

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

Introduction

The role of the cultural capital of immigrants in the success or hindrance of their social and economic integration in receiving countries has long attracted the interest of migration researchers. The concept has been mainly elaborated by Bourdieu's theoretical formulations; his cultural capital theory provides a framework for the reproduction of social inequality within highly individualistic societies which permits us to capture the differences in migrants' positions within the social space and their habitual disposition. Yet, this approach has been criticised for its lack of representation of intersectionality of social structures such as gender, race and ethnicity.

In this paper, I will consider the relevance of cultural capital when examining gendered experiences of women with immigrant background – the so-called 'second generation'. I will also discuss a biographical interpretive approach for studying how these women make use of their cultural capital during their entry into the labour market and how their experiences reflect multiple inequalities. I will argue that the biographical narrative method permits the examination of intra-categorical intersectionalities and a better understanding of the interactions between structures and social agents in the field of migration studies. My discussion will be based on the empirical analysis of selected women's narratives collected during a study on the integration of highly qualified 'second generation' migrants into the labour market and the ways they make use of their cultural capital during this process.

Second generation immigrants - definitions?

The resurgence of immigration in many western countries has initiated an intensive debate over its effects. A major portion of current research has focused mainly on how first-generation immigrants integrate into the economic and social structure of the host country, despite the fact that the overall, long-term impact of immigration also depends on the adjustment process experience imperative by their children, the so-called 'second generation' immigrants. Moreover, given the importance of immigration in the context of the current demographic trends in most developed countries, it is to determine how immigrants (both first and second generation) integrate and perform in the host country.

There is ambiguity of the term "second generation immigrant," which may refer to the first generation born in the new country, or the first generation born to parents who were themselves born in the new country. Incidentally, the less common term "1.5 generation" was unambiguously coined to refer to those who immigrate early in life, thus remaining consistent to the notion that "first generation" refers to immigrants themselves, and "second generation" refers to the first generation of a family born in the new country.

Generation labelling of immigrants is further complicated by the fact that immigrant generations may not correspond to the genealogical generations of a family. For instance, if a family of two parents and their two adult children immigrate to a new country, members in both generations of this family may be considered "first generation" by the former definition, as both parents and children were foreign-born, adult, immigrants. Likewise, if the two parents had a third child later on, this child would be of a different immigrant generation than its siblings. For every generation, the factor of mixed-generation marriages further convolutes the issue, as a person may have immigrants at several different levels of his/her ancestry.

Despite the ambiguity of generation labelling, it is frequently used in common discourse, news articles, and reference articles without deliberate clarification. It may or may not be possible to determine, from context, which meaning is intended.

The term "1.5 generation" or "1.5G" refers to people who immigrate to a new country before or during their early teens. They earn the label the "1.5 generation" because they bring with them characteristics from their home country but continue their assimilation and socialization in the new country. Their identity is thus a combination of new and old culture and tradition.

Depending on the age of immigration, the community into which they settle, extent of education in their native country, and other factors, 1.5 generation individuals will identify with their countries of origin to varying degrees. However, their identification will be affected by their experiences growing up in the new country. 1.5G individuals are often bilingual and find it easier to be assimilated into the local culture and society than people who immigrated as adults.

Cultural Capital of Immigrants

The concept of cultural capital refers to the role that distinctive kinds of cultural tastes, knowledge and abilities play in relation to the processes of class formations in contemporary societies. It has been particularly influential in sociological accounts of the ways in which the middle classes distinguish themselves from the working classes through their distinctive cultural tastes, knowledge and competencies. It has also played a significant role in accounts of differences within the middle classes (between culturally 'rich' professionals and managers, for example).

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.

Although Bourdieu (1983, 1984) criticizes the concept of human capital for its 'economism', clearly there is considerable overlap between the two concepts. Whereas human capital pertains to investments in education and the acquisition of job experience and skills that can generate returns in the labour market (Schultz 1963; Becker 1964), cultural capital emphasises competence in cultural practices that can be converted into

other forms of capital (Di Maggio and Mohr 1985). Both human and cultural capitals refer to human competence that is acquired through formal and informal education.

Cultural capital is difficult to measure, especially in a multicultural society. Research indicates that the measurement of human capital has missed important dimensions of cultural competence among immigrants. Moreover, while human capital refers to ability gained through formal education and work-place experience, cultural capital emphasises socialisation within the family. The human-cultural capital that immigrants bring with them, and continue to accumulate in their new country, can be important resources that open up employment opportunities in the social mainstream and in the ethnic community. Familiarity with the customs and language of the receiving society, its high- and middle-brow cultural forms, educational degrees and professional credentials that are fully transferable are examples of human-cultural capital that can yield profit in the majority society.

By contrast, familiarity with the customs and language of the ethnic community and past experiences in ethnic institutions such as rotating credit associations represent human-cultural capital useful in the ethnic community.

The transmission of human-cultural capital, the investment strategies and methods of accumulation, takes place largely within the immigrant family. The connection between social-class position and human-cultural capital is in the resources afforded by financial capital in initiating investments in cultural competence, with middle-class and elite families starting earlier and allocating greater resources to foreign language tutorials, music lessons, foreign travel, concert attendance, and so on.

These accounts of cultural capital and its role in the organisation of class differences now also inform cultural policies concerned to mitigate the effects of social exclusion. In all these respects, the concept of cultural capital constitutes a promising starting point for understanding how social inequalities are organised in 'culture-drenched' societies like our own. At the same time, however, the concept has been extensively criticised in the literature that has been developed in the wake of its original elaboration in the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

The problems that have been identified focus on: i) conceptual and technical difficulties concerning how cultural capital is to be identified and measured; ii) the explanatory value of the concept when compared with alternative accounts of class-based forms of social stratification and iii) how the functioning of cultural capital is to be understood when gender and ethnically-based forms of social stratification are taken into account alongside those based on class (Savage and Bennett, 2005; Silva, 2005).

Strategies for cultural capital appropriation

If the individual perceives that the borders between the dominated class – to which s/he belongs – and the dominating class – where s/he wishes to accede – are relatively permeable through appropriation of cultural capital as the main way to operate the transgression, then s/he'll have the tendency to elaborate individual strategies in order to succeed. It is the case of the individual who invests heavily in embodied capital, by entering a long process of education, longer than what her/his family would be able to offer her/him, which will inevitably lead her/him to make important economic sacrifices.

If, on the other hand, the individual perceives those interclass borders as relatively impermeable, s/he will either have the tendency to downplay the importance of the appropriation of cultural capital as the main means of transgressing them, or will seek alternative forms of cultural/social capital, the legitimacy of which s/he will search among her/his dominated peers. Her/his strategy will then be one of collective struggle for gaining legitimacy through numbers, by constituting, for instance, recognised minorities and asking for collective rights for those minorities. In the first case, the individual perpetuates the order of things by assimilating the dominant ideology. In the second, s/he is susceptible to adhering to revolutionary ideologies and to doctrines of collective resistance.

A particular case of individuals coming from dominated classes is that of the immigrants. Those coming from countries where the access to education is relatively eased by government policies for equality of chances, as is the case of the ex-communist countries, will tend to perceive the new environment as one where the borders between dominated and dominating classes are relatively permeable. They will therefore tend to re-enter the education process, following an individual strategy of embodied, but most importantly, institutionalised cultural capital appropriation. On the contrary, those immigrants coming from countries where the access to education is costly and whose embodied cultural capital is not significant (the institutionalized cultural capital is anyway almost non-existent for all categories of immigrants), or from countries whose cultures are more distant from that of the host country – in terms of traditions, social norms and values, language, etc – will tend to perceive the interclass borders as impermeable, will downplay the importance of cultural capital and tend to adopt collective, ethnocentric strategies for minimising the power distance separating them from the dominating class. They are those for which “reasonable accommodations” will be instated, as they constitute themselves in relatively powerful (but still dominated) minorities.

Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory

The cultural capital theory established by Bourdieu provides an analytical approach for the reproduction of social inequality within highly individualistic societies, which enables us to capture the differences in migrants’ positions within the social structure and their habitual disposition. Capital theory describes the position of social groups within a social space structured by economic, cultural and social structures of inequality (Bourdieu, 1982). Within these structures, the *Habitus* and thus the everyday actions are structured or defined by the relative position of a group.

Indeed, some commentators regard social capital as both an outcome and exacerbation of social and ethnic inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Fine, 2001; Morrow, 1999; Portes, 2001). Commentators such as Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and, more recently, Alejandro Portes (Portes, 2001; Portes and Landolt, 1996) provide a critical stance toward social capital, and by implication its relationship to social cohesion. They regard social capital as the outcome of social and ethnic inequalities, rather than a solution to them, and provide a challenge to the dominant normative, functionalist version of social capital. For example, Bourdieu’s pioneering work on social and other capitals emphasised the plastic nature of social capital and its roots in economic capital. Importantly, as Barbara Arneil (forthcoming) notes, Bourdieu conceptually breaks the dominant link between social capital and social cohesion, casting loose the preoccupation with shared values and

unified national identity, and focusing on access to resources.

Research led by Bourdieu using interviews and ethnographic observations showed the daily sufferings of the powerless, denied the means to adapt to the changing conditions of their lives and to find a socially dignified existence in France. For example, one case study described a new immigrant family from Algeria, living in a housing tract on the outskirts of Paris (one of the banlieues recently experiencing protest riots), who had to cope with pervasive forms of racism (Bourdieu, 1999). This grounded understanding of the forms and operation of various capital resources is in contrast to the dominant model that assumes a clean slate, where newer immigrants have both the proclivity and ability to form bridging ties to others in their new countries of settlement. By taking into account the social distinctions and class structure in contemporary society, critical research highlights how social capital building is rooted in the uneven and harsh realities of the reception experience of immigration.

Bonding, bridging and linking social capital building does not occur tabula rasa. To appropriate the title of one of Bourdieu's books, the disenfranchised and various new immigrant populations are often made to bear 'the weight of the world', bringing their social and cultural 'baggages' into established societies and communities (Bourdieu, 1999). The point is that particular forms of capital brought by immigrants from their land of emigration can become another basis, rather than cure, for imposed social inequality.

This is how Bourdieu ties together - even though not without problems – the most central of his concepts, habitus and conflict: "*I developed the concept of 'habitus' to incorporate the objective structures of society and the subjective role of agents within it. The habitus is a set of dispositions, reflexes and forms of behaviour people acquire through acting in society. It reflects the different positions people have in society, for example, whether they are brought up in a middle-class environment or in a working-class suburb. It is part of how society produces itself. But there is also change. Conflict is built into society. People can find that their expectations and ways of living are suddenly out of step with the new social position they find themselves in... Then the question of social agency and political intervention becomes very important*" (Bourdieu 2000, 19).

One of the theoretical cornerstones of Bourdieu's sociology is the idea of society as a plurality of social fields. Forms of capital (economic, cultural and social) are the core factors defining positions and possibilities of the various actors in any field. Each social field has a profile of its own, depending on the proportionate importance within it of each of the forms of capital. The forms of capital controlled by the various agents are trumps that define the chances of winning the stakes in the game. "*The field of power is a field of forces defined by the structure of the existing balance of forces between forms of power, or between different species of capital. It is also simultaneously a field of struggles for power among the holders of different forms of power. It is a space of play and competition in which social agents and institutions which all possess the determinate quantity of specific capital (economic and cultural capital in particular) sufficient to occupy the dominant positions within their respective fields [the economic field, the field of higher civil service or the state, the university field, and the intellectual field] confront one another in strategies aimed at preserving or transforming this balance of forces... This struggle for the imposition of the dominant principle leads, at every moment, to a balance in the sharing of power, that is, to what I call a division of the work of domination. It is also a struggle over the legitimate principle of legitimation and the legitimate mode of reproduction*" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996, 76)

Intersectionality

When considering gender issues, we need to acknowledge that the binary opposition – man vs woman – is no longer the only focus of interest for feminist analysts and there is a reconsideration of differences and inequalities between women. Indeed it is now widely recognised that the ascriptions of markers of difference/identity such as gender, ethnicity, social status, nationality, religion, age and so on do intersect.

The diversity approach and intersectionality analysis in gender studies assisted in the recognition of multiple forms of discrimination and social disadvantage in migratory movements (Ludvig 2006). In particular, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term 'intersectionality' for the phenomenon of merging and mingling of multiple markers of difference or 'intersections'. There is a need to move from gendered inequalities to multiple inequalities and to adopt an inclusive approach to analyses of minority groups: the inclusion of differences in the analysis of power struggles and inequalities for minority groups (Verloo 2006).

Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality as an escape from the problems of identity politics to '*denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences*' (Crenshaw 1989, p. 139). She distinguished between **structural** and **political** intersectionality. The first occurs when inequalities and their intersections are directly relevant to the experiences of people in society, e.g. this type of intersectionality would explain why a black woman is not considered for one job because she is black since the 'norm employee' is a white woman, while other jobs are also unavailable to her since black persons in that context are predominately male. The latter type indicates how inequalities and their intersections are relevant to political strategies, e.g. the unavailability of domestic violence police interventions by district which would highlight arrests differentiated by race; the information may be blocked because of fears that it might be abused to reinforce racial stereotypes about some groups being pathologically violent.

Also, Leslie McCall (2005) has recently discussed questions of how to study the complexity of intersectionality and proposes three approaches: First, a '**categorical approach**' affirms categories and has the potential to study the relationships *between* categories in quantitative research. It is useful for instance to model wage indicators and income differences between (fixed) groups (McCall, 2005: 1790). Second, McCall elaborates on what she calls the '**anti-categorical**' approach (McCall, 2005: 1779). This is the postmodern critique of categorization per se, or as she points out, an 'anti-categorical critique of categorization' (McCall, 2005: 1779). In simple terms, after postmodern deconstructionism, gender becomes the product of certain discourses and hence the category of gender becomes obsolete. The same holds true for the category of 'race' and so on. Black feminists' critiques come very close to this: first, despite rejecting the validity of categorizations, Black feminists acknowledge that it is impossible to avoid using categories strategically for political purposes. Second, despite rejecting the validity of categorizations, feminists of colour do not reject the social reality that is manifest in their everyday lives. For example, despite sex and gender being the product of certain discourses, they have 'real' consequences for our existence in everyday life (*Geschlecht als Existenzweise*, Maihofer, 1995). Likewise, despite our understandings of the concept of 'race' as a manmade classification and in no way a biological 'truth', the phenomenon of racism is still alive and produced in everyday interactions. According to McCall, methodologically 'personal narratives' and 'single group-studies' can be used to

study the intersections of some single dimensions of multiple categories in selected social positions (McCall, 2005: 1781). McCall calls this third approach an **'intra-categorical approach'**: it does not intend to address the complexity of a full range of dimensions in a full range of categories. 'Narrative' in this approach can be literary, historical, discursive or autobiographical (McCall, 2005: 1781).

Some authors distinguish between a story and a narrative, the former denoting the 'story' told by the individuals and the latter meaning the means of enquiry (Roberts, 2002: 177). For my purposes here, I use narrative, narration and story interchangeably to denote the spoken and later transcribed text of a person's freely narrated associations. I am focusing here less on empowerment in self-representations than on the constructions of categories of difference and identity in the narrative events presented by one person. By categories of difference I mean categories of distinction like class, gender, nationality, race, and ethnicity. From the point of view of the individual subject, it is through narration that the axes of identity and subjectivity become explicit: when we acknowledge that subjectivity is the way people make sense of their relation to the world, it becomes the modality of identity. **How a person perceives or conceives an event (and speaks about it) would therefore vary according to how she is culturally constructed, what she identifies herself with and/or differentiates herself from.** The individual's ability to define their identity will depend on the resources it has, or as Bourdieu says, its social, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1976, 1983). In addition, Bourdieu has equipped the discussion on the relationship between structure and agency with the concept of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1976: 165), a means to link and combine both: individuals act within 'fields', and within these fields they can shape the structures and are mutually shaped by them. The ability to act is dependent on the resources available, which determine their status within the field and in relation to the other individuals.

- Constructions of categories of difference and identity in the narrative events presented by one person

- Notions of belonging, identity and differentiation that are articulated in the interview narrative

The "Cultural Capital During Migration" project

For the purposes of this discussion I am referring to the empirical analysis of selected women's narratives collected during a study on the integration of highly qualified 'second generation' migrants into the labour market and the ways they make use of their cultural capital during this process.

The project entitled "Cultural Capital During Migration: the relevance of education titles and residence permits for the status passage into the labour market", led by a group of German sociologists and funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, investigated the potential for and restrictions on the recognition of the cultural capital of migrants during their entry into the labour market. In this respect it systematically related the broad legal-political structures for migration (in particular the institutional acceptance of professional degrees, the right of residence of migrants and labour regulations) and migrants' own –

individual and collective – interpretation and action strategies. This interdisciplinary study aimed to show why the cultural capital of migrants often remains unutilized, how forms of inequality are reproduced that are difficult to legitimate, and how Germany, as a modern knowledge society, loses momentous resources by not recognizing this cultural capital. A comparison of Germany with other countries (Canada, Great Britain and Turkey) was intended to shed light on alternative – and possibly innovative – forms of labour market integration for migrants. The final aim of the project was to engage in an on-going cooperation with key representatives working in the field and in politics, and seek to develop strategies with them for more fully and effectively utilizing the cultural capital of migrants in Germany.

The central subject of the research is the integration of migrants into the labour market. This process is conceptualised as a multi-dimensional status passage:

- (1) as an entry into the labour force, i.e. as a change in status of the educational and professional accomplishments, with its imminent social risks and need for re-orientation, and
- (2) as a process of migration, i.e. as a change in status because of a transition between nation states with their specific educational systems and labour markets.

The ability of migrants to make their educational titles or their cultural capital compatible with the demand of the labour market is decisive for the way in which the status passage evolves between educational institutions and the labour market.

With respect to its content and its recognition, cultural capital is explicitly but also implicitly bound to the nation state. Through migration cultural capital – even if it seems to be internationally convertible – can be distorted or devalued in its compatibility. In this respect migrants are widely dependent on the legal, social and symbolic recognition of their cultural capital. However, migrants are not perceived as passive “victims” of potential institutional and informal forms of exclusion. Rather, those involved in status passages are themselves shaping the locally or nationally specific conditions under which their status transition in the labour market evolves. Thus the study group aimed to reconstruct the individual and collective strategies of migrants aimed at making use of their cultural capital in the labour market in spite of the risks of exclusion that they might face. From this perspective, the investigation did not only focus on access to existing employment but also on forms of independent subsistence (for instance as small independent business owners, etc.). It also investigated if social networks are conducive to integrating migrants into the labour market and thus into the receiving society at large or whether they contribute to a process of self-exclusion.

The Biographical Narrative Interview

Since we were primarily interested in the utilisation of cultural capital in the process of a biographical status passage, above all, we resorted to the method of narrative interviews (see Schutze, 1983, 2003). Based on an initial question intended to generate a narration, we asked interview partners to tell their life-story in great detail. Our follow up questions then focussed first of all on those themes that were relevant to our study.

The narrative interviews were interpreted with the documentary method (see Bohnsack, 2003; Bohnsack, Nentwigesemann & Nohl, 2001). The documentary interpretation of

narrative interviews (see Nohl, 2006a) do not only aim at reconstructing explicit aspects of the life-story as pointed out by the interviewees themselves. In addition, they allow understanding the implicit set of knowledge that shapes and is embedded in daily practices. By referring to narrative interviews as our primary set of data we hope to get a better understanding of those socialisation and learning processes as well as sets of knowledge and competence that are not yet, or no longer, present in the form of institutionally accepted cultural capital. Second, the documentary interpretation of narrative interviews does not aim at the single case but, based on the comparison of different cases, intends to understand general orientations and experiences. Such findings can then be captured in types and a typology (see Bohnsack, 2001). By generating these typologies that generalize the findings from single cases the documentary interpretation of narrative interviews avoids reducing these interviews as simple expressions of individual biographies. Rather, this method allows for a better understanding of how individual life stories are embedded in collective, milieu-specific dimensions of experiences (see Nohl, 2006a, 2006b).

The use of biographical analysis as a method derived from and developed through different disciplines. It has proven to be an excellent way of making theoretical sense of social phenomena. Especially in the interdisciplinary field of migration studies, the biographical approach is well suited to empirical investigations of migration processes because it offers us a way of empirically capturing the diversity, complexity, and transformational character of migration phenomena and of reconstructing them through biographical analysis. (Apitzsch and Siouti, 2007). The biographical research perspective in migration studies uses biographical analysis to provide 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 (Apitzsch 1990: 90).

In this context, the concept of biographical resources (Hoernig 1989) is at the centre of the analysis. It integrates biographical experiences and the knowledge constructed from these into experience, sense, and action resources. A further characteristic and advantage of the biographical research perspective in migration studies is that the biographical approach helps to avoid reductionist concepts of social types, the latter using essentialist cultural mechanisms of investigation. Biographical reconstructive research proceeds from the characterisation of biographies as 'radical documents of the sociality of the individual' (Apitzsch 1990). In this way, processes of change and the mingling of individual and societal positionings and identity constructions can be investigated. Thus, biographical research perspectives offer a potential methodological tool within the framework of women's and gender studies (see Diezinger et al. 1994). In Women's Studies, scholars have discovered that the perspective of mainstream disciplinary migration research was based on the model of the 'normal' biography as well as the 'male bread winner model'. 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).

During the last two decades interest in biographical research in the social sciences has continually grown (Chamberlayne, Bornat, & Wengraf, 2000). The study of life histories based upon different kinds of biographical materials—the "holistic" attempt to discover and to document how radical social changes have been experienced and understood by members of contemporary societies and how they have penetrated and shaped their life circumstances and life courses—has, of course, an important place in the history of

sociology.

The biographical approach has been subject to the suspicion that it falls victim to "biographical illusions" replicating the arguments of Bourdieu's influential essay. Here Bourdieu (1986) criticized the dubious assumption of biographical research that individuals have the capacity to shape biographical opportunities and individual room for manoeuvre. However, already Fritz Schutze (1983, 1989) tried to understand the social structures that are behind personal life stories with his biographical approach. With the documentary method as it has been developed by Ralf Bohnsack (2003) based on Karl Mannheim (1964) our research gradually moves away from a "biographical illusion."

Biographical analysis is an interpretive research approach to understand how individuals partake in social contexts and make sense of them. The analysis of biographical interviews aims at revealing structures of personal and social processes of action and of suffering as well as possible resources for coping and change. In our practice of "doing biographical analysis" there is no pre-selection of what would be "relevant" categories; instead, we proceed sequentially in our analysis, to allow for the emergence of new terms of sociological understanding. Interview partners are asked by the interviewer to tell their life story in relation to the research interest. In the course of the narration, life events unfold to reveal experience, past and present insights, and perspectives. Usually it is the interviewer who later produces and interprets the transcript.

The analysis of a taped and transcribed autobiographical narrative interview proceeds by careful and methodical readings of the text. In studying interview transcripts, substantive concerns and formal aspects of the narrative are interpreted in their relation with one another. The discovery of the regular occurrence of "communicative schemes" (relating, for example, how certain events unfolded, giving a commentary, explanation, or evaluation) created a sociolinguistic basis for interpretation. Another important discovery was that painful, threatening or traumatic life experiences are not simply rendered in a "straightforward" single line of narrative presentation. Instead, such a narrative tends to be interrupted by inserted (argumentative) sequences about the background of these experiences (Riemann & Schutze, 1991). A puzzling discontinuation of an ongoing narrative and ensuing repair practices can thus sensitize the interpreter with regard to former and still acute difficulties in the life of the narrator.

Formal aspects of the biographical account reflect what might lead to a discovery of certain biographical and social processes, such as constraints on action and suffering.² Formal aspects by themselves, however, are not definite indicators of biographical or social processes. The interpretation relies on the substantive concerns reflected in the account as well as on sociological context knowledge. As an empirically based research process, an interpretation requires validity checks internally and externally. That is, it should be possible to find further support for the interpretation of a certain segment in other parts of the interview. And it should be possible to generalise interpretations with regard to other possible cases within the social and historical contexts, or "life worlds," implicitly or explicitly referred to. In fact, the basis for theoretical generalisation of a single case relies on understanding the case within its social and historical context. Interpretive researchers therefore rely on their awareness of social knowledge. This should include a critical assessment of common sense descriptions and explanations of social realities. Thus, to interpret a case, researchers need to reflexively question taken-for-granted assumptions concerning, for example, social normality and difference.

To conclude, there are three analytical steps in proceeding from case analysis to theoretical generalisation:

- first, critically assess the social, historical, economic and political aspects of general claims made about the phenomena under study;
- second, reconstruct and analyse how individuals integrate, deny, adapt to, or are sometimes overwhelmed by general ideas concerning their own biographical experience and their family as well as group history;
- and third, discover how biographical knowledge is generated from these ways of dealing with set opinions, and in which ways such knowledge constitutes a part of transformational biographical processes within the individual life story.

Three narratives: Maya, Saima, Sara

For the purposes of this discussion, I will use examples from three interviews we conducted in the South East England. As mentioned above, the biographical narrative method was employed for the conduct and analysis of these interviews. The three interviews to be discussed here lasted on average 1.30-2 hours and were conducted during one-off meetings that took place in 2006 in London and South East England. The interview partners were Maya, Saima and Sara (Maya's and Sara's interviews were conducted by a woman and Saima's interview by a man – both interviewers were immigrants themselves although not from the same ethnic groups of the interviewees). All three women grew up and were mainly educated in the UK although Maya and Sara were born abroad - in Turkey and Iraq respectively – and moved at an early age in the UK - the so-called “1.5 generation”, whereas Saima was born in the UK by immigrant parents.

The following analysis outlines how these women mention and refer to differences using the example of few, selected categories of difference. Before discussing these points I will briefly present the background of these women as a way of context.

Maya is 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 it is not clear whether their reasons were economical or political. She has 7 siblings, sisters and brothers, who live in the UK. Three of them – including Maya - were brought up by her grandparents. During her educational career, Maya follows non-direct pathways to academic qualifications. After finishing secondary school, she does Foundation GCSE, BTEC Business & Finance, BTEC National Business & Finance, and then moves on to do a University degree (BSc Sociology & Psychology). After her degree, she also undertakes GTP (Teacher Training) in order to work as a teacher in primary education; this is another strategy for her to continue her studies with a final aim to become an educational psychologist. She is single and lives in London. She has a boyfriend who is also university educated and a teacher.

Saima is born in 1978 in the South East of England (Eastbourne), where she lives with her parents until she goes to University. She is married, and lives in London with her husband. Her husband is an IT consultant (university education). She studied Criminology at the University of Westminster and has an MSc in Criminal Justice from the London School of Economics. She now works as Equality and Diversity Officer at the

London Probation Service. Her parents have college (mother) and university (father) education; they are both accountants. They migrated from Pakistan to the UK for economical reasons – father came first and his wife followed later. She has a younger brother. In terms of physical appearance, Saima wears headscarf.

Sara is 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 London due to the Gulf war. She studied medicine at the University College London and she now works as a doctor – she specialises in psychiatry. She lives in Canterbury with her fiancée, who is from Yemen and is also a medical doctor. 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.

case	type of migration	educational pathway	Employment experiences	studies
Maya Ay IUKo3	Parental migration, Turkey Migrated at 14 years old	Non-direct way: Foundation GCSE, BTEC Business & Finance BTEC National Business & Finance BSc Sociology & Psychology	Factory worker Worker at a fast food shop Auxiliary nurse Youth worker in a Turkish/Kurdish community organisation Teacher	Business Finance Sociology Psychology
Saima Khan IUKo4	Parental migration, Pakistan second generation	Regular way: 6 th form college A-levels BA Criminology MSc Criminal Justice	Equality and Diversity Officer	Criminology
Sara Salih IUKo6	Parental migration, Iraq Migrated at 12 years	Regular way: GCSEs A-levels BSc Medical Studies	Shop assistant Medical doctor	Medicine

Gender

Gender is a category that one is not easily 'conscious' of because, as a normative category, it is rarely questioned. The three women do not explicit 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 '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.

In particular, Maya views her choice to obtain University education as a strategy to

escape the women's fate in Turkey, according to her grandfather:

"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 has 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 your man because if this kicks on the bad side, depends on their income, we wouldn't depend on their income."

This choice is in conflict with her father's wishes: "I started to think what I want to do and my father wasn't to be supportive of my education and ... I had quite a lot of clashes and arguments with my dad". She is not referring to her relationship with her father frequently during the interview and she is also emotionally upset when she does. "it was very difficult and also having to deal with my family' acceptance or not accepting that I was at university that I left the house and they were in chain with the whole society, gossips. It was quite a lot of pressure". This is also evident in a later part of her interview where she refers to her father's and possibly cultural expectations of her as a woman and how she defied this stereotype: "I think I have been not lucky, I think I had to work really hard to get this education, I had to work myself and work with a dictionary to write my essays ... and fight with my father to go to university I mean that would have been really a easy option, you know, to say my father doesn't want me to go to university, I am not prepared to fight with him. Fine, I am stay at home and cook and whatever and maybe he will change his mind, may be I will go, may be I won't. It would have been an easy option and I don't know what I would have done if I opted to that choice but as I said, I was raised with that high expectations that one day I would go to university and get my job". In this case the institutionalised cultural capital of a university degree acts as a mechanism of addressing gender inequalities as well as class ones.

Maya's working class background also determines her limited access to material resources and her subsequent actions in the labour market, i.e. her need to earn money from an early age to afford things not provided by her father/parents; her father is instrumental in her finding the first jobs that will lead her to a chain of temporary, occasional jobs throughout her adolescence and university years:

"First job was in the factory that was basically, you know, my dad wanted me to work and it was in summer holiday and I needed money for the next terms, course material, or just generally you know between ages I wanted to buy things. And it wasn't provided by my parents and I thought that time I need to work to get the money myself. He would look, he would find a job, you know, he tell they need somebody in the factory I worked for. I would go along with that."

She distinguishes herself from her father's decision to migrate to the UK:

" the first three years of being here were my silent, silent years, I didn't speak, that was my way of protesting. I refused to talk to my dad and me and my sister refused to sit the same table with my dad. We were very angry, we came that he made us through ... we were just really angry @ we were just thinking. It is a very difficult age I think for any child to live, I think there are certain periods in ages, one's life to make that big move, I don't think any easier to leave to another country when you are thirty but at least you make that decision. it is your own decision, you are involved in that decision" Her antithesis with her father led to the break up of their relationship: "I am not in touch with my dad" however she is now closer with her siblings: "I have got my family and which over the years I have to work, to get close to, get to understand them."

Both Sara and Saima talk about their upbringing in relation to their religion and its 'strict' expectations for girls. Sara, in contrast to Saima, appears to have a relationally more liberal upbringing in the sense that she is not 'pressurised' to wear the hijab and has her 'independence and freedom' - nonetheless she is referring to the gendered expectations of her religious upbringing:

"from a social and cultural point of view there was lots of problems there because all the girls would go out a lot at night and you know you'd want to socialise and be out late at night and obviously my parents are more strict so (.) I think a lot of Muslim families have the same problem in this country with their kids wanting to go out and dress in a certain way. Luckily I haven't been pressurised like to wear the hijab or anything like that but there has been issues with that, yeah. Problems and arguments about that I remember throughout my teenage years... I'm lucky that my parents weren't too strict so I was able to still go out. There were lots of arguments about going out later but not as bad. //mmh// I still got my independence and freedom anyway so it wasn't too bad for me but I think other girls have had more problems and they've had to run away and all sorts of things". Nonetheless, cultural and religious gendered expectations such as an arranged marriage becomes a strong threat by her mother to make her improve in school and pursue university studies:

"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".

Like Maya, Sara is a social actor and is using institutionalised cultural capital such as higher education qualifications to improve her situation as a child of immigrants and achieve upward mobility. In Saima's case, structural factors such as religion and ethnic group determine and lead her life choices such as marriage despite the fact that her strong educational qualifications would be able to secure a more independent life and the sort of freedom she experienced at University. Although she realises through this experience how confined she was at the family home, she views this way of life as a brief break from norm and prioritises her sense of belonging to a particular ethnic and religious community, an identity more important to her that secures her social status:

"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 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"

"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 (.): I don't know about you but 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 cause a grief in the family but (5): 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"

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".

Saima, on the other hand, is raised to stricter religious expectations. She speaks of her younger brother as facing the same strict upbringing - their restrictions are social but also related to educational achievement and parental expectations, although it is not clear whether these restrictions applied to the brother too when they grew up:

"my father was always making sure that we stay home and the only time we could go outside is when we were going to see family over the weekend or that we were travelling together to Pakistan//mmmhh// yeah even sometimes my friends would tease me for getting stuck at home.: we were only allow to watch telly at certain times and go to bed even before 8pm(.):my parent never made us to go out on our own even not until I finished my sixth form and went to the university".

Saima's dependence from her father's traditional gendered expectations is still evident even when she is getting married. She is only 'allowed' to leave the parental home to join her husband as a recognition of her 'maturity' - she is still referring to her father in a positive and obedient manner as the person who is 'very sad' to leave behind:

"so we got married in Eastbourne August 2004(.) I think that was when my parents actually acknowledged my maturity and as a result allowed me to move from home to join my husband//mmh// that was actually a frightening moment for me because although I was happy to move away from home in the same way very sad to leave my dad behind//mmhh//but I haven't missed him that much that I could not bear because I speak to them regu:larly and sometimes visit them over the weekend but as much as I would have loved to"

Class

In Sara's narrative, class is an important point of reference discussed as having changed with the Gulf war and her family's migration to the UK and the subsequent downward social mobility of her father. Her 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.

" within my own family my mother hasn't worked in this country because her English was bad so //mmh// in her case she's always been someone who has been struggling to find work and now she's probably too old anyway to find a job because she's probably over 50 years old now. But when we first came she must have been in her 40's and she wasn't (.) //mmh// she struggled to get a job and I think for her the main reason was her

English. //mmh// So I think I've seen it all. Like I've been the lucky one but I've seen it in my family that my mother hasn't got a job //mmh// because she doesn't speak the English language. My father didn't have a job for many years, like 6 or 7 years, //mmh// but that's probably because he was over qualified when he first came. He had a Phd and //mmh// although he knew English he was a bit over qualified and his age, obviously, they were taking the young graduates. //mmh// So that's just life and circumstances point of view. So he didn't have a job for a while".

"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."

Religion

In Saima's narrative, religion is the main point of reference; her parents' country of origin as *an Islamic state* is important for her as a frame of orientation.

For Saima, integration experiences with the host culture are framed within an orientation of conflict with her religion. 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 marriage - and throughout the interview she does not refer to her mother or any other female figures in her life at all.

Significance of her Muslim identity and how it intersects with her female identity:

"as I was growing up I began to realise that religion was very strong in our family life//mmh//I am sure you are aware of how Muslims attach so much importance to religion?: 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"

"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".

She allowed herself to stray away from the way of life her parents/father dictated based on their religious beliefs but only briefly:

"I wasn't given the chance to grow in a way that westerners do and mixing with predominantly English friends made me to struggle with my religion when I was at the Uni (.): I kind of did certain things like smoking and all sort of things that my parents wouldn't like me to do but I did it because of that freedom I was denied of from the beginning(2): I have somehow given up my smoking but do occasionally depending on the sort of group I am with//mmhh//yes and also I realised that it wasn't good for my health but sometimes we can all be naughty and even to the extent that I had a boyfriend for the first time when I was at the Uni//mmhh//this is a serious taboo that I broke but not for long".

Migration experience represents ethnic discrimination through her parents' migration experiences as well as her own experiences - knowing about discrimination through her father's experiences - these are confirmed by her early school experiences of discrimination:

"my father who I am very to used to tell how he struggled to cope with British life when he first arrived here because of some stereotypical attitudes towards immigrants in those days/mmh//yea it was very tough for him as he tells me whenever we are naughty and take things for granted but I don't dispute his advice at all because I have personally experienced some of the things that he said they used to say or do to him in those days(5):as I was growing up and attending school in Eastbourne with my younger brother we were sometimes picked on by our school mates and name-calling was something that we became used to it as we grew up".

Religion is also related to stereotyping and discrimination. Although she has headscarf, headscarf didn't emerge as an issue. It is characteristic that in Saima's case there is a collective identity that comes to the fore (she usually refers to 'we' instead of 'I' when narrating). She mentions Muslims as a "we-group" ('us Muslims', line 42) indicating feeling of belonging towards Muslims in a worldwide frame - she refers to 9/11 and to negative public opinions. She relates to the interviewer's difference - she refers to the black skin of the interviewer, argues against stereotypes about black people but refers to him as representative of a group:

"these days people all over the world is turned against because of the 9/11 incident in America but I think it is wrong for people to generalise us Muslims as dangerous people but I think that is wrong because I will find it very difficult to say to you that all black people are such and such//mmhmmh//no I can't do that because I know you very well how people respect you and what you do for the service hence if I say so then go-sh(11): it hurts so much when these days when you step out then people are pointing and giving that funny looks "

Conclusions: intersectionality in female narratives

Maya, Saima and Sara relate to their gender identities by either differentiating themselves from their father via choices they make - eg 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, 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. Sara has to deal with her disadvantaged migration background, however language is not the barrier for her but the downward mobility of her parents. She recognises the power of institutionalised cultural capital of education by attending 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 an advantage as she comes from a middle class family background so one might argue that 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 social class position by choosing to pursue esteemed university studies and agrees to an arranged marriage. Although research that links gender to other categories of difference decentres gender, it does not centre any other category. Instead, the 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. Because they work together - and intersect - their relative prevalence shifts.

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