

**Cultural Capital of Second Generation  
Migrant Women in the UK:  
Reconstructing gendered experiences  
through biographical interviews**

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# Issues of discussion

- Cultural Capital of Immigrants
- Intersectionality
- Biographical Narrative Method
- Case examples on the intersections of gender, class and religion

# Second Generation – Definitions?

- Generation labelling of immigrants
- Ambiguity of "second generation immigrant" term
- May refer to first generation born in the new country, or first generation born to parents who were themselves born in the new country
- “1.5 generation” - coined to refer to those who immigrate early in life
- In the UK, BME is the preferred term to denote people with an immigrant background

# Cultural Capital of Immigrants

- In the migration context, the immigrant family is the repository of cultural capital, accumulated both prior to immigration and during the process of incorporation.
- Cultural capital exists for immigrants primarily in two forms:
  - **institutionalised**, such as educational credentials, and
  - **embodied**, that is, ‘*long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body*’ (Bourdieu 1983, p. 243).
- Competence in the language of the receiving country and familiarity with its cultural customs are highly valuable cultural capital.

# Cultural Capital of Immigrants

- The role of the cultural capital of immigrants in the incorporation in receiving countries
- Bourdieu - cultural capital theory as a framework for the reproduction of social inequality within highly individualistic societies; permits to capture the differences in migrants' positions within the social space and their habitual disposition.
- Criticised for lack of representation of intersectionality of social structures such as gender, race and ethnicity.

# Intersectionality

- Ascriptions of markers of difference/identity such as gender, ethnicity, social status, nationality, religion, age and so on do intersect.
- ‘Intersectionality’ - the phenomenon of merging and mingling of multiple markers of difference or ‘intersections’ (Crenshaw, 1989)
- Need to move from gendered inequalities to multiple inequalities and to adopt an inclusive approach to analyse minority groups: the inclusion of differences in the analysis of power struggles and inequalities for minority groups (Verloo, 2006).

# Intersectionality

- **Structural** and **political** intersectionality
- How to study the complexity of intersectionality? (McCall, 2005)
- 3 approaches:
  - ❖ Categorical – quantitative research
  - ❖ Anti-categorical – postmodern deconstructionism
  - ❖ Intra-categorical – personal narratives

# The Biographical Narrative Method

- The use of biographical analysis as a method derived from and developed through different disciplines
- The biographical research perspective in migration studies provides a methodological way of looking at problems and conflicts, but also of examining the subjective action competencies available to the subjects as ways of coping with crises in migration situations
- In recent years in feminist biographical research, the concept of biography has been understood as an aspect of the reconstruction of gender (Dausien, 1994, 1996, 2002).



# The “Cultural Capital During Migration” project

- Led by a group of German sociologists and funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (2005-2008)
- Investigated the potential for and restrictions on the recognition of the cultural capital of migrants during their entry into the labour market
- A comparison of Germany with other countries (Canada, UK and Turkey) was intended to shed light on alternative – and possibly innovative – forms of labour market integration for migrants
- Two-dimensional status passage: as an entry into the labour force and as a process of migration

# The Documentary Interpretation Method

- Better understanding of socialisation and learning processes as well as sets of knowledge and competence not yet, or no longer, present in the form of institutionally accepted cultural capital.
- The method does not aim at the single case but, based on the comparison of different cases, intends to understand general orientations and experiences (Bohnsack, 2001).
- By generating typologies that generalise findings from single cases, the method avoids reducing interviews as simple expressions of individual biographies and allows for a better understanding of how individual life stories are embedded in collective, milieu-specific dimensions of experiences (Nohl, 2006a, 2006b).

# Three Narratives - Maya

- Born in 1975 in Turkey (Kurdish origin) and migrated to the UK as a refugee with her family when she was 14 years old.
- Her parents have working class background with no formal education, coming originally from a rural part of Turkey. The family migrated to the UK as refugees although
- 7 siblings, sisters and brothers, who live in the UK. Three of them –including Maya - were brought up by her grandparents.
- Non-direct pathway to academic qualifications - Foundation GCSE, BTEC Business & Finance, BTEC National Business & Finance, BSc Sociology & Psychology.
- GTP (Teacher Training) in order to work as a teacher in primary education; a strategy to continue her studies with a final aim to become an educational psychologist.
- She is single and lives in London. She has a partner who is also university educated and a teacher.

# Three Narratives - Saima

- Born in 1978 in the South East of England (Eastbourne), where she lived with her parents until she went to University.
- Her parents have college/university education and are both accountants. They migrated from Pakistan to the UK for economic reasons. She has a younger brother.
- Direct educational pathway – A levels, BSc Criminology; MSc Criminal Justice (London School of Economics)
- She works as Equality and Diversity Officer at the London Probation Service.
- She is married and lives in London with her husband (of Pakistani origin as well). He is an IT consultant (university education).
- In terms of physical appearance, Saima wears a headscarf.

# Three Narratives - Sara

- Born in 1979 in Iraq but never lived there. Her family migrated to Kuwait until she was 12 years old and then migrated to the UK when she was 14 years old due to the Gulf war.
- Both parents have university education – her mother is a teacher and her father engineer; they were not able to find employment in the UK – her father is now working in the United Arab Emirates.
- She has two brothers and a sister, all younger.
- Direct educational pathway – A levels, BSc Medical Science, University College London. She works as a medical doctor and specialises in psychiatry.
- She lives in Canterbury with her fiancée; he is from Yemen and is also a medical doctor.

# Gender

- The three women do not explicitly refer to gender but do so implicitly in connection with biographical actions and in connection with their fathers.
- **Maya** breaks the father's stereotype that women do not need to be educated and instead she follows her grandfather's advice to secure her future as a woman by having education and a job and not to depend on a husband.
- **Sara** tries to uphold her father's social position by choosing a profession which is highly esteemed in their cultural group and, as the eldest child, 'restores' the family social position - she also avoids the destiny of an arranged marriage by following an educational career after her mother's 'threat'/encouragement.
- **Saima** complies with her father's wishes and realises his expectations in getting a good university qualification and getting married through arranged marriage, according to her ethnic norms.

# Gender

- "And university education was really important to me. My grandparents raised us with the expectations that we would go to university and we would have a job and earnings because my granddad always had the image, understanding, that a woman in Turkey needs a job. If we ended up getting married and not happy with our husbands and divorced then we wouldn't be financially dependent on our man because if this kicks on the bad side, depends on their income, we wouldn't depend on their income."  
Maya
- "my mum basically scared me by saying well if you don't study or do something good with your life we're going to get you married off //mmh// and I think that scared me so I thought OK I'd better study hard. And then I just (.) you know (.) one day (.) literally it was like one day I woke up and I decided I'm going to study". Sara

# Gender

- "going to the university was like the first time I had my absolute freedom it was like for me the best moment in my life but at the same time a very very sad occasion for leaving my dad and brother at home//mmh//in fact it was my first time travelling to London for the first time in my 18 years of life travelling on my own and having my liberty“ Saima
- "as a university student I think I enjoyed that freedom and for me it was an eye-opener because I had never been on my own before without the usual interference of your parents (.): ... it is this sort of Asian culture where you get your parents over your neck wherever and whatever you do(.) maybe that is why Asians in this country don't have teenage pregnancy if at all very minimal but the downside is that in the end you are given a choice that you don't want sometimes to cause grief in the family but however that's what is Asian families have lived with all these centuries so I just have to follow what my ancestors have done to give us the status that we all enjoy these days“ Saima



# Class

- Sara is also referring to the difference of social class and how it determines girls' educational success and ultimately lifestyles
- "I went to both private and comprehensive so I think I've seen both and I do think that the private schools do offer a lot better education. I got better grades. And I do think that the people that can't afford it do end up in the comprehensive schools and I do think you end up doing much worse because I went to a comprehensive school, all girls, and by the age of 16 or 17 they were pregnant and had babies whereas they didn't finish their education. Whereas when I went to the private school and did my A Levels there all the girls wanted careers and they all went to university, Cambridge and Oxford etc. So I do think there's a lot of (.) There's a lot of difference in the (.) upper class difference."  
Sara

# Class

- Sara's decision to become a doctor is motivated by the social status attached to this profession in her cultural group; she views this strategy as a common one, obviously reflecting the views and principles she grew up with in her family environment.
- "That's why I ended up doing sciences really (.) ... obviously within our cultural background being a doctor is quite highly respectable and that kind of thing. I mean I suppose my cousin is a doctor as well so //mmh// I had her to look up to. And I guess out of all my family friends, you know, some of them were doctors who were doing quite well. And because my mum and my dad were unemployed at the time I thought I would like to do well. And I think it's always like that. If you have a family that is not doing well you want to like try and improve the situation so you study hard really //mmh// to make up for it. So I suppose that's what drove me to study hard and work hard." Sara

# Religion

- In Saima's narrative, parents' country of origin as *an Islamic state* is important for her as a frame of orientation.
- In her narration, *segregation/separateness* appears as a frame of orientation in her father's strategy in the interaction with host society/culture.
- The major part of her stories deal with her father and his efforts to bring up her and her brother according to Islamic principles. This is experienced in controversial ways - both as a positive part of her identity and belonging but also as a negative experience as both children face discrimination at school (these experiences are also related to their Pakistani ethnic background).
- In her narration, there are places where the male dominance of her father and brother dictate the life choices she will eventually decide to make – e.g. her return to the family home after her university studies and her arranged marriage
- Throughout the interview she makes no reference to her mother or any other female figures at all.

# Religion

- “as I was growing up I began to realise that religion was very strong in our family life .... for us it is the focal of our everyday life and we have to abide by the commands of Muhammad may his name be praised(.): so whatever I do my religion comes first it is our culture I should say and by that we are clearly identified by the beliefs of Islam.” Saima
- “I am sure you know our culture//mmmm//well being a Muslim and coming from that part of the world although I was born and bred here and did almost everything in this country you were not allowed to have a boyfriend or be in a relationship that wasn't chosen by your parents (.) so what I did was a serious;: what should I say?: disobedience against not only my parents but the whole family and my religion//mmh//but I don't think I am the first and the last person from Pakistan or any Islamic background who has done that,: although I am against that philosophy I still believe in the culture of keeping yourself sacred and obeying God because He looks after you in all things that you do.” Saima

# Conclusions

- The three women relate to their gender identities differently: by either differentiating themselves from their father via choices they make – e.g. Maya and Sara - or by identifying with their father's expectations and by complying with cultural and religious principles (Saima). Gendered identities are also determined through their interrelations with other categories of difference such as class, ethnic group and religion.
- In **Maya's** case, her migration history interacts with gender and class: her language difficulties impede her educational achievement making it harder to pursue university studies; also her working class background dictates that she needs to seek temporary, manual, low paid labour to pay for her expenses while at school and later at university. She becomes a social actor by defying her father's wishes and pursues a university degree that leads her to upward social mobility and improvement of her circumstances.

# Conclusions

- **Sara** deals with her disadvantaged migration history, namely the downward mobility of her parents, by recognising the power of institutionalised cultural capital of education – she attends a private school to secure university entrance and a medical career. By choosing to restore the parents' social status through her own upward mobility, she also becomes a social actor who through her agency is shaping the structures of her habitus. However, Sara has the advantage of coming from a middle class family background therefore she has embodied or incorporated cultural capital to support her in her efforts.
- **Saima's** religious identity and social class predetermines her gendered experiences and life choices. In her narration, her position as a Muslim woman is something she eventually accepts and complies with. She maintains her family middle class position by choosing to pursue esteemed university studies and agreeing to an arranged marriage.
- Intersections of gender with other categories of difference serve to constitute the specific quality of the gender identity in question in a specific time and place.