British Muslim Women Between Community, Country and God: A Case Study of Successful Identification

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Abstract

This thesis has developed out of a desire to document the voices of a sample of publicly active yet unheard British Muslim women. In the face of widespread negative narratives around Muslim women particularly, it communicates the concerns of 'women who were not oppressed' (van Es, 2017:5). In addition, it explores how these proactive and engaged women have built salient, hybrid identities.

The methodological approach taken by this thesis has favoured issues pertaining to the individual rather than the institutional, and has explored 'beneath the surface' forces in a focus on 'lived Islam'. In addition, in applying participatory feminist methods to research the lives of religious women, the thesis has instituted a novel approach to the study of Muslims.

The arguments presented here found a theoretical home in the works of Saba Mahmood (2005), championing the alternative agency constructions of religious women, and Tariq Modood (2005, amongst others), in his scholarship around British Muslims (and other minorities) on the national scene. Furthermore, the frames of postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha (2004) are employed to describe the hybridity of space and identities that respondents exhibited.

This study reports the significance of religion in the lives of these women, and the particular finding of an observed trajectory in their lives, leading to a greater desire to mix with non-Muslims. With this unique combination of strong religious belief and spirited agency, these

women have been able to uphold core aspects of their identity in a secular society, while also successfully contributing to that very society.

The social contributions, integration and interaction of these women can be seen as examples of engaged citizenship, showing possibilities for a pluralist, postsecular society in which minorities and their contributions are valued. In highlighting how these women disrupt stereotypes, this thesis makes a significant contribution to academic discourses seeking the accommodation of religious individuals in otherwise secular spaces.

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Glossary of Foreign Terms

'Adl: justice, impartiality, fairness, equitableness.

Alhamdulillah: commonly used Muslim phrase, translated as 'all praise is due to Allah'.

Al Muhajiroun: The Emigrants. A militant jihadist network based in the United Kingdom, headed by Omar Bakri Muhammad. Banned in Jan. 2010.

Bani ādam: The children of Adam. Refers to the belief that mankind has a common ancestor, Adam.

Barēlvī (Urdu): a movement following the Sunni Hanafi school of jurisprudence, with over 200 million followers in South Asia. The name derives from the north Indian town of Bareilly, the hometown of its founder and main leader Ahmed Raza Khan (1856–1921). The group is particularly known to emphasise devotion to Prophet Muhammad.

Beychāri (Urdu): helpless female.

Dīn: religion, creed, faith, belief.

Hijāb: a veil, cover, screen. In modern times, the term has come to signify the headscarf donned by Muslim women.

Hijrah: the emigration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD. The Muslim (Hijri) calendar is dated from this event.

ʾInshāʾAllāh: *lit.* God willing. Commonly used Muslim phrase expressing the belief that nothing happens without the will of God.

Jilbāb: long, flowing rode-like outer garment worn by Muslims as part of modest dress.

Lā ilāha illā allāh: *lit.* there is no deity but God, the basic Islamic statement of faith. Also, commonly used Muslim phrase to express disbelief, joy, shock or any other strong emotion.

Madrassa: religious school/classes, often attached to a mosque. Many British Muslim children will attend one on weekdays, after school.

MāshāʾAllāh: *lit.* God has willed, or as God wills. Commonly used Muslim phrase expressing appreciation, joy, pride, praise or thankfulness.

Mufti: an expert on Islamic law qualified to give rulings on religious matters.

Muslimah: female Muslim.

Niqāb: the face veil worn by some Muslim women.

Salafī: a strict orthodox, and often literalist, orientation in Sunni Islam. In modern times, it can also refer to a revivalist movement that developed in Egypt in the late 19th Century as a response to Western European imperialism. Colloquially, can often be used to refer to a dogmatic and ritualistic way of thinking, or ideology.

Subhān Allāh: *lit.* may Allah be exalted/ Allah is above. Commonly used Muslim phrase often used when praising God or exclaiming in awe at His attributes, bounties, or creation.

Tarīqa: Sufi order or school, usually headed by a spiritual master.

Tauhīd: belief in the singularity of God.

'Ummah: global community of Muslims.

Wahābi: strictly orthodox Sunni Muslim group/ideology founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahāb (1703–92). It advocates a return to the early century of Islam, rejecting later innovations; still the predominant ideology in Saudi Arabia. Term can be used pejoratively by those not aligned to it.

Yā Rabb: Oh Lord. An invocation used in prayer, often when faced by hardship.

Zāwiyah: an Islamic (often Sufi) religious school or monastery. The term is North and West African, roughly corresponding to the Eastern term madrassa.

Chapter 1-- Introduction

'What are you doing here! Why don't you go do jee-had with ISIS in Iraq…? Why don't you just go back home!'

(inebriated man on platform at King's Cross Station, to researcher)

On this otherwise very ordinary day over seven years ago, I sighed with resignation and not a small amount of trepidation as I waited for my train at a Central London station. Cowering in the arches that I had on previous occasions admired on this platform, I now used them to avoid eye contact. In the very British way that we conduct ourselves, my fellow commuters and I continued to rub along, feigning polite indifference despite the very loud and prolonged diatribe, clearly directed at me.

It has been repeated misrepresentations and misunderstandings such as the one illustrated above that have led to the development of this study. It is a project borne out of a desire to communicate the 'good works' and selfhood of the type of British Muslim women I meet and work with on a daily basis, conceived not as a representation, but as an exercise in 'giving voice' to an otherwise largely voiceless minority. In addition to seeing a dearth of Muslim women's voices in public spaces, I was also concerned that the contributions of many Muslim women to British communities have gone largely unrecognised and undocumented. I

myself was aware of the existence of many such contributions by Muslim women because of my own experience of voluntary community work in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities over the last 25 years. 'Where', I would often find myself asking, on seeing inflammatory newspaper headlines and unsubstantiated caricatures of Muslim women, 'are the voices and experiences of these women, women whom I meet, work with and am inspired by on a daily basis?' In addition, I felt that portraying the work and public encounters of a sample of strong and possibly unconventional women could offer inspiration, hope, and an indication of possibilities for Muslim women. As such, I decided to select my sample from amongst those women who were making social contributions.

On the theoretical front, I was inspired by the writings of Sariya Contractor (2012) and Katherine Bullock (2003, 2005) in similarly documenting first-hand the voices of 'ordinary women' who were making contributions to society. As my study proceeded, my work found a theoretical 'home' in the seminal interventions of Saba Mahmood (2005), championing the alternative agency constructs of religious women, and Tariq Modood (2005, amongst others), in his arguments that seek to accommodate British Muslims (and other minorities) on the national scene.

My study, thus, represents the voices of a sample of socially active women living and working in and around London. Chosen purely on the basis of their voluntary community work and a self-identification with Islam, these 'social activists' have both benefitted from, and contributed to, multicultural life in Britain. My aim in undertaking this research has been two-fold: to redress the negative and unrepresentative public narrative around British Muslim women by giving voice to a previously-unheard group, and to explore how these proactive and engaged women have built salient, hybrid identity constructs. In the final section of this

thesis, I suggest ways in which the narratives of my respondents may offer hope for the future of both British Muslims and multicultural society generally. Contractor, one of my initial inspirations, affirms that 'in the British context it is important to explore these women's layered identities and the multifaceted contributions that they are making, and can be encouraged to make, within pluralist society' (2012:6).

In this chapter, I map and position both my work and my respondents within the wider field of the study of Muslims in Britain, and give a brief synopsis of the layout of this thesis.

Research Overview and Aims

'… analysis as a mode of conversation, rather than mastery, can yield a vision of coexistence that does not require making others' lifeworlds extinct or provisional.' (Mahmood 2005: 199)

It may be argued that while a number of studies since the 1970s and 80s have documented the more macro-level, institutional and politically contingent aspects of Muslim life in Britain (see Rex and Moore, 1967; Anwar, 1979; Ansari 2004), much less attention has been focused on the daily lives, motivations and voices of the individuals themselves who make up Muslim society. While we owe a great debt to the scholars who documented the early development of British Muslim communities, that we can no longer ignore the vast majority of Muslims who are living beyond official bodies and institutions is also plain (Jeldtoft and Nielsen, 2012;

Dessing et al., 2013); a study of selective Muslim institutions, economic trends and radicalisation issues raised by the media leaves us with a partial and reductionist picture. I suggest that research into Muslim communities in Britain may do better to recognise that 'focusing only on the visual and the ritual narrows down Islamic identity considerably' (Bectovic, 2012:21).

Jeldtoft and Nielsen (2011; 2012) have argued for the need to study 'non-organized' Islam and Muslims, in a call to move away from the traditional approach to the study of Muslims societies which tends to have a strong organisational focus. In approaching societies through largely the institutional and organised, scholars run a number of risks. This approach can treat all Muslims as a homogenous, reified community who have equal attachment to 'their' mosques, Islamic organisations and madrassas. In actual reality, it is increasingly apparent that the variables that define the individual must be taken into consideration when studying the communal: issues of parental heritage, colonial history, gender, socio-economic factors and generational factors, amongst others, cannot be ignored. In addition, when studying communities defined by religious belief, it is now recognised that to assume that all members access their faith through the same institutionalised avenues is a mistake. In the case of British Muslims in particular, a large majority 'identify themselves with Islam in some form or other but who do not have anything to do with any form of institutionalized Islam' (Jeldtoft and Nielsen, 2011:1115). This was certainly the case for my respondents; despite being actively involved in community life, almost none of their work was based in mosques and Islamic originations, with attendance being restricted to religious festivals and special occasions.

Even less nuance has been adopted in studies of Muslim *women* living in secular, Western societies, other than the more visible and sensational aspects of their lives, such as their sartorial choices, problems of FGM and forced marriage, and, more recently, their role in the

'radicalisation' trope. As with much of the coverage of Muslim women in the West, both academic but more so popular media coverage highlight these women as passive victims of a patriarchal social system inherent to their faith and culture, needing the 'emancipation' that only a secular, liberal system can provide (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Bullock, 2003; Kahf, 1999; Ahmed, 1992; Dwyer and Shah, 2009). In the words of Contractor, the *Muslimah* is 'the different Other who is seldom asked about her views but who is often judged', in a process in which she has little part herself (Contractor, 2012:2). Her Muslim faith is held responsible for her life of, variously, victimhood, submission or radicalisation, and she is seen as needing to be rescued by Western liberal and feminist worldviews (Abu-Lughod, 2013). In the words of Amy, one of my Black convert respondents who is also a social worker:

'It's almost akin to the Stepford wives syndrome... we don't have a say, we don't decide, we don't choose. That said, I recognise that for a lot of Muslim women that is the reality. But that's not all of us, that doesn't take into account the diverse backgrounds. The fact that some of us, many of us, have lived here all our lives, many of us are converts, many of us are professionals. I find that situation frustrating.'

It is not coincidental that Amy expresses frustration, above all, at 'not having a say', even though she is a competent professional and has been born and brought up here. As with much of the media and academic coverage that I mention above, she also finds a lack of nuance and diversity in representations of Muslim women especially. It is this very nuance and depth in research on the lives of British Muslim women that I have attempted to contribute to, and in the process 'hear' the voices of these women first-hand.

Contractor, in fact, identifies a number of different viewpoints that seek to represent Muslim women's voices; she identifies patriarchal perspectives in the portrayal of Muslim women, emancipatory perspectives, Orientalist tropes, and even the work of some Muslim women themselves who take stated positions (as 'Muslim feminists', Quranic 'reformists' and 'liberal feminists') but continue to marginalise the choices of pious Muslim women. While these latter depictions do employ more nuanced analyses, they fail to capture the essence and impulse behind the lives of women who are pious by choice and consciously live theistic lives. Most importantly, Contractor draws our attention to the negative impact of this trope: 'these different voices, authentic or not, create an Othering of Muslim women, with one stereotype often strengthening the imagery created by the other' (2012:15). This discriminatory effect has become so pervasive in the lives of Muslim women that, despite my determination to highlight the positive and the hopeful, I had to make the decision to include discussion in this thesis on the negative intersectional influences on their lives (see Chapter 6).

While at no point denying that deeply ingrained patriarchal practices can indeed undermine Muslim women and their well-being (as my respondent Amy also recognises above), and that such coverage is necessary in highlighting oppressive practices, my research shows that widely-held grand narratives such as those alluded to here can be unhelpful to individual women, and to descriptions of them. The simplistic dichotomy between modern and traditional women, for example, can be of limited value when describing not only most women in the West today, but also those working and living in the Muslim world more widely. It would not, for example, accommodate the lives of most of my respondents: Irum, an activist-lawyer who wears the *hijāb* and spends her free time on projects that empower Muslim women; Zoya, an ethical fashion designer who was initially inspired by Islamic labour-law prescriptions; and Halima, whose brightly-coloured turban *hijāb* and long flowing

dresses mask a passionate and seasoned community activist who is as comfortable speaking in Parliament as she is at her kitchen table. None of these women sit comfortably within the traditional/religious-modern/secular binary.

This study, thus, takes the view that we need to move beyond a mere reactionary approach to 'Muslim' issues raised in politics and the press. Instead, a more proactive approach to research topics must be forthcoming, an approach especially with regards to women that asks: what are Muslim women's *own* concerns, voiced in their *own terms*?

Indeed, only recently has research turned away from what I term the narrow 'veil and victimhood' approach to Muslim women to examine more nuanced areas such as youth work with Muslim girls and participation in labour markets and civil society (Hopkins and Gale, 2009; Gilliat-Ray, 2010:206). In particular, a number of recent academic studies conducted by women themselves have gone further to capture the voices of Muslim women in various areas: Zebiri (2008) in her study of Muslim converts, Contractor (2012) in her 'hearing' of *Muslimah* voices, and Inge (2016) in her research on *Salafī* women all rely on first-hand qualitative studies with the women themselves.

It is the contention of this thesis that, with increasing numbers of Western Muslims themselves entering academic and popular discourses, the time has now come to shift this narrative in ways that do justice to those it purports to 'represent' by listening to the voices of the women themselves, away from institutions and in the more 'fuzzy structures' of daily life (Jeldtoft and Nielsen, 2011:1116). In the tradition of the more recent qualitative and first-hand works referred to above, my work seeks to address the gap in the first-hand narratives of British Muslim women. By selecting publicly active and engaged women, furthermore, I contribute to an understanding of how religious life may be compatible with temporal success in a secular society.

Furthermore, my study takes a deliberate step away from the negative discourses mentioned above to frame the lives of 'ordinary' and publicly engaged Muslim women as an integral and positive part of British multicultural society. In this 'new' approach I follow a wider epistemological shift represented by the works of Contractor (2012), Scott-Baumann and Contractor (2015), Gilliat-Ray (2010) and Lewis and Hamid (2018). Rather than conceiving of Islam and its adherents as foreign, inferior and 'Other', the approach of these scholars views Muslim communities as inherently British, their contributions worthy to wider society and, in essence, 'one of us'. Hence, my initial thematic chapters focus on discussions of Muslims as part of the wider landscape of British multiculturalism.

Much of what I write is not, furthermore, exclusive to Muslim women, but can be applied to women and minorities generally. However, I aim in this study to reflect the lives of the women in my sample particularly as a springboard for better understanding of a highly publicised yet little understood group. In addition, I hope to highlight different ways of being religious in secular Britain, drawing attention also to the diversity of female experience in this country, while neither claiming to be the authoritative nor the representative version of their lives.

While avoiding rigid and prescriptive tendencies to define complex and abstract concepts, it is worth noting here the sense in which this thesis uses the concept of 'secularism'. Building on the discussion of British secularism and its implications for British Muslims in their edited volume, the current project has addressed secularism as a political project (in Chapters 2 and 3), and also as a philosophical discourse (in later discussions), as proposed by Birt, Hussain and Siddiqui (2011). In the political sense, secularism here is seen in its simplest sense as 'the relative separation between state and religion, to non-discrimination among religions and to the guarantees made with respect to the human rights of citizens' (2011:vi). From the philosophical viewpoint, 'secularism often refers to the understanding that life can best be

lived by applying reasoned ethics… without reference to a deity or other "supernatural" concepts' (2011:vi). Beyond this, it must be noted that much more can be said about the particularities of British secularism and its historical path; I consider that discussion beyond the ambit of this thesis.

I have deferred to a number of theoretical frameworks within which to locate my research; while most of these can be traced back to the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, I do consider my thesis to be the product of a multi-disciplinary approach. Thus, in locating the lives of my respondents on the national scene, I have relied heavily on the work of political philosopher Tariq Modood. I found that I concur with his view that (Asian) Muslims 'are a prime example of… communities who are keen to emphasise at least one or a limited number of core identities and are mobilising as political actors and are seeking quasi-corporate representation at local, national and perhaps even transnational levels' (2005:18). In other words, over the two decades since the Muslim faith has come to represent a core component of identity, Muslim communities have become very much part and parcel of the fabric of British life. As such, I address issues of integration and social cohesion in this chapter.

In addition, Modood's prolific and incisive observations on Muslim communities in Britain over the years have developed in tandem with events and turns in British Muslim politics and tendencies over the years. So while, for example, his pre-1980s work had focused on 'colour and cultural racism' and Race legislation for Asians as a separate category to Blacks generally (see Modood, 2005), his more recent work converses with issues of interculturalism and religion as a core component of Muslim identity (see Modood, 2016 and 2018).

A crucial component, for my thesis, of Modood's analyses has been his expounding of a 'politics of difference'. Difference, and the acceptance of it as a fact of life, came up repeatedly in the narratives of my respondents. Modood emphasises the importance of

recognising the identities that are important to people themselves, rather than imposing externally defined notions of identity in the name of integration and citizenship (2007b:37). This conception includes a recognition of not just 'negative differences' that attract racism and discrimination, but also differences celebrated in positive self-definition. In this formulation, the role of multiculturalism will be to turn 'the negative into a positive, not the erasure of difference but its transformation into something for which civic respect can be won' (2007b:41). Defending multiculturalism against its critics, Modood argues that 'strong multicultural identities are a good thing- they are not intrinsically divisive, reactionary or fifth columns' (2008:86). I discuss these ideas more fully in the next chapter.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I have focused on the national inclusion of Muslims and minorities more generally. In this, I have followed the thought of Modood, but also Ted Cantle and subsequent vocal proponents of interculturalism such as Vertovec and Wessendorf. While the arguments around the continued significance of multiculturalism in Britain locate my respondents and their efforts on the national scene, the intercultural theoretical intervention adds an important local and individual dimension. I have used the work of Wessendorf and Peterson specially to highlight the importance of daily, local and one-to-one interactions in developing good communal relations, and aiding the integration of minorities. In addition, a significant number of my chapters have been informed by the long-standing empirical research of Pnina Werbner within the Pakistani Muslim communities of Britain.
Moving from national and local discussions around multiculturalism to the actual women themselves, I have found a theoretical home in the work of post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha (2004) to describe the hybridity of space and identities that my respondents exhibit, and anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2015) relating to the agency of pious women.

The contributions of both Modood and Mahmood, around the necessity of considering the 'religious' component of identity for Western Muslims, has in fact informed much of my thesis, in overt and also subtle ways. Towards the end of my thesis, I have used the intersectional intervention of Crenshaw and Collins to indicate the disadvantages faced by my respondents. However, I have argued for a modification of this analytical tool in order to accommodate the (alternative) lives of pious women, women like Yusra who put it very simply: 'Faith is… I think it is just my foundation'. In addition, I consider Modood and Mahmood precursors to the postsecular theorists whom I showcase later in my thesis; the term 'postsecularism' has been used by scholars recently to describe the co-existence in Western, liberal societies of public forms of religiosity alongside secular worldviews. By turning academic and policy-making attention to the rising identification of Muslim minorities with faith, Modood and Mahmood have performed a valuable service to later discourses that speak of a postsecular turn in Western societies.

My work, then, focuses on the individual as opposed to the institutional, and the nuanced and 'invisible' rather than the apparent and attributed in the lives of my respondents. It allows the women to speak for themselves, and define their own identities. Thus, in answer to the question of 'who is a *Muslimah*?', for my study, it is those women who identify as one. It situates these women and their contributions as a valuable component of British multicultural society.

The current project can be situated within the nascent body of research that examines the lives of 'ordinary' yet socially engaged British Muslim women, women at grassroots level who are giving back to the communities in which they live and work; it also eschews those few Muslim female public figures who already receive considerable recognition and coverage

in favour of the 'unheard' majority of socially-active women whose work sustains Muslim communities across Britain, yet whose voices have remained silent.

My first research aim, thus, has been to focus on the work and motivations of a sample of publicly involved Muslim women working in and around London who are bearers of change and social development in their own societies. I hope to counteract the framing of the *Muslimah* as an oppressed 'Other' by showcasing those Muslim women who have risen above this stereotype to contribute to society as a positive force. This has been done by exploring their self-characterised identity constructs, and highlighting their social contribution narratives, based on individual interviews. In highlighting their successful integration and hybrid identities, I frame these women not as the veiled and victimised 'Other', but as proactive agents of social change.

Secondly, a significant research question for my study has been the exploration of empowering factors for these women. In particular, regardless of levels of practice, I have found faith to be a significant motivator in their activities. While recognising the problems inherent in measuring 'religiosity' (Hussain, 2008:169), and the perils of defining 'religion' (Asad, 2012:39), in keeping with my qualitative approach I privilege respondents' own description of the strength of their religious 'attachment' to Islam and wider Muslim communities.

My third and final research aim is to take forward the idea that the robust identity constructs and social contribution narratives of these women may contribute to the development of Western Muslims in their 'new' environment. In this way, it is hoped that my research will impact by showing possibilities for a pluralist society in which minorities and their contributions are valued, and also provide an example of positive, proactive and engaged citizenship in contrast to disaffected Muslim citizens and disengaged Muslim ideologies.

My work, then, may be situated within the triangle of strong and hybrid female identities, faith, and social contribution; the women who have generously contributed their time, their views and their selves to this study sit firmly at the heart of this nexus.

Muslim Women in Britain: Contextualising the Subject

> 'British Muslim women… are increasingly a visible presence, finding their voice and beginning to make an impact on public and civic life.' (Lewis and Hamid, 2018:113)

The documented history of Muslim presence in Britain dates as far back as the early 19th Century; preeminent historian Humayun Ansari asserts that they have, in fact, 'been part of the British social, religious and cultural landscape for almost a century and a half' (2004:2). It was not until the late 60s to the early 70s, however, that women and families, largely from South Asia, began arriving in significant numbers to join the male workforce (Hussain, 2008).

Most of these women came from rural or semi-rural, poor and uneducated South Asian backgrounds, arriving as economic dependents of male relatives. While the early spheres of both interest and influence for these Muslim women were largely domestic in nature, it would be a mistake to suggest that these women were economically and socially 'inactive' in the 1970s and 80s. A number of studies suggest that these women, arriving to alien, unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environments, contributed to family income and well-being through multiple home-based activities such as catering and machining for the textile and clothing

industry. In addition, those who were able contributed to the manufacturing sector in low-paid factory work (Brah,1993 &1996; Dwyer 2000; Gilliat-Ray 2010).

More relevant to the subject matter of this study, however, are the historical 'precursors' to the socially active and engaged Muslim women of today's Britain. A number of sociological studies describe how these early women soon began to develop both spiritual but also more temporal self-help networks to further the cause of the burgeoning community (Werbner, 1990; Burlet and Reid, 1998; Kundnani, 2007). Organisations such as the An Nisa Society (est. 1985, see www.an-nisa.org), the Muslim Women's Helpline (est.1987, now the Muslim Community Helpline http://muslimcommunityhelpline.org.uk) and the Muslim Women's Institute (an affiliate of the Muslim Parliament http://www.muslimparliament.org.uk) arose to cater to the needs of British Muslim women.

While a few such organised groups undoubtedly emerged from more secular agendas external to Islam (for example, Women Against Fundamentalism and Southall Black Sisters), it cannot go unnoticed that the vast majority of self-help type female organisations chose to work from *within* Islamic paradigms, drawing inspiration from their faith. In the words of Gilliat-Ray, 'Such women offer a powerful challenge to stereotypical images of Muslim women as either 'passive' or 'oppressed', as well as highlighting individuality and diversity among Muslim women' (2010:218).

Ansari documents the beginnings of this trend going as far back as the 1980s and 90s. He characterises the early and mid-80s as seeing the emergence of a more conciliatory approach by Muslims to cultural and religious issues, one that blended aspects of British and traditional ways of life in an effort to reach a hybrid synthesis between the two. By the 1990s, however, a clear 'return' to more religious identities, albeit in new progressive modes rather than traditional ones, is apparent. This proactive approach by Muslim women and the

organisations that they had established 'relied not on cultural "switching" or "blending", but on articulating their situation within an Islamic perspective' (Ansari, 2004:283), and in fact looking for solutions to very contemporary issues in scriptural texts. Rather than viewing religion as the source of oppressive patriarchal practices, educated and informed Muslim women developed a more self-conscious and self-directed relationship with religion. Ironically, by taking control of religious teachings in this way, these precursors to the women in my sample had begun to actually 'subvert the traditions that were inhibiting their lives' (Ansari, 2004:283). This mindset and type of activism resulted in organisations such as the An Nisa Society offering non-traditional spaces and activities for women in Islamically-acceptable forms: single-sex sports activities, inter-faith dialogue and booklets emphasizing the importance of Quranically inspired sex education for children became the new norm. It was, in fact, the beginning of a new era in female Muslim social activism; 'problems that were previously swept under the carpet were more widely recognized within the Muslim communities, together with a new willingness to address their causes' (Ansari, 2004:286).

One of the most effective and well-articulated manifestations of this approach can be seen in the workings of the Muslim Women's Network for the UK (MWNUK). Described as 'an initiative which has done most to self-consciously embody such insights as they support women's activism' (Lewis and Hamid, 2018:119), MWNUK was established in 2003 in Birmingham. With a national outlook and the resources of international networks, it has particularly employed the 'reworking' of traditional Islamic scholarship and understandings to support issues faced by Muslim women. In addition, it has advised Government departments on policies that affect Muslim women, and in this way have given voice to the women who would have traditionally been sidelined by Whitehall in favour of male community representatives.

More recently, and arguably more radically, the formation of the Bradford Women Led Mosque has marked a new chapter in the activism of British Muslim women. Conceived in 2015 after extensive community consultations to garner widespread support, this project is a creative and progressive approach to addressing the lack of female leadership and facilities in Britain's mosque structure (Lewis and Hamid, 2018). Envisaged as a woman and family-friendly place of worship, it was set up by the Muslim Women's Council (MWC), a network of Muslim professionals who engage critically with community issues in the region. Their statement of principles outlines an ambitious and forward-thinking ideal:

'The mosque will be based on the principles of openness, inclusivity, social justice and sanctuary. Sadly, the alienation that women feel has profound consequences for younger generations, who are taught that Islam treats both men and women as spiritual equals. Our mosque is also unique in that it will be led by women and governed by women. Currently, no such structure exists anywhere in the UK to our knowledge.' (Taken from https://www.womenledmosque.co.uk/about-women-led-mosque/, 7/06/19)

The role of women in instituting progressive changes in British Muslim communities has in fact been central, particularly in the area of gender equality. They are 'modelling a way forward' and 'looking for a more expansive and emancipatory reading of their tradition' (Lewis and Hamid, 2018:5). Interestingly, while some undoubtedly exercise the religious freedoms granted in secular Britain and remain only loosely attached to faith, most do still desire to work within Islamic frameworks, as with the examples of MWNUK and MWC above. Despite internal community obstacles (Lewis and Hamid, 2018:11), the efforts of such woman-led organisations bodes well for the future; my thesis contributes to this hopeful narrative by drawing attention to the individuals who make up the grassroots of such inspirational community work.

Furthermore, while this study did not aim to seek out *only* those *Muslimahs* who would be considered religiously observant, I did find that a significant number of active Muslim women seek to work with their faith rather than abandon it. Such women are also challenging Western secularist discourses that assume that female 'liberation' and empowerment can only be achieved by adopting Western, European Enlightenment values. Indeed, it is hoped that by publicising such positive social contributions, this project can illustrate that rather than being the 'bearer of "race" and cultures that are construed as inherently threatening to the presumed superiority of Western civilisations' (Brah, 1993:447), a small but significant proportion of British Muslim women today can be seen as active citizens contributing to a pluralistic society. In the words of Contractor, 'in the British context it is important to explore these women's layered identities and the multifaceted contributions that they are making, and can be encouraged to make, within pluralist society' (2012:6).

In the rest of this chapter, I discuss issues around the study of Muslim societies and my own methodology, and position myself as a researcher within the process; finally, I outline the structure of the thesis, leading into the main discussion.

Method and Methodology

'…methods should be our servants, not our rulers.' (Silverman, 2010:10)

In considering both how to study Muslim minorities generally, and developing the methodology of my own study, a number of factors had to be taken into consideration. Below I discuss, firstly, pertinent epistemological issues in the study of Muslim minorities more

generally; secondly, this leads on to a consideration of the particular methodology and methods employed for my research. In the progression of my fieldwork and analysis over a few years, I have tried to maintain a position that is adaptable and reflexive; above all, I have pursued methods that I feel best reflect the views of the women in my sample. In the final discussion below, I outline my own position as a researcher and Muslim woman. In all of this, I have aimed to remain loyal to the voices of these women, while at the same time employing transparency and robust ethics in my own practice.

Studying Muslim Communities

Much has been written recently about the tendency to overemphasise the role of religion in the study of Muslims, and to ascribe to all phenomena a faith-related explanation (Schielke 2010; Jeldtoft, 2011; Sehlikoglu 2017; Panjwani and Moulin-Stożek 2017). Studying Muslim societies can often become an exercise in studying religion. There is a clear sense, in a number of emerging academic discourses, that Muslims can too often be 'reduced to a function of their religion, and other dimensions of identity and experience have been ignored' (Gilliat-Ray, 2010: 234). This characterisation of Muslims as 'religious', over and above all else, can lead to an unhealthy stereotyping of individuals in Muslim communities, and a tendency to attribute all problems to Islam and its teachings. Of relevance to academic study is the fact that, as a result, other more important narratives have become obscured, and the homogenisation of whole communities ensues. On a more grassroots level, there is also the danger that whole communities then become 'subject to political and academic interventions which further reinforce particular conceptions of what being a "British Muslim" involves' (Gilliat-Ray, 2010: xii).

An additional consequence of this tendency, for those who study Muslim societies, is that the 'demands made on those who write about Muslims are quite different from demands made on those who study secular-humanist projects' (Abu-Lughod, 2013:46). As in the case of Mahmood's 2005 intervention in the study of the subjectivities of pious women, those who seek to convey a more nuanced and realistic picture of Muslim life are often subsequently pressed to denounce all 'harm' done by Islamic movements and teachings, and be critical of anything related to the faith.

With this in mind, I had set out at the beginning of my research to neither emphasise visible 'religiosity' in selecting my sample, nor to prioritise issues explicitly related to faith commitments. However, as I began my fieldwork, I was soon to discover that the faith convictions of my respondents did indeed form core components of their selfhood, and did so despite the visible 'Muslimness' of the women. In her study of converts, Zebiri also notes this idiosyncrasy (2008:5-6):

'"Insiders" tend to describe their own conversion in very positive terms, with reference to the transcendent, as a process of spiritual awakening… "Outsiders", on the other hand, tend to be more interested in the psychological, social, cultural and other forces…'

In reference to the fact that a researcher's own background and proclivities cannot be divorced from the research process, Zebiri goes on to suggest that this may be the case because researchers themselves may seek secular explanations for phenomena. In my case, I could not claim secular leanings personally; in my eagerness to attain 'objectivity', however, I had not foregrounded religion in my analysis. However, while this adherence to theological

convictions was unobtrusive and worn with ease for these women, I soon realised that it was an identity component that I could not set aside if I were to communicate their subjectivities adequately. I have, then, included a significant chapter in my thesis on the faith convictions of my sample, and the ways in which this was manifest.

Aside from studying the core component of religion, a number of additional methodological considerations have informed my study. Nadia Jeldtoft has made considerable effort to develop the theoretical frame of 'everyday lived religion' in the study of Muslims (2011; 2013). This can be seen as part of a distinct move away from studying the institutional, organised and visible aspects of Muslim minorities.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 2001 and July 2005, furthermore, less attention has been paid to the everyday concerns of Muslims in the wider pathologisation of them as 'terrorist suspects'. The ubiquitous negative discourse around the Government's Prevent policy, furthermore, fueled the depiction of them, increasingly, as the disloyal Other; once again, the nuanced and mundane was sacrificed in favour of a homogenised and negative discourse.

My epistemology, therefore, has aimed to digress from the unrepresentative and unfavourable focus of the past. In line with the 'new' methodology of authors such as Zebiri, Gilliat-Ray, Contractor and Bullock favoured above, I have prioritised the individual, first-hand, positive and nuanced themes in the narratives of my respondents, while being mindful of the discriminatory realities that they face on a daily basis. In the interests of highlighting the heterogenous nature of Muslims in Britain, furthermore, I follow the example of Gilliat-Ray (2010: xii) and refer to Muslim 'communities', rather than 'community'.

This commitment to generating more nuanced, individual and self-defined data, alongside seeking explanations for observed phenomenon beyond religion, has also led me to consider my disciplinary position. In keeping with my aim of greater holism in detailing the views of my sample of Muslim women, I felt the need to venture beyond my traditional 'home' of Religious Studies, and take advantage of both anthropological and sociological theoretical insights, ethnographic tools and methodological approaches. This was aided by my scholarship award from the Centre of Cultural, Literary and Postcolonial Studies at SOAS; being located in a multi-disciplinary Centre further encouraged me to venture beyond my own discipline of Religious Studies, and approach both my respondents and my methodology from a wider and more heterogenous epistemological viewpoint. In widening my disciplinary base for this research project, I have been able to obtain greater depth of data and analysis, thus coming closer to both the sacred but also temporal concerns of the women themselves. This study and the thesis, therefore, reflect my own positioning as a scholar of Religious Studies engaging with the more contemporary concerns of Cultural Studies, across postcolonial and also postsecular contexts. In particular, the concern of Religious Studies scholars with reflexive positioning has been instrumental for me. As discussed below, my own positioning, both with respect to a disciplinary home but also as a researcher, has continued to be a focus throughout this project. The aim has not been to collapse disciplinary approaches into an unrecognisable whole, but rather to highlight the reflexive imperative so central to the study of religion and religious communities. This thesis aims to understand the motivations, actions and views of a sample taken from Muslim communities still deeply connected to their religion, yet interacting in a secular society better explained by sociological frames. The discussion in this thesis, thus, has developed from a Religious Studies approach inextricable from postcolonial, feminist and intersectional critique.

In particular, this interdisciplinary approach has led to a unique blend in my study, worth particular mention: the application of feminist methodology to study Muslim subjects. Until very recently, the concerns of religious women have not been adequately addressed by mainstream, Western feminism. The seminal work of Saba Mahmood (2005) marked a turning point, with its unsettling of liberal assumptions around freedom, individuality and agency (discussed further in Ch.4 and 5). More relevant to this thesis, her interventions have paved the way for scholars such as myself to employ feminist methodology to the study of religious women. In using feminist methodology to study the lives of the women in my sample, I appropriate the widest sense of feminism: 'scholarship and activism within which it is possible to work towards rights and respect for any marginalised group, including but not limited to women' (Contractor, 2012:5). In this way, a methodology that has previously been used to study secular subjects may now be appropriated in the study of religious women, and may be used to highlight a wider range of voices and worldviews. This feminist methodology has given rise, in my study, to an emphasis on individual voice, self-definition and the centrality of freely made choices for the women of my sample.

In addition, this approach has extended to my theoretical analysis; I use a range of interdisciplinary theorists to argue against the homogenisation of minority culture/experience (and against the fixed nature of human experience). I believe this interdisciplinary approach lends itself to more holistic analysis; indeed, I have benefitted from the theoretical insights of postcolonial scholars, sociologists, scholars of cultural studies, anthropologists and theologists in creating frames within which to locate my work.

Finally, a note on definitions is called for here. In view of the hazards of concrete definitions in relation to human behaviour and belief, I have avoided being overly prescriptive in matters

of definition. Instead, I choose to construct 'formulations' of major concepts in my study. For example, in the following chapter, I have at the onset explained my formulation of 'integration', relying on detailed conceptions of the term as propounded by Modood, and developed over the years. In subsequent chapters, similarly, I have chosen to explain my understanding of key concepts, and how I approach them, rather than relying on one-dimensional definitions as such.

Thus, I have chosen a methodology that privileges self-definition and self-expression. When faced with the decision of who I will count as a '*Muslimah*', I have deferred to the women themselves; thus, I have selected and included in this category any woman who identifies as such herself, rather than use measures of mosque attendance, dress or other faith practices as a benchmark. With the ultimate aim of addressing the centuries-old marginalisation of women generally and Muslim women in particular, this project follows a feminist methodology that prioritises self-representation and, thus, gives 'voice' to a sub-section of the vast majority of yet-unheard Muslim women in Britain. In this way, my work makes no lofty claims to representation, but hopes to contribute towards the deconstruction of popular Western stereotypes of the 'Muslim Woman', and do so in their own words, on their own terms. In addition to this, it is hoped that my work will make a contribution to reclaiming the role of Western Muslim women in knowledge production and dissemination, both within and beyond Islamic discourses.

Methods Related to Current Study

'The challenge, then, is to develop tools that will allow researchers to enter into the experiences and meanings of another, to access the private moments of human perception, thereby enabling one to bridge the gulf between subject and object.' (McCutcheon, 1999:3)

In conducting the fieldwork for this study, I have used qualitative methods, and worked with live subjects. Using the methods of open-ended interviews and focus group discussions, I have studied 25 women activists in the area of London and its outskirts. In keeping with a grounded-theory approach and transparency of method, I was open about my affiliations, aims and personal commitments. Where possible, I contacted both gatekeepers and respondents personally, and met them at places and times of their convenience. As I mention below, my position as a Muslim researcher at a well-regarded institution afforded me advantages, but also threw up subtle challenges.

My interview questionnaire took the form of a guide rather than set questions. While I guided the discussions towards issues of integration, identity, faith and public experiences and their visions for the future, I did defer to themes that have been important to them. This has, in fact, resulted in significant change to my initial intentions for the research process; the resilience and confidence of these women, for example, came forth as an unmistakable quality that I felt compelled to discuss in this thesis. Their

relationship to faith, furthermore, manifested in ways that were quite novel to me. In an effort to reflect the lives of these women in their own words, I have devoted lengthy discussions, thus, to themes such as these.

I began by isolating a number of key community contacts to approach initially, followed by a snowballing technique which lead to contact with further women who were willing to take part in my research. In this process, I drew up a list of potential 'gatekeepers'. Utilising the networks built up in my own community involvement of over two decades, I isolated a number of personal contacts who are involved in community work in various parts of London, and approached them with my proposal. Their names have been changed for reasons of confidentiality:

- East London: Nausheen J., a young mother who has grown up in the Whitechapel Bengali communities and was be able to introduce me to local, active Muslim women.

- Slough: Joanna S., previously head of a large national Muslim organisation, herself a tireless campaigner and activist for women and girls. I did not interview her, but requested access to women she had worked with.

- Hounslow: Yusra M., founder and head of a local Muslim women's group (set up in cooperation with her local council), community activist and prison chaplain. Yusra had facilitated my MA research by introducing me to local respondents at the time.

- London: Irum M., a tireless campaigner and educator for the Somali communities in west London. She has organised numerous educational, heath-awareness and advocacy events in her local community.

- Brent: Leila H., trainer and consultant for a Muslim consultancy seeking to empower women.

- Watford: Shabnam K., an active local mother and community worker with connections in Luton and West London.

- Tooting: Sabeena M., founder of a local self-help group that offers legal and healthcare assistance to disadvantaged women and the elderly.

- Harrow: Aziza Z., a well-connected member of the community who has links with a large West London mosque.

Contact was made with the people above initially, and other respondents following this, by telephone, email and in person where possible. In keeping with the view that personal, one-to-one communication establishes greater trust and openness, I followed a method I have used successfully for my MA research. I sent out an initial letter of introduction, outlining the aims of my research and placing myself as a person within it. Respondents were given both opportunity and contacts to facilitate asking any questions that they may have.

In keeping with ethical requirements, I assured all respondents of anonymity of both personal names and any institutions through which they may be identified, and also obtained consent at this point to make digital recordings of their interviews, and possibly publish their views. In this regard, I have taken care to anonymise both direct identifiers such as names, institutions, places and job titles, but also to exercise care to conceal indirect

identifiers which may lead to an individual being recognised. Therefore, all names have been replaced by pseudonyms throughout the thesis, and all organisational names directly related to the women have been omitted. To comply with ethics guidelines on anonymity, I have also taken care to report data in ways that prevent the reader from attributing any characteristic or event to an identifiable individual. In all of this, I was guided by the SOAS Research Ethics Policy 2015 (https://www.soas.ac.uk/researchoffice/ethics/), as well as the Framework of Professional Practice of the British Association for the Study of Religions (http://www.basr.ac.uk/ethics.htm).

Following this, I conducted 1.5 to 2-hour, semi-structured interviews with all respondents, largely in person (one interview was conducted by email, and one more via Skype). Interviews were recorded digitally to aid transcription. Again, in order to establish trust and a good relationship, I had shared in the introductory letter some general themes which formed the foundation of my main interview guide. The term 'interview guide' and not 'questionnaire' reflects my belief in the value of an open-ended approach to data-collection. While my role as a researcher in steering conversations in the right direction was crucial to obtaining high quality data, I attempted to be equally guided by the concerns of the respondents themselves. Thus, beyond some basic personal information, I identified themes to guide the discussion rather than direct, closed questions. When questions were asked, they were designed to elucidate longer discussion and gauge the concerns of the respondents themselves, in keeping with my view that the art of interviewing 'consists in calibrating social distances without making the subject feel like an insect under the microscope' (Sennett, 2004: 37-8).

Following data collection and transcription of interview recordings, I employed the NVivo software package to identify recurring and substantial themes. This resulted in extensive

data around themes of integration, early childhood influences and cross-cultural interaction. In line with my grounded theory approach, I found that I have had to significantly alter both my focus and my chapter structure as I proceeded. The final shape of this thesis reflects the weight given to these various themes in the data.

The women in my sample

In terms of sample selection, I prioritised the women on the basis of two criteria: involvement in voluntary community work, and self-definition as a Muslim. The table below details relevant demographics related to the women in my sample; the reader is reminded that all names have been anonymised, and any resemblance to real people is purely coincidental.

Beyond this, I avoided the prominent public figures in favour of the unheard women working quietly in the background to sustain many local community causes. In addition, as mentioned above, I did not seek out visibly 'practicing' Muslims. My respondents were selected for their local and national activism on a grassroots, community level; as mentioned above, the women were not selected for perceived religious adherence or practice. I hoped to see a wide spread of 'religious practice' in my sample, believing that this would lead to more valid and robust data when addressing questions of faith and motivation. Related to this, I decided to work with not only women who are involved in traditionally 'religious' activities such as Quran study circles and mosque supplementary school teaching, but also with those who are serving more generic causes such as domestic violence, educational underachievement and child abuse.

My method, then, involved selecting a purposive sample based on community involvement and self-identification as a Muslim woman. In this way, I felt that the research aims that I had identified could be

met, and the necessary themes fully explored. This thesis, then, does not claim results that are statistically representative of the greater Muslim population in Britain, and not even representative of Muslim women in Britain necessarily. However, as with much of qualitative research, the value of such a study and method of sample selection lies in the depth of analysis achieved of a selected case. This understanding, furthermore, can become a springboard for the appreciation of wider processes.

Table of Respondents

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Ethnicity	Occupation	Educational attainment	Family status
Aini	44	Mauritian	Pharmacist	Post graduate, Clinical Pharmacy	Married, 4 children
Amy (convert)	47	Black British	Social worker	MA, Social Work	Divorced, 2 children
Anjum	46	Pakistani	Mental Health Practitioner	Various vocational diplomas	Divorced, 3 children
Baha	40	Arab	RE Teacher, Researcher	MA, Education	Married, 3 children
Betty (convert)	78	White Irish	Retired Social Worker	Vocational Diploma	Married, 2 children
Cheryl (convert)	52	White Scottish	Social research consultant	PhD, Sociology	Married, 4 children
Fatima	23	Pakistani	Student activist, Project Manager	BA, English	Single
Hala	36	Mixed, White British and Arab	Editor, Community Activist	PhD, Law	Single
Halima	55	Pakistani	Consultant, Muslim Affairs	BA, Social Policy	Married, 2 children
Huda	53	Somali	Community Interpreter	PG Diploma	Single
Irum	50	Pakistani	Lawyer	LLB	Married, 3 children
Karen (convert)	63	White British	Foster carer	BA	Divorced, 2 children
Maryam	31	Pakistani	Lawyer	LLB	Single
Naila	63	Indian	Administrator	GCE 'O' Levels	Divorced, 3 children
Saba	33	Pakistani	Grants Officer	HR Certification	Single

Sara	34	Pakistani	HR Manager, Youth Worker	BSc., Psychology	Single
Sabeena	75	Pakistani	Support Worker, Charity Founder	BSc. (Hons)	Married, 2 children
Samina	40	Pakistani	Podiatrist	MSc., Health Education	Married, 3 children
Samra	39	Pakistani	Youth Worker	CIPD, HR qualification	Married, 2 children
Shabnam (convert)	38	Indian	Ex-Software Engineer, currently SAHM	BSc., Computing	Married, 5 children
Sophia	36	Pakistani	Clinical Dietitian	PG Diploma	Married, 2 children
Sumayya	45	Bengali	Writer, ESOL Tutor	MA, Social Policy and Education	Married, 3 children
Yusra (convert)	40	Mixed, Indian and Iranian	Senior Practitioner, Tackling Violent Extremism	BSc. (Hons), Criminology	Married, 3 children
Zainab	42	Indian	ESOL Tutor	BA, CELTA	Married, 1 child
Zoya	32	Bengali	Ethical Fashion Designer	BA, Fashion and Textile	Divorced

This method resulted in my work with 25 women in various areas of London and its outskirts. Their ages ranged from 23-78, with most falling within the age range of 35-48. They hailed from Indian, Pakistani, Bengali, Mauritian, Arab, Somali and mixed backgrounds. All but 7 were born in Britain, and only 2 of those 7 had migrated as adults; my sample, thus, was comprised overwhelmingly of second- and third-generation Muslim women. The majority were married with children; 6 were single, and 5 were divorcees. In addition, 6 of the 25 were converts, of White, Black, Indian and mixed ethnicity; this represented a higher proportion than the national average for converts within the total population of Muslims in Britain. On reflection, this may be due to the fact that I had chosen more publicly involved and aware women. I have, nevertheless, devoted significant discussion to their concerns in Chapter 4.

My sample of Muslim women was highly educated and diverse in terms of professions. Educational qualifications ranged from doctorate level (two women), to graduates and post-graduate levels of attainment; the vast majority of my respondents was educated to at least graduate level, with many holding a variety of post-graduate qualifications. All but two were in employment at the time of interviewing. Professions represented, furthermore, include teaching, law, criminology, higher management, human resources, research consultancy, mental health, ethical design, pharmacy and podiatry, amongst others. This character of my sample as highly educated and professionally involved meant that my fieldwork generated a large amount of rich and insightful data.

Of more interest to my study, however, was the voluntary community work of these women, and it was this involvement that formed the basis of my discussions. This social activism and voluntary work were undertaken on a part time basis, alongside either part time or full-time paid work. All but two of these women hailed from humble backgrounds, with childhoods spent in largely mixed neighbourhoods. The vast majority, in addition, located the roots of their passion for community involvement in role models, either parental or in the form of other significant inspirational adults, both Muslim and non-Muslim. As adults, they are now involved in a range of unpaid community causes: youth work, fostering, professional advocacy, partnerships with local councils, marriage and family advice networks, social services provision for minorities, translating and cultural consulting being the main areas. This community work, I soon found, very often took an interesting trajectory; between the ages of roughly 20-40, the women tended to be involved in Muslim community causes, while from the mid-40s onwards, many of them began to look outwards and actively seek engagement with non-Muslims, often through common causes. I found that as they matured,

their passion for community work became combined with a desire to forge ties across communities. Coupled with a greater confidence as their experience grew, many of my more senior respondents are now working across communities for the benefit of all. I return to this phenomenon towards the end of my thesis. The desire for balance in their social interactions and daily lives, and a desire to develop greater bridging capital was a significant, and unanticipated, theme for the more mature women in my sample.

Reflexivity… enter the researcher

'… all discourse is placed, and the heart has its reasons.' Stuart Hall (1990:223)

Taking a step back from the minutiae of my project, ethical concerns also demanded that I assess the possible impact of my research, and its usefulness more widely. I desire that my work provides a platform for the meeting of theory and praxis, and reaches an audience who have previously been unaware of the extent of contribution by Muslim women in Britain. In choosing my topic, this concern has dominated my thoughts.

More subtle ethical concerns such as power dynamics between researcher and respondent, and 'political' implications in research discourses can also not be ignored. In the words of Kvale, 'the research interview is a specific professional conversation with a clear power asymmetry between the researcher and the subject' (2007: 14). As the interviewer, I was aware of the broader implications of this possibly asymmetrical relationship between myself

and my respondents: will my being in control of the interview agenda put me in a position of power 'over' the interviewee? On the other hand, could the tables be turned if I was working with elite and powerful women activists, causing me to lose control of the interview situation?

Most importantly for me, I wanted to develop the 'working alongside' approach to my interviewees, whereby the concerns of the respondents are as valued as my own research agenda. I aim for these women to be 'collaborative partners rather than passive subjects in a research process' (Contractor, 2012:6), in a methodology which employs the 'tools' of feminism in its simplest form as a struggle for the rights of women and the marginalized generally, but with the inclusive and contextual concerns of third- and fourth-wave feminism.

It is apt to discuss issues of researcher positioning at this point. Only recently have Muslims in Britain become subjects of study for researchers *from their own communities*. And while one may see the goal of classical fieldwork as obtaining sufficient familiarity to understand and empathise with an 'alien' culture or phenomenon, it could be posited that for an indigenous researcher like myself the aim would be to achieve sufficient *distance* to be able to study a familiar group in a familiar setting, yet still obtain valid, reliable results. The end goal for both 'insider' and 'outsider' researchers may well be the same, but without doubt one must reflect on how to walk this ethnographic tightrope.

While the study of one's own culture is by no means new to the social sciences (Altorki, 1988:2; Narayan, 1993), what very quickly becomes apparent to a researcher in such a position is that being an 'insider' is a complex and multi-faceted role to play, with much to

reflect on. How one delineates 'insider' status is also by no means straightforward. The term can, variously, refer to shared ethnicity, religion, nationality, or even class. Facing this conundrum, for my own purposes I settled on the belief that to be *aware* of these many facets of my identity, in relation to my 'insider' status, would be a good starting point for my research.

Furthermore, while initially I identified with my Muslim female respondents as an 'insider', in the course of my work I encountered aspects of my identity (as an academic, for instance) in which I felt like an 'outsider' to the very same women. I wondered whether that my position as a PhD student, especially of an institution such as SOAS, may mark me (or cause me to be perceived as) an 'outsider'. In the words of Altorki (1988:7), referring to researching one's own society, 'there is no agreement on the criteria defining this entity'.

In reflecting on this issue, my introspection led me to concur with cultural anthropologist Kirin Narayan that, in reality, indigeneity and exogeneity actually occur along a spectrum, and cannot be seen as discrete qualities (1993). Surely the issue of critical scholarship vs. appreciative understanding and imaginative sympathy is what is at stake here, and to obtain effective data one must learn very quickly to walk the fine line between both of these laudable aims. However, if one takes data to mean not only a collection of copious amounts of information on a social group or situation, but in fact an 'understanding of the values and norms, of intentions and consequences and, ultimately, of implication and significance' (Madan, 1982:268), then an 'insider' can indeed provide rich and meaningful information.

On another level, I also reflected on how I, as an insider, could avoid over-identification with the women I seek to give voice to and possibly risk losing critical perspective on the subsequent knowledge produced. So, while the 'Muslim woman' in me, trying to negotiate a space for herself in postmodern Britain, may have little difficulty achieving understanding

and sympathy with my respondents, I also consciously worked to maintain the critical distance that the 'academic' me requires. Once again, this required walking the fine line between what in anthropological terms is called 'going native' and reporting everything in respondents' terms, but also serving wider audiences by synthesising themes selected by myself to highlight.

Recognising that there will always exist a certain amount of tension in the field between sympathy and suspicion, I do however feel that my position as an 'insider' brought valuable perspectives and original contribution to the topic. Through the course of my work, I have built relationships of mutual trust and conviviality, while at the same time bringing previously unheard voices to academia. Altorki and El-Solh argue that 'familiarity with the wider social setting is an asset' (1988:16) for the indigenous social researcher, providing rich data and valuable insight. Furthermore, they assert that 'the value of such insight is not discounted by the possible subjectivity of the insider's view of his or her own society, since subjectivity could also be the peril of the non-indigenous researcher' (1988:16). For my own purposes, to be consciously aware of the possibility of such subjectivity was the first major defense against bias, both in reporting results but also in choosing themes to highlight. This awareness has enabled me to conduct extensive interviews and produce rich data; surely, social science research can rightfully be the product of a creative symbiosis of insiders and outsiders.

In the following discussion, I have structured my thesis around seven thematic chapters. Chapter 2 introduces the concept of integration as necessarily two-way and multi-faceted. This is set within the macro-level picture of multiculturalism and community cohesion in Britain since the 1990s. Underpinned by the theoretical frames developed by Tariq Modood and, to a lesser extent, Bhikhu Parekh, I show how my respondents have benefitted from an acceptance of difference, and are at ease with it. State multicultural policies in Britain have, to a great extent, facilitated their successful integration in a way not possible, in their view, for their European counterparts. I address problems of integration in this chapter, with particular reference to charges of exclusion levelled at Muslims; in addition, I show how my respondents have used tools of ethnic and religious assertiveness to create a 'sense of belonging' in Britain.

Chapter 3 follows on with critiques of state multiculturalism as applied in Britain, led by the 'intercultural' intervention of Ted Cantle and others, and supported by contact theories. With its focus on the micro-level processes that can aid integration in superdiverse cities, I consider interculturalism as not a replacement for top-down multicultural policies, but a valuable compliment to them. In particular, the convivial and everyday processes that contribute to social cohesion are considered in this chapter, as successful ways of living with diversity in a plural society. In this chapter, I also revisit the complexities of integration, and conceptualise it as a process a that is sustained by daily cross-cultural encounters, constituted

of individuals and communities that are characterised by plurality and difference, and, crucially, best developed in a two-way process of interaction. I have argued that the women in my sample, by making deliberate and meaningful contact across communities in their daily public contact, are contributing to social cohesion in Britain.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I turn to look more closely at the women themselves, and at how they have successfully created strong, hybrid identities as British Muslim women. Chapter 4 places the discussion of the identities of these Muslim women within the theoretical frames of hybridity and a 'third space' as formulated by Homi Bhabha; this is qualified by Avtar Brah's discussion of 'diasporic spaces'. In keeping with my methodology of studying the invisible and non-institutional, I have employed nuance in the analysis to uncover less obvious influences on their identities. In this chapter, I formulate identity as multicultural and varied, not easily delineated, and subjectively constructed. I uncover subtle and 'beneath the surface' aspects of the subjectivities of my respondents, to show how they have successfully used the hybrid spaces afforded to them in Britain to create strong plural identities. Difference and diversity are, for them, positive and nurturing aspects of society.

Chapter 5 discusses questions of faith and spirituality, core components in the identity constructs of my sample. Worn unobtrusively and confidently, their commitment to Islam came across as a major motivator, nevertheless. The work of Saba Mahmood around the 'alternative' agency constructs of pious women has been central to the arguments of this chapter. I have developed the concept of agency as an alternative to the liberal secular concept of the ability to seek freedom from oppression; instead, I frame the agency of the women in my sample as a capacity for change and a capacity for action, both preceded by a desire to do things 'differently'. I do, however, qualify the concept of a pious ideal with

discussion of the mundane and temporal realities of daily life; my discussion illustrates how the women exhibit a creative and hybrid 'matching' of worldviews and subjectivities in making agential choices. I show in this chapter that with this unique combination of strong religious belief and spirited agency, the Muslim women of my sample have been able to create lives that allow them to uphold core aspects of their identity in a secular society, while also successfully contributing to that very society.

Chapter 6 explores difficulties and disadvantages in the lives of my respondents. Using the analytical tool of intersectionality developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) has helped me to isolate issues that they have faced in public, of racism, Islamophobia and discrimination based on their *hijāb*. I have, however, modified the approach of classical intersectionality by including the matrix of religion within its nexus. By thus locating my intersectional analysis in a context of postsecularism, I have been able to develop its use to examine discrimination based on one's faith.

Chapters 7 and 8, closely linked, together explore the resilience, alternative agency conceptions, and commitment to balance displayed by these Muslim women to indicate the mindsets that enable them to negotiate pious lives in multicultural Britain. These chapters showcase the attitudes and empowering factors that have allowed the women to succeed in a postsecular environment that can, nevertheless, be inimical to their faith. They uncover a different story, and indicate new possibilities.

In each of these seven thematic chapters, I have showcased extensively, in the form of direct quotes, the voices of the women who so generously shared their personal views and their lives. This has been in the service of 'hearing' what they have to say on their own terms. As

mentioned in my introduction above, I strove to present themes that were of importance to them, and found myself, in the course of my research, constantly modifying and adapting my foci.

My study has aimed to contribute to a more sensitive and self-defined narrative of these women. In addition, it has highlighted successful forms of Muslim *engagement* with wider society by identifying the strategies used by my respondents to create a 'third space' for themselves in the secular landscape of Britain today. In this way, I hope to contribute to the question of how to build robust and proactive British Muslim identities.

Chapter 2-- Developing Integration Debates: Multiculturalism in 21st C Britain

'In the 80s, we were not a news item…' (Sumayya, respondent)

'A people that had been discarded for their class, excluded for their race, stigmatised for their religion, ghettoised and forgotten, was now blamed for refusing to mix.' (Kundnani 2007:54)

Anyone with even the faintest interest in the social landscape of today's Britain cannot escape the ubiquitous and much debated national questions of social cohesion, multiculturalism as a state policy, 'British' values or, alas, the thorny question of the 'integration' of minority communities. Concomitant to this, after the tragedies of September 2001 and July 2005, there has been a significant rise in academic interest in the social cohesion of Muslim minorities especially, in Western societies.

At the outset of my research for this study, a younger and certainly more naïve version of myself set out in the field, determined to document the successful 'integration' of socially active Muslim women and thus contribute to a more realistic and positive picture of the 'Muslim woman' in her Western surroundings; in addition, I was keen to explore the role of faith in their motivations and their identity constructs. Indeed, issues of belief and Islamic values did in fact inform a significant portion of the narratives of the women I spoke to, and

underpinned their worldviews; the question of faith is discussed more fully in subsequent chapters.

Soon, however, national and international events (the 2015 refugee crisis affecting Europe, the ensuing debates around 'belonging' and 'integration', rising populism, and more recently Brexit) and my own work (around drafting policy guidelines related to issues affecting Muslims) redirected my attention to what I could see were urgent issues on the national landscape: the framing of integration as a one-way process, the elusive 'British' values, the perceived incompatibility between Islam and liberal values and the ultimate question… 'are you British or are you Muslim?' In the words of Kundnani quoted above, a community already suffering high levels of socio-economic depravation and much negative media stigmatisation was 'now blamed for refusing to mix' (2007:54).

In this chapter, I begin with discussion of the term 'integration', and the implications that integration debates have for minority lives. In particular, I refer to the work of eminent sociologist Tariq Modood, and his formulation of the concept on a national, macro-level. Also discussed is the theoretical framework around multiculturalism as a state policy, with reference to the British model. I illustrate how multiculturalism has, in fact, 'worked' for my respondents in creating a space for themselves in British society.

'Integration' and National Belonging

'I look at the history of India… they accepted the White people that came in… it works both ways. No one speaks of adaptation and integration when a White person goes into an Asian country.' (Shabnam, respondent)

Before we delve into the national discourse around minority 'integration', the term itself deserves attention. The reader may at this point be questioning my sceptical use of the term; I do not believe the term is optimal to describe the processes that underpin social cohesion and nation-building, processes that are best characterised as subtly located in the minutiae and fluidity of everyday life, are marked by a recognition of minority contributions on a national level and, most importantly for my formulation, two-way. As such, I propose here a formulation of the concept that better reflects the actual way in which social processes occur across communities. Rather than emphasise the importance of minorities 'integrating' with a presumed national homogenous 'British' culture, we may look at the constantly developing *interaction* between communities, and the resultant conviviality generated, a conviviality that serves to create a sense of local and national belonging.

The processes that aid integration, then, can be seen to operate on both a macro- and micro-level, the former concerning national belonging and the policies that aid it, and the latter concerned with the impact of everyday interactions across communities. Here I discuss debates related to the wider national scene and macro-level approaches taken to encourage integration; the following chapter examines the micro-level processes by which integration actually happens in diverse societies. This is done with reference to the intercultural intervention of Ted Cantle, amongst others; 'interculturalism' may be seen as a critique of multiculturalism that seeks to challenge self-segregation, and emphasises the importance of daily, convivial cross-cultural dialogue.

On the national scene, few have contributed more to the question of the best framework for incorporating new arrivals into Britain than sociologist Tariq Modood. His formulation of multiculturalism relates to the wider picture, aiming at 'the political accommodation of minorities formed by immigration to western countries from outside the prosperous West' (2007b:5). In a departure from previous negative formulations of difference, Modood's hallmark contribution has been an insistence that difference be recognised and celebrated rather than subsumed beneath discourses of assimilation. He explains this further as an 'appreciation of the fact of multiplicity and groupness…, and political engagement with the sources of negativity and racism' (2007b:61). The theoretical frames within which I locate my discussion of multiculturalism shall be discussed in more detail below.

My discussion of integration, then, is constructed around the macro policies of multiculturalism and micro processes of interculturalism that come together to ensure the possibilities of a shared national identity and the smooth flow of daily, mutually-dependent social life. In line with the developing arguments of integration scholar Naika Foroutan (2016) and sociologists Damstra And Tillie (2016), I frame integration as necessarily two-way and argue that a sense of belonging can only be developed with 'the acceptance by the majority that the minority is a full member of society' (Modood 2014:203). This does, in fact, involve neither obscuring nor overplaying difference, but giving it its rightful recognition in a common landscape into which all communities can contribute. My respondents often employ a tenacious and resilient approach in their attempts to create these very conditions in the environments in which they live, work and socialise.

Therefore, in this chapter, I continue to use the commonly employed term of integration, but in the sense described above: a two-way process involving the mutual aim of fostering

harmonious local relations and a shared sense of belonging nationally (aided by multicultural policies), with the active contribution and interaction of both mainstream long-settled British society and those relatively new to this country (through intercultural processes).

After a brief look below at some recent top-down policy interventions around the integration of minorities in Britain, in this and the next chapter the thesis will, in turn, explore both macro- and micro-level issues of integration. While questions of group identity, socio-economic status and structural factors cannot be neglected in this discussion, my research and the resultant data generated relates largely to affective aspects of the debate.

Cantle, Casey and Integrated Communities: Problematising Policy

'…urban spaces and the people that move in them are not neutral. We are never "without a history" or in a position of "non-identity".' (Sealy 2018:701)

Integration has generally been used in public discourses to refer to 'processes that entail the socio-economic, political, social and cultural adaptation of newcomers' (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019:125). My main focus here is on social integration, referring to the relations established by those new to the country. They include both relations with the settled majority ('bridging capital'), as well as with co-ethnics and those earlier migrants who are one step ahead in the settlement process ('bonding capital'). The terms are used here in the sense originally proposed by Robert Putnam that bridging social capital refers to social networks that bring together people of different sorts, and bonding social capital brings together people of a similar sort (2000). While Putnam's characterisation has received criticism for, amongst

other aspects, over-simplification (Blackshaw and Long, 2005), his concepts do provide a helpful framework within which to consider issues of community cohesion and the potential to create bridging relationships. These social relations, furthermore, also have an instrumental aspect, in so far as they allow access to networks and information that lead to jobs, better housing and schooling.

While there is evidence to show that these resources are accessed through both intercommunity and intracommunity networks, Government discourses have for long focused on 'bridging social capital', referring to networks created with members of the majority society. The assumption is that minorities, in order to achieve successful integration and therefore social cohesion, must develop relationships with the majority. Conversely, much of the blame for events such as the 2001 riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley has been placed on the shoulders of those minorities who 'refuse to integrate'.

The riots led to the publication of the 2001 report on Community Cohesion, popularly known as the Cantle report. Based on the work of a multi-ethnic panel led by professor of race relations, Ted Cantle, it found the existence of 'parallel lives' in these cities, with both majority and minority populations living highly polarised lives. While a total of almost seventy recommendations were made, most took the form of policy advice to the Government, with little effort to examine the actual causes of rioting (Bagguley and Hussain, 2006). Moreover, a variety of social commentators have noted that since the publication of the Cantle report, there has been an increasing depiction of British Muslims as self-segregating and insular (Tyler, 2017). Most importantly for the purposes of this study, Cantle himself has since then become a strong proponent of 'interculturalism' as a replacement for state multicultural policies. This will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.

It took roughly ten years from the publication of the Cantle report for David Cameron to announce the 'death' of state multiculturalism in his famous 2011 Munich speech. In an inflammatory and contentious critique of multicultural policies as the cause of social fragmentation, Cameron clearly lay the blame, again, at the doorstep of 'segregated communities':

'We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values. So when a White person holds objectionable views – racism, for example – we rightly condemn them. But when equally unacceptable views or practices have come from someone who isn't White, we've been too cautious, frankly even fearful, to stand up to them.' (Wintour, 2011)

While British tabloids reported this intervention with inflammatory headlines such as 'Muslims Must Embrace British Values' (Kirkup, 2011) and Marine Le Pen of the French National Front rushed to congratulate Cameron, the German and French leaders of the time also denounced the failure of multiculturalism in Europe. This signalled the beginnings of direct and deliberate attempts by the Government to prioritise integration as a state policy, and in 2015 the Casey Review into opportunity and integration was commissioned by Cameron.

Led by Dame Louise Casey, a civil servant at the time, the Review aimed to 'consider what could be done to boost opportunity and integration in our most isolated and deprived communities' (Casey, 2016:7). It was responding to the belief that community cohesion had

failed in Britain, and its recommendations focussed on improving minority integration, tackling the abuse of women and improving opportunities for the most disadvantaged (2016:17). Stress was placed on the improved learning of English, promoting 'British values' in schools and the workplace, and developing local initiatives to promote and measure integration; crucially, all local recommendations were aimed at 'the towns and cities where the greatest challenges exist' (2016:17). Additionally, while there is occasional mention of rising hate crime and far right extremism, there is in the Review neither an attempt to examine the causes of this, nor any recommendations to tackle the problems. Finally, little mention is made of the structural disadvantages faced by minority communities; instead, in a cultural explanation, misogyny and patriarchy in minority communities are blamed for the lack of economic opportunity for their women.

The Review was met with varied responses. The UKIP's Nigel Farage considered many of his arguments vindicated by the report, and other commentators from across the political spectrum considered it timely, necessary and valuable. However, it was largely slated by the Muslim community as a 'missed opportunity'. Harun Khan of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) summed up his discontent with the report: 'it needs to involve the active participation of all Britons, not just Muslims. The report has little discussion on white flight, and could have delved deeper into the economic structural barriers to integration' (Sparrow, 2016). The Guardian pointed out that Casey mentions Muslims 249 times in her report, but there are only 14 references to Polish communities (Travis, 2016).

 In the academic field, the Review has been found to lack research depth and integrity. Social scientist Stephen Crossley has criticised its lack of empirical grounding, and little reference

to an evidence base; Casey herself has admitted that in many areas investigated by the report 'the available data are already feeling out of date' (2016:7). The worry, says Crossley, is not merely of academic rigour; his concerns relate to 'how policies, which affect the lives of millions of people, many of them disadvantaged and marginalised, are formulated. When the government publishes proposals to improve the cohesion of our society, we should feel confident that such proposals are built upon the best possible available evidence' (2018).

The national debates referred to above have culminated, most recently, in the publishing of the 2018 Government's Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper (HM Government, 2018). Hailed as the Government's 'vision for building strong integrated communities', it relies heavily on the recommendations of the Casey Review. The strategy focuses on local initiatives in five key areas, all designed to make Britain a more integrated country. The paper upholds what is termed 'true integration': we are told 'This is what true integration looks like – communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities' (2018: 10).

The recommendations of, and proposed changes in, this Government approach have much to be commended. In particular, the combining of a top-down approach with local initiatives that are already proving successful can only lead to greater success. In this way, the Strategy will build on existing expertise, and utilise the skills of many from within the very communities which it seeks to assist. Similarly, it held a public consultation, albeit short, which generated a wide array of responses from both individuals and organisations; should these responses be taken into consideration, they will provide valuable grassroots input and expert opinion. The Strategy is due to be trialled initially in five key 'Integration Areas'

(2018:13); these have been identified because these local authorities 'have already demonstrated a keen grasp of the challenges they face and shown a desire to try new things and learn what works'. The paper promises, furthermore, to share this learning widely, and use it as a pilot to inform further practice. Finally, and most pertinently for the results of my study, it pays short shrift to the putative irreconcilability between religion and liberalism; in a departure from previous interventions that have seemingly favoured a 'muscular liberalism', repeated mention is made the rights of individuals to practice religious freely.

However, the guidelines and strategies proposed by this publication fail to address a ubiquitous problem: as with previous political rhetoric and policy, it continues to put the onus for integration squarely on minorities, to the exclusion of any recommendations for host/majority communities. The paper highlights a number of concerns that 'point to a worrying number of communities, divided along race, faith or socio-economic lines' (2018:11). Calling this section 'The Challenge', reference is made to rising hate crime, socio-economic disadvantages and racist attitudes in Britain. Similar to the Casey Review, highlighted identity-related challenges include high levels of migration, school and residential segregation, poor language skills, cultural and religious attitudes and labour market disadvantage. Only one key problem area, lack of 'meaningful' social mixing between different communities, relates to an area which indicates some responsibility on the part of majority communities; even here, however, the identified 'white flight' that has contributed to residential segregation is not explicitly mentioned (2018: p.11-12).

In addition, while cursory reference is made in a number of places to integration being 'a two-way street' (p.10), on closer examination, not a single recommendation is made that may encourage host communities to facilitate integration. Instead, a vast array of measures, from

citizenship tests, to more English language classes, to a review of the Life in the UK test, are recommended, with the explicit purpose of strengthening focus on the 'values and principles of the UK' (p.22). In all of these recommendations, both implicit and explicit responsibility for integration is put on the shoulders of minorities and immigrants; in common, again, with the Casey Review, specific examples of 'integration problems' relate largely to Muslim communities (forced marriages, female economic inactivity, Dar ul Uloom study, review of Shariah courts). Again, while the paper contains many references to integration being everyone's responsibility, no recommendations are given for concrete actions that the wider community can take to welcome those who are newer to the country, and not a single idea is proposed which indicates that the government is willing to coax mainstream Britons to open up to newer residents. My respondent Shabnam (quoted above) is clearly vindicated here, when she asserts that 'no one speaks of adaptation and integration' when it comes to White communities.

A second intractable issue also remains in this report: it comes no closer to defining the ever-elusive 'British values'. While mention has been made of 'tolerance, freedom and equality of opportunity' (p.10), 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs' (p.28), there is no clarification as to what, in fact, makes these values the exclusive domain of Britain, rather than laudable, and global, human values held by the countries of origin of many migrants as well. The MCB, in a submission to the Casey Review, also argues that 'many Muslims are happy to sign up to common and universal values of justice, fairness, equality and democracy, collectively as equal stakeholders' (2016:4). (On a tangent, it is interesting to note that most of the discussion of British values and their implementation occurs in the context of schools, burdening already over-worked teaching staff with the responsibility to impart these values.)

Furthermore, it may be argued that this rhetoric promotes an unhealthy polarity in the national outlook; 'us' versus 'them', 'migrant' versus 'native' and 'traditional' versus 'Enlightened' become the unfortunate frames of reference. This reifying of the supremacy of 'our values' can and does also feed into the current populist trend that is seen to be on the rise across Europe and the US (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Moffitt, 2016; Shazhadi et al., 2018).

In summary, then, while the most recent national attempt to guide social cohesion can be lauded for prioritising cross-community engagement and working with local actors, the interaction it proposes places the burden of change and adaptation on newly settled communities, reinforcing the concept of integration as a one-way process. In addition, it makes no explicit recognition of the effect of minority cultures on mainstream society itself, implying a reified, homogenous and unchanging entity called 'British culture' into which minorities must integrate but to which they add no value.

To draw together the strands of this discussion, I return to an overarching aim of my study: highlighting the successful integration through positive interaction of my sample of Muslim women. My formulation of integration argues for a clearly articulated two-way process, with host communities making visible efforts to welcome the newly arrived, and make space for the cultural and religious proclivities of long-settled minorities; the latter, in turn, have the responsibility of also building bridges to other (mainstream) communities. My study aims to highlight exactly this, by showcasing the ways in which a sample of successfully interacting Muslim women negotiate these myriad and complicated identity politics, and express an overt desire to reach out to other communities.

Wherever one stands in this debate, and in whichever way we understand the terminology of integration, interaction or another variant of these terms, I argue here that the central questions are undeniable: what kind of society do we want to see, and what social processes will lead to the creation of such a society?

The discussion below turns to these very questions.

Macro-level questions and the framework of multiculturalism: 'What kind of society?'

'Multiculturalism appreciates that groups vary in all kinds of ways and so will become part of the social landscape in different ways. This means that they cannot necessarily be accommodated according to a single plan and will in different ways change the society into which they are integrated.' (Modood 2007b:50)

'People (there) don't mix the way they do here. You will see groups of people that are mixed (here). There (in the US) you don't see it so much, you don't see *hijābis* mixing and that made me realise how lucky we are here in England because you DO see a lot of *hijābis* out to dinners and lunches with loads of colleagues. You see more integrated *hijābis* here than you see there. I think we are definitely ahead of the States and that's what makes me feel very lucky. Going to New York and Texas made me feel very lucky to be in England.' (Sara, respondent)

I locate my discussion of minority integration within the wider debates about the British experience of multiculturalism, and variations of it as a means to create greater social cohesion between diverse populations. In particular, the focus will be on the experience of British Muslims and the recent attempts to construct a model that successfully accommodates them into the fabric of British multiculturalism. I believe certain theoretical considerations and viewpoints can aid our analysis of the issues referred to above: namely, how can one describe the social processes that lead to a cohesive society, and which '-ism' can we advocate here?

In this section, I discuss the idea of British multiculturalism as formulated and continually revisited by Tariq Modood in the last decade. As mentioned above, rather than chart the historical development of multiculturalism as a state policy, I am concerned with the idea and philosophy of multiculturalism as a way of building cohesive societies and a framework within which to locate the everyday, convivial relations that are its building blocks. The discussion below, then, shall focus on the politics of difference, the question of group rights and the rise of ethnic/religious assertiveness, with particular reference to Muslim communities in Britain. In two years of fieldwork and extensive discussions with my respondents, I have become convinced that not only is multiculturalism very much alive, but that the plural and dynamic character of British society has nurtured resilience, globalism and a sense of belonging in the women whose voices I convey. They consider Britain a good place for minorities, and consider themselves 'very lucky' to be living here.

'I think there's an element of being fine with being different.' (Amy, respondent)

Professor Tariq Modood of Bristol University has been concerned with debates around multiculturalism, racism and equality policy for over thirty years. While he has developed his concepts over this time, the basic precepts remain unchanged. He defines multiculturalism in the British context as 'the political accommodation of minorities formed by immigration to western countries from outside the prosperous West' (2007b:5). Initially, he framed his concepts within the discourse of racial equality and saw identity as a search for equality and sameness.

With time, however, he began to emphasise the importance of recognising 'difference', a valid and important conceptual lens 'as in Charles Taylor's concept of 'recognition' and Bhikhu Parekh's multiculturalist communitarianism' (Modood, 2018:6). This politics of difference involves the acceptance in society and full inclusion in citizenship of diverse communities settled through large scale immigration. Crucially for Modood, 'it includes the right to have one's difference recognised and supported in both the public and the private spheres' (2003:105). These populations, in addition, 'do not simply melt away into the populations they have settled amongst but are ethnically visible' (2007b:6).

This focus on the 'politics of difference' arose from a recognition of self-definition and self-identification as important concepts in social sciences. Modood emphasises the importance of recognising the identities that are important to people themselves, rather than imposing externally defined notions of identity in the name of integration and citizenship (2007b:37). This conception includes a recognition of not just 'negative differences' that attract racism and discrimination, but also differences celebrated in positive self-definition. In this formulation, the role of multiculturalism will be to turn 'the negative into a positive, not the erasure of difference but its transformation into something for which civic respect can be won' (2007b:41).

It is, however, this very stress on difference that has met with strong criticism and led to political calls hailing the 'death of multiculturalism' in Britain and Europe, with politicians and public figures imploring that we now have 'too much diversity' (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2009; Modood, 2008; Kundnani, 2007). Rather than focussing on socio-economic discrimination and the exclusion of marginalised groups, the cause for violence such as that seen in Northern cities in 2001 was being seen as a result of multicultural policies fostering 'too much difference'. In the words of Kundnani, 'the concept of racism was turned on its head… (it) was no longer "institutional" but defined instead as a prejudice arising from unfamiliarity. It was to be understood as an outcome of segregation, not its cause' (2007:131). In the discourses that held this view, young men and women who had been born and bred in quintessentially English cities of the North, spoke with broad Yorkshire and Lancashire accents, and knew no other home than Britain, were being framed as outsiders resisting, but very much in need of, assimilation.

Responding to these charges, Modood concurs with the need for strengthening national citizenship, but argues that 'strong multicultural identities are a good thing- they are not intrinsically divisive, reactionary or fifth columns' (2008:86). He argues for both equal dignity (vis a vis sameness), and equal respect (vis a vis difference): 'It is certainly not a matter of choosing between difference, integration and equality, for positive difference is necessary to integration that is informed by equal respect as well as equal dignity' (2007b:58).

Similarly, Werbner, in her extensive and prolonged research within Pakistani Muslim communities in Britain, has defended the existence of 'multiple positive identities' amongst minorities which, in her view assist, not hinder, the smooth flow of daily life (2013). She considers multiculturalism 'from below' to be an achievement: 'a cohesive, normative, moral force which resists and transcends fragmentation and division, while allowing for many different identities to be sustained and nourished' (2013:416). She argues, furthermore, that we all exhibit different facets of identity in different contexts, and 'the fact that a person has heterogenous identities, a multiplicity of identities, does not imply… a lack of commitment' (2002:267).

Difference was very much a part of life for my respondents, and a crucial aspect of their identities. Moreover, they framed their experience of multicultural encounters in a positive and nurturing manner. Highly educated and cosmopolitan tutor and mother of three Sumayya spoke fondly of the impact that mixing with friends of varied backgrounds has had on her. She credits her close childhood friendships with inculcating in her a cosmopolitan outlook, and an appreciation of cultures. 'At St. Anne's (her Catholic primary school) we had a very mixed group of friends: Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu, Indian, Sri Lankan, Chinese, Catholic', she

recalled to me, 'with them we could do cinema, pizza, end of term things. And that was local, locally we visited each other a lot.' Halima, similarly, celebrates difference in her surroundings and for her children; being a more confident national activist, she also, however, advocates for a recognition of this difference in local public services. She explained her outlook and vision to me:

'There is a whole debate in the race framework that those people who get to the mainstream… like, say, media, they are there not to be different, the only thing that is there is colour coding. If you are going to be there from a different community and you come from a different history and maybe different perspective, those perspectives are really not represented in the mainstream for anybody adequately.'

While Sumayya celebrates an everyday conception of difference that forms a core part of her identity, Halima asserts that her local council must recognise her difference and make provision for it. She felt strongly that minority inclusion in mainstream services and public bodies, when it can be found, only serves tick-box exercises to meet equality targets. In her view, deeper public understanding of the needs and lives of minorities was still lacking. Finally, the fact of being comfortable with difference, both in visible and invisible ways, was articulated by another respondent, Aini. Musing over the experiences of her early school days, she told me that 'I remember having an awareness that I am different here, especially at times like Christmas or these sorts of big festivals, just feeling that there is a difference here, but it wasn't something (problematic).'

Muslims and Group Rights

The second discernible strand of thought in Modood's formulation, relevant for our purposes, is his focus on group rights. Leading on from a recognition of the politics of difference, Modood's formulation of multiculturalism insists that in the pursuit of individual freedoms and micro-level perspectives, 'the reality of groupings' cannot be neglected. He argues for targeted policies to remove discrimination that especially affects certain groups, and stresses that this does not need to be seen as inimical to national belonging. Truly egalitarian public spaces and discourses should, in his view, also accommodate 'the group-differentiating dimensions (which) are central to their social constitution' (2018:4). These would include state policies such as those instituted by New Labour in the 90s: the funding of Muslim faith schools, the high-profile discussion and recognition of institutional racism after the MacPherson Inquiry and the introduction of the religion question in the 2011 Census.

While many academics have been sympathetic to this call for equality on the basis of group rights, in the last ten years, policy makers have tended to 'favour efforts to erode group difference in order to generate a 'shared sense of citizenship' (Cherti and McNeil, 2012:2). In tandem with this, Muslims in particular have been charged with cultural separatism, and held guilty for retreating into mono-ethnic enclaves (see Cantle, 2001; Mirza et al., 2007). Efforts, thus, have focused on interventions that purportedly increase a sense of national belonging; in Britain, these have included the introduction of citizenship tests and ceremonies, the Life in Britain test, and the introduction of citizenship classes in schools.

The empirical reality, however, paints a different picture. Vertovec and Wessendorf highlight a number of studies that question the validity of the self-segregation discourse. They quote Deborah Phillips, in her study of the city of Bradford: 'the evidence suggests that the radicalisation of space in Bradford speaks more loudly of white control and bounded choices'. The quantitative study of Ludi Simpson, in addition, is cited to argue that data indices actually show increased mixing and evenness of population distribution across Britain (2009:25). The authors conclude that, in reality, 'with regards to the assertion of self-segregation, … the situation seems to be that "the anxieties are better seen as ghettos of the mind rather than ghettos of reality"' (2009:26).

To bring the focus back to the present study, we may ask how this recognition and subsequent defamation of group rights works in practice for Muslims. In an innovative study of this issue, Paul Statham explores the attitudes of ordinary people towards state accommodation of Muslim group rights in particular. These rights signify 'the recognition and accommodation by the state of the distinctive identity and need of the minority group' (2016:218). The study examines public perceptions of mosque building, teachers wearing religious symbols and the teaching of religion in schools, across four European countries; this discussion will be restricted to his analysis of the British position. These public perceptions are then compared by Statham to the actual accommodation of group rights by the state, and how far Muslims have been able to acquire state-sponsored recognition of their needs.

Statham reports that, in comparison to Germany, France and the Netherlands, the British situation is 'remarkable'. He finds that significant rights are granted to Muslims by the state. In addition, there is little opposition to Muslims acquiring group rights, and strong advocacy can be found in public institutions for Muslim group rights (2016: 224). Conversely,

however, 'it is striking that the British majority shows a clear opposition to this policy and makes a very clear distinction in its support for Christian rights and opposition to extending the same rights for Muslims'. Muslims, on the other hand, support both Christian group rights and also their own. The resulting 'gap' in public perceptions and attitudes, then, between Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain is a cause for concern and a 'potential for conflict' in relation to Muslim group rights (2016:232). The results of this study demonstrate that while, in comparison to Europe, Muslims in Britain have succeeded in acquiring significant state recognition of their needs, public perceptions of their right to do so remain unfavourable.

A number of the arguments made above with regard to group rights have been evident in my data. One of my most experienced respondents in community activism, Halima explained the vision behind her work:

'Black history month is not adequate enough, so I don't think Britain really understands the diverse community that we are a part of. We were operating from the point of view that we are British Muslims, we live here, we are citizens and we have to engage in the structure and if the structure is working against us, we have to challenge it.'

We see here the manifestation of Modood's assertion that group rights form an important identity component for Muslims in Halima's use of the collective pronoun ('we are British Muslims'). In addition, rather than pursue insular and separatist courses of action, she has devoted her life to 'engage in the structure… and challenge it'. Interestingly, she invokes the language and tools of liberalism and policy: diversity, citizenship and political structures were all frequently highlighted in her discussion. She goes even further, and demonstrates her sense of belonging to Britain: she identifies as a 'British Muslim', and employs the tools of

advocacy acquired through a British education and upbringing to 'engage with the structure' and challenge it where it does not understand the needs of Muslims as a group.

Interestingly, and in keeping with Statham's findings above, I also encountered an unsolicited theme in my interviews: many respondents relayed first-hand experiences of attempting to practice their faith in Europe, all to conclude that 'we are very lucky to be in Britain' (Sara, respondent). Cheryl visits France often, and her experiences there lead her to remove her *hijāb* and other symbols of 'Muslimness' when in Europe. She related vociferously that her friends in Europe have a very difficult time acquiring any form of recognition for their group rights. She told me of personal experiences of Muslim French school children having 'to eat what was on the menu, even if it wasn't halal', and of how 'if the mother is accompanying the child on the school trip and wears a *hijāb*, she's not allowed on the school trip until she takes it off'. Similarly, Baha, a schoolteacher and academic, 'would *never* imagine living for example in one of the Paris banlieues … there is absolutely no comparison between the UK and mainland Europe' (emphasis hers).

Unsurprisingly, given their experiences with public encounters and advocacy, I also found in these conversations allusions to what Statham describes as 'a lot of low-level undifferentiated resentment expressed against Islam' (2016: 234). Amidst the recognition of Britain being an accommodating place for minorities, a number of respondents also mentioned the unfavourable public opinions. Alongside her European experiences, Cheryl told me:

'I think we are very privileged in this country compared even to other European countries. I think being Muslim here definitely carries its strains. You can be viewed with suspicion and as different. So, I think the English, that would include the Scots and the Irish as well,

culturally, socially, are very tolerant and very flexible. I don't think they are any less racist, or prejudiced, but they are very tolerant on a social level and we are very, very lucky for that.'

In an interesting juxtaposition, Cheryl recognises British people as both tolerant and flexible, but also variously suspicious, racist and prejudiced. The 'privilege' she recognises that living in Britain grants her may well be related to either the state rights granted to Muslim minorities here (she spoke at length about provision in schools), or even to the general British tendency to exercise indifference in public, and to recognise the rights of groups in liberal society. Sara, similarly, when comparing her life here to experiences of visiting the United States, has decided that she 'feels very lucky to be in England'. The reflections of these women and their public experiences concur with Statham's findings that there exists in Britain significant adverse public opinion regarding Muslim group rights, but within the context of favourable state provision for Muslims (compared to Europe). These unfavourable narratives of Muslim entitlement, furthermore, are 'manifest in everyday life, but largely ignored by political elites and unrepresented in public debates' (2016:234).

Ethnic and Religious Assertiveness

Finally, one of the most significant and enduring aspects of Modood's formulation of British multiculturalism, for my study, has been his recognition of a new religious and ethnic 'assertiveness' amongst British Muslims. Over a decade ago, he saw hope in this trend: 'At least some of the current Muslim assertiveness is a politics of catching up with racial equality and feminist achievements… ethnic assertiveness has been a "key process of social

integration"' (Modood, 2005: 20, 22). Framing it as a necessary and positive aspect of successful integration, Modood, sees this assertiveness as 'arising out of the feelings of not being respected or of lacking access to public space', and consisting of 'counterposing "positive" images against traditional or dominant stereotypes' (2007b:50). In this newly visible assertiveness, furthermore, religion is playing a renewed importance; for the women of my sample, it certainly forms a core component of their public identity, one that many of them are willing to advocate for.

However, this new religious assertiveness does not sit comfortably with the hegemonic political secularism in Britain, and Statham concedes that 'the public duties of worship that are associated with Islam can be more obtrusive and visible, and less easy to accommodate within the public life of a Western society' than those of immigrant groups whose religious identities are largely conducted in private (2016:219). Modood, however, sees this religious assertion as unproblematic; in his view, like previously-recognised factors such as ethnicity and gender, religion is just another facet of identity. In exhibiting religious assertiveness and demanding parity with other religions in Britain, Muslims, then, are only 'catching up with racial equality and feminism'. Therefore, recognising ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and so forth, while problematising religious identities is 'a reflection of a secularist bias' (2010:96). The ultimate goal of a multicultural state can, in this formulation, be seen to give recognition to 'the identities that marginalised groups themselves value and find strength in, whether these be racial, religious or ethnic' (2010:96).

At this point, I step away from theoretical discourses to show how the women in my sample are clearly exhibiting ethnic and religious assertiveness, in a proactive process of finding space in the British landscape for the components of their identity that are important *to them*.

Daily and unobtrusively, these women are addressing questions of 'difference' from the inside of minority groups in a move that can only nurture and enhance the multicultural spaces that they inhabit. They display a civic confidence nevertheless, one that derives less from traditional Islamic sources and more from contemporary Western discourses about equality, tolerance and legislative rights.

Irum, for example, is hopeful but critical of both Muslim minorities and the majority:

'If we think deeply about it, who we are, it's quite easy to fit in. I genuinely believe that if we could just learn to practice our *dīn* the way it's meant to be practiced, and if we could learn to be flexible… I think we created all the hang-ups ourselves, coupled with (the fact) that we are living in one of the most difficult times this country has experienced, and particularly for British Muslims.'

Irum voices her desire for religion to be practiced unobtrusively and non-confrontationally, while at the same time building bridges and exercising creativity publicly in order to accommodate religious identities; in this way, she puts the responsibility for creating positive multicultural spaces on both the majority and minorities themselves. The idea that Muslims must take equal responsibility for building bridges was also voiced quite clearly by Sara: 'We need to take responsibility; we need to have more of a presence'. Maryam, similarly, has taken over organisation of her office Christmas lunch with the aim of making it a more inclusive event; Irum, who knows her professionally, lauded this overture with praise: 'I said to her I think it's good because we're the ones who fuss about the venue, so it's important we take that responsibility to find a venue that is suitable to everyone'.

In a difference public space, Huda exercises her religious assertiveness in her middle-class, predominantly White neighbourhood of Chiswick by distributing sweets to her non-Muslim neighbours every Ramadan and Eid. She recounted to me how her first few attempts met with both hostility and indifference; however, her persistence paid off. Soon she found neighbours asking when she was going to visit, because 'my son misses you, and remembers your friendliness'. Huda's only regret is that she does not visit them on Christmas; when I met her, she was contemplating doing so in the future.

Cheryl also shared her observations of the state of minorities in Britain; she reflected not only on race and class as issues affecting integration, but also identified a generational factor:

'Issues of integration from the White community, I think, are orientated more along social class in many respects, than the race issue itself. Issues from within the Muslim community itself; I think there is a generational divide between the inward- looking older generation and the younger generation who is desperate to break out but a bit faithful too.'

Being a convert of White middle-class background herself, Cheryl exercises assertiveness in understanding the mindsets of both the majority and the minority. While she feels that for the White majority, issues of class are more important than race, she also recognises that within Muslim communities, there has been a generational change with regards to religious and ethnic assertiveness. She explained to me that there was hope for the younger, more open-minded Muslims; they were rejecting what she saw as 'inward-looking' practices of the elders and wanting to 'break out', yet they still retained loyalty to their faith. We see here Cheryl trying to make sense of her multicultural experiences in a confident and assertive

manner, yet doing so in the language of liberal Britain—she talks about integration, race, class and inward-looking minorities.

Gendering the Multicultural Debate

It seems apt at this point to discuss briefly those critiques of multiculturalism that look at its effect on women. In particular, Susan Moller Okin has, in a widely-cited volume, asked whether multiculturalism is 'bad for women' (1999). She is especially concerned with the respect and tolerance of group rights of minorities in a situation where these rights actually disadvantage women. She cites, amongst others, the case of twentieth century France, where for many years prior to the late 90s, the French Government had turned a blind eye to the Muslim practice of polygamy, despite the fact that the practice can cause much suffering to Muslim women and children. In particular, Okin makes two valid criticisms of those who advocate for group rights: that they do not consider the heterogeneity of groups, and that they 'pay little attention to the private sphere' (1999:9). While her sweeping claim that 'most cultures have as one of their principle aims the control of women by men' (1999: 10) is debatable, Okin performed a service to scholarship on multiculturalism at the time by bringing attention to practices to which Western states had, in the name of tolerance, turned a blind eye. Female genital mutilation, child marriage and forced marriage as illiberal practices detrimental to women were, at the time, nowhere to be seen on the multicultural agenda.

However, I would argue that the blame for the existence of certain cultural practices detrimental to women cannot be put at the doorstep of state multicultural policies, and the group rights accorded as part of this. One must make a distinction between governments and

local authorities granting certain groups distinct rights (such as providing halal food in schools, for example) and the laissez-faire tolerance to certain oppressive practices, usually pursued in the private domain. To draw a simple analogy, one does not withdraw disability rights nationally if it is found that a small minority of disabled people are involved in domestic violence.

In actual fact, the British Government has in fact gone some way to address the issue of cultural practices that harm women. One of the first milestones in the modern history of domestic violence legislation, to protect women and children from domestic and familial violence, was the passing of the 1995 Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act, making female genital mutilation a crime. Subsequently, the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 and the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Act 2005 extended the legislation to cover acts committed by UK nationals outside of the UK's borders (Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act, 1985). In 2004, furthermore, the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act brought further legislation against perpetrators by making common assault an arrestable offence. In 2008, the Forced Marriage Protection Orders were introduced, giving police powers of arrest in cases of non-compliance by perpetrators. They have since been used to prevent forced marriages both in the UK and abroad, and their powers extend to stopping someone from being taken abroad.

Dustin and Phillips (2008) have explored the tension between multiculturalism and women's rights, especially with regards to some practices associated with Muslim communities. They themselves do not see multiculturalism as necessarily detrimental to women; interestingly, they lay the blame for it being construed as such on sensationalist media reporting. 'The issues… lend themselves to cultural stereotyping, which can then feed public perceptions of

multiculturalism as a mistake'. Practices such as forced marriages and honour killings have, in their view, been portrayed as the norm for some cultural groups, thus sustaining a picture of 'ethnocultural minorities as peculiarly oppressive to women' (2008:416). They conclude on a positive note that in contrast to the previous indifference to this issue, there have been significant developments (such as those described above) designed to tackle these problems in the last two decades.

Shaista Gohir of the Muslim Women's Network, one of the longest-serving and most well-known advocates for Muslim women's rights in Britain, has actually argued that such women need more protection and selective policies administered by the state, not less (2019 Al Jazeera interview). She finds that the suffering of Muslim victims of domestic violence can be compounded by additional institutional discrimination and inequalities faced by them when they take the courage to report their crimes. In her view, the state needs to address such 'racism' encountered by these women in a campaign of both education and understanding of their situation.

To understand how this works on the ground, consider the only case of harmful cultural practice that came up in my interviews: that of a young Muslim girl referred to social services, and subsequently counselled by my respondent Anjum. In a discussion of how traditional parenting and 'too many restrictions' can often alienate children from both family and faith, Anjum passionately related the story of this young girl:

'*Too many restrictions* (emphasis hers). And they've (referring to parents) made the culture into religion, so that the beychaari (an Urdu term meaning 'unfortunate') children are getting confused, they think in my religion we have to marry cousins, you're not supposed to have

English friends, some parents will say, that child, her mum's divorced so you can't be friends with her! (Anjum is getting very passionate here.) This 13-year-old girl left home. She wanted to go out with her friends. The social worker said (advising parents), "I know in your religion girls are not allowed to go out at all, but meet her halfway or this will get worse." And six months down the line, she was in child protection! Her parents had hit her... look where she ended up. 50% of the cases I deal with are to do with children, and the restrictions on them.'

Clearly, practices such as those described above are detrimental to children, and can often affect women disproportionately. However, I use the extract to demonstrate that harmful cultural practices are not necessarily being upheld by state multiculturalism, and that in fact such practices are now, almost twenty years from Okin's initial valuable intervention, being challenged from the inside. Anjum, herself a pious Muslim woman, spends much of her working time defending the individual rights of young Muslims against cultural practices detrimental to them. Her involvement in these cases has been crucial to her local council, and has helped them to communicate successfully with first-generation parents. With the increasing rejection of repressive cultural practices (often upheld in the name of faith), and the de-linking of Islam from such practices, Muslim communities themselves are addressing these issues. In addition, the training that her social services department has received to address such minority issues has aided this particular young girl's care and development. In itself, this particular case upholds Dustin and Phillips' conclusion that the active involvement of minority communities themselves in ameliorating these practices is one of the best ways forward for multicultural citizenship (2008).

'There are so many positives in Britain.' Aini, respondent

The discussion above has highlighted Tariq Modood's extensive formulation of multiculturalism, and has also addressed some of its critiques. While the recent intervention of interculturalism shall be discussed in the following chapter, I conclude here with an illustration of how, for the women in my sample, multicultural Britain is a good place to live.

This relationship with their country and their experiences of public encounters were framed in a number of ways. For some, it consisted of fond childhood memories of mixed neighbourhoods and school friendships that cut across ethnicity and religion.

For Aini, her diverse school friendships and mixed council estate upbringing engendered a sense of belonging:

'my best friends at primary school were like Black girls, Chinese girls and English girls, so it's quite diverse. All through secondary school my best friend was English, we were inseparable, and she would come to my house because we all lived on the same council estate. There was no racism on that estate which was really nice…That was something that I loved when I came there, we just felt like we belonged.'

Cheryl is a very much a product of multicultural Britain. Having converted to Islam as a young woman, she now has a more cosmopolitan outlook. A regular traveller to Europe and North Africa, she credits her transnationalism to her faith, but is emphatic that life in Britain is most comfortable culturally. While feeling uncomfortable with visibly looking Muslim in Europe, here at home she tells me, 'I have connections with people across lots of different backgrounds regardless of origin, or faith or non-faith', and that she would not want to live elsewhere.

Women such as Cheryl were, in fact, so used to mixed cultural settings, that they expressed 'cultural shock' when having to inhabit mono-cultural spaces. After attending an ethnically diverse primary school in urban England, Cheryl related her surprise at moving to her new rural Scottish school: 'It was all White, all the people grew up in the village, their grandparents were from that village. It sounds lovely but it was a shock. It was a great shock. Because I remember walking into class, and everyone was White.' It is worth reminding the reader here that Cheryl herself is White and middle class; clearly, even this did not make her comfortable in mono-cultural surroundings. Similarly, in recalling her transition from primary to secondary school, Sumayya also confided that she 'hated' her time at an exclusive and well-known single-sex grammar school in London because it was, in her words, 'so mono-cultural'. Only at going to university in London and finding herself, once again, in multi-ethnic surroundings, was she again 'at home'.

Shabnam spoke at length about the importance of mixed neighbourhoods; she feels that, if one can afford to, one should move out of mono-cultural settings and into neighbourhoods where it is easier to mix with White British people:

'We grew up in an area where there were hardly any Muslims. If you grow up in East London or Luton, that becomes your norm. It's harder for you to integrate. I don't like these pockets… people live there because they feel uncomfortable (living elsewhere). But then sometimes when a non-Muslim moves into the area, the Muslims are like… oh no! … it's definitely two-sided.'

Interestingly, Shabnam recognises that suspicion of the 'other' can act in both ways. This, she felt, was aided by getting to know each other better, and making an effort to reach out to neighbours across communities. She herself was happier now that she could afford to move out of Luton and into a more mixed, affluent neighbourhood of Watford; her children have more mixed friends at school than she did, and while she often feels self-conscious in her new neighbourhood, she determinedly told me that, 'I think it is positive for you to feel self-conscious , I think it's important for you to interact with non-Muslims. I don't think it's healthy to be in a bubble'.

My final example of the multicultural influences on the lives on these women epitomises the extent to which they live in, and value, fluid and hybrid cultures. Irum recounted to me how she 'grew up in a completely multicultural environment', to the extent that her parents would send them to both *madrassa* classes on weekdays, but also Sunday school at the local church every weekend to learn about the Christian faith. In addition, her 'mother cooked a lot and our house was open… it was full of English, Indian, and Pakistani (people), because my parents were very warm people. It was a completely outstanding environment, but very integrated into the community.' She went on to explain how this attitude of her parents was central to creating a 'feeling of belonging in Britain'. The family loved the fact that they had

friends from varied backgrounds, and still recall their early childhood multicultural upbringing with fondness.

Concluding Words

'Integration can only be freely chosen and successfully pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant society is open and inclusive of its orientation towards cultural diversity. Thus, a mutual accommodation is required to attain integration.' (John Berry, 2005:705)

Reflecting on the experiences of the women above, most of whom are second-generation immigrants, one can only conclude that the multicultural policies of the 80s and 90s have been largely successful. Rather than encouraging parochialism and self-segregation, growing up in diverse neighbourhoods and experiencing a variety of cultures has broadened the outlook of these women, and helped them to feel at home in multicultural Britain. Clearly, these women are answering the question of 'what kind of society' with their words and their actions; they are contributing to a plural British outlook, where difference is celebrated, and minority contributions valued.

Nevertheless, significant criticisms of multicultural policies that aim to deliver this type of society do exist, and it is to this that I turn in the next chapter. One of the most valuable recent approaches to the issue has been that of interculturalism, and its focus on micro-level processes that contribute to social cohesion. In the following chapter, I look at topical debates around the alleged 'death' of multiculturalism in Britain, and the assertion that multicultural

policies are somehow responsible for the separatism and breakdown of community relations across Britain and must be replaced with interculturalism. I argue that the interculturalist intervention is best seen as not a rejection of multiculturalism as a state policy, but as a valuable complement to it. In drawing the attention of academics and policy makers to the everyday, micro-level activities that contribute to successful integration and multicultural interaction, intercultural approaches have done a service.

Chapter 3-- Deepening Integration Debates: the Interculturalist Intervention

'The city's public and semi-public spaces are… not natural servants of multicultural engagement.' (Sealy, 2018:702)

'I don't like what people say, that integration is *our* problem. It's a norm of society that we should all do, it's humanity to be integrated…. it comes naturally to people. We naturally shouldn't be looking at someone's scarf or kippah and be differentiating.' (Shabnam, respondent)

The Oldham and Burnley clashes of 2001, along with the attacks of September 11th of the same year, saw a change in media debates that influenced public perceptions of multiculturalism (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2009). Increasingly, it was being pronounced 'dead', and instead a new focus on micro-level processes that may aid social cohesion began to emerge.

While I argue in the previous chapter that top-down government legislation and social policies designed to ensure equal opportunities and reduce discrimination are equally necessary in fostering social cohesion, I believe that an additional focus on the micro-level processes that aid integration, and through which everyday integration actually occurs, adds value to the understanding of how social cohesion can be fostered.

In this chapter, I discuss the most recent developments in theorising about processes that create social cohesion by looking more closely at 'interculturalism' (Cantle, 2015; Wessendorf, 2013; Sealy, 2018). Interculturalists prioritise the micro-level processes relating to integration: the everyday, the grassroots and convivial interaction that allows the smooth flow of daily life in diverse societies. Here, I use the frames developed by recent qualitative studies to show how the convivial daily encounters of the women in my sample contribute in a bottom-up fashion to create cohesive societies. I look, in particular, at the intercultural critique as propounded by Ted Cantle, with its focus on everyday multiculture, superdiversity and the role of contact theories. (I mention as a side note here that, in keeping with my focus on the British and, where relevant, European context, I shall not be discussing the Quebecan contribution to interculturalism.) I support the proposition that interculturalism provides not an alternative to multiculturalism, but a valuable complement to it; for while 'multiculturalism is based on the idea of intercultural dialogue at the level of public discourses, debates and ideas, interculturalism provides a micro-level focus on interaction largely missing from the former' (Modood, 2018:1).

My research in particular has focused on showcasing what Cherti and McNeil (2012) term 'everyday integration'. In their inversion of the popular national approach to social cohesion, they argue that it emerges 'in the everyday experience of those (minority) groups, rather than

at the grand level of citizenship and national identity itself' (2012:5). They call for a redirection of integration debates in favour of a 'focus on everyday sites where identities are constructed and reconstructed' (2012:18). Similarly, interculturalists Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019) focus on integration as a sense of belonging felt by new migrants, manifest in their various social relations and the extent to which these social relations facilitate access to the resources required for settlement. They, thus, emphasise both migrants' eventual connectedness to a place and a wider society (facilitated by various local affective relationships), and to the access to material resources that support integration (aided by the support of equality legislation and a secure legal status for recent migrants). However, it is their stress on affective local relationships as 'the most valued resource' that resonates with my study; as I demonstrate below, not only are enduring and meaningful friendships (often initiated in childhood) important to foster a sense of belonging and home, but also the later-life 'serendipitous fleeting encounters can provide much needed information or even just a sense of humanity' (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019:134).

Ted Cantle: 'parallel lives' and interculturalism

The Cantle Report (2001) was introduced in the previous chapter, in the context of responses to multiculturalist policies in the wake of the 2001 Burnley/Oldham clashes. The Report was pitted as a replacement to Modood and Parekh's models (Sealy, 2018), and challenged their treatment of diversity and cultural heterogeneity. In addition, it apportioned some of the blame for the riots on multiculturalism, in what famously became known as the 'parallel lives' argument:

'Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges.' (2001:9)

In the ensuing decade, the development of an interculturalist approach by Cantle increasingly came to be seen as a distinct challenge to multicultural policies. His criticisms of multicultural polices focused on two particular charges: that multiculturalism had promoted a reified and static view of cultures, and that it did not sufficiently recognise the internal diversity of societies and the global nature of 21st Century Britain. The central argument of Cantle's book (2012) is that mass migration and superdiversity are inevitable processes of the 21st Century that multiculturalism does not recognise. In his view, furthermore, local and national identities will become increasingly irrelevant as individuals see themselves a part of global societies. As such, in Cantle's analysis, multicultural policies have 'failed to adapt and have become discredited as a result'. While he does credit multiculturalism with some successes of the past, the need now is to 'develop interculturalism as a completely different concept which reflects the new realities of diversity' (Antonsich, 2016:472).

For the purpose of my study, three particular failures of multiculturalism that Cantle identifies are relevant. In a global and internationalist take on how cosmopolitan identities are now constructed, he argues, firstly, that academic arguments for multiculturalism need to recognise the changing nature of 'difference'. We are told that 'difference no longer revolves around the interface between minority(ies) and the majority community'; increasingly, difference is defined 'by diasporas, by social media, by business and commercial forces and

by a whole range of other transnational influences' (Antonsich, 2016:472). Furthermore, he argues that multiculturalists have prioritised difference based on race and class above other forms; in this century, gender, disability, sexual orientation and religion, amongst other markers, are equally important. His second major criticism, relevant for my discussion, is that proponents of multiculturalism fail to see 'majority identity itself as developmental and constantly changing' (Antonsich, 2016:472). He identifies deindustrialisation, globalisation and immigration as having major impacts on the British psyche, impacts that, in his view, have not been sufficiently recognised in the implementation of multicultural policies.

Most important for my framing of a model in which to highlight the everyday multicultural interactions and aspirations of my respondents is a third criticism raised by Cantle. He argues that multicultural policies have paid little attention to inter-community and inter-personal relations. Any sense of the importance of good relations and commonality was 'largely ignored', and no notion of the value of contact between community groups was promoted. Cantle, then, takes multiculturalists to task for paying scant attention to the micro-level, everyday processes that create vibrant, heterogenous cultures and through which people connect to a variety of different individuals.

It is at this level that I have found the women in my sample gaining from and contributing to diversity in Britain. However, I argue that rather than throw the baby out with the bathwater and abandon multicultural policies altogether (as suggested by Cantle), interculturalist approaches that focus on the everyday diversity of, and relationships between, people can make a valuable contribution to social cohesion *alongside* multicultural policies. In order to build my argument and firmly locate in it the public encounters of my sample of Muslim women, I discuss below the particular intercultural concepts of superdiversity and, more

relevant for my study, the role of contact. In light of the previous discussion of multiculturalism as a macro-level policy approach for managing integration, and the current look at interculturalism as a micro-level recognition of how everyday processes facilitate integration, the final sections of this chapter revisit integration as a complex process, achieved in many different ways.

Living with 'Superdiversity': A Recent Focus

'Diversity in Britain is not what it used to be.' (Vertovec 2007:1024)

'I think that's partly to do with my identity. I've just become aware, because of how people have responded to me, not necessarily negatively but how they describe me… that I'm different. And I've just accepted I am just me and I'll be me because I have to be me.' (Amy, respondent)

The recent scholarly trend towards highlighting the superdiversity of large cities such as London, New York and Rotterdam is less relevant to my respondents; the majority of them were either second- and third-generation immigrants or White British women, of postcolonial heritage. However, as an interesting and potentially useful intercultural tool of analysis, the concept deserves a brief mention here.

A widely cited 2007 article by Stephen Vertovec focussed attention on increasing diversity in urban centres across Europe and the United States, with his use of the term 'superdiversity' to

describe the mix of residents. Referring to the rise in both the level but also the complexity of diversity in Britain, he coined the term to describe 'a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade' (2007: 1024). Now widely accepted as an accurate description of many large urban centres in the West (see Back and Sinha, 2016; Peterson, 2017; Wessendorf, 2013), it signals a move away from seeing migration from former colonies as the main trend in immigration. Instead, it draws attention to more variable and complex patterns of migration, and sees the future in closer study of a range of complex variables related to migrant cultures, rather than ethnicity and national identity alone. In essence, it also falls within the strain of interculturalism that calls attention to the micro-level and individualised daily interactions, processes which multiculturalism had previously neglected.

More importantly for my study, proponents of superdiversity such as Cantle and Vertovec have been criticised for neglecting the influence of racism on migrants' lives, and the importance of religion in urban identities. Bank and Sinha (2016) criticise Vertovec for minimising the effects of racism; in his seminal essay on superdiversity (2007), he mentions the term only once in a short paragraph (p.1045) containing no sustained discussion. While he has made a useful and valuable analysis of new immigrant cultures, in side-lining the experiences of postcolonial immigrants and their successive generations, he has also inadvertently side lined the legacy of empire and racism almost entirely. Wessendorf, in her study of diversity in the London Borough of Hackney, also states that the focus of her work 'lies on the everyday lived reality of diversity and not on racism' (2014:169). In countering this tendency, Back and Sinha (2016) argue for a balance between attentiveness to racism and forms of exclusion that affect immigrants, both old and new, while also paying attention to

multicultural convivialities. Their underlying concern remains that 'residual ideologies of colonial racism and melancholic nationalism remain socially alive' (Back and Sinha, 2016:521). As I write, the truth of their claim is vividly illustrated by the return to and rise of Nigel Farage in British politics (Crace, 2019).

Similarly, scant attention has been paid by intercultural commentators to the significance of religion in the daily lives and interaction of immigrants, a core component of my respondents' identities. Vertovec devotes a mention to religion, but only to emphasise the diversity of religious sects and practices in London, and to highlight religion as a marker of diversity (2007:1034). Cantle's analysis is also reductive of religious influences on the daily lives of migrants and their successive generations. Sealy criticises this approach, arguing that religion is an identity component, amongst others, that 'certain people claim to be, and experience as being, overarching or fundamental' (2018:697). The core, fundamental aspects of identity that many minorities hold dear, such as religion and nationhood, do, in fact, risk being subsumed amongst a myriad range of 'superdiverse' variables in this analysis. This was certainly true for my respondents; belief and belonging formed core components of their selfhood, and underpinned many of our discussions.

Nevertheless, proponents of the superdiversity lens in the study of urban multicultures have done valuable service to the field. In the words of Modood, intercultural scholarship has complemented multiculturalism with a new micro-focus, and 'this is the genuine additive part of interculturalism and of related research currents such as "superdiversity"' (Modood, 2018:7).

'More than schools or workplaces, the streets appear to be the place where people meet others from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.' (Damstra and Tillie, 2016:256)

'Humanity is regardless of colour, that's just how we were meant to be as people. In Islam, it's *so* clear, you don't differentiate between people. In Islam, to not differentiate between one person and another is as clear as it is to pray five times a day…' (Shabnam, respondent)

In my extensive interviews with the publicly-active Muslim women of my sample, rarely did I get away from narratives of their diverse and cross-cultural interactions in both local neighbourhoods, the workplace/school and even their own homes. While I recognise that they represent only a small section of confident and enabled Muslim women in Britain, my respondents often felt that they had been shaped and inspired by teachers, mosque volunteers, NHS health workers and even other parents at school gates. Some of these public encounters, even those described as ordinary and fleeting, were credited with shaping their positive views of diverse cultures, and motivating their later community work.

The intercultural contribution around 'contact theories', then, is a valuable frame within which to locate these salient cross-cultural encounters. I see it, once again, as complementary to top-down multicultural policies, rather than as a replacement for them. They aim to explain

the role of contact and interaction between people in diverse societies, and hold the general view that increased contact between different people, even of a fleeting and superficial nature, can lead to positive social relations if managed well.

Social psychologist Gordon Allport (1954) is widely credited with first introducing the 'idea that positive inter-group contact could be used to promote better inter-group relations and reduce prejudice' (Hewstone and Swart, 2011:374). This concept soon became part of wider 'contact theories', and in the British context, became associated with the work of Miles Hewstone (2011; 2014). Stressing the importance of inter-group contact, Hewstone showed that positive contact between members of different groups led to improved perceptions and better relations. Both scholars also stressed that the best outcomes were likely to be achieved when members of the group were of equal status, had common goals and were backed by institutional support.

In a more recent study of perceptions of Muslims in Britain, Hewstone and Schmid challenge the idea that superdiverse neighbourhoods necessarily, or even often, lead to poor community relations. Studies and arguments that highlight the problems of diversity do not, in their view, 'include the role of intergroup contact' (2014:320). By neglecting the role of face-to-face contact between members of different groups, they can confuse opportunity for contact with actual contact. In this way, many studies of diversity undertaken in the past have not benefitted from the potential that contact theory offers for reducing prejudice. Extending the conclusions of contact theory implies that diverse communities, by providing much direct and indirect local opportunity for contact with other groups, can be beneficial to reducing prejudice in society against minority groups.

This has in fact been proven to be true in a number of studies of urban localities. Two are worth consideration here: the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) 'Rethinking Integration' study of European contexts, led by Cherti and McNeil (2012), and Wessendorf's study of the superdiverse London Borough of Hackney (2013).

In a paper written as part of an international study of integration in Europe, Cherti and McNeil (2012:3) outline a 'potential new approach' to integration issues. They call this 'everyday integration', and promote it as a better alternative to previous models of integration that, in their view, 'are no longer valid'. Their work is framed as a challenge to existing ways of looking at how minorities in Europe integrate; here I will discuss only those aspects of the report which pertain to my study.

Cherti and McNeil's critique resonates with Vertovec's focus on superdiversity; they claim that past top-down approaches to integration have homogenised minority groups and have ignored their internal variations. In addition, the processes by which members of minority groups integrate are far more subtle and varied than previously recognised. In trying to understand how people view their individual and group identities, the authors argue that the best place to start is 'with a set of distinctly everyday concerns' (2012:4), rather than at the grand level of citizenship and national identity. They have studied four areas of common public interaction which include educational and leisure settings. Interestingly, their conclusions resonate with my own findings; namely, that minorities associated strongly, at different times, with both their own subgroups, and also with their national British identities. Group and individual attachments are enacted in complex and variable ways, with participants 'continuously revising and recreating their perceptions of self and others' (2012:11). The studies they quote all demonstrate that 'intergroup contact can play an

important role in reducing racial prejudice… and fostering tolerance towards other groups' (2012:13). Echoing Hewstone and Schmid above, Cherti and McNeil argue that everyday encounters in diverse local settings hold great potential for reducing conflict and encouraging social cohesion; similarly, they also conclude that there remains untapped potential for encouraging integration through local initiatives.

In an interesting and optimistic study of the superdiverse London Borough of Hackney, Wessendorf specifically looks at residents' attitudes towards diversity in their locality. Similar to my respondents, she finds that the residents of Hackney see diversity as 'normal' and unproblematic; she coins the phrase 'commonplace diversity' whereby cultural diversity is seen by them as a normal part of everyday life. While most of her respondents had more meaningful interactions with member of their own ethnic and religious communities in their private lives, they also mixed across communities in more fleeting interactions, conducted in public and associational spaces. In her analysis, this did not create problems, and social life functioned smoothly as long as people adhered to an unspoken 'ethos of mixing' (2013:412), an ethos that enabled life in superdiverse neighbourhoods. It was only when certain groups were perceived as not wanting to mix more widely (in her case, these were identified as Orthodox Jews and Hipsters living in Hackney), were they seen as problematic. In line with my argument, the importance of regular associational contact between different groups as well as a positive top-down multicultural discourse is stressed by the author; she concludes that 'attitudes towards diversity are shaped by a public discourse that positively celebrates diversity, but also by the way in which groups participate in public and associational spaces' (2013: 409). Interestingly, while she concedes that there is no guarantee that regular fleeting contact between groups will necessarily deepen intercultural understanding, her study shows that 'the *absence* of such encounters can enhance prejudice' (2013: 410).

Clearly, the character of contact in diverse neighbourhoods and workplaces is a significant consideration. Hewstone himself underlined the necessity of taking into account 'the degree and nature of intergroup contact between majority and minority groups' (2014:321). In his formulation of the theory, supported by the studies of both Cherti and McNeil and Wessendorf above, while contact in itself does lead to reduced prejudice (though not necessarily deeper understanding), it also has an oft-neglected indirect effect on negative perceptions of difference. By regularly mixing with significantly different others, even if only in fleeting ways, diversity and difference are normalised in society and the negative effects of diversity significantly reduced.

At this point, I argue that the women in my study are contributing to positive integration and better intercultural understanding by improving the *quality* of contact in these contact zones. By actively seeking and utilising opportunities for intergroup contact in their local areas, they are creating more meaningful relationships that not only break down prejudice and barriers, but also deepen understanding.

The case of Maryam is illustrative here; she takes on the job of organising her office Christmas party so that she can negotiate 'alcohol-free' social spaces, and reflected on such practices:

'I feel there is often misunderstanding in our society about different groups of people and it is important to break down barriers and try to understand each other rather than constructing divides and creating labels for each other. At the bottom of it, we have to remember that we are all human beings…'

Maryam here stresses the need to replace misunderstandings and stereotypes ('creating labels') surrounding the 'Other' in the public imagination with a conscious effort to break down barriers and thus foster greater understanding. Above all, she invokes a common humanity as a laudable ideal.

Similarly, Anjum does not hesitate to explain her need for prayer space at the start of each new job. On being asked about her experiences practicing faith in the workplace, and in public dealings, she elaborated that, in her view, Muslim communities needed to develop confidence in communicating with non-Muslims:

'…they (non-Muslim colleagues) respect me openly for praying… I think it's very easy, it's just how we perceive it, because we don't have the confidence ourselves. They made a prayer room for me, (and) my manager talked about it. What I've experienced, when I didn't have confidence, people saw me differently. Because I have that confidence in me, people see me differently. I am proud of who I am!'

And, in her own fleeting yet meaningful way, youth worker Sara makes it a point to actively break down barriers in public with a smile and conversational starters; she feels it is her responsibility, she tells me.

As indicated earlier in this discussion, my study focuses on the affective, rather than the instrumental aims of cross-cultural relationships, highlighting those encounters which have the potential to reduce prejudice and improve the understanding of other cultures in diverse settings. Back and Sinha (2016), in their study of London multiculture, stress that positive

conviviality in urban settings is an active process; the more enduring and meaningful contact does not just happen incidentally. In an analysis reflecting the behaviours of my respondents, they indicate how some minority individuals employ what they call 'convivial tools' that aid the smooth flow of everyday relations in superdiverse localities. Referring to the extracts above, the women exhibit two particular 'tools': they show 'attentiveness to the life of multiculture', and 'a capacity for worldliness beyond local confines' (2016: 523, 525). They are attentive to multicultural forces around them; Maryam speaks of 'different groups of people' and the importance of 'trying to understand each other', while Sara actively bridges cultures with small friendly gestures. They exhibit a sense of belonging to a diverse local spaces by taking responsibility for reaching out and by making space for their own particular needs (in Anjum's case, the need for prayer space at work; in Maryam's situation, the need for alcohol-free social space in a society that she has claimed as 'her own'). Finally, their cosmopolitanism and capacity to rise above the prosaic and local is manifest in their emphasis of a common 'humanity' with those they find around them.

Clearly, multicultural and convivial life is the norm for these women, a norm which they also actively work to sustain with their small but significant everyday interactions. Their everyday actions to reach across cultures and difference, and their acceptance of diversity, contributes to the healthy, positive contact that has recently become the focus of academics and policy makers alike. It is here, interculturalists contend, that true integration happens.

Keeping in mind the intercultural discussions above, and their approach to diverse societies, I consider it worthwhile here to look at what this implies for integration. In the previous chapter, I have focussed on macro policies developed to *encourage* integration; below I underline more explicitly intercultural insight into how integration *actually occurs* in

practice. I draw out more nuanced and individualised aspects of the process; in doing so, I aim to show how minority individuals such as my respondents are now taking control of their own integration pathways and devising new ways to create a sense of belonging in Britain.

The Varied Pathways to Integration on the Ground

'The real world is made up of everybody, not just a few.' (Amy, respondent)

'The surface of everyday life has a normative moral power that cannot, and should not, be underestimated.' (Werbner, 2013:402)

Much of what has been written and argued around the integration of minorities in the West in the last two decades points to a simple truth: integration pathways are by no means linear, predictable or homogenous. This is especially true of superdiverse contexts such as those within which my research was conducted (London and its surrounding suburbs), and debates, more often than not, focus on the Muslim communities to which my respondents belong. We can no longer speak simply of integration and social cohesion as processes that involve the successful merging of homogenous minority communities into an equally homogenous White British majority. This theme of problematising how integration happens on the ground has always lurked just beneath the surface of my analysis; in the following discussion, I owe much to the work of Susan Wessendorf, and the ways in which she brings out nuance in integration pathways. Her analysis is particularly relevant for my work because she also focuses less on 'the role of social relations in regard to practical aspects of settlement, but

more to notions of belonging' (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019:125); like myself, she prioritises affective relationships.

Wessendorf locates her discussion of the varied pathways to integration within the sociological concepts of 'embedding' and 'sociabilities of emplacement' (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). In a study of the types of social relationships that are experienced by new migrants in the settlement process, she identifies a number of ways through which newcomers access the material and affective resources that support integration. She uses the concepts above to argue that, in actual fact, the boundaries between instrumental and emotional aspects of integration are not so distinct (2019:126).

Describing 'embeddedness' as 'social relationships that foster a sense of rootedness and integration in the local environment' (2019:126), Wessendorf emphasises that the opportunities for integration that individuals draw upon are varied and situational. In addition, she emphasises that much of integration happens in local environments, and the nature that it takes depends on the socio-economic and cultural peculiarities of each locality. Issue of class and educational attainment, more importantly for my study, are also taken into consideration; how 'embedded' an individual feels will also differ depending on skills and affluence levels.

Many of my respondents, for example, spoke of their experiences of trying to embed themselves within the workplace, in professional settings. In their seemingly fleeting workplace encounters, seeking prayer spaces, inclusive social gatherings and lunch-time conversations with colleagues, the women I spoke to were creating spaces for themselves in multi-ethnic Britain. Amy, a mixed ethnicity convert to Islam, articulated a clear sense of

both the fleeting and the deeper personal relationships: 'So I believe that I can engage with all sorts of people personally and professionally. But I realized my affinity, socially and personally, is with a few even, though I believe I can get on with many.' She recognises the value of both types of relationships, and went on to explain to me how she has, over time, reached a comfortable equilibrium between the two. Her younger self was often concerned at her lack of social skills and desire to keep only a few friends; as she matured, however, she realised it was 'ok' to use the tools of many (largely instrumental) fleeting relationships alongside a few deeper personal relationships. To use Wessendorf's conceptualisation, these women have taken charge of everyday situations to access instrumental and affective networks, thus embedding themselves successfully and comfortably in the public spaces they occupy.

While embeddedness can refer to both fleeting and deeper encounters, with both being considered valuable, the notion of 'sociabilities of emplacement' refers to 'ideas about the depth of embeddedness, referring to more engaging social relations which contribute to a sense of belonging' (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019:127). Here, we see deference to a desire for deeper cross-cultural engagement, with a view to not just gaining utilitarian resources, but deeper human contact. For my women, in actual fact, the desire to reach out across communities was framed much more as a need to develop human contact, rather than gain economic benefit.

Maryam, a young London City lawyer, has devoted her spare time to initiatives that bring varied communities together. She concluded our discussion of her motivations for this work after a quiet moment of contemplation: 'at the bottom of it, we have to remember that we are all human beings…'. Expressing a similar sentiment, Amy reflected in our conversations on

her past voluntary work experiences within Muslim organisations. She stressed emphatically that she 'wouldn't do that again. I had frustrations there, it was insular… there's a real world out there and there's a danger of not interacting properly.' She has never looked back, and has since then worked in the mainstream social services sector; working in mixed environments, she explained to me, means that she has a greater chance to show people that she is 'just normal'. In addition, she values the connections that she makes at work; in her own words, 'that's what counts'.

In the following discussion around the nature of integration as manifest locally and also with respect to British Muslims, I look at a number of aspects: the importance of subtle daily intercultural encounters, the salience of plurality of identities, and the question of 'what do we integrate into?' In the final rubric of the varied nature of integration, I discuss the necessity of integration being two-way; for my formulation, this aspect carries much weight.

The Role of Fleeting Encounters

In this interculturalist focus on the micro-level and the everyday, a number of scholars have pointed to how much of integration happens naturally, at subtle levels not captured by grand policies, in the daily conduct of intercultural encounters. In her study of two semi-public spaces (a community centre and a library) in a superdiverse neighbourhood of Rotterdam, Peterson (2017) draws attention to the importance of 'fleeting encounters' in creating social cohesion. With the neighbourhood seen as an increasing point of reference for integration, Peterson argues that even light and occasional encounters with diverse 'others' are valuable 'as they can achieve a shift in attitude towards otherness as well as have the potential to turn into meaningful interactions by providing the first step towards building relationships across difference' (2017:1070). While these encounters do not necessarily lead to deep and

meaningful understanding between diverse people, they can reduce fear of the other; Peterson argues that 'light encounters make former strangers appear less strange' (2017:1071).

Similarly, Cherti and McNeil (2012) are strong proponents of the role of 'everyday' integration. Calling it a potential new approach, they believe a focus on daily, local interactions 'provides a better way of both analysing and advancing the possibilities for the integration of different communities into a stable social order' (2012:3). Based on a number of studies of varied settings (sports clubs, nurseries, shopping centres and educational settings), they find evidence for meaningful interaction across religious and ethnic boundaries in these everyday spaces. They locate their analysis in the contact theories described above; it is hard to contest their conclusion that 'intergroup contact can play an important role in reducing racial prejudice… and (in) fostering tolerance and empathy with other groups' (2012:13).

In a more detailed analysis of how minorities embed themselves, Pnina Werbner's long-standing and insightful ethnography amongst Pakistani Muslims in England also reaches similar conclusions about the important role of what she terms 'everyday multiculturalism'. In daily encounters occurring within diverse neighbourhoods, she argues, 'actors work to sustain the definition of the situation and with it a surface of civility and mutual respect' (2013:401). Of direct relevance to my study is her finding that second-generation immigrants practice this everyday multiculturalism with greater ease, having become more familiar with the British environment and the 'taken-for-granted systems of relevancy appropriate to different interactive contexts' (2013:402). I have found, in fact, that most of my respondents were exposed to multicultural environments early in life; their early schooling and diverse neighbourhoods taught them to cope with difference in exactly the 'taken-for-granted' way

that Werbner describes. Their daily encounters outside their own communities, however meaningful or fleeting, combined to create the collage of their own multiple identities. I have discussed this in more detail in subsequent chapters; here, I have used the arguments above to draw the reader's attention to the importance of everyday encounters across communities in the integration process.

Integration supported by a plurality of identities

One of the more distinct features of interculturalism is its stress on the multiplicity of identities as a good thing for integration. This way of approaching plural identities sees them as neither parochial nor detrimental to integration, but actually positive and self-affirming. Individuals, in this formulation, can and do hold multiple loyalties and affinities; for interculturalists, however, this does not compromise their ability to create cohesive societies. To the oft-repeated and rather provocative question of 'can you be British and Muslim?', they would answer with a definite 'yes'.

In a shift away from seeing nationalism as the main component of identity, Cantle and subsequent interculturalists stress the emerging global and cosmopolitan nature of identities in the West (Cantle, 2016; Wessendorf, 2013; Shezhadi et al., 2018). Rather than seeing identity as being about past heritage and historical encounters, they stress the here-and-now in a more future-oriented outlook. In their view, what multiculturalists have to accept is that 'plural identities are not in conflict with one another' (Sealy, 2018:697).

British Muslims have often been charged with holding transnational loyalties that conflict with their 'Britishness'; references to the suffering of others in the *'ummah*, prayers for Muslims worldwide at Friday sermons and transnational links ranging from travel to fashion

and much in between are common parlance in Muslim communities. Increasingly, however, both studies and statistics point to a different, more positive reality: that it is possible to maintain both religious/ethnic loyalties alongside national ones (Modood 2003; Roy 2004; Parekh 2006).

A 2007 study by Oxford University's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) has looked at the interaction of Muslim migrants with others in public and private spaces. They found that 'more than three quarters of Muslim migrant interviewees spent their leisure time with relatives or friends from co-ethnic and co-religious backgrounds' (Cherti and McNeil, 2012:12). However, they also found evidence of meaningful interaction across boundaries of ethnicity and religion, for the same migrants. Through work and education, they developed less intimate, but equally important for social cohesion, everyday interactions across cultures.

Werbner points to similar results in her years of study of Pakistani Muslims. She describes vibrant, creative South Asian cultures sitting alongside a healthy nationalism; in a plural mix, she gives credit to diasporic minority cultures for 'integrating South Asians into British society without the demand that they abandon their consumption-based transnational connections and orientations' (2004:909). While recognising that living between multiple lifeworlds and orientations can also cause conflict and dissonance, she draws attention to the fact that 'Islam in Britain has been incorporative and integrative, providing a legitimate locational identity in an immigrant society' (2004:908). In her formulation, diasporic ethnic and religious attachments can provide a strong identity base for minorities; these attachments, furthermore, are not mutually exclusive to national identities. In providing a 'locational' anchor, thus, heritage cultures can inculcate a sense of belonging in Britain and embed

immigrants in community networks. In the words of Werbner, 'culture as a medium of social interaction confers agency' on members of ethnic minorities (2005:749).

In the same vein, Werbner also considers transnational identities empowering and conducive to the integration of minorities. She does not see globalisation and Muslim invocations of the '*ummah* as threatening to a sense of national belonging. Transnational connections and patterns of consumption can, and do, contribute to a sense of civic consciousness and civic integration; by giving minorities their 'own' cultural roots, they are then enabled to also feel part of the British 'nation' (2000).

In a recent and insightful study of visibly observant young British Muslims (of both genders) and their feelings of 'Britishness', Shezhadi et al. (2018) make a similar case. As most of my respondents were also observant Muslims, the findings of their study resonate with mine, albeit with certain caveats related to the older average age of my respondents, compared to the participants of their study. In a direct refutation to claims that the strong religious attachments of some Muslims compromise their 'Britishness', they have found that the explicit and visible Muslim identities held by their respondents 'co-existed without any conscious conflict with what they considered Britishness' (2018:608). As with my second-generation respondents, they also show that the young Muslims in their sample actually display a greater sense of belonging to Britain that did their parents. This feeling was, however, compromised by a clear articulation that many did not feel accepted as truly British by the majority; despite themselves having strong identifications with Britain, 'they felt "othered" and viewed as being *less British* by British non-Muslims' (italics in original) (2018:608). Crucially for social cohesion and younger citizens, this feeling of not being accepted by others can, in their view, lead to further alienation and resentment. This was

expressed as a disappointment for many, and a daily reality for some. The authors report the perturbing finding that some young female participants who wore the veil 'had experienced verbal abuse so often, they barely noticed anymore' (2018:614).

While perceptions of rejection such as those described above can have serious consequences for younger Muslims and other minority youth, the attitudes of my respondents diverge at this point. Many of the women in my sample, being mature and more experienced in public dealings, saw discrimination and lack of acceptance as a challenge and an opportunity for interaction. Approaching uncomfortable and potentially discriminatory encounters with confidence, friendliness and conversation was a common theme in my interviews. These encounters took the form of workplace encounters where the women explained their religious behaviours, the adaptation of social norms to accommodate their needs and breaking barriers in their local settings with seemingly small yet significant friendly overtures. Huda knocks on neighbours' doors with gifts every Eid, Sara wears a determined smile when out and about (even on 'days when she's feeling absolutely awful', she admitted to me) and Amy has, in her forties, made a determined effort to reconnect with her old acting-school friends because 'it's not normal to live in a box'. For each of these women, in addition, the behaviours above were described as necessary for social cohesion, but also liberating on an individual level for themselves. In contrast to some younger Muslims, then, my interviewees use their public interactions to address discrimination and negative images of Muslims, rather than allowing these perceptions to compromise their own identities as British Muslims.

However, the findings of Shazhadi et al. do converge with mine on the question of the salience of hyphenated identities. In further chapters, I discuss in more detail my findings that plural identities need not be mutually exclusive; the authors also report similar findings.

Interestingly, they claim that the strong Islamic identity components of their respondents 'developed from a positive and proactive identification with Islam rather than one in opposition or rebellion against a British identity' (2018:607). In the process, thus, of constructing a viable, lived British Islam, both the women in my sample and the Muslim youth of the study described above are taking ownership of, and creating, British Muslim identities.

The case of Baha, a deeply religious but also very Scottish respondent, exemplifies this well. Much of her life story was underlined by a strong commitment to Islamic principles and discussion of how her childhood enculturation, whilst growing up in Edinburgh, had deep roots in the Quran. On hearing that I was to visit Edinburgh in the week after our interview, she became very animated. Over the next 10-15 minutes, I was entertained by the Edinburgh legend of 'Greyfriars Bobby', the loyal dog who guarded his master's grave in the churchyard. Her nostalgia for, and deep attachment to, Edinburgh as her 'hometown' was clear in this story. Reverting back to issues of faith and her hyphenated identities, she summed up her feelings of being both Muslim and Scottish to me:

'I do get emotional about certain things, and attached to certain things. Still, for me the concept of faith is something that transcends above that. But (even though) I know there are other places in the world… despite that, in the same way, I feel emotionally attached to Edinburgh. That is where I spent my formative years, my memories and primary school…'

One is reminded here of Werbner's earlier conclusion that strong cultural, ethnic and religious minority identities can provide a valuable base for embedding into the wider national landscape (2005). For Baha, her location in Edinburgh gives her roots in the British

landscape, while her faith provides an anchor that transcends even national boundaries for her.

In her nuanced study of diversity in Hackney, Wessendorf makes a valuable contribution to the discussion of plural identities and the plausibility of their co-existence with national attachment. Looking at majority attitudes in Hackney towards minority newcomers, she identifies an 'ethos of mixing' as the deciding factor in majority perceptions. Regardless of how people conduct their private lives, if they were perceived as 'not wanting to mix' in public, associational spaces such as libraries and community centres, they were viewed unfavourably by the majority. Conversely, and more pertinent to this discussion, these expectations that people mix in public spaces was 'rarely accompanied by a criticism of non-mixing in the private realm where it is seen as normal that similar people who share similar lifestyles, cultural values and attitudes attract each other' (2013:418). Her findings indicate that residents of diverse neighbourhoods in Britain now accept separate private worlds as healthy and 'normal', as long as people are also mixing in public associational spaces with common purpose. Intimate and long-term relationships characterise the private realm, alongside equally valuable fleeting and casual encounters that have the potential to reduce prejudice in the public arena. Again, we see here a recognition that residents of the same neighbourhood or work/educational settings need not know each other intimately, as long as they have opportunity to exchange occasional gestures and encounters of recognition and conviviality.

For me, the ultimate everyday example of plural identities being not only accepted but also valorised comes from the very 'British' arena of popular football. In a phenomenon similar to that described by Pnina Werbner's insights into the 2012 London Olympics (2013), the sights

and sounds last year of large groups of mainstream non-Muslim Liverpool fans chanting 'If he scores another few, I'll be Muslim too' in response to Mo Salah's inspirational performance was unprecedented in the history of British multiculturalism (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-43081318/mohamed-salah-inspires-i-ll-be-muslim-too-chant). National moments such as these allow all citizens to draw on collective identities; in the words of Werbner, those involved 'unreflexively displayed a shared British identity' (2013: 401).

Integration… With Whom?

'The established society is the site of institutions—including employers, civil society and the state—in which integration has to take place, and accordingly they must take the lead.'

(Modood, 2014:203)

In a more recent development within the field of integration studies, scholars have begun to look at the nature of the communities into which minorities integrate (Werbner, 2013; Statham and Tillie, 2016; Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). Not unexpectedly, they point to a complex and varied picture. In particular, when one considers that Britain now comprises a number of large, superdiverse urban centres, the traditional view of pockets of migrants originating from former colonies needing to integrate 'into' a seemingly homogenous White majority culture no longer holds true. In this section, I address the question of whom migrants integrate with in the settlement process.

In a direct response to Cantle's assertion at the turn of the decade that multicultural policies in Britain have led to communities leading parallel lives, Werbner paints a much more

positive and vibrant picture of life in immigrant 'ghettos' and residential enclaves, neighbourhoods where co-ethnic networks form a crucial part of the settlement process. For many new arrivals, we see that integration involves not just relations with the wider society, but more importantly in the initial stage, integration into the social and business ties of one's own heritage community. In her conception, this is to be seen as a natural and encouraging step in the settlement process. Faced with the initial confusion and disorientation that new migrants can feel when dealing with everyday, bureaucratic situations, people can retreat into the familiar where 'a sense of worth, of positive, valorised subjectivity is re-established' (2013: 404). She argues that in choosing to live in areas of high concentration of immigrants, new arrivals 'recreate a sense of home in a strange land' (2013: 404); this, in her view, should be seen as a positive and proactive step in the settlement process. Werbner goes on to give a colourful ethnographic description of the co-ethnic ties that migrants depend on in their localities to develop crucial economic and social links. Rather than conceptualising them as decrepit neighbourhoods where life stagnates, she finds 'places of intense sociability', where in the markets 'all is colourful excitement', and 'children play in the streets'. It would be difficult to find a description that is further from Cantle's 'parallel lives' conception. In a clear elucidation of how these co-ethnic relationships aid settlement in Britain, Werbner compares Pakistani women in these neighbourhoods as 'like a loose and informal trade union'; they exchange utilitarian information about children's schooling, bargains to be had in local shops, the best GP surgeries and current pay rates for home machinists.

Sumayya's descriptions of a vibrant multicultural home life, in my interview with her, painted an equally spirited yet unconventional approach to integration. She spoke with

fondness of a childhood where a large number of international guests came through the house frequently, entertained by her cosmopolitan and highly educated parents:

'We had an unusual house, there was so much overseas culture in the house, you could almost smell the mothballs from the suitcase from Islamabad… Your fruits were coming from Karachi, from Dhaka. The food was coming from overseas. So, there were like cultural artefacts all the time in the house. I enjoyed that, and I loved it, and I don't want to let it go. I benefitted hugely. It was mad, but it was really good as well, and I see the lack of that (mixing) for our children. They have relatives but we had an unprecedented amount of different adult Asian cultures— and that kept you exposed.'

Now a practicing Muslim, Sumayya told me how her secular parents were comfortable with a variety of guests going through their home; being exposed to 'irreverent' Asian adults with seemingly relaxed moral registers ('they were like proper haram!') regularly has made her more tolerant of a wide range of practices, even within Muslim cultures. More importantly, she values this early exposure to a variety of 'adult Asians'; she wishes that her children had experienced such a cosmopolitan upbringing. Contrary to the view that minority lives are insular and parochial, Sumayya felt that 'there was a real world going on in the house. It was extremely global'.

In a review of existing research on the issue of the integration of Muslims in Europe, Statham and Tillie (2016) refer to studies that show that living in diverse neighbourhoods was a good indicator for both strong bonding capital (implying ties with co-ethnics) and also bridging capital (created through ties outside one's community). In a study of Moroccan immigrants in five different European countries, they showcase results that indicate that, across all the

countries in the sample, although individuals had strong ethnic and religious attachments, 'identifying with the country of settlement is not contradictory to ethnic and religious self-identification'. They conclude that 'second generation Moroccans seem to be more confident in juggling multiple identities and resilient to negative ascriptions'; these results concur with my own findings (2016:191).

Most extensive and original in this regard is Wessendorf and Phillimore's study of the relationships formed by migrants in the settlement process (2019). In particular, they focus on those relationships that new migrants turn to for support and economic benefit. In a departure from traditional scholarship on integration studies, the authors highlight the importance of new arrivals' social relationships with older, longer settled other migrants; they report the illuminating finding that integration cannot be measured solely by 'the amount of social relations with white people' (2019:135). By showing that many migrants successfully tap into their co-ethnic and other migrant communities as much as, if not more so than, mainstream communities, Wessendorf and Phillimore problematise the notion of 'bridging capital' as being the main source of post-migration support networks. They find that supportive relationships within one's own community are crucial to the early settlement process; these contacts provide not only access to the material resources that support integration, but also a sense of belonging in a new and unfamiliar landscape.

For my respondents, such processes were apparent in the settlement of their parents and grandparents, a process which they clearly remember benefitting from themselves. While Wessendorf and Phillimore do not look particularly at family ties that support integration, for the women in my sample, grounded and stable family backgrounds were so central to their subjectivities that I felt compelled to devote a section to the topic in another chapter. At this

point, the most important conclusion for my discussion is that whether minorities are successfully integrated need not necessarily depend on whether they have ties with the White British majority. Given the diversity of many British cities, we can no longer use simplistic notions of a host society that every newcomer must aspire to integrate into. Wessendorf and Phillimore show that 'the notion of "integration" needs to reflect the social unit into which migrants are supposed to integrate' (2019: 123); as we have seen above, this is not a straightforward process, and relationships between newcomers and long-term residents can be based, equally, on commonalities rather than differences.

And Finally… Integration is a Two-Way Process

'After all, socio-cultural integration is a two-way process of interaction' (Statham and Tillie, 2016:189)

Throughout this discussion, I have emphasised the importance of seeing integration, in order to be successful, as a two-way interactive process. For far too long, Government and popular rhetoric has placed the responsibility of integrating almost entirely on new arrivals and even on second- and third-generation minorities that follow personal lifestyles distinctly different from the mainstream; most of my respondents fall into the latter category, and despite having been born and bred in Britain, still feel that the onus for integrating falls disproportionately on their shoulders. In the previous chapter, I have charted relevant policy initiatives in this regard; here I look at academic arguments for seeing integration as two-way.

One of the most vocal proponents of integration as two-way is leading German integration scholar Naika Foroutan. She has spoken and written widely since the 2015 influx of refugees in Germany, and has addressed both the migrant experience, and also the role of receiving societies in the process. It is with the latter that we are concerned here. In a series of interviews with online news outlets and newspapers, Foroutan clearly stipulates that host societies need to examine their own notions of diversity and dig deep within themselves to address prejudice and stereotypes:

'Instead of questioning our own sensibilities, we have, to date, primarily focused our attention on those who are perceived as foreign, as different. This is downright absurd. In reaction to the thesis that Germany is not a child-friendly country, for instance, we would not launch debates or conduct scientific studies showing everything that is supposedly wrong with children. We would question our own societal values. We need a debate about ourselves.' (Interview with Qantara.de, 4/01/16)

Here, we see Foroutan encouraging host societies to question their own sensibilities regarding the foreign and the 'different' other; her work has gone far to encourage the 'debate about ourselves' that she refers to above. Much of her work centres around questions of what it means to be German, and the reception of migrants and refugees by long-term German residents. However, in the same interview she does recognise that 'this is not specifically a German problem'. Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019), in the study of migrant relationships referred to above, do in fact report similar findings. The migrants they researched aspired to form social relations with who they described as 'English people'; however, they spoke about how they found this difficult, because these English people presented to them as 'reserved and less open than other migrants' (2019:135).

In a study of how 'weak ties' between Muslim immigrants and the ethnic majority are established, Damstra and Tillie apply a 'bidirectional perspective' to the issue (2016). In this approach, rather than looking only at how Muslims establish 'weak ties' with majority British communities, they also look at the majority population's establishment of weak ties with Muslims. Of relevance to this discussion is their finding that 'the average amount of crosscutting weak ties is substantially lower for members of the native populations than is the case for Muslims… on average, native citizens have "almost none" or "a minority" of Muslim acquaintances' (2016: 252). Interestingly, they also find that, of the native population, women, those of medium educational levels, and those without religious affiliations are most likely to have higher levels of Muslim acquaintances. In keeping with the multicultural neighbourhood narratives of my sample, they locate crosscutting interactions as happening most significantly in diverse neighbourhood streets; the mixed neighbourhood, then, can be a crucial conduit for encouraging cross-cultural acquaintance. Again, this concurs with both the studies discussed above, and the nurturing multicultural backgrounds described by my respondents. Furthermore, Damstra and Tillie's findings that majority communities in the UK exhibit some of the worst outcomes when it comes to crosscutting weak ties (2016:246) support the feeling expressed by a number of my respondents that integration burdens fell disproportionately on them. In the words of Statham and Tillie, 'it is important not only to study Muslims' attitudes and behaviours, but also those that they face from the majority society, since this is the context that confronts them, and after all, socio-cultural integration is a two-way process of interaction' (2016:189). I discuss this aspect more fully in a subsequent chapter.

One of the central conclusions of Damstra and Tillie's study has been related to the question of trust; they identify it as 'one of the most important preconditions of a peaceful integration process' (2016:238). I propose that, in building this environment of not just trust, but also acceptance, majority societies have a major role to play. The work of Yaqin and Morey has been illuminating in this regard. Speaking particularly of the 'British values' criterion for how well Muslims have integrated, Morey argues that a number of national tropes, such as the securitisation of Muslims and their popular association with 'terrorism', have 'had a disastrous impact on intercultural trust' (2018:10). In attempting to rebuild this trust, he sees the development of bridging capital ties as crucial. In addition, as with my formulation, he sees integration as necessarily interactive and dialogic. 'Cultural diversity requires, in fact presupposes, the possibility of dialogue', he argues (2018:11); in taking a dialogic approach, he indicates a two-way and interactive mode for integration, one which not only requires the foundation of trust between disparate communities, but will itself go a long way in increasing this trust. By being open, communicative and initiating contact, the women in my sample can be seen to be building this intercultural trust; I argue here that there is also a need for majority communities to extend similar trust-building overtures.

The very same argument is advanced by Nasar Meer in his discussion in the same volume (2018:97). In this chapter, he charts the manifestations of a heightened and proactive 'Muslim consciousness'; by showing how Muslims are successfully rising to the challenge of integration and adaptation to life in Europe, he argues that the Muslim presence in Europe is dynamic and outward-looking. However, Meer highlights the paradoxical nature of this 'Muslim consciousness' in Europe: on the one hand, Muslims such as my respondents 'are meeting standards of reasonableness in their identity articulations', yet on the other, popular narratives of the Muslim presence in Europe 'place the burden of adaptation upon Muslim

minorities' (2018:99). In his view, Muslims are increasingly, and in the context of social and political adversity, rising to the challenge of integration and developing a new, positive European Muslim presence. This effort, however, is often met with negative public narratives that can be unhelpful and undermining: the 'Eurabia' theory that Europe will soon be dominated by Muslims culturally and numerically, the belief that Muslims are exceptional to liberal secular societies, and the resentment to their political claims and group rights being amongst some of the objections raised in the public imagination. In his final analysis, Meer calls for a more balanced, bidirectional approach to building trust and facilitating integration:

'the good faith required for trust in integration contexts cannot be unidirectional or come entirely from Muslims and must instead be reciprocal in a manner that recognises Muslims consciousness on its own terms, too.' (2018:100)

Mediating Multiculturalism with Interculturalism: Belonging as an Essential Component

'The sense of belonging offered by an affective relationship is the most valued resource.'

(Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019:134)

Proponents of both multiculturalism and interculturalism have, in the main, written about two overarching aims of the integration process: to give newcomers access to the practical and material resources that aid settlement (such as jobs, better housing and welfare information), and to aid the affective aspects of integration that inculcate a sense of belonging (Berry,

2005; Sealy, 2018; Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). As indicated earlier, my study focuses on the affective aspects of integration. In the discussion both here and in the previous chapter, I have made occasional reference to the importance of 'a sense of belonging' in the integration process. Here I culminate the discussion by arguing that this aspect of integration is as important as, if not more so than, minority access to legislative and citizenship rights that support them.

Sealy, an otherwise ardent supporter of multicultural policies, has argued that in fostering healthy integration, 'crucial is not just formal citizenship, but also belonging' (2018:696). While he advocates for a consideration of past history and colonial legacy when addressing concerns of cohesion, he also recognises that the variant of multiculturalism that connects people through a shared historical memory will not engender a sense of belonging amongst minorities. Citizenship, he stresses, must take into account of 'a more imagined sense of who and what belongs' (2018: 696).

This, in fact, has been a fundamental critique by interculturalists of multicultural policies, as pursued in the past: they charge that, in pursuing national policies and enacting legislation that grants minority rights, Britain has overlooked the importance of 'any sense of the promotion of commonality, or good relations' (Cantle, 2016:473). As a result, studies point to the paradoxical situation in Britain of strong multicultural policies existing side-by-side with poor public perceptions of Muslims (Statham and Tillie, 2016). Multicultural policy, concludes Shahnaz Khan in the Canadian context, has been a mixed blessing; it can often 'leave the myriad cultures within it unconnected to social and political history' (1998:471).

This finding is significant for the way in which my respondents present, when describing their feelings of belonging in Britain. They have, in fact, developed alternative tools that allow them to create a shared national imaginary: they often referred nostalgically and with pride to shared schooling memories, sporting moments and even favourite childhood TV shows. Women such as Baha and Sumayya credit their faith-centred outlook to their daily recital of the Lord's Prayer at Catholic primary schools; Irum is a confident inter-faith interlocutor because, as she proudly told me, her parents sent her to Sunday school 'to understand British culture'; and Amy has re-connected to her non-Muslim acting school friends because she values diversity in her close friendships. I argue that these shared cultural memories (similar to the Liverpool football chants supporting Mo Salah, and Baha's fond memories of the Edinburgh Greyfriars Bobby legend) go a long way to create a feeling of belonging in second- and third-generation minorities. Werbner, in her study of multicultural conviviality during the 2012 London Olympics, reports a similar phenomenon. By recognising and being able to relate to what she terms mainstream 'systems of relevancies', second-generation immigrants such as the women of my sample 'have been socialised by schools and peers into the common-sense unspoken assumptions of everyday life in Britain' (2013:407).

This crucial aspect of integration, a feeling of belonging to Britain, has not gone unnoticed even by staunch proponents of multicultural policies such as Modood. In his seminal work of 2007, he recognises the urgency for nations to inculcate a national identity, and a shared sense of belonging; we cannot, he argues, leave multiculturalism with 'fewer emotive resources' (2007b:151). Thus, he argues elsewhere that multicultural identity, in order to be viable and have meaning for individual citizens, needs to be balanced with a national identity

with similar 'emotional pull' (2010:95). In an Open Democracy online article, he has argued incisively that:

'it does not make sense to encourage strong multicultural or minority identities and weak common or national identities; strong multicultural identities are a good thing—they are not intrinsically divisive, reactionary or subversive—but they need the complement of a framework of vibrant, dynamic, national narratives and the ceremonies and rituals which give expression to a national identity. It is clear that minority identities are capable of exerting an emotional pull for the individuals for whom they are important. Multicultural citizenship, if it is to be equally attractive to the same individuals, requires a comparable counterbalancing emotional pull.' (2007a)

I have found that the women in my sample tap into these 'vibrant, dynamic, national narratives' in order to create, for themselves, a sense of belonging to Britain. In the words of third-generation Fatima, 'my local community is Ilford, Gants Hill, Redbridge, that's a big part of who I am. That's a massive part of my identity'. This sense of local rootedness of my participants in very British neighbourhoods and cultural phenomena was deployed by them to stake a claim in 'feeling British'.

At this point, it would be appropriate to reconcile the two major approaches to successful integration in Britain: multiculturalism and interculturalism. In my concluding words below, I bring the two discourses together to argue that the intercultural focus on micro-level diversity, contact and everyday interactions can be seen as a valuable complement to multicultural policies, rather than an outright replacement for them.

Conclusion: Interculturalism as a Complement to Multiculturalism

'Multiculturalism has something to learn from interculturalism, … this mainly focuses on interculturalism giving multiculturalism a new micro focus to complement multiculturalism's macro focus. On the other hand, I do not think that macro-multiculturalism has been replaced, should be replaced, or is about to be replaced by an alternative pro-diversity paradigm.'

(Modood, 2018:7)

'I think there's an element of being fine with being different.' (Amy, respondent)

The discussion above has looked in detail at the intercultural critique of state multicultural policies as pursued in Britain. In particular, I have looked at the formulation of Ted Cantle since the 2001 clashes in Northern England, and his criticism of multicultural policies that have, in his view, neglected diversity and treated minority cultures as reified and homogenised. Much of this chapter, furthermore, has been devoted to discussion of the everyday, micro-level encounters between people of different cultures; this is in recognition of the significant and deliberate contributions of my participants to interactions across communities. Within the framework of contact theories, I have argued that such bottom-up, convivial encounters are crucial to not only providing the material resources necessary for integration, but, more importantly for my study, for engendering a sense of belonging for diverse peoples in Britain. Finally, in a recognition of the complexities of integration, I conceptualise it as a process a that is sustained by daily cross-cultural encounters (even if of a fleeting type), constituted of individuals and communities that are characterised by plurality

and difference, and, crucially, best developed in a two-way process of interaction. By contributing through their daily public interactions to each of the three components above, the women of my sample are showing that, 'difference, rather than the problem to be solved, is the source from which liberative potential can and should develop' (Sealy, 2018:708).

We owe a debt to interculturalists for bringing to the notice of proponents of multiculturalism many salient aspects of social cohesion. They have drawn attention, particularly, to the everyday sites where identities are constructed and where actual integration happens on the ground. We have seen that in order to develop and sustain stable, cohesive societies, 'we will need to have more and more everyday interactions where peaceable and mutually enriching identities can be crafted' (Cherti and McNeil, 2012:18). This is a conclusion recognised by even longstanding advocates of multiculturalism; more recently, Modood has agreed that 'for multiculturalists, a renewed national identity has to be distinctly plural and hospitable to minority identities' (Modood, 2014: 208).

My own position is close to that of Wessendorf (2013; 2019) and Peterson (2017), with their focus on the quotidian aspects of living in diverse spaces and societies. My respondents, rather than employ polite 'civil inattention' (Sealy, 2018:701) in public spaces, have the confidence to turn their quotidian multicultural encounters into something more meaningful. They are improving the quality of contact in contact zones; their encounters are not just about sharing 'saris, samosas and steel bands', but about opening up conversations and spaces that decrease social distances and challenge stereotypes. Their positive, proactive interactions hold the potential to offer a counterbalance to narratives of segregation, stereotype and 'parallel lives'.

Having said that, I believe it would be naïve to ignore the need for and contribution of state multicultural policies. In highlighting convivial relations on the ground as the *only* focus for building cohesive societies, one runs the risk of side-lining 'tensions and discord and their socio-cultural and historical circumstances' (Sealy, 2018:706). British multicultural policies have gone a long way in not just addressing the needs of minority groups, but in allowing them to challenge discrimination by giving them access to public spaces, and equal recognition in many spheres. Few can argue with the importance of being granted Muslim faith schools, the religion question on the national Census, and funding for reporting religious hate crime, for Britain's Muslim communities. In this way, multiculturalism has not flattened notions of difference and heterogeneity, but instead called for 'its transformation into something for which civil respect can be won' (Modood, 2007b:41), backed by concrete legislation and the granting of group rights.

In fact, a number of scholars have argued that there is little evidence to show that multicultural policies are responsible for social fragmentation; some, indeed, suggest that 'the wider society's treatment of minorities might drive some groups into (segregation)' (Heath and Demireva, 2014:164). Vertovec and Wessendorf also argue emphatically that 'rather than failed multicultural policies, such (disadvantageous socio-economic) traits are more likely to have developed and been sustained by sheer discrimination, labour market dynamics and geographies of deprivation' (2009:25).

Similarly, we have seen that one of the key assumptions of critics of multiculturalism, that greater co-ethnic ties and strong community bonds lead to an unwillingness to integrate, simply does not hold. This is corroborated by Heath and Demireva's findings (2014). In a positive and forward-thinking study of the effects of over three decades of British

multicultural policies, they conclude that 'high levels of bonding social capital coexist with positive orientations towards integration', intergenerational change points to increasingly high levels of British identity (in positive directions), and 'the overwhelming majority of all ethno-religious groups (studied) show positive orientations both towards their own ethnic culture and towards integration into British society' (2014:171). Of significance to my argument here is their final assessment that there was no evidence to support the argument that groups that have traditionally made successful claims for recognition of their cultural and religious practices (such as Sikhs and Muslims) have also made slower progress towards integration. Clearly, there is little empirical evidence to show that multicultural policies can be blamed for the alleged failures of integration.

This gives weight to the argument that we need both top-down multicultural policies to secure group rights and anti-discrimination legislation, yet attention must also be paid to the micro- spaces and settings in which 'living with difference' actually happens. As a suggested viable new way forward, Modood asserts 'we need more, not less' (2007b:14) multiculturalism and that 'multiculturalism is a form of integration'. It is, in his words, 'not just a remote or utopian ideal but something that exists as a policy idea qualifying citizenship and informing actual policies as well as relations in civil society' (2007b:16).

In this way, we may see a new accommodation within multicultural policies of the concerns raised by interculturalists. Surely top-down approaches can be improved by attention to more responsive local initiatives, often driven by ethnic minorities themselves, and to the heuristic premises of interaction and contact. Viewed in this way, intercultural theory and critique can be a valuable complement that informs the implementation of top-down multicultural policies. Based on the public mediations of my respondents, I have argued here for a politics

of difference and conviviality, enacted in grassroots public spaces and through local actors to complement top-down approaches and policies of multiculturalism.

Both top-down multicultural policies and the intercultural focus on diversity and convivial contact for integration have been instrumental in the lives of the Muslim women with whom I have worked. Nothing testifies to this impact better than their own words; Sumayya's musings are a beautiful synthesis of the processes discussed above. Her journey to integration and 'feeling British' has been aided both by the multicultural policies that have supported faith schools (in her case, her Catholic primary school), and the daily interactions and subtle exchanges that can be characterised by an intercultural focus. In fact, she credits her core spirituality and sense of belonging to her early life in a strong Catholic environment:

'We went to mass every week, there was confession box, there was everything. There was no delineation. I sang the hymns, I knew all the prayers. I feel that between the ages of 11 and 16 the major retention of any spirituality was because of the Catholic school. There was a presence of God every day, three times a day. Much more than (at) home, I got my spirituality here.'

The lives of the women in my sample, then, are a powerful testament to the positive impact of living and working closely with difference and diversity. In the following chapter, I turn to look more closely at the women themselves, and at how they have successfully created strong, hybrid identities as British Muslim women.

Chapter 4-- Muslim Women's Hybrid Identities: Strategies in the Third Space

'Identities are not pre-given but are culturally rooted. They rest within each other and emerge situationally.' (Werbner, 2013:411)

'We cannot require all minorities to wear their identities lightly, flexibly and contextually— to do so becomes a kind of postmodern assimilationism.' (Modood, 2016:487)

The landscape of multi-cultural and, some would argue, post-multicultural Britain, since the inception of the 'War on Terror' in 2001, has seen much debate around the issue of the successful integration of minorities. Many of the current issues, policy responses and everyday processes around integration have been discussed in the previous two chapters. I have argued that multicultural policies have worked for the women in my sample, fostering a sense of being 'at home' in Britain. In addition, their embracing of diverse cultures in Britain has meant that they employ everyday convivial relations to foster a sense of belonging, both within their own communities and across different communities.

In this chapter, I take a closer look at the identity constructs of the women in my sample, and, in keeping with my methodology of studying the invisible and non-institutional, employ nuance in the analysis to uncover less obvious influences on their identities. I formulate identity as multicultural and varied, not easily delineated, and subjectively constructed, and use the definition of Bhikhu Parekh here to elucidate a profound sense of the concept:

'Our identity refers to who we are, how we are constituted, what makes us the kind of persons we are. It includes the central organizing principles of our being, our deepest tendencies, dominant passions, characteristic ways of thought, deeply held values, ideals, attachments, commitments, our psychological and moral dispositions, traits of temperament, the way we define and understand ourselves…' (Parekh, 1995:267)

It may be argued that Parekh's definition can be expanded further to include the more outward and seemingly 'superficial' everyday activities that affect our identity construction, and through which aspects of identity are manifested. When in public domains, for example, behaviours can and do emerge situationally, in reaction to the environment. With respect to the study of minorities, it is well-documented that attacks on core identities and the resulting insecurity created can cause people to withdraw into traditional cultural habits. Erikson illustrates the security found in tradition: 'Many immigrants remain faithful to tradition because… it gives them a clear, safe identity and… offers resources they need to survive. They feel the cold breath of the chronic insecurity of late modern society, and some of them immediately withdraw into their shell…' (quoted in Kabir, 2016: 528).

My study has worked 'backwards' to examine the lives of a selection of British Muslim women who display resilient and robust identities, remaining true to both their faith/cultural heritage and their British upbringing. The quest has been to discover what factors have allowed the creation of their positive identity outcomes, beneficial not only to the individual but also to wider society generally. How have these women been able to sit comfortably in their British, Muslim, female selves while also contributing to their local communities, rather than 'withdrawing into their shells'? I have taken case studies of positive social and

individual outcomes and examined what factors have helped to build robust identities for these women.

My data shows Muslim women articulating lived, 'modern' Islam in creative ways, and in a 'newly-assertive' mode of being. They are challenging the precepts of secularism, and demanding a 'third space' for their sacred yet very British worldview. Facing the rise of fractured and vulnerable identities in the form of radicalisation and other modes of disaffection amongst a small number of Muslim youth of both genders, such an exercise may prove valuable in the study of minority cultures. Furthermore, the contention introduced earlier that multiculturalism as a national project is now redundant continues to be challenged.

Theoretical Considerations

To give a conceptual framework to the negotiated strategies employed by women seeking alternatives to the liberal worldview, I appropriate the concept of hybridised spaces inhabited by individuals mediating multiple identities. In particular, critical theorist Homi Bhabha employs the term to move away from the notion of fixed and 'authentic' cultural identities. 'All forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity,' he argues, 'but for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge' (1990: 211).

For my study, the idea of a constant flux and negotiation of identity resonates; in particular, the concept of crafting a 'third space' seems apt in describing the strategies employed by Muslim women in trying to 'marry' their presence in a Western, liberal context with their cultural and religious identification. Bhabha, in the realm of postcolonial studies, has employed this term to denote the struggle of hybridised individuals caught between their relatively 'new' environments and memories of cultures left behind. In particular, he argues against the homogenisation and essentialisation of the experiences and hybrid cultures of immigrants and displaced peoples who are faced with the dissonance of sometimes opposing loyalties. Looking to the future, in his case beyond the continuing reach of colonial powers, he envisions the creation of a 'third space' as an opening up of sites for negotiation:

'Something opens up as an effect of this dialectic, something that will not be contained within it, that cannot be returned to the two oppositional principles. Once it opens up, we are in a different space, we are making different presumptions and mobilizing emergent, unanticipated forms of historical agency' (1995*)*

One could venture that, in fact, the on-going construction of robust and positive identities is indeed empowerment itself, an empowerment that enables previously subdued voices to rise over and above 'two oppositional principles', allowing alternative worldviews to emerge. In Bhabha's words, 'these "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining society itself' (2004: 2).

In the years since Bhabha formulated his postcolonial theories, a number of commentators have criticised his approach for its theoretical bias, overlooking everyday power and material imbalances between the subaltern and hegemonic classes (Parry, 2004; Ahmad, 1995; Dirlik, 1997). His notions of hybridity, liminal spaces and cultural mediation have, furthermore, been faulted for ignoring the intricacies of daily life. In particular, these critiques stress what they see as the overly abstract and textual basis of Bhabha's construction, one that ignores the specificities of local cultures.

Recognising the criticisms above as valid and worthy of consideration, I retain Bhabha's conception of hybridity as my overarching model, but qualify my analysis in a later chapter with the more recent, feminist intervention of 'intersectionality'. While I have proffered a more detailed look at Kimberly Crenshaw's (1989) groundbreaking original theory in chapter six, here I employ Avtar Brah's (1996) concept of 'diaspora space' as a site of intersectionality that aids in the description of the lives of my respondents.

Rather than conceptualise the relationship between colonised/subaltern/minority and coloniser/hegemonic class/mainstream as linear and necessarily subjugating, Brah considers the diasporic space as 'the site where *the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native*' (1996: 209, emphasis in original). In so much as the women in my sample were second- and third-generation 'native diasporians', Brah's two-way conception of an alternative space describes their mediations well. It envisages a space in which minorities (in her case, South Asian minorities in Britain) weave a complex web of religious, cultural, social and economic transactions to create a fluid and ever-changing identity. The 'diaspora space', like the 'hybrid' space of Bhabha's earlier intervention but broken down to allow wider application, is where this identity construction happens.

Crucially for my research, Brah's conception of an alternative space (created and employed by minorities) privileges the discourse of intersectional forces that may act on individual identities. Thus, the power of this theoretical framework lies in that it allows 'us to understand that identity and difference are not fixed but made and remade, located and relocated through an active process of negotiation and re-negotiation of power and meaning in any given context or situation' (Gabriel et al. 2012: 275). In this way, Brah's more concrete underpinnings and her recognition of power imbalances and the attendant discriminations they create complement Bhabha's earlier overarching, yet equally valuable, concepts. For my analysis, both theorists have provided an illuminating framework within which to examine Muslim women's identities.

It seems valuable here to elucidate the particular conception of identity that arises out of this 'third space'. It is a creation of selfhood that is responsive, not static, and manifested according to both the needs of circumstance and situation, but also according to one's inner subjectivities. It can be seen as heterogenous, not homogenous, and multifaceted rather than singular; and it is exactly in this way that the hybrid and fluid nature of the identities of my respondents is manifested.

A number of significant themes that have impacted my respondents, and have helped to nurture strength in their identity construction, arose out of my fieldwork: grounded childhood experiences, early experiences of living with diversity, the impact of 'invisible' social processes with special reference to public encounters, and, finally, the underlying and ubiquitous role of religion and belief in the lives of these women. It is the first three factors in identity-creation that we now turn to below; the rubric of faith and belief is significant

enough in the narratives of my respondents to deserve a discussion of its own, and will be dealt with in the next chapter. In all of the what follows, the aim is to explore more closely how the deliberate creation of 'new' and hybrid identity forms can take place in an empowering 'third space'.

Grounded Childhoods and Diverse Neighbourhoods: Negotiating Difference Early in Life

'You find me a friend of everyone in this country.' (Huda, respondent)

My first few moments with each respondent began with a look at their early childhoods and upbringing; keeping the questioning deliberately open-ended and non-leading, I was interested in the hue these reflections would take. The women were encouraged to explore and reveal early childhood memories in a way that reflected their most memorable experiences, and share those that had impacted on their lives.

On collating these early childhood backgrounds, it transpired that very few had had a privileged social upbringing. In fact, the vast majority of my respondents described grounded childhoods spent in diverse neighbourhoods where being slightly 'different' was neither unusual, nor problematic.

Forty-something Aini, a pharmacist, *Madrassa* manager and mother of four, described her childhood in South London in great detail. I quote a lengthy extract here, to highlight a number of factors that have gone into creating her strong, hybrid selfhood:

A: 'We grew up on the council estate until I was about 8, we were in South East London, living in a council estate in a flat. My parents both had migrated from Mauritius to come here, not qualified or educated, so quite a simple upbringing for me. I never felt that I missed anything.

SB: You didn't?

A: Never at all. In a way, because that was my circle, you have nothing to compare to. In those days, life was much simpler in terms of media, etc. So, I was very content, but now when you look back you realise you didn't have a lot. But I never grew up feeling like (I was) missing out.

I think I had *MāshāʾAllāh, MāshāʾAllāh* this confidence, just felt quite confident. I think other things were in place, like family was secure. I really enjoyed school and I felt positive about being there, I thought I had good relationships with my teachers, and I had a lot of friends, so I think those things gave you confidence.

I remember having an awareness that I am different here, especially at times like Christmas or these sorts of big festivals, just feeling that there is a difference here but it wasn't something. And especially because of all the racism, been called Paki on the estate, you do feel that you are different, but somehow at school I had that awareness, but it wasn't

something that was a *big* problem for me. I just got on with it basically. And then we moved to North London.

But I think in a way I got other skills from that upbringing and my parents were both working full time. Even from East London when we were in a flat, when I was in Yr.4 my mum was working in London and she had to leave for work. She would leave the key with my brother and I; she would have to go to work, but she would say "watch the clock and when it's this time leave home and you go to school".

Interviewer: And you were responsible for yourself?

A: So even for my age - 8, we were getting ourselves to school and that continued while we were on the estate. Then we went to secondary school, again it's a very rough school but I just remember going to school thinking, I'm not going to let anyone bully me, I was really determined to do well.'

In the extract above, Aini identifies both a number of early childhood difficulties and also reflects on how she coped with them. Experiencing a 'typical' migrant arrival, her family start their British life on a council estate amongst residents from a number of different nationalities. With neither parent having a clear professional background, both her parents worked long hours in low-paid yet respectable jobs. While she has mentioned here the independence that was expected from both herself and her brother at a young age, later on in the interview (not quoted above), she spoke in detail about the constant harassment they received on the estate, mistaken for 'Pakis' on the block. Even at the tender age that she was, she mentions a number of times how she had 'quite a simple upbringing', 'you never had a

lot' and 'life was much simpler'. For Aini, all this came together in an early-childhood 'awareness that I am different here, especially at times like Christmas'.

However, of more interest here are the factors which she constantly identifies that developed her resilience, and helped the family to cope. Despite her intrinsically humble nature, Aini recognises that even at a young age, she 'had this confidence *MāshāʾAllāh*', giving credit to the 'other things that were in place' for instilling this confidence she felt. Chief amongst these resilience-building 'other things' is the foundation of her secure family background. Peppered throughout her interview are references to her hard-working yet 'down-to-earth' and principled parents; in addition, she mentions long leisurely hours spent with extended family in screen-free environments as the backdrop for her pleasant and grounded childhood. She also mentions briefly, both in the extract above and elsewhere in our discussions, the positive effect of having no media-generated distractions and negative narratives in her childhood.

In addition, the importance of good relationships outside the home is central to her early life. Included in these social connections are not only friends of varied backgrounds, but caring and concerned teachers at school who bolstered her academic confidence. Along with the centrality of parents as guiding adult figures, these teachers also proved to be inspiring role models; Aini considered this essential to building her resilience and confidence early in life.

Above all however, I was struck by the 'get-on-with-it' attitude of my respondents, even in the face of the widespread racism of the 80s, and life in rough schools and neighbourhoods. I found an overarching attitude of strength and positivity. So, Aini made constant references to being/feeling 'different' in early childhood, but stressed that 'it wasn't something that was a

big problem for me'. She negotiated this 'difference' through the construction of a strong sense of self at an early age, manifested in selected phrases:

'But I never grew up feeling like I missed out'

'I just got on with it basically'

'So, I was very content'

'I'm not going to let anyone bully me, I was really determined to do well'

'I think I got other skills from that upbringing'

We see in the extracts above, and in the analysis of Aini's narrative, the ability to use her diasporic space to build fluid and resourceful identities. Coming from a humble heritage, she has learnt the value of difference, hard work and confidence in one's own self. While she herself refers to these factors as 'skills from that upbringing', in Bhabha's terms, we may say Aini has successfully developed hybrid notions of identity and selfhood by utilising the third space provided by her family's upbringing.

Another respondent, Irum, a prominent lawyer and mother of three, relates similar childhood memories of growing up in the 70s and 80s, in a colourful description of her childhood nurturing:

'I: I grew up in a very humble home. I was one of the first to go to uni in my family. I'm from a very large family, 8 brothers and sisters. My parents were, I would say uneducated, working class people. But I think my parents then had the vision that a lot of Muslims lack today. I grew up in a completely multicultural environment… We went to Sunday school because my mom wanted us to learn about the Christian faith. So, every Sunday we would go

to Sunday school and every night we go to masjid for Quran lessons for Islam. Our house was full of English, Indian, and Pakistani friends, because my parents were very warm people, and my mother cooked a lot and our house was open. You see, my house was never empty, it was full from morning to night, people were coming and going, eating, talking. So, it wasn't an academic environment, but it was very much a social environment that we had. And that's the kinds of warm upbringing I had and because I had 8 brothers and sisters. Yes, it was, I think, a very beautiful setting, and so like, integrated, you know. We had new people next door, and my mom would be sending food there. It was a completely outstanding environment, but very integrated into the community.

SB: So, you had a very strong sense of your heritage as well?

I: Yes, completely.

SB: But also, a strong sense of belonging in this country?

I: Really strong sense, you know, and we loved the fact that we had friends from different backgrounds.

SB: What about school? What was that like for you?

I: School was very tough, because we moved house a lot, because we were in council houses. Because first we used to live in rented accommodation when my parents arrived from Africa. Eventually we moved into council houses, but councils tend to move you on every two or three years. So, education was very disruptive. My last house move was in the middle of my

'O' levels, which meant I did horribly in my 'O' levels, GCSEs that year, and I had to retake a lot of them. And I didn't really find my feet until I went to college, because that's when we got re-stabilised. We were in the house, we are there for 12 years, we didn't move, and things were much more stable. But moving house every two, three years was really disruptive. And I got bullied at school, every new school I got bullied a lot.'

Like Aini above, Irum spoke warmly of the exuberance and support of her family in early childhood. In particular, she credits the 'vision' of her working-class parents; quite unusually for a Muslim Asian family of that era, they insisted that their children attend Sunday school as well as the local Islamic *madrassa*. This, she later explained to me, was in the interest of giving them a rounded British education, but with a good understanding of their heritage and cultural background. She spoke proudly of growing up in a 'completely multicultural environment'. The home she described seems a microcosm of the extended diverse yet friendly neighbourhood, of which herself and her siblings felt an intrinsic part; twice she mentions feeling completely integrated into her neighbourhood.

Also, like Aini, she did not seem negatively affected by either her early council estate experiences, nor by her 'disruptive' education, eventually becoming the first in her family to attend university and take a degree in Law. She later recalls a life-transforming incident where she was physically and verbally bullied and subject to racism at the hands of an older schoolboy; coming home expecting to be 'protected' and supported, she was subjected to a lecture by her father on 'standing up for yourself'. Irum promptly did so the very next day, and has since not allowed bullying or racism to go unchallenged. In her narrative, her few but vivid experiences of being bullied have gone a long way to build resilience and core strength in her; she, like Aini above, has made use of the nurturing diasporic opportunities available to

her to develop a steadfast hybrid identity. One is reminded here of Bhabha's belief that 'the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable' (1990:211). Irum displayed a resilient, steadfast approach to life, like Aini, not allowing tough childhood experiences to halt her development. Rather than displaying a victimhood mentality, she has emerged through these difficult childhood experiences with a staunch identity, something different, new and unrecognisable to the previous generation.

Finally, Huda has a rather unusual background amongst my respondents. An unmarried health-worker in the NHS and a heavily committed community worker, hailing from a Somali background, she has in fact had a privileged boarding school upbringing in Yemen:

'Huda: Well, I went to different countries. My childhood was in Yemen, I was in a boarding school there, which was equivalent to Eton, very expensive. My late mom - my mother was a nurse and reason I wasn't there (i.e. with mom), was because she used to do night shifts. Mom instilled in me education and the importance of education. This is what I'm passionate about. Getting them (her clients) to realize whatever you want, you *get*, if you have got the certificate in your pocket.

SB: Were your parents educated as well?

Huda: My dad - no, but my mom to a certain level. *Lā ilāha illā allāh* (a common interjection in her speech). Later then I moved to Egypt in a boarding school as well. They dumped me, poor me...from one boarding school to another (laughter).

SB: Which you would not recommend for your children?

Huda: *No* actually, (it was) good! Oh yes, that has shaped me, that shaped the independent me, the independent me that will go anywhere, is quite open to others, can mix with this and that, because you are in a boarding school with people from all over. Basically, most of them are middle class or wealthy so that's why I'm at ease and given that freedom.

SB: Muslims and Non-Muslims?

Huda: Mostly they were Muslims. But yeah, it does not make any difference, apart from me wearing the *hijāb*, you (will) find me chatting with anyone. (laughs) …So you find me a friend of everyone in this country.'

Huda's childhood experiences, though markedly different to both Aini's and Irum's, have also shaped a spirited, assertive yet adaptable selfhood. Her strict upper-class boarding school life has instilled the value of not only education, but also its utilitarian benefits; she vehemently encourages her own clients from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds to obtain self-sufficiency through education and vocational training. In fashioning herself as a community champion for disaffected Somali and other families, she has translated her own childhood experiences of being left to fend for herself into an independent core persona that actually gives strength to others. In her own words, her experiences early in life have 'shaped the independent me'; she now spends a significant amount of time in her community role convincing clients to achieve economic self-sufficiency and not rely on welfare provision, while at the same time always working full-time herself to support her independent single life as a Muslim woman. Finally, her cosmopolitan and upper-class education has made her 'quite

open to others', she feels she can 'mix with this and that (i.e. a variety of people)'. So, despite being visibly and staunchly Muslim, she very comfortably opens up to and communicates with both mainstream and minority peoples.

Like Aini and Irum, and despite a foreign and different background, Huda has found a way to wear both her faith and her nationalism with ease. Like them, she has fashioned herself as a resourceful community activist, and did not speak of any dissonance between the various facets of her identity. Brah's (1996) concept of diasporic space is relevant to Huda's experience; as a first-generation migrant, she has utilised this space and overcome the disadvantages new migrants can often. Not allowing her experience to be overshadowed by imbalances of power and opportunity, she now comes across as culturally very different, yet open and assertive in her demeanour.

The cases of all three women above--- Aini, Irum and Huda --- demonstrate the clear impact of family, community and schooling on strong, hybrid identities. Backgrounds anchored in tough neighbourhood and schooling experiences have led to the development of resilient women with a clear sense of self. Positive public experiences on the other hand, even early in childhood, have taught them negotiation and acceptance of different facets of identity/ coping mechanisms.

Moreover, their subjectivities are premised on a sense of 'difference' acquired early in childhood. They have learnt that individual differences need not be construed negatively, and have negotiated the differences to their advantage. This grounded core identity, furthermore, has allowed these women to move outside their comfort zone, and interact beyond their own communities.

For me, nothing sums up this embracing of difference better than the succinct explanation given by another respondent, Zoya; shrugging nonchalantly, she tells me how she explains herself to non-Muslim friends: '…your culture is fish and chips, my culture is curry.' In the words of Weinreich, these women are 'making sense of themselves in a manner commensurate with their biographical experiences' (2009: 134).

Beneath the Surface: Less Visible Aspects of Selfhood

'When it comes to Muslim women, it's still all about what we wear… What we say, our achievements, opinions and self-determination continue to be brushed aside.' (Janmohamed, 2014)

'Subordinate groups have to swim against the tide to give expression to their own lived experience and to gain a hearing, let alone an amplification.'

(Woodhead, 2013:9)

In the overall discourse around minority identities, and about Muslim minority identities in particular, the observed and immediately apparent seem to have taken pride of place. I have argued in the introduction to my thesis that issues of *hijāb, jilbāb* and *niqāb*, for instance, have overshadowed less visible but arguably more pertinent matters of identity-creation in

the public eye. Dessing et al. argue for a shift away from 'hypervisible' and institutional forms of studying religion that have dominated in the recent past, to redress the imbalance and look at 'less visible forms of religion that also deserve attention' (2013:2). In so far as the study of Muslim identities has also tended to focus on visible aspects of selfhood, it seems apt here to discuss less visible and more subtle forms of identity-construction. This 'beneath the surface' look at the ways in which identity is negotiated aims to bring about greater nuance in the study of 'ordinary' Muslim women.

In particular, little attention has been paid to the social processes, both public and private, through which identity is constructed and negotiated. I argue below that it is precisely through these 'invisible' and continuous social interactions and that second- and third-generation Muslim women are creating 'new' ways to be and belong in Britain.

Public Identities and Private Selves

'I think you have to be brave and realise you can carry your roots with you, but your roots do not have to determine where your leaves grow.' (Cheryl, respondent)

In his study of the identity formation of Muslim Religious Education (RE) teachers, Matthew Vince argues that we ignore invisible and implicit ways of being Muslim; his study underscores 'a need to apply new theoretical tools to better articulate the ways in which Muslims are occupying diverse social positions' (2018:2). Similar to a large number of my respondents, his subjects (Muslim RE teachers) did not dwell on their religious identity;

instead, they focused on their professional and community roles, with their Muslim identity coming through not as explicit practice, but as an underpinning ethos. Interestingly for my study, Vince finds that these RE teachers have developed a 'creative space' from where they undertake 'identity-work' in order to manage what can sometimes be oppositional demands of their faith and their professional roles. He quotes a number of his respondents expressing sentiments such as 'I am an RE teacher who happens to be Muslim… my religion or lack of is not relevant to the subject that I'm presenting' (Vince 2018:5). In instances such as these, one cannot help but notice the similarity between this approach to faith and the dominant secular discourse that requires individuals to downplay religious commitments in public spaces. By deeming their religion 'irrelevant' in their professional roles, Vince's respondents have formulated an identity construct which allows them to elide with ease their 'selves' as practitioners publicly yet also as practicing Muslims privately.

The combining of personal beliefs with professional identities is not, however, always easy. While most of my respondents mentioned the positive experience of accessing prayer spaces and obtaining religious holidays at work, social occasions were often a challenge. Most of all, meeting up at the pub and office parties with alcohol present were most frequently mentioned as challenges.

 Aini told me: 'I do have social opportunity at work, but because of the alcohol aspect and the fact that it's far away and the fact that I'm quite tired, I'm not so comfortable going out with you and your drinking. I am just a bit tired and I'd rather be home. I get along really well with everyone at work, but they probably think I'm a bit anti-social… (a thoughtful pause). Maybe I should do something about that'.

Pnina Werbner (2013; 2017) presents an interesting analytical frame within which multiple identities, public and private, can be examined. Especially focusing on everyday encounters, she argues that in their various daily public and social encounters, individuals from different cultures switch easily and naturally between different facets of their identity, depending on the required context. In an empowering and creative way, shared positive identities are highlighted to assist social relations and ensure the smooth flow of public life. In a salute to the hybrid switching between different components of identity, she highlights how 'they embrace this multiplicity while apparently disattending to it for the sake of public civility' (2013: 416). Building on this, Werbner goes so far as to credit daily, amiable social interactions with building an 'egalitarianism and amity… whenever actors highlight a shared identity held in common that enables them to engage in positive communication' (2013: 402). Here, she constructs a model of important 'surface' aspects of identity that allow the smooth functioning of social relations and public life; dig beneath this surface and one finds the existence of a number of additional intersecting identity constructs, related to ethnicity, gender and social class to name a few. This, in Werbner's construction, is termed the success of 'everyday multiculturalism': recognising one's various ethnic and religious identities, yet curbing them as required in order to allow the smooth flow of public life.

However, Werbner also recognises that 'such surface civility may… be disrupted by communicative breakdowns whenever participants do not share implicit systems of relevancy' (2013: 401). She does not deny that migrant communities suffer from a host of discriminations and inequalities, but argues that to employ a primarily intersectional analysis (in the sense of Crenshaw's lens of discriminations) is to prioritise a negative, reified and essentialised construction of identity. Moving on to develop the analysis even further, she also distinguishes between the experiences of first-generation migrants, as opposed to

second- and third-generation migrants, who have a much better grasp of shared public relevancies of everyday life in Britain. Comparing the experiences of the former to the latter, she argues that the young 'easily practice everyday multiculturalism'; in coming to this conclusion, one wonders whether the implicit assumption is, therefore, that subsequent generations of migrants suffer less disadvantage and discrimination. Referring back to the office experience of Aini above, she quietly faces religious discrimination in not being able to socialise with colleagues because of her beliefs about alcohol; we can see her acknowledgement that colleagues have a different 'system of relevancy' and may not understand her position. However, her reflections during the interview process with me get her thinking, and she debates whether she has a responsibility to 'do something about that'.

My research, consisting almost entirely of second- and third-generation children of migrants and converts to Islam, paints a varied picture. I have found that due to the heightened securitisation of Muslim minorities following the events of 9/11, and also the ubiquitous negative media portrayals of Muslim women in particular, they do in fact suffer both heightened and new forms of discrimination. Yet they have also developed more resilient and creative ways of coping in public roles, of performing what Werbner terms 'surface civility'. In keeping with both Vince and Werbner, it may be argued that in order to construct a viable and realistic portrait of individual identities, the rubric must include superficial and beneath-the-surface formulations. Both formulations, furthermore, contribute equally and positively to the identity construction as experienced by minorities.

Problematising Identity Construction

A discussion of identity construction would be incomplete without highlighting the situational and contextual nature of identities. The ease with which my respondents conciliate

between public and private roles may be highlighted as a successful coping mechanism, a tool that contributes to robust identities. The more confident women, furthermore, comfortably display aspects of their 'private selves' in public encounters, and conversely are enabled in their private spheres by the confidence gained in public spheres.

The work of late psychologist Peter Weinreich (2009) is instrumental here. Drawing on an interdisciplinary framework, he emphasises the fluid and interminably developing nature of identities favoured by this thesis. His analysis distinguishes between what he terms 'primordialists' and 'situationalists'; the former 'stay with the established norms for their ethnic community', while the latter 'modulate their identifications with others, according to their being cued into the one or other cultural context'. For the purposes of this thesis, it is the 'situationalist' mode of being that is of interest. In the case of Muslim communities, for example, this would mean emphasising the 'Islamic' aspects of their culture when in confessional Muslim surroundings, yet emphasising more closely with the British in mainstream situations. In this mode, Weinreich characterises people as more 'malleable… in their empathetic identifications with alternative cultural groups' (2009:124). I argue that my respondents display such 'malleability' in the face of different cultural contexts, both public and private; they have learnt to switch successfully between the various contexts in which they find themselves and wear different facets of their identity with ease. We see this clearly in Aini's description of a workplace interview:

'I did long locums in this hospital in Chichester and I just knew from the time I walked in - you can tell when someone sees you and they meet you for the first time- this manager in the pharmacy was completely welcoming and I just fitted in, even though I was the only - forget *hijābi*! - brown face in that whole department. They offered me a job, but I couldn't take it.

And that hospital had the most beautiful multi-faith prayer room, it had a water feature and it was so tranquil and peaceful and it was easy to pray there… Whenever I go to a place where I am the only Muslim, it doesn't dilute my faith.'

We see in the extract above a number of processes at play. Aini enthusiastically relates her feelings of being welcomed and 'fitting in' despite being the only brown and *hijāb*-wearing woman in the department. To clarify, she had to turn down the job due to personal circumstances, not due to any negative perceptions related to the workplace itself. She has successfully combined her 'private self' as a Muslim with her professional persona in requesting a prayer space and time; this has been a good experience for her, making it 'easy to pray there', and she expresses regret that she was unable to take the job. In this negotiation, Aini displays her ability to empathise and relate to both her 'Muslim' and her 'professional/British' cultural group, in a process described by both Werbner ('switching between multiple positive identities') and Weinreich ('empathetic identifications with alternative cultural groups'). Interestingly, she reverses the personal/professional identity constructs employed by Vince's respondents (Muslim schoolteachers); whereas Vince's respondents downplayed their Muslim identity in school settings, Aini actively challenges the liberal secular office space by requesting a prayer space.

It may be reasonably argued that techniques such as 'switching' (Werbner 2013; 2017) and 'situationality' (Weinreich 2009) are not exclusive to minorities, but are common to all people. While this is undoubtedly true, I refer back to an intersectional perspective to argue that minorities have more discrimination and disadvantage to contend with. Therefore, they need to use techniques of creative negotiation more often when it comes to selfhood, than do host/majority individuals. In resisting the inequalities that they face, disproportionately to

mainstream communities, minorities will have to employ 'situationality' and its attendant tools more frequently. My study demonstrates the effectiveness with which a sample of British Muslim women have employed tools such as this to negotiate their positions as women of faith living in a secular society.

Baha, a second-generation Scottish-Egyptian mother of three, teacher and research student, refers to her identity juggling as 'cultural navigation':

Baha: 'I do also recognise that nothing stands still, and I think (of myself) as sort of being, if you like, a sort of cultural navigator 'cause you're constantly trying to navigate between... you know, "Well this is my life at school, what can I take? What should I leave? What can I—" so for example, like I can still recite the Lord's Prayer! Because it's engrained. But I never said it then… but simply by being, sitting there and by a sort of osmosis….

SB: Would you call yourself a cultural navigator then?

Baha: Yeah, yeah, I guess so. Definitely, yeah and I think a lot of our generation is…'

Baha here illustrates the importance of 'surface sociability' and the identities subconsciously created at the junction of two cultures… her 'Muslim child' self, who never recited the Lord's Prayer at school, but also her 'Scottish' self that learnt the very same Prayer 'by a sort of osmosis' at Primary school. As a result of her mainstream education and attendant empathetic mannerism, she can now act as a 'cultural navigator' and consciously makes identity-choices that combine her national and religious affiliations.

For my respondents who have converted to Islam in adulthood, hybridity, the third space and cultural navigation take on a different meaning. Their identity negotiations involve responding to not just a feeling of being disadvantaged by their religious choice, but interestingly also by members of their own ethnic group. The barriers to being accepted by the mainstream remain high for converts, causing them to often withdraw into limited social microcosms. In her detailed and insightful study of conversion in Britain, Zebiri reports that 'sometimes marginalised within the majority Muslim community, converts often inhabit a transitional or liminal space' (2008:3). From within this space, they can occupy the unique position of cultural mediators, by virtue of being 'outside' both non-Muslim communities of their origin, but also the born Muslims of their new religious affiliations. As such, Zebiri finds that converts can often find themselves in a position to be critical of both communities; a number of my convert respondents held strong views about the Muslim communities to which they were exposed.

Amy, a convert of mixed ethnicity, began to feel in her forties that restricting herself to Muslim friends was 'too insular', and actively reconnected with her old non-Muslim social circles; Cheryl, of majority ethnic background, spends much time criticising the Pakistani Muslim attachment to culture and tradition. Her vision for the future of British Muslims lies in distancing themselves from cultural attachments, and instead developing more spiritual focuses. On the other hand, she felt confident that the cold shoulder she often gets from non-Muslim individuals, especially the highly educated, is based in distinctions of class, and not

culture. Despite being a highly educated intercultural consultant, she senses that her 'Muslimness' indicates to them that she is of humble background:

Cheryl: 'I do find that if people who are not Muslims know me to be Muslim there is a barrier. And then they start asking lots of questions.

SB: Does the barrier then come down?

Cheryl: With the right people, yeah. With others they are very polite, and they never make any more comments about it, but they might think it is a bit odd. But you know, it's fine. I just ignore it, and they ignore it. So I don't think that is a problem. I think, as a revert, you face…it's very complicated. There are layers and layers of complication to your social interactions.'

Cheryl has found a comfortable 'liminal space' where she feels a sense of belonging in a Moroccan Sufi order. She went on to explain to me how herself and her husband (also a revert) have found solace and support in their regular visits to a Moroccan *zāwiyah* (Sufi religious community/retreat). As a White Muslim family, they feel excluded by all but only the very culturally aware mainstream non-Muslim communities. Conversely, she also experiences marginalisation from British Muslim communities because she follows neither a strict *Salafī* nor *Barēlvī* 'version' of Islam. She explained in detail how her *tarīqa* had been a lifeline for them, and helped them to overcome the difficulties of not being accepted by either cultural group. As a deeply reflective woman, she is aware of the 'layers and layers of complications to social interactions', but chooses to maintain surface sociability when she

senses antagonism or discomfort, while maintaining close ties with her fellow worshippers in the *tarīqa*.

Cheryl's 'situationality' is manifest in both sartorial and behavioural changes, depending on her context. She shared with me that she can sometimes remove her *hijāb* when needed, and also keep her distance in professional spheres, not giving colleagues an opening to discuss her personal life. This coping strategy is also referred to by Zebiri. 'Identity is not just about the individual', she states, 'but about the relationship between the individual and society: changing social structures have a huge impact on the way in which individuals construe identity' (2008: 88). In the special case of conversion however, she finds that converts cope with changing (and often alienating) social relations by emphasising the spiritual aspects of their 'new' selves, and focussing on their relationship to God (2008: 89). This, again, was manifest in Cheryl's recurring references to how social attitudes did not matter to her: 'But you know, it's fine. I just ignore it, and they ignore it'. Instead, she spoke at length of her 'spiritual roots', and emphasised how she did not feel the need for cultural roots. Paraphrasing her advice quoted at the top of this section, she stresses passionately that individuals who were born Muslims would do better to set themselves free from cultural baggage and not let 'their roots determine where their leaves grow'. In emphasising her connection to God and a spiritual community, over her heritage culture, Cheryl has found empowerment and the strength to cope with antagonism towards her White British Muslim identity. In her own words, she has 'found a way around the barrier':

'And while acknowledging the difficulty that one faces when having that initial conversation about identity and the meaning that identity has in the conditions you are living in, you either stop at the zero game or you say, "and now what am I going to do? What is the next step?"

You know we have to grow with individuals throughout our lives. And that means do not push against the barrier. Just find a way around the barrier. That's what makes us complete human beings.'

Interestingly, of my six convert respondents, the two who hailed from Asian background themselves did not speak of feeling marginalised by their new Muslim communities. Instead, their initial identity dilemmas were around 'what kind of Islam' to practice. Yusra, from a Hindu background but brought up in largely secular environments by a variety of foster families, 'always believed in a God… but I just didn't know anything about Him'. On leaving social care and discovering Islam at university, she found herself drawn to the inflammable rhetoric of Al Mohajiroon. Her journey to Islam took a turn a few years later, when she left this polarising group to practice a more 'mainstream Islam'; she now uses her experiences to inform her international work on deradicalisation. Of relevance to the discussion here is the fact that much of her narrative, and her subsequent motivation to guide those who may be tempted by polarising views, was around her journey through various cognitive approaches to Islam.

Shabnam, a convert hailing originally from a small South Indian sect, described a similar journey after conversion. She was initially befriended by literalist and *Wahābi*-inspired communities in West London and Luton; with time and the experience of raising children, she began to realise the importance of 'mixing with other communities (of non-Muslims)'. At the time of my interview with her, she was involved in a number of council-partnered initiatives related to improving community relations in Luton. Thus, while Amy and Cheryl (both non-Asian) had struggled to find welcoming people on conversion, Yusra and Shabnam (both of Asian origin) felt welcomed by the largely Asian Muslim communities around them,

but found that they moved through various approaches to Islam before they found an intellectual 'home' that they sat comfortably in. This would suggest an additional bias in Muslim communities against Black and mainstream White converts, however unintended. In Amy's case, she felt the receiving community to be too insular; in Cheryl's case, she strongly felt side lined by the Muslim community in her locality because of her commitment to Sufism. Zebiri, in fact, argues that 'intellectual and cognitive factors figure prominently in conversion to Islam, and seem to be at least as important as emotional factors, if not more so' (2008:53). She also reports the high incidence of rational and intellectual influences in the conversion narratives of her respondents (2008:56).

While actual conversion stories did not form a significant focus in my interviews, it is worth highlighting briefly how these women came to Islam. In this respect, two processes feature in the work of both Zebiri, in the British context, and Roald, in her work with Scandinavian converts: those of the 'crisis' element, and the 'affectional' element in conversion to Islam (Roald, 2004: 93-5; Zebiri, 2008:54). The crisis element in conversion refers to the role that life crises, such as divorce and death, can have in triggering conversion; in the case of conversion to Islam, both studies find that this such personal crises do not form a significant part of the narrative. Roald offers an insightful explanation; if one were recovering from emotional trauma, she suggests, they would be unlikely to choose a religion that has a widespread negative public image, as opposed to one that feels more familiar. The 'affectional' element in conversion is described by Zebiri as 'personal attachment to members of the religion in question' (2008:54), often through romantic relationships across cultures. Here, however, the picture for conversion to Islam is less clear, with researchers divided almost equally on the importance of this factor in conversions to Islam. Clearly, some

converts come to Islam largely as a result of intellectual study and reflection, while others make the journey through 'a form of personal relationship with Muslims' (Roald, 2004:97).

For the converts in my study, the picture was also mixed. Two initially came to be exposed to Islam through romantic attachments, and later married the men who introduced them to the faith. Two more undertook deep intellectual study that led them to the faith, driven by their dissatisfaction with Western society; interestingly, their spouses/romantic relationships were not mentioned at all in their discussions. The final two converts reported a journey that combined elements of both personal and intellectual factors that led them to Islam. One had started deep study of the faith and simultaneously met and married a young Muslim man at University; the other, more senior, woman first met and married her Muslim husband, but then went on to become more committed to Islam than him.

The examples above serve to exemplify the extent to which hybrid identity building can be an especially difficult and complex process for converts. For the women discussed above, their identities have undergone significant change and development, and have done so in conversation with society and also intellectual trends. In line with both Bhabha and Brah's conception, my study frames this process as a positive and proactive synthesis, albeit often fraught with difficulty, resulting in self-actualisation for the converts in my sample. The end result, however, is often similar to that of second-generation Muslim women grappling with multiple, and sometimes conflicting, identity constructs; most converts build hyphenated, hybrid identities through which they negotiate life in secular Britain.

Studying the factors operating 'beneath the surface' in identity formulations gives us a clear sense of the daily mediation and juggling being undertaken by my respondents specifically

and individuals from minorities more generally. I have looked at how second- and third-generation Muslim women in my sample have conciliated between often opposing public roles and their private beliefs, how they easily 'switch' between different facets of their identity, and how this is also impacted by the relevant context and situation. I have also briefly explored the special case of converts to Islam. Their coping mechanisms can involve supplanting cultural affiliations with an overarching 'spiritual' focus, as well as negotiating various ways of practicing Islam until they find an intellectual 'home'. Both can be seen as strategies in the third, diasporic space that help them to overcome the particular types of difficulties that they face.

In Conclusion…Revisiting the Third Space

The discussion above has focused on the complex and creative ways in which my sample of Muslim women negotiate their lives. Questions of identity in my research have created a formulation of selfhood that is multi-faceted, dynamic and responsive to context and situation. In charting the life events and attendant factors that have gone into creating strong identities for these women, I have found commonalities that are not initially apparent: early childhood enculturation in mixed neighbourhoods and schools, a strong sense of roots coupled with an acceptance of difference and a strong commitment to education, in its utilitarian and spiritual sense. Less visible but equally significant have been the ability displayed by these women to switch between situations, both public and private, and adapt their positions according to circumstance. The special case of converts is also instructive; they can face additional discriminations, and often withdraw into limited and highly spiritual social contexts as a result.

The creative use of hybrid and 'diaspora' third spaces by a sample of Muslim women has been a central theme running throughout my analysis, manifest in hybrid identities, hybrid choices and hybrid worldviews. In undertaking this discussion, I have attempted to illustrate that 'Muslim women are not powerless as they develop platforms of resistance and amelioration of their condition' (Brown, 2015:51). Hybridity, we have seen, is manifest in their lives as always appropriation and change, sometimes resistance and very often a breaking away from the past; in this unique 'diaspora space', they are enabled to contribute to British society. In this third space, an alternative space, these women are both creating resilient selves, and improving the quality of contact between cultures. In her work of countering extremism, for example, Yusra lists a number of non-Muslim, male colleagues and tells me that: 'they all see me as sisters. They're not Muslims. And *MāshāʾAllāh*, I've been in their company as well where we travel together to other conferences. Not one bit of maliciousness or anything comes out, *alhamdulillah*'. In making contribution, Yusra is also constantly forging ties across communities, and now sees these friendships as central to her worldview; affectionately calling her male non-Muslim colleagues 'brothers' has helped her to maintain her Islamic ethos, yet fully be involved in the professional work required while developing good relationships.

The value of studying the identity constructs of a sample of well-informed and publicly active British Muslim women lies in the potential and possibility that these women may hold for others. Rather than being constructed negatively and regressively, the religious, national, cultural and gendered aspects of identity for these women have merged in a creative and hybrid way, as we have seen in numerous examples above. Furthermore, these women are

challenging Western liberal sensibilities on a daily basis in their refusal to restrict faith practices to private spaces.

These strategies have been made possible by their education and British upbringing, and by being encultured in their own childhoods into faith. Women such as Sumayya and Irum, in fact, credit the distinctly British aspects of their childhood with creating spiritual awareness; Sumayya's Catholic primary school gave her a sense of spirituality lacking at home, and Irum's attendance at (church-based) Sunday school has given her the confidence to do interfaith work. They have a secure grasp of both cultures/traditions, and straddle the two to create a 'workable' third option, a constantly evolving and fluid third option. To refer back to the Bhabha's formulation, these women 'change their conditions of recognition while maintaining their visibility.' (2004:169). However, while Bhabha has framed these hybrid places as 'places of separation from origins and essences' (2004: 171), I found my respondents embracing both origins and essences (their faith and backgrounds), while simultaneously appropriating the discourses of liberalism.

I do also recognise that the ways of knowing and accessing both Islamic teachings and wider British social norms, exhibited by my sample, are not uniformly available to British Muslim women. By virtue of being strong, resourceful women, my respondents exercise a creativity and agency that may not be possible for many Muslim women in Britain. Socio-economic circumstances and cultural prohibitions can, and do, often restrict Muslim women's choices. Women with restricted access to formal education, new arrivals joining their spouses, those living in low-income segregated communities and recent refugees tend to have neither well-rooted, broad-minded upbringings, nor the same resources and networks. Often, their religious practice can be restricted to visible and ritual prescriptions, underpinned by

traditional cultural norms. However, in considering the identity negotiations of a sample of Muslim women practicing faith, engagement and citizenship in secular contexts, I hope to give new meaning and new possibilities to what it means to be a Muslim woman.

I conclude with the spirited critique of Miriam Cooke. In her construction, 'Muslimwomen' across the world, despite facing multiple intersecting discriminations, 'are constructing a cosmopolitan identity with local roots that unites them in a "shared culture" … they are demonstrating to the world how the Muslimwoman cosmopolitan can belong to many different communities while retaining her roots and rights in each. … Women's visible assumption of an Islamic identity in the twenty-first century is projecting a transnational imaginary in which they are full members of their religious *and* political community' (2007: 153).

In fact, the narrative of faith and spirituality in identity was so significant in the lives of my respondents that I have devoted a chapter to it. In the next chapter, I turn to look at the piety and religious identity components of these women, framed within the alternative conceptions of agency and selfhood that have been developed in this chapter.

Chapter 5: The Agency of Pious Women

'As individuals we possess countless attributes and qualities and stand in a host of relationships with others. Some of these attributes and relationships are contingent and transient, whereas others are central and tenacious and shape us profoundly. The fact that we are golfers or members of a particular club is a contingent fact of our lives; we would not become altogether different persons if we ceased being either. By contrast our humanity, gender, culture, religion, values, moral commitments, dominant passions, psychological and moral dispositions, and so forth are constitutive of us in the sense that we either cannot abandon them at all or cannot do so without becoming different kinds of persons.' (Parekh, 2011:4)

In the case of the study of Muslims, an additional rubric must be added to the discourse around what constitutes 'central and tenacious' components of identities: that of religion. Zebiri argues that 'Muslims and other religious people may construe (faith) as a highly significant element of their own identity' (2008:89). Until recently however, identity theory did not emphasise religion. This is now changing, with social scientists recognising that even in Western liberal societies, a significant number of people, but especially women more specifically, define themselves in religious ways (Aune et al., 2008; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Franks, 2001).

Throughout my fieldwork and discussions with respondents, the salience of faith, always implied and sometimes referred to explicitly, formed a major theme. As I have mentioned at

the beginning of this thesis, this was the case despite a method of sample selection that did not privilege women who were visibly practicing. Islam manifested as both powerful and empowering in the lives of these women; for most, it was credited as the main motivation for doing good works. Furthermore, they exhibited a deep spirituality and piety, unobtrusively worn. For them, religion has little political or socio-economic significance. In their journey to faith, they have travelled disparate and often difficult paths, and 'explain it as their conscious choice facilitated by the freedom that the third space of diaspora creates' (Hasan, 2015: 101).

However, Muslim minorities more widely have particularly come under the spotlight in the debate around practicing faith in secular Britain; they have stood out for their continued and, indeed, increasing adherence to faith practices, both in private but also increasingly in public (Hasan, 2015; Warsi, 2017; Yaqin and Morey, 2011). This, of course, can be seen as problematic when cultural and theological loyalties are pitted in opposition to national and political interests. Formulated in this way, the suggested opposition between religious and national components of identity can lead to a rigid, binary construction of identity and its components. More dangerously, this has also led to a characterisation of Muslims in Europe as the disloyal, homogenized 'Other' (Ajala, 2014; Warsi, 2017). Concomitant to this, the greater an individual Muslim's adherence to his/her faith, the more frequently are they equalised with disloyalty to the state.

Increasingly however, studies of British Muslim identity-formation point to a successful merging of these two seemingly incompatible aspects of identity—the 'British' and the 'Muslim'. Nahid Afrose Kabir (2016) terms this 'biculturalism', describing it as 'a personal practice of blending the old and the new--- retaining one's religion, ethnic culture and language and taking on the new language and culture in order to have dual membership'

(p.524). While my study has discovered cultural imaginations and spaces of hybridity that go beyond merely the 'old' and the 'new', Kabir's analysis is valuable in that she finds in her respondents a successful accommodation of heritage and host society cultures. She found that 'the participants appeared to move on with their lives because of their bicultural skills' (p.537). Similarly, in the field of literary production, Hasan (2015), Mahfouz (2017) and Akhtar (forthcoming) identify a number of Muslim writers, both male and female, who 'attempt to make sense of being British and Muslim and dispel the putative irreconcilability between Islam and many key traditional British values' (Hasan, 2015:94). These aspects of identity form significant ones for British Muslims, and this was certainly true for my respondents.

However, it would be naive of me to assume that the experience of the women in my sample, of successfully combining faithful yet British lives, can be generalised widely for British Muslim women. I consider it worthwhile here to discuss the factors that have allowed these women to exercise informed and proactive choices in their lives, a choice not always available to women from Muslim communities more widely. The discussion below represents an attempt to understand the processes that they have been through in both resisting and taking ownership of the difficulties and disadvantages presented in their lives, with particular reference to manifestations of faith. It is my belief that in trying to understand the agency exhibited by the women in my sample, we come one step closer to an improved understanding of the lives of minority women generally.

In the discussion that follows, I defer to theoretical frames around alternative formulations of agency, frames in which agency, rather than seen as a tool to obtain greater freedoms, can be

seen as a proactive choice to live faithful lives. In the second half of the chapter, I explore more closely manifestations of belief in the lives of my respondents.

Questions of Agency in Identity Creation

It may be argued that of central importance to the question of creating robust identities in a difficult and, at times, hostile environment is the question of agency. A proactive and positive approach to living religious lives in a secular society has been possible due to the clear agency exercised by the women in my study.

During the course of my field work, it became quite apparent that my respondents could not have achieved what they have without a clear sense of self, the dominant social structures that operate around them and the resolve to respond to life events in a proactive way. One may refer to self-identification as a sense of who we are and who we want to be; what sets my respondents apart is that they have a clear trajectory in this respect. They have explored the boundaries of what is possible, and have a clear sense of where they are headed, following definite goals. They have used the opportunities available to them in life, and have used both religious and liberal secular frames towards their own empowerment. They have not been passive victims or even spectators in their own lives, but have taken responsibility for charting the path that will enable them to fulfil their goals.

In developing a conceptual framework for my discussion of agency, I have drawn upon the work of anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2005). My concern here is with her radical reformulation of the concept of agency, particularly as applied to Muslim women. To frame

their actively taken choices, I have used a variation of Mahmood's formulation of agency for pious women. Combining both spiritual ideals and 'beneath the surface' social processes, often mundane ones, has allowed me to take a middle way. In this way, the agency exercised by these women can be seen as a capacity for change and a capacity for action; both, of course, preceded by a desire to do things 'differently'.

Mahmood's 2005 study of the women's mosque movement in Cairo was a ground-breaking intervention into both feminist theory and formulations of agency. In particular, she criticized prevailing liberal secular formulations of how agency is enacted, arguing that in 'ignoring other modalities of agency', they did not account fully for the freely chosen religiosity of her Muslim respondents (2005:153). A clearly stated aim of her study has been 'to develop an analytical language for thinking about modalities of agency that exceed liberatory projects (feminist, leftist or liberal)' (2005: x). Developing this aim further, and breaking down the concept of 'agency' specifically as applied to her subjects in the mosque movement, Mahmood argues that we must turn away from seeing agency merely as 'acts of resistance to relations of dominance' (2005: x). Instead, she urges social scientists to consider that individuals may, in fact, have desires other than the pursuit of freedom. In the case of the women of Cairo's mosque movement, for example, 'the pietists' main concern lies elsewhere: namely, the cultivation of submission to what its members interpret to be God's will' (2005: xi).

Furthermore, she constructs a notion of agency as historically and, more importantly for my study, culturally specific and not necessarily bound by liberal secular definitions of what it means to 'have agency' and to 'be free'. Thus, she argues that 'the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance', according to the hegemonic worldview prevailing at the

time (2005:14); for my sample, agency is exhibited not so much in how they *resist* norms of British and Muslim society, but more so in how they *inhabit* these norms in a transformational manner. As such, we need to move away from a conception of agency as given at birth, to one which considers agency, not unlike identity, as a fluid characterisation created in conversation with social forces and norms. Such an understanding, then, concurs with Mahmood's definition of agency as 'a capacity for action' (2005:18), rather than framing it as necessarily reactionary.

Mahmood's formulation of agency as applied to religious Muslim women, and her attendant critique of Western feminism, has generated much debate in the field. While praising Mahmood's ideas as groundbreaking and revolutionary, Samuli Schielke claims she falls into the trap of assuming 'illusions of wholeness' (2009) in her portrayal of pious subjectivities. In his view, the *Salafī* way of life portrayed by Mahmood ignores the ambivalence and confusion of everyday life for Muslims, instead promoting an unattainable and unrealistic normative ideal. Whereas *Salafī* teachings promote a life that is pure and simple, in actuality, he argues that life is messy and complex. Rather than the 'Godliness' that Mahmood's respondents are aiming to acquire through their ethical self-formation, Schielke argues that for most people a number of moral registers work in tandem: religion, social justice, community and family obligations, and romance being amongst them. In his formulation, focusing on key orthodox religious practices is focusing on an 'unattainable' perfection, leading to fragmented lives full of contradiction; conversely, one needs to pay closer attention to life at the margins, where the reality is ambivalent and dependent on 'silence, double standards and cognitive dissonance' (2009: S32).

Similarly, Bangstad (2011) recognises that an 'important problem for secular feminism… has been its apparent inability to conceptualize female agency and freedom in any terms other than resistance or subordination to patriarchal societal norms'; however, he also accuses Mahmood of cultural relativism, claiming that she was mistaken to generalise more widely from a small *Salafī*-oriented group that was 'only part of the picture' (2011: 29-30). In Bangstad's analysis, Mahmood's mistake is also to wholeheartedly support the women's piety movement in Egypt uncritically, while being resoundingly critical of the cultural imperialism of feminism and its related 'political ambitions'.

At this point, I take a step away from both the 'piety turn' and the 'everyday life' view of the lives of Muslim (and other religious) communities to argue for a middle way. My study documents the lives of women exhibiting piety *within* the everyday, and exercising their agency to adapt, conversely, the everyday to their pious subjectivities. The work of Fazila Bhimji is illustrative here. Writing of her research with British Muslim women in religious study groups, she echoes the observation that 'little attention has been given to the social processes that Muslim women may engage in order to better practice and understand Islam… these are not disembodied sites where only religious rituals are performed, but are created, discursive spaces and social networks that allow women to feel empowered within British society' (2009:365). She argues that visible symbols such as that veil have been given undue importance and, as such, form 'only one aspect of their religious identity' (2009:365). In her study, she found that even within these religious spaces, the temporal and public 'identity-work', referred to by Vince in the previous chapter, is taking place; the women in her sample, while apparently attending religious study circles, are simultaneously creating cosmopolitan, political and gendered identities.

While there is no doubt that the arguments of both Mahmood and her critics such as Schielke and Bangstad hold weight, I see the views of both sides as neither mutually incompatible nor mutually exclusive. Mahmood and Schielke, for instance, have studied very different subjects in different contexts—pious urban women within mosque structures, and 'ordinary' rural men going about daily lives, respectively. Both scholars have generalised from their work; and while their conclusions give us valuable insights and groundbreaking critical theory, attention is drawn to their respective contexts and the attendant limitations.

Anthropologist Lara Deeb has made a critical and, in my view, balanced intervention in this debate. She admits to feeling 'caught between' these two ways (the 'piety' and the 'everyday') of approaching the study of Muslims. I concur with her view, asking 'why these bodies of work are so often constructed and read as diametrically opposed to one another, as though this is a zero-sum game' (2015: 93). Crucially, she makes a plea for a change in approach when studying Muslims. Rather than constantly chasing the question of how Muslim subjects are being guided by religion, she calls for a review of 'the everyday'; in her argument, researchers need to examine their own epistemological commitments and ask what they actually mean by the everyday. Are they, she asks, only those practices that seem inimical to liberal sensibilities? 'A problem emerges if what is understood as nonnormative ways of being are taken up as *the only* form of the everyday' (2015: 94). A specific problem with approach, highlighted by Deeb, is that when the everyday is constructed as diametrically opposed to piety, both are reified as static, homogenous, and exclusive. However, in reality, as Schielke (2009) has so eloquently pointed out, real life is 'messy and complicated'. In fact, Deeb argues that both aspects, the everyday living and the idealistic piety, influence and are affected by each other: 'everyday practices are saturated by power and social convention

and… Islamic morality can include space to push back at convention… their coproduction works *in both directions*.' (2015:96, emphasis in original).

Like Deeb, I have found it instrumental to construct both views discussed above as complimentary to each other, both adding value to my analysis. The 'piety turn' describes women exercising agency in striving to attain a spiritual ideal, often using temporal and even liberal feminist tools and arguments to empower themselves and resist social norms; on the other hand, ethnographic attention to the ambivalence and confusion of daily life uncovers valuable information about factors other than religion that play into both formations of identity and the development of agency for women. So, while Mahmood has broadened the horizons of feminism for religious women and questioned narrow liberal conceptions of 'freedom' and 'agency', her critics have wrought an equally valuable service: they have 'humanised' the ordinary Muslim subject. In my view, by studying both aspects as mutually dependent we may achieve a more holistic and nuanced picture of the lives of Muslim women. For, in the words of Deeb, '…perhaps we can come to understand that these areas of life are not so separate in the first place' (2015: 96).

Interestingly, I have found that the Muslim women I spoke to for this study exhibit a creative and hybrid 'matching' of worldviews and subjectivities in making agential choices. The majority desire to abide by and live within faith structures, but at the same time display a deep knowledge of the language of liberalism and feminism. In order to do this, they need to have a knowledge of both worldviews-- feminism/liberalism with its attendant language of 'rights', and religion with its claims to individual spirituality—and an appreciation of how they can be practically appropriated for their use. Along the way, they also face difficulties and dilemmas, and of interest here is how they exercise their agency to overcome these.

For example, Shabnam reflected on how receiving a marriage proposal from a university friend changed the course of her life, emboldening her with the realisation that 'it didn't have to be the other way'. Shabnam had secretly left her family's religion, a small offshoot sect of Sunni Islam. While growing up, her traditional Indian-born parents had always impressed on herself and her sisters that they would marry a cousin from 'back home', who would very likely be less educated than themselves; consequently, they were also brought up to expect to support their future husband financially:

'When my husband proposed… that was a defining moment for me. I came from a family where my dad was very dictatorial. My life was laid out. I would've married someone in the family, probably from India. He (father) knew the whole process… he always talked about how you get a council flat, how you get your husband over, it doesn't matter if they can't speak English.'

However, Shabnam displays her knowledge of what she would gain if she took the courage to grasp this opportunity. In particular, she uses the thought of possible regret later on to spur herself into action:

'So, a defining moment came when a picture was shown to me that you could have something else: integration with the mainstream Muslim community, a choice of whom you marry, being married to somebody who is of the same type of thinking, whom you can converse with… That in itself opens up a whole lot of opportunity … I don't want to look back when I'm forty and think the door was open, and the support was there, and you didn't

go. That's what kept me moving in life. I didn't want to think… the opportunity came, and you didn't take it!'

Here Shabnam displays a strong sense of the practicalities needed to enable her to make her choices: support from the community she aspired to join, the 'open door' of an attractive marriage proposal with its attendant financial support and the opportunities that came with a supportive partner with whom she 'can converse with'. I argue that her foresight, courage and agency at the young age of 19 was enabled by her experience of higher education and the resulting confidence instilled in her; her experience of having her older sister caught in exactly the scenario she wanted to avoid (she was already engaged to a cousin from India) spurred her into action; and finally, the moral support of friends and community elders that she described to me gave her the strength to act.

The story of Anjum was wrought with extreme difficulties of a different sort: she is a mature mother of three, a mental health worker and a survivor of severe domestic abuse, resulting in divorce. Her courage and resilience were exemplary; at interview, I had found it difficult to hear her stories of abuse suffered while raising her young children and receiving no financial support from her husband. As she recounted her painful story to me, the ray of hope came in her determination, developed after a few years of marriage, to continue with her education and develop a career in mental healthcare. She pursued her education even in the turmoil of her life, threatening her husband with the police whenever he tried to stop her. Over the years, she described how she benefitted from NHS mental health support herself, and how she actually received very little support from her community and family. Wanting to avoid the stigma of a divorcee in the family, her own parents would urge her to 'be patient and try again; remember that you have four younger sisters'. For Anjum, support came institutionally

in the form of her non-Muslim manager at work, a well-known Muslim Imam and her case

worker at the Muslim Women's Helpline (now the Muslim Community Helpline,

http://muslimcommunityhelpline.org.uk/home/about-us/):

'I got in touch with *Mufti B*, he was so good to me. I also told my manager at work, and

Subhān Allāh she was a non-Muslim but I *really, really* (spoken with emphasis) respect her,

because she would talk to me *every single day*, ask me how I was. I was able to let it all out.'

In Anjum's case, a number of factors in developing agency stand out: as with Shabnam, her

recognition that education would be crucial to her, her knowledge of existing support systems

tailored to Muslim clients and the courage to access them (the Imam and the Helpline), and

her reaching out to her manager at work. Interestingly, while she expresses here a dissonance

in her approach to non-Muslims ('she was a non-Muslim but I *really, really* respect her'), she

impressed on me later in the interview that she now makes a concerted effort to ensure that

her children do not harbour negative preconceptions of non-Muslims; she told me proudly

that they have close friends from mixed backgrounds who visit the house regularly.

Following my argument above, Shabnam displays agency as both 'a capacity for action' but

also as a 'mode of resistance' to her family's cultural and religious norms. Anjum, on the

other hand, did not initially have the courage to resist the undesirable marriage arranged for

her by her parents, but later developed the 'capacity for action' by virtue of reflecting on her

traumatic experiences. She went on to pursue higher education and improved her situation

dramatically.

A number of my highly educated respondents from upper middle-class backgrounds displayed a reflexive and original approach to improving their situations. Baha is a highly aware teacher-turned-researcher of Arab background; in reflecting on her faith schooling (both Catholic and Muslim) in Britain, she told me found that this promoted 'a really, really strong sort of alternative life'. Consequently, she has actively decided not to send her own children to faith schools. Similarly, at seventy-five years of age, Sabeena was easily one of my oldest respondents; it is worth mentioning here that it was her story that initially inspired my study. As a young married mother in South London, she found herself and others like herself struggling to access council services to which they were entitled. At the same time, she could not help but notice the sorry state of elderly people of minority backgrounds; not being aware of systems of support available to them, she felt they suffered unnecessarily through lack of communication. Like Anjum above, she struggled to educate herself while raising her two children (albeit with her husband's support), and was determined to improve the lot of minorities that she saw around her. Over twenty years ago, she joined the dots between council services and minorities, and set up an award-winning charity that filled a clear gap in provision of services for Black and Asian minorities by local councils, and continues to campaign in her eighties.

My youngest respondent Zainab is a Shia Muslim, active on her university campus. She related to me how she 'decided to try something different' and actively engage in both Shia and Sunni University circles and causes. Interestingly, this was met with support from her family, but ambivalence from her Shia friends. Rather than succumb to the sectarian politics so common between Shia and Sunni groups even on university campuses, she felt she could further the cause of Muslims generally by setting a new standard; since then, a number of her unconvinced friends and extended family have also made overtures to the wider Muslim

community. When I spoke to her in 2015, she felt was proud of her achievements in bringing disparate Sunni and Shia student bodies together:

'Officially, it can be really hard to do things together. When I was leading (the Student Society), I organised a joint event, we had our names on the same poster! … that was like one of my personal achievements.'

My final example of Muslim women exercising agency in the face of difficult, and often traumatic, life experiences comes from Yusra, my only respondent who had been a member of an extremist organization. She related to me her horrific experience of being fostered as a child: 'What happened was, I was sexually, physically, mentally, emotionally abused by this family so eventually I tried to commit suicide twice because of that, until I spoke to a friend'. Through the course of her adult life, she had swung from being a zealous young convert who joined the *Al Muhajiroun* group on campus, to leading a strict quietist *Salafī* lifestyle as a married adult, to finally 'finding herself' in her forties and coming full circle to recover aspects of her pre-conversion self that she now feels she had wrongly abandoned in the name of piety. In the past six years, Yusra has gone back to Higher Education to read criminology, terrorism and political violence. Her plans for the future involve working with ex-members of extremist groups to use her experiences to deradicalise them; she has already started this anti-extremism work both in Britain and internationally. Her pre-conversion feisty and bubbly personality has re-emerged, and in the evenings she expresses herself through dance and music. She is pursuing a Master's programme that, by her own admission, she 'really hates':

'And I'm studying Genocide, which I hate. I really hate it, Saleema, I really hate this Masters. I hate terrorism and political violence, but you know what? It's very much needed.'

I found myself drawn to Yusra's commitment: because she sees a community need, she is pursuing a course of study that she does not particularly enjoy. She explained to me later that she had come to realise that in order to effectively fight extremism, she needed the right qualifications. When encouraged by me to think about what gave her strength and resilience after her traumatic experiences, she offered this:

'Well, I wouldn't wish anyone to be a loner. I think the fact that I was so ostracised, Saleema, I had to find my own corner in the world. I think that was it. I suppose, from a negative it became a positive. It made me stand up on my own two feet.'

Like Anjum above, Yusra was unable to resist and fight back when young; she had given up on her life and had attempted suicide. In her case, her agency was developed later, manifesting as a capacity for action which allowed her to build her personal resilience. In this, she was supported by her husband and shown a new life in her conversion to Islam, albeit an extreme form. In her own words, she credits her strength to being completely alone and ostracised; she had to 'find (her) own corner in the world'. Furthermore, in keeping with all of my respondents, giving back to community causes is of central importance to her; she is exercising agency to better the lives of others.

We have seen in the examples above that identity is sometimes negotiated by the women themselves (suggesting agency), and sometimes emerges situationally and circumstantially (suggesting external factors, but again enacted through one's own agency). It is instructive here to bring in another aspect of identity formulation: the role of what I term 'agency-enaction', referring to how agency is actually exercised. In the experiences described above,

we can see two distinct patterns of agency being enacted: one as resistance to oppression and discrimination (as in the case of Shabnam resisting an arranged marriage), and the other as a proactive response to the status quo (as in the struggles to achieve further and higher education of many of the women). Thus, we see here the existence of not only the liberal feminist mode of agency as 'resistance' to social norms and oppression, but also of the varied form of agency as described by Mahmood as 'a capacity for change'. In the latter, my respondents are creatively finding new solutions and exercising their intellectual abilities to solve problems, using agency-enaction in creative and effective ways. In Mahmood's own words, these are 'modalities of agency whose meaning and effect are not captured within the logic of subversion' (2005: 15).

Rather than merely displaying their agencies reactively, a number of my respondents have gone on in adulthood to exercise their agency proactively; to paraphrase Cheryl quoted above, they have not pushed the barriers encountered, but found their ways around them. The difference, then, is in how these women have *reacted* to and *enacted* the situations that they have found themselves in, making this an issue not just of traditions/exclusions/lack of opportunities/unmet needs, but also an issue of how they then translated these life events and situations through their subjectivities. How, then, is meaning negotiated in response to conflict? This is where agency as a 'capacity for action', and a 'capacity for change' comes in, as a refusal to accept the tropes/stereotypes/roles created for them, and a refusal to accept a singular position. This, for my formulation, is the essence of agency-enaction: a creative use of agency to take ownership of the trajectory of one's life.

The agency exhibited by my respondents is shown through their exercise of choice, their rejection of selected cultural norms and above all, their passion for community involvement.

A common thread in enabling agency, as we have seen above, has been pursuing an education and an awareness of local services and provisions that they could appropriate, often in the face of limited material resources. Some, such as Cheryl and Shabnam above, have 'disidentified' with previous modes of 'accepted' behaviour in their communities, exhibiting a considered choice to change their situation rather than passively accept it. In my previous discussion, I have outlined the factors that I believe have led to making these women resilient and proactive: grounded childhoods in mixed schools and neighbourhoods, acceptance of difference, traumatic life experiences and a number of 'beneath the surface' social processes. In the words of Sehlikoglu, 'agency is no longer seen as a human quality embedded into subjects. Rather, (it) is formed through a process of interaction between the individuals and the larger social mechanisms operating on them' (2017: 87). My formulation of agency-enaction, then, like the previous concepts of integration and identity discussed in this thesis, is a fluid, individual and multi-faceted construct. Most importantly, this process has allowed my respondents to proactively take charge of their lives against the backdrop of a discriminatory and negative national discourse that would have them live lives of submission and seclusion.

Finally, keeping in mind the criticisms of cultural essentialism and over-generalisation levelled at Mahmood (Sehlikoglu 2017; Bautista 2008; Bangstad 2011; Schielke 2009), I do not seek to claim that the women in my sample represent Muslim women in Britain more generally. Undoubtedly, there are widespread socio-economic and cultural limitations to the abilities of many of these women to exercise agency. The women in my sample have been empowered by supportive social networks (including crucial spousal support), the ability to pursue higher education, exposure (often incidentally) to wider British life and an understanding of Islam that allows them to disidentify from certain oppressive cultural

practices. There remain, however, many, many more Muslim women in Britain who simply do not have these enabling opportunities.

However, I do feel that in turning the ethnographic eye towards the previously neglected agency of religious and resourceful women, we open up possibilities for social scientists and provided greater nuance to the study of their lives. In particular, there is a need to develop 'rich and insightful ethnographies to enlighten Muslim women's experiences as Muslims' (Sehlikoglu 2017: 81). In the final analysis, I have argued that a fluid and non-linear concept of agency enables the creation of hybrid identities, and allows the women in my sample to craft British Muslim lives that not only work for them, but also provide benefit to others, through their agency-enaction.

There remains one final aspect to discuss in the question of identity for the women in my sample: that of faith. The place of Islamic belief and practice underpinned the lives of these women to such an extent that this discussion merits a heading of its own. I discuss this aspect below.

Faith at the Core

'It's like my life, my death, everything I do is for you Allah. It's that understanding that Islam, worshiping Allah, isn't just praying, it wouldn't be good enough basically, that is very selfish. I would see that as really selfish, and I don't see Islam as something selfish, you need to serve and that's the example you have in the Prophets and the companions and all the inspiring people.' (Aini, respondent)

'I think faith is a part of everything I do, and have done.' (Irum, respondent)

Much has been written recently about the tendency to overemphasise the role of religion in the study of Muslims, and to ascribe to all phenomena a faith-related explanation (Schielke 2010; Jeldtoft, 2011; Sehlikoglu 2017; Panjwani and Moulin-Stożek 2017). There is a clear sense, in a number of emerging academic discourses, that Muslims can too often be 'reduced to a function of their religion, and other dimensions of identity and experience have been ignored' (Gilliat-Ray, 2010: 234). With this in mind, I had set out at the beginning of my research to neither emphasise visible 'religiosity', nor to prioritise issues explicitly related to faith commitments.

However, at an early stage in my fieldwork, I began to read very strong undercurrents of spirituality and faith commitments within the narratives of my respondents, regardless of their visible 'Muslimness'. In line with the more holistic and less polarised analysis of Lara Deeb (2015) and Fadil and Fernando (2015), I soon found that to draw an imaginary distinction between piety and the everyday, particularly in the case of Muslims, was 'untenable' (Fadil and Fernando, 2015: 63).

While I have discussed the strong faith commitments of Muslim communities in Britain more generally elsewhere, below I discuss the ways in which faith commitments manifested within the narratives of the women in my sample.

'I am in this religion. It is in me. And articulating the intimacy of faith and the experience of worship to a Western audience is a challenge and a discovery.' (Aboulela, 2007)

In academic analyses of why Muslims often hold strong religious beliefs, little attention is paid to what may be termed non-temporal aspects of belief, the 'spiritual' side of belief. Explanations for modern-day faith commitments usually involve socio-economic reasons and political motivations, with accounts often being limited to the visible, communal and rational aspects of belief. In discussions on her study of British Muslim converts, Zebiri points to a similar phenomenon. She finds a disconnect between the positive and transcendent experience of religion described by her respondents as 'a process of spiritual awakening in which they felt they were being guided by God', and the characterisation by social scientists of religious belief as based in social, cultural and political motivation. Perhaps, she argues, 'researchers themselves who are not religiously inclined may well be drawn to seek secular explanations' (2008:6). The danger pointed out by her here is one that I would echo: these approaches tend to be theory-based and analytical, and thus, run the risk of not taking frequent religious and spiritual reasons for faith convictions into account. For many adherents to religious belief, such as the women in my sample, spiritual convictions formed a significant, if not the most significant, factor in their motivations. In Zebiri's words, 'human motivation is complex… it seems that a spiritual search and a search for a better society often go hand in hand' (2008:55).

With my respondents, I found that even without frequent reference to Islam, Muslims or religious practice, their speech and thought was underpinned by an Islamic ethos. While occasional phrases and thoughts slipped in here and there, I came across almost no direct references to the Quran or Hadith literature; however, their very clear commitment to faith came across clearly in other ways.

This lack of overt reference to Islamic teachings came as a surprise to me, especially when discussing motivations for their social work. Being aware of their high levels of education and wide-ranging experience, I had expected some quoting of chapter and verse to explain their worldviews; however, much of the language used reflected a complex blend of faith and modern-day activism. While their motives and aspirations were clearly spiritual, their modes of action were often practical and couched in the language of social responsibility. They wore their belief assertively, confidently, yet communicated it subtly and unobtrusively; they felt no need to either defend or stress their 'Muslimness'. Clearly, I was reminded that 'not every Muslim individual centralises religion in their everyday life in the same manner and intensity' (Sehlikoglu, 2017: 85).

The extensive and illuminating discussions I had with seasoned community activist Halima, aged sixty, illustrate this well. In talking about identity and the image Muslims can favour, she expressed irritation: 'So you don't have to say it all the time - *InshāʾAllāh, MāshāʾAllāh* in every second breath, but you have to know that… as long as you are clear what your core message is, that you are inspired from that (Islam) to be pluralistic and open.' Both at home with her two teenagers, and within the weekend youth school that she has been running for

over twenty years, she promotes the same philosophy of wearing your religion unobtrusively. She elucidated this vision in an almost poetic fashion:

'It's like, you know, when people say you need to dress so that people know who you are when you go out in public, often people say you have to dress and look Muslim, but I always say to the kids at school: Look, it's how you behave, it's how your manners are. What makes me proud is when I see you as young people going out and they say, "what a lovely child" because they've been considerate and helpful. When we do projects in organisations like when we started the National Gallery project or any other institution, even this inter-faith project, they always say - your kids are really great! And for me that's how I understand that. You are not making a song and dance about it, but they know from their behaviour or the things they do, there is something behind this – (they ask) what makes them like that? So that's what I think I would like to have in our youngsters… so embedded in what they draw on from Islam that it sort of emanates from them. I may be creating a fantasy in my mind, but I imagine that's how it must have been in early times because they drew from something so embedded spiritually that they didn't have to make a song and dance about it, but it drew light to them.'

A number of faith-related aspects can be seen in action here. While herself donning a colourful turban-style *hijāb*, Halima clearly eschews an emphasis on the visual; she sees no need to 'dress and look Muslim'. On the other hand, she gives more weight to a spirituality defined by comportment and encourages young people to focus on developing good behaviour and manners. In her view, the way to embody one's faith is in a subtle and deeply grounded way: 'so embedded in what they draw on from Islam that it sort of emanates from them'.

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A fluid and creative use of agency, as discussed above, is evident in Halima's outlook and her social work. It underlines the difficulties with framing both identity and agency in binary, linear ways. Her language is neither strictly religious, nor entirely liberal/secular in formulation; her identity has, over time, responded to the changing circumstances of the Muslim community that she serves; and while she has devoted her life to initially bringing the needs of her local community to the council's attention, she now focuses on mentoring youth to adjust, and contribute, to the landscape of cosmopolitan London.

Borrowing a term from Hasan, we see here that Halima performs a fluid 'identity vacillation', making sense of being British and Muslim, to successfully 'dispel the putative irreconcilability between Islam and many key traditional British values' (2015: 94). She is trying to inculcate a demeanour which is 'quietly' Islamic, and feels no need to undergird her Islamic identity with verbal and sartorial declarations of 'Muslimness'; all of this whilst simultaneously engaging with public bodies and causes to advocate for her local community. In her final reflection above, she wistfully invokes a very common Islamic trope: a reference to 7th Century Arabia and the society around early Islam as a golden age, and how Islam inconspicuously 'drew light' (in her words) to its adherents then.

Faith as action

'Most of the voluntary, community things I do stem from my identity as a Muslim.' (Fatima, respondent)

In line with this unobtrusive religious persona, a number of my respondents judged 'Muslimness' not by adherence to ritual or outward appearance, but by how much an individual contributed to society, and local communities. So, for them, while the underlying motivation for such good works is Islamic, it is manifest in a very communitarian and active fashion.

Maryam, a *hijāb*-wearing lawyer and social activist, was clearly a practicing Muslim committed to her faith; however, she only mentioned religion in my direct question on faith: 'Faith is part of who I am. (It) is a very peaceful, calming, beautiful thing'. Again, we see Maryam wearing her faith discreetly; she spent most of our interview exchange detailing her community work, and was very keen on emphasising a 'common humanity'. Much of her narrative related to her efforts to get those around her to recognise 'that we are all human beings'. Her unpaid community work involves breaking down barriers between different people; she is an active member of Remembering Srebrenica (a UK charity that fights hatred by keeping memories of genocide alive), her local Multi Faith Forum and Nisa Nashim (a Government initiative to promote relations between Muslim and Jewish women). 'At the bottom of it', she tells me, 'we have to remember that we are all human beings'.

Similarly, Shabnam's commitment to Islam is expressed as a responsibility to avail the opportunities provided by God, and to use one's voice to affect change:

'Yeah, I definitely believe that underlyingly whatever opportunities you're given, God wants you to do something with it…. Opportunities come and difficulties will be there, but I believe that you are not given more than you can cope with. And that comes from faith, I think, and faith is the strongest driver in that.'

Shabnam here, like Halima above, invokes the Islamic belief that God does not give one 'more than you can cope with'. She holds strongly to Islamic teachings such as this, but enacts them in her life through activism and practice: 'God wants you to *do* something with it' (emphasis mine). In speaking about her experience of helping those less fortunate, she was very definite about the active, socially involved aspect of faith. Speaking slowly and reflectively, she told me that 'God gives you a voice because He wants you to use it, not because He wants you to stay silent'.

Unlike Halima, though, Shabnam does see value in being recognised as a Muslim, as long as one maintains the required comportment. She sees a dual role for her community involvement. She does not just want to better others' lives as a 'higher' aspiration, but also sees herself as an ambassador of Islam in her good works. So, she feels that 'We have to show that we are visibly Muslim, and we are visibly good; and… you are counteracting the narrative'.

Another experienced community worker and author, Sumayya, charted for me her journey from teenage years to adulthood, always being taught the importance of 'faith as service'. At the start of our discussion, she had told me that her most important role in life was as a citizen and member of the community 'as a Muslim'. Elaborating on this later in our discussion, she explained how certain role models has impressed on her the importance of service in Islam:

'There were a lot of key people. My faith… it came from this whole going to YM (Young Muslims), through the UMO (Union of Muslim Organisations of UK and Ireland), cassette

tapes, talks… they taught us that as Muslims, you had to a role to do something. It (voluntary work) was entirely faith-related, there was no other reason. It is central. Especially in those early days, our entire exposure was through doing anything charitable… giving time, skills, mosque circles. All the conferences were about your contribution to society, what you do for neighbours, real citizenship stuff… it was all the heart, not just ritual stuff.'

Sumayya, in a particularly extended interview, explained to me that in her formative years of the 80s and early 90s, key inspirational figures such as Khurram Murad (of the Jamaat-e-Islami), Farooq Murad (of the Markfield Dawah Centre) and Dr. Pasha (of the UMO) inculcated in the youth a strong sense of Islam through service to humanity. She spoke animatedly about being inspired by the community work of Imam Siraj Wahhaj with drug dealing in New York: 'he was very emphatic that you can't be a Muslim if you're not good for the people around you, man!' Later in our discussion, Sumayya drew clear parallels between her youth and the current situation; she expressed the strong feeling that a 'solution' to wayward youth was to get them involved in community work.

This commitment to Islam through community involvement, so intrinsic to the motivations of many of my respondents, is described by sociologist William Barylo as 'active citizenship'. He identifies this trend, especially amongst younger Muslims, as 'a new relation to the society, especially helped by higher education and better social insertion' (2016: 385). His notion of this active citizenship is one in which adherents practice their faith as a renewed commitment to positive social action. Similar, again, to my respondents, his sample were well-educated and showed a keen awareness of issues in neo-liberal society. While Barylo describes a wide variety of social action undertaken in semi-corporate organisations by young people, the mode of interaction between his respondents and wider society, in terms of their

motivation, is similar to that exhibited by mine. Women such as Maryam, Shabnam and Sumayya clearly locate a significant part of their belief in social action, designed to aid the less fortunate.

The 'ummah: a variant globalism, a new cosmopolitanism

'I read the life of Imam Hassan al-Banna and I found that so inspiring. What I found inspiring was that he developed hospitals, schools, educated and had welfare programs and it was (about) taking his faith and translating it - I don't know all the politics.' (Aini, respondent)

'The frontier between the local and the global is blurred so that no understanding of the local can happen without factoring in the global.' (Ajala, 2014: 124)

Much of the narratives of my respondents centered on the idea of a transnational, globally connected Islam. Although not formulated in opposition to their national identities, these women clearly drew strength from the sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves (a global 'ummah'), while drawing inspiration from a number of international religious leaders as role models. Hassan al-Banna (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood), Khurram Murad (of Jamaat-e-Islami heritage) and Imam Siraj Wahhaj (well-known Imam of New York mosque) were a few mentioned explicitly. However, the political contexts of 'Islamist' figures such as these, often credited with the late 20th Century resurgence of Islam, held little relevance for the women in my sample. Aini above, for instance, clearly inserts a disclaimer: 'I don't know all the politics'. Instead, I found that references to such global

figures came as role models; they had left indelible spiritual traces that shaped the women's lives.

I have discussed elsewhere the debate around national versus religious identities, especially in the case of Muslims (Ajala, 2014; Warsi, 2017). While one side of the debate constructs the two facets of identity in polar opposition for Muslims, scholars such as Kabir (2016), Werbner (2000, 2013) and Ajala (2014) illustrate that the concept of a universal religion can sit quite comfortably with one's loyalties to a national culture. Werbner, in fact, has found that transnational and global connections and activities can help foster a greater civic sense, aiding integration not only in ethnic communities, but also as 'citizens of the nation' (2000). Rather than reading the two factors oppositionally, it is instrumental to recognise the vast heterogeneity of Muslim minorities in Britain; while undoubtedly a small minority of Muslims may see their religious identity conflicting with their loyalties to Britain, this is not reflected in survey research on British social attitudes.

In a wide-ranging review of recent research on Muslims in Britain, the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute reports that 'nine in ten Muslims say that they feel a part of British society' (2018: 33). When breaking down different identity components, furthermore, 55% of Muslim surveyed in 2020-11 felt that their national identity was 'very important'; this figure for all adults nationally was 44%. When respondents were asked to choose different components of their identity, however, the picture was not so clear. A 2010 survey for the Ethnic Minority British Election Study reported that 43% of Muslims felt more 'Muslim than British'; a similar study conducted in 2015 for the Sun newspaper reports that 82% of Muslims polled said that their British identity was more important than their religious identity (2018: 38).

While quantitative data can be interpreted variously, and indeed in the case above paints a mixed picture, for my respondents, interestingly, their perceived connections to a global Islam strengthened their resolve to serve locally, benefitting communities in Britain. Like Aini and Sumayya quoted above, many of the women had been exposed to the global 'sisterhood' and trends at university. In discussing their transitions from school to higher education, these women credited inspirational international figures, and their attendant teachings, with giving them a strong sense of citizenship and community awareness.

In keeping with this thesis, Bagguley and Hussain (2005), in their study of British Pakistanis after the 2001 riots in Bradford, also define identity in a fluid, plural and complex way. They build a model of citizenship that is multi-layered; in conjunction with religion and ethnicity, they conclude that the various aspects that make up individual identity combine to create a strong cultural base. In particular, they single out second-generation young people who consider themselves British citizens but also 'members of religious, racial, ethnic and linguistic groups' (2005:414). My respondents quoted above fall within this group; they elide easily their national and religious loyalties—indeed, one aspect of their identity seems to strengthen the other in their narratives and stated motivations.

The connections my respondents had with other cultures and countries in the global '*ummah* also manifested in their sartorial choices. Never knowing what to expect before a meeting or an interview, I was fascinated by the variety of fashion and the familiarity with other cultures that I encountered in the women of my sample. *Hijāb* choices ranged from Moroccan Sufi-inspired turbans, to colourful African turban styles, to trendy Gulf headwear twinned with Western attire, to the ubiquitous Asian 'kurta' worn with jeans and much else in between. Those not wearing *hijāb*, in their commitment to a modest comportment nevertheless,

employed creative ways of layering and combining High Street clothing to meet their needs. Often, when I enquired about a particularly elegant or well-designed item of clothing, I was met with a variation of 'Oh, I bought it online from Turkey/Qatar/Malaysia'.

The work of Emma Tarlo focuses on the growing market for Muslim fashion, and an emerging cosmopolitanism apparent in Muslim women's attire. She suggests that 'the proliferation of religiously oriented fashions amongst Muslims in Western metropolitan cities is not necessarily a sign of narrow conservatism. It may also signal the emergence of new forms of Islamic cosmopolitanism' (2007: 144). In exploring the dress of three prominent Muslim public figures, Tarlo sees in their sartorial creativity both local and global influences; the way they dress cannot be easily attributed to a particular region/country. Breaking down yet another binary in the study of religious subjects, Tarlo reflects on the irony of this unusual marriage of faith and fashion to create a 'new' cosmopolitanism:

'Islam is often perceived as an inward-looking, retrograde, didactic, and conservative religion so that visual manifestations of explicit religious identity amongst Muslims tend to be interpreted as products either of cultural conservatism or threatening political activism. Cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, evokes an entirely different set of associations. It is linked to ideas of hybridity, pluralistic dialogue, and openness to the worlds of others. It is associated with progressive thinking and a willingness to cross borders and challenge various forms of petty parochialism.' (2007: 145)

Rather than leading to a more parochial view then, we see that religion in this formulation can lead to a more cosmopolitan and global view. This was also manifest, in my sample, by a strong identification with the injustices faced by Muslim populations abroad. For a handful of

women in my sample, their activism spanned borders; Palestine, Kashmir and Bosnia were never far from their thoughts.

Hala is a very experienced and highly educated grassroots activist. Shunning her academic roots (she holds a doctorate), she now devotes herself to a number of charitable and advocacy causes:

'Protesting, that's a form of activism, every single protest for Palestine and Gaza, we will be there. … I just went to Kashmir two months ago, and Pakistan with the Read Foundation for a week, so we fundraised. I went with a local charity to Sudan, went with the Viva Palestina convoy to Gaza, went with other charities to refugee camps with Palestinians in it. And part of it is, we feel a connection to the Palestinian cause. We feel a connection to the refugee crisis because of Islam and … I think that we feel a lot more connected to some of the causes, and therefore we are more active. Why was I in Gaza on a convoy for a month with random men and women? If women don't go to Gaza, how do we speak to them about sanitary issues, and how do we speak to them about other (women's) issues…?'

Irum, a well-known lawyer and social justice activist, spoke about how the Bosnian war (of 1992-95) mobilised her:

'But at the same time as that, Bosnia happened. So it was Bosnia that made me become an activist, because I was at home on maternity leave, and I just given birth to my first child, and I think you know the story. Bosnia unravelled on the television screens, and I was a lawyer, and I had skills that Allah had given me that I needed to put to use to tackle this. So, the

combination of Halaka (Quranic study circle) and Bosnia was what made me become an activist. And to this day, it is the injustices that I see perpetrated that inspires me to carry on.'

Maryam, a much younger but equally passionate lawyer, is too young to remember the war. However, a visit to the country changed her outlook significantly:

'I was drawn to this type of work after my trip to Bosnia and the stark realisation of the horrific dangers of hatred in society and where things can end up. I feel that there is often misunderstanding in our own society about different groups of people and it is important to break down barriers and try to understand each other rather than constructing divides and creating labels for each other. At the bottom of it we have to remember that we are all human beings.'

Finally, a very different type of activist based in the Maryam Centre in East London, Zoya (now in her late 30s), described to me the start of her youth activism for a global cause:

'I think after what happened with Gaza we found (out about) MADE (Muslim Action for Development and Education, a charity encouraging young European Muslims into social action). We work with young people to become future leaders, so we thought of this campaign where we buy produce from Palestine, and make sure that it is not just any produce from Palestine, that it is ethical and Fairtrade. Then we buy this produce and sell it to the people in the UK and then that way you are directly supporting the farmers in Palestine.'

It is clear from the extracts above that the Islamic teaching of the '*ummah* as one body, regardless of national borders, has struck a chord with my respondents. In thinking about

where to use their time and skills to help others, they are sometimes propelled to look abroad. This transcendental Islamic identity, moreover, may actually be enabling their actions as 'democratic citizens', in the sense of the term as used by Engle and Ochoa. They argue that 'for democratic citizens dependable and meaningful knowledge seldom comes full-blown out of books or lectures but rather it needs to be worked over in the mind and utilized in life situations unique to every individual' (quoted in Bhimji 2009: 374). My respondents quoted above, steeped as they are in 'books and lectures', have instead credited significant global events as the instigators for their activism.

However, there is also something distinctly related to the language and tools of democratic and active citizenship here, a discourse normally associated with liberal societies. In thinking about where to use their time and skills to help others, they are sometimes propelled to look abroad. Yet their rhetoric and ideas reflect their civic awareness: Hala speaks of protesting and fundraising as forms of activism, and clearly raises gender as a consideration ('how do we speak to them about sanitary issues?'); Irum discussed how she was moved to use her professional skills to tackle injustice; Maryam wants to 'break down barriers' and is driven by her belief in a common humanity; Zoya deals in produce that is only 'ethical and Fairtrade'.

In addition, these women often went on to tell me that these initial forays into activism led them to eventually turn towards local matters needing attention. As they matured and broadened their vision, their deepening sense of citizenship, national values and belonging acted as a 'push' factor towards more involvement in wider communities here in Britain. Hala now pours all of her spare time into running a London soup kitchen, and organises a weekly support network for Muslim women in West London; Irum has spent the last thirty

years campaigning for British Muslims, and has recently joined the Muslim Council of Britain; Maryam continues to bring together disparate peoples in creative ways; Zoya has recently recovered from her second divorce, and counsels Bengoli women in East London on both marriage and employment.

Their charity, thus, has a cosmopolitan feel and can transcend borders and nationalities. In this way, an invocation of the '*ummah* can also be seen as a response to globalisation, as much as a manifestation of it. In the words of Bhimji, 'it is often assumed that the religious sphere is usually linked with parochialism rather than cosmopolitanism. However… it is actually through interactions within the realm of religious spheres that cosmopolitan identities are enacted' (2009: 374). Thus, rather than promote a communitarian and restricted vision for their activism, it could be argued that in being underpinned by the Islamic concept of Muslims all over the globe as 'one nation', these Muslim women have harnessed a variant of globalisation to display a 'new' cosmopolitanism, one that benefits communities both at home in Britain, and abroad.

A final word on faith and agency…

'I appreciate the West. I love its literature, its transparency and its energy. I admire its work ethic and its fairness. I need its technology and its medicine, and I want my children to have a Western education. At the same time, I am fulfilled in my religion.' (Aboulela, 2007)

As we have seen above, faith convictions form a major part of the identities of the women in my sample. They exhibit strong faith commitments and a deep spirituality, but exercise their beliefs in unobtrusive ways that display high levels of civic and ethical responsibility. In creating novel ways to 'be Muslim' in secular Britain, they often look abroad for inspiration. Harnessing the very Islamic concept of Muslims globally as one '*ummah*, they have gone on to use this inspiration to benefit local communities in various ways.

Regardless of which side of the piety debate one lies, we must credit Saba Mahmood and those who have developed her thought for putting uncomplicated piety and spirituality back on the map in the study of religious minorities in the West. Her works does justice to women in my sample such as Cheryl, for whom the 'prime concern is your own spiritual relationship to God. If that is correct, everything else will be fine'.

In addition, Mahmood's critique of linear, freedom-seeking concepts of agency has allowed us to look at Muslim women through a different, more nuanced lens. In this sideways look at agency, we have framed agency as a capacity for action and a capacity for change in pursuit of goals other than freedom from oppression. To use Mahmood's expression, the 'ethical self-making' of these women through social and civic activism can be seen as a unique and positive model.

With this unique combination of strong religious belief and spirited agency, the Muslim women of my sample have been able to create lives that allow them to uphold core aspects of their identity in a secular society. In the words of Bhikhu Parekh quoted at the beginning of this chapter, 'these attributes and relationships are… central and tenacious and shape us profoundly' (2011:4).

This exercise of agency and the creation of strong identities has not, however, come easily for the women in my sample. In the next chapter, I employ an intersectional analysis to examine the particular difficulties that have arisen in the lives of these women. I argue that intersectional analyses have tended to side-line religion as a basis for discrimination; most of the racism and disadvantage faced by my respondents has, in fact, been based on their faith. Thus, I widen the frame of analysis to accommodate the lives of religious people by introducing discussion of the postsecular turn in Western societies.

Chapter 6-- Employing Intersectional Analyses in a Postsecular Context: the Difficulties Faced by Muslim Women in Britain

'There is no meaning to the notion of 'black' which is not gendered and classed, no meaning for the notion of 'woman' which is not ethnicized and classed…' (Yuval-Davis, 2007:565)

'So, they (colleagues) expect me to be White… their attitude, it's a combination of (my) being Black and a Muslim. And a woman. That's definitely it, yeah.' (Amy, respondent)

'What we did suffer a lot in the 70s was racism. We lived in West London, and the National Front were massive, so we all suffered from huge amounts of racism at that time. You couldn't walk down the street… I think I was about 12 or 14, and every day you got called a Paki. Every single day… we saw that, and we beat that because we all stood up for ourselves.' (Irum, respondent)

While the previous two chapters have looked in detail at the hybrid nature of Muslim women's identities and the prominent role of faith in their identity constructions, in this chapter I focus on the particular difficulties faced by Muslim women, and their strategies to overcome them. I have employed the use of current intersectional tools of analyses, and position the lives of my participants within the postsecular turn in Western societies. I argue

that, while an intersectional approach is both illuminating for scholars and valuable for those it seeks to benefit, it often neglects the role of religion in the lives of the marginalised.

This argument is strengthened most recently by what commentators describe as the 'postsecular' turn in Western societies, a term used to describe an emerging rejection of pure secularism in the traditional sense, and an acceptance instead that religion and spirituality continue to inform the lives of ordinary people, not only privately but also publicly, and to a significant extent (Braidotti 2008; Stoeckl 2011; Singh 2015). Much of my work and findings have led me to recognise the need for this 'acceptance' that a significant number of individuals lead spiritual lives that cannot be relegated to domestic spheres only; the postsecular turn, thus, offers hope and a viable model for individuals such as my respondents. I believe that in using an intersectional approach to examine the lives of the women in my sample, but within a framework that recognises the phenomenon of increasing spirituality in the West, valuable insights can be reached.

In the discussion that follows, I set the theoretical context with reference to debates around the postsecular turn, and the ways in which women (and men) of religious persuasion are challenging traditional secular discourses. I then introduce theories of intersectionality as originally proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Collins at the turn of the century, as a frame for discussing selected difficulties faced by my participants in the context of secular Britain; I critique the neglect of 'religion' in classical intersectionality as a core identity component, and argue that intersectional analyses can be complemented by the recognition of spirituality and religion as major area of discrimination. Throughout this discussion, and especially in the latter part of the chapter, I highlight the particular disadvantages faced by the women in my sample.

As mentioned above, this chapter ends on a positive note with a discussion of how these women are utilising the potential of multiple, hybrid spaces as a way forward in multicultural Britain. Rather than presenting as 'victims' of intersecting discriminations, then, the women in my sample appear to be confidently and successfully negotiating complex and varied situations, sometimes discriminatory, to claim their stake in British life. Above all, their convivial daily interactions across cultures and faiths give hope for the future of multicultural and plural Britain.

Theories of desecularisation and postsecularism

'The deeper theoretical analysis goes, the closer it gets to the data of observation.' (Bourdieu, 2002:1)

In order to locate the underlying motivation and mindsets of my respondents, I have deferred to approaches that underline the emergence of a renewed spiritual fervour in post-Enlightenment Western society. I believe much theoretical discussion justifies bringing religion and spirituality back into the academy; with my focus on Muslim minorities in the West in particular, it may be emphasised that Muslim communities have never given up their allegiance to theistic religion in principle (see Zebiri, 2008:5-6; Lewis and Hamid, 2018: 182).

This was certainly the case in my own fieldwork; I have found that, whether they presented as visibly Muslim or not, faith formed a core component of their identity and informed their public actions and interaction to a significant extent. This was exemplified in the journey of ethical fashion designer Zoya, whom I met in her offices in the East London Maryam Centre (part of the East London mosque complex). Having grown up in a secular Bengoli household, Zoya had decided as conscientious teenager to make her career in ethical fashion and trade. Her uncle first introduced her to the wider moral values of Islam, and she was pleasantly surprised to find commonality between her non-religious ethical concerns and Islamic morality. She especially stressed to me that finding out that 'you can use it in everyday, in how you behave, how you talk' was life-changing for her. Through further studying faith, Zoya became more actively involved in community work; her Islamic values also dictate the type of work she takes on, having given her a higher purpose in her work. In the highly-competitive fashion design world of her profession, she is often offered 'a lot of money to work with people but I won't take it 'cause money isn't going to take away my faith' (referring to ventures that fall short of her ethical standards).

Below I trace the background to the discourse which emphasises the existence of a renewed spiritual fervour in Western society (albeit with higher levels of observance amongst minorities rather than majority communities); the discussion below also introduces the more recent concept of 'postsecularism' as a phenomenon which describes co-existence of significant communities of secular and religious peoples.

It was the underlying belief of most Western theorists of the late 19th and 20th centuries that a modern, liberal secular worldview would reign supreme and that both the quantity and importance of 'religion' would decrease considerably as civilisation moved forward on the

inevitable trajectory of modernity. Modernity is taken here to refer to a period of time as well as a desired state of being: 'the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries… with the socio-cultural attributes of the so-called 'developed' societies of the West… including, for example, industrialism, capitalism, rationalisation… and the 'turn to the self' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005:4). Frazer, Marx and later Freud all predicted the demise of the theistic worldview as scientific, rational thought began take a firm hold (Hamilton, 1995:165).

Foremost amongst such 'secularisation' theorists stood Peter Berger with his sociological contributions to the field in the 1960s. Providing evidence for the 'disappearance thesis' of religion, Berger argued that 'the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations' (1969a:108). Where religions *did* survive, Berger attributed this to strong sociological motives for community-building. Religions, in his view, exist to bring together communities of believers and can only develop in 'a kind of ghetto', surrounded by the majority worldview of secularism (1969b: 18-19, 31-32).

Others, however, offered more nuanced predictions and suggested that while 'traditional' religious practice may demise with the onset of modernity, new forms of religiosity would emerge. As early as 1971, Robert Bellah argued that secularism was itself a 'doctrine' stemming from the Enlightenment reaction to the Christian tradition, a non-theistic belief system designed to repudiate 'dogmatic' Christian teachings.

It was not long before secularisation theory had to be revisited, with the recognition that 'the modern world is awash with religiosity' (Kenney, 2014:6). Writing about what he termed 'desecularisation' much later in the 1990s, Berger himself admitted that 'the assumption that we live in a secularised world is false' (1999:2). James Sweeney, furthermore, asserts with confidence that 'the wholesale secularisation of society, such that religion no longer retains social significance, looks increasingly improbable' (2008:15). Others go even further to argue that, in trying to re-claim meaning and purpose in their lives, 'individuals who are dissatisfied with this fundamental divorce must find a way to re-embed moral relevance into the process of living' (Aune et al., 2008: 123).

This popular 'turn to religion', not just privately but also publicly, has most recently been termed 'postsecularism' in sociological and philosophical debates (Braidotti 2008; Stoeckl 2011; Singh 2015). Following on from the 'desecularisation' thesis of the late 20th Century, postsecular ideas call for a recognition of the fact that a significant number of people in modern, secular societies seek a moral order of sorts; in the words of Braidotti, 'religion is back with a vengeance… God is not dead at all' (2008:2).

While the term postsecularism has been used in a variety of disciplines, and used quite loosely by scholars to signify an openness to religion, my argument here refers to it neither as a rejection of secularism altogether (as may be inferred by the term 'desecularisation', or by the use of the hyphenated term 'post-secularism'), nor as a wholesale return of society to widespread religious practice. Rather, I concur with scholars who see it as 'a condition of contemporality/ of co-existence of the secular and religion' (Stoeckl, 2011:1). In a detailed and insightful discussion of the ways in which the term is now employed, Stoeckl suggests

that in 'returning to religion', we do not return to pre-modern forms of establishment religion that were so firmly cast aside by the Enlightenment. Instead, she sees a return of forms of spirituality that are changed and, in fact, compatible with modernity (2011). In describing the postsecular as a condition whereby religion and secularism co-exist, Stoeckl is advocating for a pluralism of worldviews and a move away from the belief that religion is at odds with rationalism, modernity and a progressive worldview. She does also recognise, however, that such a co-existence may not be straightforward, and details a number of potential tensions that this process is characterised by; the job of researchers now, in her view, is 'the exploration of these tensions' (2011:6). For the purposes of this thesis, however, it is the potential of postsecular ideas and discourses for the future, and the sense of belonging, of large numbers of Western Muslims that is relevant.

My own research has thrown up these very issues. A significant number of my respondents verbalised their desire and acceptance of the co-existence of the religious in an environment of otherwise widespread secularism, and desired to maintain a balance between the two. However, many also faced difficulties in public spaces when they were either visibly Muslim or asserted their religiosity; this mirrors Stoeckl's view that the postsecular condition will result in certain tensions. For example Zoya, introduced above, believes that Muslims should be 'just more open and open-minded… We need to take a step back and remember we are all human and we all have likes and dislikes and to look at the common things rather than the things that separate, whether they're religious or Muslim or non-Muslim'. Similarly, Yusra, a revert of Asian origin who now works to eliminate extremism, occasionally attends her Christian pastor friend's service in church in order to pay respect to him, and show gratefulness for his past kindness to her; she spoke of her high regard for him as a pastor: 'And I thought, we must now come in (to the church) to serve our respect. And just hearing

that message, you can sort of put it with Islam, the Islamic understanding. And what I saw, in the crowd, were former drug users, former pimps, former prostitutes… *MāshāʾAllāh*, all settled.' In common with other respondents, both Zoya and Yusra spoke of their great desire to emphasise the common, and be comfortable and accepted in the secular domain. Both also, however, spoke of the difficulties faced in practicing religion publicly, signifying the tensions that exist nevertheless. As a single woman, Zoya struggles to make ends meet because her ethical/religious principles will not allow her to accept certain jobs; Yusra has, since we spoke, stopped wearing the headscarf to enable her to negotiate public life with greater ease. We see here quite clearly the effect of religious discrimination and the juggling often undertaken by religious women in British public life.

A number of scholars point to the (re)identification of the Muslims in the West with faith. It is precisely here that the subjects of my study come in, as individuals negotiating (post)modernity with sacred beliefs. In the case of minorities in the West, it becomes manifestly clear that 'secularisation', in the strict sense of an absence of religion in public life, has never been adopted wholly by them. Prominent sociologists Parekh (2006: 323) and Modood (2010: 40) insist that multicultural Western societies must take account of religious attachments, a fact that has been unequivocally established by the results of both the 2001 and 2011 National Censuses (Hussain and Sherif, 2014). In the words of Serena Hussain, 'as Muslims in Britain demonstrated greater levels of religiosity than the indigenous minority, secularisation clearly does not apply to this community in the same way as it has done for larger society' (2008:169).

Sophie Gilliat-Ray, in her wide-ranging study of British Muslim culture, concludes that 'the religious identity of Muslims in Britain has come to the fore over the past two decades' (2010: 262). Furthermore, she points out that while this more visible religiosity may not sit

well with the wider liberal secular ethos of Britain, it can also contribute to a 'potential flourishing and reinvigoration of British society as a whole' (2010:263).

Similarly, Sara Silvestri, in reflecting on her international study of European Muslim women, reports that, irrespective of the modality of their relationship to Islam, 'nearly all participants expressed an intimate yet universal attachment to their religion' (2011: 1244). Generalising beyond the immediate results of her research, she in fact gives voice to postsecular theories discussed above; her study, she feels, demonstrates that religion continues to be relevant in Western societies. Like Bristol-Rhys and Osella (2018) and Stoekcl (2011), she also makes a plea for more in-depth research into the place of the sacred in Western liberal societies.

Morey and Yaqin (2011), furthermore, write from within literary postcolonial genres that deal with the problems arising from decolonisation and most often address the work of people from former colonies. They defend the use of religion as a lens through which to study Muslims; postcolonial studies, they insist, must overcome its 'resistance' to acknowledging religion as a key part of Muslim identity formation. They themselves, as part of their 'Framing Muslims' project, have underlined 'the constantly evolving nature of Islam as faith, as a way of life and as a global presence' (2011:15).

Gendering the theory: One size does not fit all

'Why and how is it that secularisation theories do so poorly in accounting for the lives and subjectivities of pious women?' (Bracke, 2008:183).

In an endeavour to bring women's religiosity, specifically, into dialogue with the otherwise fairly widespread landscape of secularism, my thesis argues that despite the prevalence of women in spiritual practices and as 'carriers' of faith (Marler, 2008; Franks, 2001), secularisation theory assumes a male normative, and does not address issues specific to the experience of women in interaction with spiritual practice. In not addressing the 'hidden' yet vastly relevant female anxieties around the perceived lack of 'value' given to their unpaid social contributions, equal employment opportunities, care-giving needs, mothering and family life, liberal secular theories have fallen short. A significant number of women, of both Christian and minority-faith (Aune et al., 2008), have found themselves trapped between shifting femininities on the one hand and 'a world which is governed and shaped not by sacred meaning but by the harsh and impersonal standards of a "rationalised" and "bureaucratised" order whose only aim is greater productive efficiency' (Woodhead, 2005: 26).

In this respect, my respondents reported a distinct commonality of difficulties with women more widely. Balancing caring responsibilities with not only working schedules but also, in the case of these socially active women, volunteering roles came up on occasion. Zainab had her first child later in life, and spoke of the conscious decision to change her career in her 40s to accommodate her childcare responsibilities: 'I wasn't working at the time, was looking for something new to do. I didn't want to go back to the third sector… that's my background. So I didn't want to work in charities anymore, I didn't want to work in London, I wanted to be local, I had a child'. This, in part, led her to give up her London-based, 9 to 5 job and become more involved in the community; but she also spoke of the difficulties that came with giving up her income. Hala, similarly, who holds a doctorate, had given up her career in media at the

time we met to care full time for her terminally ill mother; she spoke of struggling with her own self-esteem as an unemployed woman, her loss of confidence in public and wondered whether and if she would return to the world of work. Like Zainab, she also finds fulfilment in the weekly volunteering self-help session she runs for marginalised women in West London; giving back to the community has made her feel connected, she told me.

It could be argued, narrowing the frame, that the mutually complementary relationship between secularism and modernity rested on the predominant paradigm of the economically 'productive' work*man,* fitting into the impersonal structures of factory, office and corporation. In this paradigm, early feminism colluded with policy makers and productivity 'pundits' to reframe the rights and roles of women with the aim of achieving parity in what was, until recent times, a predominantly male activity. With the onset of industrialisation, however, women's entry into the workforce since the 1960s has followed a different trajectory. Women found that they still struggled with the burden of care-giving activities, yet were expected to rise to the goals of modernity by taking on new duties of employment outside the home as well (see Woodhead, 2008).

Thus was created the 'modern woman', in direct contrast to the 'traditional woman' of the past. Popular conceptions included that of the former as briefcase-swinging, independent and 'liberated'; the latter, on the other hand, was framed as compliant, submissive and oppressed by burdens of domesticity. Moving forward to the postmodern period complicates the model even further; the relativism and gender skepticism of current popular paradigms in the West does not satisfy a small but growing number of Western women (Franks, 2001). In their search for a more balanced approach, negotiating the two extremes of 'gender as a result of enculturation' and a biologically essentialist view of womanhood, a significant number of

women are now turning to both established religions and alternative spiritualities (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:94). With this spiritual revival in the mix, the problematic 'modern vs. traditional' model becomes more complex, for 'many women take this (religious) path as a matter of informed choice and there is evidence that some women who are high achievers affiliate themselves to revivalist movements' (Franks, 2001:1). I have reported in numerous places in this thesis how many of my respondents turn to Islam for strength and purpose.

The need to redress this neglected balance and focus particularly on women's experience of the sacred is (as opposed to a normative religious expression), therefore, necessary. This study suggests that one way forward is further research into the strategies, motivations and positive identity constructs of those women in liberal secular societies who are creating a space for faith-based identities; I myself have aimed for a clear understanding of the ways in which a segment of Western women are constructing positive life experiences for themselves, while also contributing to the betterment of those around them.

Twenty-first Century European Islam in (Post)Modernity

In the interests of fostering a deeper and more nuanced engagement with the spiritual but specifically Islamic upsurge in Britain, it may be pertinent to ask here: *why* has modernity, in the sense of embracing liberal Enlightenment values and Industrialisation-era capitalist ethics, not lead to overwhelming secularisation amongst Western Muslims? A number of explanations have been put forward.

In examining Islam in modernity, Jeffrey Kenney (2014: 28) concludes that while 'Muslim societies have secularised structurally in terms of social differentiation … they have not … adopted secular values and ideals as the language of modernisation.' Although Kenney's analysis applies to the wider Muslim world, one can quite easily see a similar pattern in Muslim societies in Europe, societies that are still very influenced by events and ideologies originating in the wider Muslim world. Social activists such as Hala (who had visited Palestine, Bosnia and France on humanitarian missions), Irum (who was first inspired by the horrors of the Bosnian war to offer pro bono legal services) and ethical fashion designer Zoya (who was spurred by the Rana Plaza textile industry disaster in Bangladesh) certainly had looked beyond Britain and felt a responsibility to marginalized communities worldwide.

Furthermore, faced by the anomie, in the sense of an absence of widely accepted social values, caused by the fast-paced changes wrought by modernity and Industrialisation, scholars have argued that minority communities react with an introspective 'return to tradition'. As such, the view that 'belief proliferates in proportion to the uncertainty caused by the pace of change in all areas of social life…' (Aune et al., 2008:10, quoting Daniele Hervieu-Leger) may also hold some value.

On the other hand, one may take a more forward-thinking and progressive view of the development of Muslim societies in the West. In this discourse, Western Muslims' trajectory could be seen as moving *ahead* (and not looking 'back' to tradition); this moving ahead is manifest in a more assertive, proactive Western Islam that now actively engages with the presumptions of liberalism as a hegemonic worldview. This 'brand' of newly

assertive Islam, as opposed to a previous defensive Islam, can be reflected in more active participation of Muslims in society, while at the same time holding onto their religious affinities. This was certainly the case for the majority of my respondents; their narratives consisted of many anecdotes relating to asserting their faith in public roles. Having been born in Britain, they also saw themselves as British Muslims, and expressed indignation that anyone may conceive of them as otherwise. In studying the relationship of European Muslims with Muslim institutions in their respective countries, Bectovic argues that while the original migrant urgency to establish mosques and later Muslim schools reflected a 'defensive' and practical need 'aimed at preserving the original identity', a more recent phase of development (identified by him as post-80s) can be 'characterized by internal positioning and reflection on new challenges' (2012:17). The challenges of Islamophobia, negative media portrayals and public verbal abuse that I discuss in more detail below are certainly 'new'; in the words of writer and educator Sumayya, 'in the 70s and 80s, we were not a news item!'

More pertinently to my thesis, within this 'newly-assertive' mode of being, Muslim women are articulating lived, 'modern' Islam in creative ways. Bracke, concluding from her research on Russian Muslim women of Kazan, asserts that 'women are important forces in a process of re-articulating Islam' (2008:193). In a very different European context, Bokhari describes similar findings in her study of Leicester Muslim women and their relationship to traditional twentieth-century theological texts. Her respondents are using Quranic and Prophetic teachings to 'support some contemporary empowerments', and 'have developed a new sense of empowerment, security and movement by way of a reconfigured reading of a traditional secondary text addressed to women' (2013:66). Not to be left behind in the digital age, a wide array of online magazines and sites founded and managed by Muslim

women offer creative and empowering solutions to very 'modern' dilemmas: Sisters magazine (http://www.sisters-magazine.com), Emel magazine (http://www.emel.com), Muslim Woman's Resource Centre Amina (http://www.mwrc.org.uk), and the Facebook page Muslim Youth League Sisters UK (https://www.facebook.com/pages/Muslim-Youth-League-Sisters-UK/195463510489011) are just a few examples of more widely-visited sites.

In essence, it could be argued that the overwhelmingly positive treatment of women in the Quran, and their treatment as spiritual equals on a par with men, makes it easier for Muslim women to accommodate anti-patriarchal and women-friendly narratives and modes of interpretation into their faith (Hammer, 2012). A number of fairly recent efforts to re-work both Quranic interpretation (Wadud, 1999 and 2006; Barlas, 2002) and popular understandings of Hadith literature (Mernissi, 1991; Abou El Fadl, 2001) have illustrated that a considerable number of modern Muslims have not felt the need to reject their religious heritage in accommodating woman-friendly modes of existence and rejecting patriarchal authority.

Finally, the availability of historical role models such as Khadija, Aisha and Hajar in the popular Muslim imagination, alongside the reworking of new ones to fit 'modern' paradigms (Sonbol, 2001; Khalafallah, 2013; Abugideiri, 2008) give Muslim women the tools to recreate their historical narrative in the service of creating strong yet modern Islamic identities.

'Exactly how non-Christian religions like Islam fit with the securalization paradigm is a long-overdue question' (Aune et al., 2008:3).

'Who are these publicly engaged but often invisible Muslim women? They are Islamic feminists who "are inventing ways to navigate between forced changes necessary for survival, a critique of globalized modernity, and a viable means of self-projection that retains dignity, modernity and integrity. In this balancing act, women are gaining symbolic importance"' (Belghazi, 2005: 279, quoting miriam cooke)

It may be apt here to explore briefly those areas of Islamic discourse related to the individual and his/her relationship with the wider society which are in contestation with the liberal worldview. This may lead to a better foundation for understanding why some Western Muslim women are actively choosing proactive and paradigm-shifting positions *within* faith systems, and the strategies they employ.

As argued above, believers of all persuasions in the West are negotiating God-centered daily lives in a widespread environment of secularism; a secularism which can be at worst openly hostile to and at best grudgingly accommodating of their needs (Woodhead, 2008; Asad, 2003; Houtman and Aupers, 2008). However, this dilemma is especially acute for proponents of the Islamic faith; the discussion below focuses on three aspects of this issue, deemed particularly relevant for the subjects of my study.

Most significantly, the overarching Islamic worldview demands a holism of its adherents, a holism which defies the liberal secular relegation of religious symbols and practice to private realms. The God-centered paradigm of *tauhīd,* the initial entry-point into the faith, means that Muslims are, daily and publicly, translating their God-centeredness into a need for workplace prayer rooms, halal foods, and modest forms of dress and comportment, at the very least. For Muslim women desiring to live by Islamic precepts while working in public spaces, this religious need requires a disruption of the public/private dualism in liberal thought that would have most, if not all, religious practices confined to private spaces (Thornton, 1991). As I have mentioned above, a number of the narratives of my respondents did in fact centre on workplace and community negotiations that attempted to accommodate faith practices, be it Christmas party awkwardness, prayer space needs or the effect of sartorial choices on employability.

Secondly, liberal secular discourse and power structures uphold models of empowerment, for both men and women, that are underpinned by individualism, consumerism, economic independence and self-sufficiency as lofty ideals. Twinned with the First Wave feminist goal to attain this masculine 'norm' for Western women as well, this particular empowerment model has left many women with the twin burden of competing with their male counterparts in capitalist economies, but yet at the same time still bearing the brunt of domestic and care-giving responsibilities primarily because men's change in work-life patterns have been little. They have not taken on an equal share of childcare and domestic responsibilities (Marler, 2008:31). Therefore, while women's status and opportunities may have improved, this model of 'empowerment' has left them caught in the famous double-

bind for women; in the case of Muslim women, religious discriminations and misrepresentation have left them in a triple-jeopardy. Indeed, Woodhead, in an elegant rebuttal to claims of 'equality' for Western women, argues that the post-60s gender revolution was 'stalled' (2008:147). And what has this 'stalled gender revolution' meant for women…? While women have begun to escape patriarchal domination, for many this project of postmodern 'selfhood' remains elusive: they still have other dependents (children, relatives) and still provide the bulk of care, both paid and unpaid. In addition to this gendered discrimination, pious Muslim women must also negotiate narratives of Islamophobia and racism. Amy, one of my convert participants and a Black social worker who spends much of her time working with lawyers, summed up with sobriety the incredulity she sometimes encounters in the workplace:

'So, they (colleagues) expect me to be White… their attitude, it's a combination of (my) being Black and a Muslim. And a woman. That's definitely it, yeah'.

In view of this, women of religious persuasion can turn to alternative models of empowerment which do not rely on individualism and the pursuit of profit as ideals (Franks, 2001; cooke, 2000 and 2007). For Muslim women in particular, Islamic discourse provides a viable alternative: its focus on the family unit over and above individual concerns legitimises their empowerment through domestic and care-giving activities. For example, eschewing a quest for absolute 'equality' and 'sameness' with the male normative, a number of Muslim women, alongside their Christian and Jewish counterparts, employ philosophies of complementarity with men, in order to both formulate a narrative for themselves but also to gain rights within traditional familial structures (Abugideiri, 2004; Franks, 2001: 161; Contractor, 2012:100). Furthermore, it has been argued that it is also this very same focus on

the family unit that has allowed a relatively more successful transmission of religious values from first- and second-generation Muslims to their children (Scourfield et al., 2013). The purpose of this discussion is to neither validate nor support such models of empowerment, but to indicate their existence as alternatives available to religious women seeking empowerment outside the popular liberal narrative. In the words of Woodhead, for women who do value their care-giving and 'traditional' responsibilities, 'it is quite likely that they will shelter under the sacred canopy of religion, since conservative forms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam provide just about the only space in Western societies these days in which such identity continues to be affirmed and legitimized rather than stigmatized' (2008: 190).

Finally, in so far as these empowering strategies are framed as a pursuit of long-withheld justice for women, the Islamic concept of justice, in the sense of '*adl,* can be framed as markedly at odds with that of Western liberal thought. In the medieval Muslim world, a world in which the current Islamic legal system was framed, justice was 'more about proportionality than equality' (Cornell, 2005: 36). This Islamic tenor to the concept of justice remains today, with justice seen more as a restoration of balance and fairness, rather than absolute equality. In the words of Vincent Cornell, the 'Aristotelian notion of distributive justice and proportional ethics was often expressed in the hagiographies of Muslim saints' (2005:37).

For the purposes of this argument, what is significant here is that this alternative conception of justice allows Muslim women to pursue empowering models that need not look the same as the male model of 'the successful man'. Their quest for equity, fairness and balance,

then, may not make the same demands for 'equality' so central to the mid-twentieth century feminist model. Shifting the focus for their activism, thus, from 'equality' to 'equity', enables them to accommodate the lived daily realities and responsibilities that continue to be a significant part of women's lives into the twenty-first century. A significant number of my respondents have utilised resources such as those above, made available to them in the Islamic framework.

An Intersectional analysis: throwing light on the difficulties faced by Muslim women

'There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives.'

(Audre Lorde, 1982)

'No other community has the same burden to take on.' (Sumayya, respondent)

One of the most widely used analytical frameworks within feminist studies in a number of disciplines has recently been that of intersectionality, in the sense of the term developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Writing from within the legal field, Crenshaw employed the term to draw attention to the multiple discriminations faced by Black women in America. Focusing on the categories of race and gender, she highlighted the 'problematic consequence of the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis' in anti-discrimination law, with particular regard to the workplace (1989: 139). Echoing Lorde above, she argued against the 'single-axis' framework dominant in looking at discrimination, and emphasised instead the 'multidimensionality of Black women's

experience' (1989: 139). In her analysis, she called for a recognition that Black women, rather than being subject to one type of discrimination, suffered the combined consequences of both racism and sexism. As a result, their actual experiences and selves suffered an erasure, and could neither be adequately reflected nor dealt with by a single-dimension analysis. While the concept itself was not new to the study of discrimination, Crenshaw was the first to coin the term intersectionality, a term which went on in the ensuing decades to gain much traction.

Nearly three decades on, Crenshaw recognised that not only had her concept been widely adopted, but it has been used to understand the experiences of others beyond Black women. 'Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to Black women', she wrote, describing how intersectionality had become 'a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power' (2015). In particular, Crenshaw isolated 'the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, ableism and more' as particular identity components that can be subject to discrimination, and overlapping discriminations for some.

The work of Patricia Hill Collins has been credited with further publicising and developing the concept of intersectionality in the 90s. Broadening the concept, Collins brought nationality into the analysis, and theorised in more detail how all of the identity markers can combine to form a 'matrix of domination' (2000). Collins can especially be credited with developing the relationship between multiple discriminations and power, especially as manifest in US politics. The extent of discriminatory effects on an individual's life choices will be directly affected by how much access that individual has to powerful social structures, a fact recognised by Crenshaw herself. 'A term can do no more that those who use it have the power to demand', she conceded in a 2015 Washington Post opinion piece calling for more

concrete action to tackle multiple barriers to equality for women and girls. Both Crenshaw and Collins, furthermore, went on to apply the tools of intersectionality to understand how privileges interlock as well, privileges that one may experience simultaneously, and as a result of each other. The ultimate privileged individual in their model, of course, being the typical White, wealthy, heterosexual male holding US nationality.

The analytic lens of intersectionality, thus, is valuable in that it allows for consideration of a number of simultaneous forces, and their possible combinations, acting to disadvantage certain groups. Furthermore, it allows us to see how not just oppression, but also power and privilege operate in intersecting and co-constitutive ways. It has, as such, become one of the most widely used concepts in sociological studies.

However, the relative absence of 'religion' or 'spirituality' as a category in intersectional analyses, especially in early conceptions of the term, can be seen as problematic. As I shall discuss below, the majority of the difficulties in the lives of my respondents were related to misunderstanding and misrepresentation of their faith, a core component of their identity. We have seen in previous chapters that attacks on overarching components of identity can be especially damaging, and feel to the victim like an attack on deeply held values and even their selfhood. This 'neglect' of religion in the lives of individuals could be seen as part of the wider phenomenon of secularism, and the insistence that faith-related issues take a back seat, acted out only in private realms. As such, one may draw a parallel between postsecular ideas and the broadening of intersectional discriminations to include religion as a category; a parallel that, especially in the case of Muslims, is a major source of discrimination and disadvantage.

In a widely cited article, Braidotti echoes the arguments of Mahmood discussed in the previous chapter; she challenges secular feminism to accept that 'agency can be conveyed through and supported by religious piety, and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality' (2008:1). She credits the postsecular turn, furthermore, with bringing these links to the forefront, and calls for a delinking of agency from negative associations of opposition and defiance. Even more pertinent to the women of my sample, Braidotti makes an interesting and insightful claim: Western secularism today, rather than being anti-Church and anti-clerical, has become particularly anti-Islamic, making Islam the 'most targeted of monotheistic religions today' (2008:4). As such, what started as a movement critiquing the Christian church and especially the dogmatic practices of the Catholic Church, has now become a vehicle for anti-Muslim intolerance across Europe. Public and academic discussions of the postsecular turn tend to focus on Islam and the practice of Muslims in the West, with a realisation that Muslims today bear the brunt of negative public sentiment and consequent Islamophobia. Braidotti's conclusion is sobering: 'This reduction of the postsecular condition to the "Muslim issue" in the context of a war on terror that results in the militarization of the social space, means that any unreflective brand of normative secularism runs the risk of complicity with anti-Islam racism and xenophobia' (2008:4). Certainly, for my research, I argue below that the root cause of much of the racism experienced by my respondents has been a result of such anti-Muslim sentiment, rather than patriarchy and misogyny.

This unfortunate and discriminatory effect of widespread secularism has meant, for religious citizens, that a key aspect of their identity is relegated to the private; in the case of Muslims, a further, and more detrimental, outcome has been their linking with 'fanaticism' and 'radicalisation' in the public imagination. In an award-winning article, political scientist

Jakeet Singh brings intersectionality into conversation with the agency of religious women (2015). Of particular importance to my thesis is Singh's critique that intersectionality privileges the structural critique of power over, and at the expense of, individual identity politics. In this way, not only do recent intersectionality tools overlook the more positive aspects of identity intersections, but they also tend to sideline the agency of religious women. In particular, Singh argues that the end result is a reliance of intersectional analysis on 'a negatively defined consensus on anti-oppression' (2015:657).

With a view to the importance of religion and spirituality in the lives of many socially active and publicly engaged minority (and, indeed, a large number of mainstream) women in the West, I believe that Singh's initiative is long overdue. Given that intersectionality 'is the branch of feminist thought that specifically purports to be attentive to the myriad differences in women's lives', one would have to take this factor into consideration when looking at discrimination (Singh, 2015:658). Within sociology, but also increasingly in other fields, it is now widely accepted that a focus on oppression and disadvantage will look at a multifarious host of factors. Furthermore, within the current 'Fourth Wave' of feminism, 'a deep engagement with issues of religions difference has begun' (Singh 2015:658). In bringing intersectionality into conversation with the agency of religious women, and thus including religion as a (sometimes major) axis of difference, Singh has attempted to bring Crenshaw's original analytical tool into line with the current postsecular turn in feminism, but also in academic disciplines more widely (see Bracke 2003; Mahmood 2005; Braidotti 2008; Bilge 2010). For the purposes of my thesis, his most significant conclusion is that a critique that focuses on the negative, and the imbalances of power, reduces 'the amount of space available… to engage with the kinds of diverse, positive ethical-political projects highlighted by the discussion of religious women's agency' (2015:658). With the caveat that my thesis

does, in fact, focus on what Singh calls 'diverse positivities', I move on here to highlight the particular difficulties faced by my respondents in carving pious subjectivities in secular public spaces.

Racism, Media Narratives and Sartorial Choices: Particular Difficulties in the Lives of Muslim Women

'the instruments of measurement will pay a role in what you find' (Bristol-Rhys and Osella, 2018:6)

Anthropologists Osella and Bristol-Rhys have made interesting and insightful reflections on the fieldwork process; their considerations are particularly useful for the context of my research, and have led me to pay particular attention to both my context, and also to my 'instruments of measurement'. As such, I have modified above the 'instrument' of intersectionality by bringing religion into its fold of analysis; in addition, my unique context of women following the precepts of a religion that demands not only private but public practice, in public contexts of widespread secularism, had meant that I must defer to postsecular critiques. When I applied this unique context and the (modified) intersectional tool of analysis to the narratives of my participants, the particular themes of racism (of various sorts), media-generated public narratives and modest attire/*hijāb* came to the fore as the main areas in which difficulties were located for these women. It is worth mentioning here that while socio-economic disadvantage and class-related discrimination was a factor in the childhoods of these women, their particular demographics (as successful and fully-

integrated women comfortable in British public life) meant that these two otherwise common areas of discrimination did not feature heavily in the narratives of their adult experience. Thus, the reader will find occasional reference to them in the discussion below; I have not, however, devoted significant space to either class or poverty issues for this reason.

Narratives of racism and Islamophobia

'The vessel in which cultural purists set sail is always, in the end, a leaky one that requires constant bailing.' (Morey and Yaqin, 2011:20)

'I think being Muslim here definitely carries its strains. You can be viewed with suspicion and as different.' (Cheryl, respondent)

'It was all ok before 9/11… 9/11… The subtle racism, you know, came after that.' (Huda, respondent)

It is widely recognised that prior to the Rushdie affair of the late 1980s, much public racism directed at Muslims (the vast majority of whom hailed from South Asian communities) was on the basis of their ethnicity (Kundnani, 2007; Poynting and Mason, 2007; Warsi, 2017). Writing well over a decade ago, eminent sociologist Tariq Modood describes how South Asians suffered from not just 'colour racism', but also 'cultural racism': the 'racialized image of Asians… appeals to cultural motifs such as language, religion, family structures, exotic dress, cuisine and art forms' (2005:7), and would become the basis for negative and

discriminatory practices against them. As such, his arguments echo those of Crenshaw's earlier intervention: Asians (the vast majority of whom were Muslims, in Britain) suffered from 'a double racism', that of colour and of culture.

I have found this experience reflected in the childhood narratives of my respondents, most of whom spent their formative years in the late 1970s, 80s and early 90s. Writer and educator Sumayya, hailing from a secular Bengoli home, especially had clear memories of being singled out as 'Asian' in her early childhood and teen years:

'There was a race issue in the eighties but if we could go back to the eighties, without surveillance issues, then it was so much better. We weren't part of the news … and I remember a growing feeling from 18, 19 and then 20 onwards. The shock of seeing us in the newspapers. I didn't like it. I was very aware. There were stereotypes and there was a lot of assumptions made (in the eighties) … no one was saying in the eighties that you are fitting in, or accepted. There was a first, second class citizen issue then… at least that was all there was. That you are immigrants and that is it. You are going to be immigrants and you knew where you stood, but now this whole Britishness and the British-Muslim thing is very, very problematic.'

Sumayya, prior to speaking of her secondary school experiences, had recalled to me that her first awareness of being 'Asian' came when her mother was invited into her Primary classroom to speak about 'cooking samosas' and 'ground provisions' (a term commonly used by Caribbean communities for root vegetables); her White British friend, however, was asked to bring in her grandmother to speak about the history of World War II. This irony did not escape Sumayya, and she recalls the subsequent embarrassment felt at being reduced to

'culinary' symbols. In line with Modood's reflections above on cultural racism, Sumayya felt, as an adult, that being singled out for cultural difference, rather than raise her self-esteem as a child, was felt to be demeaning and awkward. Like Aini quoted previously, Sumayya had to accept that she was 'different', especially when she transferred to a heavily White upper-class single-sex grammar school. She recalled passionately how at this school 'there were two or three Hindu girls and one Iranian girl (in her friendship group), we were all friends. So it wasn't a faith thing, it was a race thing. The girls that were the majority were all middle class, White girls … it was a shock to my system'.

The insidious effects of early childhood racism have actually been formative for Irum, an experienced lawyer and national activist. She spoke at length of how early experiences of bullying and being called 'Paki' spurred her to become assertive and fight for her rights. 'What we did suffer a lot in the 70s,' she related to me, 'was racism.' Living in West London, she recalled how encounters with the National Front and their supporters was a daily occurrence: 'I think at around 12 or 14, every day you got called a Paki. Every single day, by somebody or another. And people were really nasty and in school, bullies and people who would pick on the Asians and stuff. Racism was rife.' Irum's experiences have left a deep impact on her, and she now actively teaches her children how to combat discriminatory views. In addition, she credits these early experiences with sowing the seeds of self-reliance in her; she learnt to stand up for herself, and as a young adult strived to overcome her naturally shy personality to speak up for others as well.

Interestingly, the slur of colour and cultural discrimination has also been felt more widely by some respondents who were not even Asian, indicating the widespread nature of anti-minority racism in the 80s and 90s. Cheryl is herself a White convert, but remembers the

effects of racism on her friends: 'I remember the baseline of racism (at secondary school). I would say, particularly against Black people. Islam did never really come on the agenda at that point. It was more… there was a local Chinese takeaway. I remember people being racist to them.' Similarly, Aini, of Mauritian descent, recalled being labelled 'Paki' often: 'I grew up in South East London, quite racist. I remember being called Paki, even though I wasn't. People knocking on the door and then running away…' For Aini, this experience strengthened her feelings of 'being different', and a quiet acceptance that such differences were part of her life. For her, the intersection of the realities of council estate life, combined with being part of a visible minority, meant she suffered from what Modood terms 'compound racism'. Again, echoing the arguments of Crenshaw and Collins at the turn of the century, Modood affirms that such cultural racism against Asians 'is a distinctive construct, not reducible to its constituent parts' (2005:8).

With the events surrounding the Rushdie affair and the subsequent community and political backlash of the late 80s and early 90s, these racist incidents began to take on a distinctly Islamophobic character, with ethnicity taking a back seat to religious discrimination. This was matched by an increasing identification of Muslims themselves with Islam, as opposed to their ethnicity; significant and angry crowds in the northern British towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham rallied around their common faith, and in defence of its traditions. Rather than appealing to their ethnicity, many Muslim youth found an expression for their rising discontent and exclusion in 'alternative forms of identification in "religion"', with a conscious effort to define themselves increasingly as 'Muslims' (Ansari, 2004:9).

In addition, the significant rise in Islamophobia after the terror attacks of September 11th in 2001 is well-documented (Abbas, 2004; Rehman, 2003; Alexander, 2017). I use the term here

in the sense of Runnymede's definition of Islamophobia as any discrimination against Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) which has a basis in their religion, and which hinders their human rights and fundamental freedoms (for full definition see Runnymede Islamophobia report 2017:12). Furthermore, I draw the reader's attention to the significance of religious discrimination as an attack on a core component of an individual's identity; it has the potential, thus, to inflict long lasting damage. Nazroo and Bécares have studied the relationship between Islamophobia and health; they especially point out that 'racism increases exposure to the internalization of negative messages that may lead to decreased self-esteem and poorer mental health' (2017:36). While it is recognised that the vast majority of individuals of minority heritage have not experienced Islamophobia first-hand, Nazroo and Bécares also point to the insidious effects of a *fear* of racism; they report that even 'anticipatory stress' can have negative outcomes for health and well-being. Certainly, there occurred a steep rise in both hate crime and fear amongst Muslims after 9/11 and subsequent terrorist incidents; and although scholars point to racism as pre-existing, and simply exacerbated by the events of 9/11, I observed in those of my respondents who chose to speak about it a heightened awareness of Islamophobia in the aftermath of the attacks.

A number of the women I spoke to recalled having to make changes to their habits and daily routines after 9/11. Amongst them were Cheryl and Zainab, who removed their *hijāb* in certain places perceived to be 'hostile'; and Amy, who recalls this conversation with her brother, soon after the attacks:

'When 9/11 happened, I wasn't driving at the time, and I was having to get the kids to school. My brother rang me and said, "What are you doing tomorrow?" I said, "Going to work." And he said, "How are you going to get there?" "I'm going on the bus of course, is there a

problem?" He's like, "Amy, you can't do that!" "Why?" He's like, "What's just happened on the news?" I said, "I'll be fine." He said no and he brought his car around for me to use because I was more visible than him. They (global events) do impact your life.'

While Amy did not remove her *hijāb*, she did feel that conditions at work worsened for her after this, and she became more conscious of being 'Black, female and Muslim', as she put it. She recounted to me, in our discussions of her public experiences as a Muslim woman in Britain, how colleagues in the legal profession would express sentiments ranging from polite indifference to outright shock when they matched her actual persona to her name (an otherwise unremarkable English name); it took all her resolve to not let these incidents affect her mental health, but she has since then withdrawn socially from workplace gatherings.

Similarly, Sumayya, quoted above, who spoke about her experiences of racism in the mid-eighties, contrasted this with what came later, in the form of the securitisation of Muslim communities after 9/11: 'They are under surveillance, it's not a nice place for young Muslims to be. They and their parents are paranoid… because they can't afford to be naïve. There was a race issue in the eighties, but if we could go back to the eighties without surveillance, then it was so much better'. She went on to recall the shock of being a constant 'news item' and the attendant discomfort for her as a teenager. So, while Sumayya, like a number of my respondents, felt she had overcome the cultural racism of the 1980s and 1990s, the current perception of high levels of anti-Muslim discrimination can be debilitating for her.

What can often be less obvious, however, are the incidents of racism and discrimination that individuals can suffer at the hands of their own religious and ethnic communities, and even their own families in the case of converts.

Amy (Black convert) and Cheryl (White convert) are both mature women over 55, and had been Muslim for a number of decades when I spoke to them. Both suffered forms of ethnic racism from Muslim communities when they became Muslim; although neither had met the other, I was struck by the similarity of their negative experiences with 'born Muslims'. Cheryl told me that she had had

'issues from within the Muslim community itself; … if you are Black you can't belong to it because you look so different, and Asian communities have their own internal racism, whether it's against Black people or Hinduism or whatever... I think each ethnicity that becomes Muslim has its own layers of difficulty built in. I think that those White people, along with those Black people who become Muslim, have got a lot more in common than the original Muslim community'.

Despite hailing from an educated and upper-class White background (a demographic least likely, in normal circumstances, to face racism), Cheryl has long felt unaccepted by long-settled Pakistani and Arab Muslim communities. On first converting, she found this a shock, and it tempered the idealism with which she, like many new converts, had approached the Muslim community. She found that while converts were 'equal' to born Muslims ideologically and scripturally, in practice this did not often translate into social realms. Amy, similarly, told me of her surprise to find, a few years after converting, that one of her best friends would 'never consider marriage with a Black Muslim'. Both women related to me

how they subsequently have dealt with this attitude of incomplete acceptance by retreating into small social circles of their own. Cheryl socialises mainly with either upper-class English reverts like herself, or within her Moroccan Sufi *zāwiyah*; Amy restricts herself to her family and a small group of Black convert friends.

I found a few instances of this internal cultural racism working in complex ways, on a number of fronts simultaneously. Anjum, a born Muslim Pakistani mental health worker, and Sara, a younger youth worker hailing from the Mirpuri community, both faced negative attitudes from their own local communities for being progressive women who rejected many patriarchal practices in their upbringing. Anjum had left an abusive marriage after having been told to 'keep trying' for many years, and she related to me how she now counsels young couples who have marital problems. However, she is considered the trouble-maker by those in her family who believe that a woman must put up with domineering husbands. In addition, her passionate belief that one must engage with non-Muslims and mix with a variety of people socially has not been valued in her community: 'They are not so open-minded! Not willing to go get to know our neighbour. We (referring to her community) are very enclosed, even some people who are on the *dīn* are enclosed. They don't want to know. It's very, very important, they (referring to those outside the community) are human beings as well. We put up this barrier, go to extremes… either we go too far into the *dīn*, or we are very culture-fied, and say we cannot mix with them'. Both Anjum and Sara, furthermore, had a lot to say about the strict restrictions imposed on Pakistani Muslim youth, especially girls.

Sara herself was brought up by a progressive and liberal, yet faithful, mother while her father had been jailed for many years for illegal drugs offences. In her own words, she was 'allowed the freedom that none of the boys in the Mirpuri community had'; at a time when others her

age were not allowed to go to the cinema, mix beyond one's clan and community, and have friends of the opposite sex, she was enjoying these opportunities. However, this resulted in her being ostracised by local Muslim children as 'I think their hatred towards me came from (that). It was their resentment towards what they couldn't have and to what they thought I had. Some people didn't even know about my dad, some just resented me because I had this different personality to what they had, and I had this different freedom'.

While workplace, communal and family-related racism and Islamophobia certainly came up in the narratives of my respondents, it was the phenomenon of negative media-generated tropes that came up most frequently, and had the most inescapable and unfortunate effects on their behaviours and morale.

The pervasive effects of negative media narratives

'The remnant of anti-Muslim thought is lodged in the reader's mind and is much more nourishing to many than the truth'. (Scott-Baumann, 2018:58)

'I'm sick and tired of hearing about Muslims all the time. I want to go back to the days when we didn't hear anything. There was ignorance, but at least it was based on lack of information. Now its ignorance based on misinformation and racism and Islamophobia and I think that's more dangerous than the ignorance that we had before.' (Zainab, respondent)

The narratives of my respondents were often dotted with, variously, fear, frustration and occasionally anger, at being a constant 'news item', in the words of Sumayya. Public discourse on Muslims, especially in the form of negative media portrayals, is increasingly focussed on an alleged incompatibility between Islam and a vague notion of British/democratic values (Morey and Yaqin, 2011; Ryan, 2011:1046); in particular, the securitisation of Muslim communities in the West have led to the creation of a climate of suspicion in public places that Muslims occupy, and a withdrawal of Muslims generally from public roles (Modood, 2009; Scott-Baumann, 2018).

As Zainab verbalises in the quote above, a few women I spoke to even preferred the pre-1980s variant of racism to the current threat of being implicated a 'terrorist', or at the very least, being seen publicly as aligned to terrorist causes. They spoke of being 'necessarily conscious' of the negative public image of Muslims, with many women being afraid for their very safety immediately after a terrorist event. Amy told me of the precautions she now takes (when we met, a Muslim woman had recently been pushed off the platform onto the path of an oncoming train):

'I sometimes don't want to watch the news but I feel that I need to, I'm compelled to because I need to know what else is out there, what I may need to be aware of, what I may need to speak of, especially to my daughter. She wears a *hijāb*. So, it's that sort of necessary consciousness and that's how it is. When the incident happened, I had to go to a work conference the next day in York, and I considered not going because I was having to leave very early in the morning, and I was thinking there's hardly going to be anybody around… I almost didn't go. I do have a… fear is a strong word… but I don't see it as inconceivable that I could be at the end of an attack with somebody being malicious. Simple things like the

journey home and standing right at the edge (of the platform) because I want a seat on the train… I think about it now.'

What Amy is referring to here may be seen as what Ryan describes as 'a sense of disequilibrium that throws people off balance' after an incident in which Muslims are implicated (Ryan, 2011:1051), a disequilibrium that can also cause an abrupt break in the 'normal' patterns of work and daily life. One is reminded of Crenshaw's original insistence that an intersectional lens, when used to analyse discriminations, cannot be devoid of considerations of power. More recently, she has written of 'institutions that use identity to exclude and privilege' (2015); surely, the British press, in exercising the power to alter the rhythms of daily life for thousands of Muslim women across the country and make them fear for their safety, is exercising undue and oppressive power. The narratives of my respondents attest to this power, the power to stigmatise whole communities for the actions of a few; more importantly, the hopelessness created would have been debilitating for less confident and less able women.

Nevertheless, Sara, a Mirpuri youth worker in her 30s, took a moment out to confide that 'at the moment, I feel quite overwhelmed and feel like I need a break from the UK for two to three years. I feel overwhelmed by the negativity'. Amy, similarly, ended her account above with the rejoinder 'but it's always there', indicating the pervasiveness of such media tropes and the extent to which they impact on her. Baha, an academic and teacher, expressed her anger vociferously; she refuses to change her daily routines in response to media reports, but sees the wider effects of such portrayals. 'So, bacon-shunning-Christmas-hating-poppy-degrading Muslims love jihad (referring to recent headlines in the Sun newspaper) … so Steve the patriot can assault a Muslim woman in Manchester for attacking Paris and feel

justified', she vented to me when we spoke. I was surprised by her sudden outburst in an otherwise sedate discussion; this, to me, was an indication of the insidious effects of media portrayals on 'ordinary' Muslims. Rather than exhibit the stereotypical 'angry Muslim voice', however, Baha has chosen to channel her energies into intellectual endeavours that bring a variety of people together.

The ubiquitous issue of *hijāb*

'The lazy, unsubstantiated belief that *hijābi* women are dangerous, held by many, weakens the fabric of society by reducing trust in others, reducing trust in one's own judgement and pathologising diversity.' (Scott-Baumann, 2018:60)

'It's as important as the socks you wear… would you want to talk about your socks?'
(Sumayya, respondent, referring to her *hijāb*)

'They (Muslim women) are represented badly. I watched an episode of East Enders the other day, and they had a Muslim person in *hijāb*, I think pregnant, the Muslim family is always in the pub. Nice to see that they had a Muslim woman in *hijāb* in a normal environment, but it's such a warped programme anyway. It's ridiculous what they've tried to portray. Our definition is not the scarf on our head, it's not that we are a wife, it's not that we're just a stay at home mother!' (Shabnam, respondent)

In the case of Muslim women, the negative media gaze is fixated, over and above all else, on her sartorial choices, especially when they do not conform to 'Western' norms. In the words of Williamson and Khiabany, 'the veil has become an image of "otherness", of a refusal to integrate and an example of the "failings" of multiculturalism' (2010:85). The extent to which this affected my participants cannot be underestimated. Despite not initially intending to devote any research time and space to the issue of *hijāb* (and asking no direct questions about dress in my interviews), I was faced with the subject so frequently in discussions about public encounters that its significance could not be ignored. Interestingly, the *hijāb* had not come up in discussions of faith and spirituality, but only in recounting difficult public encounters or media portrayals. This in itself indicates that Muslim women's modest dress occupies a much higher profile in the public imagination than it does for the women themselves; in the words of Sumayya, she dons her *hijāb* freely and it is important to her, but does not want to have to discuss it at every public encounter… 'Would you want to talk about your socks?' she retorts in frustration. In addition, as scholars quoted above have argued, the (re)creation of the *hijāb* as a symbol of 'otherness' has only served to damage trust between communities and individuals from these communities.

Yusra, a mother of three and Criminology student who works in the community to fight extremism, spoke to me of how she, after wearing the *hijāb* comfortably for many years, has now been forced to reconsider her sartorial choices. She shared her measured and thoughtful views on the subject:

'To be honest, I've had to change my style of *hijāb*. Probably because of safety reasons. Because of the backlash of what's happening, post-Brexit and post-Daish (ISIS) as well, the emergence of Daish, so I've had to change that. Now if worse came to worst, I would have to

take it off. Right now, the good thing is I haven't received any backlash. And I'm having good dialogues with public services. What I am a bit concerned about is the lack of Islamic understanding that the frontline workers would usually have.'

Since we spoke, Yusra has in fact removed her *hijāb*, in order to continue her public work without coming under the spotlight herself. We see here again a manifestation of the direct impact of negative and unrepresentative tropes on the daily lives of these women; they have forced to reconsider core components of their identity, and alter their sartorial choices in order to feel comfortable in public.

Interestingly, as in the case of Islamophobia and racism generally, the widespread negativity associated with *hijāb* also affected a few women's relationships with their families. Baha recalled her decision to don the *hijāb* as a young adult, and the recriminations she received from her educated and upper-class Egyptian family on visiting them in Alexandria. Karen, similarly, found that on converting to Islam, her English family 'just hated my *hijāb*'. She also found that her Egyptian Muslim husband disliked it even more, because 'in Egypt at that time, remember women of the upper classes did not cover, servants covered. And after 9/11, Egyptian friends contacted my husband and said tell Hala (her daughter) and Karen to take it off'. While Karen laughs these experiences off and tells me how much she loves being identified as a Muslim publicly, and Baha went on to continue to wear her *hijāb*, Cheryl expresses a frustration common amongst my respondents:

'And I don't want to hear any more about how we are oppressed or victimised or forced to wear *hijābs* and whatnot. The 'H' word really riles me!'

Samina, similarly, feels frustrated that the public image promoted is one of 'being backwards and uneducated, suppressed by the males around them'. She finds the strength to continue wearing the *hijāb*, but like Cheryl and Sumayya, feels frustration that it receives undue attention, and has become symbolic of 'backwardness, illiteracy and suppression'. In the words of seasoned researcher on Muslim issues, Claire Dwyer, my respondents here are expressing the feeling that the *hijāb* has become an 'over-determined signifier' (1999:8).

Dwyer's framework for examining the ways in which dress contributes to the hybrid identities of modern Muslim women in the West may be instructive in explaining the way my respondents approach the subject. She considers how women are challenging the dichotomous framework which categorises modestly-dressed women as 'traditional', and others as 'Western'. This echoes my earlier arguments that such binaries no longer hold for publicly-active, assertive and yet religious British Muslim women such as those in my sample (see Introduction to Chapter 1). Of my 25 respondents, 20 wore modest dress in the form of *hijāb*, yet all were actively involved in public life, volunteering in community and international causes, and 18 were in employment at the time of interview (4 were retirees). Even a cursory glance at this profile indicates the infeasibility of this dichotomy.

It would be a mistake here to not recognise the role of patriarchal influences in the lives of many Muslim women, especially in areas of dress and comportment; the reader may, at this point, be wondering about their absence. Considering the nature of my sample, however, of confident, educated and socially active women, I came across only one mention of misogyny from within patriarchal community structures; even in that case, mental health worker Azra who spoke about her experiences focussed on how she had overcome her earlier mistreatment at the hands of her abusive husband and compliant family. Interestingly, Dwyer, in her

fieldwork, also recognises a class determinant to patriarchy in Muslim communities; she notes that 'the significance of these (patriarchal discourses and practices) positionings varied, particularly according to the class positions of individuals' (1999:9). Thus, while recognising the existence of patriarchal influences in the lives of British women today, in the interests of reflecting the lives of my respondents specifically, I have not devoted significant discussion to this.

Instead, I consider it instructive here to draw attention to the ways in which my respondents are responding to widespread public beliefs about their dress, thus continuing to develop hybrid identities. A significant way in which I saw this done was by my respondents denying the overarching importance given to symbols of *hijāb* by the media. This was done both by processes of omission and by verbalising its 'unimportance'. The fact that not a single respondent spoke of *hijāb* or other forms of comportment when discussing their faith and issues of belief indicates that it only formed a small, yet necessary, part of their worldview; on the other hand, when it came to discussing public encounters generally, *hijāb* was ubiquitous as a symbol that could draw malicious Islamophobia, an overdetermined signifier, and actually as uppermost in the minds of these women as 'the socks we wear!' Their combined frustration at the hijacking of what, for them, is a small yet significant spiritual practice, is summed by Cheryl, an otherwise sober intellectual holding a doctorate, and more used to discussions around culture and art: 'The "H" word really riles me!'

The spaces within which these women exercise their agency, and resist common interpretations of *hijāb* and suppression, can be imagined as one of Bhabha's 'third spaces'. By not only appropriating the widespread narrative of 'backward, uneducated and suppressed' Muslim women, but also giving symbols like the *hijāb* new meaning (as, for

example, a deeply spiritual practice central to their faith), my respondents are displaying their continued identity negotiations. In addition, the agency of these (often) religious women is visible here: they are resisting in the face of fear and insecurity, going about their public roles in full knowledge of public beliefs about Muslim women.

In concluding both this section and this chapter, it is worth noting that in almost every narrative and re-telling of encounters with racism/Islamophobia/disadvantage, the women I interviewed related how they overcame this. In fact, their strategies and mindsets occupied their stories to a greater extent than did the actual incident itself, or even discussion of how these events undermined their morale and sense of self. In addition, I consider it instructive to remember here that with every unwelcome public encounter came descriptions of many, many more examples of positive, healthy and neutral public encounters. Numerous examples of the small kindnesses of ordinary people such as holding doors open, being offered seats on trains, finding a prayer space at the V &A, accommodations at workplaces, strangers offering the greeting of 'Salaam', made significant impact on their feelings of being a part of British multicultural society.

In Conclusion: Postsecularism, Intersectionality and the Agency of Muslim Women

'Well… you have to dwell on it. You have to think it through and then you move on. I think that those who are not able to, are the ones that suffer.' (Cheryl, respondent)

In this chapter, I have used the analytical lens of intersectionality to explore the disadvantages suffered by my respondents living as practicing Muslim women in the liberal secular environment of Britain.

I have argued for the inclusion of 'religion' as a category in intersectional analyses, based on the observed phenomenon of increasing Islamophobia, and general negative perceptions of Muslim women on matters specifically related to their faith. Certainly for the women in my sample, almost all negative encounters attacked their 'Muslimness', rather than gender, socio-economic characteristics, other disabilities, or even colour. In addition, I have shown that a number of scholars now signal the arrival of what may be called 'postsecularism' in Western societies, with the greater visibility of public manifestations of faith in otherwise liberal secular societies.

Finally, the ways in which these particular women have negotiated incidents of racism directed at their faith and their attire gives weight to the arguments of Mahmood (2005), Bilge (2010) and Singh (2015) that these women exhibit a form of agency which is not bound a priori 'to the teleology of emancipation, whether feminist or anti-imperialist' (Bilge, 2010:9). This ability to 'think it through and move on', in the words of Cheryl quoted above, is what may be seen as the essence of the resilience, rather than resistance, of these Muslim women.

In the next chapter, I explore this very resilience and alternative agency conceptions of these Muslim women to indicate the mindsets that enable them to negotiate pious lives in multicultural Britain. In highlighting the strength and affirmation of this sample of women, it is hoped that we can 'consider the multiplicity of forms of subjectivity and consciousness that

are positive, affirmative and creative' (Singh, 2015) in the lives of minority women in Britain today.

Ch.7: The Mindsets of Muslim Women: Finding Resilience

'What, after all, has maintained the human race on this old globe, despite all the calamities of

nature and all the tragic failings of mankind, if not the faith in new possibilities and the

courage to advocate for them…' (Addams, 2002: 85)

'We are not people of positions, we are activists… we don't hold on to positions, we give

them up. We can only bring about change if we change the way we work within ourselves.

The Quran says that.' (Irum, respondent)

At the conclusion of the last chapter, we heard from Cheryl, a highly educated convert in her

50s; she is heard telling the reader that when beset by problems and social setbacks, 'You

have to think it through and then you move on*'*. It is this very mindset that, I believe, has

enabled to the women of my sample such as Irum (quoted above) and Cheryl to rise above

various setbacks, traumas and early childhood disadvantages (some of which I have

highlighted in previous chapters) to not only achieve a strong sense of self, but to also

contribute to the betterment of others.

In these last two, closely connected, thematic chapters of my thesis, I return to Saba

Mahmood's conception of agency to address more directly one of my initial research

questions of 'what empowers and motivates these women in their agential actions'? The

reader is reminded here that this thesis conceives of agency not in the sense of 'freedom from

oppression and constraints', but as a 'capacity for action' and a 'capacity for change'. Here, the discussion goes further to problematise Mahmood's conceptions of agency and freedom, and adapt them to reflect the motivations and actions of the current participants.

These chapters, furthermore, showcase the attitudes and empowering factors that have allowed the women to succeed in a postsecular environment that can, nevertheless, be inimical to their faith. They uncover a different story, and indicate new possibilities. Here I showcase the particular characteristics that make them strong, and able to successfully hold plural identities, identities that are sometimes construed oppositionally (such as faith and nationalism), and identities that have negative public images (their 'Muslimness'). The current chapter focuses on questions of resilience, positivity and pragmatism, and the following one showcases the importance of balance for my respondents, and how, in challenging public secularism in their daily lives, they become bona fide 'ambassadors' of their faith.

A particularly salient finding of this study has been what I term the observed 'generational trajectory' in the lives of these women. I have found that, for a number of my respondents, their life trajectories have followed a move from focussing on 'one's own community' and building bonding capital when they are younger, to much more of a concern for interacting outside Muslim communities and building bridging capital as they mature in age (Putnam, 2000). This significant finding goes against popular conceptions of the *Muslimah* in the West as insular and inward-looking, and has received little mention in the literature thus far. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Before this discussion delves into the particular characteristics of these women, the findings of my study are brought into conversation with the context of an emerging postsecularism in Britain, and in the West more generally. In particular, the results of this study contribute to a re-evaluation of two foundational concepts in liberal-secular formulations that describe the lives of individuals: agency and freedom. In examining the concepts of agency and freedom in greater detail and from an alternative angle, this chapter revisits and builds upon exploratory theories of the postsecular landscape in Britain introduced in the previous chapter. The discussion below develops the context around both this chapter and the next, and sets the scene within which the mindsets of these Muslim women may be explored.

The Context: Postsecularism, Agency and Freedom

In the previous chapter, the reader was introduced to the discourse around the rise of religious practice (of various forms) in the West, with particular reference to the debate in Britain. The historical background to this observed phenomenon, termed 'desecuralisation' or 'sacralisation' by scholars, was traced through the work of Peter Berger (1969a; 1999) and other 20th Century sociologists of religion. Within the British context, Charles Taylor has reignited the debate around accommodating faithful believers in a secular landscape (2007); and more specifically to this thesis, Woodhead (2008), Aune et al. (2008) and Franks (2001) have all written of the rise in religious observance and spirituality amongst educated women in particular.

Here, the discussion delves deeper into aspects of a more recent phenomenon, also introduced in the previous chapter: that of postsecularism. The term can be seen as an attempt to describe

the co-existence of significant communities of secular and religious peoples in otherwise liberal secular countries. The reader is reminded that the term is used in this thesis not to describe an absence or obsolescence of secularism, but rather to refer to a recognition that citizens of both religious and secular persuasion do indeed continue to exist side by side, and do so in significant numbers (Stoeckl, 2011); secularism, furthermore, is used in this thesis in the sense of a widespread belief in society that 'life can best be lived by applying reasoned ethics… without reference to a deity or other "supernatural" concepts', and a 'relative separation between state and religion' (Birt et al., 2011: vi). Following on from the 'desecularisation' thesis of the late 20th Century, postsecular ideas call for a recognition of the fact that a significant number of people in modern, secular societies seek a moral order and a search for meaning in their lives; in the words of Braidotti, 'religion is back with a vengeance… God is not dead at all' (2008:2).

While much of the discussion around the phenomenon of postsecularism highlights the rise in new religious movements (NRMs) and alternative spiritualities (Aune et al., 2008), this discussion restricts itself to the potential that postsecular ideas and (re)conceptions hold for religious minorities in the West. In this regard, Muslim minorities in Britain have especially been shown to have a long-standing attachment to faith; it forms a central and tenacious identity component (Zebiri, 2008; Hussain, 2008; MCB, 2015). When analysing both the identity constructs of my respondents and their motivations for volunteering, the central role of religion and spirituality was certainly apparent.

However, two particular aspects of this discourse deserve further attention with regard to the motivations and mindsets of the women in my sample: the concepts of 'agency' and 'freedom'. Through the course of my fieldwork and subsequent analysis, I had been perturbed by the inadequacy of theoretical frames dealing with agency and freedom. While I witnessed the lives of independent, resourceful and resilient Muslim women, I nevertheless

struggled to capture the reality of their daily negotiations within existing theoretical frames that described autonomous actions and attainment of freedom as antithetical to a theistic life, and frames that emphasised a stereotypical, exclusive feminist experience (for a critique of this approach, see Mohanty 2003, Franks 2005, Mahmood 2005, Abu-Lughod 1990). The aim here, then, is to think about 'modalities of agency that exceed liberatory projects (feminist, leftist or liberal)' (Mahmood, 2005:x).

Revisiting agency and freedom

'The dominant sociological frames do not ground agency in the lived experiences of *believers.'* (Avishai, 2008:423)

'The freedoms women seek, however, are contextual and the ways in which the mainstream in a liberal democracy define women's freedoms and liberties are by no means universal—especially when we bring faith into the picture or when we take a global perspective as feminisms are indeed located.' (Franks, 2005:201)

In previous chapters, this thesis has developed alternative conceptions of agency, those that do not frame it primarily as the ability to seek freedom from oppression. Instead, this discussion frames the agency of the women in my sample as a 'capacity for change' and a 'capacity for action', both preceded by a desire to do things 'differently'. Similarly, as reflected in the quote of Franks above, 'freedom' is also a multifarious concept, and can be

employed in very different ways by individuals of secular and religious persuasions; for Muslim women, for example, wearing the *hijāb* can often be framed as freedom from commodification and the unwelcome male gaze. Bilge argues that the veiled Muslim women has, in fact, become a particularly 'iconic figure in these debates' (2010:10). In the debate around whether Muslim culture hinders the freedom of its female adherents in particular, scholars such as Bilge and Franks question whether the actual concept of freedom must be problematised, and whether conceptions that are 'hegemonic within Western feminist imaginaries' can be applied universally (Bilge, 2010:10). In seeing what has become the very symbol of oppression in Western society, the veil and their adherence to a gender-traditional religion, as their free choice and assertion of independence, the women of this sample have inverted what it means to be 'free'. We shall see below that these women present as independent, educated and able to freely choose their affiliations and life choices. For them, liberation does not mean 'doing what you like' (Franks, 2005:207), but rather having the freedom to fashion their life in submission to God. As we turn below to hear the women's narratives in their own words, it is worth noting that such differences in conceptions of freedom, feminism and gender 'have ramifications for what women from different backgrounds consider to be "liberating" or empowering' (Franks, 2005:200).

My arguments do, however, qualify the concept of a pious ideal with discussion of the mundane and temporal realities of daily life; my discussion illustrates how the women exhibit a creative and hybrid 'matching' of worldviews and subjectivities in making agential choices. The result is the unique combination of strong religious belief and spirited agency; the Muslim women of my sample have been able to create lives that allow them to uphold core aspects of their identity in a secular society, while also successfully contributing to that very society.

The alternative worldviews of these women, not accommodated by popular tropes around agency and freedom, are best demonstrated in their own words. Speaking reflectively and slowly at the end of our conversation, Shabnam presented this philosophical stance on the course she has chosen for her own life, and her decision to help others whenever she can:

'I think it's important to have an impact on situations and lives. If you are put in a position where you have been given a voice, it's because God wanted you to do something with that voice. God gives you a voice because He wants you to use it, not because He wants you to stay silent. If you have the voice and the physical ability, you have to use it.'

We see here a clear juxtaposition of both religious and temporal frames; the belief in a divine being is combined here with concepts normally related to social justice and individual autonomy: giving voice, taking action to remove injustices, making an impact and making use of one's resources. In the extract above, Shabnam has clearly demonstrated that, in her view, in order to be loyal to her faith and her conception of God, she must exercise neither blind submission nor hold radical beliefs, but rather exercise her autonomous voice to secure justice for others. Having concluded that fighting for justice is something she believes we 'have to do', she confided to me once I had turned the voice recorder off that she felt very satisfied at having told me this, and found this particular reflection especially thought-provoking. 'I don't think I've ever said that to anyone before…,' she mused at the end of our conversation.

In a very different context, seasoned and well-known activist Halima exercises clear agency in re-interpreting historical events from 7th Century Arabia, in order to apply their lessons in an innovative way to her community and local government work in West London:

'It (referring to leadership) was never a straight line. At the time he (Prophet Muhammad) died, he didn't even leave a perfect society, but he left a mechanism, he left processes, he left relationships which were rooted in the Quran, reinforced by his Sunnah. What were the principles, what were the ethics behind these things? How did the prophet take, for example, a thoroughly complex, disengaged community, let's say Medina and how did he harness the different energies in there, because people are coming from all different places? One of the things for example… is looking at the constitution of Medina. Re-looking at it, so what were the elements of it? One thing the prophet never did was, he never said, now I am the leader this is how I think we should do it. What was interesting was that he maintained everybody according to what they were used to.'

Quite strikingly, Halima has unwittingly shed a very different light on historical events that are otherwise well-known in Muslim communities. Rather than merely reiterate traditional tropes around following the 'Golden Age' of the Sunnah, she extrapolates the wisdom of the prophet to apply lessons that seem more apt in 21st Century management and leadership manuals. She went on to explain to me how she is using these very same principles to develop a leadership programme for her local community. In her innovative appropriation of Islamic tradition for use in modern contexts, Halima shows clear agency and foresight. For example, she has underlined the importance of recognising the contribution, and tapping into the value, of minority communities; one may argue that this is a still a very much underutilised and ignored resource in multicultural Britain today. Political theorists and sociologists in the field of British multiculturalism have, in fact, argued for the recognition of minority contributions, in the drive to achieve a robust pluralist society. In Chapter 2 of this thesis, we have seen that well-respected commentators such as Tariq Modood have been, for

decades, calling for the contributions of minorities to be recognised and valued on the national landscape (2007b; 2014).

More pertinent to the subject at hand, the type of agency Halima displays in her work defies popular and sometimes exclusive conceptions of agency as 'resistance', 'fighting back' or 'individual autonomy'. It is precisely such display of resourcefulness and originality amongst women of religion that can obfuscate liberal-secular feminist conceptions of autonomy and desired freedoms (Bracke, 2008; Jacobsen, 2011). At the turn of the century, the unease felt by scholars in a variety of fields- feminism, anthropology, sociology- at the challenge presented by women's freely chosen participation in religious movements led to efforts to theorise this observed trend (Bracke, 2003).

Prominent amongst such theorising is the work of Saba Mahmood, introduced in Chapter 5. It was in the work and arguments of Mahmood that my results began to take root, and the agentic actions of my respondents found a home. Based on her fieldwork and reflections around the lives of women in the mosque movement of Cairo, Mahmood has been able to reconceptualise agency in a way that detaches it both from formulations relating to resistance and rebellion, and also from the way in which liberal feminist goals of freedom and autonomy can often be conceived.

As with this study, Mahmood found that existing 'modalities of agency' did not account for the freely chosen religiosity of the women she studied (2005:153). Instead, she urged social scientists to consider that individuals may, in fact, have desires other than the pursuit of freedom. Detaching the concept from its Western moorings, Mahmood called for a recognition that forms of both agency and desired freedoms can be culturally specific and

historically circumscribed; one size, in her view, did not fit all when theorising self-determined choices. For the purposes of this thesis, the reader is reminded that the women in my sample display agency not so much in how they *resist* norms of British and Muslim society, but more so in how they *inhabit* these norms in an empowering manner. This coincides with Mahmood's observation that her respondents in the mosque movement were heavily self-fashioning themselves as pious subjects by serving God's will, as opposed to following goals of autonomy. In her formulation, self-fulfillment must be dissociated from autonomy, and Western feminisms need to recognise that some individuals seek to fashion themselves by serving religious prescriptions (2005:30).

In trying to understand the strength and independence of action exercised by Muslim women, Mahmood's conception of agency can be expounded further, and even problematised. As I have highlighted in the extracts above, we find that the agency of religious women cannot simply be construed as an antidote to liberal feminist conceptions of freedom and autonomy; the reality, in fact, seems more complex and less easily defined. We have found religious women appropriating sacred discourses (as does Halima above) for some very 21st Century ends, such as efficiency and leadership development. Feminist anthropologist Jacobsen 'argues against positing Muslim conceptions and techniques of the self as "the other" of liberal-secular traditions'. Instead, she concludes from her work with young Muslim activists in Norway that 'Islamic and liberal secular discursive formations inhabit not only the same cultural and historic space, but also shape individual subjectivities and modes of agency' (2011:65). This thesis concurs with Jacobsen that while Mahmood has paved the way for alterative conceptions of agency and freedom to explain the lives and choices of religious Muslim women, one need exercise caution in applying her work as a general 'best fit' model

when contextualising the piety and actions of religious women in the West (Bautista, 2008; Jacobsen, 2011).

The current study has in fact, as highlighted in a number of places, found a unique 'blending' of Islamic and liberal ideas in the narratives of religious women living in Britain. This observed hybridity of worldviews that underpin the actions of these women indicates a 'different' mode of agency, enacted towards aims that cannot simply be described as freedom from oppression and resistance to norms.

How, then, does one understand the freely chosen submission of these women to religious norms and teachings? In the case of this study in particular, how does one explain the explicit and implicit ways in which women choose to follow a religion (Islam) that has often been portrayed as patriarchal and detrimental to female autonomy? Even more complex is the observed instrumentalisation of both sacred and temporal concepts (as in Irum's quote at the beginning of this chapter) to further both autonomous but also communal ends, aimed at social justice. A number of my respondents, for example, spoke of using their professional skills and training to further social justice causes; Irum went on to tell me that after the Bosnian war, she realised that as a lawyer, she 'had skills that Allah had given me that I needed to put to use to tackle this (public ignorance of genocide).' To date, she has spent over twenty years volunteering for the Remembering Srebrenica charity to tackle hatred, racism and intolerance in society (https://www.srebrenica.org.uk/); she sees it as her duty to utilise skills and training that she believes is God's blessing to her.

Similarly, mother-of-four pharmacist Aini reminisced about why she chose her pharmaceutical profession to further spiritual goals: 'it's about caring, … in the role that I do,

it is about looking after people, helping the sick and giving support so it's not like a business'. She explained that serving the sick made her 'feel useful, feel good', and that she did not mind occasionally working late without additional pay because she considered it a service to mankind. Her professional role made her feel a productive member of society, and often uplifted her after a difficult evening/weekend at home, where she confided that family life could be challenging and emotionally draining. 'So, I escape to work!' she laughed ruefully; ironically, her very secular workplace setting fulfils a spiritual function for her, and she finds peace in reciting Quranic prayers on her motorway journey to work. In the case of these two women, one could argue that they are not passively submitting to religious norms, but in fact reinterpreting those norms and ideals to undertake autonomous action and exercise professional skills, with the aim to further social cohesion (in Irum's case) and serve humanity (in Aini's case).

Mahmood, in fact, has argued exactly this: that what she terms the 'religious revivalist' movement actually has a strong individualising component (Mahmood, 2005:30). This may be particularly true in the case of Islam, with no hierarchical structure and little, if any, centralised authority. Women choosing to follow such creeds, then, exercise their agency in adopting religious practices to both provide their moral compass, but also to guide their day-to-day conduct. Even more pertinent to the discussion here, this study suggests that the goal of these women is not freedom from norms, or even from subjugation, but an ethical self-fashioning with the aim of becoming both productive citizens and God-conscious individuals.

One could argue that in the two case studies above, we have seen a number of autonomous self-fashioning techniques, independently enacted, taken from religion: reading the Quran for guidance, meditation, choice of a caring profession, advocacy for those less fortunate, and the

constant effort to live a 'faithful' quotidian life in the belief that one's Islam cannot be divorced from daily life. Contrary to the traditional liberal-secular 'individualisation' as a mode emphasising personal choice and autonomy, the mode of 'individualisation' exhibited by women such as Irum and Aini prioritises submission to God's will. Taking this analogy further, resistance takes on a new meaning: one resists not just unjust social norms, but also one's own desires that are inconsistent with a pious life. In the introductory quote, Irum refers to how 'we don't hold on to positions, we give them up' in a reference to not desiring power and fame, and instead aim to bring about positive internal change guided by the Quran. Aini, similarly, has fashioned a mindset where she considers work a service to mankind. She shared in discussions that she is inspired to be grateful for the blessing of health on a daily basis when she sees those who are bed-ridden and severely ill; this helps her overcome discontent and depression in other areas of her personal life. One may argue that these ruminations and modes of agency cannot be easily captured by a binary model of oppression and resistance.

Equally however, the mindsets and motivations of these women can also not be framed as a simple counter-position to the liberal-secular tradition. The relationship between the two modes of agency defies simple categorisation as either totally 'Islamic' or fully 'Western/liberal'. In the words of Jacobsen, 'the shaping and moulding of subjectivities takes place at the intersection of several internally heterogenous and contested discursive traditions' (2011:76). We have seen these women utilise the languages of liberalism and even individual autonomy, yet within worldviews motivated by a desire to submit to God, as they see it. It may be suggested that this 'mode' of agency fits in with the characterisation of their identities as hybrid, heterogenous and fluid (see Ch. 4). There are visible elements of personal autonomy in the actions of these women; in choosing careers that further their

ideals, in pursuing activist goals, and in sometimes going against one's own community in the pursuit of justice (as in Irum's case of when she chose to prosecute Muslims guilty of criminal offences, rather than protecting them as fellow Muslims). Their narratives, furthermore, were peppered with references to the life choices they had independently made, including that of actively following Islamic prescriptions, as opposed to being socially pressured to conform. For example, Halima, Irum and Sumayya explicitly spoke of actively 'choosing' to adopt an Islamic lifestyle on exposure to Muslim peers at university. Aini remembers packing a *hijāb* for the first time on her move to university because she had been wanting to 'try it', but did not have the courage to do so at home; a significant number of my respondents did not don the *hijāb* until adulthood, when they themselves had studied Islam and become convinced that it was a significant part of fashioning an Islamic persona. Choice, thus, was construed as essential to their moral agency as *Muslimahs* negotiating personal and professional lives in Britain. Rather than an external imposition, then, their piety and community activity can be seen as an indication of who they themselves choose to be.

It may be postulated that for the religious subject, 'freedom' can be had in submission to God's will, as opposed to in complete autonomy. In a fascinating study of orthodox women's observance of strict Jewish menstruation laws for married women (niddah), Orit Avishai offers an alternative theory of agency grounded in religious observance (Avishai, 2008). She argues that 'observance gives rise to an alternative mode of being and existence', and concurs with Mahmood that religious observance, for pious women, can become an agentic and self-chosen 'avenue for cultivating orthodox subjecthood through religious conduct' (2008: 424, 427). At this point, however, Avishai develops her theory of agency further and diverges from Mahmood's conception of the subject as docile; instead, Avishai focuses on an active observance of religious laws by her respondents. In doing so, and more pertinently for the

current study, she develops a new approach to 'doing religion', as she terms it: 'By associating agency with observance, the doing religion approach avoids the false dichotomy that pits compliance and agency' (2008: 429). In this way, both Mahmood and Avishai have read agency and freedom within compliance to religious norms, through the active and freely chosen ways in which individuals accept and inhabit these norms.

While theories such as those propounded by Mahmood and Avishai have come under scrutiny and criticism (see Ch.5 for more discussion), they do draw attention to the necessity of a more nuanced approach when studying religious observance by individuals living in Western liberal societies. In addition, alternative conceptions of agency and freedom encourage us to question our own position as researchers, and to question the 'taken for granted' acceptance that our contemporary sensibilities are universal, or even universally desirable. In a firm reproach of this tendency, Avishai concludes that 'women's participation in conservative religions is paradoxical only from the perspective of the observer, who is unwilling to register forms of agency that embrace religiosity for the sake of religiosity' (2008: 429).

This thesis has argued in previous chapters that it is this very belief and participation in Islamic worldviews, in subtle and overt forms, that has enabled women in this sample to actively conduct themselves as pious and productive citizens. Building on the work of both Mahmood and Avishai, Kelsey Burke identifies four conceptualisations of agency with respect to women who choose to actively participate in what she terms 'gender-traditional religions': resistance, empowerment, instrumental and compliant (2012). In a recognition that these four manifestations of agency are not mutually exclusive, and can actually fall along a continuum, Burke connects them through the concept of autonomy. 'It is inappropriate', she

argues, 'to require autonomy in order to recognize agency, especially for persons living outside a Western context… Autonomy should not be the only criteria for agency when religious persons believe in God's will in addition to (or instead of) their own' (2012:128). In this characterisation of autonomy, Burke concurs with both Mahmood and Avishai that researchers and social scientists more widely, trained in Western liberal systems, need to recognise the autonomy inherent in those who freely choose to act not for themselves, but for a Divine God. Of salience for this thesis is that all three scholars have called for further research into these debates around agency, with the aim of building a more nuanced picture of the actions of educated and independent women in religious movements.

With this in mind, the discussion will now turn to look at specific aspects of the empowerment and motivation of the women in my sample. In particular, it will highlight those qualities and mindsets that have allowed and enabled these women to 'rise above' and become active members of society, in addition to developing strong hybrid identities. The personal qualities that especially stood out in their narratives were those of resilience, a distinct attitude of positivity and conviviality towards others and a pragmatic realism towards life events. These factors will be discussed in the current chapter.

In addition, an observable balance in their perspectives and actions is evident. The reader's attention is especially drawn to the observed finding of this research that a generational trajectory was apparent in the nature of their outlook, activity and desires as they matured. These qualities, furthermore, have led to them becoming veritable ambassadors of their faith, especially in the public realms that they inhabit.

These particular aspects of their mindsets will be elaborated on in the next chapter. It is the contention of this thesis that all of these factors have in fact contributed to the development of autonomy in the lives of my respondents.

The Women: Finding Resilience

'Helpless individuals within powerless communities…?' (Hargreaves 2016:2617)

'These are the things that shape you and form you.' (Aini, respondent)

As indicated at the introduction to this chapter, I have found during the course of my research a number of salient personal qualities in the women I worked with, qualities which have clearly contributed to their sense of self, and to their ability to succeed in different environments. Here I discuss the resilience apparent in their actions and attitudes, with reference to the women's own voices, and their life stories. In particular, the discussion looks at how they were empowered to handle difficult situations, and also motivated to take part in voluntary 'good works' for the benefit of others.

Finding resilience, realism and positivity

'I think you just become resilient, after the challenges I have had, and you just think that you are not going to make it be negative.' (Sara, respondent)

On repeated and frequent occasions during fieldwork, the resilience displayed by my respondents came to the fore, especially when faced with hardships or obstacles in their path. Sara, quoted above, had had a difficult childhood as the daughter of a convicted drug dealing and abusive father. In addition, she grew up in a small yet tightly knit Pakistani Mirpuri community of ex-factory workers and their children where even minor indiscretions were looked upon harshly by neighbours. As I listened to her narrative, I could not help being amazed that she came out positive, proactive and determined to help others in similar situations. Her accounts of racism suffered at the hands of fellow Asians at school, combined with the poverty experienced while her father was incarcerated, formed the backdrop for her very determined decisions to further the cause of disaffected youth later in life. At a relatively young age, she has gone on to overcome bullying, harassment and a lack of male role models; recently, she has been offered and accepted a significant role at a large national children's charity. Becoming reflective and philosophical towards the end of recounting her life story to me, she mused about what has spurred her to succeed: 'I would think - "Allah, you didn't get me through something, then give me a realisation for me to keep it to myself" - that makes no sense. That's how I ended up here. I started volunteer youth work when I was twelve'. Sara's resilience, combined with a cheerful and positive outlook, clearly saw her through these difficult years. In addition, she is determined to connect with and help young people in similar situations to hers.

In a very different domestic scenario, although living within a similar community, 46-year-old Anjum's story of trauma and recovery from an abusive marriage also demonstrates resilience and positivity in the face of adversity. The reader is reminded of her early marriage at a young age to a cousin from Pakistan; her husband went on to regularly abuse her and left

her three young children unprovided for, both financially and emotionally. Anjum eventually turned to both her local mental health services and a well-known *mufti* for support to escape her situation; at the same time, she persevered with her own education against all odds. Today, she is a successful mental health practitioner herself, and mother of three well-rounded children. Looking back, Anjum reflected on how these experiences fashioned her: 'So, *alhamdulillah*, over the years, it's given me the strength. When I look back, I became such a strong person and *alhamdulillah* my own marriage… Now, looking back, yeah (it was hard), but Allah does everything for a reason, doesn't He… that's our faith. *That* (referring to her traumatic experiences) gave me the courage to support my younger brother and sister, and cousins to marry who they wanted to. I got myself together, sorted myself out and from there, I haven't looked back!' While Anjum had undoubtedly gone through some very difficult times as a young mother, her positive outlook stood out in her narrative; in retrospect, she bore no grudges and saw good in even the most difficult of her experiences. Her experiences have helped her to support and counsel numerous other couples, both from within her family, but also from the wider community. She joked with me that she had become the 'go to aunty' for anyone wanting more choice in marriage, but lacking the courage to challenge the status quo on their own.

The concept of resilience has been the subject of much discussion in the social sciences as a concept with political ramifications, but also in mental health discourses as a psychologically desirable attribute (Garrett, 2016). In the words of political sociologist Sarah Bracke, 'resilience, we could argue, has become a force to be reckoned with in the realm of hegemonic ethics of and truths about the self… The ubiquity of resilience in contemporary political and psychological discourse is striking' (Bracke, 2016a: 53, 54). In conducting the research for this topic, I found that the concept was applied to a range of disparate studies:

hate crime against British Muslims (Hargreaves, 2016); the Government's Prevent strategy (Hargreaves 2018); spirituality in later life (Manning, 2012); and psychiatry (Southwick et al., 2016), to name a few.

In addition, the term is defined variously across disciplines, with debate as to whether it is a desirable quality in individuals, or in fact yet another tool of oppression. Political scientists, in particular, often frame resilience as 'part of neoliberal governmentality… part of the organized practices through which populations are governed' (Bracke, 2016b:851). The implication is that the 'desirable' citizen within the masses is the one who can be relied upon to weather the shock of disproportionate and unfair state policies. In the words of Bracke, 'structural pressure… is expected to be met with individual elasticity' (2016b:851). Well-known author and activist Naomi Klein describes resilience as the 'raw material' needed to ensure continued exploitation of the masses living in the 'margins' for production to benefit the capitalist centres (Klein, 2007).

Interestingly, even in fields as far flung from politics as healthcare, practitioners have urged caution in the use of 'resilience' frameworks. In discussing its application to social work, Garrett directs a wide range of criticisms at the uncritical and widespread use of what he terms 'resilience talk'. Aside from the concerns about neoliberal politics exploiting the 'resilient' masses for economic gain, his most pertinent cautions for this discussion include a warning that the ' "resilience" discourse is laden with frequently unacknowledged, value judgements and unquestioned assumptions; … there is far too great an emphasis being placed on individuals at the expense of social structure and wider social forces' (2016:1909). For the purposes of this thesis, it is necessary to be aware of and avoid the 'misuse' of resilience as a convenient way to describe underprivileged classes, and thus neglect the deeper structural

factors that affect them; in the words of Garrett, we must seek not only to underline how people 'beat the odds', but also continue to actually 'change the odds' against them (2016:1917).

Alongside differences in how 'resilience' is construed, negatively as a tool of oppression, or positively as a desirable quality to develop, one also sees the literature on resilience divided in terms of emphasis on the individual or the communal/structural. In discourses that focus on the individual, resilience is defined as the ability of an individual to 'bend but not break, to bounce back, and to "adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress"' (Southwick et al., 2016). Crucial to these definitions seems to be the idea that one easily 'bounces back' to an original position of equilibrium that is sustainable. Critics such as Bracke, however, go as far as suggesting that this formulation of resilience forecloses any ideas of moving on, and achieving social transformation, because one is constantly trying to stay afloat and 'go back' to an original position (Bracke, 2016b).

Arguments prioritising the role of social support in resilience, however, argue that conceptions of resilience that focus on the individual 'fail to explicitly acknowledge that individuals are embedded in social systems, and that these systems may be more or less resilient in their own right' (Southwick et al., 2016). Building a more holistic picture by factoring in the role of social support systems in building resilience, studies such as these raise an important aspect in the discourse. In collective (rather than individual) models of resilience, it has been defined as 'adaptive community capacities' that are improved by well-functioning social systems (Hargreaves, 2016:2610). These protective factors can lead to a process of 'steeling' the individual against exposure to adverse experiences. In the case of my respondents, the protective effects of well-connected neighbourhood communities, embedded

childhoods, strong role models and a well-developed sense of religious identity have been discussed in Ch. 4. It would suffice here to note that one must take into consideration social support networks aspects in considering what builds resilience.

In view of the variety of conceptions of resilience discussed above, it seems necessary here to clarify the sense in which this thesis uses the term. For this thesis, it refers to a positive and desirable quality that has allowed these women to overcome difficulties, and go on to change unfavourable conditions for both themselves and others. While being mindful of the exploitative potential of 'resilient subalterns', it is argued here that a combination of individual and communal resilience-building factors has in fact contributed to the success of these women. For this study, resilience is regarded less as an impregnability to stress, but more as an ability to recover from traumatic events, and to also improve structural/circumstantial constraints. As such, the definition of resilience offered by Ungar resonates with the use of the term here:

'In the context of exposure to significant adversity, whether psychological, environmental, or both, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, and a condition of the individual's family, community and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways.' (Ungar, 2008:225).

It is worth pointing out that, as with the formulation of the concept in this thesis, resilience is seen here as a positive outcome of both individual and social/community factors.

When I initially began to observe the resilience displayed by my respondents, it manifested as a clear contribution to the success of my respondents. In some cases, such as that of Anjum described above, her strength of character and resolve to do better turned a life that could have gone very differently into one of stability and hope. My formulation of resilience, then, does not describe a way of 'subjugating the subaltern' (Bracke, 2016a, b) that is negative and exploitative; indeed, the vast majority of my respondents presented as independent, resourceful women who had significant control over their own life choices. In addition, while many of them hailed from disadvantaged backgrounds, and thus could have been framed as a 'native subaltern', it is their very agentic and self-empowering actions that have brought them out of conditions of exploitation and disadvantage. The sense in which this thesis uses the term, then, is one of positivity and proactiveness, based not on a passive acceptance of discriminating and patriarchal circumstances, but on a creative engagement with them in order to change them. As argued earlier in this thesis, the women studied here quite clearly do not simply comply with social norms, but choose, instead, how to inhabit them. Put succinctly by Hargreaves, resilience can thus be seen as 'a positive development under adverse conditions' (2018:201).

As I probed the roots of their resilience in further fieldwork, I began to uncover a picture of *both* individual and social factors at play. This thesis makes the argument for seeing a combination of personal factors, and also social processes/contexts as key determinants in developing resilience. The narratives of the women studied here give weight to the assertion that 'psychosocial support through community involvement and faith strategies themselves offer avenues of resilience' (Mitha and Adatia, 2016:205). In the extracts of Sara and Anjum above, both women identify not only external factors that helped to build their resilience, but also personal attitudes of strength, resourcefulness and pragmatism that brought them out of

difficulties. Sara identified and spoke at length of the community and family 'challenges' that made her resilient, but also underlined her own tenacity by deciding that she would 'just… not going to make it be negative'. Anjum has, in fact, made even more explicit connections between her past experiences and her resolve to pursue self-development as strengthening factors in her life. Her traumatic marriage, she asserted, 'gave me the courage to support my younger brother and sister'; she robustly 'got myself together, sorted myself out and from there, I haven't looked back!'. Both women made clear references in our discussions to a combination of social factors and individual mindsets that contributed to their hardiness.

The resilience displayed by my respondents, then, is clearly not a negative manifestation of the concept, the kind that grinds people deeper into poverty, powerlessness, disadvantage, oppression and subservience. As such, I rely on a formulation which highlights the positivity evident in the mindsets of these women, and in the way they have gone on to pursue proactive and meaningful lives; Sara, by devoting her working life to youthwork, and Anjum by offering support to local families in need. In addition, the hybridity of their identities and lives (detailed in Ch. 4) is a key factor here, because it defies the conception of resilience as a 'bounce back' to an original position of some sort. Bracke, in particular, in a strong critique of resilience as applied by neoliberal policymakers, asserts that by encouraging and developing the resilience of the masses, those in power foreclose any possibility of transformation and positive change by restricting resistance. This kind of formulation of resilience, she argues, thwarts the possibility of a better future, because one is constantly expected to face and recover from disaster (Bracke, 2016 a, b). The lives of Sara, Anjum and a host of other women that formed the sample for this study, however, put paid to the assertion that 'the material, intellectual and emotional labour an ethos of resilience requires… undermine precisely the possibility of substantial transformation' (2016 a:64).

Rather than losing the capacity to imagine a better future, the women we speak of here have gone on to develop 'new' hybridities and have extended the possibilities for both themselves and others around them. In the development of their life courses, they did not desire to 'bounce back' to their original positions, positions that they experienced as oppressive and disempowering. Their resilience, rather, led them along a trajectory of hope and empowerment, and propelled their journey of self-fashioning along 'new' and hybrid ways.

Along the lines of Bhabha's theory of hybridity, a 'new', and more desirable, position is thus reached (Bhabha 1990, 1994). For this thesis, the personal traits of resilience and assertiveness displayed by these women have been the bridge by which they have traversed the path from their traumatic and disruptive past lives to a hybrid space which is transformative and positive. In Bhabha's words, it is 'interruptive, interrogative and enunciative' (1994:1), and allowed them to manage the in-between spaces in their lives.

These women, then, have emerged stronger for their traumatic experiences (not all of which relate to their being from minority/religious communities); their resilience is manifest in a positive and pragmatic attitude, a healthy resolve to empower themselves, and a realism about their situations. For the purposes of this thesis, resilience can be seen as the ability to discover the positive from experiences of the negative in a proactive negotiation of one's circumstances. Specifically, it is 'best conceptualised as an umbrella term covering markers of adaptive functioning under adverse circumstances' (Mukherjee and Kumar, 2017:6).

Having identified the strength of character manifest in the narratives of these British Muslim women, it is necessary to explore what contributed to this building of resilient personas. I

argue here that 'a key aspect of understanding resilience and how people respond to challenge and adversity is articulating and identifying the underlying components of our abilities to overcome the greatest odds' (Manning, 2012:571). Without identifying the factors which they themselves credit for developing their spirited attitudes, one cannot hope to contribute to the possibilities for others in similar situations. In order to generalise from this data, and broaden our understanding of the adaptive and progressive strategies employed by these women, the final section of this discussion on resilience looks at the main factors that the women identified in their journeys, factors that they say built their resilience.

Building resilience

When asked directly what empowered them to do the work they currently do, respondents very frequently referred to the importance of strong social networks (including supportive family members in childhood, and husbands in later life), and also their realisation that they must focus on education for personal betterment and confidence. Sara, who still lives with her mother, mused that '*Alhamdulillah*, when compared to other people, I am so blessed I have got so much love and I've got a very strong network around me'. Although she is now in her late 30s, much of her motivation for good work comes from wanting to make her mum proud: 'I think some of it is seen what my mum went through and there is a big part of me that wants to make her proud'. Paradoxically, it was community censure and bullying in response to her father's incarceration on a serious drug-dealing charge that her mother had escaped when she was a child. To provide her children a better future with less insular neighbours, Sara's mother had moved to a new neighbourhood when her children were young. In addition, she impressed on her children the importance of serving others; Sara had

recalled her memories of being 'put on a bus at the age of 12' by her mother to travel to a youth group and offer her voluntary services. While feeling shy and a little bewildered at the time, Sara now sees this as the start of her journey to community service, and recognises the value of being introduced to wider social networks at an early age. In her narrative, we see a number of social factors identified by Sara herself that contributed to building her robust yet positive attitude: a supportive and welcoming neighbourhood, introduction to community service at a young age, but above all the presence of an inspiring role model in her own mother. At present, Sara's mother is in her 70s, still involved in local community projects, and well known in the wider community as a veteran activist.

Aini, when reflecting on questions of empowerment and motivation, looked to the workplace for her resilience: 'I am lucky and the people that I work with… I love hearing about their families and their ups and their downs and their concerns and they are not so different and to mine really, moms are moms, from China, Africa wherever… I've really respected the fact that some of them are so dedicated to their profession. So I find that quite inspiring as well and they go over and beyond the call of duty'. She confided that she finds the workplace a 'relief' from what can be a stressful home life, and is inspired by her colleagues to serve patients diligently. Echoing Aini's feelings, a handful of my respondents admitted that they saw the workplace environment as a place to 'recharge' and be themselves, as opposed to 'mum', 'wife' or even a responsible member of the community. Like Sara above, Aini also expressed gratitude for her social circle, and directly credited the people around her for her strength: 'I suppose it's that love and acceptance, so my parents, friends through school, good friends around me at uni, so Allah has blessed me and He's given me… maybe I don't have loads of people, but the people I do have, give me support, I have support.'

Taking a slightly different attitude to how social networks informed their sense of selves, Halima compared her youth to the experience of children today: 'I would say the younger generation starts from a different point of view, because now it's about them as an individual, whereas we grew up, you are not an individual you are part of a collective and we grew up far more rooted in the idea of service. It was natural that you just do (serve)'. Here, she emphasised, like Sara, the importance of being part of a strong community and the in-built expectation that one would serve. In a study of Shia Ismaili youth in Australia, Mitha and Adatia underline the importance of civic participation in developing mental resilience (2016). Of particular interest here is their finding that not only are faith communities more likely to engage in civic participation, but also that this involvement in community life 'acted as a form of resilience… community involvement can act as a protective factor against mental health stressors… and this enables feelings of inclusion amongst youth' (2016:202). In particular, early voluntary activism and the resultant ethos-building can give youth existential roots that enable them to engage more widely in bridging activities later in life; this is an important argument and finding for the current thesis, and will be dealt with later in this chapter.

Similarly, Sumayya spoke warmly of the role of the late Dr. Syed Aziz Pasha of the Union Of Muslim Organisations (http://umotrust.com/) in making her a confident 17-year-old, able to hold her own in a wide range of public gatherings: 'We thought… we're capable of doing this, you know, and we were treated as complete adults. He didn't flinch! I don't understand how he had that confidence in young people seventeen or eighteen years old, but he *did*'. We see here how faith communities can facilitate the development of resilience strategies, especially for youth. In the words of Mitha and Adatya, 'this involvement can bring a sense

of meaning and purpose which can be vital when encountering stresses to mental health'
(2016:205).

In a final, yet arguably most important, rubric of social support for resilience strategies,
prominent in adult life, was the role of quietly supportive husbands in the background.
Fifteen of my twenty-five respondents were married at the time of interview, and spoke
unreservedly of the support they received from their husbands. Converts Cheryl and Yusra
were especially indebted to their husbands for easing their journey to Islam: 'my husband, in
his own way, had made a similar journey so the two of us together, re-enforced that for me'
(Cheryl). Yusra, similarly, appreciates that her husband 'never forced her to pray', and
allowed her to explore her spirituality independently. She has come a long way in her
practice of Islam through self-exploration, from being radicalised as a young woman, to a
point that conservative Muslims may term 'progressive'; through her whole journey,
however, her husband has remained supportive and her sounding board. He now accompanies
her on conferences abroad in her own de-radicalisation work, and this gives her the
confidence, she told me, to travel further for work. Sophia, similarly, a born Muslim from a
Kashmiri background, is enabled to travel to work as a dietician and educator across the
country because her husband takes time off work to care for their three young children. She
relates how, after years of her own hesitation, her husband encouraged her to fulfil her
passion of imparting diabetes education to South Asian communities; she now regularly visits
mosques and temples to reach the communities directly.

The most personal and inspiring detail of how a supportive partner can encourage a positive
and nourishing mindset came from Irum, however. A successful city lawyer and national
activist, she described how she often felt dejected by the lack of community involvement of

most people. On complaining to her husband one evening, she related how he changed her mindset for good: 'When I say to him that people don't do the work, and I end up doing everything, he'll say, you know it's a blessing, just think Allah could take that from you, and you won't be doing this work. You would be thinking you're having a rest, but actually that work has been taken from you'. With this interesting and yet positive philosophy on activism, Irum was encouraged by her husband to see voluntary work as a privilege and not a burden.

Southwick et al. support a definition of social support as 'having or perceiving to have close others who can provide help or care, particularly during times of stress' (2016:77). The authors refer to a number of different 'types' of social support: structural, functional, emotional and instrumental, amongst others. In the narratives of the women in my sample, the emotional support offered by significant others was amongst the most prominent. While Southwick et al. point out that the effectiveness of social support 'may vary by the type of support provided and the extent to which it matches individual's needs', for these women, the support of key people, close-knit communities and favourable work-places clearly provided much-needed psychological resilience. When a nurturing environment, furthermore, provides opportunity to face challenges and even develop one's selfhood, it can clearly have a 'steeling' effect (Southwick et al., 2016; Hargreaves, 2018), an effect which can help to promote resilience. Highly pertinent to this study is the finding reported in literature that this resilience will often, in turn, enable the individual to 'acquire a realistic and positive sense of agency/self-efficacy' (Southwick et al., 2016:78).

Interestingly, this study also found a significant amount of realism and pragmatism of attitude in the narratives of the women studied, a realism that contributed to their resilient mindsets. This realism was most apparent in their recognition, often at a young age, of the need for

education to further themselves. While educational attainment varied from Further Education certification (5 respondents) to Doctorate level (2 respondents), all spoke of their commitment to personal development through education, and a number actually saw it as the 'solution' to their personal, but also social, problems.

Aini credits her schooling and university experience with giving her confidence: 'I really enjoyed school and I felt positive about being there, I thought I had good relationships with my teachers, and I had a lot of friends, so I think those things gave you confidence'. Her desire to be educated came in great part from ambitious parents; her mother was a teaching assistant, and her father a bus driver, yet both parents had firm ambitions for their own children. Sara was so passionate about education that she firmly believed that it held the answer to the entrenched social stereotypes that Muslim women face: 'education to me is where the change is going to come in, and when people see strong Muslim women then they'll realise that we are not all a threat to society'. Clearly, in Sara's view, articulate and well-informed Muslim women were the way forward in fighting common stereotypes. Anjum held similar beliefs, and told me that prior to obtaining Further Education and qualifying as a mental health practitioner, she felt that she definitely lacked confidence, and 'when I didn't have confidence, people saw me differently'.

As expected, the more highly educated respondents were even more vocal and spirited in their public encounters, approaching unpleasant people and attitudes with an unyielding confidence. Hala, on discussing how she has been treated as a *hijāb*-wearing woman in public, did not mince her words: 'I've never had an issue, partly because I would never *allow* anyone to disrespect me. Like, try and tell me to get off a bus and good luck to you!' she told me with passion.

Sumayya, paradoxically, felt that being religious in public actually forced people to become pragmatic… 'What I have seen, it has done, is it has made people I have known over years more pragmatic. They have aligned themselves, or they have reshaped themselves, in a way that they can integrate themselves or be more easily accepted by the public services'. Again, Sumayya's own educational background in a primary Catholic school and secondary Grammar school has given her strong insight into what she needs to be aware of publicly. She went on to relay details of many public meetings where she 'doesn't speak up' for fear of stigmatisation as a Muslim, despite feeling that she would like to. In particular, she was often made uncomfortable as a school Governor when minority community absenteeism was being discussed. She knew that many minority families, both Muslim and otherwise, had difficult domestic circumstances that contributed to children's absenteeism; however, in order to 'integrate herself and be more easily accepted' as a Governor, she kept a low profile.

The sagacious, long-term view of Halima is worth reiterating here. As a seasoned social activist and, internationally, my most well-known respondent, she is now in her 60s and feels very strongly that investing in the training and education of people is the way forward. 'The question is', she explained to me, 'where we see the future. There is enough money in the Muslim community to do this for ourselves, if it's not coming from the statutory sector. We could be saying we are going to sponsor ten people a year for the next five years, in order to ensure that we have these very skill sets so they can go and serve in the community. And what they then do to pay back, is give one year back to the community. This is where our resources should be going'.

In a study of young Pakistani Muslim women in Bradford, Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert have also found that, amongst other factors, education 'became an important tool for personal betterment' (2017:10). They found, in fact, that a number of their respondents used religious arguments and sources to back their desire to be educated, often in the face of parental disapproval. Interestingly, none of my respondents spoke of having to face parental opposition to their desire to be educated; like the women of Bradford, however, they did refer to 'how education and educating oneself is absolutely central to Islam' (idem, 2017:11). In a reversal of causality, while Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert argue that faith-based social capital is mobilized by the women to secure higher education, this thesis contends that educational attainment and an inherent realism of attitude has allowed the women in my study to develop their social capital, and hence their resilience to difficulties.

Much of the pragmatism apparent in the narratives of the women, furthermore, was attributed to strong role models (usually parents or teachers) who had inculcated in them the importance of education. Closer to the experience of this thesis is the conclusion that 'parents' own disadvantage (in terms of little or no formal education, unemployment, limited finances and lack of opportunities) was not articulated or passed on to their children. Instead parents used 'their experiences of hardship in the UK to encourage their children and transmit the importance of education intergenerationally' (Thapar-Björkert and Sanghera, 2010:251). The authors describe how their interviewees used the difficult experiences of their parents to motivate them to work hard and obtain higher levels of education. They echo the narratives of the women of the current study, peppered as they were with early childhood references to wanting to 'do well at school', 'work hard' and 'get an education'.

Huda grew up in a single-parent Somali household where 'My late mum - my mother was a nurse and the reason I wasn't there (i.e. with mum) was because she used to do night shifts. Mum instilled in me education and the importance of education. This is what I'm passionate about'. Her speaking of 'not being there' referred to the fact that, in order to give her a strong educational background, her mother had put her in boarding school. Huda even credits this experience as having 'made me who I am… I can talk to anyone!'. In an interesting role reversal, Amy has herself escaped a difficult marriage and poverty, but now motivates her own daughter to do well; she equates a good education to 'a passport to go anywhere'. Relating how she tries to motivate her daughter, she explained that 'I said, Jessica (her daughter), it's like imagine you've packed your bags, you go to the airport and… you with your GCSEs, great grades… you have a qualification. Somebody else is also packed, but they don't have any qualifications. I say, you've got a passport to go anywhere, but they can't leave!'. While acknowledging the experience of British Muslim women who face parental opposition to education (Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera, 2010), for the women in my sample, parents and teachers acted as encouraging role models in their quest to pursue education. Hailing from largely working-class backgrounds, the parents of these women clearly desired that their children achieve upward mobility and social security through education. The resilience and confidence that these women then developed along the way reflect a positive outcome of their ability to achieve educationally and their pragmatic recognition of the power of this education.

Alongside the social support offered to these women and their realisation of the importance of education in building confidence and resilience, spirituality played a significant role in building tenacity and strength in their lives. Reflecting on what helped her through difficult times, Cheryl was quite clear that, 'If you lose that peace or ability to contemplate

independent of the pressures around you, then nothing can really replace that'. Her 'peace', she went on to explain, came from her faith, her husband's support for her Islamic practice, and the nurturing atmosphere of the Sufi *zāwiyah* they visit frequently. Sufi meditation practices undertaken with their Sheikh gave her a certain perspective on the world that she felt many modern-day Muslims were lacking; it gave her the ability to step back, and 'contemplate independent of pressures'. In addition, she looks to events from Islamic history for inspiration, and referred to the landmark migration of Prophet Muhammad as a source from which to inculcate a resilient and accepting disposition: 'You mustn't get depressed. You have to leave everything behind. This is what *Hijrah* means, you leave everything behind. Muslims are not leaving everything behind; they want to have it all. You can't have it all'. While some may see Cheryl's attitude as defeatist and passive, it has allowed her to move on when life has taken unfavourable turns.

A significant number of my respondents reflected a quiet yet empowering inner spirituality, manifest variously as references to the Islamic tradition, a deep humanity, or in their own humility in approaching volunteerism. When asked at interview what inspired and drove her to do her work, Halima displayed a deep inner passion for justice: 'I don't know, maybe perturbed stubbornness. Somewhere down the line, a sense of fairness and injustices.' Irum, quoted above, asserts that 'we are not people of positions', and she went on to stress that in trying to achieve positive outcomes, one needs to change one's self first. She ended that particular conversation with her justification: 'the Quran says that'. Her journey, then, is guided as much by supportive individuals around her and the availability of opportunities, as her faith-inspired motivation to make the best of that support.

Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert highlight that there exists a 'growing body of literature that illustrates how Muslim immigrant women are exercising agency through reclaiming their religious traditions through embodied and knowledge-based piety' (2017: 95). The authors argue that the Muslim women of their sample use what they term 'faith-based capital' to achieve various ends, amongst them challenging community and secular norms, and also obtaining higher and further education. For the Muslim youth of Mitha and Adatia's sample, similarly, 'faith-based activities, or "god-consciousness", was also an important factor in developing resilience' (2016: 203). They note 'the role of religion in imbuing meaning and purpose in one's life', and as with Cheryl and Irum above, their respondents have used religious guidance to aid in their coping strategies. In the same vein, Mythen reports on his study of British Muslims in the North-West of England: 'For most participants, Islam acted as an "anchor identity", around and through which other expressions were routed and meditated' (2012:397). He makes a further observation salient for the purposes of the current study. The attachment of his respondents to both the national but also international faith community not only developed their resilience, but also 'a striking sense of positivity was conveyed in the study, articulated through a firm sense of self identity and confidence about the strength of the faith community' (2012:402). This thesis has also discussed in detail, in Ch. 5, the finding of the present study that the women drew strength from attachments to the *'ummah*, and from a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves. For Mythen's study, he reports that 'these practices of resilience enabled participants to reject negative labels and to attenuate hostility' (2012:402).

In a criminology study of resilience amongst Muslim victims of racism, Hargreaves found that his participants described examples of resilience in which 'religion and religious identity were central' (2016:2611). As with the current study, he found that this resilience was

reinforced through both spirituality and social networks. Ironically, he concludes that while their Islamic identity is a risk factor in attracting anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination, the very same Islamic identity can be 'an adaptive process generating resilience through agency, coping, and the personal strength derived from self-efficacy' (2016:2615).

To conclude this discussion around resilience, it seems apt to look at an enlightening study of resilience in old age. In her study of factors that lead to healthy aging, Manning explores the interface between spirituality and resilience in later life. 'Spirituality', she concludes, 'provides a framework that guides individuals through painful and joyful events, often facilitating positive discoveries amidst negative experiences' (Manning, 2012:569). Against the background of significant scepticism around promoting resilience in minority communities, Manning's evidence for the contributions of resilience to healthy aging gives weight to the current argument that understanding what contributes to individual resilience, nevertheless, offers the possibility of insight into further potential, potential for not just minorities, but for all humans more generally. As was the case for Manning's respondents, this thesis has found that 'religion and spirituality provide people with a source of hope, comfort and resilience in the face of adversity' (Manning, 2012:569). Indeed, for those who view spirituality as important, such as the participants of the current study, there exists an observable link between their faith and well-being.

The current thesis, therefore, maintains that studying resilience holds value for the potential it offers to others in positions of subservience or disadvantage. By studying adaptive processes such as those detailed above, we may be able to aid others who are in a position of disaffection or marginalisation. This resilience not only allows for autonomy (sometimes

later in life) and increased agency, but has a wider role to play; it contributes directly to social cohesion through the building of social networks/capital (Tara-Chand, 2015).

With respect to the Muslim community of Britain in particular, studying the resilience of successful individuals is important because it broadens our understanding of how individuals in disadvantaged communities cope. In addition, it aids us to look beyond narratives of victimisation, helps challenge stereotypes of British Muslim communities as disenfranchised and victimised, and challenges the assumption that everyone reacts to adversity in a homogenous way. The value of underlying the resilience of the women in my sample is ultimately in highlighting 'a cascade of adaptive processes' undertaken successfully by women suffering multiple discriminatory processes (Hargreaves, 2016:2616). In this way, these women transform and develop themselves to end up in a new, better position, a position from where they have also developed the capacity to help others. While recognising that that 'their viewpoints remain, in many senses, contained' (Mythen, 2012:409), the current study hopes to contribute to the realisation that British Muslim women are not always 'helpless individuals within powerless communities'. Rather, in the words of Hargreaves, 'consideration of resilience assumes and accepts the presence of a victim's agency, personal strength, choice and meaning-making through adversity…' (2016:2617).

The next chapter deals with another conspicuous theme running through the narratives of the participants: the prominence, in their attitudes, of a desire for balance. Within this chapter, I also discuss a finding that is unreported in previous literature, that of the existence of a clear 'generational trajectory' in their relationship-building and volunteering activities. In the discussion that follows, the reader's attention is especially drawn to this evident desire for greater engagement with non-Muslims as the women matured.

Ch.8- The Mindsets of Muslim Women: The Manifestations of Balance

'Wisdom is not simply about maximizing one's own or someone else's self-interest, but about balancing of various self-interests (intrapersonal) with the interests of others (interpersonal) and of other aspects of the context in which one lives (extrapersonal), such as one's city or country or environment or even God.' (Sternberg, 2001:231)

(Extremism) 'goes against the very essence of what it means to be a human being.' (Maryam, respondent)

A central aspect of the hybrid and novel ways in which the respondents of this study exercised agency has been their frequent references to the need for balance and moderation in all areas of life, and the current chapter focuses the reader's attention on this observed characteristic. This mindset was especially apparent in terms of balancing their commitment to their faith in a secular public arena which did not always welcome public manifestations of it; however, questions of balance were also raised when it came to the rigidity they sometimes faced in their own communities. Whether they spoke of balancing the need to socialise at work with the desire to avoid alcohol, balancing the conflicting demands of a patriarchal culture with the spiritual individualism afforded to them by the Quran, or balancing the sometimes extreme views of disaffected youth with more moderate Islamic teachings, their perspectives echoed the same underlying commitment to creating a harmonious 'middle ground' between extremes.

Above all, and most interestingly for this thesis, as they matured, they observed the need to 'balance' their bonding relationships and commitments to their own community with a more concerted effort to reach out to form bridging relationships of both friendship but also general conviviality. In particular, a number of my respondents in their 40s and above had begun to consciously seek out voluntary work in the wider community, in the interests of interacting with, and also benefitting, a more mixed circle of people. This community work, I soon found, very often took an interesting trajectory; between the ages of roughly 20-40, the women tended to be involved in Muslim community causes, while from the mid-40s onwards, many of them began to look outwards and actively seek engagement with non-Muslims, often through common causes. I found that as they matured, their passion for community work became combined with a desire to forge ties across communities. Coupled with a greater confidence as their experience grew, many of my more senior respondents are now working across communities for the benefit of all. The desire for balance in their social interactions and daily lives, and a desire to develop greater bridging capital was a significant, and unanticipated, theme for the more mature women in my sample. As mentioned previously in Ch.5, these women described how their initial forays into activism led them to eventually turn towards local matters needing attention. As they matured and broadened their vision, their deepening sense of citizenship, national values and belonging acted as a 'push' factor towards more involvement in wider communities here in Britain. Henceforth, this phenomenon shall be referred to as the 'generational trajectory' observed in the lives of these women.

Balanced public lives, and a clear generational trajectory

As they matured and developed more life experience, many of my respondents followed a similar generational trajectory with regards to their social dealings. While a number of them had been introduced to community work within Muslim settings at a young age, most came to a self-realisation in their late 30s and 40s that merely working in their 'own' communities was insufficient. They desired for their relationships to not be 'too Muslimy' (Hala, aged 36); describing the early days of setting up her successful soup kitchen, she explained that she 'originally chose the name Adam... I didn't want it to be too Muslimy. I wanted it to be felt that we're all a part of the same human family, *Bani Adam*. It's about… we actually get people who are like... "Hiya, I'm Jewish, but I'd like to join. Can I join?" I say, "It's open!" Then they are standing side by side with us *hijābis*, having our foods. It's a dual-purpose thing, it's practiced very well. It's quite instinctive. Right now, it looks as though we made some calculations, but it happened organically, that's what made the most sense, reaching the most people as well'. In this way, Hala has ensured that her voluntary work not only reaches out to a mixed community, but is also seen as a friendly place for people of all and no faiths to serve together. She has actively chosen the figure of Adam to represent a mix of faiths and a common heritage, and is keen to promote the idea that 'we are all part of the same human family'.

Similarly, the concern to develop greater 'weak ties' (discussed in Ch.3) was a prominent theme throughout 37-year-old Shabnam's narrative. Tracing the timeline of her life in West London, Luton and then Watford, she regretted that her previous Luton neighbours often 'don't mix with other (White) people… it is not a good way to be brought up. They live in a bubble'. Out of concern that her children may grow up too insular in that environment, she and her husband had made a concerted effort to move away from Luton, to 'more cosmopolitan' Watford. As mentioned previously, she made the poignant observation towards the end of our interview that when she would die, she regrets to think that her funeral would not be very mixed, and thus resolved to make more non-Muslim friends while she could. Shabnam's philosophy was quite emphatic: 'humanity is regardless of colour, that's just how we were meant to be as people. In Islam, it's *so* clear, you don't differentiate between people. In Islam, to not differentiate between one person and another is as clear as it is to pray five times a day'.

In her own quiet, soft spoken way, City lawyer and activist Maryam is driven by her belief that 'there is often misunderstanding in our own society about different groups of people, and it is important to break down barriers and try to understand each other, rather than constructing divides and creating labels for each other. At the bottom of it, we have to remember that we are all human beings'. As mentioned earlier, her commitment to working with more people outside her religious and ethnic community led to her organising the office Christmas party that had been avoided by Muslim colleagues in previous years; by building in a few 'dry hours' in the early part of the evening, she ensured that both Muslim and non-Muslim colleagues had a chance to socialise together. This had proved a great success, with even much older and experienced colleagues lauding her creative way to bring together disparate groups of people.

As always, my most experienced activist respondent Halima took a much broader view and was concerned with what this all meant for the Muslim community on a national level: 'I think every single Muslim community will have to be relevant for its time and place, but I think for us here in Britain, I think what is really exciting is how this generation is bringing together the Muslim and the Western'. Halima herself has spent the best part of her 65 years advocating for council services for her local Muslim community in North-West London and beyond, but now has changed her focus to train youth (including her own children) to engage more widely with non-Muslim groups. She is excited about any project that brings together 'the Muslim and the Western', and despite her experience, wishes ruefully that she had engaged more widely beyond Muslim communities in her own youth.

In realising how to balance their inward-looking, bonding relationships and volunteering needs with a more outward-focused attention to the importance of bridging relationships, these women are exercising their creative agency. They do so, equally, and in a reflection of the arguments of Mahmood, Avishai and Burke discussed in previous chapters, not to resist, but to pursue creative changes in their own courses of action. This is agency, once again, manifest in the terms of this thesis as a 'capacity for change' and a 'capacity for action'; we see the women exercising a balanced approach to their bonding-bridging networks to inhabit existing norms in a creative fashion. In doing so, they are empowering themselves but more importantly are performing a crucial service to social cohesion.

Sociologist Ingrid Storm has studied the relationship between religion and volunteering in Britain. Citing the relationship between the two variables as a well-documented one, she draws attention to the fact that 'the mechanisms for the relationship are not well understood'

(2015:14), and is especially interested in whether religion has an integrating or a segregating effect on societies, through the conduit of volunteering. In addition to discussing the evidence related to religion and what she terms 'prosocial behaviour', Storm also breaks down her analysis into the effects of religious volunteering on not only bonding social capital, but also on bridging social capital. Does, she asks, religious volunteering in fact 'increase civic engagement through ethnic and religious bonding, but not bridging, social networks' (2015:16)? The answer to this will, of course, have implications for social cohesion generally and the extent to which religious beliefs promote cross-community social ties. This relationship, furthermore, has implications for the conclusions of the current study, as social cohesion and the building of weak ties by Muslim women have been central aspects of the analysis here. For Britain in particular, as a secular country with significant multireligious groups, the question of how to promote social cohesion has been a vexing and yet important one.

The evidence on whether being religious has an overall segregating or integrating effect is mixed, and calls for greater nuance in addressing this question. On the one hand, many religious charities have been involved in national efforts to promote cohesion and civic participation (Furbey et al., 2006; Burke, 2019), and one can find a number of studies that indicate that religious people are proportionally more likely to be involved in regular volunteering activities, than those who do not belong to a faith. For the Christian church in particular, there also exists a well-developed infrastructure to promote volunteering and service to those less fortunate. This historic social capital, as Burke terms it, facilitates much voluntary work across Britain, benefitting not just religious communities, but non-religious beneficiaries in the voluntary sector. The reliability and longevity of this infrastructure, furthermore, is independent of changes to Government and local authority funding which

may otherwise hamper non-religious provision; it can, therefore, act as a buffer for communities in times of austerity (Burke, 2019). In addition, the ethos of social responsibility and care for the less fortunate is a feature of all religions; spiritual motivations such as these can provide both meaning and motivation for charitable endeavours. Baker and Skinner have, in fact, developed the concept of 'spiritual capital' as a way of energising 'the practical contribution to local and national life made by faith groups' (2006:4).

On the other hand, Storm argues that religious people volunteer for the benefit of their own people, thus creating bonding relationships rather than bridging ones. She suggests that religious organisations may 'fail to promote relations with a largely secular majority population' (2015:16). Citing a link between religiosity and traditionalism, she contends that religions can often promote a 'group' mentality that does not encourage people to mix beyond their own kind. Instead, she advances the proposal that, with increasing secularism in Britain and the decline of formal religious practice, a promotion of democratic 'prosocial' values such as individual autonomy and generalised trust may increase civic participation amongst the secular majority. '"Secular" moral values and attitudes', she argues, 'can also have a positive effect on civic engagement' (2015:18).

Steven Kettell, similarly, questions the empirical evidence to support any links between religion and social capital as 'comparatively thin', especially for the British context (2019:186). He points out that the large majority of the voluntary sector is non-religious; this of course reflects the fact that the vast majority of Britons are themselves non-religious. He also questions the assumptions about causality inherent in this link: does religion encourage people to volunteer more, or are individuals who are more predisposed to volunteering more

likely to join religious groups, he asks (2019:192). Quoting a number of further studies to support his view, Kettell also supports the view that religious groups promote bonding rather than bridging relationships. His final conclusions question the belief that 'faith-based organizations are uniquely well placed to provide an effective solution to problems such as social integration and a retrenchment of welfare services' (2019:198).

However, the present thesis provides evidence to show that while the picture is still very mixed, there exist very clear causes for hope in this regard. Much hinges on the exact nature of the question being asked here: if one is asking, 'Do religious people, as a percentage, volunteer more?', the answer is quite clearly, 'yes' (Burke, 2019). However, if, as in the case of this thesis, one desires to know more about the nature of this volunteering, and its implications for community cohesion, we may instead ask: 'Do religious people become involved in activities that promote bridging capital?'. The answer, in the case of the present study, has again been a definite 'yes'.

The data extracts above, and the narratives of the religious women studied here, point quite clearly to a picture of an emerging realisation on their part, as they developed experience in life, that they must undertake bridging activities. Each of the women pictured here, once they developed an understanding of the importance of weak ties across communities, has tried to bridge the gap in her own way. Samina and Sara wear determined smiles when at work, conscious that they must break the ice in conversations with non-Muslim colleagues and patients; Hala ensures that her voluntary work is not 'too Muslimy', in order to attract fellow volunteers from the wider community; and Halima is training the next generation to have the confidence to bring together the 'Western and the Islamic', as she puts it. While their efforts may represent a drop in the ocean of the interactions of religious people, it is argued here that

these efforts, nevertheless, form a significant step in the right direction. Therefore, although it may still be the case that much religious activity has bonding rather than bridging effects, there is cause for hope that a small, yet significant group of religious individuals are coming to the realisation that they must reach out to support voluntary causes that benefit the whole community.

In fact, one does not have to look far for examples of religious communities rising to the challenge. On a national level, a vivid example is the well-documented response of religious communities to the Grenfell tragedy of June 2017 (Plender, 2018). Plender has studied how diverse faith groups responded to the tragedy, and documents that 'Churches, mosques, synagogues, and gurdwaras all stepped up to the plate, responding practically, emotionally and spiritually to a moment of pain and confusion… In the first three days alone at least 6000 people were fed by a range of faith communities'
(https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2018/06/01/after-grenfell-the-faith-groups-response). Her report has had a key role in shaping NHS health plans for the local area.

More locally, a number of mosque and Muslim community initiatives to engage more widely with other communities are also apparent. The 'Visit My Mosque' initiative of the MCB, for example, is now in its fifth year, and has encouraged significant numbers of non-Muslims to visit their mosques, with over 200 mosques taking part in 2018 alone
(https://www.mend.org.uk/news/british-mosques-open-doors-promote-community-cohesion/). In a similar timescale, the 'Open Iftar' initiative during Ramadan has reached tens of thousands in major cities across Britain, encouraging Muslims to break their fast with non-Muslim friends (http://www.ramadantentproject.com/index.html). Alongside this, mosques now regularly host Iftar evenings for non-Muslim attendees in Ramadan. More relevant to

volunteering, the author's local mosque holds details of and regularly publicises local (mainstream) causes that need volunteers, and encourages congregants to give their time to causes outside the mosque environment.

To conclude this section on the manifestations of balance in social spheres, while doing good is clearly not the preserve of religious minorities, this thesis argues that a burgeoning sense of achieving balance in one's relationships has shown a definite 'generational trajectory' in the lives of the Muslim women studied here. The data highlighted here shows that the religious 'represent a distinctly resilient and enduring force for community action' (Burke, 2019).

Balanced subjectivities

In addition to the balance manifest in the public lives of these women, it was observed that they strove to achieve balance in their personal lives as well. This could be seen as a further manifestation of the 'hybridity' which characterises their lives. In aiming to achieve an equilibrium between their faith and their temporal lives in particular, they are as much religious members of a minority community as modern individuals responding to the very post-modern needs of a cohesive, plural society. As outlined in Ch.6, furthermore, they do so in the face of multiple disadvantages, those related to their gender, their minority status and, above all, to their faith.

 The women spoke of moderation in practicing Islam, the very prevalent issue of balancing work with self-care, and also exhibited an overarching sense of balance in their universalist

approach to humanity at large. Each of these attitudes is best exemplified in the words of the women themselves.

In speaking of their personal lives and perspectives, the quest for balance was most often manifest in the area of religious practice. Many of the women had experienced a rigidity of approach to the faith, either in their own families or in local communities, and had rejected this approach in favour of more moderation as a Muslim. Mental health practitioner and divorcee Anjum became very passionate about her experience of polarised views in the Muslim community: '*Dīn* is so easy! You can pray, you can be a Muslim, you can cover, you can integrate, … some people, they go on the *dīn* and they say you can't do *anything* now… Or, (they say) you can go do everything but *dīn* is not good for you! I think balance is very, very important in everything. I always teach my children, don't be too extreme, and don't be too lenient in anything… That's how I've been as a person- I always like balance'. Due to the nature of her profession, Anjum has seen extremes of behaviour, with much parental control of youth leaning on the crutch of 'religion'. In her words, many of the previous generation have 'culture-fied' Islam by justifying cultural practices with reference to the faith, with the result that they are able to make unrealistic demands on their children. This theme formed a significant portion of her narrative; as a young woman, she had decided firmly that her own three children would be given a firm base in Islam, but not be held back by rigidity of practice.

Shabnam also reflected a similar concern. She vocalised more specifically the need to mediate between one's religious and British identities: 'You have to do what's expected of you. *But* you're living in this country, and you're born in this country, and you have to be sensitive of your environment. Like… as much as I respect the right to wear *niqāb*, I don't

think it has any place in our society. You have to be able to communicate with other people. People need to see you as a "normal" person. And if you're not happy here, you should go somewhere else. I don't believe that we should make this country into a Muslim country. But equally, when people rant about Pizza Hut serving halal chicken, (about) Britain becoming Islamised, it's *not*!'. Of interest for the purposes of this thesis is that, like Anjum, Shabnam has not expressed a strong opinion in any one direction only; instead, she feels the need to verbalise her support for balance as a British Muslim by shunning extremes of religious behaviour (as she sees it), while at the same time placing herself firmly within the nexus of Muslim life.

In her 50s, and an experienced national activist, Irum stepped back from her reflections to offer a perspective on many common issues the Muslim community has been beset by. Speaking of the widely asserted claim that Muslims are somehow unassimilable to life in Britain, she offered that, 'I genuinely believe that if we could just learn to practice *dīn* the way it's meant to be practiced, and if we could learn to be flexible…', it would solve a lot of problems. Rather than taking a victimhood approach, like Anjum and Shabnam, she also places some responsibility on the shoulders of Muslims themselves. Alongside this, however, rather than rejecting either faith or 'Britishness' outright, she sees value in following a path of moderation and balance.

Cheryl has strived to translate her strong belief in a balanced approach to Islam, into her professional life. As an experienced social research consultant holding a doctorate, she has in her latter life set up a creative consultancy. It is the ethos behind her venture, however, that is of interest here: 'I would say we do interfaith work to promote understanding of the common ground of spiritual experience. We are there to promote tolerance, moderate Islam as

expressed through Sufism, but not to convert people; to actually show (that) there is another way of being and expressing Islam. And that is valid both for Muslims and for non-Muslims… It's providing another vision which is not ethnically determined, culturally prejudiced or linked to a particular country'. As in previous quotes cited throughout this thesis, Cheryl chose to speak of 'spiritual' experiences and practices, avoiding the particulars of Muslim practice for a more universalist approach. This approach, furthermore, is necessary, in her view, in order to bring people together. She also combines this attitude with a firm adherence to her faith, but insists that common ground must be found both within different sections of the Muslim community, and beyond it. The reader will be reminded that she herself alters her sartorial appearance when visiting France; in this way, she practices a balanced approach, in her view, to being faithful in an environment that can be perceived as hostile to Muslim culture.

With her focus on developing people and communities, borne of her long-term experience of national activism, it was Halima who, once again, took the view that we can learn balance from historical antecedents. Citing her belief that 'there was a time in the Muslim communities in the past where the society was so balanced', she went on to explain that 'it wasn't perfect, but elements of reason would be balanced. If somebody comes, who's like dysfunctional or something, the wider community could harmonise them and help them on the journey of change. Now what the problem is, is that we need to create a healthy nucleus because everything around is so dysfunctional. You have to protect yourself against that, you have to create a healthy nucleus'. Not unexpectedly, given that community development and youth training are her current interests, Halima expresses what she sees as the need for creating a 'healthy nucleus' in Muslim society that would foster balanced attitudes to the issues that they face. This vein of our conversation ran, quite naturally, into her concerns for

youth attracted to extremist ideologies. In her opinion, young people 'must connect with people who can be constructive and positive', people who have been trained, as she explained to me, to be part of the healthy nucleus and act as a moderating voice in the community. 'I can see the merit of the way we were brought up, and I see the merit of the way they were brought up, but ideally you want something in the middle', she summed up.

Unsurprisingly, Halima was not alone in expressing this concern. When speaking about moderation in their own personal practice, a number of participants went on to voice their concern for the youth attracted to extremism. Blaming social media and a lack of role models for much of what attracts youth to extremism, an appeal to balanced viewpoints and ways of practicing was, nevertheless, the most commonly cited 'solution'. This will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in the thesis.

Aside from wanting to balance faith and mundane aspects of existence, it was interesting, yet unsurprising, that also prominent in the narratives of these women is the more common work-life balancing act. This aspect of balance is deemed worthy of a brief mention because it underlines the commonality between these women, and women in Western societies more generally. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss this point in more detail, I feel it does go a long way in 'normalising' the women of this sample. Like other women of their age and stage of life, my research has found that many of their concerns reflect the generic concerns of women, regardless of faith, race or culture: concerns about their children and social media, about youth identity, and, as reported here, concerns about how to balance domestic and workplace demands on their lives.

Aini, for example, is a busy mother of four, a pharmacist and mosque *madrassa* manager. Speaking about how she 'copes' with the stresses of life, she explained: 'maybe I have quite a bit of balance. I take time out in the evenings and just relax, and I do a lot of reading and get lost in a good book. I have switch-off times… so it's just maybe the balance to be able to switch off and refresh. Being able to feel that you can move on, you've made mistakes, and also as you get older, realising that these are the things that shape you and form you'. We see here, in common with many women of the 21st Century, Aini stressing the importance of balancing her busy life with moments taken out to ensure her own well-being. Not only does this help her 'switch off and refresh', but it also enables her to continue her voluntary work without burning out. This extract also underlines the fact that this attitude of balance and taking a step back may, in fact, also contribute to the resilience of these women. In Aini's own words, 'these are the things that shape you, and form you'.

Irum, on the other hand, is convinced that she is not coping very well, because her life is not as balanced as she would like. She reflects on a common dilemma for most people generally, but she does it from within a faith paradigm: 'But I think I suffer from the other extreme, because I do so much community work that I don't have time to reflect anymore. I'm lucky if I get to say my five prayers on time. By the time I get home at 6 o'clock, I just collapse on the sofa. And I literally have to drag myself to bed because I'm physically done. And I want that balance where I can reflect and be more spiritual'. Above we saw Irum stressing the importance of moderation in practicing one's faith; here, she admits the practicalities of such a course are not often conducive to a modern, working life. Like Cheryl, she aspires to a sense of spirituality in her life and recognises the need for it; unlike Cheryl, however, her active involvement in a number of national voluntary causes, while working full-time as a City lawyer, often precludes this from being a reality.

In the overall question of motivations and mindsets, however, it was one final aspect of balance that seemed to spur these women on the most: an observed universality in their approach to mankind generally, and an overarching appreciation of common humanity. In the words of Sara, 'we weren't raised to see any difference in them'. This sentiment and attitude have been discussed in Ch.4, with reference to their attachment to the *'ummah*; there, this thesis has argued that rather than encouraging a narrow parochialism, this global view has encouraged a cosmopolitan and universalist approach. This is the very sentiment conveyed by Sara later in our conversation when she spontaneously raises her hands in prayer, and in a powerful moment appeals '*Yā Rabb*, never put me in the position where I ever look down on anybody'. Her strong sentiment and conscious humility are borne of her experiences of being bullied and stigmatised as a child; yet, the very same experiences have built her resilience and humane attitude.

In a final reflection on the considered and universal approach taken by some respondents, Sumayya had a profound analogy to make:

'There is nothing any different about a tree in England or a tree in Bangladesh or India. That is God's creation. Whatever we call it is like secondary to me, but if there is a lake here, it is not a Welsh lake or a Scottish lake… so, seeing it that way, I can have quite a non-contentious attachment to it, maybe naïve but it doesn't matter, it works for me.'

She went on:

'It has made it easy; I see human beings like that (too). In one shape or another, we are children of Adam. I am not trying to differentiate whether that is a good person in whatever faith. It does not really rattle me, and I do not have that fear because I have been so entrenched in my most informative years in the Catholic (school) system… if you just go on a human level, there's actually so much good. So I can value that.'

Ambassadors of Islam?

In upholding themselves as resilient, yet balanced and publicly conscious, individuals, a number of respondents alluded to the feeling that they have found themselves becoming 'representatives' of their faith, albeit unwillingly. In their own ways, a majority of respondents echoed Shabnam and Sumayya's sentiment that 'you can't be a Muslim if you're not good for the people around'. Given the raised and negative media profiles of Muslim women, and Muslim more generally, these women have unwittingly become 'ambassadors of Islam' in their public dealings. With the prevalence of an internet culture, furthermore, they are concerned with the global as much as the local.

The range of activities and attitudes this encompasses is wide. From Hala not swearing in public because it would reflect badly on a *hijāb*-wearing woman, to Sumayya refraining from raising contentious issues in Governing body meetings, to Samina always ensuring she wears a smile at work, even on 'bad days', the actions they undertake bely a deep consciousness of who they are, and what may be construed of their actions in public. This attitude impacted their voluntary work as well; I was told by Hala that 'Muslim women, we tend to downplay what we do, because in the end we don't not want to be seen as immodest, or tooting our own

horn'. On interview, in fact, a few of my respondents had to be pushed to share the extent of their voluntary activities; in the interest of humility, 'we do it silently', I was told.

The burden of representing their faith, as visible Muslim women, can be pervasive and leave the women feeling a strong sense of constant responsibility: 'When I engage with people, the first thing I always think of is that I'm a Muslim, whatever I do, I'm going to leave an impression on them, because of who I am and what I look like', was Irum's way of putting it. She also went on to recognise, quite significantly, that while she is a confident, professional woman, many others in similar situations will not be so. This pragmatism was reflected by a number of the women; they highlighted the fact that pursuing significant public roles and responsibilities for Muslim women required the equally significant ability to articulate one's thoughts, and the confidence to do so. Their recognition of this burden of representation and the responsibility that came with it was met with a variety of attitudes: complacence and resignation by some, yet hopefulness and positivity by others. More mature respondents such as Samina and Sumayya reflected that they often feel this as a burden, and 'have to try harder to prove' their worth as Muslim women. The younger and unmarried respondents such as Zoya and Sara displayed more determination and positivity, however, feeling that 'there is always a way' to tackle prejudice and preconceptions in public. All, however, felt the need to continue to mix with other cultures, and, as indicated above, developing weak ties was an important aspect of their social interactions.

This sense of public responsibility and self-consciousness was felt equally keenly by the converts in the sample. Cheryl, a convert of Scottish/Irish origin, was quite determined that 'a spiritual person... has to be conscious of an alignment with the relationship to God at all points'. While in public, mindfulness and a pervasive sense of one's purpose in life were

always at the forefront for her, and she stressed passionately that the 'ability to contemplate independent of the pressures around you' was central to her resilience; she tries, I was told, to cultivate this 'ability to contemplate' even when out and about conducting her daily business. Shabnam, a convert from a small offshoot sect of Islam, actually defined this visibility and ambassadorial role as one of the three most important ones in her life. Alongside her role as a mother and wife, she identified that her 'role in interacting with anyone I meet that doesn't know me necessarily, my impact on them…' was something that she was always conscious of; the fact that she clearly identified that she was speaking of strangers indicates that she is referring to members of the public, rather than those closer to her.

Margaretha van Es has studied this phenomenon in the Dutch context, asking why an increasing number of Muslim women for whom an Islamic identity is important turn themselves into 'ambassadors of Islam' (2017). She explores, furthermore, what the costs are of this type of self-formation in terms of unintended and unwelcome consequences. Building on the backdrop of increased stereotyping of Muslims in the West since the 'War on Terror' of the 21st Century, van Es refers to the anomaly that while much scholarly attention has focused on the nature of this stereotyping, little research has looked at 'how Muslim women deal with this' (2017: 3). As with the original stance taken by Hargreaves in studying Muslim victims' responses to hate crimes, furthermore, van Es also takes a creative approach in this regard. She studies not how Muslim women internalise or suffer from these stereotypes, but instead examines how they subvert them, and in fact 'contest, challenge and resist their marginalization' (2017:15). In doing so, her approach is in line with that followed by this thesis, highlighting the proactive and positive ways in which some Muslim women are taking control of their circumstances and changing the public narrative, while acknowledging at the

same time that there remains an 'enormous impact of stigmatizing public debates' for many Muslim women (2017:15); this impact has been discussed more fully in Ch.6.

In line with the arguments around multiculturalism presented in Ch.2 and 3 of this thesis, van Es also explores this behaviour as part of a politics of belonging. She terms this 'a process of inclusion and exclusion where the boundaries between "us" and "them" are continuously being constructed, maintained and reinforced, as well as contested, challenged and resisted' (2017:3). As with Samina, Hala and Sumayya above, van Es's participants strategise to resist and change the negative public image of them. Also like the participants of the current study, they are highly aware of the prevailing stereotypes and prejudices in Dutch society, and actively undertake to change that image.

In particular, the women of this sample use what van Es has described as 'their own behaviour in their everyday encounters with non-Muslims' to challenge prevailing negative stereotypes. The discussion throughout this thesis has made reference to many such encounters: from small gestures such as smiles and conversational ice-breakers, to significant social encounters such as charity initiatives and developing workplace relationships, these women have taken it upon themselves to re-write the scripts of 'oppressed Muslim woman', 'submissive Muslim woman' and 'jihadi brides'. While they all recognised that 'we have to overlook a lot more than other communities' (Sumayya, Fatima), they also were determined that they would 'keep giving and keep allowing for unfair comments, to get to the greater good' (Sumayya). Summing up the prevailing attitude that she believes she faces daily, Samina was succinct: '*Beychāri*, that's how they think…'

Conversely, they feel that 'little attention was being paid to Muslim women who were not oppressed' (van Es, 2017:5); this was an issue raised by the women of the current sample as well, through repeated appeals to the fact that 'we are just normal people' (Samina, respondent), yet have 'little representation in the media' (Shabnam, respondent). Often, the women studied in the current project interspersed their narratives with the reflection that 'no one has ever asked me about myself/this subject/my views before'. One may infer a certain amount of weary acceptance that their views may not reach the public imagination, and that the media instead create an atmosphere where 'the negativity is overwhelming' (Sara, respondent). In the words of Fatima, 'we have to prove ourselves'. Thus, they take on the task of representing the '*Muslimah*' in a positive and proactive fashion.

It is worth reminding the reader here that the women interviewed for the current study were overwhelmingly positive about their daily interaction with non-Muslims; it was, rather, the media negativity which overwhelmed and disappointed them. They considered British multiculturalism a success, and gave credit to both Government policies in this regard but also to non-Muslims who accept their 'difference', and whom they meet through workplace and local activities. As always, this sentiment is best expressed in their words; speaking of her experience of growing up in Britain, Sumayya assured me that 'on a personal level, it's been positive'.

This phenomenon of becoming a veritable 'ambassador' of one's faith does, however, entail certain costs. Often at the expense of their individuality, these women remain highly conscious of their public behaviour and run the risk of 'virtually every aspect of their everyday life become(ing) politicized' (van Es, 2017:14). Shouldering this burden can be overwhelming, and a few participants of the present study vocalised the feeling that the

Muslim community has a disproportionately heavy load to take in this regard. Their strategies can often feel defensive, and the discussion above has reported them reacting with resignation ('there is so much negativity'/ 'I feel like I need a break') and a grim acceptance of the situation ('no other community has the same burden to take on'). Furthermore, van Es points to an additional gender bias faced by *hijāb*-wearing women in public; as very visible *Muslimahs*, they 'not only experience a greater opportunity, but also a larger responsibility to represent Islam to the outer world' (2017:14).

As a result, then, of pervasive and harmful negative images created by media misrepresentation, those Muslim women who are active in society are very conscious of being in the public eye. They are subjected to a public gaze that they do not solicit, and receive curious attention that they do not seek. Unwittingly, they can often find themselves becoming ambassadors of their faith, and shouldering heavy burdens of representation.

In the discussion at hand, however, we have seen how a small sample of these women are resisting and reimagining these stereotypes through their daily interactions. They meet the challenge with stoicism ('we have to overlook a lot more') and, occasionally, optimistic determination ('there is always a way'). While unequal relations of power and representation may mean that their efforts represent a very small move in the machinations of the wider narrative, they are nevertheless worth documenting as strategies of belonging worth emulating. In the view of this thesis, they may offer hope to future generations of Muslim women, and offer an alternative characterisation to the non-Muslims that they meet in their everyday interactions.

This chapter and the previous one have explored the mindsets that set these women apart, the contexts within which they negotiate their subjectivities and the circumstances that guide their daily interactions. In recognition of the backdrop against which they live religious lives, the discussion clarifies how a more accommodating secularism, which could be referred to as postsecularism, is aiding their feelings of belonging in Britain by giving them a space in the public sphere. In addition, this thesis has re-worked popular liberal conceptions of agency and freedom to explain their lives, and read their actions in an alternative framework. In doing so, the discussion has relied on the framework proposed by Mahmood, Avishai and Burke, amongst others, to propose formulations that hold more explanatory potential for women such as those studied here.

In this alternative framework, agency is framed as a 'capacity for change' and a 'capacity for action', and moves beyond simply a desire to seek freedom from oppression. In addition, we see the continued manifestations of hybridity in the lives of these women; much of this thesis has shown how the sphere of concern of these women encompasses not just the spiritual, but also the temporal. They have empowered themselves, and been empowered, through education and strong social networks, and have thus combined their knowledge of secular liberal systems and discourses, with their religious beliefs. This creative hybridity has resulted in the unique combination reported throughout the thesis, of strong religious belief and spirited agency.

The research findings reported throughout this thesis reveal positive ways in which these women are negotiating life as pious individuals in a postsecular context, and do so in the

words of the women themselves. In particular, the manifestations of resilience, positivity, realism and balance have been at the heart of what drives these women. In conducting their lives as practicing Muslims, furthermore, they often find themselves representing their faith in public realms. These qualities have clearly contributed to their sense of self, and to their ability to succeed in different environments. The discussion has especially looked at how they were empowered to handle difficult situations, and also motivated to take part in voluntary 'good works' for the benefit of others.

Above all, the findings report the observed phenomenon of a 'generational trajectory' in their social dealings as they got older. As they matured and gained more experience of life, they often came to the realisation that they must interact more widely across cultures. In terms of their voluntary work, this frequently manifested as a more definite effort to give their time to voluntary causes which would benefit non-Muslims, but also allow them to create more bridging relationships. This chapter has argued that these actions, while a drop in the ocean of religious people's interaction, are significant nevertheless for the potential and hope they offer to minority individuals. Through the data presented, it has also been possible to challenge the widespread belief that religious communities always promote insularity.

The data presented in this chapter suggest that as Muslim communities mature, and those born here come of age and develop a burgeoning confidence, we will see the breakdown of the previously held ghetto mentality, towards a more positive ethos that values pluralism in public life, moderation in individual practice and a greater embeddedness in mainstream society, leadings to increased feeling of belonging. One may take hope from the arguments of Jacobsen, referred to in Ch.7, that questions of agency, autonomy and even social cohesion can no longer be seen in binary modes. We must look beyond prisms of piety vs. liberalism,

oppression vs. freedom, and assimilation vs. marginalisation, towards a more considered approach to life choices. Instead, 'subjectivities and modes of agency are shaped at the intersection of different conceptions and techniques of the self, creating both convergences and tensions as people's relationship to norms and ethical conduct unfold over time' (Jacobsen, 2011:79).

With respect to the Muslim community of Britain in particular, studying the resilience and underlying commitment to balanced lives that has been exhibited by these women holds promise and potential. As individuals, they strive to avoid the extremes of behaviour that can normally be associated with either religious dogmatism or rigorous secularism, to steer a middle ground. In aiming to achieve an equilibrium between their faith and their temporal lives, they are as much religious members of a minority community as modern individuals responding to the very post-modern needs of a cohesive, plural society. While recognising the tensions referred to by Jacobsen above, this thesis has nevertheless striven to highlight the convergences that exist between the religious and the secular, the minority and mainstream communities, and even between women more widely.

Ch.9: Conclusion

Introduction: where it all started

'… women expressed much frustration with the ongoing public debate about Islam and Muslim women, which they perceived as highly stigmatizing… they felt that little attention was being paid to Muslim women who were not oppressed.' (van Es, 2017:5)

'We're just "normal" people.' (Shabnam, respondent)

Almost six years ago, inspired by the desire to see the voices of Muslim women reflected more widely in the British imagination, I had embarked on the current research project. The journey has been long, arduous and full of reflection, yet around every turn was a new discovery, an even more inspiring woman to meet, and another previously 'unheard' voice to document. As with the participants in Margaretha van Es's study quoted above, my concern was to explore the views and lives of those Muslim women in Britain who were not, in large part, 'oppressed'.

The 'little attention' received by successful, interacting Muslim women was also, until recently, a phenomenon that could be attributed to academic literature. Only recently have scholars such as Franks (2001), Bullock (2003), Contractor (2012) and Inge (2016)

documented first-hand the views and lives of western Muslim women. However, we do have a long way to go in trying to understand how Muslim women, who have become victims of the pervasive negative public image of them as oppressed, backward and traditional, cope with this stereotyping in the public imagination. Van Es argues that 'the wide scholarly attention regarding the stereotyping and othering of Muslim women in contemporary public debate contrasts sharply with that regarding how Muslim women deal with this' (2017:3).

While my work challenges widely-held dichotomies of feminism vs. faith, public vs. private and secular vs. religious in the public imagination, it also engages with academic debates around the framing of Muslim women as passive subjects. In addressing questions of freely-chosen religious observance, highlighting 'novel' and hybrid ways of being religious in secular spaces, and challenging the lack of nuance that is often observed in the study of minority communities, this thesis pushes back at unidimensional and traditional ways of conceiving the 'Other'. By positioning previously-unheard Muslim women's lives and views within a reworking of concepts of agency and freedom, I firmly argue that it is clear that a significant sample of these women do not 'need saving' (Abu Lughod, 2013).

My first research objective, thus, has been to document 'how Muslim women deal with' living faithful lives in secular Britain, in their own voices. I chose a sample of women who had regular public dealings and cross-community interaction. This approach to sample selection led me to work with a group of women involved in giving back their time and skills to community volunteering; these 'social activists' had not only developed strong, hybrid identities, but also exhibited spirited agency in their public interactions and life choices. In the words of Sariya Contractor, 'in the British context it is important to explore these women's layered identities and the multi-faceted contributions that they are making, and can

be encouraged to make, within pluralist society' (2012:6). I have attempted to convey, for the women in my sample, both the strength of their faith and also their desire to be considered part of the fabric of British life. Throughout my study, I have employed a positive, nuanced and individual methodological approach that goes beyond what I term the common 'veil and victimhood' trope around the lives of Muslim women.

Secondly, I have explored empowering factors in the lives of these women. In particular, I have looked at what gives these women the resilience so apparent in their narratives, and characterised the strong agency they employ in their multicultural lives.

Finally, I aspire to offer, through this look at the lives of successful and contributing religious women, hope and vision for the future of British Muslims, and minorities generally. My work offers an alternative to narratives of disillusion and disenchantment, and not only gives voice to a marginalised group, but showcases possibilities for a successful integration, through interaction and contribution, in plural British society. In conducting this research, I have become convinced that while many difficulties, both structural and ideological, remain for British Muslims, the future also holds promise and hope.

The Findings Revisited

'Women, to lesser or greater extents, live in and create what we have termed "thirdspace". In this sense- that women do religious work within the public sphere; that religion refuses to be confined to the domestic arena- religious women's faith-inspired activities seem to be questioning the idea that secularization renders public religiosity insignificant. Women pose a

challenge to secularization theories: we must go beyond one-size-fits-all theories to understand the complex interconnections between women, religion and secularization in the West.' (Aune, Sharma and Vincett, 2008: 15)

The main findings of my research, guided by the concerns of the women themselves, have been, variously, both predicted and unexpected. They relate to the individual selfhood of the women themselves, and also have wider implications for social cohesion in multicultural Britain.

In view of the fact that my fieldwork was conducted in the largely liberal, secular setting of modern Britain, the first result to report would be the overwhelming role of faith in the lives of these women. I have found that regardless of visible 'Muslimness' (through forms of dress or language, for example), all of my respondents held strong faith convictions; it may be apt to remind the reader here that not all participants wore visible 'Muslim' dress, nor did all use Islamic phrases in their daily jargon. In addition, faith was the main driver in both their voluntary work and their desire to reach out to non-Muslims. My findings have, in this regard, firmly supported recent research that shows that 'stronger religious affiliation… correlates with greater civic engagement' (Burke, 2019). It was an unobtrusive manifestation of Islam, worn with ease, not loudly proclaimed and yet permeated through their narratives with quiet confidence and assurance.

Leading on from this, I found that these women were challenging popular conceptions of agency and resistance. Unexpectedly, I found in these women resilience, strength and a

capacity for change through action, yet a desire to employ these very modern 'instruments' from within their faith traditions. They recounted to me how, daily and publicly, they challenge popular dichotomies such as that of the traditional-modern woman, the religious-liberated individual and the enlightened majority-disengaged minority. All the while, I was fascinated by stories of their religious and ethnic assertiveness in public, and their belief that Britain was home. These findings led me to employ the work of Saba Mahmood to locate the agency of religious women, and the theoretical frames developed by seminal thinker Homi Bhabha to explain the hybridity employed by these women in the 'third spaces' made available to them in multicultural Britain.

A third, and possibly least expected yet most significant, finding of my fieldwork has been the strong desire of these women to develop bridging capital across communities. This was verbalised repeatedly, and manifested more strongly as the women matured. Their life experience taught them both the value, but also the necessity, of communicating with non-Muslims; I found that as they grew older, their increasing confidence in public spaces and community work meant they were able to turn more of their attention to interfaith work, cross-community projects and volunteering for generic (as opposed to Muslim) causes. I have termed this phenomenon the observed 'generational trajectory' in their lives. In addition, in wearing their faith very publicly, they occasionally became 'ambassadors' of an oft-maligned faith community, and presented to me as highly aware of their role in subverting popular caricatures of both Islam and Muslim women. Taking a step back from these individual experiences, I was able to conceive how these overtures and interaction across cultures were contributing to everyday integration, locally, and also social cohesion in Britain more widely.

This leads on to my fourth major conclusion that, on the national scene, these women have actually benefitted from Britain's multicultural policies and the attendant recognition given to minorities. I have framed these women as an integral part of British multicultural society, and have argued that multiculturalism has 'worked' for them. Their narratives of growing up in the 80s and 90s, especially, have been tinged with stories of early childhood racism and bullying; in contrast, as adults they feel much more 'at home' in Britain and a number of them spoke of how they feel much more comfortable here than in Europe. They have benefitted from the culture of accepting differences, a culture that multicultural policies have protected; a number of them spoke, unsolicited, of how Britain 'was home'. In reporting these cases of the successful integration of religious individuals in secular Britain, I was guided by the thought of Tariq Modood on multiculturalism in Britain over thirty years; and in recording the significance of the everyday public interactions of my respondents, I found a valuable frame in the intercultural intervention of Ted Cantle and Susan Wessendorf, amongst others. My belief in the value of these local, daily cross-community interactions that promote 'everyday integration' led me to employ intercultural arguments to provide the micro-level focus to questions of integration in plural societies.

However, tensions do remain between public perceptions and individual selves; difficulties in the lives of these women did arise in their stories. I found myself often deeply disturbed by narratives of trauma and disadvantage, despite the fact that these particular women have shown it possible to 'rise above' their difficulties with resilience. While early childhood and young adult lives were occasionally disturbed by bullying or cultural and familial constraints, I found that most of the racism and disadvantage faced by these women in their adult lives related, in one form or another, to their faith. I have reported incidents of Islamophobia, negative media portrayals that affected daily lives and morale, racism from one's 'own'

community and the various incidents of being singled out for their sartorial choices. I have used an intersectional lens, first developed by Crenshaw, to analyse these encounters and examine the difficulties faced by my respondents. Disappointed, however, to find little reference to questions of faith identities in the majority of intersectional references, I have found it instrumental to introduce more recent scholarship arguing that we see a postsecular turn in Western societies. Setting intersectional analyses within a postsecular context has allowed me, furthermore, to showcase the agency of (these) religious women.

More interestingly for my work, every recounting of a racist or negative incident was followed by an explanation of how they coped, and often even responded with assertiveness and resilience. I have concluded my thesis with a celebration of this very resilience, and the hope offered by these women and their contributions to life in Britain. I cannot help but concur with Lewis and Hamid that, 'while there is no doubt that there are many complex, immediate and long-term challenges that need to be addressed, by highlighting a few of the positive developments that are taking place within communities, we hope to draw attention to a more hopeful narrative of creative co-existence' (2018:225).

Locating my Research in the Wider Field

'The voices of Muslim women, striving to keep their identity in Western contexts, are seriously under-represented in academic research.' (Jawad and Benn, 2003: xiv)

Writing almost two decades ago, Haifa Jawad and Tamsin Benn, both experienced academics with regards to studying Muslim communities in the West, underlined the need to hear directly the voices of Muslim women. Many years on, we are increasingly hearing from the women themselves; my study contributes to this nascent scholarship by exploring the views of previously-unheard women. My fieldwork has, in fact, returned significant findings which, I believe, make valuable contribution to knowledge of minority lives. I have targeted an especially marginalised group on account of their faith, ethnicity and gender. In doing so, I have utilised my own position as an insider (in some respects) to these communities, and built upon the trust enjoyed to access communities which may have otherwise been difficult to reach. Indeed, most audiences remain unaware of the contributions of minority women to not only their own communities, but increasingly across communities as well.

In particular, I have attempted to give a sense of the significance of the daily interactions of the women in my sample, and have showcased their resilience in these encounters, and their balanced approach to public interaction. Employing a methodology that privileged the nuanced and the individual (as opposed to the institutional) has allowed me to highlight their hybrid identity constructs. One of the most important outcomes of my research, furthermore, has been to show how this hybridity challenges popular dichotomies in the public imagination, especially those related to Muslim women: modern vs. traditional, secular vs. religious and liberated vs. oppressed, to name a few.

Above all, my research has potential for impact in a variety of ways.

On the one hand, it may contribute to the development of Muslim women in Britain by offering possibilities for the future. The lives of the 25 women that I showcase here stand in

stark contrast to the popular narrative of Muslim women as downtrodden, voiceless or even radicalised. Each of my respondents have emerged from their very own difficulties to show that education, creativity and sheer determination can empower an individual to rise above negative caricatures and even socio-economic disadvantage. As such, the lives of these women offer valuable role models for marginalised individuals and may offer a much-needed ray of hope.

On a second, and wider, level, my study contributes to the 'narrative of creative co-existence' referred to by Lewis and Hamid above. The window offered into not only the lives of these women, but also their open and spirited mindsets, shows potential for a healthy pluralism in Britain. I have argued for a dual approach to national integration and social cohesion: one which provides the laws that are needed to support and protect disadvantaged minorities, but also encourages the everyday, cross-community interactions that are so central to a healthy acceptance of difference.

Finally, the women whose experiences and views I have documented present a challenge to the widespread and largely accepted narrative of public secularism. By practicing their faith publicly and asserting their faith in a variety of spaces outside the domestic sphere, these women are forebearers of a 'new' type of secular space, the 'postsecular' space. I have argued that we may be seeing the emergence, in the West, of a phenomenon which describes the co-existence of significant communities of secular and religious peoples, with renewed debate about the practice of faith publicly. Singh reminds us that 'a deep engagement with issues of religious difference has begun', especially in the way these practices challenge existing beliefs about not only secularism, but also feminism (2015:658).

I believe that this 'deep engagement' signals a positive and hopeful way ahead for the creation of a healthy pluralism in Britain, one in which religious and secular communities can begin to forge a co-existence characterised by mutual trust and recognition, rather than suspicion and ignorance. In fostering this interaction and developing a vision for the future, I discuss below the aspirations of the women of this study, aspirations that also suggest ways forward. My final words at the end of this chapter suggest a number of ways in which further academic research can address and contribute to this engagement.

Visions for the Future: a 'new cultural expression'

'What these (convivial tools) produce is also a sense of openness to the future. This convivial knowledge or everyday wisdom goes unnoticed by the high priests of macro-policy or those concerned only with the social arithmetic of diversity.' (Back and Sinha, 2016:530)

'The only image we have is one of refugee or terrorist, it would be nice to get beyond that. Muslims are just like Italians or Jews, just a constructive, positive, happy part of British society.' (Aini, respondent)

The previous chapters have highlighted the particular personal qualities that have empowered and motivated the women of this study, and the potential that they hold in the context of postsecular Britain. As the thesis comes to conclusion, it is apt here to look ahead, and lay out the visions these women shared for the future of British Muslims more widely. Towards the

end of each interview, I had asked what future developments they would like to see in Muslim communities, and how best they conceived of these changes happening.

While this solicited an interesting and creative range of responses, the most common references were to their desire to see projects and initiatives that facilitated greater mixing between people of different cultures, and their aspirations for young people. Alongside these, also spoken about was the role of mosques in community development, and a desire to see minority contributions recognised. I make reference here to a few examples of these considerations for the future, both as a window into the aspirations of these individual women, but also as a suggestion for future research, and even Muslim community development projects.

Prominent in the reflections of these women around 'what I would like to see in the next 15/20 years' was the feeling that they wanted the wider British public to come to know Islam as tolerant and positive. Within this desire to challenge the negative discourses around Islam, the women gave weight to 'everyday integration' (discussed in Ch.3), and the role of face-to-face encounters.

Sara became quite animated when asked to share her aspirations for the future; she knows what she would like to see more of in the future, but also has a vision for how she may contribute to it herself. In a long description of her hopes for the future, she shared with me that she would like to start up a 'speakers' community café where people of all and no faiths could socialise, be entertained and speak about their concerns. 'I think nothing bonds people together like food. I do really believe that. So, open spaces for dialogue, for everybody', is what she would like to see more of in the future. She bemoaned the lack of such spaces where

different people could socialise, and much of her narrative had been peppered with stories of her own significant face-to-face encounters with non-Muslims, encounters where she felt that she had been able to change a negative perception about Muslims and/or Islam. Recognising, furthermore, that she is a 'bouncy, friendly woman' (her own description) who has had to overcome many disadvantages in life, she does also understand that many people may not have the same confidence in approaching others beyond their own close-knit communities. With her belief in the power of positive social encounter, Sara shares the view of this thesis that everyday integration must be two-way, and that convivial relations hold much potential for social cohesion (a core argument of Ch.3). In the view of interculturalists, these daily encounters between people who would not ordinarily meet each other have been underestimated (Cherti and McNeil, 2012; Peterson, 2017; Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). These 'serendipitous fleeting encounters can provide much needed information or even just a sense of humanity' (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019:134). In the case of Sara's vision, however, she would like to move beyond a reliance on serendipity to ensure such cross-cultural interaction, and provide more dedicated spaces and opportunities for them to occur. 'In 5 - 10 years, I want to see spaces that are specifically design to bring people together', she confided.

Maryam feels the same passion for cross-cultural interaction, and in her understated way, also wants to contribute in the future to this. 'I think an effort needs to be made by all communities to engage with each other and find ways to strengthen their relationships… In the future, I hope to continue building on what I am doing and hopefully get more people involved in community-based projects', she told me. Like Sara, Maryam sees a role for herself in building opportunities for integration through personal relationships.

A number of the women put a premium on the acceptance of minority contribution when envisioning the future of Muslim minorities in Britain. They spoke of a clear desire to see a 'kinder, more inclusive, generally, I think… a more compassionate and tolerant society' (Baha). Inclusivity and an acceptance of minority contributions were important to these women; as pointed out by Modood (2007b, 2010), Sealy (2018), these women are pursuing a 'politics of belonging', and part of the struggle to belong includes a desire that their contributions be spoken of and valued more widely in society. As mentioned in Ch. 3, furthermore, while the younger respondents of researchers such as Shezhadi et al. (2018) focused on feelings of not being accepted by wider society, my respondents, being mature activists as they are, saw discrimination and lack of acceptance as a challenge and an opportunity for interaction. While some, such as Baha, voiced their integration aspirations for the future, others went further, like Sara and Maryam, and envisioned their own role in creating this conviviality.

As reported in Ch.3, the future aspirations of women such as Sara, Baha and Maryam indicate the strong 'emotional pull' they hold for Britain as their country, and as the place where they belong (Modood, 2010:95). Looking ahead, some of them hold a vision for how they might contribute to social conviviality in the future; with confidence, creative vision, and a commitment to everyday integration, they may go on to forge a path for future generation to both benefit from and also follow.

Alongside a vision to see more intercultural conviviality and the acceptance of minority contributions, the women also spoke of their hopes for young Muslim people growing up in Britain today. While some aspirations were directly related to their own children, others spoke of Muslim youth more generally. Prominent themes in this regard were the dangers of

excessive social media use (and the extremist and imbalanced views which can occasionally result from this), their pride in the ways in which young Muslim people were creating a fusion of secular and religious cultures, and their advice to youth on identity conflicts that they see many suffering.

Shabnam exemplified the common concerns that a number of women voiced around the dangers of social media, dangers they felt fortunate to have not faced when they were young. Combining her concern for both social media and youth integration into mainstream society, she told me: 'I try not to look too much at social media, the negativity is quite awful. Our kids will have to witness a lot of the fallout from what's going to come. I hope they grow up to be well-rounded individuals, integrate well into society, and are not scared… not so conscious of their *hijāb*, religion… and can practice freely but still integrate'. She went on to explain to me that she was concerned both for young men falling prey to extremist ideas in their search for belonging and a sense of identity, but also for young women (such as her own daughters) who suffer in different ways because social media makes them more image-conscious and prone to a variety of social pressures. She characterised social media as 'very dangerous, and very accessible'. Being the parents of four girls and one boy, her husband and herself have decided to regularly have open discussions with their children about these concerns, while at the same time encouraging them (the children) to mix with a wide range of people socially, and thus experience the 'real world'. The reader is reminded here that Shabnam had, previously in our discussion, wished wistfully that she had made more non-Muslim friends in her life; she spoke passionately of being inspired by the young US activists Deah, Yusor and Razan who were killed in North Carolina in 2015, and whose funeral was attended by a large group of diverse people.

In the discussion around social media and youth, a number of the women indicated that giving young people strong roots and a 'sense of self' was a good 'solution' to youth disaffection. Shabnam believes we need to leave 'a legacy for young people… so that they can contribute to society, but that they're not so self-conscious of their religion that it holds them back'. Blaming disengaged parents who do not have time for children, she bemoans that many children have 'nothing to come back to; it will be an uphill struggle for those children'. Similarly, Baha was adamant that the firm groundedness of her own upbringing was invaluable, in that her parents gave her well-defined Islamic roots, but also a strong sense of being British; she actually credited her own success to what she termed her parents' 'brave beyond extreme' vision. Her solution to youth disaffection was also couched in the need to give young people existential roots: 'You know the whole… what they say about giving people roots before giving them wings, and so on. If you're sort of caught adrift in your searching, you never really have a concrete baseline that you can measure, you can assess yourself against'. She was quite certain, she explained to me, that in their rush for acceptance and an identity base, young people will sometimes fall prey to extremes of view and even social rejection. However, she felt that when young people have a solid foundation in understanding their own background, 'there's that sense of security that you can come back to, and there is something you can call home, as it were, no matter how far you explore'. Going back to the issue of social media, she feels that young people today are 'very, very tech savvy, but they're not life savvy'.

As always, Halima has taken this belief in investing in the young further, and she now devotes most of her social work to training youth in community development programmes designed to build confidence and leadership skills in young people. Her own inspiration for this work, as mentioned earlier, comes from the children themselves: 'My children's

generation, there is a language. Like my son… in particular, they are negotiating a new cultural expression which is something that is not part of my remit, it's not my world. I am really excited about that, and I would like us, the older generation, to be supporting and nurturing in the background'. Clearly, experienced community activists like Halima see the future in this 'new cultural expression'. Furthermore, rather than resist this fusion of East and West that she explained the young can bring about, she is actively supporting it as the way forward for the future. She spoke of 'integrating principles and values' in projects that bring together diverse people. When pressed by me to elaborate, she described with pride a small entrepreneurial project set up by her own son; alongside a few of his non-Muslim friends, they have created an online ethical trading shop with roots in a common culture as children of Adam. Like Hala (with her cross-cultural food run for the homeless), and Sara (in her vision for a 'cultural café'), Halima's son not only holds a desire to bring diverse people together, but also has the vision to implement it.

This thesis has felt the need to draw attention to creative projects and points of view such as those above because of the potential they hold for the future development of a truly plural society in Britain. In addition, the visions expressed above hold particular value for the problems related to mainstream-Muslim interaction, in that they exemplify the creative and successful communitarian approaches of a small segment of Muslim women. These women have expressed a desire for greater cross-cultural interaction, and some have even taken active steps to realise this vision.

'Mosque sanctuaries' of the future…?

Finally, it is deemed appropriate here to mention the brief discussions had around the role of mosques, and the potential they hold as institutions that may facilitate the development of

robust, open-minded Muslim communities. Here, the focus lay especially on the present relationship between these women and their local mosques, and also on their suggestions for mosque leaders in developing resilience and groundedness in Muslim youth especially. As mentioned above, many structural and ideological difficulties remain within Muslim communities; the women of my sample identified mosque leadership and exclusivity as a clear barrier to further development. In addition, in keeping with their progressive and proactive attitude to all 'challenges', those that spoke of mosque-related issues also often went on to suggest solutions and creative ways to move forward.

Interestingly, of those women who chose to elaborate on mosque organisation and experiences, none expressed a desire to be part of mosque committees and/or leadership roles. Being activists, they were often highly involved in community work, but preferred to either stay in the background, or work outside the ambit of mosques and organised Islamic centres. Aini, one of the most heavily invested in mosque culture in her role as mosque *madrassa* manager, is a determined and confident woman, yet shuns a higher profile. She recoiled visibly when discussing the 'openness' of her local mosque to having women on the committee: 'Personally, I wouldn't run for it! I have never tested the waters, and you are just too busy, and also I don't like that kind of role'. When I questioned whether mosque leadership may be enriched by the inclusion of more female voices, she admitted to seeing a need for it, and confessed that she does often 'wonder where they (mosque leaders) are picked from, and how they are chosen and often you are quite disappointed by the choice'. I later came to know that when her local mosque did in fact invite female volunteers to join their mosque committee, they had difficulty finding women who were willing to fill the position.

Halima was also definitive that, 'we don't really connect with the mosque… we are not a mosque-centric organisation. So we do not ask for it. I think they do take us seriously, they know that what we do and when we meet then - I feel like we have their respect, whether they agree with us on the terms of things, but we have their respect, we can talk with them, we can negotiate with them, we can say we don't agree. But getting involved in the mosque world is a whole different thing. It requires a whole different set of resiliences to get along'. She was appreciative of the free of charge spaces offered by mosques to run her events, and alludes to a mutual respect for the organisation, but steered clear of being involved in leadership and mosque-related activities.

Instead, suggestions for the role of mosques in community development, and especially in addressing problems of youth disaffection and a lack of integration, were more forthcoming from the women. Sara, a young single youth worker, was adamant that the blame for youth radicalisation lay with mosque leaders being too involved with 'hobnobbing' influential people and not engaging with issues relevant to young people. With respect to radicalisation of Muslim boys, she asked: 'Why were the protective factors not in place… nobody held their hands, to tell these boys what Islam really is. So the wrong people were able to get to them, and I completely blame the mosque leaders'. Halima, Karen and Hala all spoke of the need for mosques to not just be 'prayer halls, and even just male prayer halls', but to be more like community centres, where people feel welcomed, and 'a sense of calm'. Like Sara, they also see a role for engaged mosque leaders to create safe spaces for disaffected youth, and not only encourage them off the streets, but also provide them with good role models.

Being an older convert with the experience of fostering many children, Karen was very passionate that mosques should be at the centre of communities: 'I think that young Muslims

in this country, they've lost their identity. They don't feel pride in being Muslim, but they

don't feel they're British. I may be totally wrong, but in my experience, our mosques are *not*

doing what they are meant to do. A mosque should be the centre of the community. It should

be where our young kids go because it's fun. Make sure they've got sports, make sure

they've got things to integrate them. We *have* to offer them something. Now, if you don't,

they will go online and it's like cults. Why people join cults, because they don't have

identity, they feel lonely, they want to belong'. Karen's long tirade around youth extremism

and her solutions in a mosque-centred approach were clearly something she felt strongly

about. Her summation of what needs to be done reflected the way she herself had brought up

a number of difficult children, and could not be argued with; 'we're not showing them

enough love', she concluded.

Reflecting the view of Aini mentioned above, the women also voiced the need to hire British-

born Imams who have been educated here, and avoid mosques becoming ethnic enclaves.

Karen, again, related how she felt that the mosque leadership does not 'understand' local

community challenges, and, on converting to Islam, after initially trying to approach Imams

for day-to-day problems, she now avoids them. Her assessment of the situation referred to the

common practice of hiring Imams from abroad: 'On the whole, our Imams are not educated

enough. Also, they are often not British, and they're not educated in Britain, and I think they

should be'. Huda, of Somali origin, was adamant that 'if I had money, I would not build

another Somali mosque, I would take the money to an existing mosque, and make it bigger

and be part of the management. I'd build a community for Muslim girls! The idea is, a place

that's safe whether you're married or single, a village where we look after each other'. In her

impassioned vision, Huda has combined an awareness of a number of issues: the mono-ethnic

make-up of many congregations, the lack of female leadership and the idea that mosques should be safe, communal spaces for young girls especially.

In her comprehensive introduction to British Muslims (2010), Gilliat-Ray identifies a number of the issues around mosques raised by the women in my sample. She draws our attention to the fact that 'in the 1980s and 1990s, however, criticisms were raised concerning the quality, qualifications and role of many of Britain's imams' (2010:163). Of concern were particularly the lack of language acquisition, cultural unfamiliarity and accusations of sectarianism (analogous to the ethnic leanings described above) of Imams originating in the Indian subcontinent and Arab Gulf regions. More recently, however, initiatives such as those mentioned above are being taken to cater to an increasing need, voiced by the women quoted above, for imams 'who can provide not only ritual, textual, scholarly/legal and spiritual leadership, but also some degree of pastoral competence. … in particular, to address the needs of youth' (Gilliat-Ray, 2010:167).

A more detailed and comprehensive account of the realities of mosque leadership in Britain today is beyond the ambit of this thesis; however, it is worth mentioning that manifest here are the beginnings of a movement to reorient mosque structures and leadership to bring them in line with the needs of Muslims in contemporary Britain. In this movement, one may read a distinctive 'British' appropriation of both Islamic discourses, and Muslim spaces. Again, this thesis points to a desire, voiced numerous times by participants, to develop feelings of belonging, and to be accepted as a valued part of the fabric of British life.

Even more relevant to this thesis is the fact that despite, and possibly because of, the continued marginalisation of women from mosque spaces, Muslim women such as those

portrayed here, 'are actively reshaping, reinterpreting, and reconstructing their religious lives outside the home'. Like Karen, Halima and many others I had spoken to, 'they have countered their "exclusion" from mosques by finding alternative ways of engaging in community action' (Gilliat-Ray, 2010:203); and, in fact, the women of my sample have even, as reported in the previous chapters, taken it upon themselves to employ a more outward-looking focus, and work with other communities, building bridges through individual interaction and common causes. It could be proffered that this in itself is as suggestive of British Muslim embeddedness in the national fabric, as the institutions of mosques themselves.

Looking Ahead: Potential and Possibilities for Further Research, and the Future of British Muslims

The first-hand narratives of Muslim women in the West are gradually beginning to come to the fore, in both popular media and academia; a distinctly Muslim, and often distinctly religious, presence is being felt. Increasingly, this presence is being felt in positive instances of contribution, collaboration and interaction between previously disparate groups. Leading the way in these cross-community efforts, as we have seen, can be strong, committed women with a desire to reach out and create bridging social capital in their daily spheres.

As I wrote, conducted fieldwork and analysed the narratives of my respondents, a number of potentially useful avenues for further research became apparent. Firstly, the narratives of less publicly active Muslim women, often living more insular lives in urban communities of socio-economic disadvantage, need equally to be heard. In their work highlighting the

creative and intellectual achievements of British Muslims today (characterised as the 'New Muslim Cool'), Lewis and Hamid also remind the reader that 'there is also a growing constituency of the left-behind in deprived, concentrated ethno-Muslim, quarters of the inner cities' (2018:218). While recognising that difficulties of language and access may arise in researching these women, researchers need to document what would enable the greater involvement and confidence of these 'left-behind' women in public life; this work may, in fact, need the support of native researchers with the necessary skills.

While discussion of issues around the role of mosques did not form a significant part of the visions these women held for the future development of the British Muslim community, it may also be posited that this theme is certainly one that deserves attention in further research. With burgeoning initiatives such as Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB, http://minab.org.uk/about-us), the Bradford Women Led Mosque, and the MCB's Women in Mosques project (https://mcb.org.uk/project/women-in-mosques/), it may be suggested that developing mosque culture and access can lead to much progress within the community. In a recent and novel approach to mosque studies, for example, Ahmed (2020) calls for more research into mosque congregations themselves.

In the area of community work and charity contributions, furthermore, there is scope for research into the recipients of this voluntary work, frequently undertaken by religious communities (Storm 2015; Burke 2019). The interesting question to explore further, in my view, would be: do people volunteer within their own communities (thus creating bonding capital), or do they volunteer beyond their own communities (creating bridging capital)? I

believe research along these lines would generate valuable information for those developing social cohesion policies in particular.

My work has also thrown up another unexpected, and interesting avenue for further research: I have found that that the mundane concerns of these women, and their overarching priorities, are common to women generally, and, in fact, many men across Britain. While there has been some research relating to commonalities between subgroups (Dovidio et al., 2010; Hopkins, 2011), the 'everyday' concerns of ordinary people from different backgrounds remain understudied. A focus on issues of environmental impact, parenting and global poverty, for example, might, surprisingly, reveal that individuals within minorities share a lot more with the wider public than they are otherwise led to believe. While not neglecting that there exist important differences between community groups, exploring the commonalities between individuals within these groups can offer a way forward towards greater understanding, acceptance and social cohesion. Again, there remains in this area potential for further research along these lines.

Finally, my work strongly advocates for a pluralism of worldviews and a move away from the belief that religion is at odds with rationalism, modernity and a progressive worldview. By employing the theoretical tools of feminism in unique ways to the lives of religious subjects, this thesis has built on and continued the work of scholars such as Mahmood (2005), Franks (2001), Singh (2015) and Avishai (2008), and brought the lives of religious women into conversation with secular feminism. In particular, through the critique of intersectional feminism's neglect of religious discrimination, and by suggesting that some individuals pursue spiritual fulfilment alongside temporal goals of freedom and liberation, this study lays the groundwork for further theoretical development along these lines. Important questions for

further research remain, such as: 'Can Western feminisms grow to accommodate the lives of women who freely choose faith as their frame of reference?', 'Will religious individuals open up to the possibilities of feminism for securing their rights in a sacred framework?', and 'How can the postsecular academic space facilitate these discourses?'. I recognise that this suggested engagement of religious and secular worldviews and theoretical stances may not be straightforward, and will be characterised by a number of attendant tensions. However, the journey I have traversed in the course of this study has led me to believe that communities of both secular and religious persuasion stand to gain from such an engagement, and must engage in further debate and dialogue.

It is my hope that I have done justice to the women who have shared their personal views so generously in the course of my fieldwork, and have been able to contribute to the field a sensitive, nuanced and self-defined narrative of their lives. In the wider arena of British multiculturalism, my work has highlighted successful forms of Muslim *engagement* with wider society by identifying the strategies used by my respondents to create a 'third space' for themselves in the secular landscape of Britain today. In particular, my study has made an attempt to 'understand the complex interconnections between women, religion and secularization in the West' (Aune et al., 2008: 15).

In this way, I hope to contribute to the question of how to build robust and proactive British Muslim identities, but also to the question of how we may move forward towards building a truly plural British society, with a healthy engagement between secular and religious communities. In this regard, I share the aims of Sariya Contractor, and leave the reader where we began, at 'an optimistic belief that the personal voices of Muslim women and others can

facilitate discourses of difference that are not polemical towards the different Other and which recognise the enriching possibilities of diversity' (Contractor, 2012:162).

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Appendix A: Letter of Introduction to Respondents

October 2015

Dear Respondent,

Assalam alaikum and thank you for assisting my research.

I am a PhD candidate at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. I am studying British Muslim culture, with a specific focus on the good works done by so many activist Muslim women in and around London.

As a longstanding and involved member of the British Muslim community, I have been concerned; you may be concerned too. Concerned about the tone of general media reporting on Muslim women, the 'veil and victimhood' approach to our existence and the unnecessary and misguided sympathy we receive as 'oppressed women'.

My research is driven by my desire to document and highlight the selfless good work that I know is being done by British Muslim women such as yourself, in their own voice. I believe your work could inspire others and show a more positive and realistic image of what Britain's Muslim women can achieve. I would be grateful to be able to share your story, and request the opportunity to interview you, at your convenience.

In addition, I would be grateful if you could introduce me to further women in London who may be valuable participants in my research. I am looking in particular for women who are quietly working away to contribute to their local communities, but have received little publicity.

I hope to be asking questions about yourself as a person, the social work you are involved in and your experiences of / views on the wider British Muslim setting. For example, this may include:

- What would you say are your three most important roles/ jobs?
- What motivates you to do your social work?
- Describe your relationship to your local mosque.

All information provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality, and all identities will be kept anonymous, unless you prefer otherwise. Also, my ethical practice will be strictly informed by University of London and The British Association for the Study of Religions guidelines.

Once again, thank you so much for giving up your valuable time to assist me. I am very grateful, and look forward to meeting you soon!

Warm regards,

Saleema Burney, PGCE, PGDPSE (Open), MA Islamic Societies and Cultures (Distinction)

https://www.soas.ac.uk/staff/staff89645.php

Detailed Interview Guide

About you

1. Basic personal information requested:

- Name
- Age
- Occupation
- Ethnic background and country of origin
- Marital Status
- Dependent children
- Highest level of education

2. What are the three most important roles you perform, in order of importance to you?

3. Tell me a little more about your background, such as…

where did you grow up, and what kind of a neighbourhood do you live in now?
your early schooling
your closest friends, then and now
what group of people you feel most comfortable with/ relate to best

4. How important is faith to your life? Tell me about your relationship to it.

Your work

1. Tell me about the work that you do…

How long?
What type? (ask for 3-4 main types)
What drew you to it? Why did you decide to pursue it? What, in your view, enables (empowers?) you to do this work?

2. Does your work bring you into contact with public bodies, people and services regularly? If so, how have you found this experience, with regards to BOTH Muslim and non-Muslim public bodies/ people/ services?

3. Describe your relationship to your local mosque… have they been supportive of your work?

4. You identify as a Muslim (wear the hijab, *if appropriate*) has this made your public engagement difficult, affected your access to services? (Theme: exposure to public spaces and faith)

The wider setting: identity, integration, representation

1.You live, work and interact with people daily in British society… in your view and based on your experience, how easy/ difficult is it for a Muslim woman to live and work in Britain?… Would you say there are any particular difficulties associated with being Muslim in Britain?

2. How well do you think BMW are represented in public spaces/ media?

3. Are you satisfied with BMW's access to leadership positions in the local community? (*I am NOT speaking here about leadership on a national and international level*)

4. Identity: you have obviously built a strong and positive identity as a BMW. But many young Muslims today struggle to 'fit in' and build strong identities. What would your advice be to these young people? (If appropriate, touch on issue of youth attracted to extremist ideologies.)

5. Integration: Muslims are often charged with 'not integrating', of wanting to live separate lives. In your view, as someone who has found the 'mix' to be able to not only live here, but also to help others, what is the best way forward for minorities in Britain? What would you say has helped you succeed?

6. (*If a strong relationship to faith is professed…*) Britain is a secular society, where public displays of religiosity are not encouraged. In your view, how easy is it for religious women to live and work in this environment?

What do you think there is something particular to Islam that allows religious MW to not only live but successfully contribute in a secular society?

7. Finally, what is your vision for the future of Muslims in Britain?