Beyond Ethnic Boundaries?

British Asian Cosmopolitans

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Abstract

For a culturally/religiously/ethnically heterogeneous society to remain a society, two factors must be balanced. The various groups must have a sense of belonging in society, and they must not feel that their distinctions are under threat. Only when there is respect for diversity (within a broadly defined framework of shared values), can individuals feel free to make unrestrained choices.

This simple logic stems from the philosopher and political theorist Bhikhu Parekh. An anthropologist will immediately ask herself, what are the cultural/religious/ethnic groups in question? To reframe Parekh's logic in anthropological terms, it should rather concern categories. 'Asian' is such a category in Britain today. It was created – ethnicised – after the increase in South Asian immigration to London and other industrial cities in the late 1950s. It was a stigmatising category, and it did not include membership in the national imagined community. Therefore, society cannot remain a society if people feel excluded on basis of what characterises them as a category. The imagined category Britishness must not exclude the imagined category Asianness.

For me, the enticement in Parekh's rationale has been; how can we achieve it practically? How is the interface between recognition for difference, societal belonging and individual freedom played out? This thesis is based on 11 months fieldwork among, roughly, 30 British Asians, aged 20 to 30, in London in 1999. With the anthropological focus on the micro level, on the experiences of socially and culturally embedded individuals, I hope to show how Britain, step by step, is moving in the direction of a cosmopolitan society.

In the first part of the thesis, I make out four major discourses that position British Asians, and a fifth that opens a space for negotiation of a *middle ground.* In the second half, I show how this negotiation is carried out in individual lives. In this *middle ground,* new ways of being British and Asian are created. By focusing on the individual negotiation, the diversity that appears indicates that their British Asianness can be contained by neither an old idea of Britishness nor essential traits of Asianness.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: field, methodology & cultural reproduction

A non-committal sociology is an impossibility.

Zygmunt Bauman 2000

From 'the tube' to the cricket world cup - from a cosmopolitan to an ethnic field

After arriving at Heathrow airport, it didn't take long to notice that London was cosmopolitan. Of course, after reading up on the subject this did not come as a surprise; and now I saw it with my own eyes. On the Piccadilly Line into town an Asian guy sat next to me. He was typing on a laptop. He's hair was bleached blond and he wore black-framed glasses, 1970s style. And just by coincidence, an Asian girl, with books on post-colonialism stamped from SOAS (School of Oriental and Asian Studies) library, sat down on the other side. Just by coincidence… The so-called visible minorities[1] seemed to be dispersed all over society, and no one seemed to take any notice. I began to worry. How would it be to focus on something no one else seemed to be concerned about?

I came to London to study the British Asian contribution to cosmopolitanism in Britain. Britain has neither a strong *assimilation* tradition nor a *multicultural* one. While the prototype multicultural society is made up of enclosed cultural units with different but equal rights, the cultural flows do not stay within bounded groups, in a cosmopolitan society. Instead they intersect and mix in various ways in various individuals. The individuals in this study belong to an ethnic category that has gone through a transformation the last few years. The stigmata by which it was categorised are in the process of disappearing (Ch. 4 below). In order for a society to be truly cosmopolitan, no members can be categorised by an imperative ethnic status that subsumes all other aspects of their identity. Being a foreigner in London, I very soon realised that

[1] The Parekh Report writes that 'minority' has connotations of 'marginal' and it perpetuates the myth of white homogeneity (Parekh 2000). 'Ethnic' is problematic because it is widely used as a synonym for 'not-western' and 'not-white', which glosses over that for instance the English is an 'ethnic' group as well in its scientific meaning (Ibid.). 'Ethnic' as well as 'minority' were experienced as problematic terms: Jitin: "I just have a real problem with the word 'ethnic'. When I looked up in the dictionary, it said, originating from primitive culture. And the last thing I see Asian culture is, is primitive. [..]. So, I think, what they mean by ethnic is non-white. It's a euphemism for non-white." And Gavin: "I hate the word minority. It feels like you're singled out as just a little thing. Which is true in a way, but it sounds like you're minors. It's this little subculture that no one really wants to know about. Let them get on with it."

the city could well be described by the concept of 'civility'. Zygmunt Bauman has borrowed this term from Richard Sennett, and he defines it as

> the ability to interact with strangers without holding their strangeness against them and without pressing them to surrender it or to renounce some or all the traits that have made them strangers in the first place (Bauman 2000: 104).

I experienced this kind of civility in most public places in London – from public transport, to the supermarket and newsagent to clubs and pubs – to a degree I've not experienced anywhere else, in Europe at least[2]. I see this as a good working definition of cosmopolitanism - a willingness to live with 'strangeness'.

Four months later, I saw the Asian guy from the tube again. This time he had dyed his hair bright orange, as a tribute to his favourite cricket team, India. India was playing against Pakistan in the world cup, taking place in England the summer of 1999. The match was shown on a big screen at ULU (Union of London University). The bar was packed with young British Asians shouting to each other; Pakistani supporters were obviously in one end of the room, Indians in the other. I speak neither Hindi nor Urdu, but I quickly noticed that the slogans were simple and reappeared frequently. They sounded the same in the two languages, as well. Or perhaps people just used the same catchwords, - most frequently English ones. Except from the huge, turbaned Sikh guys on the Indian side, sitting around a table filled with empty pints, the only noticeable difference between the two groups, was the colour of their tee-shirts; My friend Karim used safety pins to attach a green Pakistani flag to his tee-shirt. The tension was topped off by the fact that on the other side of the world, in the valleys of Kashmir, people were killing each other right at that moment. 'Free Kashmir!' someone shouted. 'Did you hear that?!' Karim was visibly disturbed, or perhaps excited. He had a degree in Conflict and War Studies behind him, and was to start an MA in Central Asian studies in the autumn. 'I told you; this is more than just a match!' In the match break, back at the politicised Union bar at SOAS, it was the real politics in Kashmir he and his Hindu and Muslim friends talked about.

During the second half, when Pakistan were batting, the tension in the bar increased. India's score wasn't too good, but Pakistan played incredibly poorly. Even I, a novice to this game, could see that. The groups separated themselves increasingly. Only one girl dressed in

[2] Bhikhu Parekh noted briefly, in a lecture, that while Britishness was defined by colour, Frenchness was defined by culture.

violet (India's colour), stayed with her friends on the green side. The Sikh guys went back and forth to the bar and became more and more vocal. They stood up and shouted down to the more sober, and not to forget, losing Pakistanis. On our side of the room, I counted only a handful of pints – or rather bottled beer – during the whole 7 hours match. On the Indian side, the turbaned group undoubtedly outdrank the rest, but they weren't the only ones drinking. It was apparent that India, the underdog, qualifying for 'the super six' (the second stage of the tournament) at the last moment by knocking out England, were heading for victory; And not just any victory, but against Pakistan! Some Sikhs jumped to their chairs; people were standing up, shouting and singing. The orangehead from Piccadilly Line and another animated fan settled in the heart of their enemy's camp. From there, they joined the other Indians in cheering biting remarks about the score. Karim said it was about time to leave. On our way back to SOAS he removed the green flag from his chest, and stopped for a chat with one of his Hindu friends[3].

Lord Tebbit's cricket test

Karim stitched (one aspect of) his ethnicity to his chest and Mr. Orange dyed his hair for the sake of a cricket tournament. They wouldn't pass the infamous *Tebbit Test*, - named after a former Conservative Cabinet Minister who, in 1990, said that Britons[4] who supported other cricket teams than the British were not sufficiently loyal and patriotic to be real British[5].

Paradoxically, the *failure* to pass the 'cricket test of loyalty' has become one of the most prominent symbols of British Asian ethnicity. Some people found it simplistic and provocative, as we shall see with Zamil and Syed below, while surprisingly many waved this easy-opted

[3] I interpret the animosities during the game as mockery, mostly. After the game, the British Asian 'ethnic minority' newspaper *Eastern Eye* filled their front page with a colour photo of purple and green clad fans waving Indian and Pakistani flags, but watching the game together. The text wrote "HARMONY" in capital letters, followed by an appeal to the peoples of India and Pakistan to learn from their British Asian counterparts. In Britain, the days of independence of the two countries- August 14 and 15 – are often celebrated together as well.

[4] He actually said *English*, not British (there is no such thing as a British cricket team). However, the Tebbit test has now turned into a notorious 'verbal icon' of Thatcherite British patriotism among many Britons. In the mythic version he seems to be remembered as having said 'British' instead of English - which people presumed he meant in the first place. (The term 'verbal icon' is from the literature critic Haydn White. According to him, narratives become comprehensible through the use of known and recognisable 'plot-structures' (White 1993: 105-6). I have found a number of frequently used 'verbal icons' in British Asian narratives.)

[5] Bhikhu Parekh uses Lord Tebbit's curious idea to illustrate that there is no public British culture, he could demand they should participate in. 'British' is a difficult term many, even natives, tend to muddle with 'English' (which many see as practically non-existent, natives included). As all national identities it is imagined to continue back in time immemorial. However, British is extremely composite; made up of four parts as well as various invasions and immigrations. The same is the case with the English language, which has incorporated words from many sources. British national identity is not based on presumed common ethnic origin, like e.g. 'Scottish' or 'Norwegian'; it is an imperial identity.

banner of ethnicity high, as Karim did. The same people would not hesitate a second to claim that they were British and belonged in Britain. Vivek Chaudhary, one of The Guardian newspaper's most prominent sport correspondents, illustrates this multi-layered attitude. In response to England cricket captain Nasser Hussein's complaint that British Asians should support England – where they are born and bred – and not a South Asian team, Chaundary called him 'out of touch with his brown side' (The Guardian May 29, 2001). I have never heard such a euphemism for 'coconut[6]' used against British Asians who make the same statement in relation to theatre, literature or music. In creative activities, Hussein's attitude is the only acceptable one.

Chaudary gives three reasons why he supports India: First and foremost, the very high level of racism among English sports fans (particularly in football, Zamil was chased home from Millwall matches by skinheads). Second, how much more fun it is to watch cricket the subcontinent way rather than the dull English way. Third, he writes;

> anyhow, what is the big deal about not supporting England? [..] At times I see myself as British, at other times as Asian, at other times as a Londoner, sometimes an Indian. Likewise in sport: I am a Spurs fan who support England at some sports, but when it comes to cricket I support India. Why is Hussain so dismissive of the fact that we can have shifting loyalties and identities? I was born in England, but supporting India is for me, as for thousands of others, a reaffirmiation of my cultural heritage. We are proud to be British, but we are also proud of our ancestry. [..] My message to Hussain is this. You need to get in touch with your brown side. Take a tour around Tower Hamlets or Southall and talk to British Asians. [..] You might be surprised by what you see: people who are comfortable with being British and being Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan (Ibid.).

Chaudary implies, like e.g. *The Parekh Report*, that seeing loyalty and identity as singular is outdated (Parekh 2000: 36). An identity is made up of various, sometimes incompatible, elements. These are fed and expressed on various arenas and through various loyalties. For Chaudary, and thousands of others, it was important to express regional loyalties (Spurs, Sheffield Wednesday or Millwall FC) as well as some kind of South Asianness.

> All evidence points to the desire on the part of young Asians to retain a variety of vestiges of their cultures of origin as a positive mark of difference, a refusal never to attempt to merge invisibly into a nebulous blob of ill-defined Britishness, and certainly not *Englishness*, which is definitely seen as forever a 'white thing' (Rattansi 2000: 130).

[6] 'Coconut' - brown on the outside, white on the inside - is a derogative term apparently used by some British Asians against their counterparts. 'Bounty bar' - after the chocolate - is the Yorkshire version. I've never heard it, but I've heard several accounts of it.

For some reason, it is far easier[7] to express one's ethnicity in support of national cricket teams, than in e.g. music and fashion. It appears that Norman Tebbit and Nasser Hussain as well as Vivek Chaudary and Karim participate in the same discourse[8] on identity, which the latter two however, are updating. This discourse is dictated by 19th century nationalism. It sees identity (and nation) as spatially bounded, temporary coherent, unique and with an immutable essence (Handler 1994). But, as we shall see in relation to Karim and many others, this discourse, no matter how important it is to communicate it, is relevant only in symbolic terms. It does not stick very deep when it comes to everyday interaction, a fact Karim is aware of (Perhaps this awareness makes a mockery of the whole discourse of nationalism?)

Complexities and reflections – narratives and context

Yes, it didn't take me long to see that London is multi-ethnic. But, as I followed Orangehead from the Piccadilly Line to ULU, I also saw that the field is complex. First, it is complex in terms of the variety of *arenas* present in an urban study. On these arenas, people will play out various aspects of their identity, as we've just seen examples of. So far, this is just another reminder of how important it is to contexualise the various levels of identification – which is well-known anthropological knowledge since the days of Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard and the Nuers' segmentary lineage structure. However, the field is also complex in a different – and at least as interesting – way; namely in terms of consciousness. Karim and the journalist knew perfectly well that they were 'playing out different aspects of his identity on different arenas'. They would know the sociological concept of concentric circles of identification in relation to their allegiances to local, regional and diasporic aspects of their identity. Just as Karim's friends would discuss whether they felt at home in the paradigm of 'skilled cultural navigators' rather than that of 'in-between cultures'.

How reflective people talked about issues of identity surprised me. My informants would never just inform me on their experiences of being second generation, but they would always include knowledgeable explanations and interpretations of these experiences. In this field, where sociological knowledge of identity formation informed people's everyday reflections, Norman

[7] Easier and more relevant perhaps, since England hasn't had a good team for ages.
[8] Briefly, *discourses* provide ways of perceiving the world and the self. Following Michel Foucault, there is nothing intelligible outside discourses.

Tebbit's cricket test becomes a joke. However, the joke was there and it had to be responded to. Zamil, a 25 years old British Bengali[9], answered it differently from Karim.

> We were in Brick Lane, and [the reporters from the BBC Worldservice] were talking to the elders, and they didn't understand English properly, so they just asked: Bangladesh or England. And we walked past and they asked; who would you support. That was quite a leading question. I just said, I would support both teams[10], because both teams represent who I am, and my make-up is a balance. And he was quite happy with that comment. But my friend Syed, he actually took that very personally, because he wasn't happy with the way the reporter was trying to put us in a corner and make us choose. And he made that point quite clearly. And I think he apologised afterwards. He said he didn't have a hidden agenda. But who knows.

Zamil was a youth worker and psychologist with professional knowledge of identity formation, while his friend Syed was a natural science teacher. Irrespective of their education, neither of them had one-dimensional understanding of their identity. Neither did they have naïve concepts of representations in the media. The anthropologist found herself in a field where the 'native theory' was so infused with sociological understandings that there seemed to be little to add from the perspective of an 'observer'; we were part of the same interpretative community. By this, I do *not* mean that the following piece of ethnography is a sheer playback of 'native' voices. No, it is a thoroughly edited piece of interpretations.

However, the participants' narration of self-understanding and worldview is a fundamental part of this thesis. The reasons for this are empirical and methodological as well as theoretical and ethical. Empirically, reflection upon self and society appeared to be very important in the lives of the British Asians I met. This impression is backed by much sociological/anthropological theory, which claims that reflexivity is a fundamental factor in modern society. In her study of autobiographies, Marianne Gullestad (1996) describes the modern self to be in a continuous effort trying to integrate the various incoherent and inconsistent experiences of everyday life. The ambition is holistic despite, or rather because, of the fragmentation of the experiences. Narratives have an important role to play in the effort to integrate and make sense of the self and the world (Ibid. p. 18).

For anthropology, this struggle for holism is interesting from a methodological as well as theoretical perspective. After the revelation that bounded and homogenous 'cultures' were just a

[9] Self-definition in his family as well as in the area they lived was 'Bengali' rather than 'Bangladeshi' (see Alexander 2000: 24).

[10] Anyway, football and not cricket was Zamil's passion. If somebody had asked him whether he supported Millwall FC or some Sylheti football team, I'm not sure if he would have been so easy-going.

great myth, individuals-in-context becomes a possible focus of study. However, how to get access to the vast array of experiences and influences shaping individual lives? The disparate and often secluded arenas, which make up people's life in the city, pose great methodological challenges to ethnography. One solution is to focus on one arena, and the part of the informants' life that is played out there. Helena Wulff (1988) did this in *Twelve Girls: Growing Up, Ethnicity and Excitement in a South London Microculture*. While Gerd Baumann (1996) focused on the suburb Southall in *Contesting Culture: discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London*. I will return to why this was not a good solution for me.

The other solution offered by anthropological method is to follow some individuals though the fields making up their life. I have done this to some extent with some people. But, for understandable reasons, no one invited me to follow this through. (Even K. Sagan, who I shared a flat with, and who invited me along to shopping, meetings, cafés, parties, demonstrations, festivals, whatever, did not let me meet his parents – only his brother). A third solution, which is becoming increasingly popular in anthropology, is to focus on a theme – e.g. to look at cosmopolitanism in British society and in the life of individual British Asians.

The solution to the anthropological ideal of holism I chose, was inspired by Marianne Gullestad's focus on narratives and the way individuals negotiate the arrays of influences in their life. In their narrated self-understanding, they will try to bring together the disparate fields that are inaccessible to the anthropologist.

I have not been in search of generalisable empirical facts of human behaviour to build models of social reality upon. Instead, the aim is to look at the relationship between agents and structure from a different angle; How do individuals perceive the influences surrounding them? How do they make sense of and verbalise possibilities and constraints structuring their life? How do they lead their life within these structures? And finally, how do their lives transform and reproduce the structures?

> People live their lives and tell their stories within socially structured conditions, but their actions and stories also have a potentially transformative impact on 'society' (Gullestad 1996: 32).

However, their narration (of self-understandings and worldviews) takes place from particular positions, in particular spaces. These particular positions and spaces – with their constraints and possibilities – are shaped by social and cultural discourses. The anthropologist must familiarise herself with these positions, spaces and discourses in order to provide a sufficient context around

the individuals. Thus, this thesis is made up of self-understandings deeply contextualised in discourses – as perceived by the anthropologist.

Anthropology and ethics

So far I've justified my strong focus on narrated self-understanding empirically (limited access), methodologically (holistic ambition), theoretically (importance of reflection). There is also an ethical reason why I have chosen go give so much importance to the voices of the participants. Many British Asians know their *Power/Knowledge* and their *Orientalism,* as the post-colonials they are. Literally *everyone* asked me why I wanted to do this study; The majority asked in order to find out if I would represent them as 'exciting, exotic Others' making up the 'new, colourful and vibrant multicultural Britain'. To spell it out clearly, this is a new orientalist stereotype many found highly offensive. I see the point of concern; they belong to a category of people (non-western), which until recently has been described, categorised and classified – usually in order to be controlled –, and it has been time for the empire to write back for a long time. However, the empire *has* been writing back for a while now, and as my participants concluded; to say that only Asians should write about Asians is the same as to say that only women should write about women – which of course is ridiculous. But, why should my language erase their voices? Marianne Gullestad writes that "social life is theorized by those who live it, and [..] their reflections[11] – crude or sophisticated – contribute to social understanding" (Gullestad 1996: 308). In this instance, the theorisation was never crude, but often more complex, colourful and articulate than I ever could have imagined.

It is however important to make clear that if I hadn't had the 'right' reasons for studying 'them', this project could not have been carried out in this form. Points of references and mutual understandings were the starting points in *every* connection, whether the points of reference in question was interest in a particular form of music, lifestyle choices or studies. A dozen of the people I met, I didn't connect with. I carried out interviews with some of them, but these interviews have a much poorer quality than the rest. They are cold, restrained, shallow and generally uninteresting, which clearly bear witness to how important it is with rapport and implicit understanding in human interaction as well as anthropological fieldwork.

[11] Making sense of ones life is used as an example of a universal human fact by Henrietta Moore, and "one of the aims of anthropology should be to examine the way people conceive the world and reason upon it" (Moore 1999: 17).

The approach was a conscious decision from the outset. I chose the topic of study – individuals who somehow make the world more cosmopolitan – on basis of personal interest. After having my (anthropological) mind blown away by Arjun Appadurai's 'Putting Hierarchy in its Place' from 1988, it was important for me to try avoiding the critique he carried forward there. Anthropology as practised by e.g. Louis Dumont, has an urge to *essentialise*, *totalise* and *exoticise* 'cultures' and 'peoples' in faraway localities. The 'other' is characterised as 'authentic' and fossilised in contrast to the ever-changing, developing, movable people of the West. These essentialised features are also made into the totality of a society's thought or practice, as in the German romantic and nationalist idea of *Volkgeist*. "[*E*]*xoticizing*, involves "making *differences* between 'self' and other the sole criteria for comparison" (Ibid. p.41). Appadurai traces these tendencies in western thought back to the 'Age of Discovery' as well as the 'Age of Nationalism' (Ibid.). (The same ideas have shaped the prevalent understanding of 'identity'. Identity has an essence, which is coherent in time, immutable, unique and bounded (Handler 1994)).

Appadurai suggests three possible remedies concerning the study of particular places (Ibid. p. 46), which I shall try to rephrase into the study of people. First, remain aware of the links and similarities between categories of people when writing about a particular category. Second, emphasise the diversity of themes pursuable within this category i.e. not gloss over the heterogeneity. The third point I find so mind-boggling – academically, as well as humanely – that I quote it at length.

> The [..] most difficult possibility, is to develop an approach to theory in which places could be compared *polithetically* [..]. In such an approach, there would be an assumption of family resemblances between places, involving overlaps between not one but many characteristics of their ideologies. This assumption would not require places to be encapsulated by single diacritics (or essences) in order for them to be compared with other places, but would permit several configurations of resemblances and contrast. [..]. [M]ultiple chains of family resemblances between places would blur any single set of cultural boundaries between them (Appadurai 1988: 46).

The idea of different biological races held true until it was discovered that the distribution of genes was more heterogeneous within 'races' than between. The clustering together of cultural differences into 'different cultures' is, as I shall look at in the next chapter, at the root of today's racism. Since mid 1980s, anthropology has finally found it timely to question their own core concept – homogenous, bounded 'cultures' – in a similar fashion. I read Appadurai to say that

these essentialised, totalised, exoticised clusters exist only in they eye of the beholder[12]. If their eyes were turned in a different direction, they could have been able to see various 'configurations of resemblances and contrast' instead[13], - which were equally true, and far more politically stabilising.

It has been important for me to show that the world is interconnected; I did not only share subcultural preferences with my informants, but we reflected on identity formation in similar ways as well, as we have seen. A consequence of this interconnectedness, George Marcus (1992) points out, is that anthropology has become comparative in a new sense. Lives of British Asians are shaped by many of the same forces that shape the life of the anthropologist. These shared, and to many extent, global flows of culture, should be recognised in the way we write. Just as the "outside forces" – of for instance global political economy, popular culture and communication technology – "in fact are an integral part of the construction and constitution of the "inside", the cultural unit itself, and must be so registered" as George Marcus (1986) and Michael Fisher write.

Critical social science (and true poetry) is for Zygmunt Bauman (2000: 203) as well as for Marianne Gullestad (2000: 139) to question self-evident frames of understanding. The first methodological aim of this thesis is therefore to go beyond traditional analytical boundaries in order to challenge conventional anthropological as well as popular and political conceptions of 'culture' and 'ethnic groups'. On the one hand, I shall place the category of second generation British Asians in as many local and global 'cultural flows[14]' as I find evidence of in the ethnographic material; i.e. to go beyond the ethnic boundaries in the study of the individuals.

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[12] Among many others now, Roger Keesing shares this view. In 'Theories of Culture Revisited' he states that the radical other is a construct European thought needed (Keesing 1994).

[13] I got a clear illustration of this thought when I visited the Victoria and Albert Museum early in my fieldwork period. Hall after hall was arranged according to established geographical entities, like South Asia, South East Asia etc. (which had nothing to do with the geographical conceptions of the peoples who had made the artefacts, of course). In one small niche, I saw silk fabrics from India from about the 11th century, which were found in East Africa. I learnt that at one stage, the Roman Empire had to ban the import of silk from India, because the demand was ruining the economy. What if the exhibition arrangements in the museum had been turned all around, and the connections had been emphasised instead of the closures?

[14] In addition to *discourses*, I sometimes use the term *cultural flows*. The distinction is for analytical purposes. As I see it, the perspective of *discourse* has a strong emphasis on power and its effects - on how certain classifications are created and how individuals are made subjects (for self and others). The notion of *cultural flow* is from Fredrik Barth (e.g. 1989) and it pertains perhaps more to the interactive relationship between the cultural *content* in the flows and individual interpretation and reproduction of it. By making this distinction, I can say that the discourses I've pointed out were the major forces *positioning* the British Asians, and it was these conflicting positions they had to negotiate between. However, in addition, they participated in a much larger number of cultural flows – everything from e.g. old traditions like world religions, south Asian cooking and classical music of various kinds, to newer flows like technological music, animal rights activism and veganism, cricket and football interests etc.

(This surely creates a writing problem). On the other, I show the heterogeneity within the South Asian population in Britain[15] in terms of class background (for parents it ranges from illiteracy to professors in physics), political affiliation, life-style choices, religiosity, interest in ethnic background and many other factors. To recognise 'non-Asian' connections as well as 'Asian heterogeneity' was important for informants as well.

The second aim is a bit more elusive (for my informants as well as for me). That is to try to look beyond the commonsensical nature of 'identity' and 'nation'[16]. An individual approach is a prerequisite starting-point with this aim in mind.

An individual focus on cultural reproduction - why?

The book that was most frequently recommended by anthropologists to my field, was Gerd Baumann's monograph from the west London suburb Southall (Baumann 1996). He spent many years on a 'community study' in the Punjabi dominated town. In *Contesting Culture: Discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London*, he aims to challenge what he terms the dominant discourse concerning ethnic minorities. This discourse binds one 'culture' to each 'community'. It is reinforced in the local society through official multicultural policies, where resources are distributed on basis of 'ethnic community'. Because public resources are scarce, people have to engage in this discourse in order to compete for them. It favours ethno-politics fronted by 'community leaders', and it leaves no space for individual civic right (ibid. p. 71). 'Sikh', 'Muslim', 'Hindu' and 'Afro-Caribbean' are the 'ethnic' categories which are equated with social groups, termed 'community' and designated with a reified culture. In addition, 30% of the population in Southall is white; of either English or Irish origin. While others acknowledge (hence reify) a white 'community', the whites and Baumann don't.

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[15] The cultural heterogeneity of British South Asians as well as South Asians has been obvious to social scientists for a while. *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian precence in Brtiatin* edited by Roger Ballard (1996), looks into how 11 ethnic communities draws on their distinct cultural resources from back home as well as entrepreneurial activity in the creation of homes away from home, as the title says. The heterogeneity is a main theme in Gerd Baumann's (1996) book, which I shall discuss below.

[16] Power in a Foucaultian sense is ingrained in the categories by which we perceive the world as well as ourselves. "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political "double bind", which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures. The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is [..] to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries" (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 216).

In addition to the dominant discourse where 'culture' and 'community' are reified, the Southallians daily engage in 'making culture' by denying the congruence between 'community' and 'culture'. Baumann calls this the 'demotic' discourse. He seems to see this discourse as going in two directions. On the one hand, he finds some shared elements in Southallian culture. First, it's a poor area and the aim to move up socially means, for everybody to move out of Southall[17] (ibid. p.43). The pivotal point in the making of a Southalli culture is however a result of the dual competence of the Southallians to engage in the two discourses. This competence turns 'culture' and 'community' into terms of contestation (ibid. p.145). Baumann shows four ways this is done: the "discovery" (ibid. p. 157) of an *Asian* youth culture centred around the reinvention of the traditional Punjabi music, Bhangra. The second is a discussion among political activists whether Asians should use the political category 'black' or not. The third is interfaith networks, where various faiths work together. The forth is religious convergence in the sense that many Sikhs and Hindus have for instance started to celebrate Christmas (Ibid. p. 179).

On the other hand, the Southallians share the "ability to reinterpret heritage in the light of changing circumstances and goals" (Ibid. p. 115). However, Baumann writes that "the dominant equation between *culture* and *community* is thrown into doubt and disengaged within the confines of each *community* (Ibid. p. 109; see also p. 98). He shows that they do this with the use of the same cultural elements as he described as part of the reified *cultures*. For instance, the Sikhs reinterpret class divisions in the idiom of castes. The Hindus encompass all the other religions in accordance with Louis Dumont's theory of hierarchy[18] (ibid. p. 117). And the Southalli Muslims come from so many different places, that it " stands to reason that their shared adherence to Islam can hardly suffice to overcome their great cultural differences" (ibid. p 124). On page 190 – after devoting almost 40 pages to delineating the reifications of the dominant discourse in relation to each community and 35 more on how this discourse is denied according to the same principles, again within each community – he comments that, while e.g. the strategy of encompassment is privileged among the Hindus, members of other *communities* will also use it, to some extent. "Not to acknowledge these overlaps would be a denial of personal agency, as well as a reintroduction of the dominant discourse through the back door" (ibid. p. 190). In my view, this is

[17] This is not the case anymore. Many people are moving back.
[18] Apropos hierarchy, Arjun Appadurai uses this gatekeeping concept of India in his critical article mentioned above (1988).

what he has done throughout the whole book. After his single-lined pretext, he makes his tautological argumentation worse, as I see it.

> To many South Asian Southallians, the *culture* of their respective *communities* is predicated upon its religious heritage and the historical dynamics on the Indian subcontinent. [..]. Given that members of each *community* thus predicate their equation of *culture* and *community* on different perceived heritages, it becomes more plausible that the equation validated in such different ways should also be dissociated in different ways in each[19] (Ibid.).

The demotic discourse Baumann presents in order to challenge the faculty of the dominant, becomes nothing but a product of the first (which he acknowledges, ibid. p. 195-6). He ends up equating 'community' with 'culture' and social group again, only that the groups are slightly different - i.e. segmentary versions of the dominant, and they share in fact a culture. This culture is "what anthropologists conceive culture to be in the first place: a process of making and remaking sense of collective changing social facts, rather than some reified possession" (ibid. p. 189). Unfortunately, we only learn of this process of making sense of collective social facts in relation to the reified, cocooning dominant discourse of 'culture'. Are all the collectives with social facts based on ethnicity[20]? Is there nothing beyond this in the life of Southallians?

Baumann criticises the 'immigrant ethnic reductionism' which, he writes, reigned supreme in Britain in the early 1980s: agency is absent and culture is an imprisoning cocoon (ibid. p. 1). No matter how much he praises fieldwork in order to contextualise and distinguish the discourses (Ibid. p. 203), Baumann unfortunately follows suit in ethnic reductionism. We learn nothing of what people do and say beyond the dominant discourse and its mirror image, the demotic. However, he indicates that there is a denial of both, but he doesn't investigate into it. Almost 50% of teenagers had close friends of a different religion (Ibid. p. 147). This aspect is only briefly treated in relation to whites (among the others it is totally absent). Because they see

[19] Baumann continues by introducing another factor: "A second reason for this patterning may be seen in the perceived structural position of each *community* in the shared, but highly competitive arena of Southall. Different *communities* continue, by and large, to occupy different positions in the demographic, economic, political, and social fabric of town" (Baumann 1996: 191)These structural positions are interpreted in terms of the dominant or demotic discourse. When the class situation changes, as for instance for east African Sikhs, this is articulated in caste terms, not class. Baumann never looks into the socio-economical tendencies *across* communities. It seems like the dominant discourse actually *is* valid in the sense that it is backed up by socio-economical inequalities, (and interpreted in cultural terms). However, Baumann never looks into this aspect.

[20] In my view, it is in fact ethnicity Baumann has written about. The dominant discourse is an ethnification into ethnicities. These ethnicities have been created for a purpose and are perpetuated for a purpose, as according to Fredrik Barth (1969). The diacritics of the ethnicities should indeed be seen in a different context from "the religious heritage and the historical dynamics on the Indian subcontinent", because the former are, according to Barth, "[s]ocially relevant factors [..], not the overt, 'objective' differences" (Barth 1969: 15).

themselves as a minority (despite being, by far the second biggest ethnic category, a mismatch Baumann does not look into[21]), "they depend upon recognizing affinities across *community* boundaries [..]. These affinities and alliances are forged in creative individual acts". This should not be discounted as a youthful phenomenon only (ibid. p. 141), he writes, because adults forge similar individual bonds (Ibid. p. 140). Such bonds are however not seen as interesting in the book[22].

> Such bonds forged between peers and neighbours are important and make all the difference to those who do not wish to move out and up. Dozens more examples could be given; yet their individual character limits what they can tell the anthropologist about the cultural dynamics within the white population at large (ibid. p. 141).

Simple logic tells that if the whites have friends from other ethnic groups, so do members of other ethnic groups. In my view, such cross-cutting bonds make a very big difference.

Despite Baumann's intention to contextualise and distinguish between discourses through fieldwork, I know very little about how the life of the Southallians are really played out. The same is the case with their 'identity'. Or is it the case that Baumann presumes that identity must be linked to discourses of ethnicity?

Almost as a response to Baumann's title (*contesting culture: discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London*), Avtar Brah published her book on theories and politics of migration with the subtitle *contesting identities* at the same year (1996). She emphasises the notion of intersectionality. 'Race', gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity and so on intersect in individuals (Ibid. p. 10), and 'Asian communities' - as well as all other categories of people - will be differentiated according to these categories. In order to investigate into the articulation of these positions, Baumann's community approach - Southall is treated as enclosed[23] and orderly arranged into homogenous communities[24] - is insufficient. One cannot ignore the various

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[21] The whites are treated differently throughout the book. For instance other people tend to perceive them as a community (ibid. p. 92), but unlike with the other four communities, Baumann fails to describe their stereotypical culture (134). I see Baumann's shortcoming in 'denaturalse' the whites as a serious failure in this field.

[22] It is only hinted at a few places. E.g. on page 3, where Baumann writes that a group of teenagers deconstructed his project title; 'cross-community peer orientations [..]' by inferring that 'the notion cross-community' "depends on what community you mean" (ibid. p. 3). He goes on to mention that the two notorious gangs in Southall consisted of Sikhs on the one side and all the others on the other and that a Caribbean kid had won the prize on a recent Bhangra dancing competition, and a number of different situations where community would mean different things.

[23] The only outside influence he treats, is the multicultural paradigm reigning public policy.

[24] These communities are not identical with the ones created by the multicultural discourse, as I have pointed out, but the alternative ones Baumann ends up with appear as equally homogenous. This also appears in the way Baumann is quoting people; everybody is quoted as a representative for a community (a reductionist way of writing ethnography criticised by Anthony Cohen in 'Self-conscious anthropology' (1992).

positions of the informants and only treat them as representatives for an ethnic category. In addition, Brah is concerned about what discourses *do* as well as how they are shaped by *power relations*. Discourses shape how we experience the world (ibid. p. 11) and they must be seen in relation to the dominant order in society[25] (ibid. p. 19). Avtar Brah is part of a trend in anthropology where discursive production as well as the experienced reality resulting from this production have become a main focus[26]. The first element, power relations and discursive formations, is studied in popular culture by anthropology's young and rebellious cousin, cultural studies[27]. However, grounded anthropology brings in how the life of people and the discursive formations interact[28].

Despite Gerd Baumann's claim, it seems to me that he has not succeeded in taking full advantage of anthropological fieldwork. Through surveys, he establishes statistics on how people view certain statements. He asks them questions mostly concerning religion and 'culture', which are "phrased according to youngsters own usage during fieldwork observation" (Baumann 1996: e.g. 99). However, we know that the discourse concerning these words is reified, and he receives answers which corresponds to the reified meaning of the word. "[T]he word culture remains restricted [..] to its reified meaning" (ibid. p. 195). It is clear that it's only the old, reified version of the anthropological notion of culture that has reached the public (yet)[29]. This was the case among all my informants, sometimes even among the ones who had studied anthropology. (At the same time, they would also use the term in relation to for instance subculture and the changing British culture). The genealogy of the term culture is not (only) in the hands of anthropologists, and in Baumann's material (ibid. p. 195) as well as in mine, people would use different words when they speak about 'anthropological culture'. I have already criticised the 'anthropological culture' Baumann found (namely the shared 'ability to redefine heritage' (ibid.

[25] Brah's use of the concept is influenced by Michel Foucault. It's his understanding of discourses I shall use as well. In this view discourses shape the understanding individuals have of themselves and of the world around them.
[26] An example of this is Claire Alexander's recent book *The Asian Gang: Ethnicity, identity, masculinity* (Alexander 2000). She studies how the stereotypes of 'violent Asian gangs' are effecting young Bengali men in a deprived area in south London.
[27] The essays in *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The politics of the new Asian dance music* have a very politicised agenda (mostly Marxist) in the linked theory building and study of Br-Asian cultural expressions (Sharmy, Hutnyk and Sharma 1996). For instance they advocate the terms 'Br-Asian' and 'Transl-Asia' to acknowledge the material and imagined links to South Asia without essentialising and closing categories and interpretations of space (Kaur and Kalra 1996).
[28] Marie Gillespie (1995) studies how young south Asian girls use television to negotiate traditions in *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change*. Routledge: London.
[29] In Norway as well are school children drawing national costumes and flags as characteristic of Norwegian culture.

p. 115) or 'collective changing social facts' (ibid. p. 189)), for being reductionist and essentialist. Surprisingly, there is very little anthropological ethnography in this book published by Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Where is all the practice that could have contextualised what people *really intend to convey* when they speak of 'culture' and 'religion', and particularly, how are bonds forged in practice? I will now turn to an ethnographic book that in my view succeeds where Baumann fails.

Barth and Bhabha and positioned individual enunciation of cultural flows

In *Twelve Girls: growing up, ethnicity and excitement in a south London microculture*, Helena Wulff focuses, as the title says, on a micro-culture (1988). She has this interest in micro-culture from Fredrik Barth. In *Cosmologies in the making*, he studies how a tradition of knowledge is (re)produced and modified (1987). "[T]he events taking place in a tradition [.. are] incidents of the very processes that shape that tradition" (Barth 1987: 84). The reinterpretation takes place by individuals deeply embedded in social relations as well as in practices of communication.

> [T]he plausible sources and correlates of ideas, and the nature of coherence in a tradition, will differ under different conditions of existence of that tradition; and this can only be appreciated if the expressions which compose it are correctly depicted with regard to the social and communicative loci in which they occur (ibid. p. 85).

Hence, cultural reproduction on whatever level must always be studied in micro-cultures, because the contexts, which are lacking in Baumann's work, are of fundamental importance, according to Barth.

The managing of meaning - interpretation, negotiation and reformulation - goes on in small groups among people with inner lives of their own, Wulff writes (1988: 27). The participants in these groups are intersectionally positioned, as Brah points out, in all kinds of cultural flows and discourses. These discourses are of course not idiosyncratic, but shared with various collections of people. Therefore, in addition to studying what goes on in a micro-culture, the cultural flows and discourses also need to be taken account of.

Could I have carried out a micro study like Helena Wulff did? The age-group that interested me – the second generation that has grown up during the reformulation of 'Asianness' and that has been through the teenage years and early twenties with intense identity construction – does not hang around in youth clubs in the neighbourhood. They live, work or go to university and spend their spare time in various locations in the city. And even more important than this, the

networks of friends I came across, were all multi-ethnic, or 'cross-community' as Baumann would have said. None of them were concerned with playing out an ethnicity (except for instance during a national cricket match). Ethnic background was very seldom relevant in these networks[30]. The few times it was an issue, I heard from liable sources that it was initiated by me or by my presence[31]. I know people sometimes sit down and talk about pressing issues, but then again - they *talk* about it. As we shall see, this is important for people, but it doesn't happen all the time. (However, I should add that I have found space for some pieces of interaction and participant observation dotted here and there.)

I will end this part on the individual approach of my project by some words by Homi Bhabha. I have to admit that I don't understand the full meaning of his literature theories, but his concept of third space can be helpful in understanding cultural reproduction. It reminds of Barth's emphasis on the (embedded) individuals' role in the reformulation and reproduction of cultural flows. Third space is the interpretation, translation and enunciation of cultural meaning from the particular position the individual occupies.

> It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable (Bhabha 1994: 37).

[30] If I had had more space available, I would have described the everyday life of some of my informants. As I followed them around, I noticed that ethnicity was made important on just a few occasions. Like the French ex-girlfriend of A., a middle class British Indian said; 'he is only Indian when it suits him'. This seems to be true most of the time.

[31] E.g. two British Asian Catholics, one lapsed Muslim, a working class Brahmin (who gave as much attention to his caste as his class, which was very rare), A. from the previous footnote and I had an intense discussion about racism in the British police (where two of them worked). These people had never discussed racism together before. Another example is when Jitin took me to Satinder's place for the first time. To advertise how 'therapeutic' it was to talk to me, he jokingly recounted the interview: "when I was 11 someone called me a Paki. We talk some more. When I was 13 someone called me a Paki as well. And at 21 I had my arranged marriage." I was mildly told off a few times for bringing with me 'my job' to social gatherings, which was apparently not the right arena for talk about ethnic background. I think people are as fed up by victimisation as they are of blatant racism. In addition, it surprised me how little ethnic background mattered to people. I do not see it as primarily an under-communication (e.g. Eidheim 1969), but more, like Bidisha says in Ch. 2, they don't feel very ethnicised most of the time. When ethnic background mattered, it usually concerned intimate issues treated in conversations on more private arenas. People didn't see it as very helpful to walk around with chips on their shoulders – the extra burden of feeling ethnicised. (Just because I know there isn't gender equality, I don't want to limit myself further by having to politicise my whole life into a feminist struggle. I just 'do whatever I want to do'). As Aisha said, it would be patronising if Asians should have to be political in all their utterances. Hanif Kureishi indicates that there was a general political shift in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The 1980s are introduced by the younger brother who criticises the half Pakistani protagonist for being 'hippie, lefty and self-pitying'. "Shouldn't they - I mean we - talk about it, Allie? "Talk about it? God, no. [..] They should shut up and get on with their lives" (Kureishi 1990: 267). It should be added that the 1990s mellowed out the most extreme Thatcherism of 'societies does not exist'.

Cultural meaning exists only in deeply contextualised individual interpretation and enunciation[32].

The unit – partial path to the metropolis

There are British Asians everywhere in British society. Wherever I went, I met people who knew someone who would be interesting for me to meet[33]. The unit of study came about through this snowballing, however the snowballing led me to too many people when it got going, and the actual composition is thus mostly a result of methodological and ethical decisions I've outlined above.

Since Malinowski's time, anthropologists have aimed to live like the natives. London is the biggest city in Europe and the most cosmopolitan city in the world. In terms of popular music and youth culture, only New York can match London's reputation. In this metropolis, there is an extremely wide variety ways to live like a native, and like in most big cities in the world today, it wasn't difficult to find a tribe for me.

Instead of trying to cover as much as possible – which would be practically nothing anyway – I hope to have taken systematic advantage of my partial position. In spite of my full time occupation for 10 months, my access to the field has been extremely partial – just as any person's orientation in modern society always is extremely partial. However, this partialness is neither random nor idiosyncratic, but in accordance with sociological categories. My aim has been to make use of these parallels between lived urban life and life as an urban researcher. *My* life in London says a lot about how a lot of people live in London in the end of the 20th century. (The fieldwork made it slightly more socially intensive than it would have been otherwise). The way I was introduced and got to know people says a lot about how people meet and get to know each other in London. How I met British Asians says a lot about where you can meet British Asians in London today – that is, everywhere. The forty of so British Asians I have talked to is not a statistical cross-section of the British Asian population. My sample is not even tentatively balanced, I have just gone for the systematically subjective, just as any person's life is systematically subjective.

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[32] Bhabha's views are inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin, whose theories on heteroglossia and hybridity will play a small but vital part in the following chapters.

[33] For instance I can mention that once on the plane from London to Oslo, my friend and I had to sit separately. By coincidence my friend ended up beside a Norwegian man who was married and had two children with a British Asian Muslim. I sat beside an upper class British Indian doctor who was married to another Norwegian in a hotshot job.

This lack of a balance in the unit does not mean that I can't say anything general about British Asians in London. I can't say anything about *all* British Asians, but all the participants are positioned in sociological categories, which means that British Asians are present in these categories. These categories, in turn, are placed in discourses of various scales. In order to describe the sample anthropologically, I will contextualise the participants within these discourses. Also, I will attempt to sort out the discourses.

The ethical and methodological perspective combined has resulted in a unit that is systematically biased in relation to a sociologically positioned researcher's paths in London. The fieldwork has therefore been carried out in small pockets of the city, rather than in one locale[34].

Novice meets reality – forcing Asian-ness onto 'them'

First, I met K. Sagan. That happened two days after I arrived in London. In order to find a place to live, I answered an ad in *Loot*, - the daily newspaper for small ads. I phoned up for the cheapest room in the scruffiest part of inner city London, where they requested a vegan/vegetarian. At the interview for the room, I met my first British Asian informant. He came down the stairs with newly bleached hair and knitted flair trousers with colourful stripes just as I was welcomed into the house. That was K. Sagan[35]. 'Excuse me, are you second generation British Asian?' I asked somewhat bewilderedly after a while. 'No! Eh… I'm a first generation android'. He was actually the first ever Briton I got to know, and he was quite delighted to hear that. The opening paragraph in Kureishi's best-seller, "and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were" fitted well on Sagan, in every sense of the word funny as well as new breed (Kureishi 1990: 3).

Sagan lived with four people in a rundown flatshare. From my experience of that kind of flatshares, I think it was a fairly common 'alternative' house[36]. The house was in a quite

[34] Quite a number of anthropologists have asked me *where* in London I did my fieldwork. Thematic rather than a localised fieldwork is perhaps not yet very common, however, it seems to gain ground. In my opinion it reflects city life at least as good as just hanging around in one locale.

[35] Who will probably never forgive me for eternalising him with those trousers. He always dressed up in black with a cool, cyberlike bag, before he left the house. Preferably, he wouldn't go anywhere without his laptop, but that's still a bit awkward. 'In the future,' he would start some kind of weird story about some kind of technological advancement you'll probably hear about in popular science programs in a few years.

[36] It was one German American environmental activist writing up his thesis in Chemistry at Imperial College; One wannabe artist from New Zealand who spent some years travelling Europe and the US; One New Age Brazilian replacing a gay guy from the Midlands who went away to study physical theatre and 'new circus'; And one Norwegian wannabe anthropologist.

dilapidated state, but painted in vibrant colours. Sagan's room was painted dark blue. The curtains were always drawn and the room was dark. Two walls were covered with old computer monitors and harddisks[37], and one with books – some fiction, particularly science fiction (Arthur C. Clarke was his favourite) and all kinds of science books.

The snowballing-effect was very slow in the beginning. Sagan had problems introducing me to any other British Asians, as he didn't know any. His huge network of acquaintances included only one girl who had an Asian father[38]. After a lot of nagging from my part, he dug up a phone number to a British Asian girl he had shared a flat with many years earlier. She worked in a police station in West London[39].

The first excursion to her place was a disaster from my 'anthropologist novice' point of view. It turned out that Sagan hadn't been in touch with her for a year or two. Once there, he drank a couple of glasses of wine (which he never usually did) and talked excessively about nano-technology and cryonics the whole evening. At the time, I was quite mad at Sagan for ruining my excellent opportunity for some real research, and I refused to talk to him all the way back to London. Later, I realised that the evening just couldn't have been any other way (evenings with Sagan never were). Neither J. nor Sagan saw their British Asian-ness as an interesting topic for discussion, and generally, Sagan talked mostly about cryonics and weird issues anyway. Hence, the evening had provided me with excellent data, it just took me a while to realise[40].

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[37] K. Sagan had long planned to open a workshop for disadvantaged people with no knowledge of computers and the internett. He spent a year organising it by filling out application forms for government funding (using his real name which is Muslim, he presumed it would be of an advantage to belong to the underachieving Pakistani ethnic group). At the time I left, he managed to start up, and it seems to go well. Apropos names, he told me took the name he's using now (not the pseudonym Krishna Sagan) after having seen a programme with Carl Sagan, where Sagan showed a drawing of a spacecraft which could have been constructed in Greece if the Greek culture hadn't been destroyed by religion and warfare, but had invented industrialism hundreds of years before the British. Sagan had named the spacecraft after a Greek engineer. He was a rationalist and Sagan chose rather to be named after a rationalist than a Muslim warrior.

[38] She was in India at the time. She knew Sagan well from working with him in the local Green Party. However, she was not interested in talking to me.

[39] Nor she (J.) became a good 'informant'. She felt and behaved perfectly English, I would say (she was a Catholic) and had never discussed issues about Asianness with her Hindu neighbour (see footnote above), until once when I was there and we discussed drug abuse among Bengalis in the East End. Neither her flatmate, who was a computer engineer, nor her boy friend (British Pakistani completely secular Muslim) were interested in participating in my project.

[40] Sagan and the disparate informants he helped me to find, illustrate a drawback of 'thematic fieldwork'. They belonged to the correct category, but they refused to see the appropriate theme – British Asianness – as important in their life.

Sagan managed to track down some other Asians for me, through friends of friends. A.[41], a Ph.D. student in Chemistry, was one of them. A. grew up in middle class Ealing and had been to a Catholic private school[42]. He didn't get to know any other British Indians (or any others, for the matter, since he had lived insulated as a child), before he came to university[43]. However, the Indian Student Association was far to insular and materialistic for A., and only through a friend of an old flatmate did he manage to help me with one more 'informant'. That was Vandana. Vandana was a lapsed Hindu and Marxist, married to an Englishman and doing a Ph.D. in social science at a London university. In addition to her sister who I spoke to once, her only Asian friend was a lesbian first-year student I only got the chance to meet once in a club; A network approach to this field was out of the question.

The Namibia connection

The hunt for suitable informants was slow in the beginning and the novice needed all the backing she could get. After sending sobbing e-mails to everyone, a friend doing fieldwork in Namibia reported that she had met a Brit with friends in London; perhaps he could help? E-mails went back and forth to Namibia and a university in London, and suddenly I had a few possible interviewees. This resulted in three excellent interviews with Aisha, Nick and Raminder, the three friends from what I would call 'alternative subculture'. Added up, their recorded material is approximately 10 hours, and makes up narratives about their identity formation. This is the least 'contextualised' material I've got, in the traditional ethnographic sense; The other people I interviewed, talked to or 'hung around' with became more or less friends or acquaintances. Instead of seeing these 'de-contexualised' interviews as a disadvantage for an anthropological thesis, I claim that they make very valuable additions to the other forms of data. I got the impression that these three participants felt freer to tell me about their life *because* I was a stranger to their world and their networks. In the two chapters where I analyse their interviews, identity formation in relation to narration and self-understanding, is the main theme. Many analysts – from Anthony Giddens (1991) to Dorothy Holland (1998), and Gullestad, as we saw, –

[41] His name is a hybrid between the English and a Hindu name.
[42] His parents were into some Indian New Age sect and didn't mind that it was a religious school.
[43] While J. were very English, (it was in fact A. who characterised her that way) A. appeared European. He had done a year of his studies in France and had a wide social network in France. He was a great fan of the Eurostar Shuttle, which made him stand out from the average British, and he lamented the British attitude to this excellent connection to the continent.

see this kind of self-understanding as very important in order to understand the modern concepts of identity, the individual and agency.

I met Ani through Raminder. While the three others recounted important stages from their past, Ani's interview is to a large extent centred on a recent, but crucial event touching on a core issue of being 'Asian female'. Being involved in a relationship before marriage, she had to negotiate with deeply seated values.

SOAS

Among the people I met at SOAS, I got the complete opposite kind of information from what the three interviewees had provided me with. There, I hung around with people in a very informal, far from private and intimate way. Again, it was a friend of a friend who introduced me, this time, the connection went via my hometown Trondheim. The bunch of people I met at SOAS were very friendly, very hospitable and very helpful.

The club connection to the Bengali family and 2nd Generation Magazine

On a few occasions, I approached prospect informants by myself. The young author Bidisha participated in a talk, which made it easy to ask her for an interview afterwards. The interview was good, and she invited me to have a drink with her in a concert some nights afterwards. Regrettably, I didn't show up. The formality around our meeting put me off, like it did in a few similar situations. However, when the snowballing got started, I could talk to 'alternative' Asians in abundance.

The luckiest day in my fieldwork was the gig that led me to meet Shahid. He was organising a club with some of the so-called 'Asian Underground[44]' people. Through him, I met some DJs and musicians, who made good music but were rather lousy ethnographic informants. However, Shahid did the generous gesture of inviting me home to meet his family. His oldest sister Taslima became my best 'informant' and an invaluable female friend. His little sister Yasemin and older brother Zamil helped a lot as well. (Usually Taslima was busy working as a nurse, but luckily, she had nothing else to do than waiting for her baby to be born when I met her. I met her friends a couple of times. Two of them were British Asians, but they were far more

[44] Artists who are subsumed under this title see it as very simplistic. For short, 'Asian underground' dance music is said to have kicked off the whole 'Asian' creative explosion in the UK.

busy with work, family and travelling than Taslima, who had maternity leave the rest of my fieldwork period).

On one of these clubnights, I met Jitin. I met him through his ex-girlfriend, who was Swedish. I heard her speak Swedish and said 'hi' to her. Her name was Cecilia as well, we started talking, and Jitin came over. Jitin was involved with *2nd Generation Magazine*[45], which actually was one of the reasons why I was doing this fieldwork in the first place. However, I had earlier given up getting to know people through asking them formally for an interview without being introduced through someone; it was not a fruitful approach. (Jitin told me there were students coming to their office every week to study the 'Asian Underground' explosion). Now, I had met one of them informally and that worked much better. Jitin introduced me to Satinder, who also had been working in *2nd Generation*.

Cosmopolitanness and the unit

In the beginning, I was looking for particular participants, since I was interested in finding 'people who merged 'South Asian' and 'British' elements in 'new ways'[46]. However, what I found quickly surprised me by being more radical, more deep-seated than I anticipated. One thing is that the recreation of cultural elements from these two reified geographical categories is happening in a manner far beyond my initial naïve understanding of hybridisation. In 2000, Ali Rattansi writes about this rapidity of the cultural transformations among British Asian:

> There is obviously no singular description or analysis that can capture this vibrant phenomenon in some clever discursive totalization – witness the failure of suggestions that a specifically British Asian youth identity was finally coalescing around the culture of *bhangra* music as suggested by Gillespie (1995) and Baumann (1996) and comprehensively contested by Sharma and his coauthors (1996). Little wonder that such concepts such as hybridity have encountered severe limitations so soon after their celebration in cultural studies (Rattansi 2000: 129).

Rattansi writes about music and creative expressions in the tradition of cultural studies. What I find even more interesting than this, is that *all* the British Asians I met - not only a 'creative avant-garde' –, took part in these cultural re-definitions in a number of ways. Hence, I have not

[45] A reportage about *2nd Generation Magazine* and the resurgence of British Asian music (which I coincidentally heard an example of on the radio around the same time) in the Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten sparked off the first ideas for this fieldwork.

[46] I was inspired by Paul Gilroy and his excellent study of how it became possible to be black British in *There ain't no black in the Union Jack* (1987).

found any cases that falsify this part of my argument, and apparently, the unit of study could have been far wider.

PART I

DISCURSIVE BOUNDARIES

Chapter 2

The British context – Nationalism and difference

Much of today's literature on the integration of immigrants gives prevalence to the specific condition and background of the migrant groups (e.g. Ballard 1996; Gardner and Shukur 1996). An alternative to this essentialistic culturalist perspective is posed by the institutionalist approaches in social sciences. They turn the attention towards the political system and incorporation regime of the 'host' countries. Neither should world-wide economic and discursive forces of various kinds be ignored in local studies of immigration issues (Marcus and Fisher: 1986; Soysal 1994:41).

Political discourse on immigration and integration in the post-war years in Britain has played an important part in how the integration of first and second generation British Asians has taken place. This discourse is in turn shaped by wider political perceptions of the legitimate basis of nation-states, the rights of individuals as well as the concept of 'culture'. Since the immigrants and their descendants participate in the same global discourses, these concepts are also shaping the way they think and act concerning their own integration.

labour immigration and British legislation

Movement of people between Britain and India took place throughout the time of the British Empire. South Asian migration to Britain increased however in the 1950s. In 1998, the 50th anniversary of the arrival of *SS Empire Windrush* with 492 passengers from Trinidad and Jamaica was celebrated as 'a landmark in the history of modern Britain[47]'. The anniversary meant to mark the beginning of post-war immigration, hence also the making of multi-ethnic Britain. However, it wasn't until the late 1990s Britain found it appropriate to celebrate the event. Throughout the 50 years that had passed since the war and the beginning of the decline of the empire, British legislation has been increasingly aimed at barring non-white people from entering the country

[47] See for instance http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/archive/windrush/ for more information on the celebration.

(Solomos 1993; Spencer 1997). During the post-war economic boom, Britain suffered from severe labour shortage. At the same time as the British State was recruiting white workers from Europe and Eire, they tried a variety of methods to restrict non-whites from the former colonies to enter the country[48] (Spencer 1997: 38; Solomos 1993; Parekh 1998: 13).

It was clear that the goal of the increasingly tough legislation was to keep Britain as 'white' as possible. In Ian Spencer's analysis, the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962 marks a turning point in the making of multi-ethnic Britain (Spencer 1997). According to Spencer, the government had refrained from legislating earlier, in order not to strain the ties with the other members in the New Commonwealth. However, at that time in history, Britain was replacing its old colonial links with a closer relationship with the European Economic Community (Spencer 1997: 126ff). Since the legislation was long expected, the South Asian immigration into Britain changed during the two years leading up to it. In order to 'beat the ban', the immigration rose from roughly 10 000 a year – which it had stayed from 1955 – to 85 000 in 1962 (Spencer 1997: 119). From 1963 through 1989, between 30 000 and 50 000 south Asians arrived every year (Ibid. p. 133). After July 1, 1962, the proportion of dependants, i.e. women and children, was much larger. This was mainly because the immigrants changed 'from being sojourners to settlers'. Either you stayed for good, or you couldn't stay at all. Now, there are approximately 1.5 million people of South Asian origin in Britain.

However, besides leading to an increase in immigration, the most important consequence of the act was that it "introduced a crucially important distinction, never before admitted in law, between the rights of British subjects born in Britain and holding British-issued passports and British subjects who held passports issued by other Commonwealth governments" (Spencer 1997: 134). Why was it so important to keep Britain white?

'New racism' and the legacy of nationalism

The meaning of 'race' is constructed differently in different historic times. By definition, it is based on notions of difference. Theories of cultural differences have long replaced biological ones, but despite being cultural, these differences are seen as "inherently different" (Brah 1996: 155). As Solomos puts it, "biological inferiority is being replaced in contemporary forms of racist

[48] "For all the years except 1960(when they were approximately equal), the number of immigrants from Eire considerably exceeded the number from the Indian sub-continent, the Caribbean and Africa combined," Spencer writes (Spencer 1997: 91).

discourse by a concern with culture and ethnicity as historically fixed categories" (Solomos 1993: 9).

In 'new racism', race – i.e. cultural difference – is linked to territory through notions of nation and nationhood. Many analysts claim that these ideas emerged in Britain at the time of the New Right in the late 1960s (E.g. Gilroy 1987; Brah 1996; Solomos 1993). Avtar Brah points out that its distinctiveness is not so much its preoccupation with culture instead of biology; it was already an important aspect in the colonial discourses on India (Brah 1996: 166), where the population was classified and objectified according to notions of radical and cultural differences (Cohn 1997). The distinctiveness of 'new racism' is rather its emergence during the economic restructuring after World War II, with "high levels of unemployment, youth rebellion, and strikes in such sectors as the National Health Service, the mining industry and newspaper publishing" (ibid.).

Paul Gilroy dedicates two chapters of his book on blacks in Britain, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, to a discourse analysis of the racial category 'black' under the 'new racism' paradigm (1987: 43-114). In a time of imperial decline and economic crisis, the presence of non-white people in Britain was increasingly[49] seen as a threat to 'a homogenous British way of life', as an 'enemy within' (Solomos 1993: 184). Gilroy provides numerous examples of political rhetoric of Enoch Powell, Margaret Thatcher and others, to prove his point.

Salman Rushdie (1991b) follows a similar line of argument when he links the racism in Britain to the politicians' patriotic rhetoric, and also to the Empire. A link it was easy to make, as

[49] Solomos claims that the political climate in Britain changed drastically in mid 1960s, which he give three examples of (Solomos 1993: 64-68). In 1964 during the election campaign in Smethwick, a Conservative candidate fiercely contested a liberal Labour opponent towards immigration, with slogans like 'if you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote labour'. In 1968, a Labour government – which had drastically changed their policy on immigration – rushed a new Commonwealth Immigration Act through parliament in three days (Spencer 1997: 141). The aim was to stop the increasing influx of East African Asians who started worrying about the Africanisation and nationalisation policies in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. Under the new act, a United Kingdom passport was no longer sufficient to the right of entry into Britain, since many of the East African Asians had British citizenship. Now, only they who were born, adopted or naturalised, or had a parent or a grandparent born, adopted or naturalised in the United Kingdom, could enter freely (Ibid.). *The Times* called "the Act a 'colour bar' and 'the most shameful measure that the Labourmembers had ever been asked by their whip to support'," Solomos writes (1993: 68). The third, and most well-known example of the changing times, is Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech. Issues of race were important in the run-up to the 1979 election, when the National Front was vocal. Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives played heavily on it: "I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people of a different culture. The British character has done so much for democracy, for law, and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, then people are going to be rather hostile to those coming in." (Solomos 1993: 187).

we see when Rushdie quotes from a speech Thatcher held after the British victory in the Falkland war in June 1982.

> 'We have learned a lesson […], a lesson which we desperately needed to learn. When we started out, there were the […] people who thought we could no longer do the great things we once did…that we could never again be what we once were. There were those who would not admit it…but – in their hearts of hearts – they too had their secret fears that it was true: that Britain was no longer the nation that had built and Empire and ruled a quarter of the world. Well, they were wrong' (Rushdie 1991b: 131).

Thatcher as well as Rushdie links today's notions of nationhood in Britain to the Empire. Rushdie points out that Thatcher made the speech at the peak of her great popularity and she was famous for her ability to arouse the masses through her speeches.

> Now if such a leader at such a time felt able to invoke the spirit of imperialism, it was because she knew how central that spirit is to the self-image of white Britons of all classes. I say white Britons because it's clear that Mrs Thatcher wasn't addressing the two million or so blacks, who don't feel quite like that about the Empire. So even her use of the word 'we' was an act of racial exclusion, like her other well-known speech about the fear of being 'swamped' by immigrants. With such leaders, it's not surprising that the British are slow to learn the real lessons of their past (Ibid. p.131).

I agree with Rushdie that the sentiments of the 'new right' and 'new racism' can be tracked back in history. Under the heading *'the myth of Civic Britannicus Sum'*, Spencer shows that politicians and civil servants cherished the illusion of equality between all British citizens (Spencer 1997: 24). The Empire, and later the Commonwealth, was built on the economic imperatives of free flow of goods, labour and services, and distinction between the citizens were seen as damaging to the imperial interests. Every British subject had thus the right to enter Britain, vote, stand for parliament and join the armed forces (Ibid. p.53). When the British Nationality Act of 1948 confirmed these rights, Spencer claims that it was clear that the politicians did not see it as very likely that many non-white colonial subjects would take up their right to settle in the 'mother country' (Ibid. p.55. See also Saggar 1992: 97-8). However, Spencer shows that at the same time as the politicians stuck to their ideal verbally – in order not to upset the New Commonwealth, they changed the policy when the post-colonial subjects actually started coming (Spencer 1997: 38).

Despite a labour shortage of between a million and a million and a half in the late 1940s and 50s, 'coloured' workers were not particularly wanted, despite being skilled enough indeed in many cases (Ibid.). The explanation was that they were considered to cause 'problems' (Spencer 1997: 40-43).

> [Ministers and high officials] were resolved to limit the number of 'coloured' people settling in Britain to a number – never specified – that was 'assimilable'. 'Assimilation' and 'racial conflict' are two terms which frequently recur in official writings on the subject of 'coloured' immigration in this period. The limit of 'acceptable 'numbers appeared to be set by the perceived ability of British society to assimilate immigrants who were different in appearance and culture from indigenous people (Ibid. p.43).

It is clear that even before the emergence of economic decline and the 'the new right', racism was based on perceived cultural differences. An unspecified 'high' number of *different* people within the borders would cause 'problems' and 'racial conflict'.

Inner city decline, cultural difference, life-world, discourse – explanations for racism

Andreas Wimmer (1997) discusses various approaches to racism in his article 'Explaining xenophobia and racism: a critical review of current research approaches'.

Rational choice theory claims that rivalry for jobs and cheap housing causes racism. Many governments argue this way in order to limit labour immigration. However, empirical data shows that conflicts do not depend on real competition, but rather the *perception* of such (Ibid. p. 19-21). In Southall, whites had already started to move out of the area before the Asians moved in; neither did they compete for the same jobs (Baumann 1996).

The functionalist explanation blames the cultural differences of the immigrants; their 'foreignness' causes problems. As we saw, the politicians argued like this in Britain. However, again, data reveals that e.g. in the US, upward socially mobile blacks find it hard to leave black ghettos, while Asian immigrants in a similar economic situation do not live segregated from whites – both cases are independent of cultural assimilation (Wimmer 1997: 24). Hence, again, it is the perception of cultural difference that must be explained.

Wimmer moves on to discourse theory, which claims – as in my argument – that an ethnic categorisation and separation takes place because of administrative and discursive practises. 'Otherness' and what is considered to be unbridgeable cultural differences are produced discursively (Ibid. p. 25). Wimmer claims that this explanation is not sufficient. There must be "non-discursive conditions which influence the relative acceptance of different points of view [and] classifications" (Ibid. p. 26). He searches for an answer to this by turning to a phenomenological understanding of nationalism.

When modern state institutions like for e.g. the welfare state no longer can hold its promise to its citizens, "anomic tension" and "crisis of collective identity" is the result (Ibid. p. 27). As we saw, it was the cultural practices of blacks and Asians that came to be seen as a threat to the 'British way of life', hence also a cause for the decline of the British nation.

> Partly by virtue of the location of their jobs and partly because they needed cheap housing, the 'immigrants' tended to settle in the rundown parts of working-class areas. Housing shortages, inadequate social services, high levels of unemployment and poor educational facilities were common features of these areas long before the arrival of the 'immigrants'. The 'immigrant', rather than the social institutions and social policies responsible for the problems of what later came to be described as 'inner-city' areas, became the object of their resentment. This resentment was constructed in the negative construction of the 'immigrant' (Brah 1996: 22).

An important element in the racialisation of blacks and Asians, was their link to inner city areas. In agreement with Brah, Wimmer writes that "perceptions of invasion", 'swamping' and "existential rivalry" was nurtured by the physical presence and visibility of foreigners in public spaces (Ibid. p. 31). But, Wimmer intervenes, one more question needs to be asked; why are the basic definitions of difference between 'we' and 'other' based on ethnicity and not class, region, religion, sex, age etc.?

Zamil – practical work on racism in deprived inner city London

Zamil grew up on a very deprived estate in inner city London. He had a BA in psychology and an MA in social work. From the age of 16 until he was 25, he worked as a social worker in the area he grew up. The estate used to be a typical breeding ground for racism, where skinheads and the National Front tried to stir up tension and recruit people[50]. In order to deal with the racism, the youth workers arranged football leagues with mixed teams instead of teams based on ethnic origin, which had been common.

> We'd have Somali kids and white kids and they'd have to play together [..]. So, instead of saying; *hey, you,* they had to learn the names. And it worked. Before the league, the Somali kids used to hang there, the white kids there, and there would be all sorts of confrontations based on race. But then you had a situation where adults are providing a service, they are providing integration purposes; then you start seeing changes. They are walking past and say; *all right mate.* They [..] have to communicate with each other. [..]. There was a Somali kid who got attacked last year – in the street – and the white kids went and rescued him [..] because he's from the area. So the identity of the area became stronger, and the race became bottom [..]; the fact that

[50] Just like BNP did in various parts of northern England in June 2001, which caused what has been termed the 'Asian riots'.

> he was Somali was neither here nor there. He was someone they play football with. He was their college, their friend, and their ally, and those territorial battles overrode the race issue.

When the children played together, they created loyalties based on locality, which replaced the (presumably) racist identifications of many parents and the skinheads. Another incident took place right behind the house where Zamil and his family lived now. Some drunken teenagers had thrown stones at Zamil's mother, and shouted racist abuse at her. Zamil confronted them, but first he asked his "next-door neighbour [..], a 6'4'' white kid" for support.

> I went out and said to them; you think it's about colour, this is my white next door neighbour. And he will fight with me. This isn't about colour, we've got to live together, I said it to these boys. There was about 15 of them. And they didn't say anything. They just looked down on the floor.

Zamil told me that this was they way they usually challenged racism at his work. Whites and non-whites always went together, to *show* that "racism isn't a black person's problem, it's everybody's problem".

Besides making a statement towards the "boisterous, rebellious white boys", Zamil also strengthened a reciprocal relationship with his white neighbours. He had been anxious when he asked for support.

> [I]f he said no, that's a slap in my face; He didn't stand by me, he's my neighbour. And we've done a lot for them, and they've done a lot for us, we've worked together.

Zamil's mother is cooking for another white neighbour every Friday, while they do some shopping for them in return. However, that neighbour's relationship is clearer defined than the other's, because Zamil knew that they were using "racist terminologies". The fact that he stood up for his Asian – or 'Paki' as his mother would have said – neighbour made an important statement, Zamil said.

> Even though he grew up thinking those [racist]things, the fact that now, I asked for him to come and stand by me and fight with those racists. He could have said no; I'm not going.

We see that this strategy challenges us/them distinctions based on race in a practical way, in physical localities. The nationalist/racist lines of identification can be dissolved through practical experience, even at times and places of social and economic crisis and deprivation. (I should add that identification can be based on all sorts of other identifications as well, not only locality). When other loyalties are possible, why does Wimmer write that the ethnic/national are the basic ones? The answer is found in the hegemony of nationalism in modern imaginary. Already the

ideology of nationalism and 19th century German historicism made a link between culture, 'races' and nations, in the notion of *Volkgeist*.

In her macro study on citizenship and migration in Europe, Yasemin Soysal looks at how the categorisation of migrants changed with the emergence of the nation-state. Migration has always taken place, but the political incorporation of new members – i.e. how they were categorised – changed with the emergence of nationalism (Soysal 1994: 14).

Soysal draws on the analyses of nationalism by Benedict Anderson (1983) and Hobsbawm (1990) to show how the concept of national citizenship after the French revolution increasingly tied the individual to the state through bonds of dependence. Labour of individuals became a national resource, and states started to invest in their citizens with education and welfare (Soysal 1994: 17). The exclusionary character of the national institutions created boundaries between states, which not only encumbered migration, but also made it consequential in new ways (Ibid.).

In order not to challenge the new national citizenship, the migration that still took place had to be dealt with in new ways. Labour migration became seen as temporary, as exemplified by the guest-worker system (Ibid. p.21). However, as we have seen, the south Asian 'sojourners' became settlers in Britain, a fate they shared with most other 'guest-workers' in Europe. Within this perspective, immigration of culturally different 'others' was seen as a threat to the perceived cultural homogeneity of nation-states, as we saw above, and the immigrants had to be categorised as inherently different outsiders.

The rise of modern citizenship is one of the three theories of nationalism Wimmer (1997) combines in order to explain why the basic definitions of difference has become based on ethnicity instead of all the other alternatives. In addition, he points to Anderson's imagined community (1983) and to the bureaucratisation of modern state building.

> [T]he nation became an imagined community of solidarity with clear territorial boundaries which held political, social and economic rights as collective goods and finally, that the ethnicization of bureaucracy and bureaucratic practices had the combined effect of state, culture and territory seeming to belong to members of the nation (Wimmer 1997: 29).

Zygmunt Bauman (1990) shows how important it was in nationalism to eliminate all other loyalties and divisions that would be in the way for the newly created national ones. Within the nation-state, cultural practices that did not conform to the norm, was viewed as potentially subversive and as a failure of the order-building of the nation-state.

The rise of nationalism led to a new intolerance – or even new perception – of difference, according to Bauman (1990: 157). Certain cultural traits became hegemonic (Anderson 1983), and the right to define these traits was monopolised (Bauman 1990: 158). The solution offered to the traits defined as foreign was assimilation into the national norm (Ibid. p. 155-8). Those who refused to assimilate threatened the order-building of the state in an ontological Durkheimian and Mary Douglas' sense.

"National states promote 'nativism' and construe their subjects as 'natives'" (1990: 154). Strangers cannot be natives; "The memory of the event of his coming makes of his very presence an event in history, rather than a fact of nature" (Ibid. p. 149), he can therefore never be 'like us'. Nations depend on seeing themselves as natural units. " The individual was or was not its member; one could not choose to be one" (Ibid. p. 162). Thus, the stranger can never live up to the 'postulated national model'. And during times of disorientation and economic decline, downward socially mobile groups will tend to protect their rights and privileges as 'indigenous of the nation-state' in the face of threats from 'outsiders' (Wimmer 1997: 30-2).

It was this century year old nationalistic ontological idea of cultural homogeneity the 'new right' built their politics on during the economic decline in the 1960s. In my view, a nationalist discourse must *constantly* be reinforced in order to keep the *ethnic* 'we' and 'other' distinction alive. We have seen that the "physical presence in social spaces", which reinforced ethnic distinctions according to Wimmer (1997: 31), equally can foster other loyalties.

Discourse analysis and worldview

According to Michel Foucault, there cannot exist an understanding of the self and of the world independent of discourses. Objects as well as actions must be interpreted within a discourse to be comprehensible at all. In order to make sense - both to themselves and to others - individuals must take up *subject positions.* Such a position exists outside, and independent of the individual. It is discursively produced and it is taken up when a person acts or makes a statement. There is no intelligibility outside discourses.

It is impossible to separate epistemological knowledge of the world and of the self (and any other knowledge) from practises and relations of power, according to Foucault, and Friedrich Nietzsche before him. Human beings are made subjects, - comprehensible to ourselves and others - through power relations, which work not from 'above' but from 'within' and 'everywhere'.

> This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects (Foucault 1982:212)

Gilroy (1987) writes that 'race' is socially and politically constructed – as well as challenged – in historic processes. We have seen that nationalism is readily linked to 'race'. The economic deprivation experienced in inner-city areas could easily be interpreted as cultural differences eroding the homogenous nation-state, – within the ideological climate - or discourse - of nationalism.

In order to avoid the social problems the rising number of culturally different people within the borders of the nation apparently caused, in addition to limiting the immigration[51], it was necessary to introduce politics of 'integration' (Solomos 1993: 83-4). I shall discuss various forms of integration but first I will look at the consequences ethnification had for the 'Asians' in question.

The minority situation and the 'Asian' ethnogenesis

We have now seen how south Asians have been racialised into an inferior group; set apart and discriminated against through the creation of an ethnicity. This racialisation is a contemporary political discourse rooted in, and reinterpreted from, the colonial relationship between Britain and India. The inter-ethnic relationship resulting from this process is termed by Fredrik Barth (1969:31) as a 'minority situation'[52]. This situation is characterised by the way it organises interaction between different ethnic groups. The minority is imperatively and inescapably determined by their ethnicity, and the goals and statuses the members of a minority category can

[51] Since the 1960s, British politicians see a strict immigration policy as a prerequisite for good race relations, while the US strategy aims for consistency between anti-discrimination measures and immigration legislation (Stone and Lasus 1998: 224). Asylum seekers are now the main category immigration policies are aimed at. On July 30, 2001, The Guardian writes about the policy of the British immigration officers stationed in Prague's airport since earlier the same month. The article points out that the control is aimed at barring a specific ethnic group, the Romas, from entering the country. While a UN report states a deep concern about the discrimination against the Roma in the Czech republic, the Labour government in Britain uses the Romas in their campaign against what is frequently described – both by politicians and tabloid papers – as 'bogus asylum seekers'. (For instance the term was used by Home Secretary Jack Straw when he introduced a new immigration and asylum bill in 1999). The Guardian writes: "Such sentiments have found protection in British law. The 2000 amendment to the Race Relations Act, which outlawed racial discrimination by public bodies, exempted the immigration service, allowing asylum decision-makers to discriminate legally on grounds of skin colour. Racism is once again being built into our immigration system – with immigration officers authorised to treat certain nationalities "to a more rigorous examination than other persons in the same circumstances". (The Guardian, July 30, 2001).

[52] It should be pointed out that Barth does not describe the process of ethnification.

attain only have relevance within their own ethnic group. The attractive statuses and goals in society are accessible only to the majority group.

> [I]nteraction between members of the different groups of this kind does not spring from the complementarity of ethnic categories; it takes place entirely within the framework of the dominant, majority group's statues and institutions, where identity as a minority member gives no basis for action (Barth 1969: 31).

Certain cultural traits are hegemonic; the others should be erased, like Bauman (1990) pointed out. In this situation, a homogenised and stereotypical version of south Asian-ness – a perceived ethnicity of South Asians in Britain, which had nothing to do with how they perceived themselves – became an imperative status for this group of people. Their imperative status was different from the norm, and inescapable in any interethnic interaction.

> Rather like the various Trinidadians, Jamaicans and other Caribbeans who discovered that they were 'West Indian' and even black, rather than just members of the 'motherland' only after they had arrived in Britain, so it was that most of those of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan origin were forced to recognize their 'Asianness' and – more rudely and abusively – their 'Pakiness' only after their arrival in Britain (Rattansi 2000: 128).

Through stigmatisation, the 'Asianness' or 'Pakiness' could be kept distinct from the ordered and homogenous national community. (See also Brah on the *experience* of being racially subjected into a 'Paki' in everyday practices (Brah 1996: 9)).

Bidisha – a post-colonial critique

Bidisha had been a journalist in various magazines and written one book, despite being only 21 years old. She had just finished her BA in English medieval literature in Oxford[53] when I met her, and she was very concerned about 'the colonial attitude that still prevailed in Britain'. We met up in the café at White Chapel Art Gallery in the recently gentrified East End of London, where she participated in an exhibition by young British Asian artists. She arrived 20 minutes late, with rollerblades over her shoulder, dressed in brown, tight jeans and a sleeveless tee-shirt, revealing a tattoo on her upper arm. Her eyes were light grey, and her hair was straight and short[54]. There was a string of piercings up both her earlobes.

[53] Bidisha appeared almost like a caricature to me, - who is an outsider to the hectic world of London media and arts as well as the politicised language of cultural studies, which dominated much academic and public discourse in Britain. For hours she was killing time with me in the café, saying hello to as many people as possible. She admitted she said 'yes' to anyone inviting or asking her for something because she was terrified of missing out on things, that 'things would stop happening' in her life. She was only 21, but with the pace fashion and fads swirls in London, I suppose she had to publish and appear in public life constantly to not be old news. Thus, Bidisha speaks from the position of a certain kind of young Londoner in the media and arts business, with a private school and Oxford

Her parents were "top-level academics" from Calcutta ("historically aristocracy"), and her academic upper middle class, private school and Oxford education background seeped into everything about her, - from her attitude to her way of speaking. Here follows her academic, politicised reflections on being racialised into an inferior minority situation together with various South Asian immigrant groups, - still, in 1999.

> The empire might have fallen, but the colonial mentality is still there, in every way. Even people in England find it impossible to understand that there are different kinds of Indians in the world. You look at the people who live around this area [- Tower Hamlets, a poor inner city borough where 20% originates from Bangladesh]. It's blatantly obvious for someone like you, who are a thinking person, that I'm not that type of person. I'm not poor; I'm educated; I don't have a fucking shop. [..] People think, people ask questions, they go; oh, did your parents work on the land in India. I say; no, they are academics. They don't realise the difference. [..] And that still goes on, and it really makes me angry. That's where my anger is. Because the racism hasn't stopped, and the colonial mentality, the kind of assumptions of superiority, the assumption of civility, that is still in place.

According to Bidisha, any internal division among 'Asians', or 'Indians' as she said, is glossed over by the brown face for the ignorant English. In addition, the only connotation that pops up, is inferiority.

> I don't think lumping me with all other Indian writers is any different from saying that all Indian writers are the same and that essentially all Indians are the same[55]. [..]. It makes me incredibly angry, and it really reminds me how bourgeois, and how falsely liberal the art institutions in this country are. Like this thing in Royal Festival Hall [where I met her]: *Asian Writers in Transit…* I'm not in transit. I'm in London, I've got a

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background. I quote Bidisha's views on racism at length because her voice represents one important view on race relations in London (Britain?) today.

[54] I don't know if Bidisha's short hair was a political statement. However, I'm inclined to think so because twice in the interview she made length of hair into political symbols, which showed that long hair easily can be interpreted as traditional/traditionalist. Many women made similar comments, and Meera Syal uses it in novel about three Asian women (Syal 2000).

[55] In a similar vein, Salman Rushdie criticises the separation between 'English' and 'Commonwealth' literature: "When I was invited to speak at the 1983 English Studies Seminar in Cambridge, the lady from the British Council offered me a few words of reassurance. 'It's all right,' I was told, 'for the purposes of our seminar, English students are taken to include Commonwealth literature.' At all other times, one was forced to conclude, these two would be kept strictly apart, like squabbling children, or sexually incompatible pandas, or, perhaps, like unstable, fissile materials whose union might cause explosions. A few weeks later I was talking to a literature don – a specialist, I ought to say, in English literature – a friendly and perceptive man. 'As a Commonwealth writer,' he suggested, 'you probably find, don't you, that there's a kind of liberty, certain advantages, in occupying, as you do, a position on the periphery?" (Rushdie 1991a: 61). A total change has taken place since Rushdie wrote this essay. For 20 years, "Booker lists [the most prestigious British prize for fiction] have seemed, at times, to be a celebration of unknown writers with unpronounceable names," the literary editor of The Observer wrote on September 9, 2001. Indian authors have been listed to such an extend that "the annual debate about he Booker Prize has partly revolved around the competing claims of an extraordinarily talented generation of Indian novelists writing in English" (Ibid.).

> career here, and I've worked for 6 years. And I've never been in transit anyway. I was born and brought up here. I'm a London writer; I'm not an Indian writer.

Bidisha continued to analyse the various forms of racism she could see around her. In Oxford, there were "no non-Caucasian people, and no non-heterosexual people either. [..] They haven't even realised that there *was* a multicultural society," she said, and explained why her writing became more political after she came to university.

> I was literally invisible. And that's what I really found interesting. As a woman, who considers herself to be stylish and interested in the world. I used to walk down the street and feel utterly invisible. And the anger from that really astonished me. The disappointment you feel in your own generation. We're supposed to be the next generation of people. [..] You're supposed to be one of the biggest brains in the country, and you've no political IQ, and that's what made me political. It wasn't a generational thing. It was really looking at my peers, and thinking; what's going on? It made me so angry. Racism has not been an issue for me, before then.

Racism can also cause invisibility. To me, Bidisha was a highly visible person. From her account from Oxford, it seems as if the imperative identity of inferior Asian subsumed even her attractiveness as a 'stylish woman'.

> What was really interesting was that my best friend, [..] a Singaporean guy, who is also gay, [..] - he was at the same college – but he was amazingly popular [..]. Because he played up to the stereotype. [..]. He's a great guy, but people liked him because they could put him into a little box.

Classification is also a feature of the colonial powers, as Bernhard Cohn (1997) pointed out[56], as well as nation-states' order-building project. Categories were created, reified and internalised into the populations. Those who didn't fit into their 'little box', were seen as threats, or perhaps became structurally invisible in a Victor Turner sense.

> Bidisha: The bourgeoisie won't accept that they are racists. That's their problem. Because their racism comes out very subtly. And it comes out, especially in terms of literature, when you get books like *The God of Small Things*; or something from Salman Rushdie. And the western press *loves* books like that. And the reason why they love books like that is because is it tells them everything they thought they always knew about India.

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[56] A shift in 'govern-ment' took place during the age of enlightenment (Cohn 1997: 3). Classification became the key to control and rule a population, and 'race formation' – 'racialisation' – must be seen as part of this picture. Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' entails that these social and personal classifications became internalised through state institutions like hospitals, prisons and particularly, - in our case -, schools. Bernhard Cohn shows how India was conquered through historiography ("an ideological construction of the nature of Indian civilisation" (Cohn 1997 :6)), surveys and classifications (objectifying "social, cultural, and linguistic differences among the peoples of India" (Ibid. p.8)) and museology ("power to define the nature of the past and establish priorities in the creation of a monumental record of a civilization, and to propound canons of taste" (Ibid. p.10)), by which the "Indians" were constituted as various and particular groups of people. These objectified classifications (e.g. castes and tribes) were internalised through 'governmentality' techniques, thus became the natural mode of identification for many 'Indians' (Cohn 1987). Cohn points out that the "process of state building in Great Britain, seen as a cultural project, was closely linked with its emergence as an imperial power." (Cohn 1997: 3). The subjects in Britain and India where therefore constituted simultaneously, - in this respect as colonisers and colonised.

> Both Arundati Roy's and everything by Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul and Vikram Seth, it's all about 'the chaos of India'. It's all about 'the texture', 'the colours', 'the richness'. All of which is completely*orientalist* stereotypes, you know. So, there is really no difference – in terms of ideological images – between the empire of the 17th century and now.

In the article 'Asian Babe Girlfriends: If you think you've got one think again' in *2nd Generation Magazine*, Bidisha criticises what she terms the 'Asian babe' attitude ("Say 'Asian babes' to a Londoner, and immediately we all know what that means" (Ibid.)). Inspired by both feminism and Edward Said's notion of *Orientalism*, she claims that (all/most?) men with Asian girlfriends were initially attracted by "ethno-fetishism". They've travelled all over the world, usually on some kind of adventure travelling, and have decorated their home with a few items from their trips, "all they need to complete the picture is an exotic woman on their arm" (Bidisha, *2nd Generation Magazine*, Issue 6).

Bidisha came up with various examples of stereotypes. They all illustrate versions of Barth's 'imperative identity'. The girlfriends become nothing *more* than 'Asian babes'; In Oxford, Bidisha herself became *nobody*, because her piercings, short hair and hardcore attitude made her unqualified for the stereotyped Asian category as well as the 'un-ethnic normal white' – within which women are fare more likely to be perceived as individuals.

Bidisha's views were very politicised. Was she carrying a chip on her shoulder, as I'm sure some of the other British Asians I know would have accused her of? I don't know, but her attitude was common, if not always posed in such an aggressive way.

Zygmunt Bauman writes that 'assimilation' provided the answer to the new 'intolerance for difference' and the 'drive to uniformity' of modern states (Bauman 1990: 155-160). Individuals were invited to escape the stigmata of the 'inferior-ised' categories. However, the dominant group, who issued the invitation, "held complete control over the meaning of their conduct" (Ibid. p. 159). And, as Bauman puts it, "like the capacity of a bridge, would be measured by the quality of the weakest section" (Ibid. p. 162), any member of a stigmatised community would be associated with the least 'progressive[57]' part. As long as there exist 'weak sections' one is reminded of the assimilation process that has taken place, hence of the artificiality of the membership in the 'natural unity' as the nation perceives itself to be. Literature, attractiveness or

[57] Progressive in the sense that the dominant group would see itself as 'progressive' and different patterns as 'backwards'. (Bauman 1990: 159).

whatever of a South Asian Briton would not be judged equally with that of a white British person as long as 'Asian' was excluded from 'British-ness'.

Assimilation, integration or pluralisation

In Britain, the general view after WW2 was that if the number of 'coloured' immigrants was kept low, they would 'assimilate', and 'problems' would be avoided. Britain has neither the assimilationist and republican policies of France nor the American way of integrating newcomers into a common sense of citizenship, so how the integration of the culturally different people should take place wasn't given much public thought until mid 1960s (Parekh 1998: 14). At that time, it had become clear from the widespread evidence of resentment and discrimination against non-whites that 'assimilation' would not happen by itself (Ibid. p. 13). Bhikhu Parekh distinguishes between three different models of integration, which have intermingled in Britain since then. Until late 1970s, 'integration', preferred by the liberals, dominated. In the era of the new right and new racism, nationalist 'assimilation' took over.

"Full assimilation consisted in 'identifying' with Britain, cultivating 'love' for and 'loyalty' to its way of life, taking 'pride' in its history, abandoning their cultures in favour of the British national culture" (Ibid. p. 16). The Conservative politician Norman Tebbit's Cricket Test of loyalty is a typical example of this attitude.

Besides the human rights issue 'nationalist assimilation' has to take into consideration, Parekh points out several logical inconsistencies in this model. There is no homogenous national culture to be assimilated into, except from "an ideologue's misguided account of it" (Ibid. p.7). These 'ideologues' were the ones who acquired the "monopolistic right to define certain other sections and their qualities as foreign", thus confirmed the social hierarchy, as Bauman writes (1990: 158). In a discussion, Vandana argued against what she saw as my naïve faith in the recent redefinition of Britain into multicultural 'Cool Britannia'. Vandana was 30 years and born in Kenya. She came from a well-educated and quite well-off Hindu family, (which is a typical socio-economical position for the 'twice migrants'). She was doing a Ph.D. on South Asian women in Britain. Her studies as well as her firm Marxist viewpoints inspired her perspectives. In her view, the old 'green and pleasant land' allusions were still very much in place as the hegemonic version of Englishness. "The countryside-English-having-tea films *Mrs. Brown, Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austin* are the biggest cultural exports," she said.

> And no matter how much the Blair Right invents 'Cool Britannia' for economic marketing purposes, he has to take into account who owns land in Britain. The agrobusiness lobby benefits from sustaining the old image of Englishness. And just as the foxhunting lobby, they are disproportionately powerful to be such a small minority.

Most British Asians would probably agree with Vandana. A number of people reminded me that London was not like the rest of the country. Brown faces and saris had not yet become natural parts of countryside landscapes and villages, even in most towns and cities. This hegemonic version of
Englishness is presumably what the migrants should feel loyalty to and assimilate into.

In addition to the misguided idea of one homogenous English culture, Parekh draws attention to what lies behind the demand for assimilation.

> [It stems] from intolerance of differences, and for the intolerant every difference is one too many and a source of intense unease. Even the thoroughly assimilated German Jews fared no better than the unassimilated ones at the hands of the Nazis (Parekh 2000: 7).

I remind of Bauman's point; either, you are a native or you are not, it is not something you can become (1990).

The idea behind 'integration' – or rather 'partway assimilation', as Parekh names it – is that minorities should be assimilated into the public realm of a society, and live the way they like in private (Ibid. p.2).

The musician Nitin Sawhney[58], aged 35, grew up in all white and National Front infested Rochester, in Kent. He was chased home from school by a van full of NF people almost every day, banned from using the music room at school by his NF music teacher and generally bullied by the other pupils without the teachers lifting an eyelid, throughout the 1970s. He recounted how he remembered 'Poppy Day', or Remembrance Day, which is a national celebration of the ones who fought in the First World War.

> I'm the only Asian person [in my class]. People would use that day to turn around to me and say; we helped you lot out in the war. You were so lucky. They don't even know what they're taking about. And then I found out, only recently, when I did the music for a film called *Dance of Shiva* last year, that 500 000 Asian soldiers in WW1 actually died fighting for the British. And they were the first in line to be sent out on the battlefield normally. And they're all awarded medals for bravery. That's part of our heritage as well, as British Asian people; To know that Asian people fought for the British, and not just white people. And it's part of the history of multiculturalism in this country. That's what happened, and yet we are not told that. There's nothing

> on television that tells you that. When you see Poppy day, it's just a celebration of these dead white soldiers who were English and that's it. We were a colonised country, and fuck us, we don't count.

'Poppy Day' was a public celebration of *British* soldiers and the *British* state, which reinforced an official version of the ethnic exclusiveness of the latter. The official endorsement of ethnic exclusion worked right down to schoolchildren; you are not one of us, in fact you are less than us.

Neither 'partway assimilation' is practically achievable. Parekh's criticism follows two lines; A society's political culture is constantly developing in response to new demands and experiences, which for instance the women's liberation is a good example of. There is no reason why cultural minorities should not be able to take part in the constant re-negotiation of the political realm (Parekh 1998: 8). Interestingly, *The Dance of Shiva*, the TV production Sawhney mentioned, is just one among a number of examples of how the attitude to the presence of minorities has changed in British society recently. The following quote from The Guardian, Nov 13, 2000, shows how 'Poppy Day' has changed since Nitin Sawhney's childhood:

> [Y]esterday's service of Remembrance in London was a new ceremony for a new millennium, combining the best of its traditions with a fresh spirit of inclusivity. [..]. [T]he Royal British Legion, strove to guarantee its future by increasing its relevance to the community as a whole. The wording of the brief service was amended to include overseas servicemen and women, representatives from more faiths took part and for the first time a contingent of civilians [..] followed the 6,000 veterans in their procession. Relatives of men shot for cowardice or desertion marched alongside evacuees, the Women's Land Army and the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society. Even representatives of the long-disbanded Army Pigeon Service, which used the birds for vital wartime messages, were present (*The Guardian*, Nov 13, 2000).

Notably, not only Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Greek Orthodox representatives were included for the first time, but also other groups who weren't acknowledged or found worthy celebrated earlier. This shift away from using patriarchy and war-making in the official canons of national identities has been documented as a general trend in Europe by Yasemin Soysal (Soysal 1994: 162). Even the Royal British Legion is now attempting to redefine and widen the public British culture to include more than white, war-making, Christian males.

Parekh's second objection to 'part-way assimilation' is that the public realm everywhere enjoys more prestige than the private does, and minority cultures will automatically suffer from structural disadvantages, however unintended (Ibid. p.8-9). I claim that the 'minority situation' discussed above, very well can be an unintended consequence of this kind of integration policy. I

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[58] See for instance http://www.nitinsawhney.com/ or http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,3903341,00.html for more information about the artist.

heard numerous examples of (unintended) degradation of non-English, non-white, non-Christian values or people, which was caused by the lack of *equal* recognition of their difference.

My flatmate Sagan initiated an unusually open conversation by asking me if my childhood memories were important to me, and if there were things I missed at that time. We were decorating the bathroom together, and it perhaps was the communal spirit that made Sagan speak about his childhood without being forced by the ethnic inquisitor. He wasn't very good at communal working, but it was something he valued immensely. Now, he told me that he had always felt excluded. "The worst thing was Christmas. When the others were celebrating, the Asians didn't even talk about it. The feeling of exclusion was too painful," he said[59]. "What about Eid and Ramadan?" I asked. "Everybody just laughed about Ramadan," he replied[60]. Ramadan was something his parents were doing, and therefore just another reason for him to try to dissociate himself from them.

It seemed like Sagan never could get enough acceptance and recognition. Another time, he told me how he had started to go to the Christian school assembly, or morning meeting, instead of the Muslim or interfaith one. The school, which was in a mixed part of Bradford – a city where one quarter of the population was of Asian origin in 2001 – started to have two different assemblies, one for Christians and one for the others. Sagan didn't appreciate being together with the Muslims. However, being one out of perhaps two brown faces among all the white ones made him very visible, which wasn't what he wanted, he admitted. Not surprisingly, Sagan also told me that he started to eat pork in his early schooldays. First he was anxious, but when nothing happened, he continued.

Ramadan, Islam and halal meat became available and recognised in the schools in Bradford, but that was not sufficient for Sagan. Being singled out made him still feel different from the norm, hence inferior, I think. This 'minority situation' can be compared to a similar

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[59] See for instance in Syal 1997: 91 for a similar experience about Diwali. However, many Hindus and Sikhs, as well as some Muslims chose to celebrate Christmas, so the children wouldn't feel left out (Ibid.). Karim's parents who were middle class Muslims, did that.

[60] After travelling for 5 hours by bus to Bradford, being left alone for 5 more once we got there, I was able to meet Sagan's brother for an hour or so. It was a nice, amicable and entertaining meeting (his brother was almost as witty and funny to talk to as Sagan), but not very rewarding concerning 'relevant data' – which of course did not come as a surprise since I already had known Sagan for more than a year. However, one of the things I got confirmed from this meeting was that Sagan didn't 'remember' things exactly as his brother did. Therefore, we can of course not be sure whether everybody laughed or not about Ramadan. Whether narrations are correct in relation to the actual events is not the important issue. Instead, the statements tell more about the person's *experience* of what happened as well as what the person wants to convey in the dialogue.

minority situation working class children meet in schools. Middle class values are often present in schools in a 'hidden curriculum', according to Marianne Gullestad (Gullestad 1996: 30). Working class children risk having the values they bring with them from home challenged by a different 'natural' order at school. The teachers have a power to define, she writes (Ibid.), which easily challenge the less prestigious worldview at home.

The authors Hanif Kureishi and Meera Syal (also actor and scriptwriter in for instance the award winning comedy series *Goodness, Gracious Me*), grew up in the 1960s. Both have written about their experiences of being made inferior by a more or less 'hidden' curriculum at school; Kureishi (1986) in the autobiographical *The Rainbow Sign* and Syal (1997) in the novel *Anita and Me*. In the interethnic context at school, Meera Syal's alter ego Meena, was confronted with characterisation and evaluation of Indians that contradicted and undermined the order of the world she carried with her from home.

> [T]his urge to reinvent myself, I could now see, was driven purely by shame, the shame I felt when we 'did' India at school, and would leaf through the tatty textbooks where the map of the world was an expanse of pink, where erect Victorian soldiers posed in grainy photographs, their feet astride flattened tigers, whilst men who looked like any one of my uncles, remained in the background holding trays or bending under the weight of impossible bundles, their postures servile, their eyes glowing like coals. [..].
>
> Then there were the 'modern' images, culled from newspaper and television clips, where hollow-eyed skeletons, barely recognisable as human beings, squatted listlessly around dry riverbeds, and machete-wielding thugs tore into each other in messy city streets, under the benevolent gaze of a statue of Queen Victoria. I always become bottom in history; I did not want to be taught what a mess my relatives had made of India since the British had left them (Syal 1997:211-2).

In a 'minority situation', everything 'Indian[61]' was not valid in interethnic contexts. Just like the official version of reality presented in the public realm undermined any challenging versions from home.

> When someone with the authority of a teacher, say describes the world, and you are not in it, there is moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing (Adrienne Rich, quoted in Rosaldo 1993: xxi, quoted in *2nd Generation* #3).

Meena was present in the teacher's description of the world, but Indians were exclusively presented in negative terms. Under such circumstances it was easy to favour the dominant order.

In history lessons, the hidden agenda Marianne Gullestad referred to, was rather obvious for the grown up Meera Syal (hence her sarcastic portrait), but clearly not for nine years old

[61] The highly derogative word 'Paki' might be a more relevant label for this stigmatised *subject position*.

Meena. The pictures taught her that white men could rule India and hunt tigers in their time off. Brown men could not rule India, but were good at attending white people. If they are not properly looked after (as the British did), they fall back into savagery, scaring women and children, and they will not even manage to feed themselves (as happened after independence).

Hanif Kureishi as well as Meena was denied acceptance as fully human but denigrated to something inferior. (E.g. one of Kureishi's teachers refused to use his real name, but called him Pakistani Pete instead, another always spoke to him in 'Peter Sellers' Indian accent (Kureishi 1986)). Consequently, they tried to disassociate themselves with the stigmata. "From the start I tried to deny my Pakistani self. I was ashamed. It was a curse and I wanted to be rid of it. I wanted to be like everyone else" (Ibid. p. 9). Meena experienced the "Indian" world inside her home as separated from the social environment "outside". The former was in every context presented as inferior, and partly, she began to see it that way, herself: as distinct *and* subordinate. The official version reaches all the way into Meena's home, when she invites her friend Anita for dinner for the first time.

> Mama had gone to the trouble of preparing two menus, which was fortunate considering Anita's reaction when the serving dishes of various curries were placed in front of her. 'What's that!' she demanded, as if confronted with a festering sheep's head on a platter. 'Oh that's mattar-paneer,' mama said proudly, always happy to educate the sad English palate. 'A sort of Indian cheese, and these are peas with it, of course…'
>
> 'Cheese and peas?' said Anita faintly. 'Together?'
>
> 'Well,' mama went on hurriedly. 'This is chicken curry… You have had chicken before, haven't you?'
>
> 'What's that stuff round it?'
>
> 'Um, just gravy, you know, tomatoes, onions, garlic…'
>
> Mama was losing confidence now, she trailed off as she picked up Anita's increasing panic.
>
> 'Chicken with tomatoes? What's garlic?'
>
> 'Don't you worry!' papa injected heartily, fearing a culinary cat fight was about to shatter his fragile peace. 'We've also got fishfingers and chips. Is tomato sauce too dangerous for you?' Anita's relief made her oblivious to his attempt at a joke. She simply picked up her knife and fork and rested her elbows on the table, waiting to be served with something she could recognise. [..]. She looked up only twice, once when my parents began eating, as always, with their fingers, using their chapatti as scoops to ferry the banquet of curries in to their mouths.
>
> Anita stopped in mid-chew, looking from her knife and fork to mama and papa's fingers with faint disgust, apparently unaware that all of us had a great view of a lump of half masticated fishfinger sitting on her tongue. It had never occurred to me that this would be a moment of controversy, it had never occurred to me because I had never eaten Indian food in the presence of a white person before. In fact, I only then realised that Anita Rutter was the first non-relative to sit and break bread with us, and the same though had just hit my

> parents, who had gradually slowed down their eating and were eyeing a nearby box of hankies with longing, I snapped to attention, [..]. 'We always eat our food with our fingers,' I said loudly to Anita. 'Like in all the top restaurant. Bet you didn't know that, did you?' For the first time that I could remember, my parents caught a lie flying out of my mouth and threw it right back at me with a cheer. Mama and papa both looked at their plates, their mouth twitching, until Sunil [the baby brother] broke the moment (Syal 1997: 252-4).

(Anita appeared as quite the opposite of Hannerz' cosmopolitan). 30 years later, chicken tikka masala would be the most popular dish in Britain. In the 1960s, however, the 'interethnic meeting' is fraught with hierarchy, and the power of definition is obvious. Despite being in an 'Indian' home, it is the majority's definition of reality, which counts. The only thing that could save the Indian family from complete humiliation, was Meena's redefinition of the habit of eating with the fingers. Only its re-designation into something appropriate to do in top restaurants, and not an inferior Indian custom, could make it acceptable. Fishfingers and eating mattar-paneer with the fingers, were worlds apart, and these worlds were by no means equal.

Meena therefore tried to detach herself from associations of home and "Indian-ness". At every opportunity, she begged for fishfingers and chips instead of elaborate Indian dishes.

> I wanted to shed my body like a snake slithering out of its skin and emerge reborn, pink and unrecognisable. I began avoiding mirrors, I refused to put on the Indian suits my mother laid out for me on the bed when guests were due for dinner, I hid in the house when Auntie Shaila bade loud farewells in Punjabi to my parents from the front garden, I took to walking several paces behind or in front of my parents when we went on a shopping trip, checking my reflection in shop windows, bitterly disappointed it was still there. (Syal 1997: 146).

What happens when common sense notions of the most basic aspects of life are confronted in a Bourdieuan *field of opinion* where everything you stand for is neither valued nor valid? Either you can refuse the denigrating teaching at school and in society and close yourself off in your own 'ethnic (or class) enclave' or you can turn to the dominant order of things, as Meena and Hanif Kureishi did. Kureishi describes one version of 'displacement' in *The Black Album*. The British Asian protagonist finds himself in the curious situation of wanting to be a racist and "hating Pakis" (Kureishi 1995: 10-11). I claim Sagan had a milder version of such a displacement when he longed for 'Christmas' and rejected Ramadan, ate pork in second grade and attended the Christian assembly.

Besides the psychological traumas the lack of *equal* recognition can cause, there are practical disadvantages as well. Satinder (25 years, writer in e.g. *2nd Generation Magazine*, MA in post-colonial literature) grew up in Southall - a west London suburb with a large Asian

population where she has a 'huge' extended family. Unlike Bidisha, her parents were not academics and she did not go to private school. At the time of the interview, Satinder worked as a freelance journalist.

At the time Satinder went to school, they had begun multicultural education in Southall. However, the importance of multiculturalism was not recognised at all levels in society, and it became a disadvantage in terms of Satinder's career. While Bidisha was prepared for the Oxford entrance exams in her north London private school, the same was not the case in a Southall comprehensive.

> In English we used to read post-colonial texts, Indians like Anita Desai. V. S. Nailpaul, people like that. Alice Walker. There was an awareness. I think that's where it started to shape my interest anyway. We didn't do too many classical texts. But that is also a reason why I didn't make it to Oxford. I had the grades and everything to go. My English teacher [..] phoned my father and said that I didn't have a chance because I was from the Southall comprehensive. People wouldn't take me seriously, and I didn't have the necessary Christian background to tackle the literature tests, the literate exams. So that always have riled with me. [..]. They're quite simply saying; You're not Christian, you won't understand classical literature.

Multiculturalism was acknowledged in the schools in Southall, like Islam which was in the schools in Bradford. But, as long as they weren't acknowledged *everywhere* in society, Satinder was met with a structural disadvantage by having a multicultural education, and Sagan felt that Islam was inferior, still.

These examples have shown that the distinction between the public and private realms is not tenable; people belonging to dominant cultural categories – be it Christian, middle class, white or English – will have an advantage in public situations where this background should not directly have any importance. The lack of 'public recognition' has generated much of the grief many second generation British Asians struggle with.

According to Bhikhu Parekh (Ibid. 19), the 'Rushdie affair' of 1988-9 represented a landmark in public thought on race relations in Britain. It became evident that the 'minorities' had their own views on their own 'integration', and they started to participate in the public debates on the issues which had previously been carried out mostly by whites. 'Integration' was no longer seen as only a one way adaptation; the 'majority' culture had to make changes as well, in order to accommodate for the minorities. With this view, the public debate was broadened to also include the 'pluralist model', which Parekh describes like this:

> The prevailing political values, practices, symbols, myths, ceremonies, collective self-understanding and view of national identity should be suitably revised to reflect its multicultural character. 'We' cannot obviously

> integrate ‘them’ as long as ‘we’ remain ‘we’; ‘we’ must be loosened up to create a new common space in which ‘they’ can become part of a newly constituted ‘we’. (Ibid. p. 3).

In 2000, eleven years after the Rushdie affair, in the aftermath of the ‘Lawrence case’, one year after the ‘nail bomb campaign’, but one year before the ‘Asian riots’, *The Commission on The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* published its report. The recommendation, which got the most media attention, was their suggestion to redefine the term ‘British’ to include a multicultural society, because in it present meaning, it had racist and exclusive overtones.

We have now reached the present, and in order to find out about the situation for British Asians today, I return to Karim and his friends at SOAS.

Chapter 3

Beyond nation-state and diaspora – Positioning British Asians

Post-colonial subjects at School of Oriental and African Studies

How do young British Asians see their situation as Asians in Britain today? The sociable hanging around of Karim and his friends and acquaintances provided me with a good environment for 'participant observation'. News of the arrival of a real novice in the colonial science of anthropology, who was interested in the plight of British Asians, spread quickly in the small, post-colonial environment at SOAS. I'm not naïvely suggesting that the interaction I participated in happened unaffected by my presence. To the contrary, I know from similar situations that my presence would sometimes initiate discussions on 'race related issues', which would otherwise not have taken place. In general, I experienced that most people were curious about what I was doing in London, and people enjoyed me taking an interest in them as well as being able to provide me with information. With a few important exceptions, SOAS was however the only place I got ethnically 'relevant data' (as Sagan would say when he once in a while endowed me with small anecdotes from his ethnic background) within a framework of ordinary interaction in a large group of people. People would come and go as they usually did in this loose network, and they would share their views as much with the others present as with the anthropologist. Notably, all the views they offered were also part - to various degrees - of more private conversations and interviews with other people. I therefore claim that second generation Asians in Britain - to various degrees - relate to the discourses I present in this chapter as important factors in shaping their lives. As a structuring device, I will use the SOAS discussions as a framework for investigating into how British Asians perceive their life conditions. Within this framework, I will add some other voices to deepen my analysis.

Once a cornerstone in the education of imperial civil servants, SOAS had developed an unmatched expertise in African and Asian studies. Now, paradoxically it attracts British Asians in large numbers as well as well-off students from the previous colonies. The students were proud by this; Karim showed me how to spot the difference between the classy South Asians (rich) and the scruffy British Asians (on student grants) and a bearded Muslim from Leeds told me that as much as 20% of the students were Muslims. Karim's wide group of friends and acquaintances

consisted of various nationalities, in addition to British Asians of all kinds. This was the case among other groups of people at SOAS as well. People took pride in their cosmopolitan environment and their own adaptable attitude.

From the posters proclaiming political stances concerning racism, black politics and feminism covering the walls in the student union bar and I got the impression that there was a high level of political engagement among the students. Arranged lectures or debates with political thinkers or artists, for instance in relation to the coup in Pakistan in 1999 or the release of the British Asian film *East is East*, were frequent and well-attended. The bar at SOAS had achieved a unique, perhaps infamous atmosphere. Some practising Muslims I interviewed at SOAS, would surely never suggest meeting in the bar, neither did I see any other veiled girls there. Quite a few hippies, who seemed never to have come down after dropping too much LSD in the 1960s, hung around. It was a nuance of cannabis[62] in the air every afternoon I was there. It was usually here or outside on the lawn I chatted with Karim and others at SOAS.

Hanging around and chatting was exactly what Karim's acquaintances seemed to be doing. Intimate and personal case-studies were not feasible under such sociable circumstances. Instead, however, there was a lot of 'dialogic construction of ontological narratives' (Somers 1994; Hannerz 1969: Ch. 5) going on. A wide circle of people came around to chat and smoke joints. More males than females belonged to Karim's network, while religion and ethnic background did not seem to be determining factors for belonging. Significantly, none were practising their religions strictly. The first and foremost *Other* they introduced me to in their 'dialogic self-presentation' were the '*fundos*', - a slang term not endorsed by everybody, I should add. The girlfriend of one of Karim's Hindu friends had just left him, in favour of stricter Islam and the hijab. The 'battles' with the Muslim 'fundamentalists' at SOAS continued to be a prevalent theme in their conversations. Someone told me that the situation at campus a while ago 'was just like' Kureishi's description of similar battles in his *Black Album*[63] (Kureishi 1995).

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[62] The overall attitudes in Norway on cannabis are far stricter than in London where it is discreetly normalised in many localities, for instance in most of the clubs I went to. For many British Asians, particularly Muslims, this acceptance is important. Many Muslims saw the intoxication by alcohol as far more sinful than that of cannabis. They would much rather smoke cannabis than drink alcohol, a choice I know some parents appreciated. However, this is not a British Asian phenomenon. Generally, in the youth/subcultures I came across in London, cannabis smoking was as usual or perhaps even more usual than drinking alcohol.

[63] *The Black Album* is played out at a London university at the time of the Rushdie affair. The protagonist, experiencing the freedom and responsibilities away from home for the first time, oscillates between a group of

Karim's brother had been beaten up by some of the 'fundos', for doing un-Islamic things, like smoking cannabis.

The second generation – home-grown British Asianness

Riaz was 24, 3 years younger than Karim. He had shorter hair and looked more anonymous than his brother. Iqbal was 22 and wore round glasses. He spoke with a strong northern intonation, while the two brothers had a mellower Sheffield accent. Khaled was also from Sheffield. They all looked like fairly ordinary guys, dressed in ordinary clothes. Iqbal had a working class background, while Karim and Riaz were from middle class homes; their mother was a teacher and their father an engineer. Their two older sisters had degrees and had married well-educated cousins from Pakistan, where one of them was living now.

I start the analysis where I left it in the previous chapter; their position in British society. They were concerned about the underachievement among Bengalis and Pakistanis as well as the 'glass ceiling' meeting the ones who were achieving. In their opinion, British Asians would not have as good chances as white people unless they just wanted a "civil servant job pushing paper"[64]. Karim, who distanced himself from the 9 to 5 'rat-race', surely wanted something more and believed a change would come; "It would get better because more Asians are born here," he said and illustrated the optimism personally. "Either I can get in there, make a difference, have positive impact or I can be like you guys." He thought about becoming a teacher, or perhaps a police officer[65].

> Iqbal: first it's going to get a lot worse. Go to East London and speak to some of those taxi drivers, man. They hate it. When you get a large community of working class people that haven't got any jobs. That are on drugs. But being Asian, yea, have come from so far away, yea, getting a job. Getting a Mercedes. Getting a good education. While their children are stuck in a council estate. Being unemployed. Things are going to get worse, man.

'fundamentalist' Muslims with a fixed mindset, who turn more and more extreme, and the enticing, but frightening experiences of sex, drugs and particularly making up your own mind (Kureishi 1995).

[64] The last figures I heard on the issue were published in the report 'the state of working Britain' in November 2001: "Around 14 per cent of white Britons have a degree, compared with 18 per cent of British ethnic minorities. Among women the gap is larger - 17 per cent of ethnic minority British women have a degree against 12 per cent of white women. On average, minorities of the same education, age, and industry are paid between 7 and 25 per cent less than equivalent white Britons." (*The Observer*, November 18, 2001).

[65] His friends had a more typical attitude to this idea: "You're crazy! How the fuck can you do that, you're Asian!" Asians and blacks are underrepresented in police force in Britain, and it is publicly criticised for being institutionally racist.

> Riaz: Wait for the population to increase a bit more. There are more inner city deprivation. Less jobs. There might be a recession. It's going to be worse.

The unemployment rates were extremely high particularly in some northern cities, but also parts of the East End. While the national average is 8-9%, in some areas it reached above 30%, for all ethnic groups. British National Party was gaining ground again in some of these areas by proclaiming that the government was pampering blacks; National Front nazis stirred up tension by recruiting and marching, as they did in the area Zamir talked about in Ch. 2. A year after this conversation was recorded, in June 2001, riots broke out among unemployed youth in the north of England.

Iqbal was from Blackburn in west Yorkshire, where he said being called a 'Paki' or met with a cold shoulder or hostile looks on the street were part of everyday life, especially from older people. "If you talk to a white person," he said, "they're basically applying that you're not English." He had experienced NF marches when he was young.

> We used to get these NF people walking on our ward, writing NF on the walls and stuff. Walking through town, it's like 60-70 BNP people coming the other way. They weren't after us, they wanted to get the Irish people that day. [..] You see racism daily. If you don't know about racism you must be ignorant, it's not because it's not there.

It was just after the 'nail bomb campaign' by a Nazi who tried to initiate a 'race war' by putting nail bombs in three crowded areas in London connected to 'minorities'; in 'black' Brixton, 'Bengali' Brick Lane and 'gay' Soho.

However, at the same time as Iqbal and Riaz did not seem to think that the situation had improved much for Asians in Britain, Iqbal refused to be put down by it. Iqbal returned to my opening question on whether they saw themselves as British Asian after he had made sure I took racism seriously.

> Iqbal: I would describe myself as a British Asian. I can belong wherever I am.
>
> C: But you don't feel accepted as British?
>
> Iqbal: Not by old people. I don't want to be accepted as British. I don't need them to accept me. I've got the same rights, in the law.

He had a reckless attitude to a hostile British environment. 'Loyalty to and love for a British national culture, history and way of life' would have been an absurd thought for any of my participants. Asian Dub Foundation, the highly political and highly successful British Asian band, shows a clear second generation post-colonial attitude to this issue in many of their songs.

> The gold that you stole/The pillage and the plunder/Is it any wonder that we're here? [..] We're only here cause you were there/Consequence of your global pillage/Yeah, here in England/A global village ('Debris' from *Facts and Fiction,* Asian Dub Foundation1995).

Neither in literature nor in my fieldwork have I come across second generation British Asians who question their *right* to be in Britain. None of the participants in this project had a problem with seeing themselves as British – *if* they were forced to define themselves in national categories. In addition to the racism some had experienced and the discrimination they all were aware of, the colonial links of labour migration were important in their understanding of their place in Britain. Satinder (25 years old Sikh from Southall, MA in post-colonial literature, freelance writer in e.g. *2nd Generation Magazine*) expressed it like this:

> We're not going back. We have a *right* to being in this country. They came to *us*, however long ago. They introduced things, but at the same time they destroyed a lot. [..] They were the ones who requested that we being here in the first place. The fact that they believed that we would come here and work; They would be able to exploit us.

Jitin (30 years, tablas player and writer in *2nd Generation Magazine* as well, lapsed Hindu, Gujerati born in West Bromwich, Midlands, BA in French) had a similar view.

> It so just happened that we were a colonised country. A lot of people of my parents' generation came over here when there was a labour shortage. And that's why I'm here now [..]. When I went to India, back in 90, and it was the first time I'd been, since I was 5 years old. And India is a developing country [..] and I saw the poverty and everything, and that was quite disturbing… Then I came to England, and I saw the buildings and the architecture in London, in the West End. And the amazing houses, the amazing poses that were build in those days. And they're all converted into flats now. There aren't enough families that can afford to have a whole big house like that in Chelsea. [..]. Simply because *that* money was coming in from colonies in those days, and there were rich families that had clerical jobs [..]. Then I saw a physical evidence of the injustice of it all. And it did make me angry for a while.

Many British Asian young people as well as analysts (e.g. Avtar Brah and Ambalavaner Sivanandan) see the labour immigration - the reason why they are in Britain - as a form of exploitation just replacing the colonial 'pillage'. Under such self-assertive circumstances as ADF, Satinder and Jitin presented, the demand for recognition and not 'assimilation' as we saw in the previous chapter, is not surprising. Satinder and Jitin identified themselves with Indians who had been oppressed and exploited members of the British Empire for centuries. British Asians are citizens with equal rights, as Iqbal said; Why should they have to *ask* for acceptance?

When dark-skinned Britons are constantly reminded that they experience their Britishness differently from whites, many will remain 'British and something more', according to Ali

Rattansi. That's what they are made to feel (2000: 129). Some literature on second generation shows that many turn to an idealised version of 'back home', as a way of coping with this kind of hostility and lack of acceptance (e.g. Rattansi 2000; Gardner and Shukur 1994). I did not find this to be the case in my material. E.g. Karim had spent 8 years on boarding school in Pakistan and knew perfectly well that he was not Pakistani. No one else had stayed that long, but most had visited the subcontinent[66] from 1 to 10 times. E.g. Yasemin (Zamir's 21 years old sister), visited Bangladesh for a month during my fieldwork. British Bengalis are called Londoni (most Bangladeshis in Britain live in London) and are seen as a particular type of Bengalis 'back home'.

> Every time you go out of London, you realise how British you are because there are certain things that you do. You don't think about it, you just do it. But when you are over there, people make you realise it; why are you doing that?

It was particularly in relation to gender identity that Yasemin became aware of 'the small differences' as she put it. Bangladesh had become "like a tourist place, like a holiday" to her. For instance, she had problems with the food there.

> It's nothing wrong with the food, I just can't eat it. [..]. I try'n' eat. My stomach just shrinks. [..]. The food is completely different. We really have so many different spices; over there it's based on season. [..]. The rice is completely different over there as well. I can't eat the rice. It's the way they' re cooking.

Her mother was present, and Yasemin translated that when her father first came to Britain there was one shop in Chinatown where they could get rice, and they would have to queue up each week when they got deliveries.

At the same time as Yasemin knew she was different from the people 'back home', it was important for her to emphasise that she would try to speak and act like them; she wasn't alienated from her parents' home village. Yasemin's attitude was common. They knew perfectly well that they were 'British', but I agree with Rattansi when he writes that they experienced this Britishness different from whites. The presumed cultural differences categorising them through the ethnification process (see Ch. 2), excluded them from a normalised 'white', 'Christian' experience of Britishness. In that sense, they were disenfranchised.

When the Parekh report (2000) called for a redefinition of 'Britishness', it was directed at the residue of empire and old colonial and racist history the term 'British' carried along, which,

[66] I met some Asians of East African origin as well, like Vandana. She left Kenya when she was two and had not yet been back, which she regretted.

of course, excluded the non-whites – pertinently illustrated by Margaret Thatcher's speech quoted above. At the same time, the subject position Asian had been re-evaluated during the 1990s, when identity politics had become very important. Hence, people do not *want* to be 'only British'. What is this 'something more' they bring with them into their Britishness?

A common Asian ground?

Karim, with his optimistic outlook, mentioned that the situation had changed profoundly for Asians in the last few years. Iqbal was playing the devils advocate eagerly that day, or he was just more pessimistic: 'It's got nothing to do with Asian culture,' he said, 'it's without context.' While it was trendy whites who were into 'Asian Underground', British Asian youth listened to Bhangra, the British revived Punjabi folk music, which had no cross-over appeal. Karim and his British Asian friends went to various clubs including 'Asian underground' ones, but they surely didn't like Bhangra. However, Iqbal got pessimistic backing from more people. White society excluded British Asians at the same time as the Asians kept to themselves.

> Khaled: British Asians make cultural expressions for them selves mostly. It's quite exclusive. If you're watching *Goodness, Gracious Me* you'll not understand half of the jokes that I'm laughing at. You just haven't got enough cultural knowledge.

Goodness, Gracious Me is a comedy series by and mostly about British Asians, written by, among others Meera Syal and Nitin Sawhney. It became so popular that many countries, including Norway, have bought it from the BBC.

Karim intervened and said that "once you know, then…". Khaled replied; "that's just not the same thing…". He implied that they had cultural knowledge I couldn't comprehend just through some explanation. He was invigorating Barth's ethnic boundaries. He emphasised a 'limitation on a shared understanding" (Barth 1969: 15). The dichotomisation of others as strangers takes place because it is in the interest of members of the ethnic group, according to Barth. Iqbal and Khaled were invigorating ethnic vestiges in the widely popular comedy show. What was it Asians (GGM is a British *Asian* show) had in common that others could not share? Khaled mentioned childhood memories. Second generation British Asians seemed to agree on this point. Many emphasised how important it was to have someone to share memories from childhood with.

Raminder's background is Punjabi Sikh, but religion *per se* did not seem to be important for her. While she rejected many aspects of the Asian community, there were certain things she only found among Punjabi people – 'it was not so much the religion as the culture', she said.

> The fact that you can joke in Punjabi, which we do often, - me and my Punjabi friends. [..]. To the way that our mums are, parent stuff. Little things, but they matter. You feel closer to somebody. [..]. I think, the way they provide for you, the way they guide you. [One Punjabi friend's] mum and my mum are very similar. [..]. I don't know what it is. Maybe it's the clothing, the way they speak, and what they're cooking, *how* they cook. I suppose [..] I feel quite at home when I go to [her] house. It's nothing about it, it's just that it is very similar to *my* house, the way my house is. The same smells are coming out of their house. The same things are acceptable and not acceptable. That sort of things. You kind of know where you are. It's just easier to know how to relate to [her] parents than it would be to someone else's.

All of the examples Raminder mentioned - joking, parental providing and guiding, clothing, ways of speaking, cooking, smells, acceptable behaviour belong to culture as ways of living. Raminder felt she could relate to and feel *at home* with these expressions of cultural sameness. At the same time, she was not encapsulated by them – she could look at them from a position on the border; half inside half outside. She could relativise them and was even (partly) verbalising them. She could do this because she was familiar with different situations, different ways of living, different smells, different ways of being hospitable.

Raminder's friend Aisha said the same thing. Neither of them expected to marry Asian men, but they emphasised the importance of having Asian friends, - because of this 'common ground'. S. said he would really have liked to have an Asian girlfriend[67], because he could have shared 'the problems of growing up with two cultures with her'. Even Sagan touched upon it, although in reverse, of course. He emphasised that he would *not* like to plunge down in the memories of childhood. It would be just too emotional for him to see *East is East*, *My Son the Fanatic* or any other Hanif Kureishi film, he said. Now, I think he lived in a world where he felt accepted. He did not want to be reminded of the feeling of exclusion from when he was younger.

Raminder discussed with herself how much this 'common ground' was an "illusion", a result of what she had been taught to believe about the English.

> I never had any English friends until I got to university [..]. I think I maybe took onboard some of the stereotypes, [..] like English people will never accept you and they will never understand you. They never understand what you're going through. [..]. I was made to believe that you get more loyalty and friendship

[67] S. told me he had never had an Asian girlfriend. He thought the kind of Asians girls he was meeting stereotyped Asian guys as sexist and therefore avoided them.

> from your own, than you get from other people. Just little stories that would go around when we were younger. When you go to an English person's house, they'll eat their dinner in front of you and won't feed you. Just things like that. I suppose, also, there are different ways of behaving.

It had been very important for Raminder to have Asian friends, as we shall see in chapter 7. However, when she started in her job she worked closely with English people for the first time in her life, and she was in a process of dissolving Barth's ethnic boundaries. She didn't seem to need them anymore.

My ethnographic material suggests that one notion of 'common ground' is an answer to stigmatisation, as a shared disenfranchisement from the majority culture. This is plainly illustrated by the British sport journalist Vivek Chaudary's main reason for supporting the Indian cricket team, namely the very high level of racism among English sports fans (The Guardian May 29, 2001). In addition, there is a 'common ground' that implies a shared experience of 'feeling at home'. Despite knowing that they were not like Pakistanis and Bengalis back home, many emphasised the strong bonds that connected them to certain aspects of South Asia. These bonds - like family and relatives, cultural expressions, language, religion, food and certain ways of behaving - made them different from English British people. Raminder emphasised her familiarity with the cultural habits and expressions of Punjabis. This assertion of common ground is - somewhat simplistically (a relaxed sport fan like me would say) - expressed through Chaudary's third reason. Through supporting India, he reaffirms his cultural heritage, he writes. "We are proud to be British, but we are also proud of our ancestry" (Ibid.). This assertion can loudly and clearly be expressed publicly on cricket matches. However, joking in Punjabi is also a way of doing it. This differentiation of two aspects of 'common ground' corresponds to the two ways 'Asians' have been excluded from 'Britishness'. They were 'British and something more' because they brought with them elements in their identity, which were not reconcilable with the normal British identity. And they were 'British and something more' because they were made to experience their Britishness different from the white, Christian norm.

Goodness, Gracious Me was perhaps an unfortunate example for invigorating ethnic boundaries. Most people I spoke to - British Asians as well as whites - highlighted the comedy as a successful way of breaking down the boundaries. Karim's view differed strongly from his friends:

> People are proud, and they're asserting themselves. And they go around just blatantly saying it's an Asian thing. Because the thing was that British people, white people themselves were taking an interest. British

> people would be more curious, in every sense. And that did a lot, especially for the younger generation who are growing up now. An example is *Goodness, Gracious Me*. The majority of people who do watch that are white. They kind of looking at Asian cultural jokes and laugh as well.

When Asian cultural expressions became publicly recognised among white Britons, Asians started to assert themselves and feel proud instead of ashamed of their way of being (British).

Britishness

We have seen that British Asians see themselves as 'British', but what do they mean by it? It's not a nationalistic or patriotic statement exhibiting love for the English cricket team, history and way of life, whatever that is. The interviews at SOAS were some of the first I carried out. I started by asking people if they saw themselves as British Asians. The decontextualised and in fact un-anthropological nature of such a question became increasingly clear to me among social science students at SOAS (see my critique of G. Baumann above). Sagan was not a social scientist but his response, "No, I'm a 1st generation android" should have set alarm bells ringing. Riaz (who studied biology at a nearby university) replied briefly "I'm Asian and I'm from Britain". Everybody laughed at his answer, but the anthropologist didn't give in. "Are you British?" "Yeah, I've got a British passport. I wear British clothes. My first language is really English. I've been brought up here." In addition, he saw his way of life as different from life in Pakistan as well as from his parents', which I've pointed out as typical. He didn't think of gender identity, like Yasemin.

> Riaz: I'd say I'm more, not just doing my education, eating my food and going to lectures and stuff. Comparing to life in Pakistan, my way of life is… I more enjoy myself.
> Karim: What about your parents? What are their views?
> Riaz: My parents' views are totally different from my views. [..]. They came over in the 60s. Compared to them, I'm [..] more broadminded. They've got set principles of life. When they came over here, they didn't come over here for holidays. In their way of life holidays doesn't exist. Education. Respecting your parents. You have to get an education. Get more education.

Riaz interpreted this generational difference of values in 'Asian' versus 'British' terms. First generation had strong work ethics and lacked a concept of leisure and holidays, while leisure was what the ''slackers' at SOAS seemed to be engaging in all the time.

Jitin, who had opted for a creative career as a tablas player and journalist, saw the different view on work as a result of economic development. His parents came from a village in rural Gujerat.

> I was encouraged to do career oriented things. [..] More and more Asian kids [..] are thinking, well, my dad wants me to be a pharmacist or a lawyer or whatever. But, I can easily get on without doing that. I have the luxury of choosing to do this. Whereas our parents didn't. My parents had to just get on. For them it was a question of just surviving. For us, it's a question of all sorts of things. All sorts of crazy, luxurious things they wouldn't even… My dad doesn't even understand the idea of leisure. He's never been on a holiday. A holiday where he just sits and relaxes on a beach. It just wouldn't enter into his head. And I've been on loads of holidays. [..] That's the difference between my generation and his. I had the luxury of choosing what I can do with my life. I don't have to think to myself; right, if I don't make this much money then I can't raise a family. Because, being British, I know that there's [..] a welfare state, as well. It's not as urgent.

Jitin interpreted the differences in attitudes between his own generation and his parents' more in terms of economy than culture; Jitin and his generation could afford holidays and they could afford to opt for creative self-expression rather than to think about providing for family and relatives. In this sense, these young British Asians shared a culture with young 'slackers' all over the world. However, engaging in slacking in Britain meant that they participate in British leisure activities. In terms of music, for many British Asians this meant going to Bhangra gigs, as they mentioned in the SOAS discussion. Bhangra had, as I've pointed out, very little cross-over appeal, but it was home-grown British, and recognised as such. Even more than Bhangra, it is R'n'B and Soul that attracted the big masses of British Asian youth. Neither these forms of music were ghettoised and exclude Asians from British culture.

The 'slackers' at SOAS were into the UK club scene. This scene is a typical example of what happens in cultural globalisation. Technological club music is a universal phenomenon, but everywhere it's interpreted and translated locally. One home-grown British version is drum'n'bass, which developed in mid 1990s. Besides being home-grown, yet a 'culmination of three decades of black musics mixed together' as a music journalist described it, its beats mix very well with traditional tabla beats.

Drum'n'bass became an important ingredient in the British Asian music scene, where Jitin as well as several other British Asians played tablas on club nights. Because they were seen as diaspora south Asians, Jitin and a DJ from the British Asian record company *Outcaste* were asked to play in a Dutch Surinam Asian gig in Amsterdam. According to Jitin, the audience was horrified[68]. Indians from Surinam have grown up with calypso and Hindi music, he said. The

[68] In many other cases, British Asian musicians are however very successful at exporting their music to the diaspora. Nitin Sawhney for instance is touring regularly to Trinidad and South Africa amongst many other places. The cultural studies theorists Raminder Kaur and Virinder Kalra write: "The significance of Br-Asian musical production

band before them was dressed up in traditional clothes from the east and they were dancing traditionally. Then the British Asians entered the stage and played drum'n'bass, a very urban and very British sound. Jitin, as well as some other of my informants identified quite strongly with this kind of music. He took pride in its original British character.

Like many others who had stayed abroad for a while, Jitin showed signs of pride for Britain when he spoke of its anti-racist attitudes and policies. When he talked about his experiences in France, there was a trace of sarcasm in his voice.

> They're not sophisticated enough to say that racism is a really bad thing. [..] That puts their society back 50 years. As a culture, as a collective mentality, they haven't progressed, they haven't moved on. They haven't changed with the times.

The constant new enunciation of culture, on the level of recreating the British collective mentality in inclusive, cosmopolitan ways or reformulating black music forms into innovative drum'n'bass, creates new ways of being British. For everybody.

'1st generation values and entrenchment

We have seen that young Britons find one sense of belonging to Britain in the various music cultures. They differed from their parents in the sense that they had a lot more leisure[69]. However, how did this cultural shift influence the relationship between the generations? It's time to turn the focus from 'the British context' to the 'Asian community'.

Karim said their father never got tired of telling them: 'I've built myself up through education'. His father had become a quite successful engineer who, like many other parents I've heard of, studied, worked and raised a family, all at the same time, when he came to Britain. He did well and, and again like many other Asian parents, he emphasised that it was only through

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has been the pivotal role it has played in constructions of the other localized hyphenated Asian identities [..]. It becomes apparent that Br-Asian musical development initially placed Britain at the core of Transl-Asia" (Kaur and Kalra 1996: 224). However, Jitin's story, combined with some similar descriptions of British musical sophistication, illustrates how very British Jitin felt.

[69] This new way of identification, with a parallel concept of ethics, corresponds to the change in mentality in what Zygmunt Bauman terms *liquid modernity* (Bauman 2000: 147). A 'work-achievement ethic' is replaced by a 'leisure-expressive', with emphasis on 'self-fulfilment' and 'self expression' (Wallace and Kovetcheva 1998: 215). Similarly, Marianne Gullestad spots a shift in identification, from 'being of use' to 'being oneself' (Gullestad 1996: 285ff) (which would amplify the quest for identity). Hans Christian Sørhaug mentioned (in a lecture) this change of personal character traits as indication of post-modernity. A friend of his, a psychiatrist, had informed him that *neuroses* weren't common among young people anymore. Instead, '*borderline'* was now the most common diagnosis in this age set. Neuroses could be related to a question of *who* one is, while in borderline one asks *what* one is. Hence, now people *constitute* themselves to a larger degree than *controlling* themselves. The borders around the individual are changing, Sørhaug said, and he compared himself to his 25-30 years old children. When he saw them as *superficial*, they would say *flexible.* When he thought he was *deep*, they would say *rigid.*

education the children could 'make it' in Britain. The story of extremely hard working parents is very common. Usually their aim was to give their children a better future. At the same time as everybody I spoke to valued and appreciated their parents' efforts, the second generation people of this thesis (*perhaps* in contrast to more 'mainstream' people) sometimes saw the gratefulness as turning into a burden. As Meera Syal's alter ego Meena puts it, before her 'eleven-plus exams': "If I failed, my parents' five thousand mile journey would have all been for nothing" (Syal 1997: 213). The initially good intention could become a pressure. Many parents seemed to expect obedience or adherence to their values, in return for their hardship.

> Karim: I call it an emotional blackmail, with guilt. They came here, they've done all that, they've built themselves up. This is where Asian value systems come into it. It's your duty. You have to do it to your parents. This happens in most Asian families. They'll expect you to do a certain profession, or job or career. And if you don't partake with that, you can be [..] ostracised. So in that respect there are a lot of pressure imposed by parents.

Karim as well as his brother put the pressures down to an 'Asian' value system of respect. To go against it would be an extra blow to their parents' values; they had lost their children's respect as well.

> Karim: They've been brought up that way, but they expect us to be the same way. If you don't conform to it, it's like, oh my god, it's the usual thing; we came to England, the west. You'll hear this: we've given our children away. They've lost their roots, the culture, the religion.

I was told that Karim and Riaz had strayed so far away from their parents' ideals that their mother blamed her troubling heart condition on them, and said she regretted ever coming to Britain.

High expectations of loyalty to strong family values is another common theme among British Asians. In the group, it was seen as the biggest cultural difference between Asian and English values.

> -: If you've grown up in England, there is no family unit. We have an extended family. It's a totally different way of looking at… it's not that you're not an individual, but it is a lot less stress on the individualism. You're always a family, basically. [..]. Wherever you go, you always reflect on your family. Either you'll have to behave in certain ways or your family looses respect. You don't get that in English families. You get respect, but there's a different way of thinking.
>
> Iqbal: In London, I'm all right. I can smoke hash and all that. In Blackburn I won't smoke a spliff. There are fundamental people who will go and say, your son this, your son that.

Individualism versus family values is a dichotomy difficult to reconcile. If 'you're judged by who's family you come from,' as somebody said, and your whole family is judged by your

actions, what do they do then, when they don't want to become 'doctor, lawyer, accountant' or just want to 'smoke a spliff'? Did they feel part of the communal value system of the extended family to the extent that they want their parents to arrange their marriage? The first reaction was defensive - against the stereotypes: "Arranged marriages are quite misconceived. An arranged marriage isn't a forced marriage," somebody said.

> Iqbal: I'll probably not have an arranged marriage, 'cause my parents threw me out of the house. There is no one to arrange a marriage. Just me myself and I, so I don't have to think about that…

Iqbal was excluded from the familial structures, while Karim seemed to refuse to give in to collective pressures. He distance himself from the well-trodden path of 'the rat-race'- in British society, *and* Asian communities. As one of his friends said: "He's the oldest boy in the family, and all he's doing is growing dreads. And going to Africa and all over the world". However, the two of them stood out in the issue of marriage. The rest didn't mind an arranged marriage. It was a non-confrontational as well as easy option[70], I think. This was the common attitude among most of the British Asians I met at SOAS. Amongst the rest in this project, a few wanted their parents to arrange their marriage, while the majority were hopeless cases in their parents' view, I presume[71].

> Why was Iqbal thrown out of this close family unit?
>
> Iqbal: I don't get on with my dad. He's a bit of a knob. I didn't get on with him so I left. I was thrown out once, then I came back. Then I was thrown out again. He asked me to come back, but I said no, it's no point after what had happened. I told him he was a prick for beating my mum up. For beating me up. For beating my brothers up. And he told me to fuck off. Not intervene in his house. So I said, all right, fair enough, I'm going.
>
> C: She doesn't want to get a divorce?
>
> - That's where the respect of the family comes in. If you have a divorce, what are the other people going to say.
>
> -…shame…

[70] Some of Karim's friends had these attitudes in studies as well. They seemed to take very little interest in their studies. Riaz for instance failed 3 years in a row.

[71] Vandana and Taslima were the only ones who were married. Vandana was married to a white Englishman. Sagan and his two siblings were in their early to mid thirties. Jitin was 30, and among his three older sisters there had been 2 divorces. Now, one was married to a Sikh, one to a Christian missionary in Jordan and one to a Hindu from the 'wrong family'. Ani and her sister were subsequently 27 and 31. Aisha was 29, and her older brother was unmarried. Raminder was 28 and her older brother was properly married. Nick's sister had married into a very traditional family, while he was gay. Taslima's family stood out because they particularly wanted their parents to arrange their marriages, only there the parents were very reluctant after Taslima's was very unlucky with the husband they suggested.

They started discussing how different the arranged marriages work 'back home'. Someone said 'it's because it's totally patriarchal male society. Women get a bit of power when they are grandmothers'. Karim intervened and said that his mother was in charge in his family. The group didn't experience 'Asian' cultural values in exactly the same way. Perhaps women had a different position in Karim's and Riaz's family because there were two older sisters, perhaps it is due to Pathan values, social standing, educational background, personalities. I haven't enough information to make a guess. Iqbal returned to 'the community's' reaction to the family disagreements.

> Iqbal: The Asian community in Blackburn says listen, you should go back to your dad and talk to him. Do this and do that. I can't. Pressure from the major community is immense. Go back to your family, that's the Asian thing to do. Not to get help. Loads of loads of pressure.

'If you go against the will of the family you're being ostracised from the whole community,' Karim said.

> Iqbal: They want to maintain the culture. The main argument of your parents is to get you married off to a girl from back home, when she brings the kids up she's still in Asian culture. The fear of losing your culture.

They went on to discuss the reasons behind the pressure to conform within Asian communities.

> Iqbal: When the Asians came to England they all moved to the same areas. The Asian population in Blackburn are from more or less 4 or 5 different villages. A really small area in Pakistan. When I go back home, to Pakistan that is, people there have become more modernised. Here it's like 1950 in Pakistan. [..]. Stuck in a time warp. The whole street was Asian. The family next door was Irish.

'Chain-migration', which is a common phenomenon in labour migration, often led to such closely knit communities made up of neighbours and relatives from 'back home' (Ballard 1996: 11). Iqbal, - first year anthropology student, by the way -, inferred that the small, tightly knit community in Blackburn had got stuck. As we remember, Riaz and Karim did not only see their parents' values as *different*, in addition they perceived them as fixed, - as opposed to their own adaptability and broadmindedness[72]. Most second generation British Asians I met, used expressions similar to 'time-warp' to describe what they saw as their parents' reified traditions, which they pointed out were forgotten long time ago 'back home'. Meera Syal makes fun of it in

[72] Later, Riaz modified this impression of his parents as very strict. 'Others could be envious,' he said. It turned out that he had failed his first year's exams in biology three years in a row. He thought it was lenient of them not be too bothered. However self-evident, it is important to point out that first generation must have gone through innumerable adjustments in their new country in most areas of life (See for instance Brah 1996: 24). However, in relation to *certain* aspects of life, there is a general view among my informants that their parents have reified their cultural traditions. Many expressed that marriage was such a core issue.

her popular Channel Four film, *Barji on the Beach*, - where a side character from Bombay is depicted as far more liberal in her values and dressing than the Indians living in Britain. The notion of 'time warp' is an example of a sociological analysis that has become common knowledge among people in general. People made use of it, irrespective of their educational background. Taslima, a trained nurse, referred to Meera Syal's film when she explained to me how she understood some aspects of her parents' values.

Raminder, as we remember, appreciated her Asian[73] friends for having someone to share a 'common ground' with. However, she did not see 'Punjabi culture' as a commonsense and immutable 'whole way of life'. Instead she saw herself free to choose, transform and reinterpret.

> I've taken a lot of things on from my… culture, but I've also dropped a few. There's good and bad things about my culture. I'm trying to get rid of the bad ones. [..]. That bad ones; it's a quite sexist community. Quite racist. Quite homophobic. You know, very narrow-minded. Restrictive. With really backward ideas about marriage. [..]. And family duty and all that rubbish, that really irritates me. [..]. You only get a lot of love and a lot of protection if you do what *we* say. If you *don't* do what we say, then you're gonna be out! It's almost like being part of a Mafia. If you follow what *we* do, and how *we* expect you to do it, then you'll get all the benefits, you'll get all the security, you get the money, you get the support, you get the uncles and the aunties looking after you. If you *don't*, [..] goodbye, and they totally reject you. So, it's very conditional.

Raminder said she opposed the British version of the Asian community, not life 'back home' in India, which she appreciated (an unusual statement). She said: "I feel that the Asian parents that brought their children over here, are trying to keep their children exactly how *they* are, really selfish." We recognise this from Karim's 'guilt blackmail': if the children don't conform, they have 'lost their children to the west'.

In 'The emergence of Desh Pardesh', Roger Ballard (1996) provides a 'rational actor' perspective on the morality of 'Asian communities'. At first, the labour migrants were sojourners with the aim to move back to South Asia when they had earned enough money. At that time, the communities consisted of males only, who put questions of moral and honour at bay. Then the sojourners turned to settlers, but in order to provide a suitable environment for the raising of children, the morality was strengthened.

> All of a sudden conformity mattered. [..] As conventional norms were re-established, deviance invited criticism and ridicule. Those who mimicked English ways too closely began to be accused of being *be-izzat* – without honour. [..] Since each settlement had become an arena within which honour could be sustained, life

[73] Punjabi friends in relation to comfort zone and Asian in general in relation to understanding for her situation as Asian female.

> within it was transformed. [..]. From this perspective *izzat* emerges not as something fixed and permanent, but as a matter of relative standing which generates constant competition [..]. It follows that as soon as competition for *izzat* takes off, there can be no escape: anyone who fails to play the game will by definition lose face (Ballard 1996: 15).

In Ballard's view, the reified morality is an effect of 'internal community matters'. *Izzat*[74] is a value in Asian culture, which the rational actors within this cultural universe compete for. In contrast to this view, Bhikhu Parekh is more concerned about the wider British institutional factors. When members of minority cultures feel that their cultural values are threatened by the majority, they will turn inwards and withdraw from dialogue. In his view, this was prevalent in the new right and Thatcher years of increasing nationalist assimilation, and it reached a climax at the time of the 'Rushdie affair'. Many Muslims felt powerless when the legislation protecting Christianity did not apply against what they saw as extreme blasphemy in *The Satanic Verses*. Again, the right to equal citizenship was felt to not include British Muslims (Parekh 1998:19).

The extremely high level of reflexivity is perhaps the factor I find most striking in my empirical material. People refused to take worldviews and ways of life for granted, but instead reflected on them. The notion of 'time warp' is a typical example of how the reflexivity of modernity (Giddens 1991) or liquid modernity (Bauman 2000) disembeds, or liberates the individual from traditional – (i.e. 'things are like they are because that is the way they should be') – constraints. Anthony Giddens refers to Kierkegaard when he writes: "freedom is not a given characteristic of the human individual, but derives from the acquisition of an ontological understanding of external reality and personal identity" (Giddens 1991: 47). The concept of 'time warp' as a way of explaining, - thus liberating oneself from -, certain cultural influences is shared among most of my informants[75]. Giddens terms this widely shared psychological, biological, sociological or historical knowledge *institutional reflexivity* (ibid.).

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[74] *Izzat*, or an English equivalent, never occurred in any of my interviews or conversations. I don't know why, but have a few suggestions: I never asked about it, and since *izzat* is often negatively perceived with sexist overtones outside the Asian communities, people might not want to talk about it in fear of fuelling the stereotypes. This explanation is unlikely in most instances, because in general, the people I met were not protective about either 'the community' or 'Asian culture'. The second explanation I can think of, is that the term *izzat* has application in relation to an Asian community. And since none of my informants care much about 'the community', to upkeep *izzat* would not be important to them.

[75] I think Sagan must be the only one I never heard speaking about it. Instead of being concerned about minute and flimsy cultural problems like that, he worked hard on trying to liberate himself from most cultural influences and some biological as well.

By viewing some of their parents' values as reified and 'time-warped', they were able to reject many of their parents' values - without disbanding their 'Asian' heritage. Most British Asians I met, saw certain cultural elements as meaningful, comforting and important; others they regarded as in opposition to their own value systems, and they chose not to follow them. The fundamental aspect of these value systems were the rights of the individual before prescribed ways of living. They used the concept of 'time warp' to characterise certain Asian traditions and values as reified and literally backward. What appears, is a processual view on identity as well as culture. However, if we follow Parekh, people can only engage in this interactive process if they feel secure enough to make their own choices. In the next part, I shall look at this process in relation to religion.

Religion: entrenched Muslims and personal reinterpretation

Karim had described their parents as 'very conservative, religious and traditional': When I asked Riaz if he was religious, I obviously introduced another irrelevant topic. He answered briefly and somewhat contradictory.

> Riaz: Yes, I believe in Islam. I've got to enjoy myself. If you think about religion, if you're being religious you've got to have no sex, no alcohol, no drugs. Have to pray five times a day. You can't have no spliff.

They were ambivalent to parental as well as Islamic values, at the same time almost everybody I met from a Muslim background said that they were Muslims. In this respect they differed distinctly from people from the two other big South Asian religions. In my spare statistical material, there were as many Muslims as others who strayed away from the religious ideals - but in contrast, the Muslims would still say; 'of course I'm religious'[76].

Many told me that there had been a revival of a Muslim identity the last ten years. They put this in relation to the 'Rushdie affair' and the Gulf war. After the two events, they clearly felt an increase in anti-Muslim sentiments. Many British Muslims felt their Britishness was put into question. Shahid was 23 years old. He came from a traditional and religious Bengali family. However, I would claim that he and his 21 years old sister, Yasemin, had a different relationship to Islam than Zamil (25) and Taslima (28) as well as their parents. Shahid pinned down the shift in Islamophobia as well as his interest in Islam to the Gulf war. People would ask Muslim if they were on 'our side' or on 'their side'. "I'm not from Iraq, but they turned it into a religious thing.

[76] I should clarify, even though it's self-evident, that I met Muslims - as well as Hindus and Sikhs - who really *practised* a religious lifestyle. I'm not, of course, questioning why these people said they were Muslims.

Because I was a Muslim, then you must support them." Once again, after the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, we are faced with such simplistic dichotomisation. However, in 1999, I wasn't aware of it and I in my conversation with Shahid I experienced how the simplicity of it offended me.

> C: a very strange question. Like as if they presumed that all white people were with the U.S.
>
> Shahid: Yes, that is it. It would have been exactly the same. If you are a Muslim, you might be associated with terrorist groups.

Ashaq – Karim's Bangladeshi friend who's family re-emigrated to Bangladesh because his father 'couldn't laugh at the other doctors' racist jokes' – had introduced me to one of the more religious people at SOAS. The two Muslims had a very different commitment to their religion but they agreed on the increasing Islamophobia in Britain lately. "Islam is probably the only religion that gets the English people a bit," Ashaq said. "They didn't appreciate that the Muslims in Britain protested about the bombing of Iraq." Ashaq's bearded friend upheld his view that Britain was a tolerant[77] country. In his view, Islamophobia 'just stemmed from all the propaganda in the media'.

> Yasrab: The one that always comes to mind to me is when the Oklahoma bombing went off. They came out with – I think it was the Daily Express – with a fireman holding a baby corpse in the hands coming out of the fire: in the name of Islam, in the name of Allah. They never printed an apology.

Ashaq had been to a conference on Islamophobia. He related it to the end of communism and the need for a new enemy. Yasrab agreed:

> Afghanistan is the best example of it all. The film that always comes to mind is Rambo 3, which was in Afghanistan. In the end of it they go; and this film is dedicated to these freedom fighters of Afghanistan. The freedom fighters in 1999 has become the terrorists of the world. Bin-Laden has become the most wanted man on the face of this earth. If you are an allied you are one of the good guys, but if you are not with us, you're not pulling our new world order line, you're an enemy.

More than interpreting this strong claim to a religious identity by Muslims as intrinsic[78] to Islam, I see it as a response to a world-wide increase in Islamophobia. There is no grey areas in-between, Muslims are being entrenched; either you defend Islam or you reject it[79].

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[77] He, like some other practising Muslims I met at SOAS, said Britain had progressive views concerning Islam, compared to other countries they had been to. Yasrab said that Britain was more tolerant than Egypt in this respect. "If you wear a beard people think you are a terrorist. I felt more alienated in a Muslim country than I felt in Britain." His statement echoes Jitin's way of expressing pride in British anti-racist policies.

[78] 'The ethos of Islam', compared to that of Hinduism of Sikhism, might be an alternative explanation why more Muslims than others claimed they were religious despite having irreligious lifestyles. However, I fall back on Islamophobia as the main reason since it was the *rhetoric* and not the practices that varied between Muslims and others.

Aisha (29), however, had a questioning attitude towards Islam. Her approach matched people of the other religions, where people with her lifestyle were likely to say that they were not very religious, at the same time as they didn't feel compelled to reject all religious beliefs[80]. 'Younger Muslim women have embraced the Muslim identity more than I have,' she said and explained the generational shift by referring to the revival of the Muslim identity I discussed above. Aisha believed in God, and she was not rejecting Islam. However, she knew she had strayed far away from what was acceptable for a Muslim to do. She had been part of the club scene in the early 1990s, where drugs were important ingredients. In her opinion, it would be hypocritical of her to say unconditionally that she had a 'Muslim identity'. "It's a continuous struggle for me," she said.

> I just try and, sort of, be a good person, really. [..]. And maybe I miss. Maybe I'm gonna go to hell, but [she's laughing] I had a good time doing in. [..]. And I know that that does not fit with a Muslim identity. And I do know that there are people who are like, probably more into having a Muslim identity than me, they probably have more signifiers, maybe they might wear clothes or have a certain style that is more in tune with the Muslim thing, like in terms of style, and the signs and the signals that it gives. I think that maybe there are some 2nd generation Asians that are giving other sorts of signals that are 2nd generation Muslim or whatever that maybe I don't do so much. But maybe those people smoke a lot of weed or whatever. I think that is part of the scene actually [..], especially for the men. And I don't really know how they justify that or how they talk about that. It has crossovers I think, with the black culture as well. Listening to reggae and that sort of thing. Hip hop. Smoking weed. All this sort of blurring of boundaries and merging of scenes and styles. [..] [T]he hard line as far as Islam is concerned is that you get intoxicated. So, I'm probably more hesitant than some 2nd generation Asians to call myself a Muslim.

Aisha said she had been thinking a lot about and debating with others how much it takes to really be a Muslim (which is presumably a bigger worry for Muslims than Hindus since Islam means 'to submit', as she mentioned), and she gave me thoughtful and elaborate answers. The issues concerned her, and her religion shaped her outlook in some concerns.

> Well, I think it really depends on how positive or negative I'm feeling, on my particular day. I think, when I'm feeling more positive, I can say; oh, it doesn't matter. I'm doing the best I can and it's better to do some

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[79] I should comment that people would of course disagree with me when I offered my reductionistic theory of 'trench warfare' initiated by Islamophobia on their religious, or anti-religious, identity.

[80] Vandana had one of the more relaxed relationships to religion. But as a non-Muslim person she was not forced to make a fierce stance in any direction: "I have a little mini-temple in the house. I would say that I'm an atheist. [..]. But the problem is, all those objects, those rituals have become part of my life. So when it comes to Diwali, I go to the temple and go through the emotions. So some part of me must believe that there's a god, but other parts of me find it quite a reactionary, regressive sort of activity." She had a Hindu marriage ceremony for her wedding as well, (without the groom).

> things than none at all. Or when I'm feeling a bit more negative I can think: oh, my god I've sinned and I'm going to hell. I've lost the way and I've strayed and I'm an unbeliever. But I think for me and for other people in my situation I think our religion is our personal… continually in process and interpretation.

Aisha's questioning account indicated that she saw religion as something personal, not as a fixed ethnic 'vestige' that characterises religion as ethnicity. If it was not a marker of identity – an ethnicity –, in which way was religion important for Aisha? It was comforting, she said. She spoke slowly, as if she was thinking about how to answer.

Aisha is educated in psychology. In some respects, she looked at religion as a coping strategy. Her parents, she said, had become more religious after all their hardship in Britain. There were however also other aspects to her religiosity. She appreciated the ethos and much of the philosophy of Islam she said, and she saw herself as a spiritual person.

> [She pauses]. I've been back to the middle east as well. I've been on pilgrimages. And that's been like, quite a weird thing really. It's like the nerve centre of Islam, the Middle East. They're the guardians of the faith. And I've been *there*. [..]. With my mum and my dad and my little brother. And that was really nice. I remember sitting in the mosque in Medina, the Prophet's mosque, with my mum. The women were sitting in one place, and the men sit somewhere else, and it was a beautiful mosque, beautiful building, and there was birds flying in and out of there, and they opened the ceiling of the mosque at night-time so you could see all the stars. And it was just very comforting to think, like, I belonged there, as well. That it was a place for me, there. I was accepted and that was just somewhere nice to be. And there was women from all over the world, from all different ethnic origins, who were all united by this Muslim identity, and Muslim, one female identity. And people making a space for you to sit down next to them. That's the thing about Islam, I think, at it's best. That it is so embracing. There is a kind of a brotherhood and a sisterhood that's universal, world-wide. In real terms maybe it doesn't always translate so positively. But it has got its moments.

The way Aisha told about the event in Medina confirmed to me the profundity of her experience. Without having to go into detail about what makes a religious experience, I would claim that this is one, and that Aisha in this respect is a Muslim. However, this religiosity is special in certain ways: it is not dictated by tradition neither by traditionalism, since Aisha – with some distress – could have an eclectic attitude towards it. Two short examples can deepen our understanding of what is special about this religious relationship.

Nick, who grew up in a religious Sikh family, had been very religious himself, up to a certain point, when he had to make drastic choices concerning how he wanted to live his life. Now, he was returning to Sikhism, but from a new angle.

> I thought that I need to learn more. Up to quite recently I was reading about Buddhism and then I thought to myself, hold on, I'm sure there are elements of Sikhism that talks about meditation. I need to go out there now

> and learn about it, educate myself about what Sikhism teaches. Because our parents didn't really explain it to us. I think they were doing their bit just by taking us to the temple every week. OK, we went to Punjabi classes, but that was to learn how to read and write Punjabi. It's completely different from [..] the language of our religious texts.

Nick described his relationship to religion as different from his parents'. It was more questioning and searching. He was gay and despite the looks he got in the Gurdwara because of his shaved head and eccentric appearance, he still thought Sikhism was right for him. Ani, a 27 years old artist, was Sikh as well. Both said they always had worn their Sikh bangle.

> A funny thing is that… I think I'm barely religious now. [..] I grew up pretty devout. I used to pray every morning. Even when I was at school, I used to get up at six in the morning and pray. [..]. I used to go to the temple every week. I think that thing never leaves you. There are lots of things that I like about our religion. It's a lot that I hate… [..]. I feel it's something that I might want to pick up on again. In my own way. Not in the way that's been prescribed to me. There are certain things I want to break from that religion. Cause I don't necessarily agree with everything. But the praying thing, that's what I want to start with again. I feel much better when I'm confused.

Ani, like Aisha and Nick, did not see herself as very religious, but she went to the Gurdwara every weekend. However, they all emphasised there were things they wanted to keep from the religion of their upbringing. They consciously picked some elements because they were valuable to them and gave them "comfort and some sort of structure," as Aisha said.

> Ani: [It give me s]ome kind of spiritual calm. You know, it's a few moments every morning, it's like complete shut down. [..]. It's almost like a mantra. It's meditational. I prefer that I don't know what those words mean. But it's definite that sense of being religious comes from my upbringing.

These religious elements had a special meaning because they were from Ani's upbringing. However, despite being part of a transmission from the previous generation, the religion they took on board was not taken for granted.

When I asked Aisha about religion, her first response was to compare Islam to Catholicism and specifically her relationship to Islam to her second generation Irish friends' relationship to Catholicism.

> [It's] very prescriptive of what you can do and what you can't do. How you should live, what you should think. [..]. I know some Irish people, and I've had a point of identification with them that I haven't had with English people. Because they can relate to the cultural evolution, and the cultural reproduction. And also in terms of the religion. There're some things about the Catholic religion that they find comforting and that they want to identify with, but other things maybe not so much; they want to distance themselves from. Particularly as women. There are some things that for women are quite hard to deal with, coming from those sorts of religious backgrounds.

In this sense, Aisha did not relate to Islam as a reified ethnic 'vestige'. Instead, she approached Islam from a dynamic perspective. Coincidentally, Ani and Aisha (who did not know each other) mentioned James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as a book that was important to them. Both linked the book to issues of identity. Ani, who did her degree in literature, puts it this way:

> Even when I did my first degree, at university, I was really interested in questions of identity. I love James Joyce and the whole era of modernism. Just because it was about the breakdown of traditional identity. It's about the breakdown of traditional authority. We're moving into a far more fragmented phase. [..]. *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, I read that, and [..] I just related to it on so many levels. This young Irish kid, the whole family thing. And his obligations to kin and church. Nation in the sense that, it raised questions for me about nationality, where I belong.

I can see why they both identified with a novel like that. Instead of taking tradition for granted, modernity introduced a new reflexivity.

This reflexive relationship to their religious background was characteristic of most of the British Asians I met - even for the Muslims, as we saw from the SOAS posse's flexible attitude to *practices*, behind their defensive verbal affirmations. I should however add that the Muslim slackers at SOAS argued similarly to Aisha, Nick and Ani; they had a 'personal relationship to religion, it is for God to judge, no one else', 'it was better to do some things than nothing at all'. Many preferred to smoke cannabis rather than drink alcohol because, as they argued, the Koran forbid alcohol while intoxication was only mentioned in the lesser Hadiths. But in contrast to Aisha, they had no reservations against saying that 'of course they were Muslims'.

Recap on positionings and the space in the middle

It's time to sum up the viewpoints we have seen so far. I find three cultural streams, or cultural discourses, frequently reappearing in the argumentation. 'English values' are differentiating and hierarchisising, and 'Asian values' and visible signs of 'Asian-ness' turn out as both different and of lesser worth. We recognise this discourse from the first chapter, where I described this ethnification and stigmatisation of 'Asianness'. This led us to the notion of 'common ground'. I find it useful to separate this discourse into a defensive component - as protection against exclusion - and an essential component - as shared meaning. The defensive 'common ground' is made use of in an ethnicity, in Fredrik Barth's (1969) sense. Cultural elements were taken out of the continuous enunciation of culture and frozen into ethnic vestiges to be used to dichotomise

between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In the second generation’s view, their parents had done this with some core south Asian values. In the third discourse, these reified elements had turned into an ‘oppressive Asian community and culture’ where the parents were seen as wanting to keep their children exactly like themselves. The reifications restricted individual enunciation of cultural meaning, which meant that individuality suffered on behalf of the collective.

The discussion at SOAS was coming to an end. Iqbal had already wrapped up his position:

> Most of the Pakistani values are daft, and most of the English ones are daft as well. But you pick and choose, don’t you? That’s the whole thing. What you think is right and what you think is wrong. You just, basically, find your own culture, your own thing. Might be different for each individual.

Riaz had mostly kept quiet, but suddenly long after Iqbal had proclaimed his position, he turned to me, concludingly: “You can’t really study British Asians, because they’re all individuals.”

British Asians were positioned by these three discourses, but their positionings were neither static nor universal and omnipotent. The notion *discourse* indicates that the significations are not fixed. Changed signification means changed positioning. If discrimination stops, it will affect their position in white English society. Equally, if Iqbal’s father and the community were willing to negotiate with Iqbal, his position within community as well as family would change. In addition, they related to all three discourses uneasily, without fitting anywhere. Their awareness of these heteroglot[81] positionings, to use Bakhtin’s words, might open up a reflexive field of opinion, a space freed from the force of natural taken-for-granted-ness. We can say that Iqbal had come to reject the ‘English’ as well as the ‘community’ discourse and was opting for an individual negotiation of values. This idea that individuals can ‘pick and choose’ and ‘find their own culture’, I term the forth discourse of negotiating a ‘middle ground’. By its nature, this must be done individually.

[81] Briefly, Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia means the coexistence of a variety of social discourses the individual is positioned in, and which he or she has to make use of in responding to the situation at hand (Holquist 1990: 69).

Chapter 4

From Outcaste to 2nd Generation

- a genealogy of British Asianness

In the previous chapter, I introduced three discourses positioning second generation British Asians, and a fourth opening a space for negotiation. Here, I introduce a fifth, the discourse of changing *Asian-ness*. The chapter starts with a report from late 20th century's London, written by Karim from the previous chapter. It was printed in *The Spirit*, the magazine for the Union at SOAS (slightly edited). He sums up the recent revaluation of 'Asian' cultural expressions.

> Star-Date 1999. SS Starship Rusmalai.
>
> I've just disembarked from my time machine, and somehow managed to land slap-bang in the middle of vibrant, Multicultural Cool Britannia[82]! Browsing through a bookshop: I'm bombarded with the latest hyped-up, Heavy-weight clash [..], the literary showdown between those Empire Strikes Back authors – Rushdie v. Seth[83].
>
> Feeling peckish; the sweet, spicy, scintillating aroma of curry sends me drifting [..] to one of London's 3800 curry houses[84]! Variety makes for a spicy life! (Thanks Kashmiri babu for that one!)
>
> Walking down the High Street I'm sonically bombarded by 'Brimful of Asha', violent 'Naxalites', confronted by 'Outcastes', confused by 'Anokha'. And I wish I could opt for 'Swaraj[85]' (self-rule). I can even hear this trance-like Sufi-inspired chanting, emitted by this fat obese geezer [Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan]! Quite ear-catching!
>
> Approaching me outside the Tube station a beautiful Bhindhi[86]-wearing blonde beacons me and asks for

---

[82] 'Cool Britannia' is Prime Minister Tony Blair's invention, in his attempt to reformulate Britain as a 'vibrant, young, multicultural country'. Karim appreciated the catchword, as Aisha did. We have seen that Vandana criticised Blair's intentions for being neo-liberal market economical.

[83]They released, subsequently, *The Ground Beneath her Feet* and *An Equal Music* at the same time, and the papers wrote extensively of this 'battle of the champions'.

[84] Curry is one of the greatest industries in Britain today. "Indian food has a turnover which is higher than coal, steel and ship-building combined." (Alibhai-Brown 2000: 3).

[85] 'Brimful of Asha' is *Cornershop's* number one hit, 'Naxalites' is an angry and energetic song by enormously popular *Asian Dub Foundation*, *Outcaste* is a club and a record company started by Shabs (see this chapter). *Anokha* was a club started by the musician Talvin Singh that became so trendy that Madonna wanted him for her *Ray of Light* album and the Islandic singer Bjørk became a regular and at the club. The compilation album even reached Norwegian shores and the ears of the anthropologist and in fact triggered off this fieldwork and thesis. *Swaraj* is the follow up club of *Anokha*. It was still running in 1999, when I carried out my fieldwork.

[86] A bhindhi (or bindi) is a mark on the forehead worn by Hindus, now a fashionable decoration often worn in clubs by anyone in the late 1990s.

> directions. Immediately I can't help but notice the intricate Mendhi[87] designs on her slender hands. She's wearing a stunning Sari with Nike Air Max's[88] and at this point I'm really confused?! Is she off to a wedding or what?!
>
> Later all is revealed when I see her gyrating on a dance floor at one of the various Anokha/Sitar-funk/Swaraj/Outcaste/Kismet nights at a hip London club. Dancing to the eclectic hybrid fusions of Dhol n'base[89]! I feel like a cultural voyeur!!!

By the last sentence, I think Karim toys with the current discussions in *Cultural Studies*, where this Asian fashion is criticised as being neo-orientalistic, commercialised 'cultural tourism' without real cultural understanding (see e.g. Sharma et al. 1996).

> I re-check the star date and location and realise to my shock-horror that I'm actually in London – not Lahore! WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON!?!?
>
> It seems that good ol' blighty's illicit love affair with the jewel of the crown, never extinguished! Chatting to a wise old pseudo-cultural anthropological type Asian academic, he offers to reveal all: "Brown is the new Black!" – I don't quite get what He means?!? Then some East-end, Bangla Rude boy interjects and in plain Cockney English sez' it all: "It's trendy to be a PAKI now!"……Low and behold, this cold insulated, introverted, Xenophobic island finally seemed to have acknowledged (If not accepted!) it's Asian presence!

By bringing in the imperial nickname of India, Karim reminds us of the old Anglo-Indian ties: the fascination and connection is not new, but has been going on for centuries. He also reminds us why the British Asians are there in the first place.

> One has only to chat to the various 'Indophiles' who frequent a 'certain' London college Bar after holiday-break, where exotic tales are exchanged, now armed only with their trusty Backpack, Lonely-Planet's Guide book and hard Western currency… they set out to the mythical Indian Sub-continent, with grandiose plans and schemes to "Discover themselves!" (i.e. take copious amounts of cheap local, illegal substances, meet other 'like-minded' individuals and go to the usual Tourist traps and haunts, i.e. Goa, Varanasi, Khatmandu.)Believe me, they probably save an awful amount of money and hassle if initially they'd made the effort to "Discover what is on their own doorsteps"…. Wilmslow Road, Manchester, Brick Lane, London, Southall to name a few.

Karim presents a common critique of a phenomenon many perceive as a naiv form of neo-orientalism, and hints of course to the many 'hippies' at the bar at SOAS.

> Anyway, I finally discovered myself – I like to think of myself as a "Friend of the World" with no "caste nor class" … a bit like ol'Kipling's Kim! [..] I'd probably without a doubt, fail that notorious WASP inquisition –

[87] Henna designs on the hands and arms. A south Asian tradition usually used in weddings, now mendhi kits can be purchased everywhere.
[88] Sari and trainers was the *Anokha* 'uniform'.

> the Tebbit test. Cos, in cricket, like betting, I only back winners, so that rules out England, and Pakistan always offer good odds if they are cheating in the dressing room! [..]
>
> It's great living in this confused, hybrid, multicultural quagmire known as Britain! And at times I think I'm fortunate that my dad (one of the initial pioneers) did pack his bags and get a one-way ticket from Karachi back in the Swinging Sixties! For I've had the privilege of being born in Sheffield and therefore the opportunity of being a diehard Sheffield Wednesday supporter from cradle to grave!

Karim is very conscious of his 'concentric' identity. He is as much Sheffield Wednesday supporter in football as he is supporting Pakistan in cricket. He can be a Pathan patriot boasting of his warrior ancestors, and he shows off a great amount of Yorkshire patriotism simultaneously. For many people in Karim's generation, those parallel regional and ancestral feelings of belonging are widespread. Karim was the most patriotic person I came across, in every concentric variety.

> Today the British eat Indian hear Indian, wear Indian, look Indian, read Indian and even shag Indian, and no-one notices. George Mikes wrote in the sixties that an immigrant has two choices, to try and be yourself and be ridiculous, or be like the English and be even more ridiculous!

This quote reminds us of the impossibility of assimilation; either you are a native or you're not. For the ones defined as non-natives, the only option is a redefinition of nativeness. No more than thirty years ago, *the immigrants* found themselves in what Fredrik Barth has termed a *minority situation*. According to Karim, they were imperatively determined to be 'ridiculous' whether they stayed in their 'ethnic enclave' or *assimilated* into standard forms of English-ness (whatever that might be).

I have already used examples from Meera Syal's novel about growing up in the 1960s (Syal 1997). We saw how the official version of reality presented to Syal's alter ego Meena at school, made her want to rid herself of everything Indian, even in her own home. As the novel goes on, Syal describes Meena as feeling increasingly at home betwixt categories. Despite Meena's agency to find a way beyond the restraints, there was still no physical space for her to belong, where the social environments merged, - until the evening her grandmother arrived from India. At the welcome party something significant happens:

> It felt so strange to hear Punjabi under the stars. It was an indoor language to me, an almost guilty secret which the Elders would only share away from prying English eyes and ears. On the street, in shops, on buses, in parks, I notice how the volume would go up when they spoke English, telling us kids to not wander off,

[89] Dhol is a kind of Punjabi drum, hence the phrase plays on the technological dance music form drum'n'bass.

> asking the price of something; and yet when they wanted to say something intimate, personal, about feelings as opposed to acquisition, they switched to Punjabi and the volume became a conspiratorial whisper (Syal 1997. p. 203).

This is a typical description of a minority situation (E.g. Eidheim 1969: 47), which – by definition – is transformed when a 'minority' publicly shows off their 'characteristics' in 'interethnic' spaces where they shift from being of no or negative value, to becoming assets.

> I stood uncertainly on the front porch and watched helplessly as the Aunties and Uncles began reclaiming the Tollington night in big Indian portions, guffawing Punjabi over the fences and hedges, wafting curried vegetable smells through tight-mouthed letterboxes, sprinkling notes from old Hindi movie songs over jagged rooftops, challenging the single street light on the crossroad with their twinkling jewels and brazen silk. Usually, mama and papa were the most polite and careful neighbours, always shushing me if I made too much noise down the entries, always careful to keep all windows closed during papa's musical evenings. But tonight, I noted disapprovingly, they were as noisy and hysterical as everyone else. (Ibid.).

They 'reclaim' public space with the elements that stigmatised them; language, the smell of Indian food, Indian songs and clothing.

> I hesitated on the porch step, unsure whether to flee indoors, dreading what the reaction of any passers-by might be, but also strangely drawn to this unfamiliar scene where my two worlds had collided and mingled so easily. [..]. Nevertheless, I froze when I heard the footsteps approaching the crossroads. It was [two local women], I was not sure which ones as in their Gooin' Out Outfits of tight shiny tops and optimistically short skirts, they all looked like sisters. By the way they were holding on to each other, I could tell they were on their way home from the Mingo disco, although they seemed to sober up immediately as they caught sight of our crowded front garden. Two pairs of red eyes ringed in creased blue powder took in the teeming, laughing masses and two lipstick smudged mouths broke into wide wicked grins. (Ibid)

The situation does not bear signs of what could be called a 'hegemonic block of superiority and inferiority' based on ethnicity. Rather, its suggestions of hierarchy are ambiguous and crosscutting.

> 'Ay up, Mr K! Havin a bit of a do then?' one of them shouted, every word sliding into each other so it sounded like a strangely musical babble.
>
> 'Oh, yes ladies!' papa called from somewhere near the hedge. 'Come and join us! Whisky, yes?'
>
> Even in this light I could tell papa's face was flushed [..]. [T]he Uncles [..] were now gathering around him, seemingly impressed that papa was acquainted with some of the local talent.
>
> 'Whisky!' the other [..] shrieked. 'Hark at him! Posh or what. Not on top of Malibu, thanks Mr K. Don't wanna be picking sick out of me birdbath again tomorrer!' [..]. The women's swooping laughter met the men's bass chuckles and it really did sound like a beautiful, improvised song. (Syal 1997: 203-5).

The symbiosis created here is important. First, Meena sees it as very positive, 'beautiful'. We should also understand it as a recognition and validation of both of her two realities. Meena's various ways of being can co-exist and even enrich each other into something better.

In the course of the book, Meena realised that her brown skin sets her apart. Some racist incidents in the local community made her fully aware that she was different and assimilation was neither attainable, *nor* desirable. Her parents' backing academic aspirations (typically 'Asian', as we've seen) encouraged her to pass her eleven-plus exams. In the end of the book, Meena heads for grammar school, leaving behind Anita and her no-good gang. At the same time, there is no doubt that she will *not* link up with her well-behaved, decent 'cousins' either. Meena moved on into 'uncharted territory'. Meena – middle-class, good marks, and 'decent' upbringing – spoke with a socio-lect and, particularly a language that made her parent flinch. Neither she – with experiences her parents could never imagine – was unmarked by the two social environments she grew up in. For her, the way onward seemed to be through reconciling the world 'inside the home' and the various manifestations of 'English society' she met on her way. In the 1960s, this reconciliation was not yet achieved in any physical space – as we shall see has become the case in the late 1990s.

But, before this reconciliation could take place, the "Indian" world had to be reassessed from its lowly position. In the novel, this re-evaluation took place during her grandmother's stay, (which I think Syal depicts metonymically as Meena picking up Punjabi). Her grandmother made her see a different India, an India she could respect, on equal footing as England.

Resistance through identity politics

In the 1960s, 1st generation Pakistanis, Indians and Bangladeshis immigrants and their offspring found themselves in a 'minority situation', imperatively determined by their ethnicity, 'Asian' (or 'Paki'). Outside the 'minority enclaves' their ethnic status had only a *negative* value, giving them no basis for interaction. Except, if they played up to the stereotypes, as e.g. the Muslim father in Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia* did when he became a spiritual and authentic Buddhist teacher.

With the coming of age of a 'second generation', self-expression changed. People refused to ask for acceptance and to accommodate within their two 'ridiculous' possibilities. Now, I would like to explore the agency presented through *identity politics.* The germ of *identity politics* can be found in Michel Foucault's 'reversal' of discursively shaped *subject positions.* E.g.,

feminism fought the male biased world meeting women when they stepped outside the boundaries, which categorised them as 'women' (i.e. as *different* from men), and demanded the right to redefine what it meant to be a woman. Foucault describes the possibility for this kind of agency in his genealogical investigation of sexuality. Homosexuality, he writes, was construed, made pathological and controlled through various discourses. At the same time, however,

> it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified (Foucault 1998: 101).

First 'Asian-ness' was discursively produced as a *subject position*, then 'the Asians' began to 'speak on their own behalf, using the same categories by which they were *culturally* disqualified.' However, as we will see shortly, in the case of British Asians, it is not a straightforward *reversal* in the revaluation of stigmata, - which is what usually takes place in *ethno-politics* (e.g. Eidheim 1969). The reformulation of 'Asian' *subject positions* takes place in a cosmopolitan (i.e. heteroglossic) society, which many people acknowledged. However, more on this later, chronologically we have not reached that far, and first, we must explore the relationship between identity politics and liquid modernity.

Zygmunt Bauman sees the life-politics fought through the *new social movements* as a necessary counteract to the individualising forces disembedding people from their class solidarity and resistance, which is taking place in liquid modernity. When human identity has been transformed from a 'given' into a 'task', individuals are left with the responsibility of making him or herself a good life (Bauman 2000: 31). There is however, not equal access to the assets, and 'minorities' and 'disadvantaged' groups of any kind – like 'Asians', 'gays', 'women', 'disabled' – will demand the right to be like everyone else, as Kureishi put it above. Or, in the words of Foucault, they demand e.g. the 'naturality' of Asians to be acknowledged. Unlike Meena's parents, second generation demand to enter public spaces without *undercommunicating* their 'Asian-ness'. They demand 'to do whatever they want to do'.

The first step in the creation of a British Asian-ness, was resistance to racism. Resistance to the political rhetoric we saw in Ch. 1, as well as to attacks from skinheads and National Front Iqbal had talked about. Suresht Renjen Bald (1995) discusses the generational differences in South Asian British fiction. "Faced with white racism, South Asian parents want to maintain a low profile but their children insist of fighting for inclusion in the British 'nation' on terms set by

Black British" (Bald 1995: 83). Avtar Brah rejected what she calls a common media image of a 'docile' first generation. She emphasised that the difference was really the home-grown character of second generation political discourse (Brah 1996: 40-7). She sees the 1981 'uprising' in Southall as the coming of age of a new form of Asian political and cultural agency, where they appropriated localities as their home, from an 'insider' position (ibid. p. 47).

The right to define

After defending themselves against racism, the second step was assertive. There are numerous accounts of how 'unfashionable' it was to be 'Asian'. The first solution for second generation to formulate a viable up-to-date identity was to try to escape the stigmatised *Asian-ness* all together. The following quote is from a personal and political essay in *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music* (Sharma et al.: 1996), an anthology in the political *Cultural Studies* vein.

> We grew up at a time when [..] certain things were clearly marked as acceptably fashionable whilst others were consigned to the scrapheap of the popular imagination. In south London at least, in the early 1980s, the wordplay and associations of the term 'Asian' were with durable notions of odour, passivity , squareness, weakness and weirdness, in no particular order. (The word actually used was 'Paki' [..]). Our reasonable enough assumption was therefore that apparently being smelly, weak, square and non-violent was ample qualification to rethinking our cultural identity and perspectives. We just wanted 'to be invisible' [..]. [T]here was always vague talk and some acknowledgement of 'the blacks' as 'hard' if despicable.[..] Soul, then, made its first appeal to the British children of Asian migrants, as an 'underground' cultural resource, invested with the currency of alterity and addressed with a spirit of fortitude (Koushik and Partha Banerjea in Sharma et al. 1996: 113).

One of the solutions to become 'invisible' as 'Asian' was to appear as a "'hard' if despicable black" instead. This seemed to be a widespread strategy. Nick born in South London in 1972 was just one of many informants who told the same story. There were not any credible Asian identities available when he became a teenager, - the only solution was to turn to 'black' symbols like music and style. Nick went to a predominantly white private school but he admired the "Asian kids who went to the local colleges".

> A lot of those kids, it's like, they'd really taken onboard black culture. The way they dressed, the music they listened to. All the time they were kind of mimicking our black counterparts. Tried to be street-wise. Talking like a black man, dressing like a black man, listening to black music, hip-hop, ragga, whatever. [..]. And it was funny, because a lot of these Asian kids came from quite middle class Asian families, but again they felt so stigmatised against. They felt that Asian culture was something embarrassing. It was something that was

> repressive. It was nothing cool about it. It's because I think, our identity really hadn't evolved, for the youth, for second generation Asian kids. [..]. But my generation, when I was 18 and stuff, there wasn't something that we could say was our own culture, as second generation Asians. Something that wasn't the culture of our parents, but was ours.

It didn't exist an Asian identity because the parents' culture was time-warped, as a means of protection against white hostility, Nick explained. At the time of Helena Wulff's fieldwork in South London[90], whites as well as blacks considered black cultural elements as 'more noteworthy' (1988: 32). In 1999, R'n'B, Soul and hip-hop were still the most popular kinds of music among 'mainstream' second generation Asians. The popular comedy character *Ali G*, who is now even shown on Norwegian television, plays on this well-know trend among non-blacks. He dresses in shiny tracksuits and Tommy Hilfiger gear, with slick sunglasses, heavy gold chains and gold rings - all exaggerations of black American popular culture. He asks prominent people in British society rude and ridiculous questions in grammatically incorrect black US patois. Without being stated so directly, a common assumption is that the character played by the Oxford educated British Jewish actor is a stereotype of a British Pakistani who desperately wants to be black.

The way Nick spoke about his and other Asians relationship to 'black culture', it seems like a *post-colonial* strategy to define themselves. The 'white' dominance appears just as a backdrop in his narrative; it was more natural to turn to 'black culture' despite it being more streetwise than the 'middle class Asians' could handle. The main agenda was the self-definition through youth culture: They needed 'cultural expressions' to mark out their identity, which is typical of identity formation within 'subcultures'.

The musician Nitin Sawhney (35) saw the style and music as a means for British Asians to formulate subversive identity in a hostile environment, both as physical 'hardness' as well as points of reference for identity formation.

> Nitin: And they also wanted their own form of music, like in ghettoised areas in Harlem and New York, you know, with the black movement, and Motown and James Brown and all of that kind of music representing what was going on. Even the *Black Panthers*, and so on. There was a kind of similar thing going on in Southall with even Bhangra music, which was just a form of music from the Punjab. It's just one form of folk music. (…) It was only *then* - (…) almost in reaction to this kind of whole skinhead thing and the National Front - that Bhangra music became very popular with Asian people, as a means of identifying themselves

[90] Interestingly, Asian youth are completely absent in Wulff's material. Perhaps they were home doing homework instead of hanging around on a youth club where she carried out her fieldwork.

> quite strongly, - or making strong statement of identity -, against being kind of pushed and oppressed and having a lot of institutionalised racism and all kinds of different racial prejudices against them. So I think it was a reactionary thing.

As Bald puts it; "being British means the right to a voice; the right to 'describe'" (Bald 1995: 84). 'Bhangra' was the first home-grown British Asian style of music. Its rebirth on British soil is closely linked to the need to formulate a post-colonial identity.

> Nick: Bhangra was really developing, I think that was the first. Obviously, music is such an important kind of cultural casket. An expression of cultural identity. So, Bhangra was the first thing for Asian kids that we could say was ours.

Nick theorised about the role music plays in identity formation for young people; for young British Asians in general and for himself. His reflections and self-understanding are permeated by 'knowledge from *abstracts systems*' as Anthony Giddens termed it. Every second generation Asian seems to know how important the appearance of 'Bhangra' was in their struggle to 'formulate' a 'British' identity. And 'Bhangra' really was important in that sense. Sagan, who really could not stand neither Bhangra nor any other 'Asian cultural elements', remembered very well the first time he heard Bhangra on national radio, in mid 1980s. It was even his hero, the well-know radio DJ John Peel who played it on his famous show on BBC Radio 1. 'Why is he playing that rubbish?' Sagan thought, simultaneously as he felt really good about the fact that 'Asian' music was played on national radio, by the great John Peel.

The main issue for Nitin, as well as Nick and the Banerjeas was the way music and style became an instrumental means to an end. In *Dis-Orienting Rhythms* (Sharma et al. 1996), "Bhangra" got this functional description:

> Bhangra [is seen] as an *affirmative movement* in the formation of an Asian identity discourse in the early 1980s, a site for Asian youth culture acquiring a sense of identity and visibility in the public domain, and negotiating an ambivalent position in relation to a culturally hostile and exclusionary British nation (Ibid. 39)

Perspectives from this academic genre (subcultural theory originating in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham) can be criticised for inflating and reducing aesthetic and stylistic preferences to questions of politics and resistance. I claim that it is not only resistance against something – it is also a form of self-assertion; a space where people can formulate a viable identity around cultural elements they find meaningful. Many people have analysed 'Bhangra' in such a project (e.g. Back 1996), however, the music had soon played its role for a lot of people.

> Modernized Bhangra of the 1980s filled a demand amongst Br-Asians, enabling them to enjoy a musical genre that was at once modern yet different from mainstream pop in such a way as to express their transmuted identity in innovative ways. However, although initially the Bhangra scene allowed for a Br-Asian identification particular to Britain, by the end of the decade the centrality of Bhangra to this formation began to subside. [..]. [L]inguistic barriers and lack of 'socially meaningful' lyrics began to surface. In addition, there was ambivalence towards the distorted an essentialist view that Asian youth have some kind of 'natural' affiliation towards Bhangra (Sharma et al. 1996: 225-6).

None of the (non-representative) British Asians I met liked Bhangra. 'After serving its purpose and making a statement', Nitin said, 'it was itself turned into a stereotype', - and stereotypes are limiting in themselves. For various reasons Bhangra was not enough for the people I met.

> Nick: Bhangra really developed. But again, it was very mainstream. And subsequently over the years, there has been a minority of second generation Asians kids, who has deviated from things like the Bhangra scene, for whatever reasons. I think a lot of these kids are people who have half a brain. People who have the capacity to, evaluate their… 'hold on, we've lived over here, this is where we should, we're Asian, trying to find a happy medium'. And there is a lot of mainstream Asians, they just stuck to their own. They haven't assimilated. They haven't *had* to evaluate their cultural identity. They kind of always closed their eyes to the fact that they live in the UK. There is a kind of minority of the Asian, 2nd generation Asian kids, who have evaluated, who have stepped back, and said hold on, were do we find a happy medium.

The development of what Les Back describes as "an autonomous alternative public sphere for young Asians" (Back 1996: 220), Nick saw as limiting. He wanted to move beyond the ethnic enclave and 'Bhangra' never crossed over to a non-Asian audience. We have now reached the next stage of the formulation of a 2nd generation British Asian identity which emphasised even stronger that "being British means the right to a voice; the right to 'describe'" (Bald 1995: 84). Until now we have seen how British Asians resisted racist abuse in physical and psychological form, how they escaped the imperative, negative 'Asian' *subject position* through putting up a 'hard but despicable' 'black' act, and later the formulation of the British Asian Bhangra muffin. Now, it is time to move beyond the ethnic boundaries, - but first, a discussion on the importance of representations. The 'right to describe' is closely linked to representations.

The importance of being represented

From the second chapter, we remember the stereotypes and racist prejudices that met Meera Syal's Meena and the young Hanif Kureishi at school. Another important interface between an ethnic enclave with circumscribed right to define reality and the prejudice majority's unchallenged truths, was television.

> Television comics used Pakistanis as the butt of their humour. Their jokes were highly political: they contributed to a way of seeing the world. The enjoyed reduction of racial hatred to a joke did two things: it expressed a collective view (which was sanctioned by its being on the BBC), and it was a celebration of contempt in millions of living rooms in England. I was afraid to watch TV because of it; it was too embarrassing, too degrading (Kureishi1986: 12).

Television contributes to a racist way of seeing the world, Kureishi said. He feared the representations it promoted, from 'within' – it influenced his way of seeing himself - as well as 'outwardly' – other people's views of Asians. I will call the first 'the importance of role-models' and the second, 'breaking stereotypes'. Both perspectives are important in people's narratives, but I will try to disentangle them. First, we take a look at the issue of rolemodels.

My flatmate Sagan was very concerned about the role of television. As he said, "TV is the key item in our culture. We're the first generation where everyone's brought up by three parents." (Another opportunity to dissociate himself from his Pakistani parents.) You can learn things from TV, but you experience the officially recognised order of things indirectly as well, as Kureishi mentioned. Sagan told about his childhood in Bradford only if I forced him to, but TV was a different case. I had to interrupt him in his passionate speech about American superheroes always helping other people in order to get some 'ethnically relevant data'. However, he remembered clearly when the first Asians appeared on TV.

> T: There were Asian characters. It could have been the early Eighties, but Seventies as well. But there were not programs you'd want to see. They were all extremely simplistic, it was all very juvenile. It was the first time TV was exploring… I guess the culture was exploring these issues of multiculturalism. [..]. *Mind your language* is a good example. It was a further education college. This was incredibly bad. And they had every single racial stereotype you could imagine. [..]. There was a Chinese guy, there was a Spanish guy, and a Pakistani woman. An African guy. A French girl. And each one was the pure stereotype. It is a very famous English program.
>
> C: Were there any English person there?
>
> T: The teacher, yeah. Mister Brown, he was called.

'A hidden agenda' shines through in these representations. Even when trying to deal with multiculturalism, the hierarchy and institutionalised racism is put across to the viewers.

> C: Tell me about when the ordinary Asians started appearing on TV.
>
> T: The only reason why it *was* significant was that… There was always people, especially the older Asian people, you don't really belong in this country etceteras, etceteras. That always made me mad, because I though; that's so stupid. Nobody I knew talked like that, apart from them. Especially not my teachers at school. It was never an issue. It was only an issue with them. And I guess at some level you began to worry about that. When it became obvious, when the establishment itself, by the TV, making an effort to depict

> Asians as ordinary citizens in society, it was just extra confirmation that you were dealing with reasonable, civilised people. It was nice to see.

Typically of Sagan's worldview, he saw the establishment, particularly teachers, as benevolent and helping. To him, it was the 'Asian community', here represented by the 'older Asians', that represented the constraints (this is not an uncommon view, Sagan is however highly biased). At the same time, he acknowledged the importance of being recognised on an official level – the collective view sanctioned officially, as Kureishi put it. Now, there are quite a few Asian and black news presenters on British television[91]. It was important for Sagan to stress the good intentions present in the British State. It was perhaps a way for him to emphasise that he was accepted. However, he even remembered the name of the first Asian news presenter.

'Representation' is a key word to understand Meena, Hanif Kureishi and Sagan's experiences. It has become a standard element in British Asians' narratives of themselves. 'There were no Asians on TV', which meant that there were no rolemodels, and also that the stereotypes of Asians being shopkeepers, or 'lawyers, doctors and accountants' were being kept alive.

To understand the significance of representation as rolemodel, I return to Zygmunt Bauman's notion of 'age of universal comparison'. When class identity is no longer available, people have to build their life-project on an individual basis. They do so by *imitating* other individuals (Bauman 2000: 30). Bauman ties this to Thomas Mathiesen's suggestion that we have moved from a 'pan-optical' to 'synoptical style society'. This is of course connected to Foucault's embodying 'governmentality'. Instead of being classified, and surveilled from outside, the categories are ingrained in us and we keep ourselves checked, through comparing and copying. "Leadership has been replaced by the spectacle, and surveillance by seduction," Bauman writes (Ibid. p.155). He explains the every-growing interest in soap-operas and 'reality TV' as part of this (Ibid. p. 66). If brown faces are first defined by their brown face, second, excluded from 'the normal order of things', they will have no 'role-models' to take example from.

'Rolemodels' are the 'inward' use of representations, the 'outward' is the breaking of stereotypes, which also play an important role in British Asians' life. Nitin Sawhney is concerned about that aspect.

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[91] E.g., the renowned journalist who made the famous interview with Princess Diana where she talked about her personal problems of all kinds was British Asian. Perhaps the most well-known news anchorperson is the black Trevor McDonald.

> Nitin: There were no Asian people in the media. The only person who actually ever, in the 80s, had a hit was Sheila Chandra with *Monsoon*, and she had a hit with a track called *ever so lonely*. And the thing about that track, was that it was kind of exotic. It appealed to people in a very stereotypical way. You know, if you look at any programs that involved Asians, you had programs like *It ain't 'alf hot mum* and *mind your language*, or *till death do us apart*, which refer to Asian people in a very tokenistic way. Very patronising, always make Asian people the butt of the joke. You know, Asian people are there to be laughed at. Or victimised, or whatever.

So many people mentioned programmes. They have become 'verbal icons'.

> And this was actually the atmosphere that still was in existence. So, right till the end of the 80s, this was definitely the atmosphere in England. And if I phoned up a record company, basically, they would assume that I was a Bhangra artist, if I had an Indian name. And there was no concepts that Asian people could have any kind of diversity to them, that they could be as much in touch with anything else around them as *anybody* is. There was *no* notion like this at all. And it really took a long time.

Again, the only representations that were available of Asian people were either exotic and tokenistic or very limited, like the 'Bhangra' stereotype. It was clear that Asians were still imperatively and restrainingly determined by their ethnicity. Nitin Sawhney wrote the first episodes of *Goodness Gracious Me* with a friend.

> And one of the things we were doing was, we didn't see any Asians comedy that was coming from an Asian perspective in England. So we formed this comedy duo. And *that* was about breaking those stereotypes, as well. So it was kind of like everything that I was doing at that time, you know, round the end of the 80s, early 90s, was kind of around, trying to redress the balance. I though everything in society was very out of balance in terms of perceptions of British-Asian people. Now, in a way, I kind of got that out of my system, largely. And what's happened is that I think I've made that statement and lot of people have now made that statement.

The answer for Nitin was to try to do something about the stereotypes, himself. As we remember, for second generation, "being British means the right to a voice; the right to 'describe'" (Bald 1995: 84).

2nd generationism

Hanif Kureishi in 1986:

> 'My country' isn't a notion that comes easily. It is still difficult to answer the question, where do you come from? I have never wanted to identify with England. When Enoch Powell spoke for England I turned away in final disgust. I would rather walk naked down the street than stand up for the National Anthem. The pain from that period of my life, in the mid-1960s, is with me still. (Kureishi 1986: 35).

The editor of *2nd Generation Magazine* in 1996:

> The Union Jack is making it's biggest fashion return since the sixties. [..]. I love and hate this potent symbol with a passion. As a child growing up in the seventies the flag was the calling card of the skinhead. A sign to

> unite Britain's white trash and to scare the shit out of me and my friends. For me the flag of the early eighties became ever more entwined with right wing politics and Thatcherism. The Union Jack was the symbol of a Britain that I did not recognise. However by 1989 I began to realise that this country, however fucked up, was home and the Union Jack a symbol of national pride. I began to see the positive aspect of British culture. When *2nd Generation* was formed we decided to use the Union jack as a symbol of our pride. Being British. [..] I'm as proud to be British as any fat Tory MP and proud of our culture and our energy. I am proud of the Britain that produces Bands like Earth Tribe, that plays White Town to No1 without care for the colour of his skin, the Britain that votes curry its favourite food. [..]. Our Britain is not the suburb of Surrey, or a quiet leafy lane in Yorkshire but the chaos and funk of the Inner City. The Britain I really love is meeting in Whitechapel kebab houses, talking dubplates in Brixton record shops. (Imran Khan, editor of *2nd Generation Magazine*, April 1997).

On the front page of the first 4 issues of *2nd Generation Magazine* (Asian Dub Foundation refused to use it, on the 5th) they printed a dark-skinned person with Union Jack on their tee-shirt or as a (fake) tattoo in order to make a statement: We belong here, and this national symbol belong to us. When black British athletes use the Union Jack when they celebrate international victories, they make the same claim.

There are a handful of beacons in the 5 years this branch of 2nd generation British Asian identity politics has been around, in addition to *2nd Generation Magazine*. Nitin Sawhney is a beacon all by himself, initiating *Goodness, Gracious Me* besides making four renowned records, released by the record label *Outcaste*[92].

Jitin, the music editor, saw the need for proper representation as a reason for joining *2nd Generation*. Many English people still saw Asians as shopkeepers, he said, but "2nd generation people can do what the fuck we like. And we do." They are as "much in touch with anything else around them as *anybody* is," as Nitin said above. This should be represented, so that people's preconceptions can change. Thus, Jitin's agenda was to show both Asians and others that Asians are 'just like everyone else'. It is not an *ethno-political* quest, advancing unique interests and demanding special rights for 'Asians'. *2nd Generation Magazine* was not a magazine exclusively for Asians, which was also consciously expressed through the music they featured, Jitin stated.

I don't know how the 'majority' of British Asians see themselves, or whether such a 'majority' exists at all. However, for my informants - whether they could be described as belonging to the '2nd generation disparate movement' or not - the 'mainstream Asians' had

[92] Nation Records, which hosts for instance Fun^Da^Mental, Transglobal Underground and Natacha Atlas, is at least as groundbreaking and important as *Outcaste*, but some delimitation is required.

become the most prominent 'Other'. Most people I spoke to agreed on two accusations: 'They' "just stuck to their own" and 'they' "closed their eyes to the fact that they live in the UK," to quote Nick.

We have now moved overt to the 'the movement's' 'inward' agenda: *take on board that you are British*. The record company *Outcaste*[93], was founded on this agenda. When I asked Shabs why Britain needed a company promoting 'cutting edge British Asian music', he was very concerned about the need to promote a certain kind of identity, - which he was exhibiting excellently personally.

> C: Why did you start Outcaste?
>
> S: I wanted to feel positive about the culture - *my* culture - about my people in the UK. It wasn't just the identity of my parents, but with an identity I felt happy with, and the only way I knew who I was. As a DJ and music journalist working around black music for many years, I wanted to create something that was my *own*. I wanted to walk into clubs were I felt culturally … that *I* was, that I felt positive. I wanted to be proud, but proud in a new way. It's a two-way thing: one, you feel let down, because society is not taking any notice of you. Then you feel encouraged because you're doing well; you're doing well because you've added something new to society. That's enjoyable.

Again, we see the paradigm of self-expression and the creation of a space. It is however not a simple question of resistance to white suppression, neither the hooking on to a diasporic 'south Asian' identity. The notion of 'newness' is significant. The aim is not to root the identity in a tradition, as Paul Gilroy wrote concerning blacks in Britain in 1987, neither in a diaspora, as he wrote in 1993. How is this identity expressing itself? Shabs talked about the newly gained second generation 'habitus'.

> The changes are basically based on the fact that people are confident, people want to be involved, they want to feel proud, too. … to get that language of confidence, - which is everything from how to speak, how to behave, what music they are making, and how they hold themselves. Holding themselves with more esteem, with more courage, and that's a very important thing, very important.

We see that the 'inward' aim – to gain self-esteem – is important. But what is it that they want to promote?

> C: What is the "Asian-ness" of the artists, what have they got in common?
>
> S: I believe, - if there is such a word as Asian-ness -, that it is a spirit, and a feeling, and also our lifestyle and an attitude; we belong here, we belong here for different reasons now than our parents did, and that's what binds us together. We belong and we're gonna to find a new sense of belonging in this country. [..]. it's about finding a new identity. You know, fusion is an over-used term. And it is not about that. Two things together

> so one and one make two. Fusion is that on and one make two. One and one should make three. That's gonna be the case. You want to add something new.

There is apparently not an essence in the identity *Outcaste* tries to promote, except that it should be different, it should be grounded in Britain and it should be held with self-esteem. I shall now continue to explore the content of *2nd generationism*.

Since Avtar Brah's 1970s and Koushik and Partha Banerjea's 1980s, the stereotypes have changed profoundly. Shabs stressed agency; - what the British-Asians can do themselves, to get away from the "odour, passivity, squareness, weakness and weirdness" (Sharma et al. 1996: 113) or cornershop stereotype Jitin referred to, and create a new identity. This echoes the 'social and political construction' and the 'elaborate ideological work' it takes to re-construct a 'racialization', which Gilroy wrote about.

> Nitin: I think it's time, in a lot of ways, to move on from that statement and now that we have made it very clear that we perceive ourselves – and other people now perceive us – as part of mainstream society. What have we got to say? And I think, you know, the whole concept now is much more about integration, rather than statements of identity. And I think that's about changing perceptions of society as being kind of racist to being pluralistic and eclectic, diverse, you know. And that's the whole way things have evolved.

This is the same acknowledgement *2nd Generation Magazine* is built on. This is the editorial in the first issue, published September 1996.

> [W]e began to realise that there is no homogenous Asian culture for us to tap in to. There is, however a rich Second generation culture; [..] of people who have been raised in Britain's Crosscultural society.

The staff came from all the big ethnic groups in Britain. The music they feature could would from any category only it was creative, as Jitin said. "All we're tryin'n' do is just cover everything that had displaced roots. We were covering a totally different aspect of British culture, a modern, futuristic approach." They made a conscious effort to have models of all colours, usually two different together in the same reportage and on the cover, in order to provide rolemodels and promote non-white models. They wrote about current social, political and arts issues.

> We are a multicultural society, not a multitude of cultures living distinct and separately from each other. We influence each other: our language is peppered with terms from Pakistan, Jamaica and India. [..]. The most exiting music made today comes soaked in Tablas, in Dub Reggae and in Hip-Hop beats. From the food we eat to the clothes we wear, it is all influenced by our cross cultural society. But pick up most magazines in any

[93] See www.outcaste.com for more information.

> given months, and will you see an accurate reflection of this culture? 2nd generation is your magazine, a magazine to document and inspire Second Generation youth.

The representation agenda: - break stereotypes – is clear. Britain is 'multicultural' – or what I have termed *cosmopolitan* and that is how it should be acknowledged.

> This isn't some political correct hippy shite about the global village, we have no truck with cod spiritualism and discovering "the East, man". [..] We are a youth that is redefining our values and reinterpreting what it is to be British. We are not British Asian. We are not British Caribbean. We are not British caucasians. We are Second Generation. [..] We gotta make our own mark. It is with our generation that rests the future. The rest of the ghettoised media (and that means you, Eastern Eye, Asian Times, The Voice) perpetuate more stereotypes than they actually destroy with their spice masala headlines and their boring editorials on "being Asian". I've been Asian for twenty five years and I still don't know what it its! (Imran Khan[94], publisher, issue #1, September 1996).

We recognise the clear agenda against ethno-politics, and the multicultural boundedness. It is however also a clear agenda against issues like stereotyping and discrimination. The magazine continued to front both issues.

This creative outpour by *2nd Generation*, *Outcaste* and a couple of other record companies, *Goodness, Gracious Me*, Hanif Kureishi's literature, the musician Talvin Singh and his club *Anokha* has taken part in redefining what it means to be Asian in Britain. During the 1980s, politically concerned non-white people called themselves 'black' as a sign of the struggle they shared against discrimination. E.g. Aisha said she used to describe herself as black, but not anymore.

> The function has served its purpose now. [..]. Asian is now a category. In the way that black was, maybe in the 80s, not just politically speaking, but culturally and socially. You have black music and black style, now it's Asian style or Asian music. It's quite a recent thing. [..]. I think before that, when 'Asian' was mentioned in the 80s, it was more problematised. I think it's a little bit more positive representation of Asian people in the last few years. Just in terms of the make up of British culture. There is now recognition that Asian people are part of that culture [..] Particularly, I think, in the 90s, early 90s, mid 90s, this thing on this 'Cool Britannia'. There seem to be a celebration of plurality of British culture. Particularly in London.

All British Asians I spoke had noticed and were affected by the changes that had taken place.

Nitin Sawhney said that people had made the statement of assessing their identity as British Asians now. It was time to move on.

> I think when I was very young I was always identifying as being, having to be very Asian or Indian in my family home and very western kind of with a lot of white people basically at school. And I was having to fit

[94] Not to be confused with the cricket player, nor the solicitor for Stephen Lawrence's parents with the same name.

> into one or the other, but never both at the same time. So it actually led to quite an ambivalent way of looking at culture, whereas with music I was developing in all different ways. So I think it's actually taken long time for my personality in a way to catch up with my musical background. Because my musical background was very diverse.

Classical Indian as well as jazz and flamenco influenced Sawhney's music. Flamenco early became important to him because it was "the first form [of music] that used the extended time cycles of Indian classical music, but also mixed together with western classical music and jazz in terms of harmony." Flamenco wasn't 'tokenistic' towards either the eastern or the western elements, unlike most other so-called 'fusion'.

> I think like everyone else I became caught up in these preconceptions of what people expect. You know, that you have to call yourself either Indian or English or whatever, and that actually constricts people's ability to actually learn and absorb what's around them. [..] This album, *Beyond Skin* is actually about realisation of the fact that I don't feel the need any longer to belong to something to be justified as a person. [..] That you have to fit into preconceptions or preconceived ideas of collectivism, whether it's nationality, race, religion, media stereotyping. All kinds of things. I don't really feel that anymore, but I did that for a long time. [..] Society has become more pluralistic. And it's kind of much easier to accept diversity within mainstream society. And I think that's what I perceive as being the relaxation of [..] or a result of having that kind of freedom, of getting away from these preconceived concepts, really[95].

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[95] Nitin Sawhney's new understanding of identity as freed from limiting categories reminds me of a very beautiful paragraph in Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath her Feet*. Many people seem to be attempting to free themselves from the "individualization which is linked to the state." And they are promoting "new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries" ad Foucault writes (1982: 216). I can see evidence of it in the way people are relating to 'diaspora' as well as the nation they are born in, however there is not enough room to include it here. However, I include a quote from Rushdie's book in order to show the similarity to Nitin Sawhney: "For a long while I have believed [..] that in every generation there are a few souls, call them lucky or cursed, who are simply *born not belonging*, who come into the world semi-detached, if you like, without strong affiliations to family or location or nation or race; that there may even be millions, billions of such souls, as many non-belongers as belongers, perhaps; that, in sum, the phenomenon may be as 'natural' a manifestation of human nature as its opposite, but one that has been mostly frustrated, throughout human history, by lack of opportunity. And not only by that: for those who value stability, who fear transience, uncertainty, change, have erected a powerful system of stigmas and taboos against rootlessness, that disruptive, anti-social force, so that we mostly conform, we pretend to be motivated by loyalties and solidarities we do not really feel, we hide our secret identities beneath the false skins of those identities which bear the belongers' seal of approval. But the truth leaks out in our dreams; alone in our beds [..], we soar, we fly, we flee. And in the waking dreams our society permit, in our myths, our arts, our songs, we celebrate the non-belongers, the different ones, the outlaws, the freaks. [..] [I]f we did not recognize in them our least-fulfilled needs, we would not invent them over and over again, in every place, in every language, in every time. Not sooner did we have ships than we rushed to sea., sailing across oceans in paper boats. No sooner did we have cars than we hit the road. No sooner did we have airplanes than we zoomed to the furthest corners of the globe. Now we yearn for the moon's dark side, the rocky plains of Mars, the rings of Saturn, the interstellar deeps. We send mechanical photographers into orbit, or on one-way journeys to the stars, and we weep at the wonders they transmit; we are humbled by that mighty images of far-off galaxies standing like cloud pillars in the sky, and we give names to alien rocks, as if they were our pets. We hunger for warp space, for the outlying rim of time. And this is the species that kids itself it likes to stay at home, to bind itself with - what are they called again? - *ties*." (Rushdie 1999: 72-3).

From 'in-between cultures' via 'skilled cultural navigators' to where?

'Asianness' is becoming an acceptable part of Britishness. This discursive shift is of course of fundamental importance in the research on second generation youth, and I claim it makes way for a new paradigm. It is time to present the foregoing.

> Ani: I had this white middle class friend – I used to play tennis with her every Sunday – from a completely different world. She's been to private school; I was at comprehensive. Her father was loaded; I'm from working class Southall. Very very very different. I remember her asking me if I was gonna live away from home when I go to university. [..]. She said, whatever you do, don't go back home every weekend. You've got to assert your independence. You've got to show that you can survive away from home-type of thing. And I remember, the first weekend away on university I went home. Because, that's what I have to do. To fulfil my duty obligation thing. [..]. Anyway, I keep coming and going, keep coming and going. Then I stared to get really freaked out. I had no idea why.
>
> We used to have this phrase called in-between cultures. [..] And I think I read so much about that, that I thought that was me. It's like, I believed it! By the end of it, I just thought, hold on, I'm not confused. I'm not fucked up. It's just me trying to reconcile my true existence. Yes, I'm still questing for that balance, but I know what's necessary and I feel a lot more conformable with it now.
>
> That's really good, because in academia, there has been that shift away from that. You know, we were being analysed as in-betweeners. But now, it's very much like no, we can take on our dual heritages, we can take on our dual identity, assert them and be proud of them. In fact, we've reclaimed such positions. We're strong, we're positive. And that brought that whole creative outpour about as well. It's not about being fucked up any more (Ani, 25 years, writer from Southall)

This anecdote illustrates perfectly how sociological knowledge seeps into people's experience of self. Ani's self-understanding was shaped by such knowledge, which described 'her situation'. Funnily, the term 'in-between cultures' that became so influential for teachers, social workers and youth workers never had any empirical base, according to Roger Ballard.

> It is [..] most unfortunate that an earlier and extremely influential compendium on the minority presence in Britain, James Watson's *Between Two Cultures* [..], used this phrase in its title. The term therefore appeared to have been given academic and analytical credence, even though none of the contributors to that volume made any further use of it (Ballard 1996: 30).

Ballard claims that when linguists have proved that bi-or multi-lingualism is not a cause for psychological confusion for individuals, neither should multiculturalism. He proposes 'skilled

cultural navigators' as a more fitting term and perceives it as a kind of 'code switching[96]' between various contexts (Ibid. p. 31). This understanding has gained influence recently in academic discourse as well as among second generation people themselves. Zamil – youth worker with a BA in psychology and an MA in social work – described himself like this:

> [D]epending on where I wanna go, [..] I have to be different people, all the time. I can never - what is myself? When I say to you; I'm being myself, that can be four or five different people. For if I'm out with my parents, and I'm going to another family's house, I have to be in a certain way, I have to behave a certain way. And those codes are given to me; this is how you should be, this is how you have to behave. There are certain roles I have to adopt[97] , as the oldest son in the family, the way that I have been brought up. So when I go to my friends, I'm a completely different person. When I'm at university, I'm a completely different person. (his father and mother and some guests enter and he speaks Bengali). So when I'm at my job, I'm completely seen as a professional, independent person. And those other parts of me, I've just left. So in my daily life I can be 4 or 5 different people. And fill 4-5 different roles.

Zamil's point is poignantly illustrated by frequent interruptions by his mother and some friends of the family, in Bengali – who he answers politely (it sounds) in Bengali – and phone calls from his friends who he communicates with more lightly in English.

In 'Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture', Ulf Hannerz (1990) describes cosmopolitans similar to skilled cultural navigators. "[C]osmopolitanism is a perspective, [..] a mode of managing meaning," he writes (Ibid. p. 238).

> [It] includes a stance toward diversity itself, toward the coexistence of cultures in the individual experience [..], a willingness to engage with the Other. At the same time, however, cosmopolitanism can be a matter of competence, and competence of both a generalized and a more specialized kind. There is the aspect of a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures (Ibid. p. 239).

I find this description very accurate in relation to the British Asians I met. Time and again I heard statements like 'I want to live somewhere more culturally diverse than the suburbs' (Nick); 'I've always had a mixed group of friends' (all of them, except Raminder). E.g. Yasemin (21 years), commented on this issue often and in various situations. She knew fewer Bengalis than her brothers and had always been together with people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. In the interview, this is what she said about a Muslim girl she just had said she admired because she was wearing the hijab (Yasemin wanted to become (more) practising.)

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[96] Code switching is a term borrowed from linguistics. It means to change from one language, dialect or sociolect to another.

[97] Note the passivity. He seems to be influenced by his studies.

> I said, don't you find it important to be around a mixture of people? And she goes; I find all the fulfilment I need being around Muslim people, so I don't really need. And I said, why, I just don't understand that. I was just being like, OK. I think it's nice being around Muslims and having conversations about Islam. But it would also be nice to have a conversation about Islam to non Muslim persons. I would find that more challenging, I'd say. She didn't agree with me, so. (Pause). She's Muslim and I'm Muslim. And we work with a catholic woman as well. And the debates we get into get really heated.

However, Hannerz also says the "perspective of the cosmopolitan must entail relationships to a plurality of cultures understood as distinctive entities" (Ibid. p. 239). In terms of my participants, this does not seem to hold true. I will now return to Ballard, and quote his view on 'skilled cultural navigators' in length in order to make my point clear.

> Just because [young British Asians] do not follow a single given set of conventions, all cultural navigators must constantly decide how best to behave in any give context, while also finding some means of switching smoothly from one to the next. [..]. Cultures, like languages, are *codes*, which actors use to express themselves in a given context; and as the context changes, so do those with the requisite competence simply switch code. [..] But problems may arise when one is *known* to have switched codes, and where behaviour in the second arena takes a form which is regarded as unacceptable from the perspective of the first. [..]. Hence if one can keep all the arenas in which one is an actor apart, so that information does not flow inappropriately and unexpectedly from one to the next, no problems will arise. When difficulties does occur, they are more likely to be a result of unexpected information leakage than of code-switching in itself (Ballard 1996: 31-2).

Certainly, the strategy of 'code-switching' is an not a new phenomenon in anthropological literature. In anthropology, context has always been important in order to understand the meaning of acts and event. A person plays out various roles in various situations. E.g. Fredrik Barth shows how role-dilemmas of authority within the extended family (between father-son and wife-husband) is solved through spatially separating the different relationships (Barth 1971). It is for sure an important aspect in many, particularly young people's lives. I fully endorse the view that people play out different and often inconsistent sides of their identity (or roles as Barth and Goffman term it) on different arenas. However, from the empirical material I present, my aim is to show that there is a strong urge to reconcile the major discrepancies in most people's life, - just like Ani concluded. When it comes to e.g. playing out roles of different levels of authority, as Zamil mentioned, I totally agree with Zamil and Roger Ballard. However, I hardly think Zamil will see his roles as belonging to '*distinct* cultural entities' (neither would the Middle Eastern sons in Barth's article).

Ani on the other hand, had profounder topics in mind, e.g. the question of independence versus family loyalties. As we shall see later, she saw some of values as belonging to different

cultures. She said "my Punjabi culture and my British culture", just like some of the boys at SOAS saw themselves as composites of various British and Asian values - *but*, as we saw above, they were determined to find a middle ground.

In my view, Ballard himself provides a key to the dispute about the distinctness of the arenas or cultures. He makes a point of that code-switching to a larger degree takes place among members of excluded and devaluated groups (Ballard 1996:31). People in a 'minority situation', as Barth writes, are forced to interact 'within the framework of the dominant' (Barth 1969: 31). Dilemmas of code-switching occurs not because 'the value-premises' are different, "but rather because each side has such a markedly negative perception of the other (Ballard 1996: 32).

Nick illustrates the recognition of Asian cultural elements when he talked about his passion for kitchy Indian cinema.

> I've always really been into popular Indian cinema. Intellectually it's quite depleting. For a long time I felt really… I hated admitting it, for my Asian counterparts oh, my god, he's watching the Indian stuff. They were ashamed of Indian cinema. I've always loved it [..]. It's funny, because a friend of mine – she's very white middle class; she has studied at SOAS – she's into Indian cinema. Because of her status – [..] this eccentric taste, interest, in Indian cinema – she can afford to have it, because of her class, or whatever. It's really wacky, it's kitsch and glam. She can actually look at it from outside [..], whereas I can't look at it objectively because it's always in a part of me, part of my character, since I was a little kid. I learnt how to speak Hindi. I was watching these Hindi films since I was a child. [..] I told people that I've always been so ashamed to be into Indian films, and now all of a sudden it's kitsch it's trendy.

In this quote, Nick asserted a claim to 'authenticity' in the emerging trend of Indian Cinema, through referring to the earlier stigma and fear of exclusion attached to childhood memories. Because of his background, he was not jumping on a trendy bandwagon. Now, childhood memories like this have become familiar 'verbal icons' in 2nd generation British-Asian narratives, particularly in relation to the 'Asian Underground' trend in music. The narrative goes that most British Asians used to listen to Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan or Hindi filmi music in their childhood, at the same time as they listened to pop or rock. Hence, it has always been *natural* for them to *fuse* cultural elements. This verbal icon is present in practically every interview with British Asian artists in the media, and I heard it from many of my informants, particularly those involved in the 2nd generation music scene. Their music is a 'fusion', and its authenticity hinges on icons like that.

The *verbal icons* of Bollywood, Quwalli, etc. have become cultural capital in trendy parts of British society. This in itself is very important for a stigmatised category like the 'Asians'. On the other hand, it has an aesthetic and experiential aspect as well; It is important for the transmission and reproduction of South Asian cultural elements like Hindi – Nick actually learnt a language through watching these films – which is a value in itself. And of course it has a great value to feel free to enjoy the music.

The negative perceptions – the dichotomisations – Ballard saw as the reason behind code-switching are being challenged among many people now. As I have delineated above, the political climate in Britain has become ready for a pluralisation – a cosmopolisation – of public life. Not surprisingly, this happens at the same time as a vocal 2nd generation culture makes its mark. The British second generation are not 'immigrants[98]' as they are in France or Norway. It is more like a *new* generation of Britons, like Helena Wulff wrote from her fieldwork among black and white teenagers in South London in the early 1980s; It is a *new* generation of Britons growing up *together* in new cosmopolitan society (Wulff 1988: 6).

From the same period, Dick Hebdige as well testifies of the ethnogenesis of a cosmopolitan second generation in the heart of the post-colonial world.

> The British Empire has folded in upon itself. And as the pressure in the cities has mounted, the old national culture and national identity have stared cracking at the seams. [..]. There is an army of in-betweens and neither-nors out there who feel they belong to no given community. They realise that any community they might belong to in the future will have to be *made by them* or it won't get made at all. In some parts of Britain, West Indian patois has become *the* public language of inner-city youth, irrespective of racial their racial origin (Hebdige 1987: 158).

Ali Rattansi pursues this idea of a new British community created by 'in-betweens and neither-nors'. He refers to the ethnography of Les Back and Roger Hewitt, which shows that the "new linguistic forms should be seen not as a mixing of heritages, but as the creation of a potential new heritage" (Rattansi 2000: 127).

> [I]n their intertwining with syncretic musical and other expressive cultures these linguistic styles are undoubtedly giving birth to genuinely new ways of being black/Asian/British which, in some locales at least, is going to have a profound significance for what 'Britishness' is going to mean, from both above and below (Ibid.).

[98] Only *once* have I seen the word 'immigrant' being used to describe a second generation in Britain, in addition to Helena Wulff's quote from 1988 (however, Wulff is Swedish). Neither first generation are described as

Academics from cultural studies have been busy studying the connection between cultural expressions and ways of being British since Stuart Hall edited *Resistance Through Rituals* in 1975. They have been concerned about the political – resistive – side of the process. Anthropology concerns itself with how individuals recreate and reproduce the structures which shape them. My aim is therefore to look at how individuals are shaped and in turn reshape this new community with its new heritages - this new cosmopolitan Britain.

Analysts have already pointed out that music plays a very important role in the new paradigm (see e.g. Ballard 1996: 34; Gardner and Shukur 1996: 160-1). Many have mentioned 'Asian Underground'. In addition to music, films, South Asian-inspired clothes, fabrics and designs have also become fashionable in mainstream British society. Suddenly 'vestiges' of 'Asian culture' have become valuable means for identification. However, more than seeing it only as 'positive marks of difference' (as Rattansi did) – i.e. ethnicity –, I see the 'Asian' resurgence as a means of making it no longer necessary to try to be 'something else', *finally*. You can be 'yourself' - whatever that might be - without being excluded from Britishness.

'immigrants'. 'Immigrants' in Britain today are groups who arrived more recently, like refugees and asylum seekers. Somalis is a typical example.

PART II - THIRD SPACE

INDIVIDUAL ENUCIATIONS

Chapter 5

The ‘Asian Community’

- a discourse on restrictions to individual freedom

> People tell others who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are. (Holland et al. 1998: 3).

> I [wear Asian clothes] when I go to family weddings and other functions. And I actually really *love* Asian clothes. But for me, unfortunately they represent certain uniform… When I was growing up, I was never really pressured to wear those clothes, but you could be sure some of my aunties would say; oh, why don’t you wear a suit at home, and that sort of thing. It would be like -*why?* I’d be happy if they could say; wear it at home ‘cause it’s beautiful, it’s comfortable. But that’s not what it is. It’s more; why don’t you wear a suit at home because you don’t look so westernised. It’s more about *not* looking westernised than looking attractive or looking comfortable. And *that’s* what I rebelled against. I rebelled against wearing Indian suits, because to me that would say again another restraint, another oppressive tactic (Raminder, 28 years).

Narration, consciousness, identity formation and agency

We are now to look at the five discourses I’ve drawn - ‘ambiguous white English society’, ‘Asian common ground’, ‘oppressive Asian community’, ‘changing Asian-ness’ and ‘carving out an individual middle ground’ - from a new angle. Three of the people we meet in this chapter, Aisha, Nick and Raminder, I hardly know. But through two to three hours of long recorded interviews they gave me access to *what they saw as crucial parts in their identity formation*. The interview, as a peculiar form of dialogue, makes possible a certain kind of self-creation through self-narration. How do they see themselves as positioned by the discourses? How do they understand themselves as shaped by them?

Reflexivity and consciousness must necessarily be the focus when I ask people questions about their life. I do not dismiss that identity has embodied, taken-for-granted aspects. I shall look at the way lives are structured in a less conscious manner through embodied cultural values in chapter 8. Here as well we learn about how Ani negotiates with her ‘ingrained values’. In

accordance with Dorothy Holland et al. (1998), I claim that *people's own reflections* on restraints and possibilities surrounding them are at least as interesting as e.g. embodied culture, which has been a popular topic of study in anthropology (e.g. Holland et al. point to Bourdieu's work on identity and habitus). The objectified, or conscious parts of identity are the most interesting, Holland et al. write, because "they are the ones more likely to mediated sustained 'agentive' action" (Ibid. p. 278). Agency - the possibility to affect your own situation - within the unfitting subject positions presented among the group at SOAS, is exactly what we are searching for: The agency to carve out a middle ground for yourself. In this chapter, we shall look at personal accounts of how the subject positions came to be seen as unfitting. In the next two chapters, I will explore possibilities for 'agentive action' within the conscious efforts of shaping and changing an identity.

The concept of identity formation conveys a view of identity as a continuous process. In *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds,* Dorothy Holland et al. (1998) see identity as *self-understanding,* continuously developed on the background of 'available cultural resources' (Holland et al. 1998: 4). The five discourses I have categorised, form important parts of the available cultural resources in this case. Holland et al. describe the process of identity formation as a co-development of a personal world and collective spaces, where identities, discourses, embodiments, and imagined worlds inform and transform each other (Ibid. p. vii). The identity-in-context packages I will present, are in connection to 'first generation representations' like emotions and evaluations in the parental home and the so-called 'community', and within some groups of second generation people. I try to convey (my interpretation of) the informants' *figured worlds* – the worlds they move around in *as interpreted by them* – through their own narrated understanding. The aim is to reach a better understanding of how people, coming from a background shaped by powerful discursive formations, reflect on, and try to understand what has shaped them.

The next step will be to look at how they try to alter its influences and replace undesired elements with other, more chosen ones. In the end, I present their 'middle ground' reconciliations, - which they see as *new* formations, carved out through their struggle.

The discourses and practices I will explore in this chapter are related to the informants' childhood and youth, 'the formative years'. I will look into how they see themselves as having been constituted in the past and, to some extent, how these embodied discourses and practices

continue to shape them. Self-understanding (i.e. identity) is both *of* itself, - as reflection and comprehension -, and *for* itself (Ibid. p. 4), - as a template for ways of being and behaving[99]. Subsequently, it is an *objectification* of 'self' as a person, (as in the dialogical narratives presented here), informed by other people's categories (Holquist 1990: 27), and embodiments of these objectifications, acted out in specific situations (similar to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*).

> The self is a position from which meaning is made, a position that is 'addressed' by and 'answers' others and the 'world' (their physical and cultural environment). In answering (which is the stuff of existence), the self 'authors' the world –including itself and others (Holland et al. 1998: 173).

The position – i.e. 'self' – is what Bakhtin calls *the authoring self*. It occupies, - or *is* -, the interface between

> intimate discourses, inner speaking, and bodily practices formed in the past and the discourses and practices to which people are exposed, willingly or not, in the present. It authors or orchestrates the products of these sites of self. (Ibid. p. 32).

The individual can exercise a modicum of freedom within Bakhtin's *authoring self*. Through the informants' narratives, I hope to catch a glimpse of the past authoring that has taken place in their formative teenage years, and which have become crucial points of reference in the persons' self-understanding, – *identity*. Holland et al. state that the "'sites of the self', the loci of self-production or self-process, are recognized as plural" (Ibid. p. 28). Hence, "people are exposed to competing and differentially powerful and authoritative discourses and practices of the self." (Ibid. p. 29). The main topic in the narratives of this chapter is their struggle to make space in a middle ground, between the various discourses and practices. The loci explored in these parts of their life-story will therefore be situated in relation to this middle ground; they are related to ethnicity and subcultural affiliation. It should be said that *other*, – as fundamental –, aspects of their identity formation – e.g. in relation to their profession – would take place on other loci[100].

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[99] This view of identity resembles Clifford Geertz' phenomenological interpretation of religion as a cultural system (Geertz 1973: Ch. 4). "In religious belief and practice a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life." (Geertz 1973: 89-90). Holland et al.'s identity-in-context package deviates however on the important point of omnipresence: a figured world is open-ended and partial.

[100] This is a very important point, which is poignantly demonstrated by my flatmate and informant Sagan. In daily interaction with him for a year, on various different arenas, I only experienced a handful of times where *ethnic background* became relevant. However, funnily, it was still a major factor in the conversations I 'forced' upon him when I needed information for my thesis.

Nick situating himself - exemplifying positioning and analysis

I met up with Nick outside the Whitechapel Art Gallery, in East London. A long, black cloak wrapped around black clothes and a slender body gave a sophisticated and distinct look. The clear-cut features in his face were further emphasised by his shaven head. Walking up Brick Lane, he talked about how the area had changed. A gentrification was taking place. He used to spend a lot of time in Brixton and here, he said, and now white middle class people entered the previously predominantly working class, black or Asian domains. "Sitting in a restaurant in Brick Lane and you see this kind of people, white kids coming in, and they talk to the waiters like they are shit".

By the topic of conversation he chose – the negative effects of gentrification – and the evaluative tone, he quickly positioned himself towards me. When you are going to retell crucial moments of your life to a total stranger, this kind of positioning must be important. I think he wanted or needed to convey to the interlocutor what kind of person he was, and see my reaction. His views on the gentrification of Brick Lane and Brixton signalled a stance against a certain stratum of young, trendy middle class people. First, it signalled that he knew the 'cool' but somewhat 'hardcore' places, second, it signalled that he was different from the people he criticised, which is a stratum found in most modern cities. In e.g. Oslo (which I know better than London), they are located in the so-called local 'Greenwich Village' – Grünerløkka. His stance is interesting, because as a media student in an east London university, and dressed in this specific manner, he could easily be taken as 'arty, middle class' himself, - as is the case with many of the people criticising the gentrification of Grünerløkka. Nick's claim to 'authenticity' – *deep* and *real* adherence to a certain style[101] - could perhaps be that he was not white. More likely, it is a claim based on 'being different'. 'Individuality' is one of the overriding themes in the present people's self-understanding: They continuously contrast themselves to 'the mainstream'. Hence, their claims were usually forwarded on an individual basis, saying, 'I, as an *individual*, is really what I claim to be, because of certain *individual* characteristics'.

Through his successful positioning, Nick came across as 'cool' – hanging out in Brixton and Brick Lane – but not a 'fashion victim' without integrity, jumping the bandwagon, – he had

[101] A famous analysis of this is found in Erving Goffman's chapter on 'Performances' in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* ([1959]).

objections to the gentrification making the places ‘safe’, but still ‘exotic and exciting’. Hence, Nick came across as an awake, liberal, political correct, ‘alternative’ but also an ‘up-to-date’ middle class aspiring academic/arts person, whom the anthropologist knew how to communicate with. A bond was established, and the interview could begin.

Parents

Throughout the interview with Nick, I posed only a few questions. He spoke lengthy, comprehensively and fluently about his life. The sophisticated impression he conveyed through his clothing was further emphasised by his voice. It was poised and calm, but at the same time firm and forceful. He spoke in a self-assured manner, which – I came to realise – reflected years of contemplation. He was 27 when I met him, and he must have revised certain passages in his life-story over and over again.

> I do come from a very traditional Sikh family. I suppose it’s more my Mum who’s more orthodox. Throughout my schooling years, I remember my social life was going to the temple. All my friends were other Asian kids that I had met in the Sikh temple we used to go to every week. I used to wear a turban. [..] I didn’t really have to evaluate much where was I coming from, what was my identity. I didn’t have to deal with so many dichotomies that I felt I had to deal with when I grew older. Particularly when I went away to study in Manchester when I did my first degree. At that point – because I had been to a predominantly white private school, and then went off to study law in Manchester – it was a real novelty for me to have like all these Asian friends.

In these starting paragraphs, we are introduced to the figured worlds in Nick’s narrative. His mother was a ‘very traditional’ Sikh, and his family used to go to the temple every week. Yet, they were well-to-do, ‘integrated’ and living in a white (initially sceptical) neighbourhood. These *contrasting* influences, - a traditional mother and a more laid-back father, ‘integrated’ in public life but ‘secluded’ in the private sphere, early childhood in the temple, then in a white private school, were not presented as *conflicting.* Presumably, they all constituted the same figured world – let us call it ‘conventional Asian’ – where whites played only a peripheral role and other socio-economically positioned people were non-existent.

> But ultimately I found that it was a bit of a head-fuck for me, because [these Asians] were very mainstream. There were kids like, I found, hadn’t really evolved from their parents’ experiences. They came from very segregated communities. [..] My parents did assimilate fairly well within the host community. Like, my parents worked for the civil service, you know, fluently spoke English.

The dichotomies started at university, manifested as a divergence from the 'Asian mainstream'. He saw this 'Asian mainstream' as different from himself in several respects. They came from a different family *background* – "illiterate in speaking English" signifying less education, i.e. a different class, and 'time warped' tradition – which the second generation had not *evolved* from. I read this 'mainstream conventionalism' as accentuating cultural elements present but mellowed out in his 'integrated' middle class background. Nick did not return to the factor of class background, but the second point – to evolve from your parents – was crucial in his self-understanding. Nick, being gay, came to find the 'un-evolved' 'Asian mainstream' values particularly constraining.

> To be quite honest, the first years of me being in Manchester there were no way that I was going to come out. I wanted to get married, have a family and do the Asian thing, I suppose. I've been brought up to believe that ultimately it's about getting married, procreate and have a family. And that was what my life was going to be about.

I presume that by 'Asian' he meant the traditional and 'natural' order in the unquestioned 'conventional Asian' figured world he stemmed from.

> And I used to go out with girls. And it's weird because I went out with girls half to convince myself that once when I do get married, I will be able to have a sexual relationship with my wife. But having said that, I was kind of… eh… going out 'cottaging', 'cruising', - I don't know if you know what that is? You have like parks or whatever, where gay men go to have sex or whatever, because it's the only way I was going to have any physical encounter with gay men.

There was no space for gay sex in the figured world of neither the first nor the second generation Asians Nick knew. He did not yet know other ways of perceiving the world and leading life outside marriage, procreation and family. A strong dichotomy appeared in his life: gay sex and a 'decent Sikh life'.

> One of these particular cruising grounds was right behind one of the university halls of residence, where I knew a lot of Asian students. And I used to be so scared, I wasn't even so scared about the police, - actually, it's illegal. But I was more scared; 'oh my god, what if I see some Asians…' Because all the Asians, if they didn't know each other personally, they knew each other by face. And I was terrified by that.

'Asian' in this context denotes the whole group of people from the *ethnogenesis*. Here I would say he still used it as a neutral term; it is not *mainstream Asian*, which was negative, neither 2nd generation British Asian, or *like-minded* Asian, used approvingly. At this age in the narrative, he has not yet made the distinction. At this time gay sex was utterly un-reconcilable with the rest of his life. There was no space for it in his identity in the figured world of 'conventional Asians'.

> [W]hen I moved up to Manchester it was a real culture shock to me. It was the first taste of freedom, which I didn't have when I was back at home. And I started drinking alcohol. I started smoking. I was wearing a turban at that time, but I started wearing my hair down, and I was cutting it.

The culture shock at university is another familiar 'verbal icon' in British Asian narratives. We recognise it from the slackers at SOAS, (but also from Hanif Kureishi in *The Black Album*). Many Asian parents have been relatively strict in their upbringing. Too strict, many of my informants seem to think. Riaz (SOAS) used it almost as an explanation or excuse for why he overreacted in terms of smoking cannabis and not studying at all when they left home to study. Shahid told the same story. He returned home to parents and London again after a year, with an ulcer in his stomach and no exams. "I think I overdone the freedom that I got. The fresh air at university. Away from home." When Shahid did a degree in a London university instead, he dissociated himself from the other Asians going 'crazy with freedom'. The people in this chapter were in their late twenties and could be assumed to be more 'mature' and 'grown up' than the SOAS slackers (except Karim, who was 27 and up to 5 years older than his friends): They do no longer experiment 'with freedom' as much as younger people tend to do. Instead, it could be said that they had made these elements an integral part of their life and they would describe or defend it as such, (as Karim's attitude was). Hence, what has happened between late teens and late twenties, is an incorporation of it into a figured world, which feels more like 'their own'. This incorporation is reflected in the analytical and reflexive way Nick talked about the acts that created the culture shock. Nick took the first *public* step beyond the borders of the familiar figured world of his parents when he started drinking and cutting his hair. (A step culminating with a shaven head[102] at the time I met him).

> But, every time I came home to my parents, I'd have to wear my turban, and again got into that world were being a good little Sikh boy. And I was dealing with an immense amount of guilt at that point. It was like everything I did in Manchester was so wrong, it was dirty. You know, having sex with other men, or whatever. So I'd just come home and I couldn't look my Mum in the eye. [..]. I felt dirty, I was gonna taint the house. I felt awkward hugging my Mum, because I was maybe impure, or I had done so wrong. And that was really hard to deal with.

[102] Shaven heads are more unusual in Britain than in Norway, where it has been a 'cool style' throughout the 1990s. Together with the fact that Dr. Martens boots have been completely out of fashion for a decade, my interpretation is that the memory of Nazi skinheads is very strong in Britain. *2nd Generation Magazine* made a fashion reportage about 'reclaiming the Dr. Martens' from its despised position as skinhead symbol, after they had carried out a similar campaign for reclaiming the Union Jack.

The feeling of guilt is important. It alludes to some kind of struggle between inconsistent ways of life. When Nick felt he did not belong to the world of conventional Asian-ness, he tried to find another world. He had found one where there was acceptance for short hair and alcohol, but also prerequisite to go out with girls. Gay sex was not acceptable in this newly discovered figured world of fellow students. This seemed to be at the core of his guilt, more so than the drinking, smoking and cutting of hair. The problem was to come to terms with actions he could not find acceptable, but still carried out. Actions he indeed believed could contaminate the house and his mother.

Nick recollected his narrative so sensibly and fluently that there can be no doubt that he has formulated these issues with himself and others, many times. Years of reflection and conscious attempts to come to terms with the disparate elements shine through in the quotes. Now, he could speak about his struggles without guilt: He justified the clandestine 'cruising', saying this was the only way he could experience gay physical contact at that time, - which he finally did not judge as wrong. They have become an integrated part of the narrative he 'tells himself and others'. His narrative contains some very emotional and evocative elements. Without diminishing his hard struggle, I would presume that the recounting of this struggle is 'rewarding' in terms of 'credibility' and 'integrity'. This 'authentic individuality' and integrity is further emphasised by his shaven head: He is not *playing* 'deviant' from the Sikh community.

As the narrative went on, Nick seemed to feel less shame for doing something sinful, but more and more guilt for deceiving his mother. In the new figured world he got to know in Manchester, going to night-clubs was not a wrong thing to do. He seemed to have integrated this view, and could no longer accept his mother's restrictions.

> We weren't really communicating when she fell ill. She passed away a few months later. But as much as I miss her, I dealt with a big element of relief since she passed away because it let me live my life how I want. This stuff is my own identity, it isn't dictated by my community, it isn't dictated by my Mum. Always since my Mum passed away, I have detached myself from the Asian community, the older Asian community that I was really involved in, until I went to study in Manchester. [..]. I feel, as far as my parents' generation, I have become a bit social deviant. I haven't done what is expected of me, I haven't got my degree yet in one of those very typical Asian kind of professions. [..]. I did a very non-typical degree for an Asian kid, media degree. And I know that a lot of the Asian community don't take that awfully seriously.

He quit his law studies and his parents were 'really, really pissed off' with him, just like they said at SOAS.

Nick escaped the moral dilemma of lying when his mother died; then he was able to live according to values more of his own choosing, to formulate his own identity (within a figured world he felt at home in). When Vandana (30 years old Ph.D. student, married to an English person) encountered a similar ethical dilemma, she chose one set of values over the other, physically expressed through moving out from her mother’s house. It was a shock to her mother, who ‘went into hospital for three days’.

> Vandana: I think I decided that I wanted my own life, that I didn’t want to lie to my mum while I was living in the house. She was paying the mortgage and the bills, I didn’t want to live in deceit. [..]. I started going out with people. [..]. So, I left home. We worked it out, and I’m really lucky. I risked not have any contact with her, I suppose. But my mum’s not judgmental. Both my parents are very able to discuss with us as equals what we wanted.

Vandana seemed to have a choice between lying and moving out, - there was never a question of coming around to her parents’ way of life. She seemed to know how she wanted to live, but there “wasn’t any tension about morality” when she and her sisters lived at home. She used the phrase “we were quite good kids”, - echoing Nick’s good little Sikh boy as well as many other. It is also a stereotype, describing British South Asian children at home doing homework or helping their parents in the cornershop when all the other kids are out having fun or making mischief.

Vandana knew how she wanted to live her life, while Nick and others experienced a “culture shock” moving away from home. Aisha put it even more strongly; moving out changed *her*, not only her life. - And that was exactly why she did it.

Aisha

The first time I met Aisha was outside a university in London, where she was doing her MA in social science. Later, I learnt that she was 29 years old, but she came across as much younger. She was energetic, efficient and, stylish in an ‘alternative’, ‘cool’ way. Her nose was pierced, her curly hair put up in a loose knot, adorned with a pale purple flower, the same colour as her nail-polish. When I met her again for the interview, she was dressed in a dark kilt over black trousers. Her strong cockney accent reinforced the impression of a cool, perhaps streetwise person. While we walked through the town to the café she had chosen for the interview, we talked about the differences between this town and London. She had moved from London 10 years ago, and now she worked here in a social profession. She did not intend to move back to London, rather she would like to buy a house and stay here. She preferred the slower pace, the more laid-back

attitude. She could work less, since she paid much less rent than she would have had to in the capital. She had learnt to appreciate being close to the countryside. In the interview, we returned to the reasons why she had decided to move.

> I could have gone to college in London; [..] I just really wanted to get out of London. I wanted to leave home. I wanted to get away and be somewhere different. And in a way, it's nice being somewhere that is so white as [this town], 'cause I knew that there aren't anyone who can recognise me from London. I'll never see any of my relatives or family. [..] Yea, I just really loved coming [here]. It was really nice to be able to feel free and be able to do what I wanted. Have a distance. I sort of grew up here, in a lot of ways. I didn't really have a social life in London. I was living with my family. And I didn't really do any of the things that I saw other people do when they are teenagers.

In the predominantly white town she moved to she appreciated the freedom from fear of being recognised by relatives. To be *somewhere* different seems to mean that she could be *someone* different: a fresh environment seemed to mean a fresh start.

> It's not that my family said; you can't go out of the front door[103]. If I wanted to, I probably *could* have. It just would have been a bit problematic, a bit conflict, and I didn't really want that. I wanted to be sort of a good girl. I didn't want to upset them.

Apparently Aisha knew 'what other teenagers were doing', therefore it wasn't a lack of knowledge of other opportunities that made her lead her life a certain way. It was rather *emotional* limitations; she didn't want to hurt them. She could put these emotions at bay by moving away.

> A: I didn't have a social life at all. [..] I'm in the middle with two brothers, and my elder brother was doing a lot of stuff, like going out a lot, and stressing my parents out. And I just didn't wanna do that. I just felt that it was down to me, the responsibility to make up for that, so he didn't do very well academically. I did well academically, and I was compensating for his eh… sort of, whatever you call it. [Pause]. I didn't want to make a point of going out when it would obviously have upset my parents. But when I left home, I felt like I could do that, without hurting them. 'Cause they couldn't see what I was doing.

She did not perceive the constraints at home as physical. Vandana, as well, emphasised that her parents had let her and her two sisters do as they wanted to, - but they all *wanted* to be 'good girls[104]' when they lived at home. Perhaps first, because moral obligations/norms become

[103] Here I think Aisha implicitly confronted the stereotype mentioned above.

[104] Again the 'good girl' 'verbal icon'. Ani, as well, used the term: "I was a good girl at High School.[..]. I studied at school because I always knew that once I turn 18 and go to university, that's when my real life will begin. And I was prepared to wait for that. I have a very patient person. I will wait for things. It wasn't a case of I wanted everything now, which was what most girls were doing. A lot of the girls in my class were seeing other boys. Some were seeing married men because they thought it was such a big thing, to like breaking up these marriages and things like that. [..]. Otherwise I just kind of put my head down and studies. I thought my time will come." Ani lived in Southall, and

embodied, - people follow them more or less *naturally*. The notion of 'responsibility' signals something between embodiment and reflection. Second, emotionally, they *knew* it would hurt their parents if they acted differently, which many people do not feel comfortable doing, i.e. they *choose* not to do it out of respect for her parents' way of life. By moving away, Aisha was out of sight and did not show them disrespect. This is a very common story, (which we have seen resulted in an overdose on freedom among some). The simplest solution, is what Roger Ballard terms the 'blind eye strategy'.

A double life – code-switching and the 'blind-eye' strategy

Ani spent her weekends with her parents in Southall and the weekdays in a flatshare in London. Her parents 'of course!' knew nothing about what kind of place she lived.

> Ani: I've lived in so many places away from home. [My father] has dropped me off and dropped my stuff off. You know, he'll do anything for me, but he's never set foot in my home. Outside of home. It's an acceptation of my other life. And he doesn't wanna do that. I know that. [..]. Ultimately they're quite happy. Ignorance is bliss. We go home; we do our thing. We maintain. We do the things that we have to do at home. Short of getting married and the rest of it. We go to the temple. We do all that.

Her parents didn't want to know. From Roger Ballard's rational choice perspective, Asian parents maintain the asset *izzat* through turning a 'blind eye' to their children's code-switching (Ballard 1996: 33). In this perspective, actors are not programmed by cultural values to act in a certain way, but instead they assess their situation rationally and opt for the choice with the best return. When the children are happy and don't humiliate the authority of their parents in public, a 'blind eye' might be the best strategy[105].

> Ani: They don't even wanna begin to understand. They know that and we know that. It's just like, yea, keep them separate. What am I getting out of a conflict? I'm quite happy to keep things separate. That's the only way I'm preserving my sanity.

We return to Aisha and her successful identity transformation through code-switching.

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her school was predominantly Asian. From the last comment we understand that the notion 'good girl' applies to far from all Asian girls. Neither does 'good' pertain only to girls, as Nick illustrated. His parents were very strict, he said, which is exactly how A. as well described his parents. He had not much (any) social life before he left home either. He, as well, had wanted and still wanted to be '*good*', while his younger brother of a few years, wasn't affected by such notions at all, according to A. He had brought his white girlfriend home, while A. could not even mention his very 'suitable' Pakistani girlfriend.

[105] From my sample, only Karim confronted his parents with parts of his lifestyle they wouldn't approve of (I heard this from a friend of his, it wasn't something he boasted to me about). The rest conformed to Ballard's description. For instance, Aisha, Ani and Taslima expressed concern about the anonymity, after agreeing to participate in my project. It was important for Zamil as well as Nick that nothing came back to their parents. In many cases, the fear is, as Raminder pointed out, what could happen to their parents if it came out.

> Aisha: So, I felt like when I left home, I had the space to be who I wanted to be. So, I went from a really sheltered sort of life, to a very free life. It was quite a radical change. But I took to it really well. My identity and personality would change. I found the expressions. Before - 'cause I never went out anywhere - I always thought I was quite insular. And then I came here, and I found that actually [..] I could laugh and be quite extroverted and gregarious. I didn't know that I had that in me, 'cause it never had the chance to be expressed.

By moving, she consciously eliminated some constraints to her development, and she felt she "grew up". She could grow up in a direction more of her own choosing. "Growing up" can mean that she found other norms and ways of being to replace her parents' with. In Chapter 7, I will explore how this can take place. For now, we notice that Aisha incarnated a new identity, with a new personality and new embodied ways of expression.

Aisha preferred living in that predominantly 'white' town, because no one recognised her there. Why is this so important? Partly, Aisha's life-style had included a lot of unconventional elements like illegal parties and drug-taking, which very few parents would be happy about. A second reason can be found in Nick's narrative.

Community pressure

The second obstacle for 'unconventional' second generation British Asians – after the emotional limitations represented by their parents – is the pressure[106] exercised by *the community.* Nick told about his relationship to his more 'conventional' older sister. Like Karim and Riaz, as well as Jitin's older sisters, Nick's sister, who was only 3 years older, got her degree and married immediately afterwards.

> Nick: She married into a very traditional, very religious family. She assimilated within that family network pretty comfortably. And there are a lot of issues that I still know I couldn't talk to my sister about. When I did come out, I never thought she'd understand about my sexuality. When I came out to her eventually, she said she knew all along. And I was still the same brother that she'd always known. [..]. She said; we still think that you should get married, and you need a companion in the house. You'd make a really good husband. I know that she wouldn't enforce anything upon me, but I know that she disapproves of my gay lifestyle. And she makes me see that, because, again it's like, I think it's ultimately about, you need a partner, you need a marriage, having a family.

This quote shows how Nick saw his worldview as fundamentally different from his sister's. Despite understanding that Nick was gay (which at first he though she might have difficulties

[106] As we shall see, the slightly different descriptions are not coincidental: While bonds between parents and children manifest themselves differently and are harder to grasp – as we have seen, the community is seen as *exercising* pressure.

grasping), she wanted him to carry on living a decent Sikh life; to follow the conventional rules. Nick seemed to think she had one particular motive in mind for wanting him to, - besides, obviously, thinking the best frames for a life to be within a family with a wife.

> And it's funny actually, because as much as I've broken away from the Asian community, people have found out about my sexuality. And it doesn't really bother me. The only thing that may bother me is that if anyone wants to turn around to my Dad and say; you know, Nick is gay. Because I wouldn't want for that to be the way my father should find out. But anyway, my sister lives in [another city], with her family, and she says that people have approached her [there] and said; oh, we heard Nick is gay. And that pissed her off. [..]. I've told a few Asian friends of mine, and it's not my fault that they ended up telling their parents, gossip travels.

Among this group of informants, closely knit Asian communities were seen as regulating and sanctioning a very limited range of appropriate behaviour by gossiping. The status of the parents within the community could be in danger when children deviate from the norm, - the competition of *izzat* as Ballard termed it. This was a genuine worry among these informants: - for instance it was Nick's *only* worry now, after coming to terms personally with his homosexuality. Because these informants belong to a number of *different* figured worlds, with different people and different values, they are not fully dependent on the approval of the 'community'. Nick thought of gossiping as a 'coping strategy'; "it diverts the attention away from the problems they may have to deal with, with their own children" [107].

In Chapter 3, we saw how second generation halt the reproduction of certain cultural values (which their parents have already distorted through reifying it) by conceptualising them as 'time-warped'[108]. They did this because e.g. Nick adhered to different norms of behaviour than their parents did. They took part in figured worlds where different norms reigned; where Nick could cut is hair, drink alcohol, but unfortunately had to date girls.

Nick and the others *partly* explained why their choices were different from their parents with the concept of time warp, but this is not the whole picture. They wanted a life that was different. This becomes clear when Ali contrasted his parents' insularity with a different 'Asian community'. Ali was gay as well. He was 25 and had spent many years campaigning for equal rights for homosexuals, particularly in the organisation *Shakti* working for Asian gays. However,

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[107] A study from a Greek village, where family honour is of great importance, shows how lowering others can increase a family's own standing in the local hierarchy. To achieve this, one has to protect ones own family honour through e.g. lying to conceal 'lowly' matters, and one must pay great interest in the affairs of other families. (du Bolay in Sciama 1981: 103).

[108] I have pointed out that the concept of 'time warp' can far from fully describe the cultural reproduction between parents and children. In the last chapter, I shall discuss various ways reproductions of cultural flows take place.

now he was tired of the 'gay' struggle as well as the 'Asian' struggle, and proclaimed himself as 'just' a political activist.

One of Ali's brothers lived in an affluent Muslim community in London that was not in a 'time capsule', as he described his parents' community up in poverty struck Yorkshire.

> They have really found this niche in the kind [..] cultural identity marked. You have this really strong, big Muslim community, which is very middle class. They have their mosque, they have their school. And my nieces all go to Islamic schools. They have an old people's group, they have football, tennis, swimming. They have all the sports, all recreations, holiday, arts. It's a world in itself. They don't have to meet anybody who are not Muslim, who is not from their community.

Ali had no social scientific education, however his description resembles Zygmunt Bauman's description of a safe haven from a confusing world.

> Being at home writ large [..] helps. If the seductive security of *chez soi* is, however, projected on a big enough screen, no 'outside' liable to spoil the fun is left. The ideal community is a *compleat mappa mundi*: a total world, supplying everything one may need to lead a meaningful and rewarding life (Bauman 2000: 172).

Ali considered this kind of community different, and also 'healthier' than his parents' time capsule. They were middle class educated professionals, not seriously poor like the Asians in Yorkshire. The context was different, he said, but it led to a different 'culture or society'.

> They are religious, but they are also allowed to lapse. To have fun, basically. People are more tolerant. My cousins in London understand, they hint, trying to get me to tell them that I'm gay. [..].I haven't told them, I don't really mix with my family.

This community is made up of second generation Muslims very different from all of my informants; according to Ali they live in an all-Muslim world. But, he did not see their values as 'time warped' like that of the first generation Asians in the town in Yorkshire. It is evolving – as living culture does – but it is evolving under different circumstances than all my other informants' lives. In the words of Bauman, they live in the safe haven promised by communitarianism (Bauman 2000: 171).

> [E]thnicity more than anyother kind of postulated identity is the first choice when it comes to the withdrawal from the frightening, polyphonic space where 'Nobody knows how to talk to anyone else' into a 'secure niche' where 'Everyone is like anyone else' and so there is little to talk about and the talking is easy (Ibid. p. 107).

'Ethnicity niches' are universes construed in order for the inhabitants to stay safe in a 'frightening, polyphonic' world. Hence, they are as much products of liquid modernity as are the free-flowing lives of my informants. Despite, and perhaps *because* of their cosiness and security,

it is not enough for any of my informants. They wanted something more. I return to Nick and his battling with ‘conventional Asian-ness’. His ‘disembedding’ took place under great pressure.

> I felt that my sister [..] was almost trying to lock me in the closet again. I know that she would never turn around to anyone who asked her and say: Yes, and so what, if Nick *is* gay. What’s the big deal? She wouldn’t say that, she’d rather like that people didn’t know.

Nick’s sister lives according to values very different from Nick’s. As far as he saw it, she let the traditional obligations demanded by ‘the community’, dictate her life. Nick had experienced a very hard struggle between a simple and safe conformity and an unacceptable sexuality, and he was no longer able or willing to embrace his sister’s view.

> I’m not saying that my sexuality is something I want to declare to the whole world. It’s a prime aspect of my personality. And I had to suppress it. I’ve hated being gay for too long. For so long, throughout my schooling years, my first two years in Manchester. I used to pray to god: why did this have to happen to me? [..] And I prayed to god to give me the strength that I may never want to come out. I was so scared; what will happen the day that I would want to come out?

This fear was from the time when he could not envision a life outside ‘conventional Asianness’, where homosexuality is not allowed to exist. Nick had chosen not to suppress this ‘prime aspect of his personality’ anymore. He did not regret, he said, but life outside ‘conventional Asian-ness’ is devoid of securities he previously could have taken for granted.

> And *I’m* scared as well, because the gay lifestyle [..], gay culture is so much a youth culture, it’s very much living for the here and now. There isn’t much long-term commitment, or whatever. And that scares me, because I think that subconsciously, in me [..] I ultimately… I *do* want to settle down long term with someone, I *do* want a family. Idealistically I want to have a gay partner and to adopt a child. But it scares me, because I’ve seen so many lonely old gay men. Because the Asian community is all about the extended family, there is always support network around. It is, for me too a very scary prospect; what if I am a lonely, old, gay man when I’m sixty years old, and I’ve not got a relationship. That’s really frightening me.

Nick grew up in a safe haven of ‘conventional Sikhs’. For a long time he took the conventional life span of marriage and family life so much for granted that he thought he could ignore being gay. What lies outside the safe haven? Nick said his sister’s generation who were just a few years older than him, took ‘it as status quo’. They took a certain way of life for granted.

> That’s how things are, this is how our parents have brought us up. They want us to get married within our communities [..]. Not a lot of them really have the conviction… [..] They wouldn’t have enough strength to come out to their parents: I’m not gonna marry a Sikh boy, or have an arranged marriage, or whatever. They just took it as that’s how it was. [..]. It’s something almost cowardly about the way [so many other young Asian gay men] lead their life. Again, they haven’t really been thinking about their identity as young Asian, gay men. A lot of them just see their sexuality as an activity. Once they get married, no one is going to lift an

> eyelid. They've done the respectable thing. And then they are free to do whatever, just as a lot of Asian men do anyway. There are so many double standards.

The 'mainstream Asians' were seen to have taken on their parents' worldview without questioning it the way we have seen examples of above: The concept of time-warp defines cultural elements as out-of-date; it is not like that even in India etc. now. Malicious gossip is a coping strategy to retain a relative status for the family engaging in it. To be gay is an identity, not an activity. Through these contextualisations, they have managed to prepare the ground for new worldviews and the contours of restraints started to appear.

Individuality: between freedom and security

While Nick had kept his religion – despite not being accepted as Sikh in the religious community –, Ali saw it differently[109]. At the same time, they shared an important perspective: The individual's right to express oneself, regardless of communal conventions. The right to believe what you want, and to do what you want. Within this perspective, it is also the individual's duty to formulate an independent identity, meaning you should not 'take everything as status quo'. Nick complained about the attitude of the majority of his counterparts, the 'mainstream', who hadn't 'evolved'.

> Some had denounced a lot of their cultural roots and gone to the opposite extreme. And a lot of them who were kind of in the middle, have now reverted back to a strong sense of traditionalism within their lives.

I heard this complaint across the board among my informants. The non-evaluating 'mainstream' British Asians – fiction or not, I cannot say, since I never met anyone who did not distance themselves from this 'lot' – was the most prominent 'Other' in everybody's narratives. Nick, and some others, followed Bhikhu Parekh's vein and saw it as a result of an excluding majority society.

> You step out to a kind of white culture and you feel that you don't belong there, so you may retrieve back to what you know. [..] A lot of Asian kids that I knew, for instance these Muslim guys that I went to school with. They were selling drugs, they did all of it. And suddenly I saw them two or three years later, they had become like fundamental Muslims. I remember I saw one of them who was in my year, at the train station in [South London]. [..]. We were having chit-chats and then I asked him; oh, have you read this book, *the black album,*

[109] First, it is likely that this has got to do with the different outlook of the religions (Sikhism is often described as an open-minded religion, including by Nick. He did not mention that it condemned homosexuality – while Islam has got very strict views on it). Second, their orientations in life are different. Ali was a gay Asian activist for many years, but has moved to a broader based political activism. While Nick talked about starting to work for an Asian gay

> by Hanif Kureishi. And he was like *no, no, no* that guy's a pervert, you can tell his talking from he's own experiences. That kind of stuff, he's out to corrupt peoples' minds, divert them away from reality. He was talking like this and I thought there is not even any point for me to argue with you because there is no sense of rationality behind what you're saying. [..]. And also it's so *insecure*. They have to shout out all immediately because they think it's gonna corrupt their minds or head-fuck them. But there are a lot of kids who are reverting back to Sikhism in a very strong way. I respect them for that. But to some extent it may be, because it's safer to embrace that; this is who I am kind of thing. Because it's an identity. You get a sense of who you are. Even *now*, I'm still trying to evaluate what my identity is. Where do I belong? It's a varied issue, because of my sexuality. Do I belong in the gay scene, do I belong in the here. I still try to find *my* own kind of ground, I suppose, in all of this.

From this quote, we understand what was at stake for Nick. It was important to evaluate your own identity. Nick could understand why people opted for the easy solution of a prefabricated identity. They got a sense of who they were, while Nick had to engage in a continuous struggle and reassessment.

Individual choice and reassessment versus taken-for-granted family or communal values, was a core element in Nick and Aisha's as well as many others' narratives. Raminder, an old friend of both of them, had made self-expression to the key element in her life-story. She was 27 at the time of the interview, and she had a social professional job. She focused the interview on her struggle to define an individual identity, which will make up the better half of chapter 7. Here, I cite her reasons for perceiving herself as different from the 'mainstream Asians' mentioned by Nick.

> Raminder: There are various sorts of set ways of being, when you're second generation, or an Asian young person. And I don't feel that I fit into that at all. [..]. I perceive it as quite negative, [..] as oppressive in many ways. In some ways you benefit from it, because you have the community, you have the backing of everybody. But in other ways, if you don't fit into it… There's a very prescribed way of behaving, talking, music, clothes. There's a certain subculture you have to fit into. There wasn't any sort of diversity.

Again, I emphasise that I have no empirical knowledge of the specific second-generation culture Raminder talked about, but I relate to it as something Raminder made use of in her self-definition. In her description, she *feared* the 'enforced homogeneity' of these British Asians.

> Raminder: I think for me, it stems from my upbringing. I've got a very big family, and I've got a lot of people that are my age. [..]. I've been surrounded by all these older cousins, that have dictated what clothes to wear, how to speak, what kind of music you should listen to. What's cool, what's not. What's right, what's wrong. What's bad, what's good. There has always been; it's bad to go out with black guys. It's bad to smoke. There

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organisation at the time I met him. Ali had only a few Asian friends, while Nick described his friends as mostly 'like-

> are so many rules. They were [..] very judgmental, very restricted in their experience within life. Not really interested in expressing any individuality. More interested in being part of a group, membership, than expressing individuality. And that got to me, really.

Raminder saw these people as more concerned about following norms than gaining 'experience', which we understand is important to her. Their lack of acceptation for expressing individuality constrained her. Their norms implied a moral system external to Raminder's life-story, but they considered it appropriate for her to follow as well, just as Nick's sister when she said he should get married anyway.

> Raminder: [They were] literally slagging me off for wearing eye makeup when I was 16. I was wearing eyeliner. [..]. She said to me; you look like a tart. These were the comments. [..] I felt depressed around that sort of environment. It really got me down. I felt that I could disappear as a person, and become part of this glob full of people. Horrible. I felt I'm very much an individual: I can express what I think, and what I want. I want people to *know* me, really *know* me; not just accept me because I'm the right skin colour or that I'm wearing the right sort of clothes. I wanted to be accepted for really what I am. [..]. On an individual basis. For me, it was a struggle, though. At university, it was a struggle. Definitely. Because I only had a couple of people that I could really identify with [..] And also, - it's a horrible thing to say, really, -. Often, all those people I met, [..] I just felt I couldn't talk to them, on a complex level, about who I was. Basically, I just thought there was no understanding there.

Like Ali, Raminder demanded acceptance for being 'herself' – 'doing whatever she or he wants to' – not for following the norms. She emphasised the importance of individualism, to *express* and *explore* herself.

> Raminder: [..] I've had issues with one friend, for a long time, because she's been different to me, because she's more conventional. She can come around and we can talk for hours and hours about our lives, about our problems, but there's something missing. And the thing that's missing is that she hasn't really thought about identity issues, or thought about breaking away or rebellion. [..]. She's gone along with it. She's got her own personality, but she hasn't really thought about her identity or *my* identity, [..] or what we're expected to do and how we're expected to do it. None of these things have ever been topics that we've discussed between each other. That's what's been missing, but she doesn't know that. She doesn't know that that's important to me.

To explore and express yourself means to *evolve* from your parents, as Nick. You should evolve in the sense that you reflect on your identity and on your life and how you live it.

'The Asian community' and the institution of marriage

Raminder felt a pressure to conform from her only friend living a 'conventional' life.

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minded Asians'.

> I always feel the pressure of having to be married, even though she doesn't put that pressure directly or says anything, but I always feel it, because she's got married, she's done the right thing. You know what I mean. It's obvious that she actually thinks that that is the right thing to do. No matter what she says to me, I know that she thinks that's the exactly proper thing to do. You should settle down.

Raminder's diversion from the norm came starkly into focus when meeting this friend, who lived her life the way Raminder knew she should have been doing. Raminder was either oversensitive or the inevitability of marriage was still deeply instilled in her, like Nick said about himself. Karim (SOAS) had concluded that marriage was the most pervasive cultural element in South Asian cultures. For even the most assimilated families, marriage was the 'crunch issue', he said. My data confirm his view. For a long time, Nick like so many other gay Asian men he said, had seen no alternative to marriage. Is there no alternative within the figured world of 'conventional Asian-ness'? I find this view endorsed by a survey reported from in an article in The Guardian (Dec 18, 2000). From 1973 to 1996, the proportion of British women in their late 20s married with children had fallen from 60% to less than 30%. While all ethnic groups were moving in the same direction, the Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, and to some extent Indians, were behind the trend. The growth of individualism leads to a proportionate decline for the 'traditional nuclear family', but this happened at a slower pace in the south Asian communities, where the "key feature of family life [..] is the very high rate of marriage"[110]. In *Who do we think we are: Imagining the new Britain*, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown imagines that Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs would do well in the Better Families Industry, since

> [t]here are low rates of divorce (though high rates of misery among some); teenage pregnancies are still a rarity and, on the whole, sex only within marriage is still regarded as the norm even by the young (Alibhai-Brown 2000:247).

Alibhai-Brown - as well as Labour and Conservative politicians, who have embraced the 'Asian communities' in contrast to the Afro-Caribbean - sees this "extraordinary depth, sustenance and permanence of family life" as a value the rest of British society can learn from. Marriage and family is the main topic in Meera Syal's second novel as well (Syal 1999). She includes all the multiple factors the subject deserves, but underneath the heterogeneity among south Asians, Syal lets the pressure this prevailing commitment exerts, shine through. Here, one of the three female main characters socialises her 4 years old daughter into Asian womanhood at a wedding.

[110] From the research paper 'Family Formation in Multicultural Britain: Three Patterns of Diversity', quoted in The Guardian December 18, 2000. See http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/Britain/

> 'Look at Auntie Chila, Nikki! She's getting married, see?' Nikki nodded dumbly, absorbing the fairy grotto effects around her. This is where it starts, thought Sunita, a little girl at her mother's knee wanting to be the scarlet princess whose beauty lights fires (Ibid. p. 14).

A few of my informants mentioned having huge expectations for the wedding from an early age, including for instance walking around the Hindu *lavan*, holy fire. As a solution to the increasing intermarriage, these Hindu girls suggested that it should be possible to have multifaith wedding ceremonies. Vandana, who was an atheist, chose to go through the Hindu wedding ceremony - *without* her English, atheist husband.

Importantly, rather than being about *Asians* Syal's book is about *women* and their struggle between various demands. Most of the characters are Asian, except from an English boyfriend, and some friends and colleagues. However, the book was marketed as a novel about "the difficult choices today's women have to make" (on the cover jacket, Ibid.). This is not an 'Asian' issue, but a predominantly 'female' one. However, as the statistics quoted above showed, for good or bad, south Asians in Britain are behind in the increased individualism and decrease in family life. For those who had a strong need for assessing their individuality, this was likely to cause problems. However, like we saw, among the people I talked to at SOAS, only Karim expressed having a problem with his parents' lined-up cousins from various parts of the diaspora. The rest didn't mind. Many claimed that Asian men accommodated more easily than women did - they got married and did what they want afterwards anyway, as Nick said.

In Raminder's view, her 'conventional' friend tried to 'fit into the mainstream' because her family stood outside the Asian community, whereas Raminder's own family was part of a big community. "I know friends that they're not in that situation, who want that. It's almost like you want something that you've never had." It seems there are no easy answers who will follow a conventional path and who will not[111]: A hastened answer would be that the ones 'inside' reproduce the community and the ones 'outside' are free to do what they want. Raminder's explanation, however, fits perfectly with Zygmunt Bauman's description of the lures of communitarianism, which is in agreement of Bauman.

> Being outside the realm of experience helps: the benign cosiness of home cannot be put to a test, and its attractions, as long as they are imagined, may stay unsullied by the less prepossessing aspects of enforced

[111] Therefore, I conclude once more that 'second generation communitarianism' is fundamentally different from the communities created by the immigrants at their arrival. It is not necessarily children from the most 'traditional' families, who reproduce their parents' culture into 'traditionalism'.

> belonging and non-negotiable obligations – the darker colours are largely absent in the palette of imagination (Bauman 2000: 172).

While Raminder had found herself on the ‘the inside’, she saw her friend’s dreams from a certain perspective.

> Those locked inside an ordinary, brick-and-mortar home could be struck time and time again by an uncanny impression of being in prison rather than in a safe haven; the freedom of the street beckoned from the outside, tantalizing inaccessible just at the dreamt-of security of the imagined home tends to be today (Ibid.).

Nick sums up the edge between security and freedom, and how the choice had to end in his case.

> Nick: I really seldom go to family functions or whatever. But for instance, I went to an Asian wedding reception last summer. And I really felt, I saw families with their kids, with their grand kids. And I felt, I can’t have this anymore. I have come so far away from that, that even if I wanted to, I couldn’t have it. But then I thought, to a large extent that maybe false security, because a lot of extended family networks are very submissive. They’re not good experiences for people who are involved in those networks. And then I thought, hold on, in the end of the day, even if I wanted to I couldn’t. Because of my sexuality. And because of the person I am I can’t be like that. And I don’t really want to be like that. I wouldn’t be the character that I am, had I not been gay.

A last dilemma – Individual choices and bonds of love and loyalty

We have now seen how Nick, Aisha and Raminder felt limited by the conformity and lack of individualism within the ‘community’. In the next chapter, we shall see how one worldview can be replaced by another, and in chapter 7, how and identity can be transformed. However, now Nick, Aisha and Raminder have come to terms with how they wanted to lead their lives. They lived in figured worlds where their choices were approved of. However, they were well aware of the correct rules for leading a life in the figured world they had left behind.

> Raminder: The worst thing is, for me, I’m second generation Asian, and a lot of my cousins are the same. [..]. And all of them have gone off and got married. So, it’s like; they’re all doing the right thing. And I can imagine what my parents will probably think, eventually; what did *we* do wrong? It’s not like it’s a second generation Asian thing. It’s something with *her*, in particular, because everyone else has happily got married, having arranged marriage and settled down. And live happily ever after.

Their parents were still living in that world. The worldview of the community had no competition for Raminder’s parents, so why shouldn’t they take it for granted? She had a black boyfriend, and even if her parents finally accepted him, she was scared of the influence her “self-righteous aunts and uncles” would have over them when it came out. They would blame themselves for having failed in their most important task - bringing up their children.

> And I'm scared of my parents going to weddings and find themselves being looked at. Looked at as anything lower than they are. That sort of stuff upsets me the most. [..] I don't give a shit, because I've got my own life. But my parents haven't. They're so involved with that. It's important for them.

Ballard's 'competition for *izzat*' was a reality for her parents. There was a limit to the 'code-switching' and 'blind-eye' strategy.

> I've got to accept the fact that I've met this guy. I can't say; see you later, 'cause you're black. That would be against what I believe in. I'm not gonna succumb to their pressures.

In the end, if they were to live by their ideals, they could not do like the SOAS slackers and just go along with all their parents' plans. However, I haven't heard of anyone who had cut the connection to their parents.

> And I *hate* the argument that… it really angers me… There's always the argument that no one can replace your family. [..]. It's not a question of choosing a man over your parents. For me, I feel it's like [..] I've met somebody that's made me happy. This is my chance to be with somebody.

Iqbal was thrown out by his father, but even that wasn't his choice. Sagan was rarely in touch with his family, but neither he had abandoned them. The rest had very strong ties with their family, seen from a Scandinavian perspective. Aisha, like many others, spoke to her mother every other day on the phone and she went to see them in London in the weekends. To forsake their family was not an option for anyone, and they were left with a very difficult dilemma. Aisha returned to her bad conscience several times in the interview.

> Aisha: But since they've come to England they've had a lot of stress, really, in their lives. With one thing or another. Financial stress and job stress. They've done really well. They've bought a house now. [..]. They've had careers. They're retired now. They've made a life for themselves. But it was hard, and they brought up kids as well. [..]. They worked really hard. And then it is stresses and strains of that, and especially I think, with their children, like with us.

Karim called this 'emotional blackmail'. However, to me it doesn't look like Aisha spoke about it in the same manner. We remember how she said she felt responsible for making up for her brother. She wasn't obliged to do it, but she felt she should. I think Aisha didn't feel blackmailed, but felt sincerely sorry for them.

> It's been really hard for them 'cause we haven't turned out how they though we would. It's been very stressful for them, I think. Because we are apart from the rest of the community, me and my brothers. [..]. We haven't performed to the parental ideal. [..] We… are in a minority really, as far as the second generation goes. The rest of them, a lot of them are married now, got a mortgage, working, kids. We just haven't done that. My mum and dad have found that really hard to deal with and accept. It's been really difficult for them and I feel really sorry for them

Chapter 6

Cosmopolitan everyday life

reflexive liberation from *sense of limits* through a *field of opinion*

> One needs to live, to visit, to know intimately more than once such universe to spy out human invention behind any universe's imposing and apparently indomitable structure and to discover just how much human cultural effort is needed to divine the idea of nature with its laws and necessities; all that is required in order to muster, in the end, the audacity and the determination to join in that cultural effort *knowingly*, aware of its risks and pitfalls, but also of the boundlessness of its horizons (Bauman 2000: 207).

A monolithical view of reality confronting cosmopolitan fissures

Anthropology and sociology are in effect founded on theories presuming a human need for stable order and fixed meanings, from Emile Durkheim to Mary Douglas. The sociologists Thomas Luckman and Peter Berger adhere to a phenomenological tradition. In *The Social Construction of Reality*, they take for granted that conduct and actions in everyday life take place in a unified and coherent experience of reality[112], for "ordinary members of society", as distinct from intellectuals, that is (Berger and Luckman 1966:33-42). Although being taken for granted, it is interpreted 'all they way down' through culturally specific categories and classifications. Berger and Luckman built their assumption of one paramount reality of everyday life on the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz' conception of the common-sense world (Ibid. p. 27).

> Growing into our world and into our society, we have acquired a certain language that embodies the interpretations and typifications in question and is their vehicle as well as their medium of expression. Our lifelong intercourse with both our elders and our contemporaries appears [..] as one continuous process of acquisitions of, and practice in, the typifying interpretations that prevail in our society and come to be accepted by us as patterns to be followed unquestioningly. Along with the language spoken in our society, we acquire a great number of recipes of all sorts: rules for handling things, modes of conduct and behaviour in typical situations. [..] Such knowledge is continuously confirmed in the course of our experience, in circumstances both trivial and consequential (Gurwitsch 1962: 56).

I question these presuppositions in three respects. First, there are more bilingual people in the world than monolingual, and very few nations have only one official language (Endresen,

[112] The anthropologist Clifford Geertz' has built his concept of culture on this assumption (1973). For Geertz, culture is "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicated, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life" (Geertz 1973: 89).

Simonsen and Sveen 1996: 327, 334). Thus, a multilingual person will have grown accustomed to *various* ways of classifying the world, without becoming confused[113]. Second, in a cosmopolitan society neither lifelong, nor even daily interaction, will be continuous; interaction will constantly be interrupted by contact with divers groups of people. The "'sites of the self', the loci of self-production or self-process, are [..] plural" (1998: 28), Dorothy C. Holland et al. state. Individuals participate in various 'worlds' where various discourses inform their own and others' interpretations of the world around them[114]. These discourses will *position* the individuals differently, - and sometimes even contradictory. What a girl/woman is and how she should behave will vary considerably, depending on the locus/figured world. The same is the case for values; e.g., what is considered a 'good life'. Aisha's way of being a woman and leading a good life differed from they ways her mother would have liked her to choose. Nick's sister still thought Nick would have a better life as a traditional Sikh man within a traditional family structure with a wife, despite being gay.

Third, - which will be the main focus in this chapter - the physical proximity enforced on people in cities, as Pierre Bourdieu emphasises, will enforce them to *observe* others "doing the same things differently, or [..] doing something different at the same time". This happens at "the very heart of the routine of the everyday order" (Bourdieu 1977: 233, n16), which is exactly the locus fundamental for the phenomenological 'taken-for-granted' acquisition of reality. Hence, in cities people are exposed to a number of different human practices. There are various ways of being a 'good mother', a 'good daughter' or leading a 'good life', and in cosmopolitan cities, they are all on display outside your own doorstep. In sum, it cannot be assumed – neither in most

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[113] As Roger Ballard points out when making a similar analogy between cosmopolitanism – or what he calls multi-culturalism – and bilangualism: "to switch from one linguistic and conceptual code to another is not a recipe for psychological confusion. Quite the contrary: the ability to express oneself with equal fluency in two or more languages is a wholly normal human capacity, with which our brains can cope with ease" (Ballard 1996: 31).

[114] The analogy (see footnote above) Roger Ballard makes between code-switching in language and between 'cultures', appears similar to mine, but it is however different. I would claim that he has a somewhat diffuse conception of 'culture', (perhaps due to his background in comparative religion, not anthropology), when he writes; "Cultures, like languages, are *codes*, which actors use to express themselves in a given context; and as the context changes, so those with the requisite competence simply switch code" (Ballard 1996: 31). I neither agree with the idea that people navigate between isolated cultures, nor that all it takes is to switch to a different code of expression in a 'different' culture. Instead, I find the analytical tool of *discourses* more applicable. That way, I am able to say that the life of the individual is played out within one field of overlapping but distinguishable discourses. These discourses position individuals into certain *subject positions*, which include the categories for interpreting self and the world in the phenomenological quote. They are, in short, "metalanguages that instruct people how to live as people" (Bauman 2000: 54). To be a person is not only to command a code to express oneself. It is a whole way of seeing and interpreting, which is far from totally verbalised.

nations, nor in most cities – that classifications and conduct will be "continuously confirmed".

In this chapter, I will challenge the assumption of a monolithic, commonsense conception of reality acquired in a homogenous community, along the lines drawn by Bourdieu. The *experience* of difference leads to reflexivity and de-naturalisation of the social order. However – as I will conclude – it does not (necessarily) lead to total relativism and moral nihilism of individual lives. (Anthony Giddens (1991) has termed such a relativism the *'internal referentiality of social systems of modernity'*). Neither does it (necessarily) lead to a withdrawal into the safe haven of the absolutism of traditionalism (Bauman 2000: 170ff). Among my informants, I find neither of the two to be the case.

Ethnographic grounding

In order to ground these high-flying perspectives, we turn to the homeland of anthropology; to the world of living, thinking and inter-acting individuals. As Homi Bhabha puts it, it is the "cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of meaning of culture" (Bhabha 1994: 38). As Fredrik Barth and Bhabha, among others say, it is in the life of individuals and their negotiations in everyday situations, that the interpretation and enunciation of culture – i.e. cultural reproduction – takes place. We are now going to look at the same cultural flows and discourses from the perspective of a positioned individual and his negotiations between them.

In order to explore the intricate ways of cultural reproduction in London today, I will use examples from the Bengali family I introduced above. As Bangladeshis they belong to one of the most underachieving groups in Britain. In correspondence to this, the parents are illiterate and they live in one of the most deprived areas in London. However, cultural reproduction is never blueprint copying; the family had developed differently from what one could expect from all the demographic statistics.

Zamil had a Degree in Psychology and a post-graduate diploma in Community Work. He had been a youth worker in the local neighbourhood since the age of 16. His own identity took shape, of course, at the same time as he studied and worked. Through his experiences and education, he was in a unique position to illustrate and comment upon the issues in this chapter.

The responsible older brother

We start with the traditional Bengali position of the oldest son in the family.

> I have a place within this family as well, and that's one of quite a lot of authority. And that has shaped my identity as well. Whereas my brother's identity has been shaped by someone who hasn't had a lot of authority, and who has been looked after to a large degree. And that's about me being the oldest, me taking under responsibility after my dad. So that's kind of shaped me and made me more responsible. I think also from a very, very young age my dad sent me to work. I was 13, and I was quite a troublesome teenager. [..] They kind of moulded me in that way, really. [..]. In the job, and in studies. And also in respect to my brother, being a role-model for him. And making sure I was able to provide for them to support their income. To be able to do the things I wanted to do.

Taslima (28 years), his older sister, described her brothers in identical terms; Zamil (25 years) was the responsible, and Shahid (23 years) the sensitive one. As a Bengali, Zamil's status as the oldest brother shaped his identity in important ways. As well as *being* responsible for the rest of the family, his body language communicated an air of responsibility and authority. The interview took place in the afternoon in the upstairs living room in his parents' house. The rest of the family were at home, and as usual, some visitors dropped by. He, unlike his sisters and brother, could obviously make use of this room as long as we needed to carry out the interview. As the oldest brother, he could, should and would act with authority and self-assurance.

habitus

The relationship between the structural position of oldest son in a Bengali family, and the attitude of authority and responsibility Zamil exhibited, is conceptualised by Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) in his notion of *habitus.* Habitus is a situational link between person and structure. Structures are reproduced in concrete situations – as when Zamil is playing out his older brother habitus in relation to his siblings and in relation to his parents.

People act through – hence in tune with – their habitus. Habitus is an incentive to perceive situations in particular ways, thus to act in particular ways. *Structures* – e.g. the *authority* of the older brother – are therefor reproduced by *practise* enacted by/through a habitus. I shall return to some of the consequences Zamil's oldest brother habitus had for his siblings, but first I will explore another aspect of this structural positioning. As we saw, in order for Zamil to become a responsible older brother, it was important for his parents to discipline him, - thus instil responsibility and authority.

> You know, in the estate we lived in, there was a lot of problems, and a lot of racism. And I used to fight quite a lot. I used to always question why I could never have the things that I wanted, - 'cause we were very poor when we first came here. We used to wear second hand clothes and things like that. My dad was doing labour job and he had to send money back home. So I was always kind of rebellious about things, because I always

> saw kids having things that I wanted. My dad was quite a strict person, he is quite a strict disciplinarian. [..] So he took me to work (..) with him, and I was washing dishes from the age of 14.

His father's disciplinarian measures and the depriving experience of poverty, shaped Zamil. He explained why he started to work in a simple means-end manner: His family was very poor, but he wanted money to buy things other children could buy. This is in tune with an inherited habitus; His parents – like other labour migrants – came to Britain for economic reasons. However, in Zamil's self-understanding, these elements now make up a narrative; he recounted in the form of a life-story how his identity was shaped. He explained some crucial turning points to me, - and himself:

> If you saw where we used to live. People used to toilet on the stairs, matches though the letterbox. It was really not a nice estate. And my dad said; do you want to live like this? Do you not want something better? [..].. It was our poverty as well that I think helped to form my identity, because I said; I don't want this. And I realised that the only way out was *this* way. *Or* crime.

The 'way out' he is talking about is studies and a professional job. How he came to choose that way is not as self-evident as it would have been if Zamil's parents were academics or middle class professionals. There was no tradition for education in his family, or in the area he grew up.

A migrant habitus?

In *Learning to Labour*, Paul Willis shows how working class children reproduce the structures that keep them in their working class position (Willis 1997). They reproduce an inherited working class habitus. We can presume that the same processes of socio-economical reproduction that Willis describes take place in the area Zamil grew up. But, what has happened in his case? Roger Ballard writes that although the migrants usually had industrial jobs and settled in working class areas, "their aspirations, strategies and expectations differed sharply from those of their white working-class neighbours" (Ballard 1996: 21). We recognise this from Aisha and Vandana's (as well as many others') description of their background. When their parents came here they were poor and they lived in deprived, or working class areas. However, unlike many of their white neighbours they worked themselves up and bought a house in a better area.

In many cases, the economic accomplishments of migrants are *entrepreneurial*, in Fredrik Barth's sense (Barth 1967). They come from outside a specific cultural understanding of the world, and take advantage of new economical niches. Another factor is that many prefer self-employment after experiences of discrimination elsewhere. South and east Asians are over-

represented in entrepreneurial self-employment (Parkeh 2000: 202-4). Karim's father had told his children that they only way to make it in Britain, was through education. He was middle class and educated himself, however, all ethnic categories but the white are over-represented in higher education (Ibid. p. 377). (The Bangladeshis are only slightly statistically over-represented). Taslima's family came from outside the cultural understanding of the deprived area, and had created a successful way of escaping 'the most severe problems in relation to household indicators' characterising their estate. Since this is far from the situation for most of the local Bengalis, the explanation cannot be found in immigrant entrepreneurship.

Cultural entrepreneurship

Zamil came from a very unfavourable socio-economical position. His life could easily have turned out very differently, a fact Zamil was fully aware of.

> I always question why I ended up the way I ended up, [..] when I was 19-20, I was going to university. And it was one of the biggest achievements in the history of my family. Because I was the first one to actually go to university. From my dad's side and from my mum's side. And I was so proud, you know. [..]. From the Bangladeshi community there was about 25 of us who left school that year. [..]. The other 19 were either in restaurants, or married or in dead-end jobs. [..]. And there was a core group of four or five of us [..]. Syed is a councillor; he's a teacher as well. And N. is a marketing officer. And those core 4-5 of us stood together, and we wanted more from life. [..]. And we made those choices.

How come they made those choices? Why didn't Zamil and his friends reproduce the most common young Asian habitus from the estate they grew up on instead? Why did these friends choose they way they did, while the others went in a different direction?

Experience of difference

When Zamil started working, he came across worldviews that were very different from the ones found in his family and the deprived estate[115].

> I was socialising with people who were 18-19-20-21, and I was only 14 at school. And meeting people from so many parts of Europe. So that gave me an insight. [..]. And, that made me realise that I could possible achieve. Because if I didn't go and work in the restaurant – even though I was washing dishes – if I didn't have the opportunity to meet those people, I would have been 16 and never experienced life outside the small

[115] Besides being very poor, rough and deprived – i.e. economically homogenous –, the variety of ethnic groups who lived there provided a very heterogeneous environment in cultural and social senses. His youngest sister Yasemin recounted how her three best friends were all from different ethnic groups. The same was the case for Taslima. Zamil had friends and colleagues from all ethnic categories, but his closest friends were Bengalis. Shahid had a group of Punjabi and Bengali friends from the college he went to in Tower Hamlets, but he had many non-Asian friends as well.

> community that I live in. And therefor I would have been quite narrow-minded in the way that I saw things, and the way that I saw people. For example, we grew up very homophobic. Very, very homophobic. And my dad's manager was actually a gay man [..] and I didn't realise that he was homosexual until I was 16. But in that 2 years, the amount of love and affection he showed me [..]. When I found out that he was gay, my initial reaction was; oh… and then it was; no, I love him, he is Ian, so what if he is gay[116]? And for me as a 16 year old, to accept that, that was a major breakthrough. Because then I was able to challenge my friends and say; stop it, [..] I understood, about looking at him as a person, and not looking at him as, a homosexual therefor he must be dirty; he must be like that. That's one of my first real challenges. [..]. From 14 to 16, I was meeting a lot of people who were openly homosexual. I had to deal with those issues in myself. In order for me to partly be accepted, I had to accept them, for them to accept me.

Zamil was aware of how his meeting with *difference* had changed him. He knew that these experiences had diverted him away from the conventional path of most of his peers. As the trained youth worker he was he gave an example in order for me to see how the experience of difference changed him. Again, I turn to Bourdieu, to conceptualise Zamil's narrative.

From doxa to opinion

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) provides a theory of how a taken-for-granted worldview – which he calls *doxa* – can be *de-naturalised* into what he has termed a *field of opinion. Doxa* is an 'arbitrary order' (i.e. it is not objectively given), which has become *naturalised* in the following manner:

> Of all the mechanisms tending to produce this effect, the most important and the best concealed is undoubtedly the dialectic of the objective chances and the agents' aspirations, out of which arises the *sense of limits*, commonly called the *sense of reality*, i.e. the correspondence between the objective classes and the internalized classes, social structures and mental structures, which is the basis of the most ineradicable adherence to the established order (Bourdieu 1977:164).

Systems of classification (in which I would like to include 'ethnic groups') become embodied, and are thus reproduced as the natural order. Gender roles as well as the class differences Willis (1997) writes about, are reproduced in this way. These naturalised orders present themselves as *limitations*; the world simply is like this; certain actions are possible and others unthinkable – in its literal sense. The eldest Bengali son is responsible; in the sense of being the eldest, he *is* responsible. Girls can't do certain things because girls just don't do such things.

> Systems of classification which reproduce, in their own specific logic, the objective classes, i.e. the divisions by sex, age, or position in the relations of production, make their specific contribution to the reproduction of the power relations of which they are the product, by securing the misrecognition, and hence the recognition, of the arbitrariness on which they are based: in the extreme case, that is to say, when there is a quasi-perfect

[116] I.e. not seeing his homosexuality as his *imperative identity*.

> correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization (as in ancient societies) the natural and social world appears as self-evident (Bourdieu 1977:164).

We recognise this social construction of reality from the phenomenologist quoted in the beginning of this chapter, but in addition, power is important for Bourdieu: Classifications are results of power relations, and the internalisation of classification reproduces and strengthens the power relations by naturalising them. As we shall see, the embodiment of the 'older brother' habitus reproduce social structures both within the family as well as in the wider society. Important parts of Zamil's experience of himself as (e.g.) male will come from the older brother/son habitus. As a man, he acts with responsibility. The same embodied reproduction of classification takes place with all other structural positions.

According to Bourdieu, the *doxic* order can only be challenged by 'the constitution of a *field of opinion*[117]'. A field of opinion is the locus where competing discourses confront each other (Bourdieu 1977: 168). Here, self-evident 'instructions of how to live as people' crumble in confrontation with different 'metalanguages' (as Bauman termed discourses), - but remember, for Bourdieu it only takes place on an *embodied* level. Self-evidence is destroyed practically. It is particularly in cities that people are exposed to *difference*. When different cultural traditions are confronted in small spaces, the arbitrariness is exposed and experienced. in the very heart of the routines of the everyday order, of the possibility of doing the same things differently (Ibid. p. 233, n16).

Zamil got to know different ways of life as well as practical results of doing things differently. As we remember, Zamil started to work. He enjoyed the experience of earning money, he said.

> If I get an A-level I can get a better job. I realised that I don't wanna wipe tables all my life; I don't wanna wash dishes; I don't wanna be a cashier. From a very early age, I realised that. I knew the only way that I would *not* be doing that is if I had an education.

His explanation for making an effort at school is simple and practical: Then he could get a better job and earn more money. This is in tune with Fredrik Barth's notion of an individual's attempts to maximise their assets (e.g. Barth 1967), (but is it in tune with Bourdieu's notion of habitus? I will try to answer that shortly). Zamil knew a way to escape the poverty of the estate, since he had experienced it at work. In addition, his friend Syed achieved so well academically that he

[117]Opinion is, according to Bourdieu: "one of the different and equally legitimate answers which can be given to an explicit question about the established political orders" (Bourdieu 1977: 167-8).

was granted a scholarship to a private school in the West End. His achievements inspired his friends and when he went to college, his friends wanted to go as well. They learnt that there existed a different path than quitting school and becoming a dishwasher at the age of 16.

> I think that inspiration came through, because my brother was beginning to show signs that he was going to do very well at school. And he was studying really hard so, and my sister was doing nursing as well. So I think there was a knock-on effect. To continue and try.

Zamil and his friends' academic achievements reproduced neither their parents' illiterateacy, nor the working class ethos of the area. Instead, they acted as entrepreneurs making new paths for others to follow.

Cosmopolitan London

In a cosmopolitan city like London, there is a hotchpotch of life-styles and worldviews on display. In the 'prototype' of a multicultural society, understood as the classical fruit salad of bounded communities with distinct and equally valued cultures, this does not represent a challenge; A *field of opinion* will not challenge the various but distinct cultural orders. London is not a prototype multicultural fruit salad, - if there ever were any.

As there are no real ghettos in London; different ethic groups are dispersed all over the city. The locales where my empirical studies took place are all multiethnic[118]. So are the areas my informants grew up, and the schools, colleges and universities they went to. They have been exposed to observable and audible differences in all areas of life, and I claim that a *field of opinion* has been established in many of them[119]

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[118] The main locales for my thesis are all multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural in many senses of the word: I lived in Elephant and Castle, which seemed to have many African residents as well as many working class and unemployed whites. However, most of the newsagents and some of the small groceries were owned by Patels and other South Asians. The local curry shop was, typically, run by a local Bengali family. In the local market in East Street, people of black, Asian and white ethnic groups had stalls, and they all spoke in the same cockney manner. Brixton is famous for its Afro-Caribbeans. Many 'mainstream' Asians and whites shun the area, while various counterculture movements were attracted. *Swaraj*, one of the 'Asian Ungerground' club-nights was situated here, so was *2nd Generation Magazine*'s office. Sagan and 'the Green Party activist' worked for South London Green Party in Brixton, and it was the natural place for Sagan to put up his 'Community Technology'. Tower Hamlets has hosted cultural minorities for centuries. Before the Bengalis, who makes up app. 20%, a big Jewish community lived there. Now, Tower Hamlets and particularly Brick Lane is flourishing with trendy arts people and small designer outlets as well as religiously ardent Bengalis, mosques, sari shops and well-known cheap restaurants. Ealing, Southall, Hounslow, Harrow are west London suburbs with large south Asian populations, traditionally distributed according to social standing. However, in no area do the various south Asians populations make up more than 20%. I spent some time hanging around on two universities, Imperial College and SOAS, which were both very cosmopolitan. The 'Asian' club nights were not ghettoised but took place in west, north-east, south and central London.

[119] In addition to being exposed to differences in the course of everyday life, all of my informants are educated, a majority of them in social sciences. (Partly, this apparently lopsided selection is due to the high level of education represented in the British Asian population). As we have seen with Zamil, education is a powerful 'disembedding'

Is the willingness to embrace cosmopolitanism a result of an effort on the part of my 'informants'? Or is it true – as they all say – that they have *always* had different kinds of friends and been interested in different kind of people? In London, I claim the inhabitants have a more or less conscious and free choice between 'the safe haven of communalism' and the acceptance of cosmopolitanism. All my informants have embraced the latter. They claim that the other alternatives never have been an option for them - not because they didn't know about it, but because they rejected it wholeheartedly.

Meera Syal's Meena who we met in the first part, was left to her own device in forming an identity. She did not get on with the polite, sweet and family-loving daughters of the "aunties" and "uncles" who came to visit once in a while. Just as they could not put up with Meena's unruly behaviour.

> I was always told off, but I was beginning not to care. I know I was a freak of some kind, too mouthy, clumsy and scabby to be a real Indian girl, too Indian to be a real Tollington wench, but living in the grey area between all categories felt increasingly like home (Syal 1997: 149-150).

This description echoes stories from my own material. Vandana described herself as a 'novelty' in the Indian community as well as at the department where she did her Ph.D. and other 'English' arenas. She was married to an Englishman, she was the first non-white to do a degree in her department, and she had grown up with a special mix of working class and middle class elements, seen from an English perspective.

Meena did not conform to either of the appropriate categories: well behaved Indian daughter/feisty "wench" roaming the neighbourhood, - and there was no middle ground. Being positioned betwixt put both statuses in question – in a Turnerian sense. The liminal realm of betwixt and between, as Victor Turner points out, opens up the structures of the world and render them fragile and mutable[120].

> Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence *novel* configurations of ideas and relations may arise. (Turner 1967: 202).

As we saw earlier, British Asians know they experience their Britishness differently from their

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tool. I claim that these influences have led them to develop a cosmopolitan, - *'opinionated'* as opposed to *doxic* -, outlook on how to live their lives.

[120] Turner did not pursue the possibilities for change within the liminal phase of rituals, as his objective was rather to investigate the rituals as tools in keeping societies integrated and harmonious, following the tradition after Emile Durkheim. The relevancy of bringing up the liminal phase here, can be debated, since Meena was not going through a rite of passage. Her structural position is however similar to the neither-nor/both-and of the novices.

white counterparts, and they know they are not Bengalis and Gujeratis like their relatives 'back home'. Their generation of British Asians has had no ritual experts to guide them through the liminality. Some find the salvation in solidifying reality with fundamental beliefs (see Nick's description above), while the people in this thesis keep on revising their *best-of-both-world* syntheses without ever seeming to stop questioning the alternatives.

Step by step, we have seen how Zamil exploited his knowledge of different ways of life into what he saw as the best option. In doing so he diverted from the majority of his peers. I will now see Zamil's 'disembedding' in a wider sociological perspective.

Fields of opinion and reflexivity/identity as life-project

According to Bourdieu, the habitus of a person is unalterable (Holland et al. 1998: 18). He assumes that "improvisations of the parental generation are the beginning of a new habitus for the *next* generation" (Ibid. *my italics*). I find an explanation of the stability and unalterable character in Bourdieu's view in his notion of the 'homogeneity of habitus'. The homogeneity of a group's *habitus* is a result of similar or identical experiences within the class or group. These experiences produce a commonsense, objectified world (Bourdieu 1977: 80). I see Bourdieu's notion of 'the homogeneity of habitus' in relation to Zygmunt Bauman's catchphrase on early modernity: 'it disembedded in order to re-embed' (Bauman 2000: 32). A commonsense worldview was torn apart in order to free peasants from an agricultural society into labourers in industrialism. The 're-embedding' took place when a new worldview (and *habitus*) was created for and by the labourers. (Ibid.). The modern project freed the individual from inherited identity, not from the whole need to have "a solid, resilient and immutable identity". Now, it was up to the individual to achieve the proper identity (Bauman 1997: 49) through 'living true to kind and keeping up with the Joneses, as Bauman puts it (2000: 32). The suitable identities became connected with the new classes, and they became objectified as well, the way Bourdieu describes.

In anthropology today, it is recognised that culture is not equally distributed in a group of people, and that a person participates in a number of arenas with (slightly) different worldviews. E.g. Holland et al. (1998), emphasise the *plurality of loci for identity formation*, hence a plurality of groups where the *habitus* is being ingrained. What happens to the 'homogeneity of habitus' under such circumstances? And what happens to the self-evidence of habitus? I will return to this, but first I shall finish Bauman's macro-sociological overview of the 20th century.

Life-chances and universal comparison in liquid modernity

As we saw, 'the homogeneity of habitus' can be seen in relation to the 're-embedding' of early modernity. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the embeddedness of modernity is now *liquefying* (Bauman 2000). The *field of opinion* is expanding as the "pre-allocated 'reference groups'" of 'heavy' modernity are *liquefying*[121], and we are moving into the "epoch of 'universal comparison" (Ibid. p. 7). Identities are no longer solidly bound to labour (as we saw in chapter 4 above), class and gender, - or ethnicity. Instead, identity becomes a *life-project*, fraught with choices[122]. The *field of opinion* has become swamped with 'different and equally legitimate answers'. Individualisation, Bauman writes, "consists of transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task' and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task" (Bauman 2000: 30).

It is important to point out that all options are not open to everybody, since "life chances condition lifestyle choices" (Giddens 1991: 86). Giddens acknowledge this, while Bauman makes it into a crucial point[123] for his critical sociology. However, Giddens' main topic of concern in *Modernity and Self-Identity* is the role of *reflexivity* in the construction of the modern self. We have seen how a creation of a *field of opinion* made Zamil reflect on his own life and how he wanted to live it. But, there are other ways of learning about difference than experiencing it directly, as Bourdieu wrote in 1977. Giddens points out that however constrained a person's situation is (his example: black, single mother in a deprived area), she can hardly avoid to "know about factors altering the position of women in general, and her own activities will almost certainly be modified by that knowledge" (Giddens 1991: 86). 'Mediated experience' and

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[121] Statistically, this can be read out of 'the class voting index'. Since the late 1960s there has been a "steady decline in allegiance between the major classes or occupational categories on the one hand and the major political parties on the other" (Crook et al. in Barker 2000: 126).

[122] The changing need in capitalist production is the socio-economical explanation for the shift. Today's buzzwords are flexibility, creativity and temporariness. But once put in motion, the forces of cultural globalisation take on a life of their own. Tourism, migration, the Internet and mass media expose taken-for-granted life-courses to denaturalising contrasts. 'Nature' does not dictate which cultural niche you belong in, but some have 'naturally' a wider scope of choice than others. In the era of universal comparison, the gap between what you can see and what you can get is wide. "[I]n a synoptical society of shopping/watching addicts, the poor cannot avert their eyes" (ibid. 88). In this perspective, there is no place (estate, class), the disadvantaged belong, only places they can not reach because they lack the prerequisite assets. I would say that Zygmunt Bauman provides a seriously important analysis, but down-to-earth ethnographers can easily target him for exaggerating both the liquidity of today's identities and, - as a consequence -, the breach with earlier ways of being.

[123] The discrepancy between *de facto and de jure* individuality is of great concern for Bauman. By this, he means that when all people have lost the security and protection of class membership - they are individuals *de jure* with no one but themselves to blame for their problems, but they have not gained equal possibilities of pursuing their individual goals. The plight of critical social science is to abridge this gap, Bauman writes (2000).

'knowledge from *abstracts systems'*, as Giddens terms this kind of knowledge, permeates everyday life. In the post-traditional era, individuals will make use of it for continuously reconstructing their self-identity, or life-project. I would now like to give an example of this in relation to Zamil, afterwards I will return to the question of reproduction or change of habitus.

Abstract knowledge and deprived inner city schools

We have seen how Zamil's experience of difference – in the workplace and through the example of his older sister Taslima (who was the first to demand an education) and friend and 'role-model' Syed – led him to choose a different path from his parents and peers. In a sociological perspective, he had done a remarkable socio-economical leap in relation to his family background as well as to the area he lived. In order to have made this leap, I presume that Zamil (and particularly his older sister Taslima) must have put a lot of commonsense knowledge at bay, e.g. as we saw about homosexuals. I found evidence of the disembedding power of abstract knowledge in Zamil's narrative about school.

School has an important role to play in the reproduction of socio-economical standing. Class is reproduced in schools in various ways. In addition to biased middle class curriculum (Gullestad 1996) and working class habitus Willis (1997), there is a huge gap in resources provided for each child in schools in working class and middle class areas in Britain[124]. Schools in deprived areas provide a poorer learning environment than schools in areas which are more affluent. These three points add up to sociological abstract knowledge about how the school system works. Zamil had knowledge about the challenges his school faced. The school had a high number of 'English as second language' pupils. Many of them had problems with English and the school 'didn't do well'. British schools are ranked according to performance. Parents, who value education and who have got the resources, will pull their children out of poorly achieving schools, to schools in less deprived areas[125]. Zamil explained some of the structural problems he met at school.

> I got [..] good [grades] as far as the school was concerned, but there was no real effort to push me to get an A or a B, because; why bother? Because for that extra effort a teacher could spend time with 5 other students. So it's about balancing the resources. So nobody ever believed that I could achieve As and Bs. Nobody ever said

[124] Read more e.g. in the "Schools in Crisis" series in The Guardian, Septemeber 1999, on http://www.guardian.co.uk/ e.g. http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,271559,00.html

[125] Even Prime Minister Tony Blair and other Labour Politicians are sending their children to better schools than they belong to geographically. See e.g. http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,3813226,00.html

> to me at school; you can go to university. You can do these things. That was never encouraged. I question why that was.

In order to make sense of the treatment he got at school, Zamil saw his experiences in the wider perspective of the crisis in the school system in Britain. "A lot of the time teachers don't teach, they are minding children," he said. This is an example of what Giddens calls the influences of s*ystems of accumulated expertise*[126] (Giddens 1991). This type of knowledge is constitutive of modern institutions (which are dependent on universalised as opposed to relative knowledge), Giddens claims, and it is constitutive of the *post-traditional order of modernity* (Ibid. p. 20). Expert systems are powerful *disembedding mechanisms*[127] in the sense that the knowledge 'de-naturalises' life circumstances; The knowledge gives the individual an opportunity to reflect on his or her own situation from 'outside'. The concept of time-warp is another such example[128].

The abstract knowledge disembedded Zamil so that he could see that it was not 'natural' and 'unavoidable' that teachers overlooked him. Instead, he was able to explain their behaviour in terms of economical and political circumstances. He also understood that he was not predestined to be a 'C-student', and that it was in his power to get to university if he wanted to.

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[126] The knowledge purports to be universal, and it is accumulated through the medium of writing. Universal application is a defining feature of modern, scientific knowledge as opposed to 'local knowledge' (see e.g. Archetti 1997).

[127] A further disembedding effect of abstract knowledge and accumulated expertise, is that they "represent multiple sources of authority, frequently internally contested" (Giddens 1991: 3). When Taslima, Zamil's oldest sister who was a nurse, had her first child, she experienced just that. Her friends and the visiting infant nurse provided her with various advice, and said to her, 'you can try this and see if it works.' While her mother, who had raised four children, said, 'this is the way you do it.' In addition, Taslima borrowed books from the library, and she could observe ways of raising children and various ways of being a mother, in the neighbourhood, among Bengali friends of the family and among friends and colleagues. Under such circumstances patterns and configurations of how to be a mother are far from 'given'. How to care for your own child is not 'self-evident', but a question solved with reflection, assessments and doubts, as Giddens points out.

[128] People used *accumulated expert knowledge* about the world and themselves all the time. Stereotypes can be seen – in some cases, at least – as abstract knowledge that has turned into structures working back on people's life like a loop. E.g., from surveys and the media, 'everybody' knows that Bengalis are achieving poorly at school. All Bengalis face this abstract knowledge that has turned into a stereotype. Yasemin, Zamil's youngest sister, told about several such experiences. This is from the west London college she went to in mid 1990s: "My teacher one day, we were talking about languages. We were going to the blackboard and write, to see what the languages looked like and if they were similar to English. And my teacher, the first one she looked at was me [..] Yasemin, perhaps you'd like to write something in Urdu. And I looked at her; I don't speak Urdu. And she goes; How about Hindi? And I said; no. Gujerati? No. The fact that I may be Bengali didn't come into her head. And then the other Asians go; aren't you Gujerati? And I was like; no, why would I be Gujerati? So, what are you then? I'm Bengali. [..]. And the shock on their faces was like; oh, my god, she's Bengali. It was like a big thing. The way they see Bengalis, sort of uneducated, sort of low class people." We see how Yasemin employs abstract knowledge about Bangladeshis in this narrative. Just like old Bronislav Malinowski said that people had an inclination to come up with magic to deal with uncertain tasks, and the Azande explained unfortunate 'coincidences' with witchcraft according to Sir Evans Pritchard, people will always use the means available to make sense of their world. Accumulated abstract knowledge of all kinds is the means in modern society.

Put differently, expert systems help people to find explanations for why things are as they are. They can also provide recipes for what to do with them. To understand that things are not bound to be a certain way – they are not 'nature' – can dismbed the individual and open up new opportunities[129].

Narrative as anthropological tool and self-understanding

I have now attempted to provide an illustration of the cutting edge of cultural reproduction: of translation and negotiation. I have claimed that Zamil was socio-economically positioned in a certain way by going to a school in a deprived inner city area. This position can be read from the fact that very few of his peers went on to further education. From the new environment at work, he learnt about different ways of living, which made him able to break away from commonsense ideas of how to live, and instead make different choices. Second, Zamil made use of abstract sociological knowledge about the conditions he grew up in, which helped him to de-naturalised his position, - he disembedded himself.

Internally referential modernity versus emancipation and life-politics

When 'how to live' is disembedded from the allocated niches of gender and class, it becomes a *life-project,* which is continually revised.

> I often sense that I have my own prejudices. And I often challenge myself and my way of thinking. Often I have in-depth discussions, straight arguments with my sister about the way things are.

In Zamil's – and the rest of liberal Britain's – view, *prejudices* are negative and should be challenged. The notion of pre-judicion entails a dynamic perception of the world; – preconceptions should either be revised, or justified (in the course of new knowledge, which makes them no longer 'prejudices', but 'knowledge').

This dynamic view is in contrast to how legitimation takes place in tradition. Giddens writes that tradition is normative and provides firmness in the sense that things are as they are because that's the way they always have been and that's the way they should be (1991: e.g. p. 48, 145). Modernity is *post-traditional* in the sense that 'justification in the past' is no longer a

[129] For Zamil, this knowledge was a liberating force. Due to the sociological understanding of deprived schools, he could see himself as an underachiever – structural conditions made him not achieve to his potential. Bauman and Giddens are concerned about the 'individualising' effects of this kind of knowledge; you alone are responsible for your life See footnote above.

sufficient justification[130]. In contrast – still according to Giddens – the justifications of modernity are *internally referential.* In modernity, the development of the self has obligations only to the *coherent narrative of the self,* not to any 'outside' duties or moral obligations. This coherence is the only measurement for personal integrity and authenticity (Ibid. e.g. p. 80). Giddens writes that modern institutions, as well as lives, are internally referential. However, in the final chapter of *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Ibid.), he describes how *life-politics* re-moralises social life. *Life-politics* was born out of the general ideas of *emancipatory politics.* The latter is played out on an institutional level, i.e. in governmental institutions and legislation. It aims to liberate the individual from the constraints of tradition and illegitimate political domination; i.e. discrimination because of sex, race, disabilities and sexual orientation. *Life politics* are the self-actualisations which *emancipatory politics*[131] paved the way for.

I find Zamil's example of *prejudices* interesting in relation to Giddens' theoretical debate. He was challenging what he termed *prejudices* because he was influenced by the emancipatory politics of equal rights for men and women. In this case, the *prejudices* are commonsense views of women, which limit their freedom.

> She [his sister] might wanna go out, and she won't be allowed to, but then I can go out. And she might want to stay too much in people's houses and things like that. And I can do that, and she can't. That's one prime thing. When she wanted to go to university, she wanted to go and leave home. My parents were quite against it. I don't think it was because she was a girl, though my sister does. But I think it's more that they didn't want to let go of their daughter, and being the baby of the family, and she won't be able to cope; she won't be able to manage. Whereas with us, the guys, it'll be all right. Those kinds of discussions and arguments, we have.

Zamil appeared to have two conflicting views on this issue. Their parents are not more protective of Yasemin because she is a girl, but because they were not sure if she – 'the baby' – would be able to cope as well as the 'guys'.

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[130] An example of this, is the care of Taslima's baby, which I described in the footnote above . Her mother would say; 'that's the way it's done', which is a justification through tradition. Taslima and her friends however, would revise their childcare in the light of all new experience and knowledge, as the attitude; 'try, and see if it works', indicates.

[131] In chapter 4, I looked at the *life politics* of second generation British Asians. A very interesting development is now taking place within *emancipatory politics*. Yasemin Soysal, among others, looks at how a human rights discourse is supplanting the sovereignty of nation-states in many respects. Individual equal rights which earlier had been fought for within nation-states are now expanded universally. Within the *post-national* model, "the individual transcends the citizen"; their rights are based on transnational concepts, not on citizenship in particular nations (Soysal 1994: 142). This is an interesting as well as important backdrop for the study of the making of a cosmopolitan Britishness , however I have not found room of it in this thesis.

> She challenges me all the time. And she challenges my way of thinking. She should have the same rights and the same freedom as we do. But [..] the way my parents have brought me up, their values have been instilled into me, so I have quite a protective nature for my sister. So if she was going out, I would be concerned where she was going, who she was going with, how she was getting home. That kind of concern can be seen as too protective, I think sometimes. [..]. And I can't help that in me, because that's the way my dad was with me. My dad has said that I have to look after them. And it's the same with my brother as well, that's how I justify it.

Zamil clearly had two ways of looking at his sisters (particularly his younger sister, who was 21). I think he was partly aware of it and partly he did it unconsciously – 'because it is instilled in him' – just like these quotes show. "There is a lot of sexism in this house. Still. Because it is not an equal relationship," he said. He knew there was, and he could even admit it. There are a lot of things the girls can't do, nor *would* they do them. His sisters confirmed his analysis of sexism in the house[132]. At the same time, I will claim that they reproduced the same duality. I will return to this important point.

I have now tried to show that Zamil is aware of his older brother habitus, which he knew could limit his sisters' freedom. He can't however do away with it (completely), because 'those values have been instilled in him.' I would claim that he *is* trying to change his habitus, and that it has been possible to some extent, but there are strong factors structuring lifestyle choices, still. One of the factors is 'instilled values' i.e.. protective attitude; another is 'political values' i.e.. equal rights for women. The self does not seem to be internally referential, and I would now like to look at some of the determining factors.

Life-style choices

When important elements in a person's worldview is denaturalised in a field of opinion, people have expanded 'the sense of limits' and they are able to *choose* how to live to a larger degree. We have seen how this inspired Zamil to have an education. It was also shaping his spare time activities. He had a lot of different friends, which made different choices from him.

> There would be people that would have the freedom to do whatever they wanted to do. So there would be my white friends and black friends. [..]. For example, I would earn 40 or 50 pounds a week, and they would earn 40 or 50 pounds a week, and they would earn it, and they would go out Friday night into a club and they

[132] However, Zamir also compared his family to working class English families he had worked with in the community. "I think there is a lot more liberation and freedom within *this* house. Because a lot of the families I work with, the girls they get 16-17 and then it's perfectly natural for them to get pregnant." Britain has the highest teenage

> would spend it. [..] And I would ask questions like why can't I do that, why do I have to account for my money. *I*'m earning this. I would have to give money to my parents, and I would have to say; I'm taking 20 pounds out to buy these trainers. I was always accountable.

Many British Asian children help by supplying their family with money. The stronger bond between family members, for instance shown in a larger number of extended families, is one statistical characteristics of 'Asian' in Britain.

> So I had the dilemma about saying that he's not wanting it because he's being greedy [..], he's wanting it because he's trying to build a future, he's putting it in a bank or he sends it back home because there are people starving. So I never resented that. I had to understand that. Because they had that freedom, and I never thought I had that complete freedom.

Zamil did not resent his parents, (though he said he would give his children more freedom because he knew how suffocating it felt). He could understand why they acted the way they did. Zamil as well as Taslima said they used to argue a lot with their parents, but the atmosphere in the family appeared to be very amiable now. According to surveys Avtar Brah carried out, there is not a higher level of generational conflict among Asians in Britain than among other ethnic groups (Brah 1996: 42-3).

> And within that, I always had to question why I had to deceive my parents and be secretive. Because their value-system is not my value-system. And in order for me to enforce my value system onto them and break something that is very precious to them [..]; the way that they see me. And if that was broken, then I felt that I would be letting them down. And I would upset them, so rather they don't know.

Zamil said he started to question himself and the way he led his life because he saw others leading a different life. He ended up doing certain things (like giving his father the money he earned), not because he did not know otherwise, but because he *chose* to. We see that it no longer is a question of *the limits of reality* mentioned by Bourdieu, but a different set of structures. Rather than being a naturalised sense of limits induced in the habitus, Zamil was conscious of these limitations, just like Aisha refrained from having a social life to not 'upset and hurt' her parents.

Zamil, like the people we met in the previous chapter, saw his value system as different from his parents', but at the same time, it was fundamentally important for him not to upset his parents and he would make use of the 'blind-eye strategy' as well. He would go to pubs with English friends. He also has had a girlfriend, but he would makes sure not to 'put it in their face'.

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pregnancy rate in Europe, and it is still very much a class divided society. Zamir said many local girls as well as boys followed the traditional gender roles while in his family there was "a lot of encouragement to prosper and develop".

> Because I know it would upset them. Because my culture dictates that I would get an arranged marriage, and there will be a time for me to know the girl and these things. And my religion dictates that as well. So I have to be secretive, and I have to have a private life. Because I *choose* to do that. Because I don't think that there is anything wrong with that. But then, my parents have a different approach to that. So therefor, I have to respect them. But at the same time I have to do what I feel is right for me as well.

Zamil did not think he was doing anything wrong (despite not following the letter of Islam), he just didn't want to upset his parents because he respected them. Hence, it was of vital importance to keep the arenas apart and switch code smoothly. However, sooner or later he - as the other code-switches - would have to make a choice. In the near future, Zamil would have to make important decisions about how to live.

> [I]f the girl was not from Bangladesh, [..]. if she was not the same religion, I would have problems. They would not accept it. [..] If I fell in love with an Englishwoman, for example, I would have to make the choice of either sticking to my culture, and my family, or *leaving* it. Because I don't think that the two would work.

Zamil claimed that there was a limit to the cut'n'mix of ways of living. He did not want to be 'absorbed by western culture'; nor are his values identical to his parents'. His family stands above everything else in Zamil's life, to a degree unheard of in most Scandinavian families.

> I sit down and talk to my dad about issues about the family, about what I want to do, about how he can support me and how I can support him, what they want to do in their life and how I can support that, because we are seen as one, in terms of the future, [..], - this notion of the extended family. So, there is an expectation, for example, that I would get married and stay with my parents, in one big house. [..]. I actually value that and respect that. So I don't think it's a problem. It's something I want. I want my children to grow up with their grandparents. I don't know how my how wife will feel about that, but hopefully she will feel the same way. But that's very much something that's traditional, that's very much something that's important to my parents. Something like that, I believe in it not because my parents are telling me, because I want it, and I'll negotiate and I see that it would make them and I think it would make me happy.

In the book *Between Cultures: continuity and change in the lives of young Asians*, Muhammad Anwar writes that while parents of all south Asian religious groups preferred the extended family, young Muslims were more in favour of it than their Hindu and Sikh counterparts (Anwar 1998: 104).

> The major reason for favouring the extended family was the fact that it was part of the traditional way of life and that it made for a happier family on which the individual member could depend in time of need (Ibid.)

Zamil didn't opt for an extended family because 'that's the way it should be'. He said he *want to choose* tradition.

> Because we have that relationship[133]. If the relationship isn't there and they have an expectation that I will marry, and my parents, I wouldn't necessarily, I could say oh, I don't want to live with them, I'd just married, I want to be with my wife. Why, I don't want to go back home or I'm moving out. Which I can quite easily do and that would upset them and it would upset me. So being brought up, that identity is very similar in my parents and in me. Because I choose to live that way, and that's something I certainly want to do. But if that was forced to me, you have to get married, your wife has to live here. Then I would say, hang on, so, it's give and take.

When making that choice, he emphasised the *freedom* of choice and the good relationship he had with his parents. If he didn't have a good relationship with them, there would be no reason why he should want to live with them; From his friends, acquaintances, colleagues, neighbours, etc. he knew of different alternatives.

Bhikhu Parekh values cultural diversity just because of its disembedding effect.. When people become aware of the fact that their life is culturally contingent, they can choose to commit themselves to certain cultural values, like Zamil has done. Like the majority of the Muslims in the survey, Zamir thought he as well as his family would be happier if he had an arranged marriage and lived with his wife as an extended family

Zamil's way of talking is blurring the distinction between post-tradition and tradition. The element of choice, which is so important for him, makes his *choice* post-traditional; In this case, I follow Giddens' distinction and I do not agree with him that his identity' is the same as his parents. However, the result of his choice (if it comes true, of course) will be the same as in traditional Bengali families: He is the oldest son, he has already taken up the responsibility after his father and he is going to settle patrilocally. Perhaps this is *traditionalism*?

> But there will be problems when that happens, because I would want freedom, and my wife would want freedom, and they might not want to give that level of freedom that we want. Because the cultural restraints would be that you can't go out without this and people might see you and have to get permission, all those things that are quite cultural, quite traditional. Especially when a new wife comes into the house. There have to be negotiated. The boundaries would have to be drawn. And there would be new boundaries.

Zamil was clearly *choosing* tradition – he was not dictated by its commonsense naturalness, its 'binding' normative character, that traditions always have, according to Giddens (1991: 145).

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[133] When Zamil says he will keep up his traditional responsibilities because of the *relationship* he has to his parents, he conforms to British families in general. Sociological studies of British families claim that obligations and privileges are not fixed according to statuses in the family, but are instead built up as results of reciprocal relationships (Finch and Mason 2001).

Neither was he reverting into reified traditionalism. The notion of *balance* was prevalent in Zamil's account.

Behind all my discussion of tradition and post-tradition, it seems what is actually taking place, is just ordinary cultural reproduction. 'Tradition' has of course never been fixed; it has always accommodated changes. Presumably, Giddens' view is too firm as well; when people are saying the "'world is as it is because it is as it should be'" (Giddens 1991: 48), many anthropologists would argue that they have their own agenda for saying so. Perhaps what is new, is that Zamil finds himself in a *field of opinion* where doxic justification has withered away – and is recognised as being gone.

Zamil has given us a thoughtful and well-informed account of what he thinks has 'shaped his identity'. I have used his narration to show how he encountered differences that transformed his doxic worldview into a *field of opinion.* Within this field, he has made a lot of choices, which he recognised as having been strongly affected by a normative worldview.

We have now seen that strong values guided Zamil in choosing how to live. He could go to pubs with his English friends, but I doubt that he ever drank alcohol. At the same time, it wasn't even an issue when he served alcohol in his birthday party. He preferred an arranged marriage and to live in the house of his parents. All this he could talk about and tell me why he chose the one and not the other. In the instances we have seen until now, Zamil had clear views of how he wanted to live his life and of the alternatives, which he did not choose. In chapter 8, I will move to a subject that I find more difficult, namely the less verbalised – thus less conscious – elements of cultural reproduction. I shall pick up the thread where Zamil[134] left it:

> There are still very strong, one set of rules for the girls and one set of rules for the boys. And those issues are harder to break down, because Yasemin is a girl and I'm a boy. It's more acceptable that I can go and do these things, although it's still not acceptable.

However, I shall end this chapter by comparing Zamil's masculinity and the choices he has made with a very different way of being second generation. The notion of conventional, un-evolved 'mainstream Asians' has been a leitmotif throughout this thesis. In a copy of *2nd Generation Magazine* I found yet another account of this mythical Other, which put Zamil's account in an interesting perspective.

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[134] Funnily, after writing 20 odd pages on Zamil, I still haven't mentioned his greatest passion – football. According to his sister Taslima, he spent all this time watching, playing or refereeing football. This is the same problem as with most of my informants; their life does not revolve around issues of ethnic identity.

'My brother the twat' - an example of a British Asian masculinity

The author, Satinder, grew up in Southall with a ten years older brother. She starts the article by describing a Sikh and Hindu ritual, which symbolises the relationship between sister and brother in the two religions.

> On the day, a piece of highly decorative string – rakhri – is tied by a sister around her brother's wrist in exchange for cash or other gifts. As a symbol of a sister's loyalty, honour and respect for her brother, rakhri bestows her blessings of long-evity and prosperity upon the fraternal figure whose cash gift underscores his role as his sister's protector and provider in life. If it's a brother you love, it's effortless to engage with the poignancy of the occasion. But if it's a brother of thoroughly reprehensible character, the symbolic aspects suddenly reveal their flagrantly sexist undertones (what loyalty, honour and respect *him* as *my* protector and provider?)

We recognise the brother's role as a protector from Zamil's interview. But when there was love in abundance between Zamil and his sisters, and Zamil had reflected a lot on his role, as we saw, Satinder shows us the other side of the coin[135].

> My own experiences of rakhri are coloured by a relationship with a brother for whom I feel a deep-seated antagonism instead of respect. He is a brother who typifies a certain breed of unenlightened Asian (specifically Sikh Punjabi) male in 80s and 90s Britain – one steeped in a destructive sexist traditionalism, chauvinism, alcoholism, religious and cultural territorialism without comprehending all that his determining roots entail. These boys wear tradition, religion and culture as though they are designer labels. Nominally clinging to them to maintain their privileged status as sons, husbands and brothers, they engage in displays of empty masculine posturing without any attendant cultural responsibility.

Her brother was part of the gangs in Southall in the 1980s and early 90s, and illustrates Jonathan Friedman's[136] concept of ethnicfication and *tribalism* (e.g. in Friedman 1997: 84). Perhaps the term *in-between cultures* is relevant in this case? This 'breed of Asians in Britain' uses symbolism from a cultural tradition in a different context, without taking on the full meaning and responsibility of being Sikh male, protector and provider.

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[135] Not only were the relationships between the siblings utterly different in the two families, they also belonged to different religious and ethnic groups. Zamil was a Muslim of Sylhethi (Bangladeshi) origin, religiously and geographically far from the Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab. Whether the older brother has the *same* protective and responsible role in the different ethnic groups is not the issue here, what is at stake is rather that Satinder's critique highlights the possible sexist undertones in this kind of male responsibility.

[136] Friedman sees *ethnification* as a more fitting description of the late 1990s, than cosmopolitanism, which he dismisses as highbrow, academic, politically correct "self-identifications" on part of the 'hybridity theorists', (amongst them Ulf Hannerz). "[In t]he urban poor, ethnically mixed ghetto [..] the problems of survival are more closely related to territory and to creating secure life spaces. Class identity, local ghetto identity, tend to prevail, just as the local arena may itself be divided into gang territories" (Friedman 1997: 84). Ethnically based gangs was a problem in places like Southall in the 90s. As we are soon to see, this does not preclude a process of *homogenisation*, or *ethnogenesis*, taking place *parallelly*, - as organic, unconscious hybridisation.

> The relationship between a mother and son is perversely sacred. [..]. A mother expects her daughters to maintain all standards of decency, decorum and tradition, while her sons are given untrammelled liberty and licence to abuse them. At the same time, their [the sons'] fragmented identities are situated between inherited and assimilated cultures, traditional and modern definitions of a changing masculine role to which they are finding it difficult to adapt because progressive thinking never intended to be a part of the life-plan.

The contrast to Zamil is striking. Evidently, the reformulation of tradition – 'post-tradition' – can take various forms: Zamil opted for *revision*, while Satinder's brother went for *traditionalism*, one mindful and reflexive, the other unconscious. Mikhail Bakhtin's distinction between organic and intentional hybridisation (1981) springs to mind.

> During his early teens, my brother physically gravitated towards all the unruly kids in the area but, being the eldest and only child, my overtime-working parents left him to his own devices. Such freedoms were more sparing for the girls in the family who dutifully fulfilled their traditional obligations while big brother eked out an increasingly notorious reputation on the streets.

Satinder interprets her brother's unruliness and the general youth problem as originating in the British context of overworked parents. It also has roots in gender roles from the subcontinent, maladapted to the new context.

> Being Sikh, these boys readily assumed their bequeathed identities as 'Singhs', 'lions' and defenders of the faith in a masculinized warrior culture, yet neglected to pursue its other spiritual and ethical aspects. [..]. During the Khalistan years[137], Sikh communities were awash with political and religious fervour and boys like my brother, with their conspicuously turbanless, beardless appearance were suddenly fully signed up and paid members of the Khalsa Brotherhood with a cause to champion and stoically defend. Yes, massive human injustices against the Sikhs were occurring in northern India but a national tabloid front-page photograph of the revelry following Indira Gandhi's assassination perfectly captured the irony of it all among Sikh male 'gangsta' youth for me. The photograph depicted a maniacally grinning Indian male with a champagne bottle in hand (or to mouth) in a state of celebration. The photograph was taken in my hometown and the stooooopid boy was my brother, obviously doing his vital bit as a defender of the faith[138].

Rather than describing these boys as in-between cultures, their project seems to be very modern, and in tune with 'the safe haven' of communalism described by Bauman, or perhaps more likely, like Friedman's tribalism? She gives some typical example of tribalism, and sexism, as the other side of protective masculinity. "My brother would deliver threats of, 'If he lays an eye on you, I'll sort him out', despite the fact that he would be less than innocently laying eyes on other boys'

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[137] After the Indian Army's massacre of Sikhs in their holiest place, The Golden Temple in Amitsar, in retaliation of the assassination of Indira Gandhi by one of her Sikh lifeguards, the Khalistan movement fought for an independent state for the Sikhs in the Punjab province, which they wanted to name Khalistan.

[138] This story parallels an episode in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* so closely that one might suspect that the bestselling author has been reading *2nd Generation Magazine* (Smith 2000).

sisters." Satinder does not leave them much credit neither as men, nor as religious people. And again, the issue of gender inequalities comes up.

> Their attitude to girls and women also grossly manifests itself in an unshakeable belief in female subservience and male superiority. These are the types who agree to arranged marriages because they will soon possess their very own Indian village servant girl attending to their every whim and desire.

I don't know to what extent this is actually taking place[139], but I heard similar accusations of British Asian young men from various sources, - both male and female (British Asians). Sexism among Asian men was not a principal theme in my conversations, but it was touched on by the majority - again men as well as women[140].

> In building himself up as a loyal son, brother, husband and father, my brother soon revealed himself to be the weak, pathetic male he actually is. He is the same brother who vociferously spoke of his "shame and humiliation" as a Sikh and brother when my sister cut short her extremely long hair, yet frankly thinks nothing of the "shame and humiliation" he should feel as a grossly inept father, husband and self-proclaimed defender of his faith. It's a personal tragedy when I think of the shattered brotherly ideals involved – I've only had the pleasure of knowing the antithesis of what I was raised to believe is a sacred, very special relationship. Although I may wish he was different, his type is no loss to Asian families and cultures that are experiencing the inevitable change dreaded by our parents. On the precarious path to new cultural

[139] In his survey-based book, Muhammad Anwar writes that British Asian girls are more reluctant to marry in the subcontinent than their male counterparts.(This of course leaves a shortage of marriageable males in Britain(Anwar 1998: 111), which was why Taslima's parents had to turn to Bangladesh to find a husband for her). The number of fiancé(e)s from the subcontinent is declining, Anwar writes: while it was 250 males and 300 females in 1993, it was reduced to subsequently 140 and 250 in 1995 (Ibid. p. 112). Primarily, this is due to the increasing reluctance among British Asians to marry a south Asian. In addition, tougher immigration legislation is aimed at securing that marriage – and not entrance to Britain – is the purpose (Ibid.).

[140] Sagan – of course – despised 'Asian' cultures for their sexism. Zamil, as we saw, mentioned it. Vandana saw Asian men in general as sexists, while it was an important reason why Raminder and Aisha didn't want to marry Asians. The Green party/cannabis activist told me he had never had an Asian girlfriend, and he said he missed it (he could have shared many things with her). However, the Asian girls he had known did not want an Asian boyfriend because they worried they were sexists, he said. Taslima was very critical of men in general, but particularly Asian men (however, I'm not sure how much this was part of her feminist rhetoric). Both Yasemin and Taslima said many times that their mother had to do everything for their brothers. To me, their brothers did not appear sexist, but very respectful, attentive and equality-minded. Shahid, who I know much closer than Zamil, did not show off in any 'macho' way. Once I told him and a friend of his that Jitin had cooked for me, his friend commented that his wife should cook and clean for him. I presume it was something substantial in what was said as a (sexist) joke. Shahid did not join in. In general, everybody treated me very respectfully, whether they knew my position or not. While Zamil made a point of having reflected on, but was trying to make the best of his protective male Asian role, Karim in his loud way did somewhat the opposite. I would claim that there is a modern male identity/role, in which the man makes clear he knows all about political correctness and of course agrees on the equality of women and all that, but where he still, somewhat mockingly plays out traditional concepts of 'maleness'. The role is clearly post-tradition in the sense that reflection and choice is prerequisite. Karim told me about the conversations he had with two girls he knew, where he clearly wanted them to make him coffee, but they refused. He wanted his wife to take care of him, he said, while I (and the girls) had replied that of course he wanted someone equal he could communicate with, if not, he would get bored.

> understandings, his type are simply bloated retrogressions [..]. (Satinder Chohan in *2nd Generation*, issue No. 10).

When Satinder heard that I would like to use her article in my thesis she gave me some extra information. I start with Bakhtin's notion of unconscious hybridisation, which I claim could describe the lifestyle of Satinder's brother. In the article, Satinder implied that her brother ended up somehow 'between cultures'.

> I don't think that he feels it? [141]. Even though he behaves that way?. Because he feels very Indian. There's no question about it. He doesn't feel British. No way. But, he's been surreptitious into it by British culture. [..]. On a subconscious level. And that's why he behaves the way he behaves. He knows there are alternatives. There are no alternatives in Asian culture. You can't divorce. You can't do those things. Being brought up here, you realise that; yea, you can! It's feasible, it's possible. At that point, they're all doing it.

While everybody in my sample (except Sagan) stressed their effort to 'take the best of both worlds', Satinder suggested her brother did the opposite; thoughtlessly, he ended up with the worst from both cultures.

> Oh, I could tell you a lot about my brother [she laughs]. He's a real breed. He's a Southall breed. A Southall breed is an Asian boy, who… 'cause you know, in Asian families, the son is the beloved. The son is like, the god. [H]e's the first boy and that puts even more, kind of prestige upon him. [..]. He's just really wayward. [..]. The Southall boys are notorious for the whole gang thing. He got into the wrong crowd. And then, even though he knew he didn't want an arranged marriage, he agreed to it, just because of the expectations. He's quite traditional. [..]. But when he was young, he was far more radical. He was really into Bob Marley and reggae. Whereas he loathes that now. It is purely Punjabi music. [..]. Bhangra.

To me it seems that Satinder described her brother as a *traditionalist*[142] rather than traditional. He has opted for the 'ethnicity' version of 'the safe haven of communitarianism'. Ethnicity, Zygmunt

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[141] Since I am concerned about hybridisation in this part, I should mention that Satinder exhibited a hybrid in her way of talking. Every now and then she spoke with what I at first would call an American accent. She did her MA in colonial literature in the United States and stayed there for a year. I don't know what her code-switching indicates, but I have marked it with a question mark (inspired by the way Salman Rushdie – who writes in British English – marked American English accent in *The Ground Beneath her Feet*). An American accent is considered cool among many people in London. I recently learned from a *Guardian* article (Sept 21, 2001), that this rising voice is not called an American accent, as Rushdie did, but 'uptalk' or HRT (high-rise terminal). According to The Guardian, HRT spread to the UK either from Australian soaps, where it first appeared in the 1980s, or from the Gen X/Douglas Coupland and slacker generation in the US in the early 1990s. Since it appears to have originated many places at the same time, some people guess that it has Irish ancestry. A theory also connects it to post-modern (i.e. Coupland) relativist statements, as opposed to the absolute truth in modernity. Political correctness plays perhaps a role as well, as people monitor their statements to not offend (Ibid.). I find the way the Guardian treats the phenomenon very interesting. It's not seen as an Americanism polluting the language of the kingdom (as would perhaps be the case in France), but instead it's understood as a global phenomenon with many roots, signifying the time.

[142] Question: what is the difference between traditional and traditionalism? Is the first the 'authentic', 'pure' and 'holistic' version well adapted to a integrated cultural world, while the latter is an ill-informed hybrid corrupted by power, cultural pollution and lack of knowledge, in short inauthentic? Perhaps Satinder is right when she terms it traditional, in the sense that her brother has not made a conscious choice. As Bakhtin points out, it is through

Bauman writes, naturalises history into a fact of nature. There is only one way to belong, and if you are not at home anywhere, you're nothing (Bauman 2000: 173). There is no choice, which was exactly how, in Satinder's opinion, her brother led his life.

> But, he got married. My parents brought my sister-in-law over from India, a village in India. He only saw a photograph of her, and he said; yea, fine. Yea, I'll marry her. Even though he was seeing other girls all the time?. But she came over?. And, they were fine for a few years, and then he started having an affair with a local Hounslow girl!

Again according to Bauman the safe haven of a total, naturalised world may be attractive "as long as they are imagined, [and] may stay unsullied by the less prepossessing aspects of enforced belonging and non-negotiable obligations" (Ibid. p. 172). However, Satinder's brother knew of alternatives to the obligations he had taken on for life. When he eloped with the Hounslow girl, it caused reverberations in both families.

> He's brought shame upon the family. So my brother actually took the step to divorce my sister-in-law. Which was a real, like, big taboo. Big taboo. But this is the kind of thing that is happening in Southall now. On a large scale. All these boys who've had arranged marriages, they've agreed to arranged marriages. But, you know, less than a year later, total marriage breakdown. Even if they married girls from here. The marriages break down. And the divorce. It was unheard of ten years ago, whereas now, it's all right. And *that* is about being Indian *and* British. It's like, being Indian, you're fulfilling your parents' expectations of you, getting married. Being British, you know that there's an alternative. There's an escape. I don't have to put up with it for the rest of my life.

This Southall unconscious hybrid is not viable, because the life-forms are incompatible: the obligations of tradition are naturalised and non-negotiable, while post-traditional modernity has introduced doubt and revision.

> I think he's now married to this girl, which is even worse. [..]. My mother, [..] she's a broken woman. Because her son has done this to her. [..]. My parents kicked my brother out. My sister-in-law and my nieces are living with us at home.

Satinder criticises sexism implicitly and explicitly. Partly, it is directed at 'Asian' cultures in general; 'the son is at a pedestal'. But more prominently, it seems to me, she criticises the sexist results of ripping out south Asian gender roles from their cultural context. Due to some cultural – or more likely – power reason, which I find to be outside the scope of this thesis, the women lose out in the new environment (whether women loose out in the old environment as well is not the issue here). Satinder's father and brother cut their hair, but went wild when her sister did the

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unconscious hybridisation that languages and then also cultural traditions evolve. Perhaps the notion of traditionalism should be saved for conscious choices?

same thing. Satinder and her sister ‘dutifully fulfilled their traditional obligations’, which remind us of the ‘good girls’ we have heard about in previous chapters, while the same expectations did not apply to their brother. The different upbringing particularly concerned questions of morality, particularly sexual morality.

Chapter 7

‘Charting new territory - finding a middle ground’

- a discourse on agency

> Nick: I haven’t got contact with a lot of Asian peers who I knew when we were kids. [..] Now, they’ve got their hotshot jobs in The City. They’re looking to meet an Asian guy or an Asian girl, get married, have a flashing car. Get all the financial security, the status symbols, which our parents, having come over here, have encouraged. It’s all about getting ahead materially, financially. And they’ve really taken that forward. And I can’t live my life like that. Because I know marriage is never going to come into the equation. I don’t want a nine to five job in baking or accountancy. A lot of Asian kids, they’ve grown up having to suppress any kind of creative element in their personality, because our parents came over here and made all these sacrifices. [..]. I feel that I really had to fight. I didn’t submit my law degree. And I came back and that caused a lot of problems for me at home. But I thought there are other sides to my personality and I wanna nurture that. [..]. So as far as a lot of Asian parents, even a lot of Asian kids that I knew are concerned, I’m a bit of a failure. I felt I really had to detach myself, keep a distance. I’m not going to take onboard how you think I should live my life. I try to find my own, to find my feet by myself. Do things of my own taste. And I don’t regret … I feel I’ve had some rich life experiences. There have been a lot of problems; my life hasn’t been easy. But there are certain experiences that, I’d rather be who I am, than being this kind of straight Asian lad [..] who has this really mundane life. Who doesn’t really have many aspirations, like experiencing different cultures, different things. A lot of them don’t. They don’t have any aspirations.

From the above quote, we can read that Nick had come to terms with the choices he had made. He had chosen to be open about his homosexuality and to pursue an ‘unconventional’ career as well as an unconventional life, which set him apart from ‘the mainstream Asians’. In order to find his own way, he had to detach himself from most of his ‘Asian peers’, he said. They, like Raminder told, had very set principles about how one should live, and they deemed Nick as a failure for not achieving according to the standards.

> Nick: Ultimately, I was constantly trying to affiliate these mainstream Asian things. But, it was still a head-fuck because I always thought; why am I different from these people? Why can’t I be like them? Subsequently, I really had to break away from a lot of these Asian kids.

Nick and Raminder wanted to ‘find their feet by themselves’. But, the *figured world* surrounding them exercised a hegemonic definition of naturality prevented them from doing this. In the previous chapter, we saw how a worldview can be altered. In this chapter, I shall explore how the worldview can be practised. We have seen that it cannot be practised within a *figured world* with strict and hegemonic definitions of ways of living; Nick ended up questioning his own normality;

why can’t I be like them? In order for him to not judge himself according to these norms anymore, Nick needed a different *figured world* with a different worldview and different practices. In this chapter, I will explore how people can manipulate their own identity formation through finding a suitable *figured world*.

The first step was to ‘get away’ from the *figured worlds*, which presented hegemonic and limiting versions of the norm. Nick started on a path to ‘find his own feet’ as an unconventional gay Asian when he met Raminder and another girl with whom he could be open about his homosexuality to. Raminder was already aware of the fundamental influence of other people. When she met Nick, he was still closely involved in the Asian community in Manchester. They were ‘mainstream Asians, within a fashionable image culture,’ she said.

> I had broken away from it and I was more isolated in some respects. [..] But I chose consciously to break away from it. [..]. I felt a bit fanatical about my identity. I was almost *so* careful about the people that I was interacting with, because I *knew* I was so sensitive to it. [..]. I was so trying to remain strong, and it was so hard to be strong when I was around people that could make your will lurch; [.. who were] putting you down, in subtle ways.

It had been important for her to break away from environments that could – therefore surely *would* – influence her in a way she had come to think of as restraining. We shall explore her struggle to do so in her teenage years, but first I will revert in time, to Vandana’s early teens.

Vandana – being an outsider but being fine

Vandana’s childhood were similar to that of Nick and Aisha’s in some respects. The three grew up in predominately white areas, but they did not have (m)any friends, neither white nor Asian. Vandana told me how she coped with it.

> V: In my junior school, I was the only black person. [..] I think it was painful when I was younger. And then, after a while, I just became very insular. [..]. I couldn’t work it out at first. I didn’t know what it was about. I just felt different. And I was on my own a lot, when I walked around or played around. But then I ended up doing things that I was interested in. I ended up reading or listening to certain types of music. And that was good for me, because I had my own identity, and also, I realised that it’s quite cool to have your own identity. [..] Well, when you’re younger, we’re all reading the same magazine we’re wearing the same clothes. And when I hit the sixth form, the end of my secondary school, I had my own; I was a ‘Goth’; I was into certain types of music. I didn’t give a fuck about anybody, ‘cause no one had ever given a fuck about me. That did me a lot of good.

Vandana talked about identity as a particular attitude and particular interests; as a way of being in the world; as having a ‘style’. Lifestyles “give material form to a particular narrative of self-

identity," Anthony Giddens says (1991: 81). In youth culture, lifestyle is almost synonymous with *subculture*[143], and in the 80s, 'Goth' was a popular *subculture*. Vandana's description is typical; a certain type of music combined with a certain way of dressing, which signals a resistance to the dominant order of society – in this instance the other children at school. Notably, she adopted this style on her own, inspired by the styles present in this area in south London during this period. Presumably, she also learnt about it through radio, TV and magazines (now also the Internet), which is how youth styles are diffused all over the world. In which sense does the notion of *subculture* remind of Holland et al.'s notion of *figured world* (apart from the element of resistance, which is not defining for the latter)?

> Figured worlds take shape within and grant shape to the coproduction of activities, discourses, performances, and artifacts. A figured world is peopled by the figures, characters, and types who carry out its tasks and who also have styles of interacting within, distinguishable perspectives on, and orientations toward it (Holland et al. 1998: 51).

Figured worlds are "made up of Geertz's 'webs of meaning'" (Ibid.). Hence, they provide ways of interpreting the world, which holds true only superficially for Vandana's adherence to the 'Goth' *subculture*. Instead, she described it as a strategic way of 'standing out', - which became very important at a certain age.

> V: [P]eople wanted to know you, and they thought you were really fascinating. But, I had my own life, I suppose, but it was all in my head. I didn't do things. I didn't go clubbing, I didn't go to gigs, but I did have my life, and my very strong sense of independence.

Interaction with others, who can strengthen or restrain your way of being, is a fundamental aspect in *figured world*s. 'Goth' is therefore rather a *subculture* in a style sense in Vandana's case.

Curiously, her account of insularity is very common in my material. It was not only Vandana, Nick and Aisha who sat at home reading, or going to the library reading, but this was the case for a majority of my informants. This how Ani spent her youth in Southall:

> I used to spend a lot of time in the library. During my holidays. I'd be there from morning to evening, with books. I think books and the escape books give me, that's totally what inclined me. I'd read everything. Mythology. Fiction. Astronomy. Other countries. It was this whole thing of educated yourself, knowledge is power. I think it's written there, on the library steps. Knowledge is power. It has kind of been my motto. I

[143] Subcultures are opposed to 'mainstream society', in so far as their style challenges the natural order of things (Hebdige 1979: 18). However, with a growing acknowledgement of 'British culture' as heterogeneous, variations will be seen, - by definition -, as part of it. The diversity of styles of late modernity blurs the boundaries between 'subcultural' and 'mainstream', as well, and subculture does not longer automatically mean an opposition to the mainstream.

> knew that that was the one thing that would get me away from Southall and the mundane, conventional path. You know, of going to school, arranged marriages, family etc. etc. And it has been.

Nick found his first escape in Hanif Kureishi's books. He found points of reference and he found alternatives to the insular haven of suburbia and 'conventinalism'.

> It's really weird, in both his books, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, I feel there's so much I've been able to relate to on various levels; [..] the dissatisfaction with living in the suburbs, which is a pretty suppressive environment to live in. People in the suburbs have a very insular lifestyle. [..]. At one point I remember; I had come home from summer holidays and I was living back at home. And it was so suppressive. And I was reading *The Buddha of Suburbia* at that time and it was so much I could relate to. And then again with *The Black Album* he was dealing with the dichotomies of Islamic community or whatever, and he's just met this mad kind of English teacher with this really mad lifestyle. The dichotomies they were having to deal with it; what's right what's wrong, which path do you chose.

In teenage years when a search for 'identity' as well as 'somewhere to belong' is a struggle with an uncertain outcome, I know what it means to find support in books, at least.

For young people, s*ubculture*, usually connected to music, is an extremely important "material form to a particular narrative of self-identity", like Giddens' notion of lifestyles (1991: 81). As we remember, Aisha said she felt free to explore ways of being in the new environment she moved to. This took place within the emerging *rave culture* in the end of the 1980s.

> A: It was the heyday of [the rave] scene when I came here. That was my subculture. There would be big parties, clubs out [..] in the countryside. Big raves, just illegal parties. I knew a lot of people that were involved in that scene. A mad time, really.

Aisha was older than Vandana when this happened, and for her, the subculture meant – including a style in clothes and music – interacting and being with like-minded people in public spaces. In this case, the *subculture* increases its importance into that of a *figured world*. Identity formation, in Holland et al.'s sense, can only take place in a *figured world*[144]. Aisha said her identity and

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[144] Vandana surely had an 'identity of her own', but it was only 'Goth' in relation to *style* and *attitude* (clothes, music and an introvert world denouncing typical of the genre). The rest was apparently played out through reading books and daydreaming. Moreover, the notion of *play worlds* is very important in the process of embodying an imagined and desired self (Holland et al. 1998: 236). "Play is the form of activity that proceeds in ignorance of any constitutive condition other than a cultural and conventional design" (Ibid.). Their notion of play reminds me of Claude Levi-Strauss' perspective of myths. In myths, humans can imagine the world and the conditions they live under, without being constrained by 'real life' limitations. Hence, it is in myths, the human imagination i.e. the structures of the mind can appear in its full capacity. Through the conceptualisations in myths, humans find a way of coming to terms with the un-settlable dichotomies in the human condition. According to Clifford Geertz, it is in rituals that "the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world" (Geertz 1973: 112). Hence, the 'world and humans as they should be' are embodied – thus turns real – through being played out in ritual. It could be a similar process Holland et al. have in mind when they write "through play imagination becomes embodied [..] [and] our fancied selves become material" (Holland 1998: 236). Through

personality changed; she went from 'insular' to 'extravert and gregarious', a change that only could come about by interaction with other people.

Raminder – subcultural mediating devices and figured worlds

The psychologist Raminder gave a detailed account of her identity formation, starting in the mid teens.

> Raminder: When I was about 16… I didn't know who I was, actually. I was very… following the whole Asian mainstream. I was into the soul, the hip hop and the reggae. And even the Bhangra. To an extent. Not so much. [..] A lot of my influences are black as well, because I went to a school that was 50% Asian and 50% West Indian, Jamaican. In East London. I was surrounded by black and Asian people, my influences derive from both those categories. And you'll find that a lot of the Asian youth culture is directly influenced by black youth culture.

She conceptualised her identity formation through subcultural styles in clothes and music, which, firstly, shows how important these elements are for young people growing up after the 1960s, - perhaps even stronger in England, the cradle of pop culture, than anywhere else[145]. Secondly, I see it as an example of how styles in music can be indexical to subcultures with their own worldview - to *figured worlds.* In order to participate in a particularly figured world, styles of music with certain artefacts – material forms that are symbolically infused on a public level[146] – are used. These artefacts are what Holland et al. (1998) term *mediating devices,* or *semiotic mediation*. They are used to evoke and maintain a *figured world*, which they see as a prerequisite condition to shape an identity. When Nick changed his way of life after a while in Manchester, we remember he *took off* his turban. On his way back to his mother for holidays, he put it *on* again, and in doing so he evoked the figured world of a 'good Sikh boy'. Mediating devices play a pivotal role in the individuals' possibilities for agency in relation to their own identity formation.

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teenage daydreaming and the playing out of the introvert and world-weary Goth style, Vandana materialised a strong and individual sense of self.

[145] Styles play an important part in the life of the teenagers in Helena Wulff's monograph from South London in the early 1980s (Wulff 1988). While in my school there were only two categories 'posh' and 'alternative' including the dull ordinary people, the girls in London distinguished between all sorts of subcategories.

[146] On one level, mediating devices are symbols in Geertz' sense: They are "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception – [..] the symbols meaning" (Geertz 1973: 91). Geertz emphasises the intersubjectivity of symbols (Ibid. p. 92), a view echoed by Holland et al. in their focus on identity formation *within* figured worlds. But, while the latter recognise the plurality of figured worlds, Geertz – following the phenomenological traditions – perceives *a singular* 'general order of existence' (Geertz 1973). (Geertz did not even see this as a point of discussion in the early 1970s).

The first part of Raminder's narrative conforms to what we saw in chapter 4. Raminder was 16 in 1988, at a time when there was no 'cool Asian' identity available. Since many Asians grew up in close contact with blacks, it was natural for them to turn to black street culture, which was the 'coolest' available at that time - and still is. (In addition, we see that Raminder also illustrated Giddens' *institutional reflexivity*: She *knew* it was common for young Asians to be influenced by black street culture, and her description of herself – consequently *self-understanding* – is informed by such knowledge.)

However, Raminder did not feel at home in this 'mainstream culture', as we saw in the previous chapter. When she went to university, she "had a fantasy that it would be loads of Asian people that would really try and express themselves, or do something a little bit different, or try and break away from the mainstream." She had hoped to escape the narrow-minded world of 'mainstream' Asians by meeting different Asians[147]. Unlike Vandana, Raminder had not found a way of retreating into books and an imagined community where she could develop a certain sense of self.

> First year of university was just a blur, in regard to who I was. [..]. I hadn't formed who I was, and I was 20 years old and I still didn't have an idea of what kind of person I wanted to be!

Her way of speaking of her identity seemed to be shaped by her profession. It is also a good illustration of how young people look at their own identity nowadays, it's flexible and can always be altered and improved.

> My real identity sort of change was when I was in my second year. [..]. And then, I started to get into *The Cure* and *The Smiths*, and *The Stranglers* and *The Doors*. And from *that* I got into [..] urban music. I was listening to music that I was not supposed to listen to. Traditionally, a young Asian woman won't be listening to that sort of music. So, for me it was more than just to listen to music. It was an expression of difference.

This narrative is very familiar to the anthropologist. (An appropriate example of how popular culture spreads quickly from London to e.g. the peripheral town Trondheim). We are the same age, born in 1972, and have gone the same path, musically and consequently in terms of interests[148]. At a certain age, 'we' (i.e. people sharing this subcultural universe), would get to

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[147] It was important for her to still have Asian friends, partly because she had never had any English friends and she had "taken on board the stereotyping that English people will never accept you". And partly because "a lot of the people that I met, had totally isolated themselves away from Asian people, [..] I was very wary of them. 'Cause I thought that they had totally rejected who they were. It wasn't like they were just trying to express the difference and accept it."

[148] A curious example of this shared subcultural background is that we have travelled the same backpacker route in South East Asia, and even taken identical photos of a statue of Buddha's head in a small town in central Thailand. As Henrietta Moore writes, in agreement with George Marcus (1992): "The major change in anthropological theorizing

know people solely on the background of a piece of clothe, e.g. a certain type of scarf or a tee-shirt displaying the 'right' kind of band. Clothes and music were indexical to a whole range of value orientations, which the specific *subculture* implied. Raminder was in addition going completely against the grain in terms of style, and clearly expressed that she rejected the 'mainstream' version of being 'Asian' as well as 'female Asian'.

Raminder turned to electronic music in the 90s. She moved away from the 'baggy hippie style' where she wore 'one dress and mountain boots for a whole year', to a modern techno culture.

> I rejected what I was when I was at college. Then I rejected what I was when I was in my second year. I'm not that, and I'm not this. And I just had to be this individual, that does what she wants. It doesn't have to be defined. You don't have to fall into a category.

It is as if she formulates her latest identity, - 'individuality' -, as a collective identity, - which I think it was in the late 1990s.

> And then I started to get into all the techno stuff. I've always liked soul and hip hop. But then I started to get into drum'n'bass. Drum'n'bass clubs and music don't just attract black or Asian people. Drum'n'bass attracts a diversity. Now, I just like individual stuff. But all the 'Asian underground', I was into for a while. I don't think the music brilliant, brilliant.

It was within this new electronic musical genre, Raminder was able to bring together the various elements from her background[149], - a reconiation which was important to her. This reconciliation, however, must take account of a number of factors.

Pigeonholing?

"I think there is some really good stuff around," Raminder said and mentioned the main British Asian artists who are lumped together under the term 'Asian Underground'.

> Raminder: But again, I've always wanted to get away from being part of a clan. I never wanted to be into drum'n'bass and just be into this. I want to deal with different things and not separate myself from other things.

It was important for Raminder to emphasise that 'Asian Underground' was not the only music she was interested in, and that this music attracted not only Asians. She wanted to escape being

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has come about through placing the anthropologist within the same frame of reference as the subjects of anthropology" (Moore1999:19).

[149] Technological music – e.g. house, drum'n'bass and hip hop – attracts more 'second generation' people from the 'visible minorities', than rock does. At the annual 'Day of Music' festival in Oslo, the difference in audience was striking between the different stages. In France and England, it is technological music not rock, that attracts second generation youth. It has black roots and has become a tool in a post-colonial resistance.

part of a clan, she said. Aisha had the same attitude in relation to music as well as other artistic works. She would keep herself updated on what Asian writers, film directors and artists were producing.

> Aisha: But that's not all I would be interested in. I'd be interested in other things as well. But I would keep an eye out, to go and see, or read, or hear that particular thing. But with the music thing, it's not all I listen to. It's quite a small part of what I listen to.

Vandana said the same thing about British Asian as well as south Asian fiction, and British Asian music and clubs. Does this hastiness to emphasise that they listen to other kinds of music in addition to 'Asian' music express a fear of being pigeonholed as stereotypically 'Asian' in any way? Would someone black or someone white feel the need to say the same thing? If this is the case only for Asians, their fear can be interpreted in two ways; either they carry chips on their shoulders or, it is a real threat.

Jitin, the music editor in *2nd Generation Magazine*, emphasised that in the magazine, they "didn't want it to be strictly second generation British Asian music. I didn't want it to seem as though – to other people – like we only listen to one kind of music. I grew up listening to everything." Jitin implied that Asians still had to prove that 'they were like everybody else'. To be Asian and listen to British Asian music could presumably still challenge their claim to individuality. This statement evokes the first part of the '2nd generationist' agenda from chapter 4: to change the subject position Asian.

On the one hand, 'Asians' feared not being recognised as 'just like everybody else'. On the other, it was a fear of not being seen as individuals (but essentialised in terms of 'culture'). Lumping all Asians together was very much still a reality, in writing as Bidisha said, and even more so in music. Virtually every musician categorised by the term 'Asian underground' as well as most British Asians who was aware of it, detested it. It labelled all kinds of bands which would have been put in widely different categories if the they had been black or white. Therefore, is the category 'Asian' deprived of is imperative connotations yet?

In relation to 'Asian' clothes, the lack of neutrality is apparent. The following conversation took place with Aisha because I was quite sure she had worn a kind of trendy sharwar-kameez the first time I met her. I asked her, but she said this was not the case.

> Aisha: I have worn some clothes that has been like a sort of… like a mixture of eastern and western dress. Like skirts and trousers. [..]. That's become more fashionable now anyway, in the mainstream. I've got my nose pierced and I've got some Indian jewellery and stuff. [..]. I will wear some things, the odd, little details,

> maybe, once in a while, which is definitely Indian. Like bangles, or clothes which has got a little bit of embroidery, or a scarf or something. But, I just feel a little bit silly if I wore some Indian clothes.

Her answer surprised me. I 'remembered' her in a shalwar-kameez, so it confused me that this was not the case. Her answer seemed to imply that she only felt comfortable wearing Indian inspired clothes in public when they could be characterised as trendy in the mainstream. I therefore have to conclude, first, that Indian clothes are far from neutral yet, - particularly not for 'Indian looking' people. (Some of my informants told me that people still stared at their mothers wearing saris, - despite the latest club fashion). Second, that the pressure to 'fit in' must be strong when a seemingly determined and secure person like Aisha would "feel silly" standing out in that way. Particularly since Aisha – unlike Raminder – said she wore Indian clothes at her parents' place.

A public space and 'common ground'

Raminder and Aisha agreed that the Asian club nights like *Anokha* and *Swaraj* fulfilled an important "purpose" for people like themselves.

> Aisha: Many people have that kind of feeling like 'I have somewhere to go'. I don't really know how to describe it. But, where I sort of fitted in. Even though I don't think I don't fit in in other clubs. But I felt that I belong. That was my space sort of thing. Not that I didn't think maybe white people felt that they didn't belong there. But I felt; that was my place there. What they were tryin' n' do with the music, and the whole concept was touching something about me, really deeply inside. That it wouldn't do to someone who was white, maybe, or someone who was black. Something particular about being Asian and being second generation. That is what that music was about, and the club and the concept.

Aisha's description recalls the way Meera Syal lets Meena experience "Punjabi under the stars" (Syal 1997: 203; see chapter 4 above). However, this did not happen in a garden, but in trendy clubs in London, which white people eagerly visited[150].

> I suppose, it's making reference to different layers in my identity. It's making reference to the fact that [..] I was really into drum'n'bass in the early 90s. [..] But it was changed in a way that it also made reference[151]to,

[150] The club with its music became so popular that the *Anokha* album reached the shores of Norway and was played on national radio. The anthropologist rushed to the record store immediately after she heard it, and within an hour, I knew what my thesis had to be about.

[151] In his classical study, *Subculture: the meaning of style*, DickHebdige sees the collage element in popular music and subcultural style as an expression of *bricolage* in the Levi-Straussian sense. Old elements are put together in new and unforeseen ways, and create an "explosive junction", which "disrupt and reorganize[s] meaning" (Ibid. p. 106). Hence, it is a way of creating new meaning by giving completely new associations with the help of old elements. As a friend of mine said when she visited one of these clubs for the first time: "It was a complete shock to hear Hindi spoken from the loudspeaker in such a setting". Personally, I did not have a problem feeling that I belonged in the club, but 'explosive junctions' of meaning – or *feeling* as Aisha was talking about – was beyond my cultural capital.

> maybe, Indian classical [..] music, or something like that. So, it wasn’t just drum’n’bass music, it was specific to something, that I could relate to. And I could relate to all of those things.

Interestingly, the first reference Aisha mentioned, was not ‘ethnically Indian’, but drum’n’bass. The shift in her identity formation – she grew up, she said – took place in relation to *rave culture*, long time before ‘Asian Underground’ surfaced. At *Anokha*, a crucial element was added. The club created a new way of belonging, of feeling at home in a multiethnic space in Britain. Here, ‘Asian’ elements, which we remember were making up the ‘common ground’ comfort zone of many British Asians, were exposed in public, and amalgamated with other areas of people’s lives. This is a combination of the double agenda of ‘2nd generationism’: ‘outwardly’ redefining ‘Asianness’ while ‘inwardly’ creating ways for Asians to be ‘British’. The double agenda was achieved in this kind of trendy arena with crossover appeal to non-Asians.

Raminder said the same thing. She started going to *Anokha* in 1996, the year after it opened. It was important for her because it was something she enjoyed, she said. It was an ”expression of difference”, and of “fusion of cultures”, and “it was underground”, three elements that were important to her. The elements fused were all part of Raminder’s upbringing: It was ‘Asian’ *and* underground, urban and black. The happy coming-together functioned on several layers, she said: for the first time it made publicly available a *cool image* for Asian people - the ‘outward’ agenda of breaking stereotypes -; it was a meeting-place for like-minded people and, it was a locus for self-exploration and self-expression. It was the third point that was most important for Raminder. She was 23 when *Anokha* appeared. The critical stages in her identity formation took place earlier, as we have seen. She said that the club could have quickened the process of identity formation, if it had been around when she was younger.

Anokha and the so-called ‘Asian underground scene’ surrounding the club, became a huge trend, with a following commercialisation. As a by-product of the rapid commercialisation of youth culture, people constantly need to create new ways of putting forward claims to authenticity. For the individual, who symbolises and mediates her or his identity through commodified goods, there is a fine line between integrity and empty signs. It was important for Raminder that the scene stayed political. She did not think much of the people who jumped on the fashionable bandwagon because the scene was a badly needed locus for a *quest for self-expression.*

> The late 90s… There’s a thing that happened, that pisses me off a little bit, is that there are gonna be people that are gonna see this music scene, and look at it as a cool thing to do, and just do it because it’s cool. They’ll

> put on the right clothes, they'll listen to the drum'n'bass or whatever *Outcaste*, Nitin Sawhney, because it's cool. But they may not really understand *where* it came from, and *why*. [..] It will make it difficult for those people who are truly trying to get some sort of understanding of who they are… completely confused [she laughs].

"There is a political statement made from the scene," she said. By that, she seemed to mean a psychological form of *identity politics.* The music and the style are quests for self-identity, expressions of hybrid selves. The people jumping the bandwagon without an inner understanding are not 'real' and 'true' in the sense Erving Goffman described; they are prey to fashion and empty consumption. For Raminder, the major influence of Asian clubs was not their capacity to break stereotypes, but the *space* they made available for an inwardly search for self-expression. This was in sharp contrast to Bidisha's angry anti-colonialism, and was partly linked to their different professions, partly to different backgrounds[152]. Raminder's resentment was not primarily directed towards 'society', but towards *the Asian community*, as we saw. She expressed this even more clearly when I asked her if she felt "confused", as she said, still.

> R: I feel angry about a lot of things. They've made it very complicated for us. [..]. I know my kids are gonna have it so much easier. We've been totally split down the middle. [..]. I feel that still. I feel that with relate to my boyfriend. I feel that upon whether I should get married. Oh, I feel that in a lot of respects, but I feel; luckily, I'm strong enough to do it my own way. I don't wanna do it the English way, and I don't wanna do it the Indian way. I just wanna do it my own way. That's the way I feel.

When 'doing it their own way', they had to balance the sharp edge of individual integrity: between the commodification of youth culture and the ghettoisation of non-white 'Asian-ness', away from the conventional mainstreamers who expect you to toe the line. To accomplish this, Raminder was developing 'her own' sense of self as well as expressing this difference through the right artefacts (*mediating devices*) connected to the right subculture (*figured world*), as we have seen. I will make a small theoretical diversion to recap and clarify what has taken place so far.

Environments for agency and identity formation

The senses of self develop within *figured worlds.* A *figured world* is played out with certain personalities and narratives to conform to. It provides ways of acting as well as ways of

[152] Bidisha's parents were liberals (her mother even a feminist), high-ranking academics and upper class. Raminder's parents were from a completely different background: Her mother finished halfway in her teacher training when she married her father, who came from an uneducated family, and they used to be quite poor.

interpreting meaning (Holland et al. 1998). The symbols or artefacts can “‘open up’ figured worlds. They are the means by which figured worlds are evoked, collectively developed, individually learnt, and made socially and personally powerful” (Ibid. p. 61). These artefacts work as *mediating devices.* Vandana would slowly adopt the ‘Goth’ way of being in the world (‘not give a fuck about all those who didn’t give a fuck about her’) as she, presumably, put on the black ‘Goth’ costume and the ‘Goth’ expression in her face.

> It is a process of personal formation that occurs via cultural resources enacted in a social context. The person ‘makes’ herself over into an actor in a cultural world; she may even, over time, reach the point of being able to evoke the world and her sense of herself within it without the immediate presence of others. But the cultural figurings of selves, identities, and the figured worlds that constitute the horizon of their meaning against which they operate, are collective products (Ibid. p. 282).

Just ‘being on her own a lot’ did not give the same appearance of unapproachable coolness as when Vandana dressed her solitude in publicly meaningful expressions, i.e. the ‘Goth’ outfit. Some figured worlds constitute abstract, or imagined communities “acquired and maintained through the use of common cultural artifacts that have acquired indexical value” (Ibid. p. 247). Vandana did not know other ‘Goths’, but their symbols were publicly available in south London, as in Bradford. The subcultural artefacts mentioned by Raminder were present in Trondheim in the 1980s as well, and they carried the same connotations. In the public arena of the British Asian clubs, Asian ‘cultural resources’ could be ‘enacted in a social context’ in which Raminder actually ‘enjoyed herself’. These Asian elements are also given new meaning in these clubs; they become British resources, with meaning in British society, not only in Asian ‘comfort zones’.

To incorporate ‘the complex – device plus behaviour in context’ in a credible way, ‘the immediate presence of others’ is required. Raminder was concerned about this necessity; to find like-minded friends was almost like a guiding element through her life-story.

> Raminder: And I think, as an Asian woman… and I’ve always known that I’m not gonna follow the conventional path. I think you always feel like you need to be around people who are gonna support that you are gonna be doing something different. So, you’re careful who you’re friends with.

As we remember, her cousins could “slag her off” for not behaving according to a specific norm.

Like Aisha, Raminder moved to another city to go to university. After five years in Manchester, she moved back home to her parents.

> Raminder: ‘Cause I almost thought, if I sit on my parents’ long enough, I’ll come around to their way of thinking. [..] I though, university is university. Go through all your experimental stages, and do whatever

> you've got to do, and you come back home and you settle down. I wasn't settling down, I was getting more and more like going travelling.

Living at her parents place, with the same old restrictions, made her want to travel.

> And I though: why do I want to travel all the time? I got obsessed with it. First I went to Turkey, and I travelled through Turkey. And India and Thailand, and I went to Mexico. [..]. And I though about it, and I though: what is it about travelling, how can I fulfil myself without having to go travelling all the time? You can't do that, you've got to earn money, you've got to live and stuff. And when I came back from my last trip, from Mexico, I though travelling represent freedom. [..]. I though: I've got to move out. Basically, I think I though: I've got to accept who I am. And I've got to get on with my life.

It seems her travelling was some extreme kind of code-switching, however, she couldn't escape the necessity to make a choice sooner or later.

> And I though: I'm not going to change. I need to accept the fact that I'm not going to become Raminder, the cute little Indian girl, that [..] my parents expected me to become. Or *be.* So I realised that I wasn't going to become that person. I wasn't gonna, sort of, succumb to their way of thinking. Then I moved out, and moving out I'd go to a strength to just dictate my life the way I wanted it to go. It's the best thing I've ever done.

She had reflected deeply on the effects her parents' environment had on her life and her identity. In the end, it became crucial for her to alter that influence. She fabricated a little bit for her parents when she moved out, she said. She got a job in North London and told them that it was for job reasons. That way, she avoided a major ontological battle over the way she chose to lead her life.

Presumably the most crucial point for her parents to influence her on, also became one of the most important reasons for moving out. On her last trip to Guatemala, she met someone; "It wasn't important, it was just a fling," she said. However,

> I came back to my mum and dad. I don't think I'm gonna meet the person I'm gonna be with by living at my parents' house. It's not gonna happen. [..]. December last year, I met my boyfriend. So, my whole year… In a way this is so different, because it's not only me making room to do my own thing, but also meeting my boyfriend as well. It's the strongest relationship I've ever had with anyone. I feel like I did the right thing. If I hadn't moved out, I would still be sitting at home waiting for the perfect Sikh man to come along, and it wasn't gonna happen.

Raminder seemed to be considering the *construction of reality*. "If I sit on my parents' long enough," she said. "I'll come around to their way of thinking." She would embody her parents' figured world. Nick struggled with this for a long time. In Manchester, he kept on seeing girls, as he said; "half to convince myself that once when I do get married, I will be able to have a sexual relationship with my wife." Neither Raminder nor Nick came around to the 'conventional' way of

thinking, and through moving out, Raminder put herself in a position where she was able to ‘dictate her life the way she wanted it to go’. Neither of the three *could* or *would* live the life they wanted in the their parents’ environment. We have seen the limiting effects of social environments, now we are going to look at what kind of agency Raminder sought in her chosen figured world.

Aisha, (in order ‘to feel free and do what she wanted,’) Vandana (‘to not live a lie’) and Raminder knew that they needed a different environment. Raminder slowly built up a different identity through affiliations to various subcultures. As we have seen, she sought like-minded people with the aim to *express herself*. The most important aspect of this ‘like-mindedness’, I think was that their individual self-expression was *authentic* and *genuine*. What is it like-minded people can give each other in their quest for self-expression? Raminder sought support for her rebellion, she said, not to be tucked back in the fold again. She saw *friendship* as the key concept in her quest for freedom. It is also the key concept in her narrative, almost her worldview. Meera Syal’s Meena said that her friend

> Anita never looked at met he way my adopted female cousins did; there was never fear of censure of recoil in those green, cool eyes, only the recognition of a kindred spirit, another mad bad girl trapped inside a superficially obedient body (Syal 1997: 150).

In this friendship, Meena was neither imperatively determined by ‘the good Indian girl’ subject position within a community discourse, nor by the racial interpretation she felt in history lessons. Instead, she had found a like-minded person with whom she could try out tempting but inappropriate ways of being a girl. Raminder talked about the instrumental aspects of friendships. What is it Raminder searched for in friendships?

> There were a few Asians, dotted here and there, that I could totally relate to. We could *try* something different, that I could *express* myself to, emotionally express myself to. [..] But my friends haven’t just been friends for me. My friends have helped me and been part of the process of me developing myself. I’ve chosen my friends really carefully. [..]. On the basis of not just going out having a laugh, going and clubbing and just being able to have a chat, because I can have a chat with so many people. There was something deeper, which definitely, certainly effected on who they were, that was important to me. I don’t know whether that is right or wrong, really, to choose your friends on that basis. But I need it, because I thought; I’m gonna be alone anyway. It’s a lonely path for me to take, so I should really do it with support.

Anthony Giddens terms the kind of friendship Raminder described as *pure relationships*. It “is sought only for what the relationship can bring to the partners involved” (Giddens 1991: 90). It is established through choice and “not anchored in external conditions of social or economic life”

(Ibid. p. 89): It is a typical uniplex relation, which came about – according to Giddens – with the emergence of intimacy and the new sense of private life (Ibid. p. 6, 94). Hence, it is closely linked to the wake of individualism. The function of pure relationships is to negotiate self-identity "though linked processes of self-exploration and the development of intimacy with the other" (Ibid. p. 97). In this perspective, these 'others' are individuals e.g. Raminder has chosen, based on the specific way she would like to negotiate her self-identity. And, due to the lack of external 'glue' – according to Giddens – it is only the *authentic* expressions that holds the relationship together (Ibid. 186).

The way Raminder described her friendship with a 'conventional Asian' (see chapter 5 above) – who had not considered "identity issues, or thought about breaking away or rebellion" – conforms to this perspective:

> There've been times that I've just felt really confused about the friendship. I feel guilty because she says that I'm her best friend, a loyal friend. But on the other hand, I don't feel supported, I don't feel supported in who I am by her.

However, at the same time as Raminder sought *support* for making her own choices, she stressed that "it is a lonely path." By that, she signalled a need for something resembling a community: a community of like-minded individuals chosen by her, to replace the safe, but insular and reproachful haven of communalism. With this in mind, I find Giddens' focus on pure relationships insufficient: People do not only need to 'negotiate a desired identity', but also a place to belong. (And they would prefer to belong where their 'desired identity' is appreciated, and consequently nurtured, as in Giddens' perspective.) Outside the 'safe haven' loneliness looms, - as Nick vividly described in chapter 5.

> Raminder: My issues have been that I'm really scared… you're made to believe that you *need* to be part of that community. And if you don't, you'll end up lonely, isolated, without any support.

Negotiating a self-identity and creating a support-network are indeed intertwined. As we have seen, the paramount question is marriage. 'The crunch issue' connects both the question of belonging and the question of forming an identity. Marriage, or cohabitation, requires an engagement with another person's intimate world, which makes it into an essential scene for maintaining a certain identity. At the same time as a home is a place to feel safe and 'at home'. Through the institution of marriage, children are socialised into social, cultural and perhaps religious worlds. Raminder wasn't keen on the Bhangra dudes, she stated.

> The whole thing with expectations of having a Sikh marriage. I've always known that I wasn't gonna do it. And I had to surround myself with friends that I knew were gonna support me. I've come into a situation, I'm 28, my boyfriend is mixed race, half black half white. My parents, obviously, don't know about it. I'm lucky because I've found a group of friend that can support me, within that. So, I will not have to deal with these sorts of pressures.

As a Hannerzian cosmopolite, she fled cultural encapsulation. Hence, a whole range of attachments is required in her *pure relationships*; they are not internally referential -devoid of external moral obligations - as Giddens' version. In order for people to express themselves creatively and freely – which is the main aim for Raminder, Aisha, Nick and Ali – there are various forms of repression and intolerance they cannot accept.

When identity is no longer (totally) ascribed but negotiated, new qualities will gain value on the marriage market. Aisha described the dilemma:

> Aisha: I have met men through the arranged-marriage thing. [..]. But again I haven't really found anyone that I had anything in common with. A traditional type of person really. Someone from good families and all this sort of thing, really. The focus is on what job they're doing. Can they provide for you? What's the status of the family? Are they respectable? It's not anything to do with what is their subcultural affiliation. [..]. It's not part of their experience, it's not something I share with my family. It's something new to them.

Subcultural affiliations gain importance over family background, status and respectability. Karim's mother's four requisites; religion, nationality, ethnic group and perhaps caste[153] are nothing but negative, limiting and repressive to Aisha and Raminder.

> Raminder: Me and my friends often discuss, I've given up the dream about the Asian guy on my wavelength. I know they are out there, but I've given up, really. It's left such a bad taste in my mouth.

What did Raminder find in her black boyfriend?

> Raminder: Basically he's half African half Irish. [..]. I've always been attracted to black men, but I haven't been out with many. I went out with a few when I was younger [..]. He's a Rastafarian, and he's got dreadlocks down to his bottom. [..]. He's really interesting, he's really artistic. Intelligent. Very spiritual. He's just everything I want in a man, really. Except the fact that he is black. [..]. I always thought to myself; I'll be all right. I'll probably end up with somebody, my parents might not really want me to, but they will accept him. But I know that G.; they're not going to accept him. Black, they won't accept because there's racism in Asian culture. [..].. They also won't for of the fact that he's got dreadlocks. That's something that's gonna bother them. I thought; my god, I've rebelled! [She laughs]. It's just like; oh, my god, I could've gone for the easier option, but I just didn't. I just fell in love with this guy.

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[153] People mention caste no more than a handful of times. Perhaps the parents had reached a point where any person speaking the same South Asian language would do? Or, perhaps they just did not speak about such a taboo subject to me?

The characteristics Raminder spoke of are fundamentally different from the ones Aisha's parents thought of. First, the qualities by which suitable men were categorised, were different: Aisha's parents categorised them according to (ascribed, to some extent, but particularly) communally endorsed assets, like family background, respectability and income. Raminder appreciated qualities her boyfriend had achieved through various subcultural affiliations. These had no but negative value in the community. Second, Raminder sought qualities in a man on the basis; what was good for *her*, not what was good for her family in its entirety, like Zamil said. In both instances, the difference is between individuality and communality.

> At that time I was thinking; I wanna meet a Sikh guy, I wanna meet a Sikh guy, but I met G. [..] I *knew* that my parents wouldn't accept it. I knew it from the start. Something just made me go for it. I though; to me, the hardest thing has been to fall in love with somebody who would be good for me. It's been really difficult to meet somebody that I could love, who I can respect.

Raminder 'had tried to come around to 'their way' of thinking', but again, the opposite happened. She was situated in a *figured world* where size of bank account and respectability could not attract her. What she loved about him, she said, was his unusual identity and unusual family background. She mentioned the various ways he stood out from what would be expected of a black person with dreadlocks.

> He just doesn't fit into any categories. [..] The identity thing had a lot to do with it. This unusual identity that he has. I was really attracted to that, 'cause I felt that I had that as well.

Again, what parents and children see as important qualities or similarities was fundamentally different. Raminder had found an 'anomaly' like herself, which she thought was the main reason for why she was attracted to him. They shared a common ground. But the communal pressure in her background held her back, and set them apart. Ani as well, complained that her white boyfriend did not understand the pressure she suffered when constantly having to 'code-switch' between her two *figured worlds.*

We have seen that Raminder sought support for making 'unconventional' choices: for leading a life that strays away from what is expected of her. In order to achieve this, she needed to replace one 'restraining' community with a 'supportive' one – based on different affiliations – where she was able to play out her identity as 'Raminder the individual', not Raminder 'the cute little Indian girl'. But, the pressure to be the 'cute little Indian girl' positioned her in a special way many others – like her boyfriend – could have difficulties comprehending. Until a few years ago, Aisha did not have any Asian friends. She was able to formulate how it was to have

someone from a similar background to share her experiences with. ‘It was such a relief,’ she said, ‘to find Asians people who were on the same wavelength.’

Another aspect of common ground

Why was it a relief? What was it Asians on her wavelength could give her that her white friends ‘didn’t really understand’? She could talk to them about it, but they didn’t share it, she said. These Asians had been clubbing and going to parties like she had done with white people.

> Aisha: In addition, there is, like an understanding about being positioned in a certain place. And what the repercussions of that are, how that feels. I think on a practical level, there is a level of supporting each other through that, ‘cause it’s quite hard[..].sometimes it’s just really stressful or just a bit sad, when you know that your mum wanted you to be married by the age of twenty-five. And you just know that you’re just never gonna do that, [..] like her only daughter and her plans for her wedding. It’s not her fault that you’re in this place. They only wanted the good things for us. So that is a sad thing, for her to come to terms with. Sometimes it’s nice to be able to speak with somebody that can relate to that aspect. You can support each other through. So I think it is that on the emotional plane.

Aisha, who mostly had white and a few black friends, found an emotional understanding and support for the way she led her life when speaking to Asians in the same situation. Before we have seen that they could share memories which others, from a different background, didn’t have. They could share feelings of sadness, And perhaps a little bit of ontological anxiety, as well.

> Aisha: The thing about charting new ground, charting new territory. It’s like you don’t know the way, you don’t know how to deal with things sometimes.

Aisha – charting new territory

During the interview, I got the feeling that Aisha was carrying a lot of sorrow for having to hurt her mother in order to pursue the life she wanted. Now, she had close contact with her mother again, which seemed very important to her.

> A: I speak to my mum every other day on the phone. It has taken time for our relationship to improve. [..]. The older I’ve got, we’ve mellowed out each other**.** I think it has been harder for them. It’s been hard for me as well. [..]. I probably saw them a lot less than I do now. I was probably a bit out of order. I was probably a bit… sort of… uncaring really, when I was younger. About how they were feeling and stuff. But I felt like I needed to express myself. And I needed to have space.

Now, the critical parts of identity formation had taken place. Aisha had gained a secured position and a successful personality in a desired *figured world*. Her parents’ worldview was not a threat anymore. But there were still points of emotional tension: Aisha, who had such a strong sense of

responsibility in her teenage years, had not done exactly what was expected of her, and that caused grief for her mum as well as for herself. They weren't pushing it, but she knew they would like to see her married soon, she said. Neither her older brother was married.

> But I don't really know what's gonna become of that. We just have to wait and see. I think I'm part of a whole generation of women, of Asian women, that we're in the same boat at the moment. And that's one of the thick points of contact between me and my Asian women friend; that we have these same issues to deal with at this point in our lives. We don't know the way, we don't know how it's gonna work out, what's gonna happen to us. Taking it day by day. I try not to think about it too much, 'cause then I a bit panicked and sometimes can get a bid depressed about it. Just try to keep positive about it. And just try to think that something will happen to me that's right for me. Take it one small step at a time.

Aisha did not 'know the way', she said. How would she describe the territory she was charting?

> Being a woman, I'm sort of charting new terrain that hasn't been explored. [..]. I feel that I really am like a sort of… in a way as much of a pioneer as my parents were to come here. They made the first step coming here. I'm making the first step 'cause I was born here, and now it's like; what's gonna happen to me now? I've lived through my twenties now, where I had quite a mad time. [..]. I was thinking, in terms of my family, and the generation, thinking in terms of matrilinear life, I'm probably the first woman, [..] who're doing these sorts of things. 'Cause we're in the west now. So, I don't know what will happen to me. In terms of, say, if I want some kids, or settle down with someone. Is it gonna be with someone who's white, or Asian? It's quite… I know a lot of women my age are thinking about that. Being in their late twenties and thirties. But for me, it has added what is happening to my cultural identity as well. If I have kids with someone who's white or black, it is gonna affect where I'm going, in terms of my identity and culture. It's quite a big thing to think about. No one has done this before. I feel like I'm sort of making history. In a way.

Exploring 'new territory' has become a powerful metaphor in Aisha's life; A territory situated on a middle ground. This theme is prevalent in many areas of her life. She talked about the work ethic we heard about at SOAS. Both her parents were working when they came to Britain. Her father educated himself at the same time, and achieved a good profession, at the same time as raising children and buying a house.

> They've got that work ethic, which I haven't got. I mean, I'm working now. I'm not ashamed to say, when I finished my degree, I was taking it easy. [..]. I did a lot of slacking. And I enjoyed it a lot. [She laughs]. And I am certainly not ashamed to say that. And I think that I needed that time. On one level you could say it's slacking, you know, from a capitalistic work ethic point of view. [..]. But on another level, you could say, in terms of discovering who I was and my identity and growing up, I was working hard. Do you know what I mean? [She laugh again].

Aisha, like the 'SOAS slackers', and Jitin, saw themselves as much more leisure-minded than their parents. Karim's 'emotional guilt' is not what is at stake for Aisha here, rather she implied

that there were various ways of 'working', and she did not think she had wasted any time when 'slacking'[154]. At the same time, she perceived herself as different from her white and black counterparts:

> The thing is, when I said I slacked, I slacked, but then I also kept it together as well. When I got a degree, I got a BA, right. I've done quite a lot of work, but I've done short time work. 6 months, or a year, or a year and a half, you know 2 years. I haven't just finished college, got a job, and just, you know, worked, and then got a mortgage. I've just alternated working and not working. Socialising and working, and studying. So I've probably achieved more than most of my white friends have, actually, in terms of my career. I know a lot of my friends, a lot of them are like single parents. Or, they have never really had a job. Or, they are on benefits or they've just now, started to go back into education. Or whatever. But I've always, like I got a degree by the time I was 21. By Asian standards, even by Asian standards, I think I've achieved pretty well. By white standards, in terms of my peers, I have achieved extremely well. Because I've got a Master's degree now, and I'm working… [in a profession] now.

In relation to work, Aisha seemed to consider herself as benefiting from her 'Asian' background. I don't know what will happen with Karim's young friends, but I'm not sure if their inappropriate behaviour combined with their unconfrontational attitude, in terms of studies as well as marriage, will work out. Aisha, like Karim, saw herself as succeeding in taking the best from 'both worlds', and she could benefit from it in her job, just like Karim planned to benefit from it as a teacher or police officer. Karim emphasised his adaptability as well as his 'variety makes for a spicy life' attitude. Aisha's multiple positioning and the negotiations and struggles she had to engage in because of that, had been valuable in her opinion.

> The whole way my life has gone, [..] stands like finding a middle way between two opposing themes. Culturally speaking, there's like a mainstream culture, a British like, culture and then there's the Asian thing, and it's finding a synthesis of that. Even as a woman, finding that middle ground between family commitments and career commitments: Just the whole of my life is just identical themes, for me. A big, strong theme has been, trying to find a balance between different forces, really.

Ethnically specific discourses have only been one aspect of the different forces. And even the culturally specific elements, are related to general discourses on womanhood: between career and family, or on duty/individualism/egotism: work or leisure. It is hard to establish how important ethnicity is in Aisha and other informants' life. Just like we talked about all kinds of 'non-ethnic' reasons for why Aisha moved to this town before I turned on the recorder, she ended the

[154] A similar debate occurred in Norway. Should the students finish quicker and travel less to become useful taxpayers quicker, or should they take time to gain experiences outside 'the conventional path'?

interview by conceptualising her shift in identity in other, ‘non-ethnic’ terms. She did no longer feel like a Londoner. In the smaller town she escaped the ‘rat-race’, the stress, the latest fashion, the consumption. She could survive on less money.

> just wanna be a bit more mellow, a bit more chilled out. I think I’ve got different priorities. [..]. That's what it taught me. That’s what I discovered. It’s more who I am, I think.

But when Aisha wanted to pursue her newly discovered interest in country life, she has to face the restraining positioning again.

> There’s places like Cornwall, and other rural places that I’ve been to, - I’ve been to festivals in parts of the country but I’ve also been camping -, and I really feel that I don’t fit in there. [..]. Because it’s just white, no ethnic minorities. [Pause]. Quite a lot of ignorance and racism. They don’t stop me from doing it. ‘Cause I think, someone’s got to start doing it. [..]. Some of the black people that I’ve met [here], who’ve come from London, they’re like me. They’ve grown up in an inner city or urban environment, and they’ve come here because they want different things now. [..]. So, I feel part of a new breed in that respect. [..] The black people who live in my house, we’ve got real points of reference with each other. In terms of identity as non-white people [here]. And we talk about it. We talk about it and interview each other like, what it means to be [here], where the majority of people are white. And also, not wanting to be in London anymore, even though there is a big ethnic minority, populations in London, who just don’t want, the hassle and the stress of being there. I don’t want to feel ghettoised, just because of the colour of my skin. That I’ve got to be there. I wanna have the freedom, to do different things. Even if I’m not white. [..]. I suppose I am breaking new ground. I suppose, at the time, I don’t really think about it.

A final illustration of how Aisha and her black flatmates can build strength to pursue what they want in life, in this case in a relationship stemming from a ‘common ground’. The ‘common ground’ in this instance, is restraining positioning according to ‘racial’ stereotypes and the want to lead a different life than they were destined to.

Chapter 8

Asian women for the future

- negotiating female gender identities

In this chapter, I shall try to develop some themes from the two foregoing ones. Satinder, Raminder and Aisha pointed out their special position as female Asians. In relation to her brother, Satinder said that while he was brought up to do as he pleases, she and her sister was always told what to do and what not to do. “You’re a girl. And you remember that. You never forget that,” she emphasised. We can presume that gender identities with the notion of female purity will be deeply embodied. It is therefore particularly interesting to look at how Asian *women* negotiate new ways of being British Asian (*female*, as Aisha stressed). We have seen how Zamir started to reflect on his own worldview through learning about other ways of life. In this chapter, we shall meet a woman, Ani, who negotiated her own way of being female. This negotiation took place between security and freedom on more than one level.

Ani and a London/worldwide ‘youth’ culture

Ani was the sweetest girl imaginable. I had met her once before I interviewed her, in one of her two homes. It was on a party before Ani’s sister and her boyfriend went on a trip to Latin America. They lived in a big communal house in London. The people on the party seemed to be involved in creative businesses, and despite their relaxed way of dressing, something made me think that they had a little more money than most of the other people I knew. Probably they were pursuing their creative careers more successfully than most other people I knew, who were trying to do the same. The house was pained in vivid colours just like our own (which was in poorer South London), but the rooms were bigger and there were more funny gadgets around, which gave it a little bit of a more sophisticated atmosphere. As usual, among this kind of people, at such an occasion, in London in the late 1990s, there was a some cannabis smoking, and a little alcohol.

Ani was 27 years old. Her older sister was 4 years older.

She willingly helped me out with the interview, although being busy with her career as a photographer. Despite the fact that she did me a favour spending many hours on the interview, she refused to let me pay for the lunch in a café. Her generosity and sweetness really enchanted

me. She seemed to be perfectly at ease in the interview as well as at the party. There she conversed lightly and giggled gleefully, at the same time as being attentive to my friend and me, and the other guests. When listening to the interview afterwards, her sweet and generous way of being made perfectly sense – it was the way she was brought up.

Southall – Ani's suburban microcosm

Every weekend Ani would leave the communal house to go to her parents' place in Southall. She and her sister had their own answer-phone there, and Ani readily called it her home. While Nick viewed living in the suburbs only as something negative, Ani appreciated aspects of suburban life.

> If somebody asked me, where do you consider home, it wouldn't be India, it wouldn't be Britain, it'd be Southall. Because, I think it's a microcosm of my experiences as a British Asian second generation. [..]. It's completely a love-hate relationship at the same time. It's a place where I feel grounded. And, you know it's a place where I feel secure and very stable, but at the same time, it's a place where I want to escape from [..] because there are certain aspirations and ambitions that I want to achieve, and I know that I won't be able to achieve within that. [..]. It's always been like, geographically, out in the suburb. So it is very much that suburban… mentality.

Security versus freedom; For a lot of young people, the other side of the coin of security is boredom. In America, what Ani was doing is called 'social commuting'. Nick was not happy with the suburban mentality. He mentioned the lack of aspirations and cultural diversity. Ani could also sense a value in it.

> But then it's always something that pulls you back. [..]. I love London. But sometimes I feel very alienated from the pace at which it moves. And the sort of overbearing commercialism of it. And the overbearing ambition of it.

Here, Ani's scepticism of London reminded me of Aisha's. Aisha moved away from London to escape it. Nick wanted to move away from the suburbs to escape the narrow-mindedness he found there. (Neither of these two objections were based on 'ethnic' terms). Ani was moving back and forth.

> And I need to go back to Southall. It's just really focused. And the things that are important; Home, family, community. Because there is that sense of community there. That you don't get in a lot of places anymore. [..]. I want to escape what's repressive about those structures, which is, as an Asian girl, as an Asian female, I'm not supposed to do certain things. I'm frowned upon because I *am* pursuing a career, because I'm *not* married. [..]. All those things frustrate me about being in Southall. And being Asian female.

Here, Southall represented something particularly Asian. The various cultural understandings – or discursive formations – of gender roles, particularly female ones, are at often at odds with each other and are therefore hard to reconcile into a middle ground. We have seen various examples of the cultural importance of being female in a certain way in many Asian families. We have seen how important it was for many to be 'a good girl' (or a good boy, for the matter). Zamil mentioned the inequalities in his house based on the simple fact that 'Yasemin is a girl and I am a boy'. Aisha talked about how her life had been different from her whole matrilinearl family before her. She saw herself as part of a new generation of Asian women who are charting new territories in Britain now. Many said it is a double disadvantage to be a woman from an ethnic minority.

> I was up there two days ago. We've got into the *same* old conversation my mother and I, that I've been in… Even, oh, this is the funny part. [..].In the waiting room [at the beautician's], there's a woman, who must have been my mother's age, sitting next to me. She's going to do the same thing [pluck her eyebrows with an ancient Indian technique]. She is Hindu, I think. So, we're sitting there, she started chatting to me [..]. And almost immediately; are you married? No. How old are you? 27. Why aren't you married? [..]. We got into this discussion and I was tryin' get to her that my sister was 31 and she wasn't married. And she would go; why isn't she married? Why doesn't she want to get married? [..]. Like there's something wrong with her; she needs to see a doctor. Stuff like that. So, it's *in* the community. And the time it's in the community, it's all around you, *that's* how you perceive an Asian female.

In the previous chapter, we saw how people tried to dissociate themselves from this community construction of reality, which they found limiting in the same way as Ani. To leave Southall and pursue a career instead of toeing the line is discouraged by the community, she said. How did her parents react to Ani and her sister's unconventional choices? The opinions and gaps are not clear-cut:

> The other day, it was funny [..]. We were all at home, it was my mum, my sister and me and my cousins. And we had a neighbour, a female neighbour come our. And my mum gets pissed off with my sister. [..]. What she does is, she works for about six months, saves up enough money, and they go travelling. And she's just come back from Latin America. [..]. [M]y mom hates the fact that my sister goes off. She's not married. You know, what is she doing, travelling to these faraway places, but then this female neighbour came over. And my mum called my sister down to, basically, you know, oh, tell her, tell her that you went to Latin America. Tell her what you saw. I was actually quite excited about that. They discourages it on the one hand, but then they find something good in it. [..] Yea, they do try to understand where we're coming from. I don't think, it's not that, but in the eyes of the community. *That* makes a problem. What the collective are thinking and feeling. [..]. Your kids shouldn't be doing that, but, they are doing that. So, it goes on like that.

We have heard about this generational and community versus individual conflict earlier, but here we see that the opposition between community and parents, and the rebellious second generation is far from clear-cut. Ani's mother tried to negotiate a place in the middle.

> I think there is definitely a sense of pride, but we know what we wanna do, even though we're not fulfilling their expectations of us. Somehow we'll succeed. And they admire that fact that we've been brave enough to step out. Step off the treadmill. Back off the cultural treadmill. Even though it's *not* the done thing. But, having said that, we still get so much grief [she giggles]. We get loads and loads and loads of grief for having made the choices that we've made.

Their parents didn't approve of their daughters' choices, but it was never a question of renouncing them. It was particularly their mother who grieved their choices. Ani could understand why.

> [M]y dad, he speaks English, he feels more integrated in a sort of British [..] society. In the whole work place and stuff like that. Whereas my mum has always been the immigrant worker. When she came to England, she was a housewife for a long time. Then she was [working] at home. [..]. My mum doesn't really speak English, she speaks very, very poor English. So, in that sense, whereas I can discuss certain things with my dad and make him understand, just because I don't really have that full linguistic range in Punjabi. And my mother, she's quite simple at the end of the day. [..] She never went to school. She doesn't know about those things.

By using the word immigrant[155] worker, Ani indicates that her mother is *not* part of British society in the way her father is. Their mother would be more worried for losing her children, since she would not understand as well what was going on outside her enclave. Her father had been to school and had been working in English society, and 'he connected more with the two sisters'. He also encouraged Ani in her career.

Ani had now indicated that the 'Asian community' did not represent one homogenous worldview, following two lines. Firstly, her parents took a pride in their daughters' will of their own and found it worth protecting against a 'community' who might think 'it's something wrong with them'. Secondly, the understanding the parents have of their children's life is depending on their participation in, hence understanding of wider British society. How did the 'immigrant worker' mother react to her unconventional daughter?

> I was discussing it with my mum the other day. [..]. She's like, you really have to get married. You're the only one left. But mum, can I marry a white man? Can I have an Indian wedding and marry a white man? And we just got into this really, really funny conversation about it. She was saying; well you know, you can marry whoever you want, just as long as you get married. And then she says, no, I don't really want you to marry a white man, you know, it's the language, the communication. I won't be able to communicate with him. What

> could I say to her? She was just coming up with all these really funny limited English expressions. There's a lot of humour about it. But, ultimately, it *is* going to be a problem. [..]. Oh, and then she was also saying about, the fact that we have to keep our own. It's about collecting and preserving our own. I actually *do* discuss these things with my mum.

Ani and her mum could understand each other. However, certain aspects of Ani's life where very different from her mother's world. At the same time, Ani somehow appreciated her mother's point of view.

> She doesn't understand how I can create a career out of that, how I could get a decent job out of it. It's not the thing I should be doing. I showed her my photos in The Guardian. [..] [She is] like don't get too above yourself. And I like that, though, because that's what Southall is about. It's the grounding thing. Don't get too above yourself. Don't become like those western people, who get above their station. Remember where you came from, remember what you are. Even if you, the greatest achievement or whatever. [..]. There are a lot of truisms, Indian truisms, about the west. It *is* that focus on occasions and family, a sense of self. You *can* get lost drive for money or ambition.

We have now seen why Ani described 'Southall as a microcosm of her experiences as British Asian second generation'. In that locality, layer upon layer of influences have shaped her. There is the pull of the city common for her kind of suburbia dweller. But there's also the feeling of belonging. There are constraints and security. In Southall, her worldviews are clashing, and in her story about her mother, we see that there is not necessarily a gulf of understanding between her mother and her.

Between a rock and a hard place: 'middle ground' and 'crunch issue'

I will now try to look into how Ani experiences the influences she said Southall represented to her.

> The way I see the world, I realise it's very Indian, emotionally speaking. In terms of the *values* that I feel instilled with.

As we remember, Zamil told how certain values were *instilled* in him. He emphasised that he had chosen to appreciate and follow many aspects of his parents' worldview.

> I *know* there are other things that set me apart from being British. Those are the things that make me Indian. Just in terms of normal human interaction, human exchange. I get those things from my culture. My Punjabi culture. I don't get them from my British culture. Things like… [..] hospitality… Certain standards… The way you treat people. You know, there's a certain openness; these are certain rules that you're taught. [..]. I

[155] No one calls the Asian or Afro-Caribbean populations in Britain immigrants, as I've pointed out elsewhere.

> can't contain exactly, but, I just, I *know* the values of the things that really make me Indian. The way I see the world.

Often, when the interviewees spoke about the issues of 'instilled culture'[156], they would say it was hard to explain. However, as I have pointed out before, they displayed a very high level of reflexivity concerning embodied culture. Ani as well gave an example of how she experienced differences. A friend of the two sisters had passed away recently.

> And the way our friends reacted to his death, we found really alien. Don't wanna talk about it. Just kind of getting on with things. Whereas the whole Indian way of responding to that kind of tragedy, is to embrace that expression, that emotion. It's about immersing yourself in the total tragedy of the event. [..]. I've grown up within this culture. The way that you experience about death, marriage, things like that. Even relationships… I was seeing this white guy. For about a year and a half. [..]. Our relationship and commitment are so different. I'm an Asian female, I'm taught certain things about loyalty and commitment. And he was frustrated about the fact that I would be home every weekend to see my family. Right. Because he doesn't see his family [..], he sees his family for Christmas and New Year. If that. Or maybe once or twice during the rest of the year. You know, it's not as important for him, whereas for me, it is a lifeline. I *have* to see them every week. It's that loyalty and commitment to my family.

In the quote above, Ani did not see her position as an Asian woman as negative, as a burden. (Whereas I think Aisha was more focused on the constraints and bad conscience connected to her obligations). Instead, the nuance of sarcasm in Ani's description and her choice of the word 'lifeline' indicates that she thought her ex-boyfriend missed out on something when he had so little contact with his family. There is another side to strong family commitments and obligations lamented by Aisha and Raminder.

The bond and commitment Ani felt towards her family set her apart from her boyfriend who, in Ani's eyes, did not have such sentiments. Secondly, she saw her commitment to their relationship as different from his as well.

> When you're brought up as an Asian female, even if you're going to have an arranged marriage, it's about loyalty and commitment for life. You know, that's what we're taught. For me, I've pretty much felt like I've hit upon the right kind of guy. I know he's not perfect, I know he's not my soulmate, but I was in love with him and I think that's enough for building those foundations. But, he's the one who has a different notion of loyalty and commitment and knows that there's a way out. For me, there was never a way out. It was like, OK I'm committed to this guy, and that's the end of it. He was frustrated by so many cultural differences that he

[156] It was only in interviews 'instilled culture' was a topic, so 'interviewee' is a fitting term here.

> pulled it off in the end[157]. [..]. There was little nuances, little cultural nuances, like that, that made me realise, that yea, I've been brought up a certain way. I *have* had a certain upbringing. It's different from an equivalent kind of British youngster.

Again, we see how people become aware of and put words to the small differences they experience. Yasemin said the small differences made her realise she wasn't Bangladeshi, like the Bangladeshis 'back home'. Ani realised the nuances and she appreciated them.

Like Raminder and Aisha in the previous chapter, Ani said firmly that she didn't want an Asian boyfriend. However, just like Aisha described, Ani needed understanding for her special situation as an 'Asian female', and she didn't think her ex-boyfriend was able to show this kind of understanding.

> A year and a half into the relationship and then realising that, the first time I slept with someone… That's why I'm even more pissed off, because that's me with the cultural thing. I lost my virginity; I had bordered my virginity for like, so many years. And I lost it to him. In Asian cultures, that is about leaving it to your husband type of thing. I wouldn't have done it if I haven't thought that this is a long-term thing. He could speak of it so shallowly; like it meant nothing. And he couldn't understand even *that*. [..]. I never said it to him.

Ani pointed out that 'it was just stubbornness' on her ex-boyfriends side, ' because her friends understood it'. Hence, she didn't need Asian friends in order to deal with these challenges[158]. Ani presented two different ways of committing oneself, which were difficult to align; one was for 'life' the other for 'a while'.

> I know it is ingrained in me, and I *respect* it. I really respect that whole way of thinking. You have a partner, you stick with them for life. If it is the right one, of course. I'm not saying the first person you meet, but you

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[157] Again, I should point out, this is Ani's interpretation of the events, not the actual events themselves. The interpretation has not put her off white men for the future, but it has, as we are about to see, made her reflect on her own way of behaving and feeling in relationships.

[158] The ethnic background of Ani's friends was similar to most of the people in this sample (Raminder is the most striking exception): "At school, I gravitated towards the black kids and the white kids. Definitely I had lots of Asians, 'cause I went to Asian schools. Where black and white kids were [..] in a total minority. So, it was that sense of difference that used to intrigue me [see comment about Hannerz' cosmopolitanism above]. I was gravitating towards the minority. [..] At university it was really funny. It was this huge Asian contingence. [..] Completely segregated. So all the Asian kids down one end and everybody else on the other. We used to nickname it Bombay Airport. [..] But the way they used to regard me because I used to hang out with the white kids. [..]. There was a kind of a *coconut* thing going on. You're black on the outside, white on the inside. The accusations used to fly. I'm not worried about it. I know what my heritage, my history, my identity's about. But, I also love that sense of… I want to embrace difference. I wanna learn about other cultures. I wanna learn about other people, and other identities. And I think sometimes, we need to break out of that whole priory. You know, collective, collectiveness or whatever it is" This quote is very characteristic for the people in my sample. In addition, most - like Ani - did not seem to imply there were things others did not understand, like they did in the discussion at SOAS. There were cultural differences in for instance interaction - like Ani had pointed out - but they were not beyond comprehension. However, I should

> know. Whoever it is, if you love them enough, that's something you build upon. And I like that whole concept of responsibility [..]. That it is, it's not when the initial kind of attraction wears off that you need to be partners. It's about building. And that's what our generation are losing. 'Cause we *are.* We *are* embracing more romantic notions of love. That is a trend that has arisen very recently in Southall. It's something that you should definitely mention.

Ani saw the values of life-long commitment as inherited from her parents. They were however transformed in two respects. First, like in Zamil's case, but unlike Satinder's brother, Ani had become conscious of her embodied values. She could verbalise her values and see that they were different from e.g. her white boyfriend's. Despite viewing them as ingrained, or instilled, as psychology trained Zamil put it, they were no longer taken for granted by either Ani or Zamil. The second difference follows from the first; when a way of life is no longer *doxic*, but a conscious 'choice', the choice can be revised, and altered. Ani touched upon this when she said that it didn't have to be the first person you meet, which presumably would be the case in the traditional system. This consciousness also made her able to evaluate her values and give an effort in holding on to the ones she appreciated, and letting go of the ones she disliked. However, at the same time, the words 'ingrained' and 'instilled' entail that the various answers of 'how to live as human' are not 'equally legitimate' for the person. She cannot let go of the values without a struggle. This is what makes her and Zamil's values similar to their parents'. It is Ani's 'Punjabi female side' and Zamil's 'Bengali oldest son side'.

I would like to address one more factor. In chapter 6, we saw how Zamil and Satinder challenged the unequal relationship between girls and boys in Asian families. They both said that girls had less freedom. This injustice conflicted with other values important to them, namely equality for men and women. The principle of equal human rights challenges prejudices. For Ani, this injustice can have worked as a further disembedding mechanism. However, she ended up experiencing a clash of incompatibility between equal human rights to individual freedom and values instilled from her upbringing.

Ani's sister had been in a long term relationship, while Ani had had a relationship with a white man, as we saw. It had ended some months before and her mixed feelings concerning this relationship took up a big part of the interview. Her boyfriend couldn't understand her particular problems as an Asian female.

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also point out that Ski had a very, very close relationship to her 4 years older sister, whom she would be able to share all the heartache Aisha spoke of with.

> He never understood that. He would be upset because he didn't think I wanted to be in a relationship. He couldn't understand that this wasn't about him; This was about other things; Just a reaction to everything that I've been indoctrinated with. On an emotional, on a physical level I felt something completely different. Something so overwhelming, that I couldn't help feel these other obstacles, impediments, out of my way.

To ignore the 'instilled values' was not easy. It wasn't 'just to switch codes from arena to arena', as Ballard assumed (1996: 31-2). Ani seemed not to have been able to 'switch codes' entirely – because the codes were incompatible. Her boyfriend thought she didn't care about him when he didn't introduce him to her parents[159]. And, it wasn't easy to have to deceive her parents all the time. Neither was it easy to go against her own 'instilled values'.

> I feel really bad having to lie. Because that wasn't they way I was brought up. I've felt a lot of guilt. I felt so much guilt. I had to hide who I was seeing for a year and a half, feeling so much guilt. I mean, I was completely in love with him. The guilt is crippling. Because you *know* the way you've been brought up. You *know* the things that you've been taught. And you know, by being in that relationship, you're going against all of that. [..] And it just did my head in [With emphasis on every word]. It was really bad for him, because he didn't wanna lie about it. But [..] that's the reality of the relationship for me. My parents would freak if they found out. [

We have seen that the 'blind-eye strategy' can be a solution for a while. Ani went against what she had been taught. However, if she managed to cope with that for herself, the next step was the guilt of lying to her parents. Neither her boyfriend could deal with it. The code-switching was problematic at three fronts: partner, parents and self. In addition, sooner or later Ani and the others would have to make up their mind; the gay Asian strategy Nick talked about - get married and just do what they please afterwards - was not an option.

> Sometimes I think maybe, maybe, maybe they'd understand. And I joke about it with them, 'cause that would familiarise them with the idea. I sit down and joke with my mum. [..]. Even if I get through to them as a first obstacle, there's the rest of my family, the extended family, like my grandfather. How on earth would my grandfather understand something like that?

Ani saw her situation similarly to Raminder. However, Ani didn't see it as 'community pressure' and 'competition for *izzat'*, but rather a question of worldview, it seems. She can talk about her life with her parents – particularly her father, since he is familiar with British society, and also her mother to some extent – but for her grandfather the idea of she not marrying a Punjabi Sikh

[159] When I talked to some professional middle class Sikh and Hindu girls (about 25 years) in Hounslow, one of them (the less educated, and less conventional) was frequently talking on the mobile with a black boy she had met the night before. They were discussing whether to meet up again, but one of the issues they had to deal with was that he obviously was suspicious of the parents of Asian girls. Hounslow has a large Indian population, so he had probably heard/experienced it before.

would be unthinkable, she implied.

She had not found a compromise yet and had only managed to but the problem at bay, for a while. But, I think just like Zamil, she was determined to change what was instilled in her when it went against what she believed in.

Distinguishing between various restrictions and responses

I have devoted the better part of this chapter to Ani's battle to balance her 'two halves'. Ani's negotiation between various and at times irreconcilable subject positions available for women, was prominent in her narrative. I described Satinder's brother's 'Southall breed' masculinity as *traditionalist*. Ani and Zamil however, opted for a constant revision of what their 'parents had instilled in them' in their negotiation of gender roles. Earlier, I have attempted to show that according to Homi Bhabha's notion of third space, what is instilled would always be re-negotiated in individual expressions. As we saw, with Ani and Zamil on the one hand and the 'Southall breed' on the other, this re-negotiation can happen more or less consciously: lesser in a reification in traditionalism, more in Zamil and Ani's constant reevaluation.

In order to conclude the discussion on instilled values, I will go back to the discussion on the experience of, and responses to, constraints from chapter 5 and 7. We have seen a number of cases where individuals have found themselves affected by many different, and often conflicting, influences.

Community expectations/pressure

We have seen that the people in my sample had few objections to rebelling when they saw 'the community' as posing constraints in their life. Tellingly, many were concerned about the right of the individual to make choices. I did not find any evidence of feelings of ascribed obligation to a wider 'Asian community' outside close kin due to some imiagined community and perceived common origin. Neither, were Raminder, Nick, Ani – and some more people, as we shall see in the final chapter – concerned about their own position within an 'ethnic community'[160]. Instead,

[160] In a survey among young Asian girls and women carried out by Henning et al.(1999), the expectancy of an arranged marriage as an important reason for young girls to conform to the norms of the community. However, very few in my sample were interested in having an arranged marriage. Except from Zamil and Taslima's family, who I will return to in the final chapter, the only ones who opted for this kind of marriage were the young men at SOAS and a group of professional, middle class young women (25 years) from Hounslow who had 'tried the love market' and were now looking for suitable partners in the 'arranged section'.

they saw 'the community' as infringing on their personal liberties; Nick's right to be gay, Ani and Raminder's right to live the life they wanted as well as the right to have a boyfriend of their own choosing. As opposed to these values of individual freedom, they saw the values of the community as 'time warped' and reified, communal, narrow-minded and materialistic.

However, all of them were concerned about their parents' social position. They were willing to restrict their own freedom if they knew it was important to their parents. As Raminder put it, her parents had only one world while she had many, and she was very concerned about that.

Loyalty

Vandana, Aisha, Ani and many others stayed home and were 'good girls' (or 'good boys' – which was not an expression in the same way as for the girls, but many of the boys in my sample saw their upbringing as much stricter than that of the white teenagers). The reason they gave for this was to not upset their parents. Zamil, and Ani, Aisha and Raminder after they moved out, kept secrets from their parents in order 'not to break their parents' picture of them', as Zamil put it. Clearly, they did not see these constraints as originating from 'community pressure'; they did it out of respect for and loyalty to their parents' worldview. A worldview they saw as different to their own. They did not choose to 'keep within the boundaries' because they were instilled with these values themselves, but because breaking them would cost them more in terms of emotional distress, than it would to wait until they were out of their parents' sight. Ani's 'good girl' story goes like this:

> Loads of boys and girls used to bunk off school to go to daytimer gigs. [..]. I was a good girl in High School. I never used to do things like that. The thing is, I studied at school because I always knew that once I turn 18 and go to university, that's when my real life will begin. And I was prepared to wait for that.

After Ani left for university, she started to switch codes between Southall and London, weekends and weekdays. She, Aisha and others transgressed these kind of limitations with the help of an 'ignorance is bliss' justification; what their parents did not know would not harm them. Ballard's concept of code switching is valid in the purest form of this argument: Ani chose to wait in order to be out of sight of her parents.

However, Ani did not change her lifestyle from one day to another. Neither did Aisha, whose – she said – 'identity and personality changed' after she left home. It wasn't 'just to 'switch codes'', but after some time in the new environment, their identity and worldview would

change. This new environment might be a figured world they have constructed with 'like-minded people', where they could play out new identities and worldviews, as I showed in the previous chapter.

Sense of reality – sense of limits

Ani said she had 'never really been attracted to boys' because she knew how her parents felt about it. Nick, however, had sex with men despite feeling so guilty about it that he felt he 'tainted the house' and his mother when he returned home to the figured world he had grown up in. These are examples of 'instilled' religious obligations and cultural traditions, which (I think[161]) Ani expresses in the following quote:

> My mum has said to me so many times, I want you to turn out like me I want you to be pure [..]. Oh, I've made the biggest mess out of my life, Mum! And I can't tell you about it!

This is a (more or less) commonsense view of reality where the experience of constraints stems from a *sense of limits* or *sense of reality*, as Bourdieu puts it (1977: 164). Nick had freed himself from these inner constraints, while Ani was in the process of doing it. She slowly started to get involved in a relationship after living away from home for a long time, and she was – like Nick – determined to free herself from the constraining feelings of guilt.

> It's like the drink and the drug thing. [..]. I don't even feel guilty about it. I feel guilty about it sometimes, but. If I go to the temple I feel, oh God, I'm so bad. I drink so much – and I don't drink that much. I smoke so much. And that's one thing I shouldn't be doing. And I feel bad about it when I'm in the temple. When I'm doing it, I'm fine. So I think the relationship thing for me is a real head-fuck.

And like Aisha in the previous chapter, Ani had to come to terms with the fact that her mother could not accept, and not even imagine, 'what a mess she had made out of her life.' But she seemed determined to find her own way round – or *through* – the points of friction.

> I know that I have to thread very carefully in relationships, because of my situation. I need to be with somebody who understands, and who could give me that space. And not take it personally when I cry or get really upset. He took it personally. I need someone who is strong enough and assured enough. This is the guilt thing I need to work for. I know I'll get over it one day. But you need to be in a relationship to start working through it.

Ani was determined to change what was instilled in her and she had even been thinking about how she should do it[162].

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[161] She might just be a dramatic narrator.

[162] Some might question my predictions here and say that she might still get married to a Sikh of her parents' choice. That might of course be true, but if that happens I'm quite sure that the Sikh will be Ani's kind of person. Although

It is important to point out that the constraints Nick and Ani experienced only is *felt* to be constraining when they are being transgressed. Yasemin, just like her brother Zamil, wanted her parents to arrange her marriage. But unlike her two brothers, she did not want to have anything to do with the other sex before that time. I see her as a firm Muslim, and she seemed[163] to be completely at ease with following the prescriptions of the Koran and staying chaste until marriage. In her case, the 'constraints' did not affect her – this seemed to be her commonsense worldview; She would presumably not get involved in relationships whether she lived at home or not. Yasemin's 28 years old sister Taslima had lived away from home for two years before she got married, and she told me she was never involved in anything her parents wouldn't have approved of. The term constraint looses its meaning, since Yasemin and Taslima didn't see it as constraining. It is just like Bourdieu describes it; - *a sense of reality.*

This analysis might seem coloured by an individualistic approach to feelings: I imply that constraints are experienced differently when they come from 'outside' – like from a 'community' you haven't involved yourself in by your own choice – compared to when they come from the way you experience reality. However, people in my sample distinguish clearly between 'instilled values' and 'community pressure'.

When is a sense of limits *constraining?*

There is one more comment I would like to make. It is however a difficult comment, because it involves the dilemma of universalism versus relativism. Can the validity of worldviews – senses of reality – be compared? Bourdieu thinks so when he writes that power relations are the product as well as the cause of the commonsensical reality of classification systems (Bourdieu 1976: 164), see Ch. 6 above.

Taslima and Yasemin's range of choices were constrained by a narrower '*sense of limits*' than their brothers experienced. Zamil as well as Shahid have had long-term relationships with (Asian) girls, without their parents knowing. This would have been unthinkable for the two girls in the family. I don't know the reasons behind Yasemin's attitude, but I'm convinced that her

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many of my participants doubted it, there are actually many 'like-minded' British Asians out there. My reason for being so sure is that Ani's sister had already reached the age of 31 without getting married. The odds for settling down in a traditional Sikh marriage - whatever that might be – is not very high at that age.

[163] She did not speak much about this issue with me, but her older sister Taslima has confirmed this impression several times. Taslima had even asked her if she wasn't interested in any boys.

religious or cultural values were embodied. Also in other aspects of their life, the girls were more restricted. Neither Yasemin nor Taslima had driving licenses (Yasemin would soon get one, but Taslima had failed her test), and they were worried about using public transport in the evening. They were not interested in going out like their brothers did. Taslima said her sister 7 years younger could go out more and do more than she had been allowed to do. That's why Yasemin wasn't that interested, Taslima said. It wasn't so attractive when it was permitted. Taslima had had to rebel and fight for everything. Zamir, as we remember, shared this attitude. He respected his parents' values because he had had the opportunity to see other ways of life and had freedom to choose.

On the other hand, it is clear that Zamir had seen more than his sisters, hence he had had a wider freedom to choose. Taslima said there were some things she regretted she hadn't done. Like Zygmunt Bauman (2000: 207) and Bhikhu Parekh emphasise, through experience of cultural diversity one can engage in cultural efforts knowingly. One becomes free to pick and choose, and renegotiate on one's own terms. Taslima wished she had more education. Ten years earlier it wasn't common for local Bengali girls to study, and Taslima had pushed the boundaries when she went to nursing school. The other thing she regretted was that she hadn't been dating when she had had the chance. She would have acted differently, she said, if she had not felt so pressured to get married. 9 years younger Yasemin however, had said to her sister when she asked her, that she would not like to date anyone. On the one hand, the two sisters practised their Muslim faith more consistently than their brothers. On the other, I would guess that it would not have been easy for any of the girls to break out of what I choose to call *instilled* concepts of femininity. Female chastity and purity seems to be an important notion here. At the time Taslima told e.g. that she went to school, young girls shouldn't walk alone. First, her parents had picked her up, later she went with her brothers. I suppose the classification as females had instilled in them the importance of 'purity'[164].

At the same time as Taslima regretted not having made other choices, she expressed envy of the new British Muslim identity of her sister's generation. She saw them as more integrated into British society, at the same time as they practised Islam. Perhaps she envied this new generation because they could find structures that facilitated their choice to live as Muslims, while Taslima ended up in-between? This interpretation goes against Bourdieu's universalism;

[164] It is a delicate issue, illustrated by the little humorous conversation around the education of Taslima's baby. 'You'll have to teach my child about the truths in life,' Taslima said to Yasemin. 'I don't know them myself,' Yasemin replied quickly. Taslima said laughingly that the child should e-mail me and ask. In danger of over-interpreting this brief exchange, I think both girls signalled that they are innocent when it comes to 'the real world'. At the same time, I think Taslima wanted her child to have a wider array of choices than she had herself. Both Yasemin and Taslima knew that Shahid arranged gigs, but they have never accompanied him – 'because they are not into that kind of music'. I believe that's the main reason. At the same time Taslima has told me that she guessed I would have been judged differently if I had been Asian and hanging around with guys on clubs like I did. I have come to their house with green eye-shadow and my hair hanging down to join Shahid in a club. No one seemed to think bad of me because of that. Taslima could say things like; 'don't get drunk tonight, you don't want a hangover tomorrow.' I don't know about the boys, but the girls in the family surely have relatived values: They would not like to do the things they know I do - drinking and going to clubs, but it would surprise me if they disrespected me for it. But, at the same time as it was not 'their cup of tea', they knew/presumed that it would harm their reputation if they did it. Yasemin for instance, mentioned several times that she would not walk alone or only with another girl in Brick Lane because she would be hassled for not having a male with her.

sense of limits is expression of power relations. However, it is in tune with Parekh when he writes:

> If otherwise disadvantaged minorities are to survive and flourish, they need public recognition, encouragement and material support not in order to protect them from change but to create conditions in which they enjoy the security, self-confidence and broad equality necessary to make uncoerced choices (Parekh 1998: 3).

Chapter 9

'Middle ground' – Family and the negotiation of cosmopolitanism

Post-, co- and pre -figurative cultural processes

In *Twenty Girls: Growing up, Ethnicity and Excitement in a South London Microculture'*, Helena Wulff (1988) is inspired by Fredrik Barth's view when she looks at how cultural change takes place on a micro-level. Anthropology has traditionally been concerned with how culture is transferred from the older to the younger generation without much change[165]. Margaret Mead, terms this the *post-figurative* process of cultural reproduction, Wulff writes (1988: 37). As an alternative to this view, Mead introduced the concepts of *co-figurative* and *pre-figurative* processes. The first suggests a process where children and parents learn from or develop together with their contemporaries. In the latter parents learn from their children (Ibid.). In contrast to Mead, Wulff does not use these terms to describe different *cultures,* but different cultural *currents,* which often take place interrelatedly (Ibid.).

In Wulff's study, the girls formed co-figurative currents together at the street-corner and the youth club, and to some extent at school. While school and home, and to some extent the club, were dominated by post-figurative flows – from grownups to children. Pre-figurative flows – from children to parents – were not common in Wulff's material. However, when they occurred, they usually concerned what I have termed a cosmopolitan stance; The girls had closer relationships across 'the ethnic boundary' than their parents, and their 'inter-ethnic' friendships influenced many in the older generation (Ibid. p. 37-8). Notably, cosmopolitanism was the most prominent example of pre-figurative cultural transmission also in my material. But in contrast to Wulff's study, I noticed a number of cases where children changed their parents' assumptions about the world[166].

Cosmopolitanism was the first element Zamil mentioned when he talked about the new 'way of life' his parents had had to accommodate to.

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[165] This traditional anthropological view is present in many anthropological definitions of culture, e.g. Tylor's classical and Geertz'.

[166] Perhaps the girls Wulff studied were too young to have started to divert from their parents, to debate with them, and influence them to a large degree. The examples of pre-figurative cultural transmission I came across took shape when the children were in their late teens.

> You have to learn to live with people from different countries and different nationalities. I don't think my parents fully appreciates that. [..]. Or they *do*. *Now*. I don't think when they first came here [..] we were stuck with our own community. [..]. We used to go to Bengali people's houses.

As we remember from the SOAS discussion, 'chain-migration' led to closely knit communities. Most of Britain's labour migration was chain-migration, as was the case among these Bengalis. 'Time warp' is linked to chain-migration as we remember.

> We[167] changed that, because we made friends based on friendship, not on race. And that was really important as a major breakthrough, because when people come into your house – you belong to different cultures, and they have a different way of doing things – a nd then you learn a little bit from them and they learn a little bit from you. [..]. That's important for me to challenge those assumptions, because there are still Bangladeshi people who don't make friends with white people or black people. Or they do in their work, but they wouldn't bring people home. Because parents might feel uncomfortable with them.

Zamil's parents had become used to people from various ethnic backgrounds through the children's very ethnically diverse circles of friends. E.g. none of their neighbours were Bengalis, but they had a reciprocal relationship with at least one white family (see Ch. 2 above). A young white reflexologist regularly came over to massage their mother's feet. Shahid invited me to their home to meet his sister Yasemin who also studied anthropology, just after meeting me once. This act of hospitality and intimacy was rare in my fieldwork, and it shows how remarkably friendly his family was.

This expression of hospitality indicates a couple of other things as well: First, the family was very close, and it was common for the children to bring their friends to the house. E.g. Zamil's friends – and their families – had become friends of the whole family. The household seemed to be a more important social arena in this family than among my other informants. Secondly, because of the combination of a cosmopolitan stance *and* the close family unit, Zamil's family stood out from whites as well as Asians. "Almost all the significant social interactions of older settlers take place within the local ethnic colony," Roger Ballard writes (1996: 29-30). Raminder remarked that while she 'had her own life, her parents hadn't.' They depended on the community for all their meaningful interaction.

Zamil used his parents' openness as an important *marker of difference* in relation to the rest of the local Bengali community. One of the few things all my participants had in common,

[167] Zamil used 'we' quite a lot. Perhaps he perceived situations more uniformly than the girls would. Also, he saw himself as a protector of the family, which the girls didn't.

was that they saw explicit cosmopolitanness as the most important difference between themselves and the ‘other’, ‘mainstream’ Asians. In Zamil’s family, I heard all the four children characterise their whole family as standing out in this respect. Yasemin and Shahid said the same as I later heard from their brother the very first evening I was there. I therefore claim that the *direction* of the cultural flows – ‘pre’ in some instances, and ‘post’ in others – had become an important marker of identity for this family. In some instances they followed their parents values, in others they didn’t, but instead, they made their parents listen to them. (Both cases were often in contrast to other Bengalis).

Brief recap

We have seen many examples where people have halted or altered cultural flows from their parents (without returning the changes they’ve made). I will now take a quick look at the ethnography in preceding chapters from the prospective of flows of cultural transmission. At SOAS, we met a group of young men, engaged in passing time collectively. I claim that they *constituted a reality* through this interaction; together they created a ‘space’ where they could mediate and rethink earlier influences, and negotiate between they while playing out the resulting ‘middle ground’ identities. In Margaret Somer’s words (1994), their narratives and interaction were ‘ontological’, in Ulf Hannerz’s it was ‘mythmaking’ (1969). The *discourses* that situated/influenced them were coming from an unfriendly and discriminating ‘British society’, from oppressive ‘Asian communities’, a ‘common ground’ and in addition the redefinition of ‘Asianness’. While the two first are typical post-figurative - from older to younger without much change, the two latter are developed among their contemporaries and even their peers. The important ‘carving a middle ground’ discourse is of course what they were creating together, through narration and practice. Here, they made sense of the influences and carved out more or less viable ways of dealing with all of them.

Research on ‘second generation youth’ has moved from the paradigm of ‘in-between cultures’ (reigning until late 1980s), to that of ‘skilled cultural navigators’. I have, however, pointed out that there is a limit to code-switching, and consequently, there seems to be a persistant aim to ‘find a middle ground’. This cultural flow is different from the four others in the sense that it doesn’t come prefabricated; it has to be carved out for each individual. (A ‘common ground’ comfort zone - both in terms of physical space and discursive formations - seems

however almost to be obligatory to achieve this. Just as Raminder and Aisha said they needed support in order to deal with their mothers' expectations and grief.) I have tried to show these individual efforts to negotiate middle grounds in every chapter, however it was particularly the theme in the chapters about Zamil (Ch. 6), Ani (Ch. 8) and Aisha in Ch. 7. In order to reconcile – a term popping up ever so often – the various influences (or discourses), second generation British Asians have to participate in and contribute to all the three directions of cultural transmission.

In 'From Outcaste to 2nd Generation', I showed how a stratum of second generation British Asians together were assessing their 'right to describe themselves'. This time it was not (mainly) against 'the Asian community', but as a reaction to stereotypes from mainstream British society, which had been classifying them in certain constraining ways. And finally, the last mediation in the process of reconciliation; After the friends at SOAS had carved out[168] – or narrated and played out – a 'middle-ground' in their 'self-assessed' identity and reality together, they would be able to return to their parents, or 'the establishment', and try to speak back[169]. This is the pre-figurative flow we shall have a closer look at in this chapter.

One Bengali family – examples of a pre-figurative cultural process

Zamil, Shahid and Yasemin lived together with their parents in a three-storied terraced house, in inner city London. The area used to be very run down, but had been refurbished some years earlier. It was however still one of the most economically deprived parts of London, and it had kept its reputation among Londoners for being very rough. The house was however very well kept and neatly situated, facing a lawn and a playground away from the main road.

On the ground floor, there was no wall between the kitchen and what is often called the front room in English houses. Instead, the living room was upstairs, and it did not have the 'solemn' atmosphere I have felt in other English (or Asian) living rooms. The atmosphere in both rooms invited visitors and family alike to sit down, relax and have a chat; and visitors came indeed around every time I was there. Taslima said that the big kitchen had been important for her mother when they decided to move in. It was spacious enough for a table and six chairs, and a couple of plain armchairs. There were green plants around, and there used to be fruits on the

[168] This is of course a continuos process, as Hannerz showed in *Soulside* (1969).
[169] One of Karim's friends provided us with an unsuccessful attempt of a pre-figurative flow, when he recounted how he was thrown out of home for telling his father to stop beating up his family.

table. On the fridge, usual funny fridge magnets were stuck, announcing what a great mum they had. The walls were pale and sparsely decorated. There was a frame with a verse from the Koran in calligraphy, paintings of the holy Kaba in Mecca and a photo of Zamil in the black gown and hat worn at the graduation. Their mother was often fussing around in the kitchen when I was there. From time to time she would sit down in one of the armchairs and join us in the chitchat, or she would make herself a paan[170] from the silver box at the table. She looked sweet, but thin and fragile. There were tints of grey in her hair, and she wore cotton saris[171] in beige, pale orange or yellow. She did not speak much English, but I think she understood it well. Her children spoke to her in Bengali, dotted with a few English words. There were always children, neighbours and friends of the family coming and going when I visited.

Shahid and Yasemin

The first time I was there, Shahid served me all sorts of snacks and sweets as soon as I sat down at the table. 'You mustn't refuse,' he said, when I expressed how overwhelmed I was by his hospitality, 'you will find out that it is like this.' He knew this was the first time I visited an 'Asian' household, and took pride in this well-know 'Asian cultural trait'. Later, I noticed that neither he nor his sisters would ask me more than once how I preferred my tea.

Shahid was 23 when I met him. He did a joint degree in media and anthropology at a London university. Besides this, on Saturdays, he worked at a nearby library, and he filmed various projects in relation to his studies. His main interest was the gigs he arranged together with his friends from a spin-off of the *Outcaste* 'scene'. This took up most of his time. It was at a gig I met him, and in the last part of my fieldwork, I joined him several times. He would usually pick up the DJs, a lot of equipment and me, in his newly acquired car. In the early hours, he would

[170] A paan is maybe similar to chewing tobacco. It is made with the beetle nut, which is probably as intoxicating as tobacco. It is very common in South Asia, and is also sold in shops in areas with a big British south Asian population, like Brick Lane and Southall.

[171] 'Post-traditional' Muslims seemed to prefer the shalwar-kameez, rather than the sari, which is more 'revealing'. It was normal for Taslima and Yasemin's mother to wear a sari at home, as well as covering completely up when she went outside. Sometimes, she would throw a dupatta (light scarf in chiffon, thin cotton or silk) over her head at home. Her way of dressing reminds of the strong Hindu influences in Bangladesh, which both Taslima and Yasemin talked about on several occasions. Like so many other European Muslims, Taslima and Yasemin distinguished between 'religion' and 'tradition'. However, in contrast to Euro-Islam, they did not necessarily go 'back' to the scriptures, because then they would have to renounce important parts of their Bengali tradition. Neither Taslima nor Yasemin were denying the Hindu elements in Bangladesh. " What's so bad about that? Most of our heritage is Hindu. [..]. We were Hindus at some time. I really didn't know how much Hinduism we had in our country and history," Yasemin said after her trip around Bangladesh.

drive me home again. It was a lot of helping and a lot of teamwork between this group of young men, and they spent a lot of time together, not only at the gigs[172]. The inner core of the group was British Asian Muslims from East London. These people had a high Muslim profile. They fasted during Ramadan (and tried to not smoke cannabis), and many of them went to the mosque frequently. They did not drink (much) alcohol[173], but some smoked quite a lot of cannabis. In addition to this core, they had other non-Muslim friends[174].

Shahid's time schedule did not go well with his weekend job at the library. But, - according to his sisters -, he would smile timidly and his employers would forget about his late arrivals. Shahid smiled a lot, and he was charming and good-looking. On a few occasions, I saw him swarmed by girls who obviously adored his somewhat childish charm. (White girls, I very rarely saw Asian girls behave in such a way[175]). Shahid – continuously trying to learn more about Islam, and to refine his religious practice[176] – did not encourage this kind of behaviour. He was perhaps too polite to discourage it, as well.

Yasemin, Shahid's younger sister of three years, did anthropology as well. She worked regularly in a library (not the same as Shahid). Between finishing her BA and starting an MA; she took a year out of university and worked as a teacher in a nearby school. She was affectionate and open, and provided me with huge amounts of relevant information, from the first time I met her. Like (literally) everybody else I spoke to, she was curious to know why I had come all the way from Norway to study this particular topic. In addition, she took great interest in how my research

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[172] The loosely knit group consisted of Shahid who organised the events; his friend from college, a DJ (who also had a part-time job in an antiques firm); an interior designer, who was opening a coffee shop in Brick Lane; a restaurant manager (a French nouvelle cuisine restaurant, not a traditional tandoori house) and some other people whom I didn't speak to.

[173] They did not have problems with others drinking alcohol. I'll return to this point. As the polite non-Scandinavian men were, they would ask me if they could buy me a drink, and one of the DJs gave me his drink vouchers in a club he played.

[174] The bass player in the DJ's band was white English, and the singer was Hindu. Jitin, who worked with them once in a while was Hindu, so were some of the rappers they worked with.

[175] I observed girls 'like that' on several occasions, 'e.g. on *Outcaste* club nights on their regular club in Notting Hill. I heard comments about 'this kind of Asian girls' from all sorts of people. Jitin and the DJs met them on gigs, Shahid saw them at university and Taslima knew about the phenomenon from her time as a youth worker. They all resented their behaviour, but would explain it in the same way; the girls had probably had a very strict upbringing, and when they finally found freedom at university, they ran 'completely wild'. We have already heard that this kind of behaviour is common among Asian guys. Neither this did people appreciate.

[176] I interviewed Shahid as well as Yasemin and Zamil, but his interview did not work very well. It was the least personal interview I managed to do; In contrast to most of the others I did, I got the feeling that Shahid said what was expected of him, and sometimes it resembled things he might have read or heard bout Islam. We talked more easily in the car, on the phone or at the gigs.

was progressing. She asked me all kinds of questions, like if I had bought a sari now, if I had met the gay Asian again, if I had been here and there.

Yasemin was lively and was characterised – as well as characterising herself – as the ‘baby of the family’. My impression is that she was treated that way, as well, and she did not express any discontent with the role. She spoke to her mother on the phone almost every day when she was in Bangladesh for a month with Shahid and her father, and Taslima said they both missed each other very much. Once, she was going to the optician and Taslima discussed who would make time to go with her and ‘back her up’. Having said that, she seemed to exhibit a remarkable duality, as I commented in the previous chapter. She appeared proficient and strong when she spoke about e.g. women’s rights in Bangladesh, and the stereotypes of Muslim women in Britain, while humble and girlishly unknowledgeable when she talked about her own academic achievements. Just after she had described, explained and analysed her experiences in Bangladesh in an interview with me in a serious and ‘professional’ manner, she reappeared as the animated and childish ‘baby sister’ in front of Taslima, and she sat down on the lap of an elderly female neighbour. As Zamil exhibited a habitus of authority and responsibility as the older brother, Yasemin had very much a baby sister habitus. Yasemin was the youngest British Asian I met, but she was far from being the most immature. She concealed her strength behind a young, delicate and in certain ways feminine appearance.

Taslima

Ten years ago, the family had moved house, as Zamil told in chapter 2. Before that, they lived in the most rundown estate in the very run down area. The severe problems affected this family as well. E.g. Shahid said he started to mix with ‘wrong people’, and just like his older brother Zamil, his life could have turned out very different. In addition to the general socio-economical deprivation, racism was widespread on the estate. The main reason for moving house, seems however to have been of different kind.

Due to the ‘chain-migration’, there lived several other Bengali families in the estate; many of them were kin or close friends. Ten years ago, Taslima, the eldest, was in her late teens. The pressure from the community to conform was massive, she told me. They expected her to get married very early, around the age of 16. As the pressure on her to marry a relative’s son,

Taslima insisted on going on to further education. The community interpreted her behaviour as 'out of her parents' control', which was considered shameful (Taslima's description).

At that time, it was not common for local Bengali girls (or any other local girls, or boys, see Zamil, Ch. 6) to get an education. Taslima worked as a social worker when she was 18. She saw the high rates of pregnancy and the elopements into love-marriages among the teenagers in the area. In her view, the misery among the youth was a result of the un-negotiable pressure from parents. If they didn't give their children any freedom at all, they had to face the risk of 'losing them'. Taslima's parents must have sensed that fear. As pressure to conform mounted strong, they moved out of the estate. Taslima moved away from home and went to nursing school.

The reason why they moved house was the first thing Taslima told me when I interviewed her (without the recorder). We were sitting in two big armchairs in the living room at the first floor at her parents' place, drinking tea. She was 8 1/2 months pregnant and wearing a comfortably looking shalwar-kameez[177]. She used to come here every day while waiting for the baby to be born. Particularly Zamil bullied her brotherly for not staying in her own place. 'We thought we had got rid of you when we married you off', she quoted him saying. (Sylhetis are patri- not matrilocal, and Zamil was concerned about tradition, as we remember). Taslima was very close to her family. There was a constant flow of phone calls between her and her mother and sister. She had wanted to live nearby, and her flat was 5-10 minutes away, in a council estate. Apparently, this area had not taken part in the refurbishment scheme around her parents' place. She had three rooms on the fourth floor. The flat was spacious and light and the view was nice, but there was no elevator. Taslima said she wanted to buy her own flat. She was working as a nurse, her husband had an unskilled job, and they would be able to get a mortgage. But, her husband did not want to buy a flat. He wanted them to invest money in Bangladesh instead.

[177] Taslima usually wore a shalwar-kameez when I met her. She did not often wear saris as she said she didn't feel comfortable in them (she did not use Islam as an explanation). Only once did I see Taslima wear a duppata over her hair, and that was when some friends of the family wanted to take a photo of her and her new-born baby, and she had to find a scarf somewhere. She told me that her youngest brother Shahid had angered and surprised her once (in his Islamic endeavour) by asking her (his older sister) to cover her head before they entered a Muslim halal butcher's. I never saw Yasemin covering her head. When we went to a restaurant together, she wore a beautiful green shalwar-kameez, and she encouraged Yasemin to wear something South Asian as well. Yasemin didn't, and only a few times at home, did I see her wearing one. Immediately, it might seem paradoxical that Yasemin, who was more religiously concerned than her older sister, was the one who dressed in 'western' clothes. I would however, say that instead of seeing the three women in the family as representing a continuum of religiousness, they might represent two/three *versions* of religion; Yasemin represented post-traditional religion, just like her brother Shahid, while her mother was immersed in a traditional universe. Taslima and Zamil was more or less influenced by traditional religion. The whole family fasted during Ramadan, they all prayed from time to time, I think, while the father prayed regularly.

Nobody seemed to be particularly pleased with Taslima's husband. He visited her parents frequently as well, but they didn't get on very well according to Taslima. Usually when I was there, I didn't stay in the same room as him and the father. The only time we were together, I noticed that none in the family nor the visitors paid much attention to him. He didn't pay much attention to his new-born baby either, while the new uncle Zamil affectionately carried and entertained her. Taslima said Zamil's friends had tried to introduce her husband into their circle of friends after the wedding, but he had not returned their invitations. Neither had he showed much gratitude over their gifts at the birth of his firstborn baby. Taslima thought her parents felt guilty for their role in the marriage, which was why they were supporting her very much now. If it had been a love-marriage against their will, they would not have acted the same way.

Taslima's grandmother had found her a husband in Bangladesh. Taslima started writing to him when she was 22, after her sister had met him and said he seemed 'all right'. They married three years later. To still be unmarried at the age of 25 was a massive point of concern for her parents, and increasingly so for Taslima herself. She said she was relieved to have a baby before she turned thirty (she was 28), after being through two miscarriages. Growing up in a community where the parents preferred their girls to get married at 16, I am not surprised that Taslima felt the way she did.

Since Taslima's marriage was not a success, her parents would not look for spouses in Bangladesh for the remaining three children. Their mother had jokingly remarked that they would not help in looking for spouses at all. Neither Zamil nor Yasemin liked the idea of finding a partner on their own (I didn't hear Shahid comment on the issue). Zamil explicitly wanted his parents to arrange his marriage. The girl should have a perfect mix of 'eastern and western values', - as the most common phrase in the burgeoning classified ads for British Asians puts it. She should be 'Muslim and traditional, yet open-minded and well educated'. 'If I have to wait in queue, I will pass the menopause,' Yasemin commented in the mildly sarcastic way of speaking shared by the three female members of the family[178]. After I left London, the family started to

[178] Yasemin and Taslima were great and entertaining company. They had an amusing and witty way of speaking, which it sounded like they shared with their mother. (I got the impression from the tone of voice and the amount of laughter in their conversations, and also when they referred to what their mother had said). Taslima characterised her youngest brother as 'sociable, but quiet', a description I agree with. He was remarkably open and good-natured to invite me into his home just after one meeting, and always very helpful. However, on a personal level I felt I did not get to know him very well. When I was there, it was always a light, humorous tone between the siblings and their mother, which to me signalled closeness and a lot of love. Their father seemed to be more distant. I never spoke to him, but he smiled and said hello when he passed by. He had grey hair and beard, and wore a kurta-pyjama. Both

look for a wife for Zamil. A year and a half later, after visiting various families in various parts of Britain, he had turned several prospects down; She didn't have enough education, he didn't find her attractive enough, they didn't 'click' etc.

Pre-figurative cultural reproduction

When Taslima's parents[179] chose to move away from the estate, they chose their immediate family before the other relatives and 'the community'. This way, they could let Taslima have an education and live unmarried for a few more years. It was not common to do either for local Bengali girls at that time (ten years ago), while now education is an important asset when parents look for a wife for their son, (according to Taslima[180]). For the parents, it turned out to be a choice between enforcing the 'will of the community' or listening to the children. However, her father suffered a stroke because of the strains of breaking with his relatives.

Taslima told me she used to cover her hair and pray until she was 15, but at that time, she stopped, 'just as a reaction'. In her view, priests, and many men in general, tainted established religion by using it for their own benefits[181]. 'It ended up being about power and prestige, not religion'. Taslima led a religiously proper life[182], different from Aisha's, who was the same age. They shared however the criticism of the 'hypocritical' young males who smoke cannabis and mixed with women, and were very concerned about their Muslims identity.

I don't know what inspired Taslima to choose differently from most of her peers, to fight

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Zamil and Taslima mentioned the importance of respect on several occasions, and I saw it practised a few times in relation to their father. The few times I saw them speak, the conversations were briefer, and they lacked the light tone, laughter and quick exchanges characterising how they spoke to their mother.

[179] I presume they made decisions together. Taslima said she knew her parents discussed everything, but they would never do it openly, in front of their children, which she said was common among Bengalis. To her husband she emphasised that partnership in marriage was *not* a western phenomenon and referred to her parents.

[180]

[181] Taslima was concerned about women's rights. She knew of cases of forced marriages and extreme violence against women, both from her social work and from others in 'the community'. The two sisters often discussed the situation for women in Bangladesh. A concern they shared with their mother. Taslima told me that her paternal grandfather had not given her mother any presents when she had her first child, because it was only a girl. Taslima had once told him that it was God's punishment for treating women badly that he only had two grandsons and many granddaughters. Her mother had told her off for being disrespectful. Her own reproach had been with respect; respectfully she had just refused to accept presents when her next child - a boy - was born.

[182] She did not drink alcohol and didn't 'mix with men in improper ways). She observed the religious ceremonies in relation to her new-born child, and she fasted during Ramadan (however she was the only one in the family who didn't loose weight, she complained).

for an education, and refuse to marry at an early age. Her three friends[183] I met shared her feminist views on religion and power. Here, I find it suitable to paraphrase Zygmunt Bauman's quote that 'people resemble their times more than their parents' (Bauman 2000: 128). Taslima was a teenager in the politicised 1980s, and possibly she was inspired by what she saw and learnt as a social worker. Whatever the causes, the result was that she paved the way for her younger brothers and sister. When they saw the benefits of education, they encouraged the others, Zamil said. Gardner and Shukur confirm that Bengali parents have changed their attitude to education, also in relation to girls. They, as well as Ballard (1996) in the same book, have a 'rational actor' perspective: "Higher education is increasingly identified [by parents] as a route for both greater earning potential and social mobility. Younger British Bengali women are also pressing forward in the same direction though, given the strength of parental fears, rather more slowly" (Gardner and Shukur 1996: 152).

However, Zamil didn't only see his parents as 'rational actors'; 'Ontological security' is also a relevant notion.

> Zamil: In an ideal world, I think my parents would probably want more control over our lives. Because it gives them a sense of their purpose here, because they don't want us to go and be completely absorbed by the white European culture, they still want us to have our values. I think over the years they have realised that we have that. We are our own people. I think that's part of the education; that when we became educated – we went to university; we went to college – they realise that we have our own mind and we can see things differently to them, and we can still respect them, and they can still respect us. I think that was quite unique for us. Basically, my parents are the same as the other parents that came here.

Zamil thought his parents feared their children would be 'absorbed by the white European culture'. This is a reasonable fear in the 'minority situation' discussed in Ch. 2; In a world where everything 'non English, non white, non Christian' was devalued, it is understandable that non English, non white, non Christian people would fear for their culture and language, their human worth, and their religion. Zamil's parents could not think of a 'middle ground' in which their children could be different from them (in terms of language, education, interests – i.e. 'culture'), but still respect them.

[183] Her closest friends were from the area, and Taslima had known them for a long time. Two of them – a second generation Indian Sikh and a second generation Portuguese – were not married, while I think the third, a Bengali was.

Ethnicity and trench warfare against corrupting Westernisation

As community workers Taslima and Zamil had seen what the strictness of many Asian parents could lead to. 'If they experiment just a little against their parents' will, they risk to be labelled in the whole community. There is very little giving of ground, very little negotiation.' Zamil and Taslima discuss it with their parents now, and their parents have understood their point of view.

> Zamil: When I'm talking to my parents and they say; so and so's daughter has run way, and I will sit there and say; they are so stupid. [..] She is not running away because the boy is something so great that she wants that boy. She's running away because they are oppressing her in the house. [..]. My parents can see that now.

But if Zamil was trying to argue in a similar way to other Bengali parents, he was met by problems.

> If I'm in a relative's house and I can see something that is upsetting me, because he's denying someone a clear opportunity. And I say; look you have these opportunities and why don't you… And then I think; I'm overstepping the boundaries. I have to stop, because then *I*'m seen as the alien, you see. I'm seen as; you're too western, you're trying to put bad ideas into my son's head or my daughter's head.

None of the children in Zamil's family saw themselves as 'westernised' (we saw Zamil consciously chose to hold on to his parents' values). However, their relatives were sceptical of their different way of life (education, the children had friends of all kinds of ethnic origins, who even came to their home, Shahid was involved with clubs, music and journalism), and interpreted them as 'westernised'.

Zamil proposed that parents should be less strict in order to keep teenagers from running away from home, thus to keep families together. They should also encourage their children to study, because of the long-term benefits, for the child as well as for the family as a whole. Both reasons are in tune with important values in 'Asian cultures'. Why did his relatives not see it likewise?

His relatives seemed to imply that any change meant 'westernisation', despite Zamil's rational and 'traditional' (in terms of family sentiments) reasoning. It is obviously negatively perceived to be 'too western', and the notion appears as a dichotomised devaluation of 'the Others', - here the surrounding British society. Hence, Zamil's ideas and behaviour did not threaten 'Asian' sentiments *per se*, but he threatened 'British Bangladeshi[184]' *ethnicity*, as a

[184] I should point out that I never heard the term 'British Bangladeshi' as a notion of self-description, as 'British Asian'. In Zamil's narration, 'the relatives' did not seem to stress any kind of home-grown British identity, but exactly the opposite, as Satinder's brother I presume. My use of the term is however a way of emphasising the '*Britishness* 'of their attitude: It is an ethnicity grown on British soil, like the 'Southall breed'.

marker of solidarity towards 'the Other'. In this understanding, there is no middle ground between the ethnic boundaries (as Barth writes 1969: 15).

Zamil and Taslima emphasised communication and personal choice and negotiation instead of too strict parental authority. When the parents have a stricter view of obedience than what the children become used to at school and among peers, it can result in a conflict between value systems (obedience[185] versus democracy and negotiation). Zamil pointed out that they lived in a democratic society, where people should not be dictated by insular and reified versions of a time-warped culture from 'back home'. Taslima's parents did not essentialise and reify their worldview, which so easily happens in a minority situation, because they listened to their children. They didn't have to retreat into entrenchment in order to protect their worldview. Their parents have moved out of '*izzat* competition' and the trench warfare into a space where mediation and negotiation were possible.

Negotiation

When Taslima moved away from home, her father helped her. From the way she recounted the moment her father left her outside her new place, I understand it must have been very emotional. 'Bengali parents don't show their feelings in front of their children,' she said. Many years afterwards her mother told her that her father had mentioned that she didn't even look back when he left. This is how Zamil interpreted their fear.

> Zamil: I think their concerns was more that by educating my sister they would be impairing her to have her own mind, which is fine, but then they wouldn't know if she would turn around and say; no, I don't want to do this, and no, I don't want to do that. But she didn't, ultimately. She went on and studied, and she kept within the boundaries. I think they were most concerned that they were loosing their daughter. And I think when the first six months, the first year was over, they realised that, hang on a minute, this is good what we're doing, because we are making her a very strong, independent woman. We are not loosing our daughter, we are educating her.

After a while, the parents realised that they would not 'loose their children' despite letting go of them – to some extent. Taslima moved away to escape the pressure marry. However, she 'kept within the boundaries' as Zamil put it[186]. She did not do things that went against or were

[185] Zamil said it was a stronger emphasis on obedience in Bangladeshi families, than in British.

[186] She did not refuse to marry because she wanted to get involved in romantic relationships of her own choosing. I think she must have rebelled profoundly within the Bengali community, but, she did never include morality in her rebellion. Zamil presumed that the situation would have been different if she did. Taslima divorced before she reached 30. She didn't think she would marry again. Within the Bengali community divorced women are considered

incomprehensible within her parents' worldview. The parents could incorporate what the children gained through education into their understanding of a good and decent life. That way, they must have retained the sense of 'purpose' as Zamil put it, which again provided an assurance of their worldview.

Taslima's parents moved away from the community in order not to enforce Ballard's 'competition for *izzat'* so far that they ended up turning the children away from them. They lost their position in the community for doing that, but they kept their children. What about their 'sense of purpose' and 'identity'? They didn't retreat to trench warfare when their daughter went against their will, and neither Taslima was 'labelled', as Zamil put it, and forced into entrenchment. They retained positions from where negotiation was possible. This had been the case, as Avatar Brah points out, in most areas of life for the migrant population (1996: 24). However, as we have seen, some fundamental aspects of life, perhaps particularly concerning sexual morality had become reified in certain communities. In Bhikhu Parekh's view, a plural society – which recognises cultural difference, not only civic equality – is prerequisite in order for otherwise culturally disadvantaged minorities to "feel secure and confident enough to experiment with, retain, revise or freely reject their ways of life." (Parekh 1998: 9).

Practically all of the British Asians I met were somewhat 'outsiders' in relation to the infamous 'community'. But none had cut the connection to their family. Only one, Sagan, was rarely in touch. The rest had very close ties to their family, - seen from a Scandinavian perspective. Many phoned home every day. The cannabis/Green Party activist, who squatted a house in Brixton, told me he phoned his parents every second day, and supported them substantially at the time when he had earned a lot of money as a computer engineer. I have not got information on the 'community status' of the families of all my participants. Quite a few of them, however, could tell stories of 'pre-figurative change', similar to Zamil and Taslima's. Ani as we saw told how her mother had supported her sister's choice of lifestyle – going to Latin America – in the face of neighbours in Southall.

'used goods', she said, but she acknowledged that e.g. her brothers, were not sexist in such a way. *If* she would ever establish a relationship with a non-Bengali man, I doubt she would tell her parents, who are retired and getting old now, and it surely would upset them immensely. Karim and others have termed marriage the 'crunch issue in even the most 'westernised' or assimilated families'.

Negotiating the crunch issue

Vandana had married an Englishman. She challenged what Karim termed a crunch value in South Asian families. Zamil said that while their parents had learnt to appreciate education, but "with mixed marriages, I think there is a strong sense of something is being lost". He said, however, that he had friends who had had mixed marriages, and the parents had "accepted it, begrudgingly, in the end. But it causes a lot of heartache and problems". He himself also considered mixed marriages problematic, as we saw.

I should mention that Vandana's family are Hindus, East African Asians, and well educated, which statistically point in the direction of a flexible view towards tradition (E.g. Anwar 1998). However, when Vandana married, her family went through the same problems - ontological anxiety, I presume - as Taslima's when she moved away from home. As we remember (Ch. 5, above), her mother went into hospital for three days because of the trauma when Vandana left home.

> Vandana: I think it's hard with my mum, the judgements she gets in her family. Because I wasn't living at home, and because I was going out with someone white, she was treated badly in the community. So, she was talked about, she was a bad mother. My grandfather, my dad's father, came and told her that she's done a crap job of bringing me up. That was when I left home. They were very, very painful moments. [..] But at the same time I've been quite lucky, I've got a lot of moments where those values were sort of tested. My father died. My mother had a very difficult relationship with my father. In all those periods of time when she really needed support, no one has been there, apart from me, and John [her husband] and my sisters. There have been odd relationships with relatives that has been around, but consistently she's been horrified by their lack of support. Or they were actually going out of their way to make things worse. [..] I think it's been good, 'cause we've had the tests.

Far from being a corporate group supporting each other in times of need, Vandana described a community very much in tune with Ballard's analysis, seeing competition of *izzat* as a zero sum game. Her mother needed and expected support from relatives and the community – presumably the only ones she had, just like Raminder described. To her surprise, they wouldn't give it to her.

> So, she really doesn't give a shit, because she knows that John's always going to be there, she doesn't really have to worry about what people think of me, because she knows what's what. [.. I]n some ways, she's very proud. We're a quite successful couple. We've got somewhere to live, I'm doing a Ph.D., John's very financially secure. He's doing a normal job, but he's got a degree behind him as well. He's got first class honours. She's always going on about that with other relatives. We don't cause her troubles, we don't add to her woes. [..]. I think we're very supportive. We're *able* to support her. I think she's realised now that the Asian community aren't always… whatever.

Vandana summed up what her mother found important: education, financial security and family support. She didn't loose her daughter and what was valuable to her despite Vandana going her own way. Instead, she realised it was possible to include a white person in the family. In addition, Vandana and her sisters were succeeding in their own ways – without, as we saw, ruining what was dear to their mother.

> So, when it comes to writing letters or backing her up in legal matters or whatever, I think they are very impressed with my mum having three daughters that she can rely on.

Success and family unity are highly valued within 'the community', according to my informants. Vandana and her family were succeeding in their own manner.

From earlier accounts, we recognise that they saw the 'the community' as supportive as long as you follow the rules. They saw the norms as inflexible, authoritarian and conservative. If you are unable or unwilling to follow them, you are an outcast, - as Karim and the others at SOAS said. Vandana's mother had a personal experience of it. But, when the 'community' abandoned her, she found support in her immediate family. Since the family in this case was strong and successful – i.e. carriers of cultural assets – the mother regained her status within the community, but for her, it had lost its paramount importance. By then, she had learnt that it could not provide what she needed, when she needed it the most.

Vandana also recounted what had happened to the ones who had criticised her mother. After a while, things started going wrong – in the spiralling quest of *izzat* – in their families as well, and they couldn't say much to Vandana's mother anymore. This seems to be a classical development. Ali commented, after summing up various divorces and 'moral failures' in his family;

> my dad first would do anything his older brother asks of him, anything, whenever, wherever. The first time ever in his life he said no. Doing things for himself. Thinking about himself and his wife. [..]. Nobody cares really. The rest of the community, every family in the community had a scandal. It was just becoming silly, and they realised that. What were they trying to protect?

Jitin talked about the same time aspect. At first, his family became the black sheep in the community and even considered moving to the US.

> Jitin: We're quite an old Asian family, 'cause my dad came in 1957. [..]. So, all the problems with having children brought up here, happened to us first. Now, what happened was that my oldest sister started to go out with guys and stuff. She got a really bad reputation in our own community. [..]. Eventually, she had to run away from home because it caused such a scandal. People stopped talking to us in the temple, to my parents.

> [..]. We became outcasts, basically. Now, the same people that used to treat us this way, are coming to my mum for advise when their daughters run away, [..] have got a white girlfriend and stuff. It’s kind of ironic.

When the other children came of age, their families ended up in the same difficulties and his mother became ‘aunt agony’ of the local community, the one the others turned to for help.

Interestingly, it was in order to *avoid* moral failures that Taslima’s family reasoned it was better to move out. There has never been a scandal in their family, except from their refusal to toe the line with the community’s censure. They moved out to keep the family together and to *not* loose their children into early love-marriages and other ‘western’ evils. They achieved this through negotiation and finding a middle ground together.

Post 11th September script

I have claimed that the two preceding paradigms on second generation youth in Britain cannot adequately describe my British Asian informants. Rather than feeling 'in-between cultures', they saw themselves as creating their own – from positions on the inside/the outside/the border of various cultures. Although they at times 'code-switch' between roles and statuses, this was not the guiding principle in their life. The key terms in their self-understanding were rather 'reconciliation', 'negotiation' and 'finding a middle ground'. By making use of their narratives, I hope to have shown examples of the variety of these negotiations and middle grounds.

The overall goal of finding their own middle ground rests on certain conditions. British Asians must feel free to make genuine choices about how to live their life. In order for this to be possible, the various alternatives confronting them must be equally recognised on the level of society – certain alternatives cannot exclude them from being recognised as individuals that belong in Britain. Recognition of difference is therefore essential.

On the preceding 199 pages I have claimed that Britain is moving in the direction of a plural society, where differences are recognised as legitimately part of society. However, I have also pointed out that in areas of life and society where this is not the case, people do *not* feel free to make unrestrained choices. E.g., all parents are yet far from sure that their children will not turn around and abandon their parents' traditions, worldview and values. Muslim British Asians are being far more imperatively determined by their religious background than their Hindu, Sikh and Christian counterparts.

My assumption is that the ontological anxiety resulting from being challenged by hegemonic and discrepant versions of reality – hegemonic versions questioning e.g. Muslims right to belong in society, their individuality, their equality – very well can lead people into safe havens of closely guarded communalism. Society as well as individuals will suffer from this. We all need to acknowledge that there is no such thing as 'us' and 'them'.

Appendix – List of frequently mentioned participants

name	sex/age	origin/grew up	religiosity	miscellaneous
1. Aisha	F 29	Indian/London	Muslim	social scientist
2. Ali	M 25	parents from Madras to Karachi during partition/ Yorkshire	anti-religious Shia Muslim background	former gay Asian activist
3. Ani	F 27	Punjabi/Southall	Sikh	photographer
4. Bidisha	F 21	Calcutta/North London	None	author, freelance writer
5. Iqbal	M 22	Pakistan/ Blackburn	Muslim	student at SOAS
6. Jitin	M 30	Gujerati/ West Bromwich	Hindu	tablas player, freelance writer
7. Karim	M 27	Pathan north Pakistan/ Sheffield	Muslim	Sheffield Wednesday supporter
8. Nick	M 27	Mother from Punjab, father via Kenya/ South London	Sikh	
9. Nitin S.	M 35	Indian/ Rochester, Kent	Hindu influence	musician
10.Raminder	F 27	Punjabi/East London	Sikh	social scientist
11.Riaz	M 24	see Karim	Muslim	
12.K. Sagan	M 30	Kashmir Pakistan/ Bradford	anti religious, Muslim background	into cryonic suspension, IT. futuristic nano-technology
13.Satinder	F 25	Punjabi/Southall	Sikh	MA colonial literature, freelance writer
14.Shahid	M 23	Bengali from Sylhet, mother from India during partition, inner city London	Muslim	
15.Taslima	F 28	see Shahid born in Sylhet	Muslim	married to a Bangladeshi, one child
16.Vandana	F 30	Gujerati, born in Kenya	Hindu	Ph.D. on South Asian women in Britain, married to an Englishman
17.Yasemin	F 21	see Shahid	Muslim	BA in anthropology
18.Zamil	M 25	see Shahid	Muslim	community worker, Millwall FC supporter

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