This programme was first broadcast in 1999.
This is not an accurate word-for-word transcript of the programme.

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Joao Abreu: My association was only with a few Portuguese people.

Bootsie Ditlhabi: I love theatres. I’ve been to quite a few and it’s very interesting... something completely different from home because we don’t have that back home.

Presenter: Voices of immigrants talking about their social lives as immigrants in Britain.

Our first speaker, Muriel Hunte, is from Guyana in South America – culturally thought of as part of the Caribbean. She arrived in England in 1953, together with her young child, and joined her husband to live in North London. At that time, not long after the Second World War, there was a shortage of food and other items; people were only allowed to buy them in limited amounts in exchange for vouchers from ration books. Generally, they had very little money to spend on leisure activities. So, who did Muriel make friends with when she
first arrived and what did she do in her spare time?

Insert 1

There were a few black people around but not many Guyanese. There were plenty of Jamaican people and Trinidadian people and as time went on you got to be friendly with one or two. But, the main source of activities, leisure etc. was through the Church of England and the church did very well for me. I joined all the different activities, the Mother’s Union, the choir and whatever was going. So, life was not too bad. You had a bit of a social life mixing with the people in church. You were taken out to various places. Because then, it was just after the war. We still had ration books and to be taken for a day out was a novelty for a lot of people.

Presenter: There weren’t many other people from Guyana where Muriel lived, but she made friends with other black people from the Caribbean. However, her main source of leisure – the place where she made most of her friends was her Church. There, Muriel joined several groups, including the ‘Mother’s Union’ – where she met other women with young children, and she also sang with the church choir. As Muriel says, a day out for most people at that time was ‘a novelty’ – a new and pleasant experience. So, she generally had a better social life than many of her neighbours.

Our next speaker, came to live in West London in 1970 but unlike Muriel, English wasn’t his first language. So, did this make a difference to the kind of friends he made or limit his social life at all?
My name is Joao Abreu. I came in 1970 from Madeira, Portugal. At the beginning when I came to London. My association was only with a few Portuguese people. Those of my family around here and also some of those I made friends when I was working in the hotel. Then I came to know, even, English people and make friends and of course things started getting better and better and easier for life, because life at the beginning was very difficult, not speaking the language and so on.

Presenter: When Joao first arrived in England, he mainly associated - socialised with other Portuguese speaking people. They invited each other to their ‘places’ – their homes. But as Joao’s English improved, he also made friends with English people. He feels that having English friends helped to make his life easier and more enjoyable. When he arrived in England, there were a few Portuguese clubs where people could meet and have a drink. But, as Joao’s never been a drinker, he doesn’t enjoy such places. (take out)

Frank Ndjukende also arrived in England in 1970. He’s from Zaire, now known as The People’s Democratic Republic of Congo. Like Joao, English isn’t his first language. Frank enjoys meeting up with people from his own country and there are a few places, such as clubs and restaurants, where he can do that. But with a business to run, Frank says he doesn’t have much time to go to them. So, he’s pleased that now, people also use his barber shop as somewhere to meet, even when they don’t need a haircut!
Actually, we have a night club every weekend, Friday or Saturday. Most people, they do, go to enjoy there but myself, personally, I don’t. I used to but I stopped since I started my small business because I don’t have much time to go. But, they do meet and we have some restaurants, Zairean restaurants. Especially when it’s summer time. My barber shop is a good place to meet but not like a night club or a pub or a restaurant. No. It’s just, they like sometimes to spend time to have lovely time, to enjoy themselves, then go to a swimming pool or whatever. And, especially the ones who work seven days a week.

**Presenter:** Today, we’re hearing about the social lives of Britain’s immigrants.

Rajinder Dulai, who’s from the Punjab in India, came to England, in 1977. He went to live in The Midlands, where there is a large Asian immigrant population. At first, Rajinder’s friends were mainly other Punjabi speakers, but whilst at University, he also made friends with immigrants from other countries – whom he fondly calls ‘foreigners’. Was there a particular reason for this?

**Insert 4**

When I was at university, most of my friends were foreigners because they felt the same way that I did. Because, the problem here was, even still is, that if you don’t know the language, English language, then it’s looked upon that you must not be very clever. It’s really related to your intelligence somehow. They think, you know, you must be dumb, stupid or so. And every foreigner, even the white foreigners feel the same. So, for me it was easy to make friends with them.

**Presenter:** Rajinder believes that, when he was at university, English speaking people
thought he and his immigrant friends weren’t very clever…. He says that they related not speaking English very well, to a lack of intelligence. And as a result, it was easier for Rajinder to make friends with people who weren’t British.

Rajinder is now an engineer and works long hours, but he does find time to attend a drama club. Rajinder’s group recently performed a play that he’d written to show how difficult life is for illegal immigrants in Britain – people who live here secretly although the law says they’re not allowed to.

Insert 5

We wanted to do something on the immigrants’ experience, especially the illegal immigrants in this country. And, it was more of an ethical thing for us to do. It’s a story of illegal immigrants who are here and they’re hunted by the police and the immigration offices and they’re exploited by the local sweat-shop manufacturers. And what we showed in the play was that these people are real fighters. Regardless of all these pressures they still sort of manage to live their life and find some humour in life and support themselves and support their families back home.

Presenter: In Rajinder’s play, illegal immigrants are ‘hunted’ – searched out like animals - by the police and immigration officers. The play shows how illegal immigrants are ‘exploited’ – they’re paid very little money by manufacturers - for working very long hours in factories. Rajinder calls these factories ‘sweatshops’.

Through his leisure activities, Rajinder is able to express his views on life as an immigrant in Britain.
Our final speaker today is Bootsie Ditlhabi from Botswana in Southern Africa.

She came to London as a student in 1997 and finds the leisure activities exciting and fun. So who are her friends and what does she do in her spare time?

Insert 6

In London during my leisure time. I do sometimes mix with people from with home because there are a lot of students in London from Botswana. It’s not a very big Botswana community but they’re quite a few students from home that I do meet with and, in that way, it really makes me not to feel so homesick because they are my own people, we speak the same language and it’s very exciting. And other than that…what I do most is like going to theatres, and I think that’s one of the best things and the best experience in living in this country that gives me so much exposure. I love theatres. I’ve been to quite a few and it’s very interesting…something completely different from home because we don’t have that back home. So, it’s really good going to cinemas…it’s really fun. And the only thing that I have a problem with, it’s like, the night life in London, it’s all to do with night-clubs and going to pubs and that’s not my kind of lifestyle. Because, really, if you don’t drink alcohol, if you’re not into that kind of fast and busy life it’s not interesting for me.

Presenter: Bootsie has found that mixing with other people from Botswana and speaking her own language helps to stop her feeling homesick. But generally, Bootsie finds life in London exciting. She’s ‘not into alcohol’ – she doesn’t like drinking - and finds that although this is a big part of life in Britain, she doesn’t find it interesting. Bootsie says it doesn’t suit her ‘life-style’ – the way she likes to live. However, she’s got other things she likes to do, particularly going to the theatre and cinema. As such leisure activities aren’t generally available to her at home, in Botswana, Bootsie finds it’s a lot of fun.
Presenter: Join me, David Thorpe, next time when we’ll be hearing more insights into life in Britain as seen through the eyes of her immigrant population.