A. Britton, 'Club cricket and Asian communities in Leicester on the cusp of the 21st century' (unpublished De Montfort University MA thesis, 2003), 16.} However Singh stressed the importance of inclusion. He claimed, 'I got boys together, all the Asian

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boys, especially from East Africa but even poor people from India, Pakistan, they joined us.' This also spanned different generations; 'even the elderly fifties, sixty, would come and join us, everybody it was a nice group.'\textsuperscript{118} For Singh this aspect was that was 'the beauty of the system.'\textsuperscript{119} Similarly, Saujani claimed the youth club was 'the first time that Asian people were coming together as a group.'\textsuperscript{120}

These associations also helped to counter the effects of stigmatisation. As Saujani explained, 'it played a very strong role in giving us an identity as to who we are and also helped us balance it out in the outside world.'\textsuperscript{121} A similar ethos underpinned Patel's dance society which was established in 1982. 'Asian music and dance it's one of the arts which is very very useful, it needs to be because without that and the language you can't keep your identity and you can't understand the root of your existence.'\textsuperscript{122} This shows how associations served to retain cultural links and how respondents drew on an ethnic or cultural heritage as a positive identification, to cultivate self pride and reassert a distinctive identity. They therefore helped to compensate for intolerance directed at them outside this sphere.\textsuperscript{123} It should be noted, however, that whilst immigrants may have sought to recreate 'traditions', this rarely reproduced a static 'traditional' culture but involved a process of cultural syncretism, whereby new cultural forms emerge.\textsuperscript{124} Furthermore, these associations and the concomitant ethnic assertiveness was not simply a response to racial exclusion, they also offered a temporary escape from the daily challenges and regimented life in Britain as in Patel's words, 'for some people it's very mechanical life here, because from home to work from work to home.'\textsuperscript{125} Dance, therefore, offered some form of psychological succour.

\textsuperscript{118} BL, NSA, C900/00049 M. Singh.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} BL, NSA, C900/00011 R. Saujani.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{122} EMOHA, CHC, 00601, CH/096/0155 D. Patel.
\textsuperscript{124} This is a major theme of Back, New Ethnicities.
\textsuperscript{125} For further discussion see T. Modood, S. Beishon, and S. Virdee, Changing Ethnic Identities (London 1994).
Many respondents were involved in religious organisations and this also enabled the possibility of ‘belonging’ again. Kapasi described the activities associated with her Muslim group, including the monthly meetings involving prayers and the exchanging of food and it was through the practice of routines and habitual interactions that ‘home’ was recreated. Islam provided, therefore, a ‘home’ that transcended time and space. This notion was also conspicuous in Singh’s comments. ‘People think about their roots but it’s only a story created. With the Sikh system your root is the whole world, whole earth is your root.’ Therefore Singh did not subscribe to the collective memories and myths about a homeland; a consciousness which typified other diasporic groups. For him, Sikhism offered a form of belonging which was not confined to fixed origins.

Initially houses were used for religious meetings, however the first mosque was established in 1962, the first Gudwara in 1966 and the first Hindu temple in 1969. For many women, from the 1970s, religious associations were perceived as an opportunity to socialise. Mandy claimed, ‘I did enjoy going to the gurdwara it was a way of the community getting together you know it was more the social life.’ Similarly, for Saujani Hindu temples countered feelings of alienation:

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127 BL, NSA, C900/00049 M. Singh.


129 For further discussions see Brah, Cartographies, 197.


132 Mandy 28 May 2002.
I think I used to feel, before some years ago, twenty years ago, I used to feel really lost here. In a way that there wasn't anywhere else where you could go to meet people on that religious basis and to share but no, I think in a place like Leicester for example, there's so much to do, there is something every week. So I don't feel so much a loss of not being able to practice it with other members.\textsuperscript{133}

The male respondents, particularly those from East Africa, typically detailed their role and contribution to religious public life from the 1970s to the twenty first century and their involvement clearly offered pride, status and personal satisfaction. Morjaria stressed, although he was 'not very rich', 'whatever I have done for the community and God is the reward.'\textsuperscript{134} Yet, women were also able to gain prestige within religious institutions. Sikhism encouraged women to partake in the public sphere of religious life and Mandy seized the opportunity to take a leading role within her local gurdwara and overcome social exclusion in the late 1980s.\textsuperscript{135} She commented, 'I started doing a lot of the community work at the gurdwaras. I started filling in forms and so forth and all of a sudden they realised “oh God this woman’s got talent that we haven’t got and we need her”' and that’s how then you know, I got accepted, but I really had to earn it.'\textsuperscript{136}

Others participated in organisations that aimed to combat discrimination directly. Patel forged alliances within the Belgrave Asian youth project during the 1980s and this acted as a forum to contest the status quo. He claimed, 'politically as well there was an opportunity for us to invite politicians to explain their role and responsibility so we could challenge them and ask questions.'\textsuperscript{137} The organisation helped to foster a collective voice and provided an opportunity to actively engage with the public sphere and question the local hegemony of the council. These youth movements emerged in other urban locales in the early 1980s such as London and

\textsuperscript{133} BL, NSA, C900/00011 R. Saujani.
\textsuperscript{136} Mandy 28 May 2002.
\textsuperscript{137} BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel.
Bradford and although they were formed as a result of events within their own communities they also represented a national network, which offered mutual support and aid.\textsuperscript{138}

Since the 1970s then, the city witnessed the acceleration in associations and religious organisations and this coincided with the arrival of the East African Asians and with the phase of family reunion.\textsuperscript{139} By 1992 there were some 186 ethnic minority associations in Leicester and the growth of these social networks helped to create a civil society which evolved in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{140} Civil society has been seen as vital for enriching communities and cultivating attitudes such as loyalty, trust, co-operation and mutual respect.\textsuperscript{141} Yet the associations also had an important spatial dimension. As Soja has noted ‘there are no aspatial social processes.’\textsuperscript{142} Thus, whilst there was no purpose built Hindu temples in Leicester, Baptist and Catholic churches, factories and private homes were converted into Hindu places of worship representing a wide range of caste affiliations.\textsuperscript{143} This included the conversion of a Baptist church in 1971 to the Shree Sanatan Mandir; Leicester’s largest Hindu temple and the conversion of a Roman Catholic Church to the Shree Shati Mandir Hindu Temple in 1975.\textsuperscript{144} It was not until the mid 1980s when the city council actively endorsed the establishment of purpose-

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\textsuperscript{139} Vertovec, ‘Multicultural’, 270.


\textsuperscript{142} E. Soja, \textit{Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places} (Oxford 1996), 46.


\textsuperscript{144} Bonney, ‘Understanding’, 37-8.
built places of worship for minority ethnic groups and the city’s first purpose-built
Mosque was completed in 1987 in Loughborough Road, Belgrave.145

Consequently, the meaning of the landscape was dramatically altered, so that
it acted not as an index to the dominant white culture but was an expression of an
alternative cultural and religious identity.146 This was testified by Kumar’s
reflections of living in Belgrave.

I think till about you know mid 80s I always thought of myself well
I never thought I was different, I always thought I was British, but
since sort of last ten, twelve years, I think again because of my
environment, the things are here, the facilities are here, I think I
know that I’m an Indian, ’cause you can do your thing, your
religious stuff, before I suppose you couldn’t.147

The subjective experience of sharing a particular social space gradually heightened
Kumar’s awareness of his cultural heritage and this has been identified by some
academics as a key feature of living within diasporic communities.148 Others also
defined Leicester as a place where you could do ‘Asian things’, thus despite the
diversity of affiliations Leicester was generally perceived as an ‘Asian place’ which
transcended ethnic and religious divisions.149 This was most evident in the growth of
Asian cinemas. Subedar arrived in Leicester in 1972 and claimed there were five or
six Asian cinemas in the city.150 This included the purpose-built Natraj cinema on
Belgrave Road, Belgrave, which during the 1970s showed twenty five Asian films a
week and included a ladies night.151 According to Musa’s recollections, Natraj’s

145 Gale, ‘Pride of place’, 10. By 2002, there were twenty mosques, six Gudwaras, at least eighteen
146 For details of this transformation see Ibid.
147 Kumar 16 February 2002.
148 S. Vertovec, ‘Three meanings of “diaspora”, exemplified among South Asian religions’, Diaspora,
7 (1999), 277-300. For further discussions see also T. Modood et al, Ethnic Minorities in Britain.
Diversity and Disadvantage (London 1997), 290-388.
149 BL, NSA, C900/00011 R. Saujani.
150 HL, HRA, Councillor F. Subedar.
151 BL, NSA, C900/00006, J. Musa,
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

audience encompassed ‘all Asian communities say Muslims, Gujaratis, Sikhs, everybody with their families’ from ‘all over the Midlands.’

Another salient feature of these ‘Asian spaces’ was that they were also experienced as sanctuaries. Drawing on Day’s work, sanctuaries are conceptualised as spaces which offer, ‘psychological safety and common understanding often missing in everyday life.’ This aspect was stressed by Kumar,

Yes as I say basically they feel at ease firstly and secondly if they can’t speak properly English or read and write they know they can get help round here, they’re with people even if they’re different, they all look the same, I don’t think they’ll communicate much to each other as long as they think they’re all Indians, they feel safer I’m sure.

Belgraves therefore offered a friendly and supportive space and a feeling of protection and retreat from white domination. It can be surmised that this dimension of the neighbourhood paralleled the growth of associations in the 1970s and 1980s and according to Chitra it was a perceptible characteristic of Highfields when she arrived in 1974.

Like I said when we first started I’ve been one of the lucky ones, I can’t particularly remember anybody being hostile to me in that manner, our own community was very active and quite strong already even at that particular time it was already established and they used to organise day trips to the seaside and things like that

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152 Ibid. Musa was the cinema manager of the Natraj. He claimed that cinema audiences declined in the late 1970s and 1980s with the growth of videos, thus the Natraj closed. For the importance of Indian films see BL, NSA, C900/09136, N. Kara. There were also plans to transform Belgrave into a tourist attraction named ‘Asian town’ based on the model of London’s China town. ‘Creating golden smiles out of the Golden Mile’, Leicester Mercury, 13 April 2001.


154 Kumar 16 February 2002.

155 This echoes Hook’s conception of ‘homeplace’ in B. Hooks, Yearning. Race Gender and Cultural Politics (Boston 1990).
Thus the neighbourhood increasingly acted as a vital source of security and served as a buffer against racism. Overall, community organisations clearly helped to deflect the effects of exclusion and stigmatisation by encouraging engagement with society, providing places to meet, offering acceptance and belonging as well as providing a space for the expression of different cultures and the defence of different identities.

Notwithstanding the positive effects of social capital, it is also necessary to discuss the negative ramifications to avoid a simple romanticisation of ‘community’ life. One respondent discussed the growth in extreme right religious organisations in Leicester since the 1980s, specifically Hindu nationalism. More typically, respondents claimed religious associations often generated demands for conformity and promoted social control. A few male respondents discussed the pressure to adhere to specific cultural styles to signify their religious affiliation. Singh claimed that although he tried ‘to mix and blend things’ from different cultures, he encountered relentless pressures from his Sikh friends and this was amplified following the Indian army action against the Golden Temple in 1984. In his words, ‘a lot of my Sikh friends were continuously pressurising me to have long hair again and stop eating this and don’t drink and do that and that.’ For Singh the Sikh religion was ultimately experienced as a form of constraint and he was critical of overt displays of religiosity claiming, ‘the longer the Sikh’s beard the more lies he tells.’ These concerns were also voiced by Patel ‘you will actually find that in Africa we were not that religious. We were religious minded but we were not that

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158 This is a major theme of A. Wardak, *Social Control and Deviance. A South Asian Community in Scotland* (Hampshire 2000).

159 BL, NSA, C900/00005 S. Singh.


religious showing the public.' Conversely in Britain, 'even I have seen that people are showing too much, that believing it's all external, all the religions are external which is dangerous.' He added, 'what we are doing here is just a show off, it's a competition, that's dangerous.'

However, the pressure to conform to specific modes of behaviour was also strongly felt by the female respondents. This was illustrated by Bhambra’s account of her experiences of living in Leicester in the 1970s.

The life we had in Kenya was totally different from the life we had in England. In Kenya we could just go anywhere without asking anybody but in England we were sort of frowned upon, how we dressed up, where we went, going to the local temples on Sunday, that was stopped by my brother saying that the girls are getting too much freedom. In the sense he was so frightened of holding onto his own culture and I found it very very hard to adjust to the family way of life.

Here the term ‘frowned upon’, reveals how Bhambra’s sense of autonomy and freedom was curtailed by the disapproving ‘communal gaze’ of the neighbourhood. Her body was effectively policed within the streets to uphold communal and religious identities and so her style of clothing was closely monitored and scrutinised and her use of certain spaces was impeded. This evidence of increased constraints placed upon women within the neighbourhood has been observed in other Leicester based studies, for instance Hill’s interviews with Muslim women revealed that the practice of purdah was more restrictive since coming to Britain and hindered their use of space. Arguably, the pressure to adhere to religious practices tightened as religious communities developed yet other research

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162 EMOHA, CHC, 00524, CH/037/0154 M. Patel.
163 Ibid.
164 BL, NSA, C900/09149 M. Bhambra.
has revealed how this surveillance of women was actually reinforced through the state’s pursuit of multicultural policies including the appointment of community representatives in the 1980s. These ‘ethnic brokers’ were invariably conservative males, who were granted a degree of autonomy to supervise their own communities and typically silenced internal differences and glossed over gender inequalities in the interests of presenting a unified ethnic community.167

Nevertheless, the female respondents established important informal networks with other Asian women as a means to circumvent both the hierarchies of power within the household and the neighbourhood. According to Bhoot, women from four to five Punjabi families would meet each day in each others houses.

One day one of us would light a fire and all of us would come there. We’d spend the whole day together. Next day, the second one would invite us to hers. Like this we’d sit in front of the fire all day, nobody worked. We’d get some wool from town and do some knitting. Knitting jumpers and sweaters in front of the fire from morning till evening. In the evening we’d go home and invite each other around. That is how we passed our time.168

These networks clearly helped to counter feelings of isolation and alienation, yet they also offered an important sanctuary and a space of social and emotional support. Research has revealed how relationships between individuals from the same ethnic background can act as a vital means of assistance as individuals can empathise with each other and use the group as a forum to express or vent their emotions and help to solve problems.169 Bhoot revealed this aspect. ‘There were problems but when we


168 HL, HRA, H. Bhoot.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

used to go to each others houses we talked about our problems and solved them.'

Therefore, the female respondents created their own autonomous space and transformed the household into a temporary retreat away from hierarchies of power within the household and wider communities.

However female respondents did not simply withdraw into the private sphere; several women organised activities solely for other Asian women. Many women discussed the value of exercise groups which tended to be established towards the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s and were state subsidised. Johan for instance, helped to mobilise an exercise class for Asian women and claimed she actively encouraged other women to participate ‘we started pushing them out “come on lets go and lets do it lets do it.”’

Several women also enjoyed swimming and claimed perceived barriers such as norms pertaining to dress code and privacy were gradually overcome. As Mistry explained, ‘you see many Asian ladies even elderly they enjoy their life, they go swimming, exercise and we never used to do that. I mean after fifty I learnt swimming and everything but before that people used to talk about everybody, but now lot has changed.’

Thus exercise sparked feelings of empowerment and emancipation for the women and also contributed to a sense of achievement. Another woman recalled the importance of the ‘lonely women’s group’ which she anticipated all week and this was extremely valued as it provided emotional and social support for divorced women who were otherwise outcast from the Asian communities. Consequently, she stressed her immense disappointment when this class closed.

A further gender based activity evident in the narratives involved venturing outside the confines of the neighbourhood for day trips. Devi for instance

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170 HL, HRA, H. Bhoot.

171 Johan 8 March 2002.

172 Mistry 8 March 2002. See also Devi 24 June 2002

173 This was also discussed in S. Wray, ‘What constitutes agency and empowerment for women in later life? Towards the development of a culturally sensitive theoretical framework with which to examine ageing’, paper presented at the British Sociological Association Annual Conference, 25-27 March 2002.

174 Devi 24 June 2002. See also EMOHA, EEC, 00646, EE/19/20 U. Shamsunnisa who as a widow was dependent on the Sharma women’s centre.

175 According to Watt this was a coping strategy adopted by Asian youth. Watt, ‘Going’.
described how her friend regularly hired a van from the city council to take Asian women to the seaside.\textsuperscript{176} This provided an opportunity for women to escape the scrutiny of the household and neighbourhood and like, exercise, the seaside signalled a form of emancipation. As other academics have noted, 'the seaside has always been a place accommodating difference you can be whoever you want to be.'\textsuperscript{177} Overall, gender based networks were a core element of the women's life stories. The interviews reveal how these networks cut across cleavages of caste and kin and show how women actively recreated their own friendships as part of a survival strategy and to foster a dynamic social life.\textsuperscript{178} They also highlight the importance of the semi public space for women, defined by Harzig as situated 'between the traditional confines of the home and the demands for public representation of the receiving society.'\textsuperscript{179}

Having traced the different types of social networks, it should be noted that social ties were dynamic and configurations of social capital shifted and changed over time. Generally the respondents claimed that by the twenty first century, informal gatherings had declined due to the stresses and strains of paid employment and 'scandals' such as divorce and intermarrying between castes and ethnic groups, which encouraged individuals to distance themselves from others.\textsuperscript{180} Instead, the main focus of the respondents' social life was confined to major religious events and in particular, weddings.\textsuperscript{181}

Respondents encountered diverse and overlapping forms of exclusion within the neighbourhood. However they did not retreat into silence and shame or disengage from society as some theorists have suggested.\textsuperscript{182} Instead they responded by forging

\textsuperscript{176} Devi 24 June 2002. See also Chitra 22 May 2002.


\textsuperscript{178} The importance of female alliances has been noted in other studies of migration see Ryan, 'Moving', Werbner, 'Taking', Gardner, \textit{Age}, 129.

\textsuperscript{179} C. Harzig, 'Women migrants as global and local agents: new research strategies on gender and migration', in P. Sharpe, (ed.), \textit{Women, Gender and Labour Migration Historical and Global Perspectives} (London 2001), 21.

\textsuperscript{180} Chitra 22 May 2002, Sue 10 July 2002, Balbir 8 May 2002.


\textsuperscript{182} This is a major theme of N. Elias and J. L. Scotson, \textit{The Established and the Outsiders} (London 1965).
their own networks of social capital.183 These included neighbourhood networks of self help, female friendships with white female neighbours, community associations and Asian female networks. These forms of capital were not primarily driven by economic profit but, in accordance with Coleman’s views, were associated with the positive aspects of human relations, providing practical aid, belonging, empowerment, participation, safety, and social and emotional support. Paradoxically, as networks developed new forms of exclusion transpired. Thus overall, there was no rigid dichotomisation between exclusion and inclusion, rather the neighbourhood was essentially remembered as a contradictory terrain. Furthermore, the interviews highlight how memories were constructed. That is, as the respondents interpreted their past, certain relationships were elevated and acquired new meanings both over time and in the context of present day concerns. Finally, although it is recognised that relations between groups were affected by events in the Indian subcontinent, an examination of this has been beyond the analysis of this chapter and is an issue which warrants future research.

EDUCATION AND THE WORKPLACE

This chapter will explore the respondents' memories of education and the workplace, particularly their encounters with racist discourses. This will highlight the multiple manifestations of racism within the respondents' everyday lives and uncover the spectrum of responses and coping strategies. The experiences of education in the 1960s and 1970s as a racialised setting will be followed by a brief consideration of women's experiences of education in the 1990s. The men's experience of work in the 1950s to 1970s will focus on the East African Asian's initial loss of status and the principal theme of hard work. Three distinct forms of racism will then be delineated: daily hassles, racist practices and institutional racism. An analysis of the women's experiences will include experiences of hard work and racism; however, it will be argued that in sharp contrast to the male narratives, employment was ultimately conceived as a positive and valuable experience. Overall, this chapter explores the theme of work as refracted through the lens of gender and analyses the respondents' resiliency and strengths, aspects which are often absent from studies of racism.1

Education

Several respondents recalled experiences of education, including primary and secondary schooling and further and higher education. These experiences were located in the 1960s and 1970s and therefore predated the advent of multi-cultural approaches to education whereby a plurality of cultures, including different religions and histories, were recognised and celebrated. Instead, government education policies, and consequently the approach of Leicestershire Local Education Authority,
were based on a model of assimilation with the explicit aim of 'Anglicising immigrants.'

This not only reduced African Caribbeans and Asian children to the category of 'immigrants' but the notion of assimilation was underpinned by the belief that British culture was inherently superior and ethnic and linguistic and cultural diversity was problematic and should be suppressed. Furthermore, white racism was often ignored and was attributed to the perceived excessive concentration of newcomers in specific areas.

Within this context, a salient theme which structured memories of schooling was the experience of 'symbolic violence.' Developed by Bourdieu this concept refers to the imposition of a dominant culture, chiefly within an educational setting, and the process by which minority groups are encouraged to accept the dominant culture as legitimate and their own culture as illegitimate and therefore inferior. 'Dominant culture' is used here to refer to a white middle class culture and 'minority groups' to Asian students, though the latter could also apply to white working class students. A key manifestation of this symbolic violence was the way in which minority languages were viewed as a sign of backwardness and were strongly discouraged. Respondents typically claimed, 'I remember that I dare not be seen speaking in Punjabi or any other language other than English,' whilst others recalled the disapproving comments of teachers that children were 'jabbering in their own language.' Balbir stressed the sadness she felt when she was separated from her sisters and friend for speaking in Indian, thus for many respondents their initial

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6 For further details see Chessum, From Migrants, 176-9.

7 BL, NSA, C900/00007 U. Valand, BL, NSA, C900/09149 M. Bhambra.
EDUCATION AND THE WORKPLACE

experiences of education involved an undermining and devaluing of their ‘home culture’ and resulted in feelings of marginalisation and a sense of social exclusion. For Devi this was exacerbated by the ethnic composition of the school which in 1960 contained only two other Asian girls; one Punjabi and one Muslim. She stressed, ‘I was totally lost in school.’

This process of symbolic violence was also experienced through the National Curriculum which typically excluded the histories and cultures of minority ethnic groups. Bhambra explained, ‘I mean the art, I was very art orientated and I was totally discouraged to use any Indian images, any Indian colours or any Indian art we sort of had to follow the western culture, we had to look at the western artists who were totally alien to us.’ For Bhambra this was remembered as part of the process whereby ‘we had to shed a lot of our Indian ways we had to shed a lot of our Indian sort of cultural values our dressing up to be part of the host community.’ The emphasis on having to ‘shed her Indian ways’ was particularly insightful and reveals how Bhambra felt stripped of her previous culture and history. Her own cultural capital, including her particular knowledge and skills were unrecognised; instead she had to learn a second way of being which was viewed within the college and the wider society, as legitimate and as the ‘norm.’

According to Bourdieu dominated groups are largely unaware of the process of exclusion within education and consequently actually view the dominant culture as intrinsically legitimate which in turn, generates low self-expectations. However, Bhambra proved the exception as she did not totally reject her cultural heritage but responded by consciously practising Indian art within her own free time. Her reaction resonates with Mac an Ghaill’s concept of ‘resistance with accommodation’ whereby minority ethnic students may conform on an instrumental and superficial level but do not actually accept the dominant model of white society propagated within schools.

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8 Devi 24 June 2002.

9 BL, NSA, C900/09149 M. Bhambra.

10 Ibid.


Respondents were also alerted to their difference from the white norm through racist bullying from white children. Research on racism within schools has suggested that racist name-calling may or may not be a manifestation of racist beliefs; that is, racist taunts have been used by children who believe in racial equality. This was more recently reiterated in the Macpherson report, which emphasised that individuals themselves may not be knowingly racist, but that a culture of racism, based on racist assumptions, may go unchecked. Moreover, racist name-calling does indicate the practice of whiteness, as a place with which to view, mark and racialise others. Singh for instance claimed he was ridiculed at primary school due to his long hair. He elaborated:

Sometimes they'd even just call me top knot and while I was playing they would start pulling my hair and they'd say "how comes you've got hair like that?" Or "what's that tennis ball doing on your head?" And then you think was that one of the reasons why I asked my parents if I could cut my hair so that perhaps I can fit in with everyone else?

Other Sikh respondents recalled similar incidents and this suggests that Sikh children may have suffered greater levels of verbal harassment as the wearing of their hair in a bun (jura) covered by a cloth (joti or patka) was a visible marker of difference. This underlines the importance of the body as a key site of identification and affiliation. Drawing on Goffman's work, Singh's long hair can be viewed as a 'stigma symbol', in that it signalled a devalued social identity within the school and thwarted acceptance from other children. Social acceptance is crucial to a person's identity as a worthwhile human being, thus stigmatised individuals may respond by

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‘passing’ that is attempting to conceal the ‘stigma’ by passing as ‘normal.’ In constructing his life story, Singh reflected whether his decision to change his appearance and cut his hair was the result of his ‘choice’ or whether it emanated from a desire to conform to a white cultural identity. Having learned the attitudes of the ‘normals’ through racist taunts, he clearly felt uncomfortable with his Sikh identity and his ensuing remarks that he viewed long hair as a ‘disability’, implies that he ultimately viewed outward identifications of Sikhism as negative, rather than a source of pride.

Nevertheless Singh did not passively accept social exclusion from other children, but with support from teachers was able to negotiate the dominance of whiteness by playing football. He claimed, ‘at the end of the day we used to play football and it doesn't really matter, you learn the game and then you just play it doesn't really matter if you can't speak your friends’ language but you just get involved in sports and that’s what the teachers tried to do.’ Sports activities, therefore, provided an opportunity to integrate and bridge differences and perhaps allowed Singh to assume a masculine identity based on sporting ability, which transcended a racialised identity.18

Furthermore, according to Goffman stigmatised individuals pursue a ‘moral career’ whereby they oscillate between identifying with the majority ethnic group and the stigmatised group. However, Singh’s narrative revealed that he had reconciled contradictory identifications by positing a hybridised identity based on combining elements from different ethnic cultures.19

I'm flexible, I'm not like as you say, when you say ‘are you a Sikh? Do I believe in having long hair? Do I believe?’ I don't particularly go by those rules. Like I say I learnt from different cultures and I try to mix and blend things. I might say I like this thing about the Asian people; I like things about the Western

18 BL, NSA, C900/00005 S. Singh.
people, the English people so you have to live as much a balanced life as you can.\textsuperscript{21}

Another example of these themes was provided by Kumar who recalled incidents of physical bullying at his secondary school.

Those days it was like the English lads against the Indian lads. I can remember on one occasion ….. the elder lads would stand around and get the younger lads, they used to mess around, bullies (laughs) and we couldn’t do anything because they were standing there and I think I don’t know if you can blame the teachers but you know, I think the teachers even found it petty so they didn’t act on that as well.\textsuperscript{22}

The sense of helplessness that Kumar felt was exacerbated by the teachers. He elaborated, ‘what it was I remember going as a bunch and saying to the teachers “we are being intimidated or hit or punched or kicked”’ and I think even they accepted it as just bullying, nothing to do with racism.’\textsuperscript{23} The important role of teachers in challenging racism has been stressed by other academics and in Kumar’s case, the failure of the teachers to appreciate the gravity of the harassment and respond allowed a racist culture to persist unchecked. This resulted in the retaliation from the children as they were forced to defend themselves.\textsuperscript{24} According to Kumar,

In this area youngsters formed gangs I can remember a few names, one we used to call Blue boys (laugh), I can’t remember you’re talking twenty years ago if not more, no twenty five years ago. Youths got together to try and defend but I think that sort of

\textsuperscript{21} BL, NSA, C900/00005 S. Singh.

\textsuperscript{22} Kumar 16 February 2002.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}

Kumar described a process whereby violence between four gangs from different secondary schools escalated. In his words a ‘gang used to come from one school and hit on us and we used to go and hit on someone else.’ Arguably, the presence of Asians within the Belgrave neighbourhood triggered fears amongst white inhabitants that Asians were ‘taking over’ and prompted a form of white male territorialism, whereby gangs fought to redefine ‘who rules round here.’

Despite this collective resistance, the incidents of racist bullying had a considerable impact on Kumar. He revealed,

You know because you get bullied and intimidated and intimidated everywhere you go I think you always expecting something to happen. (laugh) Mentally I do think small children suffer a lot but I mean I would say yeah, it affected my education I’m sure, you know a few years when I was a youngster I was very bright then because of the bullying I skipped school and had less interest in studying that sort of thing. Academically it has affected me.

Kumar presented a stark image of school as an extremely hostile environment; a place where he felt threatened on a daily basis and the danger of white racism was ever-present. Kumar’s response was unequivocally one of disengagement: to reject schooling. This strategy of avoidance was conspicuous in other accounts and had adverse implications for respondents’ life chances, particularly employment opportunities.

25 Kumar 16 February 2002.
26 Ibid.
27 For further discussion see P. Cohen, ‘Labouring under whiteness’ in R. Frankenberg, (ed.), Displacing Whiteness Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism (London 1997), 244-82.
28 Ibid.
29 Research conducted in Leicester has shown a distinct correlation between occupational status and educational qualifications. See K. B. Duffy and I. C. Lincoln, Earnings and Ethnicity (Leicester 1991).
not adequately converse in English and as a result was unable to inform the teachers of the bullying she experienced. She withdrew, therefore, from school and this was remembered with a deep sense of regret: ‘I wish I had stayed on a bit longer, worked a little bit harder and got into college somehow, then I would have been a different person all together. I always wanted to be a nurse’.

Yet for Kumar, racist bullying also incurred psychological costs. He admitted, ‘I mean obviously it does have a lot of mental effect on you, I don’t think I grew out of it until probably I was thirty.’

Kumar discussed how at the age of thirty he finally accepted his Indian identification. His narrative exposes how the pervasiveness of racism within his school not only spurred feelings of self-doubt and a process of internal questioning but had a debilitating and long lasting effect on his sense of self.

Other respondents encountered hostility from the teachers. Valand recounted the comments she received during her teacher training in the 1970s.

The tutors (sighs) some of them were very, very helpful, the others didn't want to know you because you were Asian. I remember the comment one of the tutors made quote, “go home and check your passport, if it's not Britain you shouldn't be here” unquote. I was very upset about it. After the lecture I went to her and I said “I do have a British passport and I do know what I'm doing.” She didn't like it but then she knew I was doing the right thing.

The teacher’s insensitive remark inferred that Valand did not fully belong to British society, yet Valand did not withdraw from the course, instead she showed resilience and assertively confronted the teacher. Alongside this Valand claimed she was frequently treated as an ancillary and was told to clean the toilets and wipe the tables. Again, Valand’s experiences illustrate how the deployment of racist stereotypes and unwitting remarks contributed to a racist culture. However

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30 BL, NSA, C900/00009 B. Kaur.
31 Kumar 16 February 2002.
32 BL, NSA, C900/00007 U. Valand.
33 This has been noted in other life stories of teachers. See C. Pole, 'Black teachers giving voice: choosing and experiencing teaching', Teacher Development, 3 (1999), 322.
this bolstered her ambition and determination to prove her competence. In her words,

Those were the comments that people made. Although they were not racist comments, they hurt, they did hurt me very much. But that made my will power much more stronger (laughs) and no matter what people said I wanted to be there, I wanted to be even more in that situation, so they helped me by saying those comments.34

Clearly, the education system was essentially remembered as a racialised setting; through the hidden process of symbolic violence, covert white harassment and thoughtless assumptions which fostered feelings of exclusion for the Asian respondents and created a climate hostile to ‘outsiders.’35 These experiences resemble Macpherson’s definition of institutional racism as ‘the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people’.36 Yet responses varied considerably and included not only a rejection of schooling or a staunch resolve to succeed, but also tactics of negotiation, such as playing sport to counter exclusion temporarily and questioning and resisting the dominant white culture by conforming at a perfunctory level. Furthermore, the prominence of these narratives within the respondents’ life stories discloses how their experiences of schooling had a profound and cumulative impact on their lives.

Despite the pervasiveness of these negative experiences, an alternative narrative genre can be gleaned from the accounts which stressed the positive

34 Bl, NSA, C900/00007 U. Valand. Rakhit was also struck by the determination demonstrated by South Asian teachers to racism. See A. Rakhit, ‘Silenced voices: life history as an approach to the study of South Asian women teachers', in P. Connolly and B. Troyna, (eds), Researching Racism in Education Politics, Theory and Practice (Buckingham 1998), 55-66.

35 This reflects the findings in A. Brah and P. Golding, The Transition from School to Work Among Young Asians in Leicester (Leicester 1983), 4.1-4.4.

36 Cited in D. Mason, Race and Ethnicity in Modern Britain (Oxford 2000), 9. This has been subject to criticism as the concept is seen as too broad. See for example, Anthias, ‘Institutional racism’ and J. Solomos, ‘Social research and the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry’, Sociology Research Online, 4, 1, (1999), <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/4/lawrence/solomos.html>
experiences of education. This was expressed by women who pursued education at middle age, particularly during the 1990s. These women unequivocally identified their experiences of education as empowering and emphasised their success. Sue for instance, gained a diploma in interpretation. She claimed, ‘I took six exams you have to take specialisations in English law and I got one distinction and five passes.’ Devi attended a local community college with her daughter and obtained an art GCSE. She recalled ‘I joined the class and then we had exams and I passed and it was really good. I felt so happy that I had done something.’ Similarly, Chitra took a part time law degree at De Montfort University and concluded, ‘I said it was more fulfilling my own ambitions that I undertook the study as opposed to money and it’s paid off you know, none of it has suffered in vain.’ For these women, the process of gaining qualifications was therefore a principal source of achievement and self-fulfilment. Middle age has been identified by some academics as a period of ‘self development’, yet the comments by the female respondents need to be considered in the context of their specific past life experiences. In particular, the constraints they encountered in their youth and as daughter-in-laws, including their exclusion from further education as discussed in chapter five.

Employment: the local economic context

The respondents’ experiences of work in Leicester were influenced by labour market conditions. Availability of employment and conditions of the type of work available were all significant factors though they have often been ignored in research on minority ethnic groups and work. Leicester’s prosperity built on its staple industries had been a major attraction for immigrants. In the nineteenth century Leicester was

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37 This contrasts with the findings by Davidson, whereby mature students criticised colleges in Leicester as white institutions. M. Davidson, 'Maintaining the balance: ethnic minority participation in access to higher education courses', (unpublished University of Leicester MA thesis, 1994).

38 Sue 10 July 2002.


40 Chitra 22 May 2002.


an expanding industrial centre with hosiery and footwear manufacture established as the main local industries. From 1955 to the mid 1970s Leicester's local economy enjoyed sustained growth and diversification.\textsuperscript{43} Manufacturing developed in the twentieth century with light engineering, printing, adhesive manufacturing and food processing. By the late-1960s and early-1970s employment in the electrical and electronic engineering superseded the footwear industry as the largest manufacturing industry and the knitted textile industry sustained its leading role in the local economy, influenced by the rise of large clothing retailers and mail order businesses.\textsuperscript{44}

Leicester therefore boasted a relatively diverse and buoyant economy and consequently avoided the structural unemployment, which afflicted the English northern industrial towns from the 1930s to the 1960s.\textsuperscript{45} Nevertheless, Leicester was not immune from economic decline and demand for labour fell considerably in the mid 1970s with the national recession. In 1983 Leicester's unemployment rate was 14.9 per cent with higher levels of unemployment reported amongst Asians.\textsuperscript{46} In 1982 it was reported that the unemployment rate was 20 per cent for Asians and 17 per cent for non-Asians.\textsuperscript{47} At the national level there was a shift from the manufacturing to the service sector, yet whilst Leicester has witnessed a growth in service industries in the 1980s, the city remained unusually dependent on manufacturing employment, particularly the textile industry, with manufacturing accounting for 40 per cent of total employment in 1984.\textsuperscript{48} Despite this, employment in the textile industry was cyclically unstable and has been characterised by long-

\textsuperscript{43} Leicester City Council, \textit{Key Facts About Leicester No. 3 The Economy} (Leicester 1988-90), 1.

\textsuperscript{44} D. Nash and D. Reeder, \textit{Leicester in the Twentieth Century} (Stroud 1993), 61-75.


\textsuperscript{48} Leicester City Council, \textit{Key Facts}, 1.
term decline. Furthermore, Leicester has had a tradition of low pay compared to both the East Midlands and Britain as a whole and in 1985 an estimated 40 per cent of Leicester’s workforce was classified as low paid. It is necessary to consider the following narratives within this local economic context.

**Men and work**

Narratives of work were irrefutably gendered. Whilst women’s stories were organised around the key theme of relationships with others, whether in the household, within the neighbourhood or at work, male narratives were dominated by stories of work. The subject of work often constituted the main section of the interview and was clearly the preferred topic of discussion. For instance, when Singh was asked a question about the weather he simply replied ‘the money is coming in’ and the male respondents typically recalled their life through an account of their past occupations. There were many possible explanations for this. As other academics have noted, the need for the male respondents to establish themselves economically was a priority. Work was simply imperative for familial survival, that is, to pay for accommodation to secure the basis for family life in Britain and support not only the immediate household but often kin within the extended family. In addition, those who migrated direct from the Indian subcontinent were typically expected to send remittances to relatives in their country of origin. It was reported in 1969 that Indian immigrants saved on average 18 per cent of their income and remitted one-third of it to India.

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51 This was also a finding in K Gardner, *Age, Narrative and Migration The Life Course and Life Histories of Bengali Elders in London* (Oxford 2002), 77.

52 EMOHA, EEC, 000629, EE01/01, K. Singh.


Yet work was also the foremost concern because it offered the possibility of enhancing family wealth, and according to some academics, economic success and the concomitant increase in symbolic status has been a shared principal goal within the Indian population.\footnote{V. Robinson, ‘The Indians: onwards and upwards’, in C. Peach, (ed.), \textit{Ethnicity in the 1991 Census, Volume Two, The Ethnic Minority Populations of Great Britain} (London 1996), 97.} The pressure to achieve economic success was reinforced by the perception of Britain as a place where success and status could be achieved, as discussed in chapter four. The male respondents’ expectations, therefore, had a paramount bearing on their experiences and the construction of their life stories.\footnote{For further discussion see K. F. Olwig, ‘Constructing lives: migration narratives and life stories among Nevisians’, in M. Chamberlain, (ed.), \textit{Caribbean Migration Globalised Identities} (London 1998), 63-80.} Furthermore, whilst forms of masculinity were culturally specific and varied across different classes and groups, common notions of masculinity were rooted in conceptions of men as the ‘breadwinners’ and ‘providers’ for their family.\footnote{C. Jackson, ‘Men’s work, masculinities and gender division of labour’, \textit{Journal of Development Studies}, 36 (1999), 89-108, F. Osella, and C. Osella, ‘Migration, money and masculinity in Kerala’, \textit{Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute}, 6, 1 (2000), 117-33.} For instance, Shaikh claimed that although the family would have benefited financially if his wife had taken paid employment, he asked her not to work but to 'cook, pray and look after the children and nothing else.'\footnote{EMOHA, EEC, 000643, EE15/16, H. Shaikh.} He added, ‘when I married her I did not say to her you have to work, I had the strength to support her and then I married her.’\footnote{Ibid.} Thus, Shaikh felt solely responsible for the household income and his ability to support the household signalled ‘strength’ and was a fundamental source of honour and pride. These attitudes were not specific to Asian communities but also influenced white working class women and other immigrant groups in Britain, such as the Greek Cypriots.\footnote{S. Josephides, ‘Honour, family, and work: Greek Cypriot women before and after migration’, in S. Westwood and P. Bhachu, (eds), \textit{Enterprising Women, Ethnicity and Gender Relations} (London 1988), 34-57. The notion of marriage followed by full time housewifery was an enduring ideal for working class women, although since the 1950s there was a gradual acceptance of married women working outside the home. See J. Bourke, \textit{Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity} (London 1994), 62-135, J. Lewis, \textit{Women in Britain Since 1945} (1992), 66.}

In contrast to other oral history accounts, the male respondents did not retell the familiar story of the immigrants rise to success, but instead stressed the obstacles...
and hardships they endured. These experiences were unequivocally influenced by their former class status and those from East Africa frequently delineated their initial loss of occupational status and their exclusion from white collar jobs in the 1970s. Travadi worked as an assistant chief accountant for Mercedes in Kampala for eleven years but despite this experience was unable to find similar work in Leicester. He explained, 'I tried to get some job, I wish I could get it because wherever I went I was told I had no local experience.' Travadi encountered indirect discrimination, which the 1976 Race Relations Act sought to eliminate. That is, the requirement for the post excluded specific groups as recent immigrants would not possess local experience. This demoralising experience corresponds with other accounts. Mashru who had earned a reputation as a prestigious photojournalist in Uganda encountered derision towards his abilities and training by employment agencies in London and consequently found work as a sales assistant in a photography shop in Leicester. He summarised, 'my career changed completely in this country', thus 'my life changed from holding my camera in my hand to giving the camera to someone else’s hand.'

These extracts clearly convey the consequent sense of disappointment, frustration and powerlessness felt and show how the male respondents grappled with a decline in their occupational status. This downward mobility was a recurrent theme in the narratives of the elderly men, who typically accentuated and discussed at great length their previous entrepreneurial success in East Africa. For instance, Ganatra claimed he 'started in poverty' and progressed from the status of a clerk to managing three factories in Uganda. These men articulated how their former habitus appeared out of step and incongruous with their new social world. Their cultural capital, such as their training and education, did not have the same currency in Britain, but was devalued as they were automatically regarded as inferior to whites.

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62 This correlates with other research, for instance, research showed two thirds of Ugandan Asians in Leicester had suffered downward occupational mobility. B. N. Adams and V. Jesudason, 'The employment of Ugandan Asian refugees in Britain, Canada and India', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 7 (1984), 474. See also 'India clerk is disillusioned', *Leicester Mercury*, 31 January 1962.

63 BBC Radio Four, 'Haven of refugees, Ugandan Asians', 2 November 1982, 8.50pm.

64 EMOHA, LOHAC, 919 LO/274/225 M. Mashru. See also Karim 7 May 2002.

65 EMOHA, LOHAC, 836 LO/200/151 G. Ganatra.
Furthermore, it can be inferred from the subtext of the interview that the respondents also attempted to dispel any assumptions held by a white interviewer that dark skin colour was necessarily synonymous with a low social standing.\textsuperscript{66} This was implicit in Kari’s comment; ‘you’ll be surprised if I tell you that I was a bank clerk.’\textsuperscript{67} The respondents were therefore engaged in a process of challenging dominant perceptions and contesting racism which sought to define and homogenise them by defining themselves and constructing a masculine identity. Furthermore the loss of status and sense of powerlessness incurred within the wider society casts considerable light on the contested and dynamic nature of household relations discussed in chapter five. That is, the male respondents reassessment of power within the home may have represented an attempt to reclaim and reconcile a masculine identity which they felt was threatened and undermined within the sphere of work.

Whilst respondents from East Africa tended to mention how they used adverts to search for jobs, those from India often lacked fluency in English and were more dependent on networks of social capital such as friends and relatives to find work.\textsuperscript{68} This severely restricted their job opportunities and many found unskilled labouring jobs in the factories and foundries. For instance, Sissodia described searching for work in the 1970s and claimed, ‘wherever I saw a big chimney, I used to go and ask for work, this was taught to me by my brother. I did not know any English but wherever I used to see the big chimney I used to go and ask for work. They would either say “yes” or “no”. Then I would go on.’\textsuperscript{69} A dominant feature of these narratives was the focus on the hard and demanding nature of the work. For instance Khan obtained work in a local factory in mid 1950s and claimed, ‘at the beginning when I see the working people, they were very tough and very dirty you know, we had some kind of feeling, oh I can’t cope with this country.’\textsuperscript{70} The sense

\textsuperscript{66} For further discussion see M. Banton, ‘The race relations problematic’, in E. Cashmore and J, Jennings, (eds), \textit{Racism Essential Readings} (London 2001), 286-94.

\textsuperscript{67} Karim 7 May 2002.

\textsuperscript{68} For the use of adverts see Karim 7 May 2002, EMOHA, CHC, 000524, CH/037/0154 M. Patel. Research conducted in 1975 revealed that Ugandan Asians in Leicester were more likely to use adverts to apply for jobs in contrast to Ugandan Asians in Ealing who relied on friends and the Employment Exchange. Community Relations Commission, \textit{Refuge or Home?} (London 1976), 26.

\textsuperscript{69} EMOHA, EEC, 00637 EE/09/010 P. Sissodia. See also EMOHA, LOHAC, LO/317/268 Sandhu.

\textsuperscript{70} Khan 4 July 2002.
that the type of work was often unbearable was echoed by Sandhu who worked in a foundry for ten weeks in 1962 which he defined as ‘very hard work’, ‘very bad job, hot.’ This provoked the desire to return ‘home’. Thus, he claimed ‘I think many times I go back and it will be better for me.’

Work was essentially remembered as a struggle. Respondents recalled the long hours, such as twelve hour shifts and the long journey to work. Sissodia for instance walked seven miles daily from East Park Road in Highfields, to his workplace in Wigston. Others stressed the more damaging costs to their physical health. For instance, Kumar claimed his father, a labourer who worked in a local foundry, tragically died aged thirty nine from a heart attack due to the ‘hard work’, and Khan claimed his poor health stemmed from the tiredness of working night shifts in a bakery in the 1950s. These interviews support existing research conducted within Leicester and at the national level in the 1970s and 1980s which showed that the majority of Asians were concentrated in unskilled manual work, in particular traditional industries. This work was characterised by low pay, job insecurity, unsociable hours and health risks.

However, this literature tends to present Asians as passive and exploited workers. Yet the life stories reveal that whilst the respondents certainly gave prominence to these particular experiences, this type of work was generally temporary and intermittent. Indeed, many respondents were employed in various occupations throughout their life cycle and were often consistently engaged in a quest to find better work. This was illustrated in Khan’s life story, as he moved from Birmingham to Coventry to Leicester in the 1950s and 1960s in search of what he termed his ‘betterment’. This included working a night shift in a bakery, a store keeper in the Dunlop factory, a bus conductor and a butcher before establishing a

71 EMOHA, LOHAC, LO/317/268 Sandhu.

72 Ibid.

73 EMOHA, EEC, 00643, EE/15/16 H. Shaikh, 00637 EE/09/010 P. Sissodia.


Turkish delight factory in 1970 which ultimately proved unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, whilst the respondents consistently emphasised the hard work they endured, they simultaneously presented themselves as active agents.

Why then did the notion of hard work constitute such a prominent theme within the narratives? Arguably, the focus on hard work could be interpreted as an attempt to reassert masculinity, as amongst lower status groups in India manual labour was a highly prized and respected male attribute.\textsuperscript{77} Yet it is important to note that the theme of hard work was not simply confined to personal experiences of unskilled manual labour. Rather, the respondents consistently stated that hard work was a defining and often intrinsic element of all Asians. Morjaria stressed: ‘There are certain things which are \textit{inborn} in the Asians because they are very hard working people.’\textsuperscript{78} Similarly Singh claimed, ‘they [westerners] also can learn a lot from us because you know we Asian people I believe are very hard working people even in England what I noticed was it was always Asian people who would do the back breaking jobs. Like my father he really did work hard.’\textsuperscript{79} Karim described working for the Imperial Typewriter firm in the early 1970s and contrasted the hard work he observed amongst the Asians to the lax behaviour of whites. In his words, ‘absenteeism, sickness very many from the white people. Slight injury off, back injury they will get letter from the doctor to the industry, after long time they are sleeping on hospital bed because it was very easy at that time, anything back trouble, you are there and enjoying all the benefits in the hospital.’\textsuperscript{80}

These comments are particularly insightful and could be construed as a response to the racial discourses discussed in chapter three which defined Asians as essentially undisciplined and unworthy. According to the white respondents Asians were undeservedly living off the welfare state and were guilty of flaunting their money and social status which they had acquired through their cunning and sly ways. Thus, the Asian male respondents responded by constructing a moral boundary

\textsuperscript{76} Khan 4 July 2002.
\textsuperscript{78} BL, NSA, C900/00066 T. V. Morjaria
\textsuperscript{79} BL, NSA, C900/00005 S. Singh.
\textsuperscript{80} Karim 13 June 2002.
between themselves and whites, which classified whites as lazy and defined the collective identity of Asians as hardworking and, therefore, morally superior.

A further core theme of the male respondents’ narratives was the salience of racism within the workplace. This included daily hassles from whites. For instance, Singh described the hostility he encountered when he started working in 1968:

I did face some discrimination or some jealousies from some young people when I worked at the shoe factory but in the end I think it’s your will power to overcome these. You expect some discrimination at the end of the day. You are in a different country thousands of miles away and you can't speak good English so that didn't help and you didn't know anybody, 'cause I didn't go to any school in that country so there was some discrimination. I sort of took it and then I started my next job at the factory where they were all English people, there were only two Asians, me and my other friends, and we did face some discrimination.81

Singh’s claims that ‘he just took it’, that such hostility was expected discloses a perception of racism as universal and inevitable, and ultimately suggests a degree of acceptance. This was supported by his following comment that it was ‘just a bit of name calling which was quite normal in those days’.82 This also shows how Singh attempted to minimise the racism, perhaps because his lack of fluency in English hindered his capacity to challenge the perpetrators and assert control over the situation. Yet his comments also imply that these incidents did not represent a considerable threat. Racism, albeit ever present, was simply not an important issue or a defining part of his life. Furthermore his reference to ‘jealousies’ can be construed as an attempt to reject the effects of racism as by stressing the inadequacies of whites he was also protecting his own self-esteem.83

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81 BL, NSA, C900/09138b G. S. Singh.

82 Ibid.

Consequently, Singh’s narrative revealed evidence of acceptance, alongside a desire to downplay the effects of racism and rationalise the situation. This was consistently reflected in other accounts of racism within the workplace. For instance, Tripathi recalled his experiences as a bus conductor including an incident whereby a customer responded to Tripathi’s consistent requests to show his bus ticket with the comment ‘why don’t you go back to India?’\(^{84}\) However Tripathi claimed, ‘I just laughed at it you know, it’s not much to do with the colour but because of their own selfishness.’\(^{85}\) Like Singh, Tripathi’s recollection suggests that he perceived the incident as trivial. His response was simply to laugh and to locate the problem unequivocally with white people. Others conceptualised racist taunts as ‘resentment’, whilst according to Karim, it emanated from the ignorance of whites.\(^{86}\)

Karim expanded his hypothesis by contrasting the past experiences of Asians who travelled internationally, to whites who ‘just go to Skegness, very few go overseas.’\(^{87}\) Karim reflected, ‘that’s why you find these white people fighting very very hard and difficulty with us, they say “oh no we don’t want immigrant” because they don’t have wider knowledge and understanding of the people.’\(^{88}\) Here Karim stressed the disparities, between the world views of East African Asians and whites and his comments alluded to the nature of white working class habitus, which as Bourdieu formulated, framed how they saw the world and acted in it. This indicates an astute evaluation of the complex causes of racism, yet it also shows how encounters with racist remarks did not precipitate feelings of inferiority, anxiety or shame, as some academics have assumed.\(^{89}\) Instead the respondents were again, constructing a moral boundary between themselves and whites, whereby they deflected the blame from their own groups and in Elias’s terms asserted a ‘group charisma’, in which their group was seen as superior.\(^{90}\) Furthermore, these quotes

\(^{84}\) EMOHA, LOHAC, LO/333/284 U. Tripathi.

\(^{85}\) Ibid.

\(^{86}\) BL, NSA, C900/00003 C. M Vadhia,

\(^{87}\) Karim 13 June 2002.

\(^{88}\) Ibid.


\(^{90}\) Ibid. This is also a salient theme in M. Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men* (Cambridge 2000).
also highlight the different narrative genres used by the male and female respondents. Put simply, the male respondents preferred to postulate theories for their experiences in contrast to women who tended to recall personal emotions.91

However, the male respondents articulated a clear distinction between individual racism from whites and actual processes in the workplace which placed them in positions of material disadvantage. According to Anthias, a racist practice can be any practice that produces racist effects and differential treatment correlates with ethnic differences.92 These racist practices, such as the denial of promotion, constituted major threats to their life opportunities, yet they were principally hidden and for many were not realised instantaneously. For instance, during the 1970s Kapasi worked as an accountant in a knitting manufacturing firm and after seven years he claimed, 'I realised this is the glass ceiling.'93 He then sought work elsewhere and obtained a job in a book-binding company, but stated 'again I soon reached the glass ceiling.'94 Kapasi described his increasing awareness during the 1970s and 1980s of racist practices and as he attempted to overcome these difficulties and establish his own company, new patterns of exclusion surfaced. For instance, the bank refused to lend him money because according to Kapasi they 'never trusted our people they always felt that if you lend money to these Asians they may one day run away from the country.' Saddled with this, white businesses would not trade with his company, and as Kapasi commented 'there were constraints everywhere.'95

Kapasi’s narrative creates the impression that racism was experienced as all pervasive and ubiquitous within the workplace and this was mirrored in Mashru’s life story which retold similar predicaments, including barriers to promotion and the absence of financial aid from the bank. The impact of these experiences can be gleaned from Mashru’s conclusions: ‘that’s the vicious world we live in and we can’t change this vicious world,’ reinforced later with the comment ‘this is one of the

91 Other histories have explored these differences. See for example, I. Bertaux-Wiame cited in R. Samuel and P. Thompson, The Myths We Live By (London 1990), 7.
93 BL, NSA, C900/09135B J. Kapasi.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
vicious worlds we find and we are to accept it.' 96 This reveals how racist practices by ‘gatekeepers’, such as staff responsible for promotion, had a profoundly different impact on their lives compared to whites who were not placed in positions of authority. Whilst racism from white individuals could be explained and dismissed, the respondents clearly felt that racist practices presented intractable problems, experienced primarily as a barrage of inescapable constraints. Hence, Mashru’s comments that ‘we can’t change’ and ‘we are to accept it.’97 Perhaps these racist practices also provoked considerable concern and anxiety because they were concealed. As Singh stated, ‘I don’t think there’s justice as you can say. It’s a game unless you can know that you are being discriminated and many times because of your education and your level you can’t know that you’re being discriminated.’98

However, despite this rhetoric of resignation, the respondents were not passive recipients of unjust practices and the strategy of establishing their own business was itself presented as a pragmatic response to racism and an escape route from low status jobs.99 Furthermore, as the respondents confronted additional forms of exclusion, chiefly in the process of establishing their business, they responded by adapting to new constraints and displaying determination.100 This was epitomised by Mashru who decided to set up a photography business in 1974 and without financial aid from the bank, circumvented the high rates and rents in the city centre by establishing the business in Belgrave. He claimed, ‘I had the guts and I had the faith and I had the confidence that I might break it...it was the determination which kept me going.’101 Mashru described a process of gradually accumulating funds and

96 EMOHA, LOHAC, 919 LO/274/225 M. Mashru.

97 Ibid.

98 BL, NSA, C900/00049 M. Singh.


100 This was also noted in Aldrich, ‘Business’, 173.

101 EMOHA, LOHAC, 919 LO/274/225 M. Mashru.
expanding through the profits and he reflected, ‘I had to be a carpenter on that there to build up the partitions. I’d never done it in my life but you know when you got determination nobody stops you.’\textsuperscript{102} Mashru’s response clearly involved a determination to actively negotiate constraints combined with a resolve to succeed.\textsuperscript{103} A manifestation of this success can be seen with the proliferation of Asian businesses. By the late 1970s Asians had already captured a significant share of the retail trade. In 1976, 59 per cent of shops on Belgrave Road and 27 per cent on Melton Road were Asian owned shops, compared to 1966 when there was only one shop under Asian management in the Belgrave area.\textsuperscript{104} Furthermore, by 2002 there were over 10,000 registered Asian businesses in the city.\textsuperscript{105}

Alongside these experiences which were defined by a gradual realisation of racist practices, for other respondents’ experiences of racism was more apparent. Patel worked for Leicester City Transport in the late 1970s as a bus conductor and described an occupational culture infused with racism. Patel’s experiences correspond with Essed’s definition of ‘everyday racism’, whereby racism itself could not be diminished as a sporadic or unique event but was experienced through manifold relations and situations and was systemically created and reinforced through everyday practices.\textsuperscript{106} For instance, Patel described seating divisions within the canteen, as whites refused to sit next to Asians and Afro Caribbeans.\textsuperscript{107} This racial segregation within the canteen was also noted in Singh’s life story as a worker for Leicestershire police in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{108} It depended on the tacit consent of whites to demonstrate their loyalty and unity to a white identity, regardless of whether they harboured racist views as individuals and it served as a daily reminder to minority ethnic groups of the unequivocal demarcation between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{103} See also BL, NSA, C900/09135B J. Kapasi, EMOHA, CHC, 000524, CH/037/0154 M. Patel.


\textsuperscript{105} Singh, ‘Multiculturalism’, 45.


\textsuperscript{107} BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel.

\textsuperscript{108} BL, NSA, C900/00049 M. Singh.
EDUCATION AND THE WORKPLACE

illustrates how racism was not simply rooted in individual prejudice but was inscribed within particular occupational cultures.⁹⁹

Patel also recalled examples of racism from staff in positions of authority, including forms of harassment whereby ethnic minorities were subject to greater levels of disciplinary action, coupled with more subtle racially coded comments. He claimed,

I can remember my experiences with the chief inspector, I put some money in the vending machine and the machine had some defect and kept on rejecting my coins and he turned around and said "perhaps you ought to try some rupees" and I put in a complaint to the managing director. They tried to play it down and said "look it was a joke." I said "look it may have been a joke to you but to me it's not a joke and I expect the behaviour of this individual to be put right because he is in authority and if he is in a position of exercising that sort of behaviour then what does it leave for the rest of the workforce?" ¹¹⁰

The connotations of the chief inspectors' seemingly flippant remark were that Patel was viewed as intrinsically different; he did not belong and was 'out of place.' Yet the comment evoked particular meanings for Patel in the context of the multifarious and daily experiences of racisms within work. As Essed explained, 'each instantiation of everyday racism has meaning only in relation to the whole complex of relations and practices.'¹¹¹ For Patel, this included disparaging comments from union members that Asians were from the colonial empire and persistent name calling from passengers and staff, such as 'you peasant' and 'wog Patel.'¹¹² The chief inspectors' reference to rupees could not be disentangled from the racialised construction of Asians as intrinsically primitive, uncivilised and ultimately inferior. Furthermore, as Patel noted, the failure of whites in authority to challenge racism

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⁹⁹ See S. Holdaway, 'Constructing and sustaining “race” within the police workforce', British Journal of Sociology, 48, 1 (1997), 19-34. This was also emphasised in the Macpherson report.

¹¹⁰ BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel.


¹¹² BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel.
effectively was an indication of a tolerance and endorsement of a racist culture and this parallels the respondents’ experience of institutional racism within education.

A further visible manifestation of this racist culture cited by Patel was the appearance of National Front graffiti in the late 1970s. Patel recalled, ‘there was actual graffiti appearing on the cabs of buses which in my view could have been quite clearly pinpointed if management took the initiative to find out.’ However, ‘that didn't take place and that was where anger really started building in.’113 Unlike derogatory remarks by white colleagues which could be experienced as a hassle, the National Front graffiti signalled a critical threat and an unambiguous attack directed at the mere presence of minority ethnic groups. However, Patel refused to accept the situation and whilst at an individual level he consistently challenged racist comments with direct rebuttals he also responded on a collective level.114 This included joining forces with six other colleagues and complaining to the union and local management. However, although the graffiti was removed there were no further efforts to investigate or monitor the situation. ‘We were very angry about it we demanded this thing needs sorting out, investigated, that never took place’ ‘that graffiti repeatedly began appearing.’115 Added to this, the union was not only unsupportive but actively reinforced racism.116

Consequently Patel turned to pressurising and lobbying the council in the late 1970s and advances were secured in the form of an investigation and subsequent report by Leicester City Transport. Patel cited the vital role of Asian councillors, specifically Paul Sood, Sarinda Sharma and Councillor Prama as instrumental to this achievement. This highlights how Patel’s experience cannot be divorced from the institutional structures of the city such as local government.117 In particular, the transformation of the power base of the local Labour party in the 1970s coupled with the electoral success of Asian councillors, enabled Patel to mobilise support and

113 Ibid.

114 Collective responses were evident in other accounts. Kapur and Sandhu were active in the Indian Workers Association and Karim participated in the Indian Typewriters Dispute in 1975. EMOHA, LOHAC, 970, LO/325/276 S. Kapur, 962, LO/317/268 Sandhu, Karim 13 June 2002.

115 BL, NSA, C900/00014 H. Patel.

116 See also EMOHA, LOHAC, 970, LO/325/276 S. Kapur.

117 This theme is discussed in N. Jewson, 'Migrant populations, community divisions and ethnic mobilisation', in N. Jewson, (ed.), Migration Processes and Ethnic Divisions (Leicester 1995), 108-33.
challenge prejudice through normative channels.\textsuperscript{118} This collective response to racism was not unique to Leicester, but was also evident in other cities from the late 1950s to the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{119}

Overall, work was irrefutably a dominant theme of the male narratives and this was intricately linked to the respondents’ sense of identity, as work was fundamental to their sense of self, as a male migrant. Alongside the loss of status endured by the East African Asians, the notion of hard work was central to these narratives. This can be read as a direct response to racial discourses which classified Asians as unworthy and undeserving of their economic success. A further salient theme was the diverse experiences of racism and responses hinged on a host of factors such as education and linguistic skills.

Racism from white colleagues or the public was experienced as immediately perceptible and was typically minimised and rationalised. This can be seen as an attempt by the male respondents to create a buffering life space, as opposed to internalising the negative views. Conversely, racist practices were less explicit and manifested as tangible economic constraints. The reaction to this form of racism was not immediate but involved a process of gradual awareness by the respondents and was only acted upon following several years of residence in Britain. Patel’s experience, meanwhile, illustrates the everyday nature of institutional racism and as Macpherson stressed, similar racist structures could be detected in other public bodies and agencies.\textsuperscript{120} Nevertheless, it is important to note that racism is historically and geographically variable and Patel’s experience reflected the emergence of the National Front in Leicester as a white ‘backlash’ to the arrival of Ugandan Asians in 1972.\textsuperscript{121} Moreover, concepts of racism, whether ‘individual’, ‘indirect’ or ‘institutional’ often fail to incorporate a consideration of how minority ethnic groups respond and assert their own choices. This was demonstrated in the interviews


\textsuperscript{119} Race Today Collective, \textit{The Struggles of Asian Workers in Britain} (London 1986).

\textsuperscript{120} Such as the police and criminal justice system, Mason, \textit{Race}, 119.

\textsuperscript{121} See chapter two.
through the preference for self-employment and whilst there were examples of collective responses to eradicate racism, the respondents also stressed a personal responsibility and determinacy to navigate and supersede racist exclusions.

**Women and work**

The core themes which dominated the male respondents' memories of work were also enmeshed in women's narratives. For instance, some women mentioned the hard work they endured. This was conspicuous in Shenta's narrative which detailed her various factory jobs and consistently described as 'its very hard work.' Most notably, one job was remembered as particularly distressing. Shenta claimed, 'I find one job in a sausage factory so cold in there and I see the meat and I cry, my fingers all swollen and cold.' Similarly Johan claimed she worked from eight in the morning till eight at night in a box factory and she recalled, 'I used to get tired a lot, I just left school and came here and the work was so hard.' Nevertheless, it was not just paid work itself which was the struggle, but relations within the extended family which meant combining full time work with taking full responsibility for the housework. This was testified by Johan's ensuing comment, 'then come home and cook dinner and everything and my father in law was with me as well as my husband, so there was three of us, and I was only seventeen so first I find it bit hard.' Similar examples abound. For instance, Devi recalled 'four o'clock I used to get up and god I had three children that time, my youngest daughter was six I think six months old or three months old, something like that and in newspaper shop you have to pick the bundles outside in winter, really hard work.' These quotes mirror the male narratives, in that work was essentially remembered in terms of a phenomenal body, such as the sensations of the cold conditions and physically

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122 Shenta 8 March 2002.

123 Ibid.

124 Johan 8 March 2002.

125 Ibid.

126 Devi 24 June 2002.
demanding work. These extracts therefore offer an insight into how the recollections of bodily sensations provide a lens through which to view and interpret the past.\textsuperscript{127}

Likewise, Sue described her job in her father-in-law’s shop which consisted of putting lentils into different bags. She summarised,

\begin{quote}
I was like looking after my daughter, my new born daughter, doing all the shop work and doing all the house work and I was washing clothes and sounds like a Cinderella story but yes, I was hovering the whole house it had to be done every day, polishing, cooking, washing clothes washing up, everything you name it yeah.\textsuperscript{128}
\end{quote}

The interviews convey the palpable sense that women’s work was arduous, though by contrast to the male narratives this was related to their experiences of the ‘double burden’; a theme discussed in chapter five. Moreover, Sue and Devi’s experience of shop work illustrates how Asian women often participated in hidden work, which according to previous research was vital unpaid family labour that contributed to the development and success of family businesses.\textsuperscript{129}

Alongside the theme of hard work, a few women also relayed experiences of racism. Like men, some women noted that they were confined to low waged, factory work despite their educational credentials.\textsuperscript{130} For instance, Sagoo’s objectified cultural capital in the form of a degree did not bestow economic and symbolic capital in Britain. According to Bourdieu, an academic certificate is a ‘certificate of cultural competence which conferred on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to power.’\textsuperscript{131} However, despite searching for a job as a teacher or clerk she reluctantly took her first job in a hosiery firm in 1974 and

\textsuperscript{127} B. Misztal, \textit{Theories of Social Remembering} (Buckingham 2003), 77.

\textsuperscript{128} Sue 10 July 2002.


\textsuperscript{130} This has been noted elsewhere. See for example, G. F. Rafiq, \textit{Conversations with Education Asian Women: Their Experience of Racism and Discrimination} (Norwich 1999), 44.


211
recalled, 'I was very annoyed, very sad because I thought I have enough qualification to go for better jobs but I ended up doing the machinist because that was the only job I could do in those days.' She added, 'I find out quite few girls like me.... I was very shocked actually in those days, they didn't recognise Asian qualification.' Sentiments of fundamental injustice saturated Sagoo's narrative and her occupation as a machinist highlights how her experiences of the labour market were both racialised and gendered. That is, women migrants in various societies have tended to cluster in occupations which were shaped by gender roles and expectations, such as employment in the clothing industry.

This is not to suggest however that Sagoo was simply a victim of structural and ideological forces. For instance, Sagoo worked for a textile firm, Corah, in the 1980s and was appalled by the unjust treatment directed at fellow Asian women, particularly from one white female union representative. She claimed:

Because some of the Asian people they couldn't speak like I couldn't speak when I came from India, she used to tell them off for no reason and the Asian people they didn't know their rights and they were scared, they were very scared to speak their own piece of mind, but I think it could be something in me or I don't know what, I was always strong minded person and when I used to think how the Asian people have been treated it used to really get my blood, heart and I really used to get annoyed myself and I couldn't see one person treating another person that bad.

Sagoo's feelings of anger were clearly evoked and she not only defined herself as strong but took decisive action to exert control and stood for the position of union representative, which she gained in 1984. She consequently fought for higher wages.

132 BL, NSA, C900/00040 R. Sagoo. See also Johan 8 March 2002.

133 Ibid.


135 BL, NSA, C900/00040 R. Sagoo.
and an increase in Asian representation within the union. Sagoo’s case exemplified the important role of women in forging campaigns to improve working conditions.\textsuperscript{136}

A further form of racism encountered by the female respondents echoed the experiences of symbolic violence depicted within educational settings. For instance, Saujani worked for Leicester Council for Community Relations in the 1970s and recalled:

Even within that organisation I found it very difficult to fulfil my job responsibilities and one example I'd give you for example, I was responsible for youth activities and every committee meeting I went to the question would be "why aren't there any evening clubs for Asian youth?" And I was saying "because the parents will not let them out in the evening so we have day time, after school, weekends and so on", but I was always made to feel somehow very small because I wasn't having evening clubs for Asian people and so it was very difficult.\textsuperscript{137}

Saujani’s comment, that she was made to feel ‘very small’, reveals how she felt humiliated as she experienced the imposition of a white dominant culture which masqueraded as the ‘norm’ and ultimately deemed her culture as inferior. She responded however, by consistently attempting to challenge and contest dominant perceptions, exhibited in her claim ‘I felt, with Leicester Council for Community Relations, it was very much in terms of you fighting all the time for things to change, so it was very much a role of saying over and over and over and over again “no this isn't how people should be treated”.\textsuperscript{138} Saujani stressed, ‘but in those days everything was a battle and it was trying to change ideas’\textsuperscript{139}.


\textsuperscript{137} BL, NSA, C900/00011 R. Saujani.

\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Ibid.}
Despite these examples, racism was not perceived as ubiquitous within the workplace and accounts of racism within employment were only discussed by three female respondents.\footnote{See also Mandy 28 May 2002.} This parallels Ramnji’s study of professional Asian women, who posits that women were unwilling to condemn organisations which they have benefited from.\footnote{H. Ramjit, ‘Engendering diasporic identities’, in N. Puwar and P. Raghuram,(eds), \textit{South Asian Women in the Diaspora} (Oxford 2003), 227-41. Jayaweera’s findings were similar in relation to Afro Caribbean women. See. H. Jayaweera, 'Racial disadvantage and ethnic identity: The experience of Afro-Caribbean women in a British city', \textit{New Community}, 3 (1993), 383-406. Other studies have noted the salience of racism within employment. See Rafiq, \textit{Conversations}. Research in Leicester revealed that Asian women felt discriminated within employment on the basis of ethnicity, age and gender. M.O.R.I and Leicester City Council, \textit{Asian Women Workers in the Hosiery, Knitwear and Clothing Industries} (Leicester 1993).} Whilst this factor may have contributed to the limited cases of racism within work, it can also be surmised that the women had other pressing problems, such as constraints within the household, isolation and confining gender roles, that had a greater impact on their sense of well being and the quality of their lives.\footnote{See chapters five and six.}

Moreover, many women entered the labour market in the late 1980s and 1990s, when racism was less covert compared to the 1960s and 1970s. To elaborate briefly, the Race Relations Act of 1976 outlawed racial discrimination within various activities including employment and also distinguished between direct and indirect discrimination. This legislation, albeit limited and flawed, has been credited for restraining potential discriminators as they were compelled to consider the legal consequences of actions.\footnote{H. Goulbourne, \textit{Race Relations in Britain Since 1945} (London 1998). See chapter five.} This was evident in Sue’s interview.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Did you ever face any hostility like when you first came to Leicester or in your jobs, any barriers to your employment?}

Because I’m an Asian?

Yes

And because I’m a woman?

Yes

Never. … I’ve been working for the police for the past almost thirteen years and honest to god and I’m not just saying just to
make it sound good but in thirteen years of experience I’ve never come across one police officer whose made me feel that I’m an Asian and that I’m a woman not just only Asian but I’m a woman, and so I have not had any sexist problems like you know ‘you’re a woman oh my god’, nothing like that. I’ve had so much respect from all the people, social workers, immigration officers, police officers, solicitors, never.144

Thus Sue was unambiguously adamant that she had not encountered patriarchal or racial discourses within the workplace which defined her as inferior or as an ‘other.’

In reviewing accounts of work, several themes can be identified. The themes which dominated the male respondents’ accounts such as hard work and racism could also be traced in the women’s narratives, however for these women, hard work was not simply confined to the workplace but was experienced in conjunction with the household chores. Furthermore, despite some recollections of racism, a defining facet of the women’s narratives was that work was essentially evaluated as a positive experience. Many women conceded that although they sometimes experienced a downward shift in occupational status, it was relatively easy for them to find paid employment. For instance, Johan claimed in 1967, ‘I didn’t find it that hard to find a job it took me a couple of weeks to find a job’, and Mistry stated ‘I didn’t find any trouble to find a job’.145 Similarly, when Chitra arrived in 1974, she recalled, ‘I certainly didn’t struggle to find a job. Like I said my friend took me to the job centre, he took down my qualification spent me for this interview to this place.’146 She summarised, ‘so I walked into the job basically.’147

Moreover, paid work was principally seen as a way of forging friendships and this was a fundamental concern for the women considering the isolation they experienced.148 For instance, Sagoo claimed she ‘grabbed’ her first job because ‘I

144 Sue 10 July 2002.


146 Chitra 22 May 2002.

147 Ibid.

148 This was also a theme in S. Westwood, All Day Everyday. Factory and Family in the Making of Women’s Lives (London 1984). See chapter five. See also K. Stone, ‘Motherhood and waged work: West Indian, Asian and white mothers compared’, in Phizacklea, One Way, 38-9.
was glad I could just get out from the house to do anything.\textsuperscript{149} Devi related the long hours she worked in a factory but added, ‘but then you need money so you go and you meet friends.’\textsuperscript{150} The respondents often recalled one particular friendship. Devi recalled,

There was a lady called Mabel and she taught me how to do overlocking how to do it and she became \textit{such a good} friend she was old lady, \textit{very nice}, very gentle. I used to go to her house and visit her at the hall but because she was older she passed away. Oh often I think about her, such a wonderful lady I used to go and visit her all the time. I remember she used to make banana jelly, frothy with milk and then she used to slice bananas on top, you know such a wonderful; I will never forget that bit.\textsuperscript{151}

This mirrors the close relationships formed with white elderly women within the neighbourhood.\textsuperscript{152} The emphasis is on the valuable help offered within the workplace and the friendship and hospitality provided.\textsuperscript{153}

The importance of work as a source of friendships was also a conspicuous theme of Sue’s life story and served as a counter balance to the considerable isolation experienced within the household. For instance, she worked intermittently in 1979 and recalled excitedly, ‘I was allowed to work for two months at Millans store, which is a big store on Belgrave Road. So I really liked it because I made few friends.’\textsuperscript{154} However work not only helped her to overcome the problem of isolation, but this form of social capital also enabled her to gain valuable advice and confidence. She professed:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{149}] BL, NSA, C900/00040 R. Sagoo.
\item[\textsuperscript{150}] Devi 24 June 2002.
\item[\textsuperscript{151}] \textit{Ibid.}
\item[\textsuperscript{152}] See chapter six.
\item[\textsuperscript{153}] Food was a common memory and acted as a tangible signifier of this friendship. See also Chitra who recalled her lunch breaks with a white female colleague, which centred on visits to Bradgate Park and eating ice-creams. Chitra 22 May 2002. For the salience of food in memories see chapter four.
\item[\textsuperscript{154}] Sue 10 July 2002.
\end{enumerate}
I worked throughout the day from seven in the morning I worked till five non stop, doing everything you name it, housework chores, everything in the shop five thirty and I would drive to Leicester General hospital and work as a domestic assistant cleaning the floor and cleaning the toilets. But I didn’t mind because I made one friend there an Irish woman and she started to say if I pronounce something wrong because by this time I had no confidence at all I honesty believed I’m really bad person I’m stupid, I’m thick and whatever English I could speak I didn’t have confidence because other people would laugh at me because I had very strong accent and therefore I wouldn’t say anything I was just so so in a shell. I was so so no confidence at all really like that, so that was good because then she’d say you know I’d talk about my children growing up and she say “oh don’t worry.” I’ll say “look sometimes my son pretends as if he’s smoking and I’m really worried.” She’d say “don’t worry Sue, it’s the part of growing up, all children do it”, I said “oh really?” So it was like I started to get a bit of general knowledge and not take things so seriously and then if I said something wrongly in a funny way, like some words I still do, it doesn’t bother me now but it did at the time, then she’d say “look Sue you don’t say it like this you say it like this” you know and I started to learn English again actually communicate in English and that was such a good feeling.155

Thus Sue stressed that although she was engaged in low paid work, it was nevertheless highly valued because the friendship she established was a vital source of knowledge. Most importantly it enabled her to relearn English and this was recalled as a pivotal stage in the process of asserting control over her life. Indeed, each successive job occupied by Sue was evaluated in terms of accumulating new skills. For instance, she worked as an assistant in a play group and claimed, ‘I started to learn how to handle children, how to play with them, I was a better mother’,

155 Ibid. See also BL, NSA, C900/00040 R. Sagoo.
whilst her work in a fashion store and electronic equipment shop enabled her to further develop her communication skills and enhanced her confidence.\textsuperscript{156}

For other women, success at work conferred recognition and personal fulfilment. Balbir worked in a biscuit factory from 1977 to 1993 and stated that she had put all her energies into work to counter the adversities within her home life. ‘I was into saving money for the company you know I very much thought it was my own business. I was conscientious. I was passionate about my work that took my mind away from my marriage at home.’\textsuperscript{157} Moreover, she was successful despite lacking formal qualifications and progressed from working as a packer to a senior supervisor. She claimed:

\begin{quote}
I got the recognition from work and that was enough you know I was just a high flyer so it was good cause I’d sort of got nothing I’d got no education behind me I’d got good English, but other than that I haven’t got any academic qualifications or anything but I was on the same wage as people who had come out of university. I was recognised, I got a pat on my back every time know what I mean. So that did a lot for me that made me think I was worth something.\textsuperscript{158}
\end{quote}

Balbir’s lack of cultural capital was not experienced as an insurmountable obstacle, as she successfully acquired symbolic capital in the form of a prestigious job. According to Balbir her work was also satisfying and rewarding, evident by her comments. ‘I enjoyed my job, that gave me total fulfilment you know I enjoyed the job’, she added, ‘I left after sixteen years but that sixteen years was real, I left in 1993 and I feel as though I’m still there, in my mind because that’s how much I enjoyed it, but that’s unusual that is because people don’t usually think of work like that.’\textsuperscript{159} As memories are inseparable from the temporal perspective of the present, Balbir’s current status as unemployed may have shaped these positive memories of

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{157} Balbir 8 May 2002.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
her past employment. Yet despite this, her narrative also exposes how work offered an alternative identity based not on her role within the household but an occupational status and furthermore served as a paramount source of self worth and respect. A further consequence of employment was that it spurred a consciousness for minority ethnic women that their life was not fated and could be subject to transformation.\footnote{M. Morokvasic, ‘Birds of passage are also women’ in \textit{International Migration Review}, 18, 4 (1984), 14.} This was evident in Valand’s comments when she became a teacher: ‘I felt so proud that yes it is true, one can decide what one wants to do in life.’\footnote{BL, NSA, C900/00007 U. Valand.} Thus, Valand realised that she could pursue her own goals and was capable of creativity and choice.

Evidently, for these women, work was conceptualised as an important milieu through which social and symbolic capital was attained. This is not to suggest that all women achieved successful careers. For instance, a study of Leicester in 1991 revealed that whilst a quarter of white women occupied management positions, only one in fourteen Asian women were in management posts and instead were over-represented in production industry.\footnote{Duffy and Lincoln, \textit{Earnings}, 148. This was based on a main sample 750 interviews and a booster sample of 500 interviews.} Nevertheless, though factory work did not confer symbolic capital it was conceived as an opportunity to forge friendships which transcended ethnic boundaries.\footnote{See BL, NSA, C900/00040 R. Sagoo, who claimed they were a ‘happy family’ within the factory.} This is most important considering previous research has stressed the exploitation of Asian women within the labour market.\footnote{Phizacklea, \textit{One Way}, A. Phizacklea, ‘Entrepreneurship, ethnicity, and gender’, in Westwood and P. Bhachu, \textit{Enterprising}, 20-33. This is also a theme of ‘immigrant’ women. See for example, Lee, ‘Issues in research’.} Whilst it is not denied that Asian women were both racialised and gendered within employment, it is significant to acknowledge that the women themselves did not subjectively view it as such.

Narratives of work expose the divergent perceptual realms inhabited by the male and female respondents and highlight the vital need to consider the respondents’ previous experiences to fully comprehend their subjective experiences. This chapter has mapped the multiple forms of racism encountered and highlighted
the diverse coping strategies developed in response. The respondents who were educated in the 1960s and 1970s typically recalled their racialised identity within educational settings through the process of symbolic violence, white harassment and unwitting remarks. An alternative experience of education was also detected which cited education as empowering, albeit this was specifically confined to women who pursued education in the 1990s.

The male narratives of work were framed by their expectation of Britain, ideological constructions of masculinity and the ethnicity of the interviewer. For the male respondents, racism was experienced as all pervasive within work and they typically distinguished between different types of racism which demanded different responses, both at a collective and individual level. Conversely, for many women paid work outside the home was experienced as a new phenomenon and was largely couched in beneficial terms. This is supported by the evidence in chapter five which revealed how employment granted some women the leverage to negotiate power relations within the household. As this chapter has shown, it also enabled the attainment of symbolic capital and most importantly it represented an escape route from the isolation they had previously endured.
CONCLUSION: DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

This thesis has taken Leicester as a microcosm of the nation to explore the marginalisation of Asians from British society and, in particular, the responses to this marginality. These issues have been examined through the lens of the household, the neighbourhood, education and the workplace. There are, undoubtedly, a number of other filters that could have been applied, yet as other academics have noted, it is within the commonplace and everyday spaces of the migrants' lives, such as work and the home, that the contested and transformative nature of social relations can best be explored.1

It has been shown that there was no uniform exclusion from British society which itself was not homogeneous. At the neighbourhood level, the respondents encountered diverse forms of exclusion at different times and within different geographical spaces. Those who arrived in Britain in the 1960s typically claimed that white hostility intensified in the 1970s, though overall racism was envisaged as presenting a tangible threat beyond the confines of the immediate neighbourhood, of the predominantly white estates, the villages and certain parts of the city. Similarly, there was no singular, monolithic racism experienced within the spheres of education and employment, though for the male respondents racism was recalled as both insidious and ubiquitous within the workplace.

Boundaries of exclusion were not insurmountable. The respondents accrued their own forms of social capital, evident by both informal relationships established at the individual level and through a variety of cultural and religious associations which flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. The importance of female based networks was stressed by the Asian women and a salient theme was the friendships established with white women, within the neighbourhood and the workplace. Overall, these social networks fulfilled a range of functions from practical aid to socio-emotional

CONCLUSION: DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

support, yet it is also pertinent to stress that they signalled an active engagement with society. This is most important considering the predictions of some theorists that a typical response to exclusion is to disengage from society.²

Furthermore, this research has offered insights into why some white people may use racial discourses. This showed that racist narratives provided a framework through which to interpret transformations within their local landscape and more broadly, changes within their own working class identity. Racial discourses were also gendered. White women criticised Asians for defying values of white femininity and in the process boosted their own self image. The analysis therefore revealed the pervasiveness of racist ideologies as the white respondents consistently sought to construct a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them.’

Nevertheless, inter-ethnic contact was clearly beneficial; Asians were viewed as exemplary neighbours and many whites differentiated Asians from the negative racial stereotypes and treated them as individuals. They also gained knowledge and understanding into the differences within Asian communities and often employed a rhetoric of equality. Thus, the boundaries between whites and Asians proved to be more malleable and permeable and this has important implications for how white racism could be effectively contained.

Whilst some general themes have been delineated, the aim throughout the thesis has been to highlight the complexity of experiences which defy simple generalisations. It has been shown that integral to the respondents’ experiences was the combination of specific factors which shaped their social location and subjectivities. This included not only the web of structural factors, economic status (in the country of origin and Britain), race and gender, but also a host of other variables such as ethnic origin, language ability, their place within the family hierarchy, timing of arrival, education, religion, and household type. Overall, the various axes of differentiations coalesced and interacted dynamically within different social, spatial and temporal contexts of the respondents’ lives. These factors also formed both layers of the respondents’ habitus and influenced their access to types of capital. Yet their forms of capital were not necessarily legitimated within British society. For instance, the conversion of institutionalised cultural capital, such as an

² N. Elias and J. L. Scotson, The Established and the Outsiders (London 1965). This is also a major theme of S. J. Charlesworth, A Phenomenology of Working Class Experience (Cambridge 2000).
CONCLUSION: DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

Clearly, experiences of transition and settlement in Britain were deeply affected by the respondents' ethnic origin and former economic status.

Perceptions of 'home' were also differentiated by gender. The female respondents typically insisted that although they continued to visit their country of origin, they did not possess a desire to return permanently. As Bhambra explained,

Kenya to me was where I was born and everything was so familiar like now today in this country everything is so familiar and I'm so adjusted to this life if I was to go back to India or Kenya I don't think that I would survive. I have adopted all the culture all the values in England today to suit my needs the way I can survive in this country.....
If I were to die here I would like my children to scatter my ashes in the back garden that's it full stop (laughs) you know I wouldn't want them to take all the trouble of going to India, a country that's unknown to me a culture that's unknown to me.7

For Bhambra, Britain was unequivocally viewed as her 'home' and this was evident by her conviction that following her death her ashes should remain in Britain. Conversely, the male respondents, particularly the elders, frequently expressed a utopian view of 'back home.' As Khan explained,

when I went back [to Kashmir] I was taking so many medicines because of here but there I give up all medicines, only the atmosphere and the food, and the fresh air and fresh water and fresh everything. It was very suitable for me. It suited me and the whole distress and depression and these types of anxieties it was overcome and I was feeling better. So I will say there are big diseases here in this country the distress, lonely, and the depression and you have everything but you are still not satisfied.8

educational qualification, into economic capital was often blocked by indirect or
direct racism within employment.

However, a prominent 'difference' existed between East African Asians and
Asians and this was reflected in perceptions of 'back home'. Respondents from India
often cited examples of poverty in India, which were contrasted with the economic
security found in Britain. Comments such as 'the life was very hard there you know'
and 'it was a very hard tough life' were typical. As Gheewala from Gujarat
commented, 'If you are in India it's like a continuous struggle, even if you have to
catch a bus it's a struggle. If you want to travel from one place to another it is a
struggle. Over here you don't know what the name of the struggle is.' Conversely,
those from East Africa often stressed their comfortable and high standard of living
prior to migration and in particular, the servants they relied on. Mashru lamented that
the servants were one of the 'luxuries' he missed, whilst Kotecha claimed, 'African
used to do everything. That was the luxury life there, now we got to do everything.'
This was also stressed by Karim,

[In Kenya] you don't have to worry because what you do
mainly cooking there is someone there washing up, cooking,
serving up, cleaning whole house mopping, brushing
everything, cleaning windows, so as such the life was relaxed
because there was helping hand there and why the life was good
and relaxed because people must be earning good money in
order to pay servants. So in that terms it was good, very relaxed.
Over here yeah you got to cook yourself, DIY, everything,
cooking at home, washing up, cleaning house, looking after
children and at the same time you struggle for money .... they
used to work in the industry, light industry, heavy industry,
shoe industry whatever, all mechanical, people never did that
before but they had to over here, they found it very hard.

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3 Devi 24 June 2002, Shenta 8 March 2002. See also EMOHA, EEC, 00644, EE/16/17, A. Bibi.
5 EMOHA, LOHAC, 919 LO/274/225 M. Mashru, BL, NSA, C900/09083 B. Kotecha.
6 Karim 13 June 2002. For other references to servants see Chitra 22 May 2002, Sue 10 July 2002.
CONCLUSION: DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

For Khan, Britain was detrimental to his mental health. It was synonymous with depression and distress, whilst Kashmir was the antithesis; once there his ailments dissipated.9 Other male respondents also professed a preference for their country of origin. For instance, Patel commented that a return to Zambia ‘was my aspiration and is still my desire’.

This supports previous research on gender and migration which has revealed that men tend to express a desire for eventual return to the ‘homeland’, whilst women favour the prospect of permanent residence in the new country of settlement.11 However, it is vital to interpret these gendered attitudes towards ‘home’ in the context of the respondents’ complete life story and with an understanding of the divergent experiences of migration and settlement for women and men. Put simply, for women, racism was not presented as a defining problem; it was not uppermost in the minds, particularly on arrival in Leicester. Rather the initial isolation and the lack of a social life constituted a paramount concern. Yet this adversity could be overcome and proved to be intermittent. In addition, women’s participation in the labour market typically enhanced their relative power within the home and enabled them to forge social networks and in the process acquire valuable social knowledge. For those engaged in white collar occupations, employment also offered prestige and the affirmation of an alternative identity which was not confined to their gendered role within the household.

Thus, migration presented both greater ruptures for the female respondents, but also more opportunities. This is not to suggest that Britain was equated with a new found liberation for the women as the interviews reveal that they were engaged in a continual struggle of navigating and negotiating restraints. However, women’s relative position of power within the household did increase throughout their life course, particularly for those who arrived as the daughter-in-law, and there was a

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9 This association between Britain and ill health was also a theme of V. Raja, ‘Conceptions of health and health care among two generations of Gujertai-speaking Hindu women in Leicester (unpublished University of Leicester Ph.D. thesis, 1993).

10 C900/00014 H. Patel.

palpable sense that for the women, the experience of migration had been fundamentally transformative. Hence, Bhamra’s emphasis on having ‘adjusted to this life’ and ‘adopted all the culture.’ This dimension was explored in chapter five, which showed that the women’s role as cultural reproducers granted them a degree of authority and respect and enabled them not simply to pass on a static culture that they had inherited, but reassess and revise their values in the context of their experiences.

Conversely, the male respondents grappled with more intractable problems. This included their loss of relative authority within the household, coupled with their disappointment and frustration that their hopes and expectations of achieving wealth and social status were thwarted. Most notably, the male respondents from East Africa recalled their acute sense of loss that they were demoted socially as they attempted to rebuild their lives in the 1970s. From this perspective, the quotes regarding ‘home’ are most poignant so that, for example, Khan’s idealistic vision of ‘back home’ helped to reconcile his failure to achieve economic success in Britain. Religion may have fulfilled a similar function and served to give meaning and identity to the male elders’ lives. Though this thesis has explored specific sites separately - the home, the neighbourhood, education and the workplace - it is important to acknowledge that they were not actually experienced as extraneous or exclusive from each other but interconnected and overlapped.

It is also worth noting that although some men expressed a yearning for eventual return, they generally conceded that their wives and children were settled in Britain and that, despite their experiences, Britain remained a place where economic and educational advancements could be attained. In short, their children would benefit from their sacrifices. For instance Patel explained, ‘in Africa we couldn’t send our children to the higher education, because of the money problem, but in this country we have found very easy.’ The female respondents also stressed the achievements of their children. Devi proudly claimed,

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13 This is discussed in V. S. Kalra, From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks: Experiences of Migration, Labour and Social Change (Aldershot 2000).

all my children are grown up and they've all got a degree. I told them, I told them "you must get a degree, I don't want you to end up like I ended up in hosiery because my English wasn't very good, at that time." So they've all got a degree two of them are married and I'm a grandmother now (laughs).  

Similarly, Johan explained,

when I left India I was seventeen and I was so clever at school I used to come first in the class, but when I came here, because I couldn't understand English although could write English but I couldn't understand it so I couldn't go back to college or I couldn't go back to school and I had to go back to work because of the money problem and everything and I really regret that because at that time I wanted to be a doctor but now I'm satisfied because my daughter, she's a doctor now.  

Thus, their children's success justified their struggles and their migration was ultimately posited as successful. This illustrates the notion that respondents seek composure as they construct their memories and attempt to align the past, present and future, although as the life stories reveal this composure was never absolute. Furthermore, although this thesis began by stressing the impact of migration on both the urban milieu and the newcomers themselves, it is clear from the interviews that migration was not a singular event and that the ramifications were felt throughout the respondents' lives.

At one level then, the methodology of oral history serves as a social microscope with which to view the spectrum of personal experiences and capture rich detail, complexity and specificity. The experiences recalled by the Asian respondents spanned different historical decades, though many memories tended to focus on the initial period of settlement, particularly the 1960s and 1970s. Arguably, these experiences were specific to the locality of Leicester. Most notably, was the
influence of the East African Asians, who originated from a predominately middle class, urban background and brought with them a range of transferable skills. For instance, respondents from East Africa claimed they fulfilled a vital organisational role in the creation of cultural and religious associations. Similarly, their previous entrepreneurial experience may have fuelled the development of the Asian business sector in Leicester, though another important variable here was the relatively buoyant local economy.

However, although the narratives were intensely personal and by definition were unique, they also possessed a wider resonance. That is, they illuminated the human condition of migration. For many the experience of migration and settlement was, in essence, contradictory. The neighbourhood encompassed experiences of friendships and hostility; it provided security and social identity, but also generated pressures for social control. Likewise, the household for women was a source of intimacy but also of social constraint. This human element was also highlighted through the respondents’ visions, expectations, losses, loneliness, conflicts, injustices and resiliencies. The narratives exposed feelings of empowerment and powerlessness, the sense of displacement and the consequent need to belong; a key characteristic of a diasporic consciousness. The process of inhabiting a new space as an embodied experience was also uncovered, evident through memories of tastes, smells, and other physical sensations. These dimensions of human experiences transcend the specificity of Leicester, historical dates and categories of social location such as economic status and religion. Furthermore, these insights into social relations and the human condition are a further strength of the oral history method and are valuable facets which simply cannot be accessed from quantitative methods, such as official statistics or large scale social surveys.

This thesis has also offered some glimpses into the construction of life stories. The form and content of the interview was informed by a myriad of factors including the respondents’ present day concerns. For instance, Devi’s current status at the time of the interview, as unemployed, in conjunction with her ill health,

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arguably influenced her nostalgia for the ‘good old days.’ Similarly, the events of September 11th 2001 may have reinforced the proclivity of white respondents to perceive Asians as a threatening ‘other.’

The core themes which structured the interviews also emanated from the specific encounter between the interviewer and the interviewee. Many ‘stories’ represented an attempt to educate a white interviewer and this aspect was most evident in the accounts by Asian men. The emphasis on hard work could be interpreted as a response to racial discourses that defined Asians as undeserving of their economic success. The tendency for East African Asians to stress their previous high standard of living was partly a counter to white racism that reduced all Asians to the status of ‘backward peasants.’ Moreover, the decision by the male respondents to detail the legacy of colonialism imparted a significant message; that the Asian respondents were not ‘black immigrants’ or ‘strangers’ but were actually British passport holders with full legal rights to settle in Britain. This was further emphasised by their insistence that prior to migration, Britain had felt familiar to them. According to Hall, racism stemmed from the collective repression and denial of the British colonial legacy in the 1950s. As Hall eloquently expressed:

> The development of an indigenous British racism in the post war period begins with the profound historical forgetfulness – what I want to call the loss of historical memory, a kind of historical amnesia, and decisive mental repression – which has overtaken the British people about race and Empire since the 1950s. Paradoxically, it seems to me, the native, home-grown

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21 Many white respondents mentioned September 11th and the discovery of an al-Qaeda cell in Highfields, Leicester 2002. For further details of this see R. Bonney, ‘Understanding and celebrating religious diversity: The growth of diversity in Leicester’s places of religious worship since 1970’, *Studies in the History of Religious and Cultural Diversity*. Academic Papers (Leicester 2003), 70-1. A recent survey also found that racist and religious attacks in Leicester rose considerably after September 11th though they decreased during 2002. Hindus and Sikhs had encountered higher levels of racism although not to the same extent as Muslims. L. P Sheridan and R. Gillett, ‘Effects of the event of September 11 on discrimination and implicit racism in five religious and seven ethnic groups’, (unpublished paper, University of Leicester, 2002).

22 The representation of Asians as ‘alien’ and ‘outsiders’ was articulated by Powell. See A. M. Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality* (Cambridge 1994).
variety of racism begins with this attempt to wipe out and efface
every trace of the colonial and imperial past.  

The interview, therefore, provided an opportunity for the Asian men to remind a
white interviewee of the ramifications of the colonial legacy, to reinstate their
integral place within British history and to reaffirm their British citizenship.

A defining feature throughout the accounts by Asian women was the
emphasis on their independence and personal strength. Their narrative scripts
highlighted the multitude of restraints encountered but also their creative capacity
and resourcefulness to overcome adversities and secure outcomes that enhanced their
well-being. Several women also claimed that the sum of their past struggles had
reinforced their sense of fortitude in the present. As Sue claimed, 'so all the trouble,
the hell I've been through you know .. I'm very happy, I mean it's all over now, I
couldn't go through it again I don't think, but one thing is I'm much more stronger.
I'm a very very strong woman now.'  

Their memories clearly constituted their self
identity in the present, yet arguably this focus on their personal strengths was also a
response to racial stereotypes that classified Asian women as intrinsically passive
and submissive. Clearly, the interviews were not simply a window with which to
view the internal world of the migrant, but encapsulated particular genres, or
discourses, in terms of ways of talking that were framed by the cross-cultural context
of the interview.  

Finally, it is necessary to posit some theoretical conclusions. Bourdieu's
concepts of habitus and capital have provided useful categories of analysis. Yet it is
pertinent to note that Bourdieu's principal concern was class analysis; gender and
ethnicity were not incorporated into his schema. This thesis has shown, however,

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23 Hall quoted in Ibid, 132.

24 Sue 10 July 2002.

25 See A. Rattansi, ' "Western" racisms, ethnicities and identities in a "postmodern" frame', in A.

26 For further discussion on genres see for instance, S. Leydesdorff, 'Genres of migration', in
Chamberlain, *Caribbean*, 81-91. M. Chamberlain and P. Thompson, 'Introduction, genre and
narrative in life stories', in M. Chamberlain and P. Thompson, (eds), *Narrative and Genre* (London

27 For further discussion see F. Anthias, 'New hybridities, old concepts, the limits of "culture" ',
that gender and ethnicity were central to the lives of the Asian respondents. The life stories revealed other correctives to Bourdieu's analysis. For the Asian men who arrived mainly from the Punjab, in the 1950s and 1960s and the Asian women, throughout their life course, networks of social capital were not driven by economic profit as Bourdieu predicted but fulfilled an important socio-emotional need and were crucial to the respondents' sense of well-being.

Secondly, according to Bourdieu, habitus refers to a person's past experience, which is rooted in their social location and frames the way they see the world and act in it. One's world view is in essence produced and reproduced by objective structures, such as class. However, the interviews illustrate that although habitus did influence action it was less mechanical and deterministic than Bourdieu hypothesised. This is shown by the Asian women who called into question their former beliefs and often reassessed cultural values. Furthermore, Asian women's perceptions and subjectivities were not totally determined by their social location. They could act in a way that generated feelings of power and control for instance, by drawing on religion and spirituality as a source of strength. Moreover, the Asian women often attempted to assume control over their lives by accepting reality at a given time and making pragmatic decisions, with an eye for their long term aims. Sue's decision to become pregnant as a means of staying in Britain is a prime example.

This thesis adds to the growing volume of historical research on gender and migration and contributes to debates within ethnic and racial studies and twentieth century British history. Furthermore, Leicester has recently received recognition as a model of multi-cultural success and 'Britain's most ethnically harmonious city.'"28 Whilst this thesis does not propose any overarching explanations for this reputation, the interviews reveal the histories, the struggles and the 'stories' behind this apparent 'success.' Moreover, the contrasting fortunes of the Asian respondents and their

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28 The Improvement and Development Agency commissioned by Leicester City Council, Taking Forward Community Cohesion in Leicester (Leicester 2002),<http://www.leicester.gov.uk/sys_upl/documents/departments/dpt_1105.pdf>,
subjective experiences problematises grand claims to Leicester's multi-cultural success and prompts the question: success for whom?
## APPENDIX

**Biographical Details of Interviewees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>White respondents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marge</td>
<td>30 January 2002</td>
<td>1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marge</td>
<td>5 March 2002</td>
<td>1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>5 March 2002</td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladys</td>
<td>13 March 2002</td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>14 March 2002</td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor</td>
<td>21 March 2002</td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>21 March 2002</td>
<td>1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan</td>
<td>21 March 2002</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phyllis</td>
<td>29 April 2002</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladys B</td>
<td>2 May 2002</td>
<td>1922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phyllis</td>
<td>6 May 2002</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan</td>
<td>13 May 2002</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phyllis</td>
<td>20 May 2002</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td>28 May 2002</td>
<td>1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline</td>
<td>28 May 2002</td>
<td>1930</td>
</tr>
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<td>Alice</td>
<td>9 July 2002</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>9 July 2002</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>9 July 2002</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>9 July 2002</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asian respondents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kumar</td>
<td>16 February 2002</td>
<td>1959 in Fuji. Moved to UK 1968</td>
</tr>
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<td>Johan</td>
<td>8 March 2002</td>
<td>Nairobi Kenya</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chitra</td>
<td>22 May 2002</td>
<td>1957 in Gujarat India. Moved to Kenya to UK 1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karim</td>
<td>7 May 2002</td>
<td>1941 in Nairobi Kenya. Moved to UK 1970</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balbir</td>
<td>8 May 2002</td>
<td>1958 in Punjab India Moved to UK 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy</td>
<td>28 May 2002</td>
<td>1960 in Punjab India. Moved to UK 1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karim</td>
<td>13 June 2002</td>
<td>1941 in Nairobi Kenya Moved to UK 1970</td>
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<td>Devi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patel</td>
<td>3 July 2002</td>
<td>1927 in Nairobi Kenya Moved to UK 1965</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khan</td>
<td>4 July 2002</td>
<td>1928 in Pakistan. Moved to UK 1952</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX

Sue 10 July 2002 1957 in Tanzania. Moved to India to UK 1976

P. Winstone 7 June 2002, Director of Race Relations and Equal Opportunities, Leicester City Council.

PC Phillips 19 March 2002, Community Police Officer, Asfordby Street Police Station, Highfields, Leicester.

The British Library Sound Archive Millennium Memory Bank (1999)

C900/00001 A. H. Choudhury Born in Punjab India 1917. Moved to UK 1938
C900/00003 C. M Vadhia Born Kampala Uganda 1945. Moved to UK 1972
C900/00005 S. Singh Born in Punjab India 1964. Moved to UK 1969
C900/00006 J. Musa Born in Nairobi Kenya 1941. Moved to UK 1974
C900/00007 U. Valand Born in Lindi Tanzania 1953. Moved to India to UK
C900/00009 B. Kaur Born in Punjab India 1956. Moved to UK 1967
C900/00011 R. Saujani Born in Mbale Uganda 1953
C900/00022 M. Dosanjh Not known.
C900/00040 R. Sagoo Born in Amritsar India 1952
C900/00049 M. Singh Born in Punjab India 1934. Moved to Uganda to UK 1972
C900/00062 P. Patel Born in Mombassa Kenya 1960
C900/00066 T. V. Morjaria Born in Teber India 1938. Moved to Uganda to UK 1972
C900/00080 S. Kanji Born in Karachi Pakistan 1972
C900/00081 K. Vaz Born in Aden Yemen 1956
C900/00090 D. Rajput Born in Arua Uganda 1970. Moved to UK 1972
C900/09064 B. Sharad Born in Mombassa Kenya 1960. Moved to India to UK 1991
C900/09083 B. Kotecha Born in Uganda 1952. Moved to UK 1972
C900/09101 S. Bagum Born in Bangladesh 1972. Moved to UK 1972
C900/09135 B J. Kapasi Born in Uganda 1950. Moved to UK 1976
C900/09136 N. Kara Born in Mobassa Kenya 1960
C900/09138a L. D. Singh Born in India 1964. Moved to UK 1989
C900/09138b G. S. Singh Born in India 1952. Moved to UK 1967
C900/09145 S. Singh Born 1964
C900/09149 M. Bhambra Born in Nairobi Kenya 1957. Moved to UK 1968
C900/12596 B. Vora Born in Jamnager India 1922. Moved to Kenya to UK 1968
APPENDIX


740, LO/108/059  C. Singh  Born in India. Moved to UK 1961
820, LO/184/135  J. Desi  Born in India. Moved to UK 1937 Returned to India 1958
829, LO/193/144  A. Haq  Born in Punjab India 1917. Moved to UK 1938
836, LO/200/151  G. Ganatra  Born in India 1907. Moved to Uganda to UK 1972
864, LO/228/179  C. Sharma  Born in Gujarat India 1902. Moved to Kenya to Uganda to UK 1972
866, LO/230/181  Anon  Born in India 1940. Moved to Nairobi to UK 1967
934, LO/289/240  S. Pandirker  Born in North Kanara India 1943. Moved to UK 1981
962, LO/317/268  Sandhu  Born in Punjab India 1921. Moved to UK 1962
970, LO/325/276  S. Kapur  Born in Punjab India 1936. Moved to UK 1965
978, LO/333/284  U. Tripathi  Born in Pakistan 1932. Moved to UK 1960


000524, CH/037/0154  M. Patel  Born in India 1931. Moved to UK in 1970s
0600, CH/095/0104  P. Winstone  Born in UK

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261


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